



# Praying with the Poets

T.S. Eliot \* Mary Oliver \* Emily Dickinson \* Langston Hughes \* Tagore  
Maya Angelo \* Jane Kenyon \* Dylan Thomas \* Rumi \* Wendell Berry  
Thomas Traherne \* Scott Cairns

April 15- June 24 – Tuesdays – 2 sessions daily – 7:30-8:00 a.m & 12:00-12:30 pm  
Community Christian Church – 4601 Main Street – Kansas City Missouri

## Session #10 – Thomas Traherne

**Thomas Traherne** (1636? – September 27, 1674) – born in Ledbury, England; father was a shoemaker; very likely due to support of wealthy relative, educated at Hereford Cathedral School; attained masters degree in arts and divinity in 1652, at Brasenose College, Oxford; ordained in 1656 as Anglican priest; during his time as rector at church in Credenhill, encountered a powerful mystical experience and thereafter began to write about his new “Felicity;” served as private chaplain to Sir Orlando Bridgeman who became his benefactor and patron; minister at Teddington; buried in St. Mary’s Church under the reading desk; author of *Roman Forgeries* (1673), *Christian Ethicks* (1675), *Thanksgivings* (A Serious and Patheticall Contemplation of the Mercies of God) (1699), *Poetical Works* (1903), *Centuries of Meditations* (1905), *Poems of Felicity* (1910), *Commentaries of Heaven: The Poems* (1989) – was a poet, philosopher, and mystic whose philosophy had an impact during his lifetime but whose poetical works, for the most part, would wait for more than 200 years for discovery. Beloved and quoted by C.S. Lewis and Thomas Merton, he included among the “Metaphysical Poets” and his writing is often compared to that of John Donne, George Herbert, and Andrew Marvel.

**Day #1: Ecstatic** – Thomas Traherne was an ecstatic writer. That is, he wrote much about his ecstatic religious experiences, in both poetic and prose forms, and he wrote in a style that bore an obvious ecstatic flourish. Witness the ecstasy he conveys in the following poem, “Love.”

*O nectar! O delicious stream!  
O ravishing and only pleasure! Where  
Shall such another theme  
Inspire my tongue with joys or please mine ear!  
Abridgement of delights!  
And Queen of sights!  
O mine of rarities! O Kingdom wide!  
O more! O cause of all! O glorious Bride!  
O God! O Bride of God! O King!  
O soul and crown of everything!*

Among the twelve ecstatic “O” utterances about the love the poet has for God and the love the poet receives from God, there is likely only one (“O God!”) that would be common to many folks in the English-speaking world today. Still it is instructive for us to consider this poet who fell so completely “in love with God,” as one reviewer put it. Pray today that God will inspire your prayers regarding the One whom Traherne describes as “O cause of all!”

**Day #2: Child-like Faith** – For Traherne, the gift of child-like faith was essential for a joyful experience of God’s many gifts. Much of his poetic insight, as in the following poem, “That Childish Thoughts Such Joys Inspire,” has to do with losing and returning to child-like ways of engaging with the world.

*That childish thoughts such joys inspire,*

*Doth make my wonder, and His glory higher,  
His bounty, and my wealth more great  
It chews His Kingdom, and His work complete.  
In which there is not anything,  
Not meet to be the joy of Cherubim.*

*He in our childhood with us walks,  
And with our thoughts mysteriously He talks;  
He often visiteth our minds,  
But cold acceptance in us ever finds:  
We send Him often grieved away,  
Who else would show us all His Kingdom's joy.*

Pray today for a fresh and keen awareness of how God walks with you now. Pray that you will not send God “... grieved away.”

**Day #3: Profound Bible Truths**– In “The Bible,” Traherne waxes exuberant about the saving truths of the Bible.

*That! That! There I was told  
That I the son of God was made,  
His image. O divine! And that fine gold,  
With all the joys that here do fade,  
Are but a toy, compared to the bliss  
Which heavenly, God-like, and eternal is.  
That we on earth are kings;  
And, tho we're cloth'd with mortal skin,  
Are inward cherubins, have angels' wings;  
Affections, thoughts, and minds within,  
Can soar through all the coasts of Heaven and earth;  
And shall be sated with celestial mirth.*

Pray today that you will receive new enthusing insights from the Bible which will set you on a path of refreshment and reinvigoration for your life and faith. Pray that all may know “we on earth are kings.”

**Day #4: Awash in Wonder** – In “Wonder,” Traherne gushes about the overwhelming goodness of creation and the blurring of any line between the sacred and the profane.

*How like an angel came I down!  
How bright are all things here!  
When first among his works I did appear,  
Oh, how their Glory me did crown!  
The world resembled his Eternity.  
In which my soul did walk;  
And every thing that I did see  
Did with me talk....*

*A native health and innocence  
Within my bones did grow,  
And while my God did all his glories show,  
I felt a vigour in my sense  
That was all spirit. I within did flow  
With seas of life, like wine;  
I nothing in the world did know,  
But 'twas divine.*

Pray today that “A native health and innocence  
Within [your] bones [will] grow.”

**Day #5: “Made to Hold A Communion”**– In *Centuries of Meditations*, Traherne describes the mystical encounter he had at Credenhill.

*... being alone in the field, when all things were dead and quiet, a certain want and horror fell upon me, beyond imagination. The unprofitableness and silence of the place dissatisfied me; its wideness terrified me; from the utmost ends of the earth fears surrounded me. . . . I was a weak and little child, and had forgotten there was a man alive in the earth. Yet something also of hope and expectation comforted me from every border. This taught me that I was concerned in all the world: and that in the remotest borders the causes of peace delight me, and the beauties of the earth when seen were made to entertain that I was made to hold a communion with the secrets of Divine Providence in all the world. (CM III, 23)*

Pray today to receive confirmation that you too have been made “to hold a communion” with God’s abundant blessings.

**Day #6: Blessed to Be A Blessing** – As Abraham was blessed in order to be a blessing, so Traherne wrote about so loving and believing in God that others might also love and believe. In his poem “Amendment” Traherne uses the tact of questions to point to the crucial place and power of one’s faith in the task of enhancing the gift of grace.

*Am I a glorious spring  
Of joys and riches to my King?  
.... And may they see*

*So wonderful a thing  
As God in me?*

In your prayers today seek God’s blessing on your capacities to show God’s loving nature and grace-filled power to others.

**Day #7: Till the Sea Itself Floweth in Your Veins**– In one of Traherne’s most quoted poetical meditations, he writes about humanity’s relationship with the world. He balances the personal perspective of his ecstatic enthusiasm – and thus avoids being lost in narcissism – by his urgent desire for the happiness of others and his “*delight in God for being good to all....*”

*...Your enjoyment of the world is never right, til every morning you awake in heaven: and see yourself in your father's palace; and look upon the skies and the earth and the air as celestial joys having such a reverned esteem of all, as if you were among the angels.*

*You never enjoy the world aright, til the sea itself floweth in your veins; til you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world.*

*Til your spirit filleth the whole world the stars are your jewels; Til you are familiar with the ways of God in all ages as with your walk and table; Til you are intimately acquainted with that shady nothing out of which the world was made; Til you love men so as to desire their happiness, with an equal thirst to the zeal of your own; Til you delight in God for being good to all; You never enjoy the world.*

*Yet further, you never enjoy the world aright, til you so love the beauty of enjoying that you are covetous and earnest to persuade others to enjoy it.*

Pray today “as if you were among the angels,” feeling “the sea itself [flowing] through your veins,” knowing that “the stars are your jewels,” loving “the beauty of enjoying” God’s great wide world so much that you will not be satisfied until others join you in the Holy Palace of the Most High.

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Thanksgivings (A Serious and Patheticall Contemplation of the Mercies of God)
- Poetry** Poetical Works  
Centuries of Meditations  
Poems of Felicity  
Commentaries of Heaven: The Poems

This is a part of the weekly series of the Prayer Group of  
Community Christian Church, 4601 Main St., Kansas City, Missouri 64112  
816-561-6531, FAX 816-531-0805.

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