



*Sarah Monaghan*

Sarah Monaghan resides in Wichita, Kansas, with her husband, Adam, and two small children, Eliana and Seth. She attends Crossroads Friends Church. She enjoys working alongside her husband as they seek the Kingdom first and desire to be faithful in their roles as parents, neighbors, friends and partners with Evangelical Friends Church—Mid-America.

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 131*

My childhood family often celebrated a Sabbath Sunday afternoon by piling in the old red Suburban and driving through the countryside to the base of Stissing Mountain (Pine Plains, NY). The hike up the mountain was not exceedingly long, but for a small child's legs, it was unusually steep. The effort was rewarding, though, because at the peak was an old fire tower, with eight sets of exposed staircases. If you made it up all of those creaky steps, you were treated to an absolutely breathtaking panorama, one hundred miles in radius.

The problem was that I didn't always make it to the top. So often I would climb up to the third flight of stairs, then my eyes would look up to the top and I would wonder how I could ever make it up so high without falling. Something deeply physiological would happen in my knees and there I would stand, frozen in space and time, barely overlooking the treetops, completely missing the vista above.

Psalm 131:1 says, "O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me" (ESV). My adult experience of ordinary life validates my childhood experience of climbing Stissing Mountain. When I embrace my pride and try to "figure God out" and wonder and worry, I miss out on the beautiful rest that is available only when I have stilled and quieted my soul.

*SONG: Be Still, My Soul*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Keep my soul from pride and from the temptation to choose anxious thoughts instead of trusting you. May the stillness of resting in your embrace plant deep within my heart the immensely valuable seed of hope.*

—Sarah Monaghan

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 90:1-12*

Some of my favorite moments of the day occur just after the sun has set and I snuggle with my little ones in our long-outdated pink recliner and listen to their pre-sleep mumbles. Some days, amidst the babble, I imagine the topics that this pink recliner may witness in the years to come. I hope there are celebrations to recount and anticipate. I hope that we can find discernment and wisdom in the stickiness of life's circumstances. But in all these things, I hope that I can teach my children that our days on this earth are numbered and the length of our days is finite.

I desperately don't want my children to live in fear of death, but I want them to be mindful of it. That balance is hard. Dallas Willard is known for saying, "I think that, when I die, it might be some time *until I know* it." When we live in the reality of Immanuel, God with us, we find that life and death have a lot in common. In either case, we are surrounded by the immense love of God. I want my children to know this deep down in their soul.

But I also pray for my children that they will honor Jesus when he says, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life" (John 6:27). George Fox explained it this way "Mind that which is eternal, that lifts your hearts up to the Lord, and see that you are written on one another's hearts."

*SONG: Your Love Never Fails*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you for your love—it never leaves us. Nothing, not even death, can take us from your presence, God. Focus my gaze and my labor on that which is eternal.*

—Sarah Monaghan

*BIBLE READING: Phillipians 2:5-11*

A friend of mine led her church youth group in a thought-probing exercise. She started by asking the youth to each draw a line. On one end of the line, the youth wrote the word “War Monger” and on the other end of the line, the youth wrote the word “Pacifist”. She then had the youth put an X on the line to describe where they thought God fell in between those two extremes. She also had them put an X on the line for Jesus. Interestingly, almost every student put the X for God closer to “War Monger” and the X for Jesus closer to “Pacifist.”

Is this just the mistake of young Christians? Or are we guilty also of forgetting that we know exactly what God looks like? Jesus said, “Whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:19) and later “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

If you have ever wondered about the nature of God and wished you could know how he would lead you, don’t forget that Christians are the people who know what God looks like! He looks like Jesus, because he is Jesus! As you honor him as your Lord, immerse yourself in his life and learn from his way and his teaching in the gospels. Your understanding of God’s purposes on this earth will become increasingly clear.

*SONG: I Stand in Awe of You*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, God, that you have not hidden yourself from us, but that you have revealed yourself to us, acquainted yourself with our sufferings, and showed us exactly what God is like.*

—Sarah Monaghan

*BIBLE READING: John 5:24-30*

Quantum physicists believe it is possible for a very small particle to be in two places at once. My two-year-old daughter would understand quantum physics very well. Whenever I give her a choice of opposites such as, “Would you like to stay outside or go inside?” She always answers, “Stay outside, go inside.” She somehow thinks it is possible to do two opposite things at once.

Sometimes in our attempt to make our faith reasonable, we act like a classical physicist who cannot contemplate a particle that can be two places simultaneously. Perhaps we are guilty of trying to organize our faith in a linear way when ultimately we are called to live in the tension of “both/and.”

In John 5:24, Jesus says that he who believes in “him who sent me” has eternal life. In the next breath, Jesus, speaking of the resurrection, says, “those who have done good will rise to live” (5:29).

“Whoa. Which is it?” we spend our time wondering. But Jesus believed in quantum physics, just like my daughter.

When Jesus spoke to the righteous Pharisee, Nicodemus, he said that eternal life was obtained through belief. When Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler, he said that eternal life was obtained through giving up his wealth.

The woman with the alabaster ointment was forgiven of her sins in the act of anointing Jesus’ feet. The thief on the cross was forgiven his sins, simply in the asking.

Do good works? Yes. Simply believe? Yes.

*SONG: Trust and Obey*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Give me wisdom to know how you are working out salvation in my life. Help me to embrace belief, where there is unbelief. I confess my apathy which holds me back from doing good.*

—Sarah Monaghan

*BIBLE READING: Luke 1:28-38*

Some of the most difficult times of prayer in my life were when my now-husband, Adam, and I were just starting to correspond. I longed so deeply in my soul to marry him. But I wanted, with equal desperation, to be wise and discerning as to the leading of God.

There are times when a delightful hope lays hold of us so strongly, that all prayers and thoughts seem laden with the cumbersome longing for fulfillment. Sometimes yielding in despair can even seem the enviable option when compared to laboring in prayer and hope. As Adam and I waited through this time of uncertainty, I thought often, “How shall I pray?”

Mary, the mother of Jesus, gave me an example. Here was a woman who faced an uncertain future, who certainly hoped for many good things, probably none of which included a pregnancy that was out of wedlock. But nevertheless, her response to God’s work in her future was refreshingly simple and exactly the prayer that instructed my heart in the tender moments of hope, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word.”

How beautifully Mary’s prayer incorporates the peacefulness of surrender and the determination of hope. Yes, I am God’s servant and so I can live with a posture of yieldedness. Yes, my hope is in God’s word to me and therefore I live in great hope because his word is good.

*SONG: Seek Ye First*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I am your servant. I surrender to you. May it be to me according to your word. My hope is in you.*

—Sarah Monaghan

*BIBLE READING: Acts 3:1-10*

One of the joys of parenting has been watching my little two-year-old learn to talk to God. At meals and at night, my husband and I often ask her, “What would you like to talk to God about?” She has decided that praying consists of blessing others and so she often launches into a precious litany of blessings. But even more special to me are the moments when I happen to hear her from the next room, as she tucks her little doll into the straps of her stroller. She starts up a conversation with God so naturally, “Bless Grandma. Bless Mommy. Bless Jacob.” On and on. Just like that. In the middle of her toy room.

It’s fun how God uses the little ones to teach us what the Kingdom is like. Some days I long for the opportunity to go to a solitary place and experience the presence of God. But my little girl reminds me that *God is here*. I can pray on my feet. I can pray with my hands. I can pray as I go. Why do I forget the ease of living life with God?

Peter and John are examples to me of heroes who prayed with their feet. In Acts 3, they are simply *on their way*. They weren’t waiting for a spiritual moment. They were just going about their normal business. They saw a man in need. They proclaimed the healing power of the God who is with us. The cripple was healed.

May we not underestimate our conversations with God that happen along the way.

*SONG: I Need Thee Every Hour*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you for your presence in daily life. Thank you that you hear us when we call—whether from the solitary place or the busy place. Make me aware of you.*

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*BIBLE READING: LUKE 3:7-14*

Not all Bible stories cause me to imagine myself in the plot. But when I read this passage from Luke 3, I can so easily see myself lining up after the tax collectors and the soldiers to ask John the Baptist the very same question. Sometimes it almost seems like the next stanza reads, “And then a mom of young children (insert yourself here) came to John and asked him, ‘And what should I do?’”

In the liberality of my imagination, the answer that John gives is perhaps the most obvious answer that exists. His answer tells me to do what I intuitively know that I should do, but also that which I find hardest to do.

“Don’t treat your children as machines to be marched through the factory of life. Help them learn to see God in the hidden places. Create spaces and places of joy and wonder for them to experience his fullness. Model what it means to sacrifice for the redemption of others.”

Fruitfulness in the moment of my calling. There, that’s it. Nothing fancy. Nothing exotic. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

*SONG: I Am the Vine*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: May I walk humbly with you, that your life in mine may bear much fruit. In the unique circumstances of my life, may I consider how you would teach me to live so that this earth would look more like your kingdom of heaven.*

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