



Bethany Lee

After years of working as a full-time stay-at-home mom, homeschool teacher, and musician, I returned to school this year for training in the use of music in healthcare and hospice settings. I can trace this yearning back to my childhood, and I love watching God put the pieces into place for this work to begin.

My family and I live in Lafayette, Oregon. I work part time as an accompanist for several choirs in my district, and lead worship regularly at multiple Friends churches in the Portland/Vancouver area. In between all that and the work I do raising my girls (now a junior and a senior at McMinnville High School), I write, drink tea, read, and pay attention.

BIBLE READING: Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17

When playing a simple song, each note needs care and attention to create musical beauty. In a small batch of bread, accurate measurements become vital, as even a little too much salt or a smidgen too little yeast can impact the whole loaf. The most powerful poetry is spare, each word necessary.

So I think it is with my daily actions and choices. As a young adult, I was given the idea—if not explicitly told—that it was my job to change the world. “Do great things for God,” they said. “Dream big!” But my dreams have never been of large things and my skills and stamina don’t lend themselves to a large audience. I am content with, even prefer, my smaller life. More than once, by God’s leading, I have chosen a smaller sphere of influence and quieter life. Other times, this life has been chosen for me by chronic illness and physical weakness, by struggles with anxiety and depression, by a deep and welcome obligation to my immediate family.

I haven’t always been content with this idea. I bought into the concept that I could and should be a world-changer on a grand scale. I think it’s a human tendency to want to see the impact one makes in the world. Often most of what we do seems invisible; the pebble never sees the ripples it makes in the still water. Our daily kindnesses and simple acts may never make the news or the history books. But as I am called to a smaller and smaller sphere of influence, my life, my quiet actions, don’t matter less and less. They matter more and more.

SONG: Take My Life and Let It Be

PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, give me wisdom to hear your call and strength to follow.

—Bethany Lee

BIBLE READING: Mark 8:1-10

Today I'd like to ask that you read the Scripture before you return to these words. Or at least hold in your mind the story of Jesus and his disciples feeding the four thousand. What do you notice?

The story is simple. There were crowds of people listening to Jesus and they were hungry. The disciples brought the problem to Jesus, along with only seven loaves and a few fish—all they had found to offer. Jesus gave thanks, broke the bread, and handed it to his disciples to distribute. And all the people ate their fill.

Do you notice that Jesus didn't wait until after the small portion had been divided and multiplied to give thanks? He accepted what they brought without recrimination and gave thanks immediately. Do you notice that he didn't tell the disciples that what he handed them would miraculously be made enough? He just broke the bread and handed it over, and they passed it out. I wonder if they gave out parsimonious amounts for awhile until they saw that there would be enough. Did some go hungry because they didn't understand? Did they pass out real portions to the front row, thinking some should eat well, even if there wasn't enough for all? When did they start believing in the miracle of abundance? A few rows in? Not until the last person was served?

Do I give thanks for what I have to offer, even when it seems wildly undersized in the face of the hunger of the world? Do I share generously, leaving the multiplying power up to God?

SONG: Beautiful Things

PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, may I be faithful to offer what I have and trust you to make it enough.

—Bethany Lee

BIBLE READING: Isaiah 42:1-9

The slow food movement began in Italy in 1986 as an alternative to the fast food industry. Since then, “slow” movements of all sorts have sprouted around the world—slow home, slow design, slow parenting, slow religion, slow cinema, slow architecture, slow education. All these seek to remind people that faster is not necessarily better, to nurture the idea of quality versus quantity, and to reconnect us to each other through the slow process of community.

But our fast-paced world so often rewards the quick, demands instant results, and derides anyone who steps away from the rat race into a slower way of being. I bring my desire for instant change to my prayers. I want justice now. I want sanctification now. I want the kingdom of God now. I forget that my work is to partner with God, to work alongside the One beyond time who promises to “faithfully bring forth justice.”

Here in Isaiah 42:1-4, the prophet speaks of Christ, saying:

*I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
...a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth.*

(Isaiah 42:1-4 NRSV)

Along the way to justice, God is gentle to the oppressed and brokenhearted. My hope is not in power or force, my hope is in this gentle God.

SONG: I Lift My Eyes Up

PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, bring healing to this broken world; redeem us and make us whole.

—Bethany Lee

BIBLE READING: Romans 5:1-11

Recently, I spent a weekend visiting with out-of-town family and found myself in a deep conversation with my brother-in-law on the concept of hope. We were both feeling a bit discouraged and hope seemed like a flippant response to hard circumstances—a little cheap. I think at times I've mistakenly treated hope as the feeling you have while you wait for what you know you'll get.

It's hard to believe with all your heart that "hope does not disappoint" while knowing what you're hoping for will not soon come to pass, at least not in your lifetime.

Romans 5:3-5 reads, "We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (NRSV).

I would much prefer that hope came first in this equation, that somehow, if I could drum up enough hope, I would have the kind of character that endures well through suffering. But God's ways are not my ways. It is suffering that produces endurance; endurance, character; and character, hope. The hope that suffering, endurance, and character produce is not a cheap replica of hope. This is the hope of Moses, who led God's people to a land he would never enter. This is the hope of Hannah, who prayed for a child she would not get to raise. This is the hope of all who keep walking through a world of suffering, toward God's kingdom of mercy, justice, and grace.

SONG: My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less (The Solid Rock)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: By the power of your Spirit, God, may my suffering be transformed into hope.

—Bethany Lee

BIBLE READING: Psalm 27:1, 7-14

Recall from yesterday's entry the conversation about hope. Maybe you've had similar deep conversations amid the chaos of a family gathering. That same day, while I stood at the counter with my brother-in-law, my daughter and her cousins were playing a game over at the dining room table. We weren't paying that much attention to the general hubbub until, into a sudden silence, one hollered a rule-clarification, saying, "Courage is always a free action." We looked at each other and grinned, grateful for this reminder of truth from an unexpected source. Courage is always a free action.

Sometimes courage comes unbidden, like peace beyond understanding in the midst of the storm. This kind of courage walks me through the darkest nights and miraculously calms the fears I feel.

Sometimes no effort on my part can summon feelings of courage. My heart races, my breath catches, and I can't push my way free of anxiety. There is no shame in these moments of visceral dread. I bring my humanness to God and rest in his love and care.

But other days, courage is a choice. We are instructed to "Be strong and let your heart take courage," to "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful" (Psalm 27:14; Colossians 3:15). Courage and peace are God's gift and God's way. The choices I make from a place of courage will always be superior to those made out of fear.

SONG: Be Bold, Be Strong

PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, please nurture courage in my soul. Remind me that courage is always a free action.

—Bethany Lee

BIBLE READING: Proverbs 2:1-10

After years of playing only the piano, I'm learning to play the harp. I expected that it wouldn't all be easy, though I thought I'd be able to apply quite a bit of the theory and musicality I've learned over the years to my new instrument. And I've mostly been right about those expectations.

However, I didn't expect the harp to teach me. I've learned all sorts of new things about music, about theory and composition, and even about myself from this new endeavor.

One of my biggest lessons comes each time I practice. Before I even begin to play, I have to tune my harp. Most instrumentalists take this step as a matter of course, but I've always just sat down at whatever instrument was provided and started playing. If the piano is out of tune, has a broken string or a wonky hammer, there's not much I can do about it. So I learned to not pay too much attention to the problems with my instrument, not to listen too carefully to the tuning.

Since I've started tuning regularly, I've become much more sensitive to an out of tune string. There's a way that strings ring when they're in tune with each other that's not like anything else. Instead of a wimpy warble, the powerful sound swells and magnifies, filling the room. It's subtle, though, and it takes attention and careful listening to ensure.

Tuning my harp has moved from being a chore to being a cherished practice. Each time I stop to tune, I am reminded to listen well, to shift slowly to match the correct pitch. And these practices resonate well beyond my playing and into my life.

SONG: Teach Us To Listen (Nate Macy)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, tune my heart to your song of love.

—Bethany Lee

BIBLE READING: Psalm 119:97-105

One of a navigator's most important tools is a compass. Humans have been finding their way by compass for over a thousand years. Whether one is navigating on land or at sea, a quality compass can mean the difference between becoming lost and being found.

But a compass is an unreliable narrator, easily thrown off by what is around. Any ferrous metal nearby matters: the cooking pot three feet to starboard; the rigging knife set beside the binnacle; electricity flowing through nearby wiring. All these pull the fickle compass their way, exert their magnetic force and swing the North off true. There are even markings on the charts warning of magnetic deviation in the field surrounding the earth. These deviations vary from area to area and change over time with no discernible pattern.

On top of all this, the entire magnetic field shifts as well. True north and magnetic north are no longer the same. And sometime in the next billion years or so, the poles will reverse altogether in the slow, slow dance of magnetism.

A careful navigator takes all this into consideration. We too must attend well to the tools we use to find our way in this world—our interpretation of Scripture, our sense of the Spirit's leading in our inner self, the external voices we heed.

Take care of your compass. Keep it swinging freely, clear of distractions and obstructions. Recalibrate it regularly in clean, quiet places. Watch it closely. But never forget the power of a good, long look at the sky. And may love always be your guiding star.

SONG: Come Thou Fount

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Guide me along the right paths for your name's sake.

—Bethany Lee