



# 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 Carins

Community Christian Church - 4601 Main Street - Kansas City Missouri

## Session #1 - T.S. Eliot

**Thomas Stearnes Eliot** - St. Louis native, Harvard educated, Unitarian by background, Anglo-Catholic by choice, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (1948), renown as well because of his book *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, upon which the musical "Cats" is based - became the symbol of English language modern poetry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with poems like "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Gerontion," "Ash Wednesday," "Four Quartets," and, most importantly, "The Wasteland."

**Day #1: "Teach us to sit still...."** - In the first stanzas and then again toward the conclusion of one of his most religious poems, "Ash Wednesday," Eliot speaks of a universal petition to God by those who would be faithful: "Teach us to care and not to care/Teach us to sit still...." A true balance of passionate concern and patient trusting in God's care, and thus not our own, can be achieved only by learning how to "sit still...." Pray today for God's wisdom to be granted to you so that you can sit still enough to learn of God's care for you and the rest of the world.

**Day #2: Still Point** - In the second section of "Burnt Norton," Eliot describes "... the still point of the turning world...." Today, contemplate "the still point" that empowers your world to "turn."

**Day #3: The Mixing** - The most monumental of Eliot's poems, "The Wasteland," commences with the famous lines "April is the cruellest month, breeding/ Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/ Memory and desire, stirring/ Dull roots with spring rain." Give thanks for the month of April that we are now experiencing, but also offer up your prayers of grieving for the awkward (and sometimes painful) transformations which "springtime" growth and maturity entail.

**Day #4: When the Shadow Falls** - What do you do when the shadows of life seem to overtake you? Eliot has a solution: "Between the desire/ And the spasm/ Between the potency/ And the existence/ Between the essence/ And the descent/ Falls the Shadow/ For Thine is the Kingdom...." ("The Hollow Men") The poet's immediate response to the presence of those dynamics that would overtake a human being is to pray for God's kingdom. Pray this petition of "The Lord's

Prayer" with renewed conviction today, especially if you are weighed down by seeming contradictions of your life.

**Day #5: Prayer** - "And prayer is more/ Than an order of words, the conscious occupation/ Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.... Here the intersection of the timeless moment/ Is England and nowhere. Never and always...." So Eliot says at the end of the first section of "Little Gidding." Today, give a word of humble thanks for the touch of eternity upon your life.

**Day #6: Community** - In *Choruses from "The Rock,"* Eliot declares a mandate for community: "What life have you, if you have not life together?/There is not life that is not in community.... What is the meaning of this city?/ Do you huddle close together because you love each other?"/What will you answer? 'We all dwell together/ To make money from each other'? or 'This is a community'?" Pray today by giving thanks for the life you share in community with others which gives you life and entices others with life at its best.

**Day #7: Knowing Your Place** - In "Little Gidding" (#V), Eliot writes, "We shall not cease from exploration/ And the end of all our exploring/ Will be to arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time." Can you imagine the amount of "returning" that happens in your life? Can you further imagine experiencing a place for the very time? Seek from God the wisdom to know where and when and how you can return to a special place of origin in your life with fresh eyes, ears, and heart, mind, and soul.

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. © Robert Lee Hill, Kansas City, Missouri, 2008