

Accumulated longings

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

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God of our salvation, all our longing is known to you, our sighing is not hidden from you ...

So begins one of today's prayers in the [prayer book I use](#). Quite appropriately, as it turns out, for I do a lot of longing and a lot of sighing. Indeed, it seems like the older I get, the more longings I accumulate. I took an hour to make a partial list today.

I'm a parent, so my longing very often begins at home. I long for a good future for my kids, for them to make wise choices, for them to find ways to express their gifts and dispositions in ways that benefit themselves and others, for them to chart a course in the world that aligns with who and how God has made them, for them to respond in faith and glad obedience to their Creator. I long for them to love and to be loved well. I long for them to encounter acceptance and goodness far beyond what I could never secure for them.

I long for good things for those close to me—for parents and siblings and dear friends who I have known for decades. I long for health and strength and peace and fulfillment and hope and courage and joy and many other things besides. I know the road is long, and that each of us has faced and will face different obstacles along the way. I long for an abiding experience for each one of Christ along the way, the One who goes before, behind, around and within us no matter where life takes us.

I long for the church. A lot. I long for the church to become what Jesus had in mind for his body. I long for us to demonstrate unity and courage and conviction and hope, and to wean ourselves from our addiction to power and the unworthy metrics of faithfulness that we clamber after. I long for a deep commitment to the truth that there is no fear in love, and that to love well is to tell the truth about the world and our place within it. I actually do a lot of sighing for the church, as well, because having been part of this thing for a few decades now, I know that there is plenty worth sighing about. I sigh over how much we squabble and snipe, over how little charity we have for one another, how we seem so eager to define ourselves by what

(or who) we aren't rather than what (and who) we are in and through Christ. I sigh for how we say too much about what we should shut up about and not enough about those things that ought to call forth our voice. I long for the world to look at the church and to see always and only Jesus.

I have deep longings for a world put right. No more war, no more disease and famine and injustice and suffering and violence. No more commodifying of human lives, no more degrading and insulting discourse, no more trivializing of what matters most, no more careless and greedy exploitation of creation and one another. I long for a world where refugees return home and never have to run again. I long for a world where the rich and the loud and the powerful no longer squelch and stifle the poor, the weak, those whose voices are ridiculed, misrepresented, or ignored. I long for Isaiah's vision of wolves lying with lambs and all that warm, fuzzy eschatological goodness that we rehearse each Advent to become reality.

And, of course, I long on an individual level as well. I long to be less anxious, less frantically pessimistic, less uncertain about the many things I find to doubt in myself and the world. I long for an experience of joy to overwhelm and transform all that might naturally call forth my anger and sadness. I long to love more consistently and comprehensively. I long for less to require forgiveness for. I long for faith to grow strong and settled and true, and to be able to invite others into the same. I long to love what is good, true and beautiful more than I love being thought well of or vindicated or justified. I long for the law of God to be written on my heart, to know even as I am fully known.

Some of this longing, I am convinced, is good and worthy and true. But not all of it, no doubt. How could it be, for longings, like everything else in our human experience, needs to be retrained, reoriented and redeemed? I have little doubt that I sometimes long wrongly. I long for the presence of comforts that might be destructive and corrosive to the life that I was made for, and for the avoidance of trials that could undoubtedly purify my soul. I long to long better.

In the midst of all this longing and sighing, it is immensely comforting to return to the words of my prayer book. None of what I have written here and none of what I have withheld, is hidden from God. All of it is known by God and held by God. What a deep relief to be called back to the basic truth that God knows me better than I know myself, that God takes all the inchoate and fragmentary longings that I have gathered up along the way—all the sighing and groaning, all the hoping and praying,

all the failing and falling, all the loving and leaning that is part of who I am, who I have been, and who I will be—and improbably fashions it into salvation.

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