Plumbing his own sorrow and dramatic encounter with God, Matthew Clark mixes media to weave an expansive, inclusive, artful tapestry of the Christian life. There is so, so much beauty here to comfort, heal and inspire the reader. Perhaps my favorite line (of many!): "God was always dreaming of a wedding."

—Esther Lightcap Meek, author of *Doorway to Artistry* and *The Mother's Smile*

Where the River Goes is the soul-nourishing finale of The Well Trilogy. I'm not in the habit of meeting books that provide actual music in addition to vulnerable stories, literary reflections, and theological meditations, so I am quite sure I haven't yet gleaned all that this book has to offer. But I know firsthand that if this book is read as its format suggests—letting each writer's voice speak, listening to the songs as their lyrics appear—the attentive reader will find her understanding of Christ's love being built out image by image and word by word until all threads converge in the epilogue, where the last line sings.

—Amy Baik Lee, author of *This Homeward Ache*

Matthew's prose is as full of easy beauty and truth as the melodies we've come to know and love from him. This book, a perfect conclusion to his trilogy, is a gift to the Church.

—Kevan Chandler, author of *The Hospitality of Need*

In this album, accompanied by the book of essays, Clark and his fellow pilgrims take on a role similar to that of Abimelech, whom Abraham sent on a long journey to fetch a bride for his beloved son, Isaac. The journey home to the bridegroom is dangerous. The road ahead is fraught with wild animals, bandits, and exhaustion. Danger lurks in the moonlight. And, to use Clark's term, "every species of death" encountered along the way has the potential to breed fresh reluctance to go on. But with each new pang of fear when the bride feels like turning back, Clark and his friends, in Abimelech-like fashion, pull out of their satchels courage-scented blossoms picked from the Master's Garden, and hold them before her face, saying, "He will be worth it." And when she tires of looking ahead at the same old barren, dusty roads, and she is tempted to go back to the dainties of her old country, they reach down in their satchels and pull out fresh grapes from yonder Canaan and place them in her hand saying, "He is worth it."

Truly, this is a project that helps cultivate a proper "eyeing" of Jesus by faith, so that the hope of the full, unveiled sight of His radiant face will lead us home. I encourage all my friends to get a hold of *Where the River Goes*, and be reminded again and again that by the "eyeing" they do here, like Moses on the cusp of the promised land, they can glimpse the excellence of the country to which they are traveling.

—The Rev. Dr. Ryan T. Streett, Rector, Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Madison, Mississippi This beautiful project—both the songs and the book with its essays from a wealth of thoughtful contributors with their unique voices—are not a collection of disparate objects but rather a cohesive whole, much the way that lament and hope are bound together in our fallen but God-visited world. At the core of the project is the vital reminder that "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor 15:26). For in that reminder are both the hope and indeed knowledge that death will be destroyed, as well as the recognition that death is nonetheless still an enemy that has not yet been fully vanquished and which causes uncounted grief and sorrow. Thus, as Clark wisely notes in the book, "The Psalms invite us to make the very real pain of being a human in this world entirely mentionable to God. They seem to insist that we do so. And not just quickly mumbling our complaints into a corner; they're emphatic we sing out our laments in public, right alongside our thanks." Yet the core is also joy and hope and love, made all the more powerful because they do not deny the pain and loss, but point us to a joy and hope that transcend the loss. What I write here, though, as a somewhat clumsy attempt to say why this project is so moving and important, Matthew Clark and the various contributors do with great art and creativity, drawing on the wisdom of writers from Plato, Shakespeare, and John Donne to Hopkins, Chesterton, J. R. R. Tolkien, and C. S. Lewis. Like the best work of art, this project will move the hearts and imaginations as well as the minds of those who enter it.

—Matthew Dickerson, author of Aslan's Breath: Seeing the Holy Spirit in Narnia and Birds in the Sky, Fish in the Sea: Attending to Creation with Delight and Wonder Matthew has been bringing people together with his music for years, and his books are a perfect example of how he uses creativity to build community and draw others to the gospel. Where the River Goes is flush with ideas, experiences, and stories from writers drawn in by Matthew's music and his remarkable artistic hospitality.

Pete Peterson, Publisher, Rabbit Room Press,Artistic Director, Rabbit Room Theatre

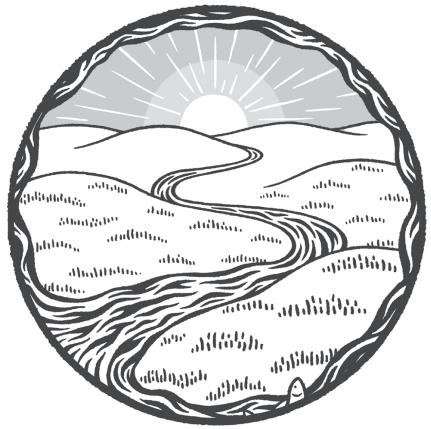
As a kindly guide full of hope and wisdom, *Where The River Goes* offers readers the best of company. Through its well-shepherded words, we are given in this good volume fine writing like twinkling lights for our evening path and stars above for courage. This is a book to keep close at hand and return to for deeper reading!

—Lancia E. Smith, Founder and Executive Director of The Maker's Project, Publisher of *Cultivating Magazine*

"Where the River Goes is a collective contemplation of final hope. This worthy final installment of The Well Trilogy sings a song of harmony to a world in despair, inviting us to see beyond the immediate darkness to the promise of eternal restoration. With insight and honesty, these essays reflect on the meaning of things, reminding us that joy is truly more profound than sorrow."

—Heidi White, Teacher, Podcaster, Classical Education Consultant, and Author of *The Divided Soul:* Duty & Desire in Literature and Life





Meditations on the Return of Jesus Christ
• in STORY and SONG •

MATTHEW CLARK

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by Matthew Clark

Steven A. Beebe
Rachel Mosley
Ruth Naomi Floyd
Elisabeth Adams
Micah Hawkinson
Esther Moon
Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson
Nicole Howe
Douglas Kaine McKelvey
Ned and Leslie Bustard
Malcolm Guite

Edited by Elisabeth Adams

For those who grieve and yet hope.



For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, who I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

JOB 19:25-27

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:24

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Welcome

Well, we made it! Welcome to the last book in The Well Trilogy, Where the River Goes. I am grateful to you for carving out a little space to spend with these songs and books. There are so many things you could be giving the very precious gift of your presence and attention to, and yet here you are. Thank you.

But where are we, exactly? Let's look around and get our bearings before moving forward.

In book one, *Only the Lover Sings*, we joined the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in the heat of the day. We talked about the things that have made us afraid of God, and the pain that's got us convinced we could never belong and that God could never call someone like us "Beloved." But, then we heard the woman at the well singing a song that shook our hearts with possibilities we'd long given up on; we took a risk, faced ourselves, and faced Jesus. Where we expected disgust on the face of God, we were astonished to find a tender smile. A new name, a new song, poured over us like cool water.

In book two, *A Tale of Two Trees*, we found ourselves exiles on pilgrimage through a harsh, confusing world. Why didn't meeting Jesus at the well fix everything? If anything, life feels even harder.

Was all that about belonging and belovedness a cruel joke? Am I crazy for believing these promises? Crazy for singing these songs of home in a place that feels so far from it? We talked about persevering, trusting, making again and again the choice to root ourselves in the True Vine—the Family Tree of God—even though the thorny, twisted branches of the Family Tree of Evil are always trying to choke out the Lover's singing. We found that we must keep the feast of song going in this world, not just for our own sake, but for the sake of those who don't yet know who Jesus really is and how he has loved them.

And now here we are in book three, *Where the River Goes*. This is a book about resurrection and joy. If this trilogy began with the light of Jesus' face by Jacob's well, and if that face seemed to withdraw behind a veil in the middle book, this is the full return of the Lord's shining face in all its glad glory—every veil removed.

Put another way, if this trilogy began with our thirst being surprisingly slaked at a well in Samaria, and then the water seemed to recede deep underground in the middle book, this is the breaking forth of all the reservoirs of God's presence in a Grand River that will bring cleansing and flourishing to all that he has made.

Or put even another way, if book one was about a Bridegroom going to find a very unexpected Bride, and book two was about that Bride fighting to keep on believing in that love while the Bridegroom was away, then this book is about the end of all that miserable waiting, because it's almost time for the wedding.

So, this book is about God's most beautiful dream for us and this world finally coming true. Still, if we're going to talk about God's good dream, we have to be honest about the nightmare. That means this has also turned out to be a book about Death. Literal physical death, yes, but also all those thousand species of death that we encounter every day of our lives. Because we all know that

for the time being, our experience is a confusion of both life and death, wheat and tares, good and bad.

Jesus, as usual, is honest and realistic about our situation. Remember the parable of the sower? That little seed can expect to endure a lot of opposition to its growth: heat, crows, thorns.

Something I love about Jesus, though, is that he doesn't accomplish healing by pretending like there is no problem, or like the problem is not as bad as it seems. I've looked a lot at the idea of grieving and healing over the last decade or so since my divorce, and a common theme has been that you can't grieve a false narrative and you can't grieve it alone. That is, if you want to really deal with a painful thing, you've got to face reality, and you need someone with you in the process. The cross is the ultimate example of both of these things. In the cross, Jesus shows us how bad things really are—and that even in a place this bad, he's glad to be with us. He really is Immanuel, God with us even here, in the most brutal of nightmares. Or as Psalm 23 puts it, the slain Lamb himself shepherds us through "the valley of the shadow of death." That psalm ends with an assurance that the Lord will get us through that death valley to the destination God always dreamt of for us: "to dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Meanwhile, the Lover sings two songs at the same time. One is an old song of weary lament: "How long?" The other is a rousing pilgrim chorus with an eye to the eastern horizon: "I am my beloved's and he is mine." The first moans through a veil of tears, "Oh, LORD, will you hide your face from us forever?" The second hums along like an invisible rivulet watering every good thing: "His love endures forever." The first song will grow thin and, at some point, expire entirely. The second will thicken and unfold endlessly.

So, thank you again for being here. This is just as much your story as it is mine. For, if a dream is a desire that love brings to be, you and I and this whole cosmos have been desired and loved into being, and our Maker, that greatest of dreamers, is preparing a place for us, just like we are being prepared for it. In fact, in the same way Jesus was prepared through pain to be just the right kind of savior for people like us,¹ we're being prepared for the deathless world to come by joining Jesus right where he has already proven himself glad to join us: in our grief and suffering.

Like any great storyteller, God seems to love a good narrative twist. Can you think of a better one than enlisting death itself as midwife of our new birth into endless life? Where we thought the dream had surely died and the story was over, new chapters begin. In the most unlikely of places—the crucified body of God—a way through sin and death is opened to us. The dream of God for his family lives.

Here is my prayer for you (or perhaps my dream) as you listen to these songs and read this book. I hope you see yourself seated around a dinner table with friends you love and trust. The sun has gone down. Most folks are finished with their meal, but no one is in a hurry to leave. Someone poses a question to those around the table: How have you learned to suffer well, to grieve honestly, and still hold on to hope? For the next few hours, tea, coffee, cake come and go, as each person shares some story of the many deaths love has outlasted.

Everyone listens. Everyone knows. In the quiet moments that no one worries about filling, a wordless kind of knowing gathers among the talkers where you sit. A bone-knowledge, a burning-of-the-heart kind of knowing wells up amidst the river-course of conversation you share: Jesus is here. He really is. And a Day is coming when the Last Enemy will be removed forever, obliterated by the light of Jesus' face and the breath of his mouth.

¹Hebrews 2:10-11

But I'm getting ahead of myself! You've got a whole book in your hands where you can read all about that. So have a seat at the table. I pray these writers and their essays, these songs and stories will be good companions for you as you press on in your pilgrimage of trust in Jesus Christ. There *is* a Great Joy set before us, and "even at the grave we make our song."

Introduction

A week ago today I couldn't get out of bed. Well, I did manage to get out of bed for coffee in the morning and some lunch around noon. Other than that, sleep was the most I could manage to deal with the unrelenting dismay I felt. The weariness that had me pinned.

A new skill I'm working on is to resist the pattern long-formed in me that shows up as an "obligation to be alone." When I find myself in some ridiculously sad spot, my new rule is that I have to tell someone. Just let someone know. So I did. On this particular occasion, I told two people: Annie and Diana. They prayed for me, and suggested that a walk might help disrupt the deep groove of sadness. Good advice, except that one of my pinkie toes was the shape and color of a Concord grape, having been magnificently stubbed in the early morning dark the day before. Woe upon woe upon toe!

²This phrase surfaced and has become important as a way of naming a basic disposition that has taken root in me. I'm thankful to Jesus for challenging (often by way of the family of friends he's set me in) the automatic belief that I somehow owe the world my absence.

I don't know about you, but I get something like voices in my head on these kinds of days. Cruel voices. They say things I wouldn't say to a dog I already hated that had just eaten the dog I loved. But the mean words have bite, because there seems to be some substance, some truth to their teeth.

Outrageous meanness can sound perfectly reasonable. The weird thing is how long I am willing to put up with it. I have lingered too long, dwelling in the tents of Kedar. That's what the psalmist says in Psalm 120. Whoever wrote that was worn out from living among the hateful, ready to pull up the tent pegs and set out, if not for greener pastures, at least pastures with fewer fanged foes camped next door.

Once again the scriptures prove relatable on the deepest levels. Whether the psalmist was talking about his fellow villagers, his closest kin, or maybe even the voices in his head, I can connect to the feeling that something's got to give. Good Lord, is there nowhere I can go to get away from this?

The next thing that pops into my head is a little voice that says, "How dare you complain, when there are people with much harder things going on?" See what I mean about the reasonableness of the voices? I wouldn't say that to a hurting friend who came to me, even if I did think their trouble was manageable. I'm not sure how one-upping suffering is supposed to help.

Even Christ, as far as I can tell, didn't say, "Stop whining, I mean, look how bad so-and-so's got it." It seems to me that even at the cross, Jesus isn't saying, "I've got it worse, so get to praising instead of complaining." Instead, the cross is Jesus naming the reality of our situation. He suffers our suffering, saying, "I see how much it hurts. It's *this* bad, isn't it?"

"Every species of death" is a phrase I've used across this trilogy, one meant to encompass the fullness of our suffering. Recently, my friend Glenn pointed out in his writings on lament that death is not just one thing; it's everything that isn't life. It's any word, action, meanness, news report that is anti-life. We encounter a thousand species of death on a daily basis. Just this morning, I was talking with a mother about the unsolvable grief of estrangement from a child and, in turn, from her own grandchildren. She said, "But that's life, I guess." Glenn's lament came to mind, and I said, "No, that's not life—that's death. That's just one instance of death's horrific intrusion into this good world."

That's the thorny briar working its way up from the roots of the Family Tree of Evil to wedge itself between family members, killing, stealing, and destroying. Putting asunder what God intended to be joined together.

You may remember from earlier in this trilogy that *diabolical* means to "throw apart" or divide, and its opposite is *symbolical*, which means to "throw together" or unite. You could think of *death* as anything with a diabolical quality—anything that divides what God originally intended to be joined and whole. And you could think of *life* as anything that carries on the redemptive, healing work of re-symbolizing God's primary and enduringly good Creation that has been put asunder by the intrusive and perishable will of death. Even you and I can become diabolical agents anytime we participate in whatever works against the way the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live their life. That's one way to talk about what sin really is. It's anything that deviates from the beautiful ways of the Trinity, from the dream of God.

Death was not God's dream for us or this world, even if he did account for it. His dream was a giant family get-together, a feast. Ultimately, the greatest of these feasts of union is what we call a wedding. It's no accident that, in Christianity, the world as we know it ends with a feast of union on a scale the cosmos has never seen, and no human has ever dreamt of, though all our dreams are suffused by it. How could they not be? This union is

what we were made for. It is God's dream for us. It was his dream for us from before he even created us. What kind of thing are we humans? We are just the right kind of thing to be wedded to God himself, married right into the Life of the Trinity forever. If you'll permit me playing at applying such romantic imagery to God, we're just the kind of thing to be so desirable and dear that a man (even a God-man) might make a complete fool of himself in front of the whole wide world, in hopes that we might sing back to him the love song he's been out under that streetlight singing up to our windowsill since darkness fell. He might be reckless with his own heart—something of the "foolishness" of God—but by no means rash or aimless in his endeavors to win our affections.

The end of the world isn't the end of anything but this long (albeit rocky) courtship, where God has been doing everything necessary to prove himself a suitable suitor, so to speak. And so, here in this last book of The Well Trilogy, we come back to the place we started: a weary God-man laying it all on the line in hopes of catching the skeptical eye of a deeply wounded woman by Jacob's well in Samaria. She's the wrong woman; we all are. But what can you tell a fool for love? He's made up his mind. You can give Jesus all the reasons he should be looking elsewhere—and they may be excellent reasons—but God's love is, for the most part, unreasonable. He's got that dreaming, faraway look in his eyes—he's already picking out the paint colors for the room he's going to build for you in his Father's house.

But I should backtrack a bit. The end of the world will be the end of something besides the courtship. It will be the end of death. It will be the end of death in all of its seemingly endless iterations. Every species of anti-life that has ever evolved across time, regardless of how fit it has appeared to be thus far, will not survive. Wickedness has no prospects.

Let's linger over that word, *prospect*. It's got the root word *spect* like *spectacle*, *spectator*; it has to do with vision, and the *pro* part has to do with forward motion. So, a prospect is "forward vision"—a vision for the future. The vision that evil casts forward about the future is a deception; it's simply not real. If there is no wickedness in God, then wickedness doesn't have any ultimate claim upon reality. When what is really Real arrives, death and anything that has allied itself to anti-life will be exposed for what it is, which is not much of anything, really.

"What's lost is nothing to what's found, and all the death that ever was, set next to life, would scarcely fill a cup," writes Frederick Buechner.³ In *The Great Divorce*, Lewis depicts hell as a thing so small that if a butterfly swallowed it, "it would not be big enough to do it any harm or to have any taste." Like the fog burned away by the sun, like hunger and thirst abolished by food and drink, like fear dissolved by the embrace of perfect love, death will be swallowed up by reality, by life.

To stay with the idea of prospects, the Christian is assured by the deposit of the Holy Spirit that there's plenty more where that came from. God is casting a vision out in front of us, a vision so good it seems incredible. I mean, it strains our sense of what is credible, especially for us, so well-trained by fear and sorrow. *Resignation* is the word I think of most often to describe what it's like when one's heart collapses into a foregone conclusion about life's sad absurdity. That resignation often appears, externally at least, as confidence and authority. But it is a confidence in hopelessness.

"Despair," says Gandalf, "is only for those who see the end beyond all doubt. We do not." Despair requires a level of certainty

³Frederick Buechner, *Godric* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 96.

⁴C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 120.

⁵J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 262.

about the future we do not have, because some unexpected good is just as likely as some expected bad.⁶ Wrong though she was, I imagine despair seemed a foregone conclusion for the Samaritan woman—a confidently held sense of resignation. She simply couldn't have dreamed she was actually "living her life on the brink of a great beginning." Until there was an apocalypse⁸ at Jacob's well—an unveiling of the delighted face of God himself, shining upon her, of all people! Incredible.

In this last book, the same Face that smiled upon us at that well in Samaria, the Face we worried had abandoned us by the bitter waters of exile in Babylon, returns to face us again with unclouded joy. C. S. Lewis, for whose conversion joy was foundational, wrote to his brother Warnie, "I begin to suspect that the world is divided not only into the happy and the unhappy, but into those who like happiness and those who, odd as it seems, really don't." Psalm 96 portrays a raucously jubilant cosmos, celebrating precisely because the LORD has come to judge the earth. When Jesus, the Only Unconfused One, faces the world, every place where evil has been fused with God's good Creation will be removed. The tares and the wheat will be separated. These things are hard to talk about, aren't they? In Ezekiel, Yahweh is emphatic. "Do you think that I like to see wicked people die?' says the Sovereign LORD. 'Of course not! I want them to turn from their wicked ways and live" (Ezek 18:23 NLT). That is the voice of a loving God who "hopes all things" and yet is realistic about the fact that some people will forever bite the

⁶Actually, goodness is infinitely *more* likely, given that at the heart of reality is the God disclosed in and by Christ.

⁷Amy Lee, "The Bright Window," *Cultivating Magazine*, March 6, 2019, https://cultivatingoakspress.com/the-bright-window/.

⁸Apocalypse is a word that usually carries a negative, destructive connotation. But its meaning is positive, since it means the unveiling or the long-awaited revealing of the beautiful face of Jesus at his second coming.

⁹C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 2 (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 334–335.

hand that feeds them, threatening the well-being of God's family. Death and death's allies will be removed. Meanwhile, anyone's life can still change direction. Tares can be transformed into wheat.¹⁰ Sinners can be saved. Death can be undone, at the very point it seems most impossible. Tolkien coined a word for it: *eucatastrophe*:

The sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears... it produces its peculiar effect because it is a sudden glimpse of Truth, your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb out of joint had suddenly snapped back.... this is indeed how things really do work in the Great World for which our nature is made.¹¹

Eucatastrophe is, apparently, a feature of reality; the unexpected happy ending hinted at in nearly every fairy tale is true of our world. Though we can be certain that the Family Tree of Evil and Death will one day be uprooted with finality, we can always hope that a given branch will repent and be grafted into God's Family Tree. It happens all the time. It's likely happening right now. Anyone "who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom 10:13).

The eucatastrophic fairy tale turn is something, under normal circumstances, that children naturally know, isn't it? In *The Pilgrim's Inn* (a book I've referred to already in this trilogy) Elizabeth Goudge says, "The expectation of childhood is that gloriously unlikely things are likely to happen at any moment." ¹²

¹⁰For more on this idea, see the introduction to *A Tale of Two Trees*.

¹¹J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter, assisted by Christopher Tolkien (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000), 100. (Letter 89)

¹²Elizabeth Goudge, *Pilgrim's Inn* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1948), 211. This quote is in chapter 12, in case you get a newer version. I loved this book so much that I wrote a related song called "The Heart of the Wood," which you can listen to online.

Children, until the heart is deeply broken, dream of "a joy set before them." Assuming the best, they revel in elaborate visions of good as they look forward to being grown-ups. I'll say more about that in the Epilogue.

The trick is to keep the feast of that childlike expectation in the midst of heartbreaking brutality. To keep singing the songs of Home, even by the withering rivers of Babylon. The footsore pilgrim is constantly tempted to cease her pilgrimage toward Joy and resign herself to life among the tents of Kedar. To conclude that none of this was really going anywhere anyway. It was just some stupid dream. Child's play. Time to grow up. That's the conclusion I'm tempted to wallow in on those days when I can't get out of bed, and death's whisperings crowd my cranium.

Meanwhile, the whole world is practically busting at the seams with some great secret. Haven't you seen it in the face of a friend who's desperate to tell you some juicy thing they've promised not to divulge? Their mouth may stay shut, but their face makes it plain. This world's beautiful face is no different. Earth and heaven are barely containing some delicious secret. Every beauty is winking at clues, dropping hints. They may not utter a word, but their language pulses out a proclamation to the very ends of the earth.

Ironically, even the letter of the law, in a roundabout way, suggests that just maybe there really is a realm where righteousness, justice, humility, and mercy light upon all there is, without leaving a single shadow on the land. I see it in Paul's writings. Whatever he glimpsed in his encounter with Christ, he strove to get across to his readers. What did he see? Whatever it was, he couldn't describe it. Either he wasn't allowed, or even for a wordy fellow like him, it was irreducible to language.

But I think he must've seen something like a foregone conclusion, not in the direction of resignation to despair, but toward the inevitable realization of God's dream for what he has lovingly made. It was good enough news that Paul claimed any suffering we could possibly encounter would be worth it. If you had any idea how securely held you really are, of the good you've got coming to you, of how Christ's visitation has completely changed what's possible for, well, the whole universe, you'd count the very worst death that could throw at you as puny. No big deal—and this from a guy who was no stranger to serious suffering.

For the woman at the well, in light of the face of Jesus, no cruel claim of shame could keep a grip on her anymore. She sings with the innocence of a maiden, carefree as a Carolina wren. A vision of joy has washed over her, has washed over Paul, is washing over all that there is like a Great River of liquid gladness.

The last thing I want you to hear me saying is that suffering doesn't matter or the hurt is all in your head. Or even that suffering, if we could nail down the equation or believe hard enough, is solvable. How could I say that without minimizing even Jesus' crucifixion? Even after my divorce, when I was so blistered to the bone by death, I can tell you that Jesus didn't fix anything. Didn't distract or entertain me. Didn't try to cheer me up. Didn't try to shrink the misery by saying, "Well, at least..." Didn't make me feel like an idiot for hurting, by comparing my suffering to someone else's. He just showed up and said, "Take your time. I'm glad to be with you. I'm not going anywhere."

I think about Hebrews 11 and the list of faith-heroes. We're told they didn't receive what they hoped for. Many of them were brutally martyred. Because they weren't adequately optimistic? Because they failed to tap into the power of positive thinking? No, because this is a world where things go horribly wrong, where anyone is free to be cruel, or kind, or foolish, or wise, where even God doesn't always get what he wants, precisely because God has made himself rejectable, wound-able (which is what *vulnerable* means).

Still, our wounded God has committed himself to putting

back together anything that has been put asunder. Anything torn that we lay in his hands, he's promised to mend. I began this trilogy by describing how Jesus met me in the misery of my own divorce, and you could think of divorce as a central metaphor of death's diabolical quality. Death divorces us from everything and everyone we love. Death, in a million different forms, shoots our heart full of holes like buckshot. But Jesus loves weddings. He loves to take tenderly in hand a hole-riddled heart, slip it right into his side like St. Thomas's fingers, and hide it in his own holy, pierced, heart.

That is the place where every human heart was conceived in the first place, and it is every human heart's true, longed-for home. Jesus can and will get us home. That Face you saw shining upon you by Jacob's well will one day be unveiled when the curtain of the sky is rent in two. In the light of his perfect love, anything that separates us from him, he will separate from us. No amount of death will be the end of you. And, one day, we'll see our impossibly strong enemy vaporized forever, when the I AM says, "I do." It's a foregone conclusion that this world ends with a wedding.

When God sets his heart on his Bride, look out. "Love's as strong as death, as unrelenting as the grave," says the Song of Songs (8:6). Paul says that he's convinced that "neither life nor death, nor angels, nor demons, nor anything in all of heaven or earth" (Rom 8:38–39) can knock this Great Lover off course. You want to stand in the way? I can't say I'd recommend it. You want to lift your cruel voice to condemn and accuse the one God has called "Beloved"? Well, I mean, all right, fella, but I can't see how that's going to end well for you. "If God is for us, who can be [foolish enough to be] against us?"

You want to dam up that River of God's redemptive Spirit? You will be swept away. Funnily enough, you'll be swept off either way, but you're always invited to go with the flow and be swept wonderfully away—like a lover is swept off her feet. Eucatastrophe

is a catastrophe even for the believer, but the kind that wrecks us to wash us, rending and removing our mortality to bathe and clothe us in immortality.

A very long time ago, Ezekiel saw as much. He saw death. He saw the hell of exile. And right in the middle of all that catastrophe, he was given a good vision of the hopeful prospects that, in the end, could only flow from God himself. A great healing watercourse that would bring life where it seemed most impossible. Jacob's well becomes, at the end of the age, a river... *the* River.

"Streams of mercy never ceasing" flow from the mouth of God's dwelling, pouring like a cascade that crescendos across Creation. A glad song—a wedding song—for anyone with ears to hear. And what is it that makes this song that is making its light to shine, smiling on all with eyes to see? A face... *the* Face.

Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. *Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face?* If we could only get round in front—¹³

We are a veiled Bride on a long pilgrimage down the aisle of the ages. Ahead, we see the back of the Great Groom, our God. One day we will arrive, and he will lift the veil that has so long obscured our view of his face. At that mutual apocalypse, we will finally get round front. We shall meet that "Love which moves the sun and all the stars," and discover ourselves folded into that thrice-holy eternal embrace. We will see him seeing us, and God's dream for his family will come fully true. That true happily ever after, about

¹³G. K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (New York: Dover, 1986), 100. (Italics mine.)

which all the best tales and the deepest beauties the world has known offer only the merest hints, will at last begin its endless unfolding. That destiny for which we were created, to be *with* and *like* Jesus, will appear with his appearing. "What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).



How Long?

When will you ever, Peace, wild wooddove, shy wings shut, Your round me roaming end, and under be my boughs? When, when, Peace, will you, Peace? — I'll not play hypocrite

To own my heart: I yield you do come sometimes; but That piecemeal peace is poor peace. What pure peace allows Alarms of wars, the daunting, wars, the death of it?

O surely, reaving Peace, my Lord should leave in lieu Some good! And so he does leave Patience exquisite, That plumes to Peace thereafter. And when Peace here does house He comes with work to do, he does not come to coo, He comes to brood and sit.

G. M. Hopkins, "Peace"

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.

Rev 9:6-11

e went through two waitresses and one waiter during the long visit, and ended up closing down the restaurant. Over the course of those hours at the dinner table, someone would come fill our glasses and ask if we were ready to order. Then their shift would end with our ignored menus still pushed aside, and someone new would pick up where they'd left off. "We're longtime friends, and it's been a few years since we've gotten to sit down and catch up," I explained, "We'll be here awhile." We explained many times, until the last waitress, a kind, graying woman in her fifties, thoughtfully offered to establish a signal. "Place the menus like so, and I'll know you need something. Until then, I'll leave you to visit."

There was so much to talk about. Major life changes. Relocations, new careers, family updates, creative projects. And losses. Some of those losses we'd gone through together, and talking through them, we agreed about the strange, almost unreal quality those years of grief have taken on over time. How to describe it? It can feel like looking through the wrong end of the binoculars to see a faraway image of your world that feels unconnected to reality. Like those memories aren't really yours, couldn't really be yours. Maybe you saw that horrible thing in a movie somewhere. It was someone else's life, wasn't it? Surely you didn't actually live through that. All the while knowing that you did. All the while knowing that however alien those experiences feel, they remain a part of you—of the song that you sing (and that you are) in the world.

In that singing-sense, our voices blended there in the corner of the restaurant as patrons dwindled, waitstaff came and went, and the candle on our table petered out, sending a long strand of sweet smoke heavenward. We lamented and laughed, as the song of our long friendship wove its way through regions of sorrow and joy, death and life.

In Tolkien's *The Return of the King*, once the Ring has been destroyed and all are gathered at the king's table, Samwise watches as the court minstrel steps forward to sing the story of evil's defeat and the birth of a new eon of righteous rule. All who listened "passed in thought out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness."

Till then, we cry out, like those beneath the altar slain for the faith, "How long?" It's an old, old song, and who isn't weary of singing it? The whole world groans it out, and has since Eden. One day, that song will peter out, expiring heavenward, and the old establishment will close down for the last night. How long till then? Who can say, but when we rise to that full and final dawning, we'll wake to a world as like and unlike our own as the old song is to the new, as the smoke-strand is to the bright, newborn flame.



How Long?

There's nothing new beneath the sun There is no song that ain't been sung But there is one that won't go on forever

That song is writ in blood and tears
That beat down through these weary years
A song that burns down in our bones like a fever

How long, how long, O Lord?
Till we hang our broken harps up by the River?
How long, how long, O Lord?
Till a world that went so wrong is delivered?

Your Bride has waited patiently Kept watch these many centuries Your Family Tree sent roots down deep to listen

But these branches thirst for righteousness For springs to burst the firmament To wash this withered riverbed with music

Count me among the fools out carving little boats
In the middle of the desert
Who still believes in you and every word you spoke
And keeps an eye out for the weather

How long, how long, O Lord
Till the labor pain of song gives way to wonder?
How long, how long, O Lord
Till the Day you tear the veil of sky asunder?



Longing for Home

Steven A. Beebe

I didn't know if he would live through the night. Jason, a beloved family friend whom I've known all his life, was in the grip of heroin addiction.¹⁴ When he called, I was in the middle of a busy afternoon filled with teaching, meetings, and presiding over our annual Communication Week celebrations at Texas State University, where I served as chair of the Department of Communication Studies.

I will never forget the terror and fear in his voice. "I'm not sure where I am right now. Leaders of a drug cartel are coming for me. I owe them money!" Then he sobbed, "If I don't pay them by tonight, they said they will kill me!" They knew where he lived, so he couldn't return to his apartment. "I don't have a car and I have no money. They are looking for me! Please help!" he pleaded.

He had been in and out of drug treatment centers and halfway houses for the past twenty years. It was bad. His parents had twice planned his funeral in the heartbreaking expectation that he wouldn't survive. Over those twenty years, when he had no one else to turn to, he would call me. Sometimes in the early morning

¹⁴Name changed.

hours, sometimes interrupting a workday, his panicked requests made me feel that I'd been thrust into the middle of a tragic opera.

"Yes," I said haltingly, realizing the gravity of the situation, "I'll help." We decided on a pickup point in Austin, Texas, where I checked him into a hotel, and wondered again if he would survive the night. There were many other days when I answered his emergency calls, but I had not yet learned how to avoid enabling his disease of addiction. Nor had I always drawn on the support I needed to remind me that even during dark nights of fear and uncertainty there was hope.

As I reflected on the many times he reached out and I simply didn't know what to do or how to help him, I asked myself, "How long? How long can he survive this crisis? How long can or should I keep trying to help?" Blessedly, he made it through that night, but his battle with addiction was far from over.

I've always taken comfort in the Good Friday sermon "It's Friday—but Sunday's Comin'!" It's a stirring message of being confronted with profound Friday fear and anxiety, the bleak uncertainty of Saturday, with a joyous Sunday conclusion. Originally preached by S. M. Lockridge, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in San Diego, it was brought to a larger audience by Tony Campolo.¹⁵

In my own experience of frightening "How long?" episodes, I have too often kept my focus on my "Friday" fear rather than the "Sunday" promise of victory. This sermon's message resonates with me and many others because it juxtaposes two common life experiences: suffering and hope, confronting profound fear and anxiety with the promise of the resurrection.

¹⁵For a history and summary of Lockridge's sermon, see Candice Zakariya, "It's Friday, But Sunday's Coming—A Powerful Sermon by S. M. Lockridge," *Her Daily Bible*, April 14, 2022, https://medium.com/her-daily-bible/its-friday-but-sunday-s-coming-a-powerful-sermon-by-s-m-lockridge-8a34b494e9cb. Also see Tony Campolo, "It's Friday but Sunday's Comin," YouTube, https://www.youtube.com//watch?v=RkKvdvZ77-0; *It's Friday but Sunday's Comin*' (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 120–121.

Perhaps you are experiencing anxiety and dread on behalf of a loved one. But not all "How long?" moments are as dramatic as the crisis call I received from Jason. Some are trivial: being interminably placed on hold by your internet company with music unfit even for those cloistered in an elevator. Whether inconsequential, or a life-hangs-in-the-balance emergency, you, too, have undoubtedly voiced the centuries-old lament, "How long?"

In the middle of our suffering, we may feel alone in our pain, or unique in our brokenness. But we are in good company. Feeling alone, depressed, and estranged from others is a centuries-old human experience. As Solomon reminds us, "There is nothing new under the sun." Sometimes all we can do is impatiently suffer. As Ron Rolheiser aptly paraphrases the third chapter of Lamentations, "Sometimes all you can do is put your mouth to the dust and wait." ¹⁶

It's Friday

In his unforgettable sermon, Lockridge passionately reminds us of the pain and anguish of Good Friday (called Sorrowful Friday by some):

It was Friday, and Mary was cryin' her eyes out. The disciples were runnin' in every direction, like sheep without a shepherd, but that was Friday, and Sunday's comin'. *It was Friday!* The cynics were lookin' at the world and sayin', "As things have been so they shall be. You can't change anything in this world; you can't change anything." But those cynics didn't know that it was only Friday. Sunday's comin'! ¹⁷

¹⁷Campolo, YouTube.

¹⁶Lam 3:29. Ron Rolheiser, "How to Respond," Personal blog, August 27, 2018. https://ronrolheiser.com/how-to-respond/#.ZBNhYi-B0kg.

As we endure our "mouth full of dust," we are nonetheless promised that there will come a time when all will be well. But we don't know when our Sunday will arrive.

When I waited through the night hoping Jason would still be alive in the morning, I experienced palpable fear; I didn't know how that drama would end. Like the captive Israelites living in ancient Babylon, we know what it is like to live with the heartache and anxiety of a "Friday" world. As Christians, however, we have been told how our "life opera" ends: we are not cast in a tragic plot, but one of triumph. But the presence of pain often drowns out any promise of hope. Pain is loud. We not only have our personal periods of distress and dread, but we can readily see evidence of a "Friday" world in the Ultra-High-Definition-4K-Surround-Sound news pictures that are daily beamed into our homes, or instantly accessible on our phones and tablets. And like the movie *Groundhog Day*, the images of war, famine, mass murder, earthquakes, wildfires, and heartbroken people seem to be the same images we saw yesterday.

But it's not just the newsworthy tribulations that arouse our compassion; we each experience life-depressing personal trials, disappointments, separation, and sadness. More than 60 percent of adults in the United States report feeling chronically lonely, with ages eighteen to twenty-two feeling the loneliest. US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy proclaimed that persistent loneliness was as deadly as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. 19

It may appear that pain, despair, and suffering have triumphed. Our lives may feel like Mr. Tumnus's description of a White-Witch-dominated Narnia: it's "always winter and but never Christmas." ²⁰

¹⁸Mark Elias, "49 Loneliness Statistics: How Many People Are Lonely?" *Discovery Therapy*, May 23, 2024, https://www.discoveryaba.com/statistics/loneliness.

¹⁹ Dylan Scott, "The Surgeon General Says Loneliness Is as Deadly as Smoking," *Vox*, May 3, 2023, https://www.vox.com/policy/2023/5/3/23707936/surgeon-general-loneliness-epidemic-report.

A few months after Jason's panicked call, he asked for help getting his weekly dose of methadone, needed to mitigate his cravings. His car had been stolen or, more than likely, exchanged for drugs. When I picked him up, I was repulsed by the putrid smells and disarray of his apartment, and disappointed that his disheveled appearance confirmed he was still in the grip of addiction. After I took him to get his medication, I asked where he would like to go next. After a long pause coupled with a vacuous stare, he muttered, "I don't know." After another long pause he said, "I guess take me back to my place." I feared that if I took him home, his heroin-fueled addiction would continue, but I simply didn't know what else to do. My premonitions proved accurate. He wasn't yet ready for sobriety.

How Long, O LORD?

Several millennia ago, the author of Psalm 13 also asked, "How long, O LORD?" Taking his plight personally, he continued, "Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Ps 13:1)

As we experience today's pain, we may forget that Jesus promised that there will be suffering. He said, "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn over what is going to happen to me...." (John 16:20 NLT). Theologian Henri Nouwen reminds us, "To wait patiently, therefore, means to allow our weeping and wailing to become the purifying preparation by which we are made ready to receive the joy that is promised to us." But in the moment of my own fear for Jason's life, these words seemed mere words. The emotional angst overwhelmed any efforts to reflect on lofty religious promises. That is, however, what we are asked to do: Wait. We are called to have patience.

²⁰C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950).

²¹Henri Nouwen, You Are the Beloved (New York: Convergent, 2017), 77.

The word *patience* has its origin in the Latin word *patientia*, which means "to endure suffering." Although Jesus told his disciples that they must wait "a little while" for him to return to them (John 16:16), he provided no precise schedule. How long is "a little while?" How long is the Saturday between Friday's anguish and Sunday's glory? Like impatient children on a cross-country car trip, we repeatedly ask, "Are we there yet?"

After posing the "How long?" question, Psalm 13 moves from a lament to an instructional hymn of hope: "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation/I will sing to the LORD, for He has been good to me" (Ps 13:5–6 NIV/BSB). Amid our struggle, we long to see a sliver of light under the door that obscures our view. The sight of a veil offers promise that there is beauty behind it. From the psalmist, we learn not only to pray for relief from our present concerns, but to also trust in God's everlasting love.

As the lyrics to "How Long?" remind us, waiting can be accompanied by a song soaked in blood and tears. Years of waiting make us weary. We sing a song that burns in our bones like a fever. We likely feel helpless, even foolish, as we carve boats in the desert when the weather forecast offers no hope of rain.

Longing

Most of us are waiting for something. Perhaps you are waiting for something positive—a highly anticipated event, vacation, anniversary, the completion of an academic degree, or a promotion at work. The word *advent* stems from the Latin *adventus*, which means "arrival" or "appearance." Our lives are punctuated with advents. We long for something better to appear.

C. S. Lewis embedded the idea of longing in virtually everything he wrote. He suggested that what we wait for may not currently be attainable: "The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that really excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy."²² Is Lewis trying to squelch our hope? Or is he suggesting we just need to be patient—for now?

Lewis labeled this unrequited longing *Sehnsucht* (pronounced *Sehn-Zuckt*) which is German for "yearning" or "craving."²³ We long for "something," suggests Lewis, that is not accessible in this realm. So, when we ask, "How long?" even though we may have "something" more immediate in mind, there is an ultimate longing expressed by the psalmist in the question, "How long, how long, O LORD?" Yet, we typically seek instant gratification. The ancient Jews, while captives in Babylon, were longing to hang their broken harps by the river so they could return home.

In his sermon "The Weight of Glory," delivered to a packed Oxford University church on June 8, 1941, Lewis suggests that what we long for may be misdirected. "The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing." Continuing, Lewis eloquently unmasks what we truly seek, by offering metaphoric promises of what is to come:

These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.²⁵

²²Lewis, Mere Christianity (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952), 135.

²³Lewis, Surprised by Joy (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955), 14.

²⁴Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," *Theology: A Monthly Review* 43, No. 257 (November 1941), 265–266.

²⁵Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," 266.

This "news from a country... never yet visited" is our ultimate destiny. What one longs for is to be reconnected to the "country" of one's dreams—the best recollections of the past and the most optimistic hopes for the future. It is this ever-present longing that Lewis believes is an implicit constant in one's life, a worth-waiting-for, yet-to-be-experienced condition.

The Quest to Find Home

Understanding the plot of our own stories may help us clarify what we ultimately long for. Author Christopher Booker suggests that in all the stories ever told there are only seven basic plots:

- 1. The Quest
- 2. Voyage and Return
- 3. Overcoming the Monster
- 4. Rags to Riches
- 5. Rebirth: From Shadow into Light
- 6. Comedy: Problem and Solution
- 7. Tragedy: Solution and Problems²⁶

Although Booker's clever plot summaries are thought-provoking, I propose that there are not seven plots, but only one. "Quest" stories are ultimately about a search for what? Home. Voyage and return where? Home. Where does the protagonist go after the monster has been vanquished? Home. Where does the seeker go after finding riches? Home. Where do births and rebirths happen? Home. Test this conclusion: Note whether the next movie or TV show you see, or novel you read is, in some way, about finding home. The solution to human problems can be found in Dorothy's insight from *The Wizard of Oz*, "There is no place like home," and

²⁶Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

E.T.'s quest to "Phone home" and eventually return there. Home may not be a literal place, but a condition. We don't long for a specific geographic destination, such as Dorothy's Kansas, but a feeling of peace and comfort. Conflict, the stuff of all stories, separates people from what they seek—or, in Lewisian terms, that for which they long. What is the ultimate human longing? Home.²⁷ And what is the ultimate emotion you can anticipate upon finding home? *Joy* imbued with *Love*.

Lewis would have agreed with his friend Dorothy Sayers's sentiment, expressed by her character Peter Wimsey to his wife: "And what do all the great words come to in the end, but that? I love you. I am at rest with you. I have come home." Lewis summarized the ultimate quest for home, both a place and a condition, when he said, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." ²⁹

Hope

But how does the promise of home help us in our "How long?" season of pain? It can remind us to be patient. Being aware of our longing for home can muster a mustard-seed-size faith. What we long for may be beyond our limited imagination. On the surface we see a parched desert, but underneath the arid plain there is an out-of-sight aquifer that offers thirst-quenching springs that never

²⁷Henri Nouwen has also written eloquently about the universal longing for home. See *Finding My Way Home: Pathways to Life and the Spirit* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004); *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Image, Doubleday, 1993). The observation of finding home as the plot of all stories originally appeared in Steven A. Beebe, *C. S. Lewis and the Craft of Communication* (New York: Peter Lang, 2020), 274–275.

²⁸Dorothy L. Sayers, *Busman's Honeymoon* (London: Gollancz, 1937).

²⁹C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 121.

run dry. God promises that refreshment will cascade over you like a river that flows over your parched spirit. It is during a drought that we are more likely to listen to the weather report, hoping for a better forecast.

You wait. You ponder. You suffer. You ask, "How long?" But as you wait, remember how the story ends: *The God of Creation knows you. The God of the universe loves you. God will lead you home.* But until that day, we wait—and are instructed to pray.

As I anxiously waited through that night wondering whether Jason would survive, I admit that I wasn't thinking of the psalmist's promise of hope. I was mired in fear and anxiety. I prayed an unfocused prayer using incomplete sentences. But I should also have focused on the promise of hope. The psalm and the song and the question "How long?" are really prayers for strength and courage to endure the present pain.

Today, almost fifteen years after the call to rescue him from the drug cartel, Jason is in active recovery with a sponsor and serving as a sponsor as well. But the trajectory of his recovery has been jagged with ups and downs. Devastating relapses (one that occurred quite recently) jolt us back to Friday. Sometimes when we think the drama is over and all is calm, the stage door is flung open, and the opera begins anew. In this "Friday" world, we may feel we're living within a prescribed plot, in a role we cannot change. Before the promise of Sunday, we don't know how long Saturday will last. "How long?" we wail. We don't know.

Yet, the central message of the Good News is that there is indeed Sunday Glory. You *will* find home. When we fearfully ask, "How long?" we should also immediately add the same affirming coda of Psalm 13: "I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation/I will sing to the LORD, for He has been good to me." When experiencing pain, we are called to remember His past blessings and unfailing love.

May the existence of pain, the seemingly endless waiting, and the sometimes-discouraging news of the day be only a prelude to soul-restoring relief from suffering. There is a difference of but one letter between the words *hope* and *home*. Having hope sets us on the road toward home. The psalmist coupled the "How long?" lament with a declaration of trust in God's unfailing love. And that is the central lesson for us: Rejoice in the promise of salvation. As the river flows on, you ask, "How long must I endure uncertainty, suffering and pain?" We don't know—but we do know this: We know the unalterable sequence of the days of the week. *It's Friday, but Sunday's comin'!*

Contributors

Steven A. Beebe

Steven A. Beebe, PhD, is Regents' and University Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Texas State University. He has been a Visiting Scholar at both Oxford University and Cambridge University and author or coauthor of fifteen books (with editions totaling more than eighty-five books) used at hundreds of universities throughout the world (including Russian, Chinese, Canadian, and International editions) by several million students. He is also author or coauthor of seventy-five articles/chapters emphasizing communication skill development. He received Texas State's highest awards for teaching, research, and service, served as president of the National Communication Association, and was named Outstanding Communication Professor in America by the National Speaker's Association. His book *C. S. Lewis and the Craft of Communication* was the basis for selection as Scholar of the Year by the Religious Communication Association.

Rachel Mosley

Rachel Mosley is an illustrator, preschool teacher, half of a musical folk-duo, and a sometimes-writer. Rachel has parented five kids with mostly-excellent results, survived one rare and bizarre heart attack, performed at Chastain Amphitheatre as the opening act for the '80s band Air Supply, and lives in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida,

where she drinks several cups of (decaf) coffee daily. When not writing or drawing, Rachel can be found reading (poetry, lately), swimming in the Gulf, or, most likely, driving carpool. You can find Rachel's art on Instagram (rachelmosleydraws) and her music on Spotify (The Mosleys).

Ruth Naomi Floyd

A vocalist and composer, Ruth Naomi Floyd has created a discography dedicated to a sacred jazz expression. She has been at the forefront of creating vocal jazz settings that express theology and justice for over 25 years. Blessed with a soaring mezzo-soprano voice, she leads her own multi-faceted ensemble. Her recordings consist primarily of original compositions, and critics praise Ruth's music for its distinctive sound of progressive ensemble jazz that is seamlessly blended with messages of hope, faith, redemption, and love. Ruth has recorded and performed with such notable instrumentalists as James Newton, James Weidman, Gary Thomas, and many more. Rooted and grounded in a faith ethos, Ruth has been a presence and worker in areas of the arts and justice throughout her career. Ruth has lectured on the intersection of beauty, theology, justice, culture, and the arts at numerous performance centers, academic settings, and conferences around the world.

Elisabeth Adams

While living in Jerusalem, Elisabeth Adams studied modern Hebrew and historical geography, and taught English as a foreign language to university students, young professionals, and children. Currently based in New England where she's a cook and mentor

for young adults, she's also the eldest of eight, smitten aunt of six, and instigator of tea parties for young and old. A longtime contributor to Boundless.org, a current team member at Kindred Grace, and a freelance editor for the last dozen-plus years, she loves hearing and telling new tales of God's faithfulness.

Micah Hawkinson

Micah Hawkinson lives with his wife and four children in Topeka, exactly one mile south of the Kansas River. He makes stories, pharmacy software, and a mean quesadilla. He's currently working on a novel set in the world of Beowulf and St. Brendan the Navigator. He enjoys reading, singing, teaching, playing games, and filling his shelves with more books than he is statistically likely to finish in his lifetime.

Esther Moon

Esther Moon lives in Irving, Texas, where she enjoys life with her church community, practices holistic healthcare, writes interactive literature guidebooks, and avoids mosquitos at almost any cost. Some of her favorite past adventures include exploring ancient Egyptian tombs and chaperoning high school students in Italy (while teaching them some Shakespeare). She earned a PhD in Literature from the University of Dallas in 2022; her dissertation explored Chaucer's thoughts on poverty and wealth (including the spiritual and literary kinds) in the Canterbury Tales. Chaucer is still her favorite. She also loves to read George Herbert, Shakespeare, and Richard Wilbur; however, it must be admitted that her sci-fi and mystery bookshelves are the fullest.

Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson

Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson publishes and lectures internationally on George MacDonald, Victorian Britain, the Inklings, Faith & Arts, and Ecology & Community. She writes academically (such as chapters in *The Inklings & Culture, Unsaying the Commonplace*, and *An Introduction to Child Theology*), introduces MacDonald texts (such as *Lilith, Hope of the Gospel*, and the full-text graphic novel of *The Golden Key*), and crafts pieces for organizations such as the Rabbit Room, Radix, and ArtWay. She is on various boards related to academic work on the Inklings and George MacDonald, and is chair of the George MacDonald Society. Some of her lectures, teaching, and podcast interviews can also be found online. Kirstin directs Windstone Farm Linlathen, a non-profit that seeks to facilitate and encourage community through 'Theology, Ecology, & the Arts' in the Ottawa Valley, Canada.

Nicole Howe

Nicole Marie Howe is a writer, speaker, wife, and mother to three teenage mavericks, a ten-year old bohemian, and a rescue pup named Samwise Gamgee. Nicole is Director of Formational Community for The Cultivating Project and a columnist for Cultivating Magazine. She is also founder and co-director of OneStory, a creative collaborative that provides Bible learning resources for kids and families. She serves locally as lay teaching pastor for The Practice Church. Nicole holds a master's degree in Cultural Apologetics from Houston Baptist University, where she discovered the power of the imagination to restore awe and wonder to her floundering faith. She is currently pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree in Spiritual Formation and Relational Neuroscience from Western Theological Seminary.

Douglas Kaine McKelvey

Douglas Kaine McKelvey grew up in East Texas and moved to Nashville in 1991 to participate in the early work of Charlie Peacock's Art House Foundation, an organization dedicated to a shared exploration of faith and the arts. In the decades since, Douglas has worked as an author, song lyricist, scriptwriter, and speaker. His books include three volumes of the bestselling series Every Moment Holy: New Liturgies for Daily Life, and a critically acclaimed middle-grade chapter book titled The Angel Knew Papa and the Dog. He has also served as a scriptwriter and story editor for the first three seasons of the animated series The Wingfeather Saga, and has penned more than 350 lyrics recorded by a variety of artists. Douglas and his wife Lise live near Nashville, Tennessee.

Ned and Leslie Bustard

Ned and Leslie Bustard were married for over three decades, raised three daughters in the West End of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and helped found three organizations: Square Halo Books, Wheatland Presbyterian Church, and The Row House. They have written essays for The Cultivating Project, Veritas Press, and Rabbit Room Press, and have appeared on a number of podcasts. Some of Ned's books include Saint Nicholas the Giftgiver and Revealed: A Storybook Bible for Grown-Ups, and some of Leslie's books include Wild Things and Castles in the Sky and Tiny Thoughts That I've Been Thinking. Learn more about Ned's work at WorldsEndImages.com and find more of Leslie's musings at PoeticUnderpinnings.com.

Malcolm Guite

Malcolm Guite is a poet and priest, and Life Fellow of Girton College, Cambridge. His books include *Sounding the Seasons: Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year* (Canterbury 2012) and *Mariner: A Voyage with Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Hodder 2017). In 2023 he was awarded the Archbishop Lanfranc Medal by the Archbishop of Canterbury. He has a YouTube series called 'A Spell in the Library' at https://www.youtube.com/c/MalcolmGuitespell.

Matthew Clark

Matthew Clark is a singer/songwriter and storyteller from Mississippi. He has recorded several full-length albums, including a Bible walk-through called *Bright Came the Word from His Mouth* and *Beautiful Secret Life*. Matthew hosts a weekly podcast, "One Thousand Words – Stories on the Way," featuring essays reflecting on faith-keeping. A musician and speaker, Matthew travels sharing songs and stories. Whether it's a song, a podcast, a meal, or an essay, Matthew loves to *make things that make room for people to meet Jesus*. Matthew's current project, *The Well Trilogy*, consists of three albums, each accompanied by a book of essays. Part One, *Only the Lover Sings*, Part Two, *A Tale of Two Trees*, and Part Three, *Where the River Goes*, which, if you're reading this, you're holding in your hands right now.

Album Credits

Produced and mixed by Matthew Clark Mastered by Cody Norris (Gilder Collective)

Instrumentalists

Drums: Bobby Hansford (4, 5, 8, 10, 11), Paul Eckberg (3),

Horacio París* (7, 9), Jason Cooper (2)

Bass: André Vasconcellos* (1, 2, 6, 8), Bruno Migliari*

(4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11), Carson Murphy (3)

B3 Organ: Tyler Kemp (2, 10)

Strings: Anastasiia Tikhanovska and Tetiana Kravchenko** (In-

finito String Music) (11)

Cello: Volodymyr Kotliarov** (1), Emanuel Pavon* (4)

Accordion: Damiano Della Torre** (1)

Uilleann Pipes, Celtic Flute: Faliq Auri** (11)

Pedal Steel: Aaron Fabbrini** (5, 7)

Backing Vocals: Matthew Clark, Mike and Allie Murphy, The

Epoch House** (choir on 2, 10)

All other instrumentation: Matthew Clark

*via Musiversal

**via Fiverr

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MATTHEWCLARK.NET



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• Share or mention *Where the River Goes* on your social media. Use the tags #TheWellTrilogy, #WhereTheRiverGoes, and #WhereTheRiverGoesBook to spread the word!

- Write a book review on Amazon or Goodreads.
- Like the album and follow Matthew Clark on Spotify.
- Post this message on Twitter,
 Facebook, or Instagram:
 I loved #WhereTheRiverGoesAlbum
 by @matthewclarknet!
- Recommend this book for a Bible study or a book club.
- Share a copy with your friends and family.
- Follow Matthew Clark on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, iTunes, and Spotify, and sign up for Matthew's newsletter at www.matthewclark.net

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Making things... that make room... for people to meet Jesus

Songs, stories, house concerts, meals, conversations, books... these are ways to join Jesus as He brings His kingdom within reach. Songs can sink below layers of shame or defensiveness and touch the heart with truth. Stories invite us into God's way of imagining what is possible through the Gospel, making a new redemptive narrative available.

Now is a good time. It's never been easier to distribute music; however, it's become an essentially free commodity due to streaming services like Spotify. Still, music remains costly to produce. On average, it takes \$15 to \$20,000 to create an album. And that's just one aspect of this work.

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THE WELL TRILOGY



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