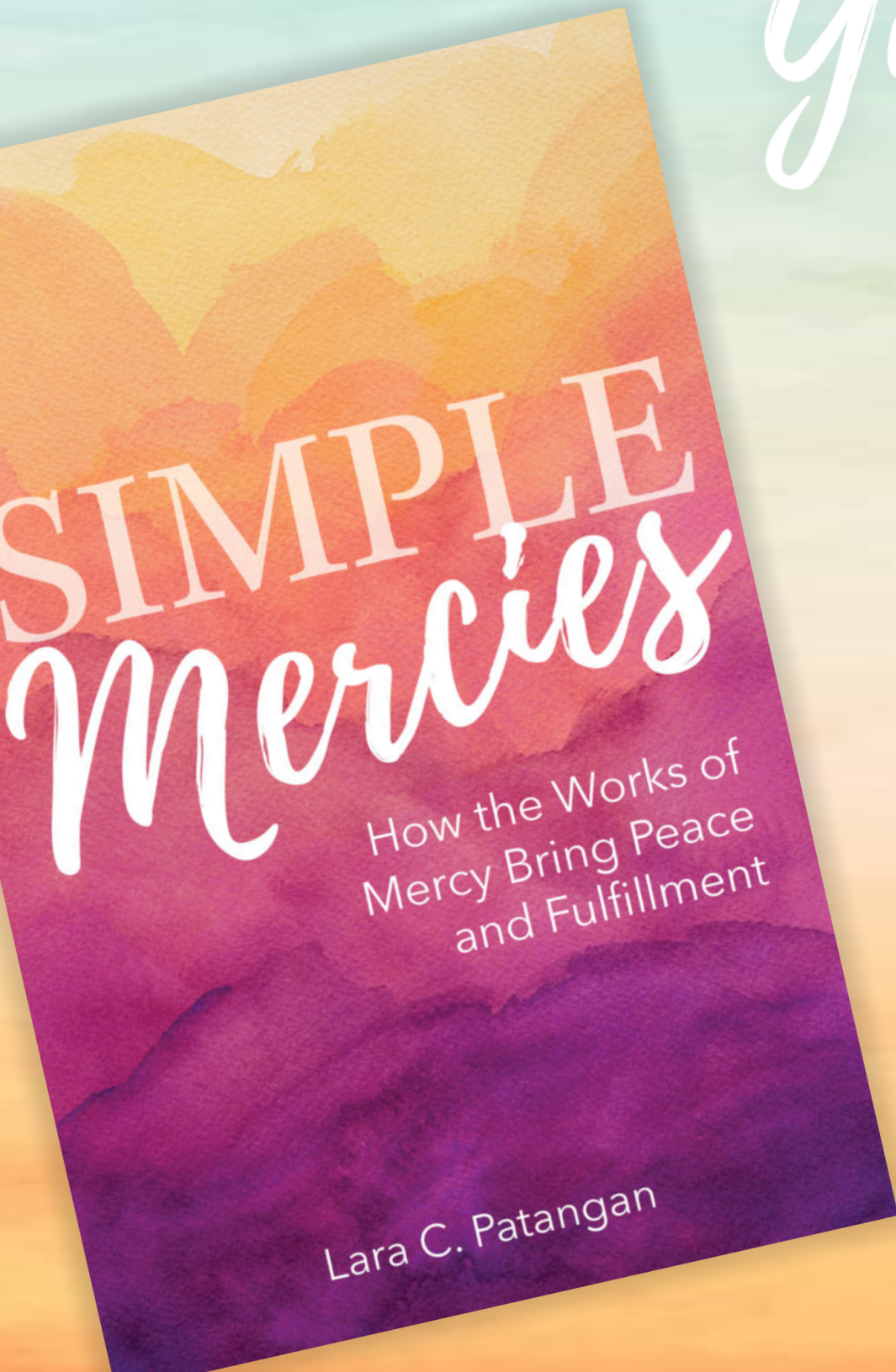


# STUDY *Guide*



Lara C. Patangan

Dear Friends,

Thank you for reading *Simple Mercies: How the Works of Mercy Bring Peace and Fulfillment*. The power that mercy has to affect change in our world and our relationships with God is extraordinary and empowering. Through service, we can be a gift to others while absorbing the peace that comes from growing closer to God.

I know too many people who serve in their homes, jobs, children's schools, and with their elderly parents, who don't make the connection between their service and their Savior. By simply acknowledging our efforts as an act of love and worship for God, we can begin to see how our daily service makes a difference to others and in our own lives.

I wrote *Simple Mercies* because I wanted to show that our everyday compassion makes a difference in exponential ways. We may not always be able to see how our kindness spreads but knowing our service is pleasing to God can offer a kind of satisfaction that the world cannot sell. The works of mercy aren't just another gimmick. They are game changers. When I tried these works of mercy as an alternative to the creed of the secular world, I found less striving, less busying, less dissatisfaction, less emptiness, and more time for my relationship with God, my family, and the people I love. Mostly, through God's mercy I found myself.

I want others to see themselves and their neighbors through the merciful eyes of Jesus, too. I want them to know the sacred satisfaction that can come from even the simplest act of service; the redemption available to all of us; and their unconditional value as children of God.

For years, I have enjoyed the benefit and blessings of Bible studies, prayer groups, and book studies. The wisdom and insight that comes from these discussions has had a profound impact on my spiritual life. With that in mind, I wrote this study guide to help deepen your understanding of each chapter through scripture, discussion, and reflection questions. My hope is that it will facilitate a deep commitment to practicing mercy in your life and in your community as a way to love and serve God.

If you have any questions, speaking inquiries, or just want to connect, please don't hesitate to reach out. I am on Instagram and Facebook under my name, Lara Patangan, author, and my website [www.larapatangan.com](http://www.larapatangan.com) where you can subscribe to my blog or email me. I always love to hear from you.

Mostly, thank you for being on this journey with me. Discovering mercy has been a gift that I continue to unwrap. You are a part of that gift just as I know you are a gift to so many others. As complicated as life sometimes seems, it helps to remember that it is in giving that we receive and in his loving service that we are saved. It really is that *simple*.

Love and Mercy,

Lara

# Chapter 1. Feed The Hungry

If we want to be satiated, we need to make sure we are consuming substance. When my kids were little, I called their healthy foods, “grow foods.” God wants us to keep growing: in our faith, our love for him, and our service to others. In order to do this, we need to feed ourselves a healthy diet. When we feel rejected, inadequate, insecure, and unlovable we sometimes feed ourselves junk (literally and figuratively). We swipe our credit card to purchase something to mitigate the pain. We numb our feelings with food, alcohol, or by binge-watching television. We distract ourselves and we are left hungry and unsatisfied despite our indulgences. God doesn’t just save. He satisfies. Our love and service to others does too.

*Read and Discuss: Mark 6:30-42*

## *Reflection Questions:*

1. What are you hungry for in your life? What messages make up the majority of your diet — are they from the world or the word of God?
2. What feeds you and what leaves you aching for more? How can your relationship with God help fill the source of your ache?
3. In what ways can you feed your spouse and kids words of affirmation in areas where they feel empty?
4. What are some concrete ways you can grow your family’s faith life around meals?
5. How can you “feed” others on a daily basis by imitating Jesus’s example of the fishes and the loaves turning small acts into an abundance of love?

## Chapter 2. Give Drink to the Thirsty

When the whole notion of God feels like a desert mirage, his mercy leads to the well of redemption. Like many of us, I have experienced the struggle to lift a foot out of the heavy sand just to step forward to sink again. I know what it's like to feel like God can't possibly be interested in the minutia of my pain. Yet as much as I can still feel that irritating sand in my shoes, I am certain that during those times God walked by my side. Just as he does with all of us. "For by grace you have been saved by faith, and this is not by your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Most of us have lived through the darkness of despair from a significant loss, failed plan, unbearable grief, or unimaginable heartache. What gets us through it is the grace of God's mercy. Pouring out of his own wounds, he sends mercy in the people who lift us, love us, and refuse to let us perish in the dry land of despair. When we feel like we or others are dying of thirst, the quench of God's mercy offers relief. "They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes," (Revelation 7:16-17).

*Read and discuss: John 4:1-11*

*Reflection Questions:*

1. How do you recognize your own spiritual thirst and that of your spouse and children?
2. What conservation efforts can you make in daily life?
3. How can you show mercy to yourself in a way that frees you to devote more time to your relationship with God?

## Chapter 3. Clothe the Naked

Conflicting messages of having more and weighing less leaves a void that easily equates with nakedness. A misconception exists that to be considered worthy we need to conform to the standards set by society. God's message is one of timelessness not trends. We can either cover ourselves in the fickle standards of worthiness set by humankind or accept our unconditional value as children of God. Through him, we can transform the world's heavy cloak of inadequacy into the impenetrable armor worn by the descendants of the true king of kings. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels," (Isaiah 61:10). This important work of mercy isn't just about donating clothes. It's about recognizing our inherent dignity as children of God and finding creative ways to communicate and clothe others in his unconditional love.

*Read and discuss: Genesis 3:7-21*

### *Reflection Questions:*

1. Do you judge people by what they wear or how they look? Do you feel judged by how you look?
2. How do stereotypes affect your interactions?
3. How can you balance buying your children clothes that feel like "them," while also teaching them that our value doesn't come from what we wear?
4. What are some ways you can support charities in your community, starting with what's in your closet?
5. What are some concrete ways you can dress (and address) your spouse in dignity?

## Chapter 4. Shelter the Homeless

Busyness isn't our primary business. Finding our way home to God is our one true mission. We know he is in all and through all and yet we still need to make space for him in our hearts and our homes. When we do, we can feel his reassurance and our daily to-dos recede like the tide making room for the shore. The temptation will always be to return to the commotion of life's chaos. This void of distraction leaves us vulnerable to the whims of the world. But under God's shelter, we are protected and can best protect those we love. Creating a restful home where we can genuinely welcome and accept others for who they are regardless of their circumstances is a meaningful way to serve. Home doesn't have to be as quiet as a church to still be a sanctuary for others. Sheltering the homeless first starts with the home you create for God in your heart and from there it can extend anywhere and to anyone.

*Read and discuss: Genesis 18:2-7*

### *Reflection Questions:*

1. In what ways can you and your spouse ensure a strong foundation of faith for your family?
2. In what ways — good and bad — has your own childhood influenced your family interactions? How can you use those experiences help you to be intentional about creating the ideal home for your family?
3. How can you challenge stereotype of the homeless to inspire others to help serve them?



## Chapter 5: Visit the Sick

Illness, no matter how poor the prognosis, becomes the least of our ailments when we turn away from God in anger, despair, and disbelief about our situation or that of a loved one. By surrendering self-reliance and trusting in his will, we can find comfort that is not of this world. The life of Jesus that we carry in our souls cannot be ravaged by disease. Through his own wounds, we have been offered a cure. Accepting mercy when we or a loved one is sick sometimes feels harder than offering it. Mercy by definition isn't something we deserve or can repay. It's a gift of compassion that reminds us that we can share the burden of our crosses. We aren't meant to carry them alone. We are made stronger by letting someone help us when we feel weak. When we let our guard down enough to receive the love of others, we are reminded of yet another benefit of mercy – its power to heal. It's like medicine. Sometimes it can be hard to take, yet it makes everything better.

*Read and discuss: Luke 5:17-26*

### *Reflection Questions:*

1. What would you find most helpful if you or a loved one were seriously ill? Using those comforts, how can you help the sick?
2. Is there something in your life or the lives of those you love that is making you sick at heart? How can the word of God heal that anxiety or pain?
3. Has there been a time in your life where someone else came to your aid?
4. Do you accept mercy with grace or is it hard for you to accept help? Pray with this question and ask God to help you receive mercy just as you seek to give it.

## Chapter 6: Visit those in Prison

In daily life, serving can feel less like freedom and more like being held captive. The monotony of it often feels like a prison sentence. Each day, similar to the one before: cooking, cleaning, commuting, cajoling, and carousing. Too often, we don't make the connection between our service and our soul. Saint Augustine said, "Love is the beauty of the soul." While it's a message pretty enough for Cupid's arrow, love manifest in service looks more like cleaning nacho cheese from the ceiling than a pink valentine. Our souls were created to love and serve God. No one said it would be easy or that it didn't involve spilled milk, dry shampoo, or Band-Aids. Yet realizing it is pleasing to the one who created, blesses, and suffered and died for us offers a satisfaction that fills souls. We may not be embraced with appreciation by those we serve, yet works of mercy offer a chance to embrace the divinity of God, grow closer to him, and discover that imitating his mercy offers the unparalleled freedom of genuine love. Visiting those in prison is also a chance to consider ways you may be held captive from destructive habits, toxic relationships, and self-destructive thoughts. Often, we hold the key to our own prisons. Ask God to help set you free.

*Read and discuss: Acts 5:18-20*

### *Reflection Questions:*

1. Keeping in mind the merciful love of God, how can you address what imprisons you?
2. Using the concept of free will, how can you teach your children the merits of using freedom to live as Christians?
3. In what ways can you show compassion for the imprisoned? Are you able to visit them?
4. In what other ways might God be calling you to notice and serve those who are imprisoned, whether behind bars or in other, more hidden ways?



## Chapter 7: Bury the Dead

I remember what it meant to me when I lost a close relative, and friends attended the funeral. They weren't there for the dead. They came for the living. I was so touched by their presence that momentarily I didn't feel grief. I felt love. It was a beautiful gift to have a respite of mercy. By comforting others, we remind them that even in darkness there are shades of relief. It's not easy to know how to comfort the bereaved. There is no one way. No right or wrong. No black or white. There are countless shades of gray and each one starts merely by showing up. From there, hope is illuminated.

Likewise, consider the things in your life that need to be put to rest. Think of the peace that awaits by burying old hurts, resentments, and perceived failures. Bury them and see what blooms in its place.

*Read and discuss: Romans 8:35-39*

### *Reflection Questions:*

1. When you think about those you loved who died, what do you remember most about them? Which of those memories sustain you and which can you bring to God and ask him to turn your grief to healing?
2. What Scripture verses offer you hope in your grief? Who in your life might need you to share that hope today?
3. Thinking beyond the immediacy of death, what are some ways that can help the bereaved in the months and years following their loss?

## Chapter 8: Admonish the Sinner

We all make mistakes. By keeping that in mind, admonishing others doesn't feel so taboo. It isn't about casting judgement but caring for someone enough to judiciously point out that their salvation is in jeopardy. Having someone love us enough to encourage us to seek a better path is a beautiful work of mercy. Done with gentleness and in the spirit of love, admonishment can be a game-changer in someone's life. Practicing humility with ourselves and our neighbor is an important aspect of being able to admonish without judgement. We are reminded of this in Matthew 7:5, "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of you your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

*Read and discuss: Luke 7:36-49*

### *Reflection Questions:*

1. Have you ever regretted not admonishing someone for something they were doing that would hurt themselves or others? Do you think you would do anything different now?
2. Does receiving admonishment make you feel defensive?
3. How can you accept criticism as a chance to convert away from sin?
4. How can you become more aware of self-admonishment and how can you use God's mercy to obliterate those destructive thought patterns?

## Chapter 9: Instruct the Ignorant

Our primary responsibility as parents is to get our children into heaven not Harvard. We can do this by being the principal source of their religious education. We are expected to return the souls we have been entrusted back to God. “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it,” (Proverbs 22:6). Our children’s evangelization is more important than their entertainment, academic education, and extracurricular activities. In the Annunciation, Mary answered *yes* to becoming the mother of God. Throughout her life she lived this affirmation. As parents, we too are called to answer *yes* by instructing our children in our faith and modeling Mary’s example. This work of mercy also extends past parental responsibilities to answering our call to be disciples of Christ by teaching others the good news of our faith. We are called to catechize our neighbors through our example, by looking for opportunities to teach others about God, and by making sure we ourselves are knowledgeable about the rich history of our faith.

*Read and discuss: Matthew 28:19-20*

### *Reflection Questions:*

1. Thinking back on your life, who has taught you the most about your faith? Why do you think their style of teaching resonated with you?
2. Even if you don’t think of yourself as a teacher or feel knowledgeable enough in the Faith to teach others, can you identify some times in your life where you did teach someone about God or the Catholic religion?
3. In what ways can you take advantage of organic opportunities in daily life to teach children, friends, your spouse, and even total strangers about God?

## Chapter 10: Counsel the Doubtful

Often the world distorts truth. It highlights dollars instead of deeds. It confuses popularity with purpose. It's easy to get distracted and disillusioned by doubt's falsehoods. "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind," (James 1:6). Doubt transforms the colorful kaleidoscope of life into a narrowing tunnel that stretches perspective into some far away dot of black ink. We can't always see the difference we make. By trusting in our personal relationship with Christ, we are assured that despite doubt's manifestations something far greater awaits resulting from the beautiful acts of service inspired by his love. Being a good friend, loving parent, generous person, dedicated volunteer, and active disciple are all ways to connect to God. Serving offers the strength to carry us through dark days when defeat marches at us like an anthem of doubt. God never emphasized the glory. Instead, he embraced the gritty. By redefining what we value to be in alignment with God we will eliminate any uncertainty.

*Read and discuss: Mark 4:35-41*

### *Reflection Questions:*

1. Where are you struggling with doubt in your life?
2. Who can help you work through this doubt — a trusted friend, a priest, or your spouse? What holds you back from seeking their counsel?
3. How can you help your spouse, children, and friends become better aware of identifying self-doubt and ways to eliminate it?
4. Why do you think it's easier to fall prey to destructive thoughts than to have faith and hope in who God created us to be?

## Chapter 11: Comfort the Sorrowful

All of us have been hurt. Not everyone knows the extent of our injuries and sometimes we too ignore the ache of our wounds. We try to be tough. We try to move on. We think the heart heals as intuitively as our bodies do from injury or sickness. We assume healing will just happen without acknowledgment or effort the way bruises fade from darkness into nothingness. Yet our hearts were not made for darkness and nothingness. They were made for love and the consequences of that ability to stretch and surmount and pour out and let in -- is a vulnerability to being hurt. Jesus knew this. He loved unequivocally and it motivated his willingness to suffer for us so that we could also know great love. Jesus willingly endured physical and mental anguish in the name of love. Despite his suffering, he didn't wallow in the wounds of life. He rose from them. He transformed them from brutality into the beauty of redemption. Pain in life is inevitable but we don't have to carry it with us. Through him, we can heal. We can redeem it. We can help others do the same. We don't ever really know what anyone else has been through, what pain they have been hit with, or what they've had to walk away from. And, that's okay. We just have to know that no matter where our wounds originate, walking into his loving divine arms, is a place for healing to begin.

*Read and discuss: Matthew 5:4*

### *Reflection Questions:*

1. What comforts you when you feel sorrow?
2. How has comforting others brought you clarity or offered you a new perspective on life?
3. Have you ever noticed a tendency to pull away or check out when you are hurting? How can you check in with God instead?

## Chapter 12: Bear Wrongs Patiently

A slight, a rude word, a hurtful remark, a too-bossy tone makes us feel defensive or wounded. How should we react? Do we confront it? Do we let it go? Do we eat a piece of chocolate or a tub of ice cream?

One of the things I love most about the people in my life is that they accept me as-is. Sometimes I take this for granted and don't even bother to act better. Other times, I am filled with immense gratitude that friends and family imitate Jesus by loving me unconditionally despite my deficiencies. They remind me that acting like Jesus *is* possible and more importantly, *it matters*. It matters that we let go of our grievances. It matters that we show up for one another. It matters that we see people beyond the snark, that we make allowances for bad moods, forgive hurtful choices, and love even when all we see are the annoying flaws in our neighbor. If we can't do that, then we don't have love. And that's just lame. Colossians 3:8 reminds us, "But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice slander, and obscene talk from your mouth." Nothing about loving our neighbor when we are having a hard time just tolerating them is easy. It requires patience, humility, and occasionally ice cream. The first two we can find from our Savior, and the third, at the supermarket!

*Read and discuss: 1 Peter 2:19-23*

### *Reflection Questions:*

1. How can shifting your perspective toward the eternal transform how you manage daily aggravations?
2. How can you bring this perspective into your daily interactions, not only in person, but also on social media?
3. In what ways could you show more patience with your spouse, children, and friends?
4. When you have been shown the mercy of patience, how did it make you feel?



## Chapter 13: Forgive Injuries

Many of us avoid forgiveness. It feels like an act of heroics more than one of love. Reason, rationale, and justification become the creed that governs us instead of God's mercy. Forgiveness can feel impossible. A spouse cheats, confidences are broken, fraud, financial ruin, betrayals, violence, abuse, negligence – the number of ways we can hurt others can sometimes feel as bottomless as the depth of wounds they inflict. These are wounds that often change us, acts so painful that they pivot us onto paths that we would not choose, and scar us in ways that make us feel damaged if not ruined. While it's sometimes easy to resist the mercy of forgiveness as a means of self-protection, it eventually ends up hurting us more. When we don't embrace forgiveness, vulnerability, and new beginnings, we inevitably get comfortable with the grief of the wounds we harbor. We settle in with heaviness and hurt when God offers redemptive peace. "And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful," (Colossians 3:15). By confronting our pain and giving it to God it can be transformed into genuine peace. This is the miracle of forgiveness. And, it's available to you.

*Read and discuss: Luke 6:32-27*

### *Reflection Questions:*

1. Whom do you need to forgive?
2. How has being forgiven by others changed you or a situation?
3. How does receiving forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation help motivate you to let go of grievances towards others?

# Chapter 14: Pray for the Living and the Dead

*Yadda. Yadda. Yadda.* That's what I imagine it sounds like when I pray – an eruption spewing the hot mess of my life and attaching an *amen* to the heap of ash I leave at his feet. I don't know if that's a bad thing though. It's easy to get caught up or overthink proper ways to pray. We don't have to be in front of an altar, burning incense, or on our knees to converse with God. When we fixate on the formality of prayer, we often miss its function: connecting with God. "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words," (Matthew 6:7). What matters is that we speak to him about everything from the mundane to the meaningful, staying in communion with him at all times.

Works of mercy are a prayer of service -- a way to communicate to God through acts of love for our neighbor. Serving is a prayer we can embrace through the spontaneity of our day. It's another way to talk to God. We can pray constantly – in words, acts, or a quiet pause. It can be raw or recitation. Talking to God doesn't have to be edited, scripted, or perfected. Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton encouraged, "We must pray without ceasing, in every occurrence and employment of our lives – that prayer which is rather a habit of lifting up the heart to God as in a constant communication with him." Prayer's emphasis shouldn't be on how we do it but on the constancy of it. My prayers may appear as ash – embers of adoration, gratitude, service, laments, and suffering. Yet it's out of the ash that the phoenix rises enabling hearts to soar in divine communion with his.

*Read and discuss: Luke 18:9-14*

## *Reflection Questions:*

1. What are some ways God might be inviting you to have more patience or trust as you wait for an answered prayer?
2. Does praying to a saint or praying the Rosary feel different to you than when you talk straight to God? Which are you more drawn to and why?
3. How can you make others feel more comfortable about asking for prayer intentions or allowing you to pray with them?