

DEEP CALLS TO DEEP: SUMMER IN THE PSALMS

Into the Waters

Psalm 93

June 28, 2026

Prayer is about attention.

That's what my pastoral care professor and academic advisor, Sonya Waters, said.

I had the privilege of taking the last class she ever taught, called *Dying and Grieving*—a class she taught while she herself was actively dying, fighting the final stages of a hard battle with cancer.

Every minute of that class was sacred, holy ground. And so I will never forget her words:

"Prayer is about attention."

She described prayer like this: Imagine you're in a room and there's a candle in the corner. Whether you look at the candle or not, it is there. It burns with a steady brightness, but you can easily go about your business without ever noticing the candle or its light.

Prayer is like turning toward the candle, taking notice of the thing that was always there but that perhaps you forgot to see.

Prayer is the act of turning our attention toward the presence of God. So at any moment, in any situation, we can turn our gaze, acknowledging God's presence and noticing the light it gives. Prayer isn't about fancy words, or even about words at all, but about the orientation of our attention.

The candle is a helpful metaphor for God's presence because it reminds us that we do not need to maintain full and constant eye contact with the candle in order to be aware of it. We can cast the candle a glance or hold it in our periphery. We can look for longer stretches of time and watch the light play against the wall.

But all of these things, no matter how brief, are still adjustments of attention. They are acts of reorientation. And when we do them, even in small ways, we grow our overall awareness of the candle's presence.

What if we thought of prayer like this? Not full-bore eye contact with God for an hour straight—although sometimes it is that—but the subtle adjustments of awareness we make throughout a given day.

I'm doing the dishes—God is here.

I'm watching TV—God is watching TV with me.

I'm navigating a hard conversation—where is God in this?

At any moment, in any situation, the turning of our attention toward God's presence is prayer.

This psalm explores the same idea, though it uses different imagery. Here the metaphor for God's presence isn't a candle but a throne, firm and established, robed in majesty. This throne is immovable. It is always there, whether people take notice of it or not. But the psalmist takes notice.

And it's important to name where he is when he notices—his circumstances when he turns his attention to God's presence. Because this psalm is not sung from the sanctuary, but from within the rising waves.

Often in Scripture, water represents the things and circumstances in our lives that we cannot control. And often in the Psalms, the roaring waters of creation, the formless void of primordial chaos, are called to mind as the psalmist ponders his own chaotic circumstances.

And in the middle of this chaos, he looks up. He turns his attention to the throne established forever, that marker of the unchanging presence of God.

And this is prayer.

This is what we can do in the chaotic and the mundane situations of our lives. In the hospital room or the conference room, we can take notice of the presence of God that has always been there. It is a simple and yet very challenging reorientation.

It is so hard to turn our eyes to God when it feels like we're being swallowed up. It is so hard to look up when it feels as though taking our eyes off the challenges right in front of us, even for a moment, would throw everything into disarray.

Whether it is fear, busyness, overwhelm, or pain, there is so much to keep us from looking up, from noticing God's presence in the midst of it.

But God is here. Right here.

And if Sonya was right and prayer is about attention, then we must ask ourselves who, or what, we are paying attention to. What orients our vision? What do we look to for meaning or salvation?

The things we pay attention to are never neutral. They shape us. The things that capture our attention become the things we value. The things we look to for security become the things we think will save us. And the place we focus our vision is the place toward which we will surely move.

So what do you pay attention to? What do you pray to?

Now, I don't think the only thing you should pay attention to is God. But I do think we must pay attention to God in everything.

This week at VBS, we did something I call God Sightings. Every morning I put on these silly glasses and asked the kids where they had seen God the day before. They would groan and laugh at the embarrassing glasses, but they were also thinking. They were noticing.

They saw the beauty of God in the red cardinal outside the window. The goodness of God in their pets. The friendship of God in their friends and siblings.

Several of them said they saw God in their bedrooms as they got ready for bed. How beautiful to think of our children getting into bed at night and turning toward the candle, turning their attention to the One who is always there.

I was blown away this week by the attentiveness of the children who came to VBS. I saw firsthand, from the giant wooden dock in McFarland Hall, 160 faces of almost entirely attentive children. Not every moment, not perfectly, but they were locked in during song and story.

My personal favorite God sighting of the week was sitting in Bible Land, led by Sara Hayden, Lindsey and Dorothy Lewis, and John Gable, as a group of thirty kindergartners sat enraptured for fifteen minutes by the story of God's deliverance of the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt.

I have never seen anything like it in my life. And the story, so beautifully told, was all the more beautiful because of the ones paying attention to it.

I went on a walk that night, and I felt like my eyes were more open than they usually are, as though these little ones had given me new eyes to see. I was seeing things in my neighborhood that I had never noticed before: a lamp post I didn't know was there, a tree with a particular bend in its trunk, people dancing to reggaeton in the pagoda at the park.

The whole world felt fuller, more real, and the only thing that had changed was the way I was looking.

Without my intention, this ordinary walk became a prayer walk. God's beauty and goodness were unmissable. But oh, how often I miss them. How often my attention is taken by other things, with no room left for the acknowledgement of God's presence. How often does the candle slip from my view, its light taken for granted?

I think of the story of Peter that we learned on day three of VBS. This story tells us that Peter and some other disciples were on a boat when a storm came. And rather than stay safely on the shore, Jesus came to them, walking on top of the water. And Peter, ever eager to be close to his friend, stepped out onto the waters.

For a moment he walked, but then his gaze slipped from Jesus' face. His attention turned from the One who was with him to the things that might go wrong. Fear and confusion caught his eye, and the waves overtook him.

But thankfully, this story is not about Peter's perfect attention. It is not about his unflinching gaze on God.

What happens next is the important part.

When Peter started to sink, Jesus' hand reached out immediately. Peter's attention was not perfect, but he had a present Savior. And even as he fell, he had the chance to reorient his vision, to shift his gaze, to look back at Jesus.

And while this story is so much more than a metaphor, it is also a perfect metaphor for the Christian life, which is not about perfection, but about presence. Not about intelligence, but attention.

It is the daily, simple act of seeing, noticing, the presence of God, of living as if God is right there with us.

This is a simple task at which we often fail. And we fall. And the presence of God will be there too—God's hand outstretched to draw us back.

Friends, wherever you are, whatever you are going through, whether the waves are overtaking you or you're walking calmly atop the waters, put on your silly glasses. Look. Notice. Turn your attention toward the candle, so that your whole life may become prayer.

When you pass through the waters, God will be with you.

May we have eyes to see God's unchanging presence.

Amen.