

The 1999 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture

An Unexpected Prophet: What the 21st-Century Church Can Learn from Youth Ministry

Introduction

Youth ministry is not just about youth. It's about ministry, period. By its very nature, adolescence embodies, sometimes acutely, fundamental concerns about being human: Who am I? Whom can I trust? What does it mean to be in communion with others? As a result, youth ministry invites transformation for the entire church and not for youth alone. As we look for ways to renew the church in Christ's name, we can't afford to overlook a prophet in our hometown: ministry for, by, and with the young people among us.

The 1999 Princeton Lectures on Youth, Church, and Culture have significant implications for ministry with youth, but they are no less important for the church at large. Kenda Creasy Dean suggests that youth ministry is the point at which Christians should reclaim a theology of desire—not for the sake of youth ministry, but for the sake of the church. Dean then posits that the postmodern crisis of fidelity calls the contemporary church to reclaim holy friendship as central to the life of faith.

Jürgen Moltmann reflects on Jacob's struggle with God at the Brook Jabbok, on his own journey to faith as a young prisoner-of-war, and on prayer as watchful expectation. He calls Christians to watch for the hidden "yes" in the suffered "no" of God. Moltmann also addresses how one becomes a "true" theologian, exploring the personal side of theology and its existential depths.

Cynthia Rigby unpacks the practical implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for youth ministry and for the church and demonstrates how this doctrine can help us understand the mystery of our friendships with God and with one another. She then looks at the doctrine of the incarnation from the perspective of young people seeking relevance for today and arrives at timeless truths for all God's people.

Eugene Rivers calls the church to move from a ministry of church maintenance to a ministry of true reconciliation and justice. He challenges us to listen to those beyond our comfort zone that we might serve as faithful witnesses to Christ in the new millennium.

May you find these lectures to be unexpected prophets, calling you to new understandings and new forms of ministry.

Faithfully yours,

Amy Scott Vaughn
Director of Leadership Development
Institute for Youth Ministry

1999 Lectures

Kenda Creasy Dean
Holding On to Our Kisses: The Hormonal Theology of Adolescence
The Sacrament of One Another: Practicing Fidelity through Holy Friendship

Jürgen Moltmann
Praying and Watching
What Is a Theologian?

Cynthia L. Rigby
More Than a Mystery: The Practical Implications of the Trinity in Ministry with Youth
More Than a Hero: The Practical Implications of the Incarnation in Ministry with Youth

Eugene Rivers
Youth Ministry for the World in Which We Live
New Wineskins, New Models, and Visions for a New Century

PRAYING AND WATCHING

WRESTLING WITH GOD

This youth ministry forum reminds me of my own youth at the end of World War II and the dark years afterward. At the age of seventeen, in 1944, I was drafted into the German army. Before I turned eighteen, I was captured by British troops in the Reichswald near the Dutch border and spent three years in prisoner-of-war camps in Belgium, Scotland, and England. In 1948, at twenty-two, I was “repatriated” to my hometown of Hamburg, which still lay in ruins. This was a quite normal destiny in my generation in Germany. But what happened to my soul in those years was so extraordinary that I would like to share it with you in a personal meditation on Jacob’s struggle with God at the Brook Jabbok following Genesis 32:25-32:

And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob’s thigh was put out of joint, as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Then he said, “Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” Then Jacob asked him, “Tell me, I pray, your name.” But he

Jürgen Moltmann is professor of systematic theology at the Protestant Faculty of the University of Tübingen. His main works are translated into several languages and include *The Theology of Hope*, *The Crucified God*, *Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, and *The Spirit of Life*.

said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face-to-face and my soul has been healed." And the sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his thigh.

In the years I spent as a prisoner of war, 1945-1948, the biblical story about Jacob's struggle with the angel of the Lord at the Jabbok was always for me the great story about God, in which I found again my own little human story. We were caught up in the terrors of the end of the war, and in the hopeless misery of a prisoner of war's existence. We wrestled with God in order to survive in the abyss of senselessness and guilt, and we emerged from those years "limping," indeed, but blessed. The end of the war, when it at last came on May 9, 1945, found us with deeply wounded souls; but, after the years in Norton Camp, many of us said: "My soul has been healed, for I have seen God." In the labor camps, the night of cold despair fell on us, and in that night we were visited, each in his own way, by tormenting memories and gnawing thoughts. But when we emerged, we saw "that the sun had risen." As a lasting reminder, as it were, each of us had somewhere or other "his lame hip"—the scars of that time in body and soul.

When we lie awake at night and descend into the deep wells of memory, then suddenly everything is present again, although it is all so long ago. It is as if there were no distances of time in the depth of memory. The pain and the blessing are still in us, for they go with us wherever we turn. Out of the profusion of the visions that then swim to the surface, let me take and tell a few.

THE ROAD TO MISERY

In 1945 we were the ones who escaped. We escaped the mass death of World War II. For everyone who survived, hundreds died. Why did we survive? Why aren't we dead like the rest? In July 1943, I was, at age sixteen, an air force auxiliary in a battery in the center of Hamburg and barely survived the fire storm that the British Royal Air Force's "Operation Gomorrah" let loose on the eastern part of the city. The friend standing next to me at the firing predictor was torn to pieces by the bomb that left me unscathed. That night I cried out to God for the first time: "My God, where are you?" And the question "Why am I not dead, too?" has haunted me ever since. Why are you alive? Why? What gives your life meaning? Life is good, but to be a survivor is hard. One has to bear the weight of grief. It was probably on that night that my theology began, for I came from a secular family and knew nothing of faith. The people who escaped the firestorm in which 40,000 died probably all saw their survival not just as a lucky gift but as a serious charge, too.

Lost hopes

We had escaped death, but we were prisoners of war. I was first in the wretched mass of Camp 2226 in Ziegler near Ostend, Belgium, then in Labour Camp 22 in Kilmarnock in Ayrshire, Scotland. It was July 1946 before I came to Norton Camp, a camp for the education of teachers and pastors for postwar Germany. The end of the war and the summer of 1945 brought cold horror into the camp: all the German cities in ruins, twelve million people driven out from East Prussia and Silesia as now Albanians are from Kosovo. Many people were face-to-face with nothing and didn't know where to go.

We had escaped, but we had lost all hope. Some of us became cynical, some of us fell ill. The thought of there being no way out was like an iron band constricting our hearts. And each of us tried to conceal his stricken heart behind an armor of untouchability.

My spiritual nourishment had been Goethe's poems and his *Faust*, from a pocket edition for the armed forces that my sister had given me to take with me. These poems had awakened the emotions of the boy; but now, when I was shut into a hut with 200 other POWs, they had nothing more to say to me, although I often said them over to myself. I had dreamed of studying mathematics and physics. Einstein and Heisenberg were my heroes. But in that hut my dream fell to pieces. What was the point of it all?

Tormenting memories

And then those sleepless nights, when I was overwhelmed by the tormenting memories of the tanks that overran us on the fringes of the battle of Amheim, I woke up soaked with sweat; then the faces of the dead appeared and looked at me with quenched and sightless eyes. It was at least five years before I found some degree of healing for those memories. In that mass camp, where we just sat around and had nothing to do, one was especially at the mercy of those tormenting memories. In those nights one was alone like Jacob and fought with principalities and powers that seemed dark and dangerous. It was only afterward, and later, that it became clear with whom one had been wrestling.

And then came what was for me the worst of all. In September 1945, in Camp 22 in Scotland, we were confronted with pictures of the concentration camps Belsen and Auschwitz. They were pinned up in one of the huts, without much comment. Some people thought it was just British propaganda. Others set the piles of bodies that they saw over against Dresden. But slowly and inexorably the truth filtered into our awareness, and we saw ourselves mirrored in the eyes of the Nazi victims. Was this what we had fought for? Had my generation, as the last, been driven to our deaths so that the concentration camp murderers could go on killing and Hitler could live a few months longer?

Some people were so appalled that they didn't want to go back to Germany ever again. Some of them stayed on in England. For me, every feeling for Germany, my so-called "sacred Fatherland," collapsed. It was only when my father's Jewish friend Fritz Valentin returned to Hamburg from his English exile in 1945 (he was president of the provincial court, a devout Christian, and later founder of the Protestant Academy in Hamburg) that my father in his French captivity and I in England felt duty-bound to return to that country of contradictions, between Goethe's Weimar and the concentration camp of Buchenwald. The depression over the wartime destruction and a captivity without any apparent end was exacerbated by a feeling of profound shame at having to share in this disgrace. That was undoubtedly the hardest thing, a stranglehold that choked us.

THE UNDESERVED TURN OF EVENTS

For me, the turn from humiliation to new hope came about through two things: first through the Bible and then through my encounter with Christian people.

In the Scottish labor camp, together with some other astonished prisoners, I was for the first time given a Bible by a well-meaning army chaplain who visited our camp. Some of us would rather have had a few cigarettes. I read it without much comprehension until I stumbled on the psalms of lament. Psalm 39 held me spell-bound: "I was dumb with silence, I held my peace and my sorrow was stirred [But Luther's German is much stronger: 'I have to eat up my suffering within myself'] ...my lifetime is as nothing in thy sight... Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not thou thy peace at my tears, for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were..." They were the words of my own heart, and they called my soul to God.

Then I came to the story of the passion, and when I read Jesus' death cry, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" I knew with certainty: this is someone who understands you. I began to understand the assailed Christ because I felt that he understood me. This was the divine brother in distress, who takes the prisoners with him on his way to resurrection. I began to summon up the courage to live again, seized by a great hope. I was even calm when other men were repatriated and I was not. This early fellowship with Jesus, the brother in suffering and the redeemer from guilt, has never left me since. I never once for all "decided for Christ," as is often demanded of us, but I am sure that then and there, in the dark pit of my soul, Christ found me. And then I decided very often for Christ. Christ's God-forsakenness showed me where God is, where he had been with me in my life, and where he would be in the future.

The other life-altering element for me was the kindness with which Scots and

English, our former enemies, came to meet us halfway. In Kilmarnock the miners and their families took us in with a hospitality that shamed us profoundly. We heard no reproaches, we were accused of no guilt. We were accepted as human beings, even though we were just numbers and wore our prisoners' patches on our backs. We experienced forgiveness of guilt without any confession of guilt on our part, and that made it possible for us to live with the guilt of our people and in the shadow of Auschwitz without repressing anything and without becoming callous. I corresponded with the Steele family for a long time afterward.

The other experience that turned my life upside down was the first international SCM conference at Swanwick in the summer of 1947, to which a group of POWs was invited. We came there, some still wearing our wartime uniforms. And we came with fear and trembling. What were we to say about the German war crimes and the mass murders in the concentration camps? But we were welcomed as brothers in Christ and were able to eat and drink, pray and sing, with young Christians who had come from all over the world, even from Australia and New Zealand. In the night my eyes sometimes filled with tears.

Then a group of Dutch students came and asked to speak to us officially. Again I was frightened, for I had fought in Holland in the battle for the Amheim bridge. But the Dutch students told us that Christ was the bridge on which they could cross to us and that without Christ they would not be talking to us at all. They told of the Gestapo terror, the loss of their Jewish friends, and the destruction of their homes. We, too, could step onto this bridge that Christ had built from them to us and could confess the guilt of our people and ask for reconciliation. At the end we all embraced. For me that was an hour of liberation. I was able to breathe again; I felt like a human being once more and returned cheerfully to the camp behind the barbed wire. The question of how long the captivity was going to last no longer bothered me.

In some English circles, Norton Camp counted as a camp where young Germans were supposed to be "re-educated" for a better postwar Germany. But in reality it was a generous gift of reconciliation offered to former enemies, and as such it was unique. I came to the camp in the autumn of 1946. My wartime Abitur, the school-leaving certificate, was no longer accepted, and I had to go back to school first.

The decision about whether I should become a teacher or a pastor was made for me through my experiences with the Bible and at the Swanwick conference. In the evenings I often walked along the camp fence and looked up at the chapel on the hill, a Nissen hut. "I circle round God, the age-old tower..." (R. M. Rilke) I was still searching, but I sensed that God was drawing me in and that I should not be seeking God if God had not already found me. I wrote to my family: "I end most

days in a curious way. In our camp there is a hill, overgrown with huge old trees. It is really the center of camp life, for there is a little chapel on it where we meet for evening prayers, so as to end the day with a hymn and collect our thoughts for new life. I like to sit there in the evening and look through the windows into the twilight, out onto the lake and the fields of the free world. Perhaps we ought to see this whole imprisonment as a long church-going..." We loved the chapel. It cast a wholly unique spell over us.

THE BLESSING OF NORTON CAMP

For us, Norton Camp was a kind of monastic enclosure, "excluded from time and world," as a friend of mine wrote in 1948 in his farewell letter. The day began at 6:30 a.m. with a bugle call (because we had lost our watches when we were taken prisoner) and ended at 10:30 p.m. when the English put out the lights. All at once we had time, time in plenty, and stood, spiritually and mentally starving as we were, in front of a wonderful library put together by the YMCA. During those days I read everything—poems and novels, mathematics and philosophy, as well as any amount of theology, literally from morning to night.

Everything, and the theology especially, was fabulously new to me. The YMCA also printed books to help the prisoners of war. I still have some of them: Nygren's *Eros and Agape* and Bonhoeffer's *Nachfolge* (*The Cost of Discipleship*). My first book of systematic theology was Reinhold Niebuhr's *Nature and Destiny of Man*, which made a deep impression on me, although I hardly understood it. New worlds dawned for us, worlds that had been forbidden to us under the Third Reich. We read "emigré" literature such as Thomas Mann, as well as the works of modern English and American writers.

The semester timetables were rich and varied, and of course we wanted to hear everything. I learned Hebrew and passed the examination under an older student of theology. Gerhard Friedrich, a well-known New Testament scholar, introduced us to the New Testament. And then there were the visitors from outside: Anders Nygren from Uppsala stayed a fortnight and taught us systematic theology; Professor Soe from Copenhagen did the same for Christian ethics; Werner Milch, an emigrant, later in Marburg, enthralled us with a history of twentieth-century literature; Fritz Blanke came from Zürich, and Matthew Black from Scotland. I met him again later in St. Andrews. Of course we were a "show camp," and not without reason; but we were honored and richly benefited by the visits and addresses of Birger Forell, John Mott, Willem Visser't Hooft, Martin Niemöller, and others.

I think no less of the moving sermons of our camp chaplains. They were the first sermons I had ever heard, and I can still repeat some of them today. I can still see in my mind's eye the long procession of prisoners on their way to Cuckney

church, or to the Methodist church where Frank Baker was minister. I met him again later at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

At night we sometimes crawled through a hole at the right-hand corner of the back fence so as to fetch dry wood from the Duke of Portland's park for the iron stove that stood in the middle of the hut. How much time we had for nighttime talks in the firelight of the stove, long after the lights had been put out! Never again have I lived "the life of the mind" as intensively as I did in the last semester of the theological school in Norton Camp. It was a marvelous, richly blessed time. We were given what we did not deserve and received of the fullness of Christ "grace upon grace."

LIMPING BUT BLESSED

For us, what looked like a grim fate when it began turned into an undeserved, rich blessing. It began in the night of war and, when we came to Norton Camp, the sun rose for us. We came with wounded souls, and when we left my soul was healed. Certainly we did not "see God face-to-face" like Jacob at that place on the Jabbok. No, what we experienced was just the reverse: God looked on us with "the shining eyes" of his eternal joy. The blessing and the spirit of life always have their origin in "the light of God's countenance" (Psalm 51:11; 139:7; Numbers 6:24-26), just as his judgment means his "hidden face" (*hester panim*), and rejection is the face of God when it is "turned away." What we had experienced was for many of us the turn from God's "hidden face" to "the light of his countenance." When it began we experienced with pain his hiddenness and remoteness, and in the end we sensed that he looked upon us "with shining eyes," and we felt the warmth of his great love.

Fifty years later, in 1995, we came back to the place in order to praise the hidden and yet so merciful God for everything that we experienced. Our old British camp commander, Major Boughton, said, "I have never heard of prisoners who voluntarily returned to their prison." But we did. We had come to remember with gratitude the people who came to meet us lost prisoners of war with such readiness to forgive and with such hospitality. We shall never forget the Swedish pastor Birger Forell, or John Barwick, an American businessman, who set up Norton Camp, and we have lasting ties with the YMCA, which organized that generous prisoners aid that raised us up. Let me close this part of my lecture with Psalm 30, verse 11, and acknowledge:

Lord, thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing;
Thou hast loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness,
that my soul may praise thee and not be silent. O Lord my
God, I will give thanks to thee forever.

PRAYING AND WATCHING

Wrestling with God goes on in our prayer life. Praying is not just religious and sweet and always comforting. Praying is very often dramatic, sometimes a tragedy and a wrestling with the “hidden face” of God, suffering under the No of God and still searching for the Yes of God because we believe that there is a hidden Yes in the No of God. But to remain in prayer is to remain in the life with God and to find deep life experiences in God.

Praying and watching are not the same, but they belong together—watching with open eyes for the realities of life and praying for the presence of God.

Praying means to become awake and to live with attention and expectation

My God,
we cry out and complain
we groan and weep
we are speechless and silent.

And we beg and implore
we wish and we will,
we crave and insist.

We thank and praise,
we rejoice and dance,
we sing and we glorify.

These are all ways of expressing our lives before God. To call them all “praying” is much too narrow, because the word “pray” means much the same as “ask” and “plead.”

Modern men and women often think that praying is something peculiar and that in order to pray one must have a special religious aptitude. But this modern impression is quite wrong. There is nothing especially religious about praying. It is something generally and essentially human. In fact, praying isn't even just something human; the whole of creation prays without ceasing in the breath of the Spirit.

A sigh goes through the world

When people are seized by God's Spirit and begin to long for the redemption of this unredeemed world, they become sensitively aware, with freshly awakened senses, that this longing fills all the living who want to live and nevertheless have to die. This is the big surprise, which Paul describes in his letter to the Romans, chapter 8:19ff.; “All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God,” he had said

earlier (Romans 8:14), and we think, “Great for us!” But then he sets this human experience of the Spirit in the context of a universal cosmic expectation: “The creation waits with fearful longing for the revealing of the children of God...because the creation itself desires to be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.” (Romans 8:19, 21) Together with the whole of creation, “fearful” because of evanescent time and the destiny of death, we long for the redemption of the body. The torments of death and the yearning for life make all earthly creatures sigh and groan, and join in our sighing and groaning. For where these sighs and groans are heard, there is still hope for redemption. Where everything in us and around us is struck dumb, hope dies, too. Signs and groans are hope’s signs of life in opposition to death. That is why, according to Romans 8:26, God’s Spirit, the life-giver, also intercedes for us “with sighs too deep to utter” when we ourselves feel we can’t go on and are struck dumb. But this means nothing other than that God himself suffers in his creation and with his creation and sustains it through his sympathetic suffering and sighing patience, until the day of redemption dawns and his glory is revealed in all creatures, so that there is no further need to remember “this time of suffering.”

So when, in the Spirit, who is the life-giver, we human beings begin to complain of death and to weep for our dead, we shall wake up and hear how the earth weeps and how all its creatures groan and cry.

When we come awake in God’s Spirit we also participate in God’s sufferings in this world and with this world and wait for the future of his redemption. In this sense, praying simply means doing what the earth with all its living things does, and doing what God himself does in the world through his Spirit. It is not praying anymore that is the singular thing, because it singles out silent human beings from the crying and groaning earth. Not to pray means not coming awake, being numbed by God’s absence.

The world is full of praise

There would be no fear of death if there were no delight in life, and there would be no sighing in the world if there were no love for life there. Indeed, the stronger the delight in life, the deeper the fear of death, and the more passionate the love for life, the louder the sighs and groans. The sighs and the song of praise are not contradictions. They reinforce each other mutually. The pain of death is simply the negative, reverse side of the positive love for life.

The world is full of praise, for God is in this world. He is not far off, in the Beyond, but is himself the life in the world. Israel expressed this by saying that God’s Spirit, God’s Wisdom, and God’s presence fill everything created in such a way that all things live from God and have their existence and continuance in God. “The

Spirit of the Lord fills the world.” (Wisdom of Solomon 1:7) “God’s immortal spirit is in all things.” (Wisdom of Solomon 12:1) But one day “the whole earth will be full of his glory,” as Isaiah “saw” in his call vision. (Isaiah 6:3) So nothing is so far from God that it does not hold God “within itself,” as Aquinas said, and God is so close to all things that, together with human beings, in him “they live, move, and have their being.” (Acts 17:28)

How do we perceive this? All created things praise, love, glorify, and adore God by rejoicing over their existence before him and by enjoying their life in God. “All thy works give thanks to thee.” (Psalm 145:10) “The field exults and everything in it. All the trees of the wood sing for joy.” (Psalm 96:12) “The heavens are telling the glory of God,” says Psalm 19, and Job 26 is the record of a wonderful hymn of creation.

It is only for modern men and women that the world has become dumb, for it has now come to be seen merely as material for research and technology. The modern world for its part has led to what Rachel Carson called “the silent spring,” and has turned the song of praise of living creation into the stillness of the dead and ravaged world.

But the world is not mute. All creatures speak, even if human beings can no longer hear them. All creatures are aflame with the present glory of the Lord and reflect his glory in a thousand different mirrors—but “we are blind, we have no eyes” said Calvin and Francis of Assisi, too.

People who thank God every morning for the new day in their lives, people who praise God through their delight in existence and glorify him through their love for life, are not doing something singular. They are only doing what all creatures do, universally and unceasingly, each in its own way. With the lives they live, these people are joining in with the cosmic resonance of God’s goodness and beauty. To pray like this means waking up out of the mute world of modernity and turning back to the cosmic solidarity of all created being.

Praying means coming awake. So praying also means awakening the senses. “Awake, my heart, and sing the Maker of all things,” wrote Paul Gerhardt, and “What the great God so greatly does awakens all my senses.”

Living with unheard prayers is called “watching”

How can we go on living with unanswered prayers and still keep our trust in God? How can we exist when God is silent? The suffering from God begins with the unanswerable and inexorable question: “My God, why?” And suffering from our own unfulfilled lives begins, too: “Why me?” or “Why not me?” Many people then give up and stop praying altogether because it hasn’t helped anyway. Many people give up believing in God or rebel against this God who leaves us in the lurch

when we need him. “Curse God and die,” Job’s atheistic wife advised him as he sat in the ashes of his life and contended with God. When Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane was not heard, his disciples fell into a deep sleep. That, too, is a natural reaction to absolute desolation.

If our prayers are not heard and we feel only soundless silence round about us, it is good to think of Gethsemane and to enter in spirit into Jesus’ passionate prayer to his heavenly Father and into his God-forsakenness. He was not spared the cup of forsakenness for whose passing he had so implored. Not his will was done, but God’s, the will he did not want.

Any of us who find again our own God-forsakenness in the forsakenness of the Jesus who prayed without an answer enter into an experience of God that the Christian mystics later called “the dark night of the soul.” This is the great temptation. We would give up, or become inwardly numbed, or as if turned to stone, if we were not, together with Jesus, to acquire the power to “watch” in this “night of God.” Watching means being aware, open-eyed and with fully stretched senses, of the reality of this eclipse of God. The New Testament does not simply say “pray!” We are told again and again to “watch and pray.” We learn this watching in fellowship with Jesus, when God is far away from us. It is a watching and waiting in the Holy Spirit who is beside us and intercedes for us when we lose sight of God and when the last spark of faith in us dies out. The watching Christ in Gethsemane shows us this way of being open for God’s reality in God’s absence. Watching in tense expectation is the strongest form of prayer, because it is a great human answer to God’s hiddenness. We watch for God.

“Be sober, be vigilant”: this is what the New Testament expects of Christians. They are supposed to keep watch in a sleeping, drunken, and dreaming world. What do we perceive when we live with senses that are open to receive and at full stretch? We perceive the dangers threatening the world and the tribulations hanging over its self-assured and despairing people. But we watch, too, because we are watching for God’s coming. “Blessed are those whom the Lord shall find watching when he comes.” (Luke 21:36) Waiting puts great expectancy into our praying and by so doing makes it messianic. Watching goes beyond the praying and beyond the falling silent, because it makes our whole life an animated and awakened life in tense expectation of God’s coming into this world.

It is actually astonishing that I can pray not just for myself but for other people, too, and that other people can pray not only for themselves but for me as well. These intercessions bring us into a great, often worldwide, fellowship of the Spirit. To know that this fellowship is there and intercedes for me when I fall silent gives me a powerful feeling of safekeeping. In this intercessory dimension, praying doesn’t make us solitary; it overcomes our loneliness. People who have a hard time

ahead of them and know that others are praying for them know that they are sustained, and they don't give up. Human life becomes living when people are there for each other; and in the same way, life in the Spirit becomes a living life because people pray for each other and bring one another reciprocally to God.

This is what I wanted to tell you with the story of my life when I was a young prisoner of war and with what I have learned in wrestling with God, in praying and watching with Jesus. There is always a hidden Yes in the suffered No of God. Don't give up when you experience a No of God. Search and pray for the hidden Yes of God. Expect the unexpected, and you will find it. It is not always our will and what we had wanted, but we shall see what God's will is and how good God is. The No is not God's last word. His last and everlasting word is Yes; "Yes, I live and you shall also live." ❀