

INTRODUCTION

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774–1821) was born to a prominent New York family. Devout Protestants, the Bayleys cultivated in Elizabeth an appreciation of books and a desire to help the poor. With her husband, William Seton, Elizabeth had five children, but William's business failed, and he died young from tuberculosis. After his death, Elizabeth converted to Catholicism and was scorned by her family as a result.

Suddenly single, poor, and struggling with her own illness, Elizabeth found herself experiencing calamities that had always evoked her compassion. Nevertheless, with firm faith and trust in God, she spent the rest of her short life establishing orphanages and schools through the small religious community she founded, the Sisters of Charity.

For the next thirty days, we invite you to walk with St. Elizabeth, meditating upon her surrendered life, her continuing impact in the culture, and her inspiration for the church today.

May St. Elizabeth inspire you to entrust your own circumstances and unique difficulties to our loving God, whose plans are to give you a future and a hope.

The quotes from St. Elizabeth Ann Seton were chosen by Lisa Dye, who also chose the Scripture quotes and wrote the Prayer and Practice pieces.

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RENEWING MY MIND

Give some time, if it is only half an hour in every day, to devotional reading, which is necessary to the well ordering of the mind.

Scripture

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. **PHILIPPIANS 4:8**

Prayer

Father, as a busy mother to five children, St. Elizabeth founded a religious order, opened orphanages, and started schools. Yet she counted time spent devoted to you as most vital, the perfect foundation for her effectiveness. Please help me, like her, to renew my thoughts daily with Scripture and other worthy writings, so that I will resist all that is negative and low, cultivate what is pure and excellent, and steadfastly pursue your will. Amen.

Practical

I will ask someone from my church for help finding great books to begin regular devotional reading.

THE VOICE OF GRACE

Be attentive to the voice of grace.

Scripture

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” JOHN 10:27

Prayer

Loving Savior, you came to lead me in your path of life. You are my Shepherd, and I am one of your sheep, belonging to you because you have bought me with the sacrifice of yourself on the cross. You know me completely, better than I know myself, and still desire only what is good for me, even when I sometimes stray from your path. You speak to me through Scripture, within your church, and by your Spirit, who guides me into truth. Although the busyness and clamor of life try to drown out what you are saying, I thank you that your voice of grace is always calling me to follow you. Amen.

Practical

I will listen for the voice of grace as I read Scripture and pray.

REFINING OF MY FAITH

Afflictions are the steps to heaven.

Scripture

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

ROMANS 5:3-4

Prayer

Loving Father, you do not wish me to suffer needlessly, but you sometimes permit difficulties that lead me to a more perfect and refined faith. I can see in the life of St. Elizabeth that the trials of widowhood, parenting five children alone, and the loss of material wealth helped produce a deep love of Christ and an unflinching trust in you. By your strength, her resulting hope and great love led her to serve others. I want to be patient with my struggles, to gain a pleasing faith, and to also have your hope and love live in me. Amen.

Practical

I will thank God for my trials. By them, he is producing character and faith in my life.

TRUST GOD'S PLANS

*God, who sits above, smiles at the anxious,
calculating heart and makes everything
easy to the simple and confiding.*

Scripture

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

PROVERBS 3:5-6

Prayer

Spirit of Truth, I know that when I try to make decisions without your wisdom and guidance, I err, often without realizing it. Peace eludes me as I struggle and strive to order my own circumstances. I have no confidence in trying to chart my life's course without your help. Come, Holy Spirit. Please teach me to bring all the daily concerns of my life to your loving oversight and to trust that you will lead me in the Father's perfect path. Amen.

Practical

I will not worry but make important decisions after times of prayer and listening for the Spirit's leading.

A SECRET BLESSING

How happy this earth to possess Mary so long. A secret blessing to the rising church.

Scripture

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." **John 2:3-5**

Prayer

Mary, what a moment this was between you and your Son. You knew in your heart that this miracle would mean the beginning of his walk toward the cross. Yet you did not withhold him from a world desperate for salvation, and you pray unceasingly to him as a mother for us all. Please pray that I also learn to put God's will and others' needs before my own ease and self-interest. Amen.

Practical

I will see Mary as a blessing, teaching me to pray for needs I see, and reminding me to do as Christ tells me.

PERFECT PEACE

Let your chief study be to acquaint yourself with God, because it is the only knowledge that can fill the heart with a peace and joy that nothing can disturb.

Scripture

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. **ISAIAH 26:3**

Prayer

Loving Father, as I know you better, you will enclose me in peace. It's what I long for, but life's urgencies rise up every day. Although they are often problems to be solved as part of the work you give me in this world, my first reaction is sometimes stress. Please help me not to be distracted by situations that are not mine to solve and to keep my thoughts centered on you. Amen.

Practical

I will pay attention to God's presence and expect his peace as I care for loved ones, do my work, and go about all my activities.

MARY, MY MOTHER

O Mary, be to us indeed a Mother; pity the fears and sorrows of your children in our state of long uncertainty and danger; show yourself a Mother to us in the hour of our death.

Scripture

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” **JOHN 19:26–27**

Prayer

Jesus, you saw Mary at your cross and knew your church would need her. I need her. She shows me how to love you. She speaks to you about my sorrows and fears and will pray for me at the hour of my own death. She is my mother too. Amen.

Practical

I will consider the ways in which I need the prayers and help of a mother, and I will call out to Mary.

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

O my God, forgive what I have been, correct what I am, and direct what I shall be.

Scripture

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. **EPHESIANS 5:8–9**

Prayer

Father, I entrust myself to your loving forgiveness for who I have been and what I have done. I thank you for what you are doing to transform me into a child of light. As I am ever more fully surrendered to Christ's life through the Eucharist, I welcome his purifying power to correct my thoughts, speech, and actions. Refine me in the brightness of your Son's presence. Amen.

Practical

I will let my past rest in God's forgiveness and I will cooperate with his corrections today. I will look forward to what he is making me.

GOODNESS AND MERCY

Oh, how plentiful is your goodness, O how sweet is your mercy, dearest Lord Jesus, to every soul that seeks and thirsts after you.

Scripture

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. **PSALM 23:6**

Prayer

Father in heaven, your goodness and mercy will not fail. Your goodness is a lavish gift, given though I don't deserve it. Your mercy is the sweet restraint of consequences I do deserve. Your Son purchased these gifts for me upon the cross, and you are happy to give them. Please help me to be thankful for what he has done and to run after him with greater strength. Amen.

Practical

I will meditate upon what goodness and mercy have come to me through Christ. I will seek him all the more.

THE BLESSING OF PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance: a gratuitous grace, yet forfeited so often!

Scripture

As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. **JAMES 5:11**

Prayer

Father, Job's story reminds me that your blessing was both a result of his perseverance and the force behind his perseverance. He suffered the loss of health, family, wealth, and reputation...nearly everything but his life, yet you were the persevering strength within him and the cause of his ultimate restoration. I too will encounter difficulties in relationships, in work, in health, or in challenges to my moral integrity. Let me cling to your grace and persevere. Amen.

Practical

When I am challenged by a long and difficult circumstance, I will remember God's graces of the past and look for the ones he is faithfully giving today.

PURE HEARTS

Purify your hearts that they may appear to God like bright little stars at the bottom of a fountain.

Scripture

Remove the dross from the silver, and a silversmith can produce a vessel. **PROVERBS 25:4**

Prayer

Gracious Father, you are a silversmith, and I am silver in your hands. Help me to patiently surrender to the ways you purify me from lingering selfishness and weakness. I will pray and examine myself in the revealing light of your Son's life so that I will see and confess my true condition. I ask you to transform me into a bright and useful vessel for you. Amen.

Practical

I will accept and participate in God's cleansing of my heart. He means this for good—to help me to see him and to brightly reflect his beauty to others.

LOVE WAITING

Remembering the comparison of my unworthiness with your goodness, let my soul wait with patience and glorify you for your patience with me.

Scripture

But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. **ROMANS 5:8**

Prayer

Loving Father, you have waited patiently for me to acknowledge my spiritual emptiness and to offer back to you in my worship the goodness you have shown me. You loved me even before I was born, before I had any knowledge or desire for you, even when you knew I would sin against you. Christ proves your great love. Although weak and wavering, I now come truly desiring your goodness. I will wait for you always, as you have always waited for me. Amen.

Practical

I will glorify God for his goodness and patience, demonstrated in his call to me through Christ.

GOD'S LOOKING GLASS

The accidents of life separate us from our dearest friends, but let us not despair. God is like a looking glass in which souls see each other. The more we are united to him by love, the nearer we are to those who belong to him.

Scripture

For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. **PHILIPPIANS 1:8**

Prayer

Father God, St. Paul suffered imprisonment and separation caused by the hazards of his ministry. Circumstances may differ, but I also grieve separation from people I care for deeply. Yet our fellowship in you overcomes these distances. Drawing closer to you, I hope to see more clearly and know more intimately those who also share in your life and grace. Thank you for this communion so rich, so wide, so deep. Amen.

Practical

I will pray for those I love, drawing closer to them and to God.

ORDER, PEACE, AND SOLITUDE

You will hear a thousand reports of nonsense about our community. The truth is, we have the best ingredients of happiness—order, peace, and solitude.

Scripture

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands, just as we told you. **1 THESSALONIANS 4:11**

Prayer

Loving Father, you know all things, and you know what I need. The simplicity you intend for me defies a demanding culture that tells me to always want more of everything, including busyness. Chaos created by others may affect me, but I want to purposefully cultivate an orderly life and daily times of quietness. Please show me how to eliminate unnecessary and shallow activities. I want to spend my time working quietly in the depths of what is essential. Amen.

Practical

I will practice doing my work, whether at home or in a place of business, without drawing attention to myself.

SPIRITUAL PARENTING

*It is expected that I shall be the
mother of many daughters.*

Scripture

Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

1 CORINTHIANS 4:15

Prayer

Loving God, you are making a family for yourself through Jesus, your Son, and you want those of us who are your sons and daughters to take part in this. Many people I know are not yet a part of your family or, if they are, need a mentor, a spiritual parent to help raise them to a mature faith. I ask you to help me to be generous with my time and to be committed to anyone you put in my life to assist in their walk of faith. Amen.

Practical

I will keep my eyes open for those I can walk beside and encourage spiritually.

UNION

*This union of my soul with God is my wealth
in poverty, and my joy in deepest afflictions.*

Scripture

As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I enter and see the face of God? Deep calls to deep in the roar of your torrents; and all your waves and breakers sweep over me. **PSALM 42:1–2, 7**

Prayer

Majesty, how I have need of you—to see your face and hear your voice! As I perceive you little by little, I am filled and enlivened. You are a mighty river of living water able to deepen the canyon of my soul. When I call out, you sweep through me in torrents of love, overflowing me with your joy. How you bless me! Amen.

Practical

I will sit in God's presence asking for nothing but to be with him.

HEALTHY HABITS

Piety must be habitual, not by fits. It must be persevering because temptations continue all our life...and perseverance alone obtains the crown.

Scripture

“Whoever endures to the end will be saved.”

MATTHEW 10:22

Prayer

Gracious Father, truly I know that faithfulness to you is a virtue that will come to me only by your strength, but I want to invite and welcome it by my steady habits. Please help me as I practice being in your presence through daily prayer, meditation, reading devotionally, and participating fully in the sacraments. These are the disciplines meant to shape my soul for your pleasure, the means of cultivating vibrant spiritual health to carry me safely through my life to you. Amen.

Practical

I will regard spiritual disciplines not as drudgeries to be checked off my list but as good food for growth in godliness.

WANTED BY CHRIST

*He wills us to have an easy access to him—
it is not necessary to make long and painful
journeys. We find him in the midst of us.*

Scripture

And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. JOHN 1:14

Prayer

Loving Savior, you have not conspired to make it difficult for me to come to you, but so earnestly wanted me that you did everything to make it possible, including joining your divinity to humanity. In this way, you spoke so that I could hear, and you lived so that I could see your great love. Now, by the Eucharist, you continually draw me into unity with the Father, yourself, and the Spirit. I thank you, dear Jesus. Amen.

Practical

I will run to you with abandon, grateful you want me with you.

PERFECT IN WEAKNESS

Instead of measuring your difficulties with your strength, you must measure them with the powerful help you have a right to expect from God.

Scripture

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

Prayer

Jesus my Savior, there are seasons when I feel inadequate to meet life with any strength or success. Some days, I have more work and responsibility to handle than I have time or energy. Other times, a very difficult circumstance arises that seems to have no earthly solution. But my weakness is an opportunity to see your divine power at work in me. Thank you for the grace of your perfect sufficiency. Amen.

Practical

I will most expect Christ’s great strength during my weakest moments.

CONFIDENCE AND PEACE

Be not grieved and afflicted if your good intentions fail you. Know your kind Master accepts even your desires, and what you would do if you could.

Scripture

God does not see as a mortal, who sees the appearance. The Lord looks into the heart. **1 SAMUEL 16:7**

Prayer

Loving God, I want to please you. Even when I cannot accomplish what I am aiming for, you look deep inside me and see the hopes of my heart. Just as I might receive with pleasure a child's imperfect poem or painting because it is filled with painstaking effort and heartfelt desire to delight me, you see the beauty of my intentions and receive them. For they are intentions placed within me by your Spirit. Thank you for your loving kindness. Amen.

Practical

I will not despair over my failures but have confidence that God takes joy in my desire to please him.

KNEELING... LIKE JESUS

*The gate of heaven is very low; only
the humble can enter it.*

Scripture

“If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” JOHN 13:14–15

Prayer

Jesus my Savior, forgive me for resisting service to others in ways I think inconvenient, uninteresting, or demeaning. When I consider that you knelt and washed your disciples’ dirty feet, I see that I have far to go in learning humility. My opportunities to wash feet may be in caring for someone physically, mentoring a struggling coworker, or giving of personal resources where I see need. Please teach me to do as you did and serve. Amen.

Practical

I will welcome opportunities to serve others, even in lowly tasks, and so follow my master and teacher.

FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

*Faith lifts the staggering soul on one side.
Hope supports it on the other. Experience
says it must be, and Love says let it be.*

Scripture

We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. **1 THESSALONIANS 1:3**

Prayer

Thank you, holy God, for lifting me up by faith on one side, by hope on the other, with your love as underlying strength. Each of these gifts, arising from you and ministered through your Spirit and the help of others, has supported me in my difficulties. Let me now be a vessel of faith, hope, and strong love for those staggering ones you bring to my care. Amen.

Practical

I will support others by good works born of faith, patience born of hope, and labors born of love as God instructs.

STILLNESS AND STRENGTH

*Plenty of people in this world to mind
planning and opinions, but how few to build
in God and be silent, like our Jesus.*

Scripture

Be still and know that I am God! **PSALM 46:10**

Prayer

Sovereign God, how often I resort to plotting and planning my solutions to life's circumstances and problems. I give energy to urgent demands, even at times when you do not call me to give it. I often waste time fretting, when what you desire is for me to be still in your presence, letting you help me sort everything out first. Please teach me to come to you without an agenda. I want to learn to gain your strength in silence, just as Jesus did when he withdrew from the crowds to pray. Amen.

Practical

I will begin to practice regular times of solitude and prayer, refraining from speaking, and meditating silently on God's strength and sufficiency.

INTEGRITY AND SIMPLICITY

*Nothing draws on us the favor of God
and esteem of others so certainly as integrity
and simplicity in our words and actions.*

Scripture

“Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’”

MATTHEW 5:37

Prayer

Instruct me, dear Jesus, in keeping simplicity as my standard in how I live and speak, just as you did. I want my words to be few, but filled with truth and supported always by such faithful actions that others regard them as reliable and trustworthy. I know that if I keep myself too busy, I will either be tempted to take shortcuts in moral integrity as I try to fulfill my obligations, or I will find it impossible to do as I have promised. I need your guidance, your example, and your wisdom. Amen.

Practical

I will study the gospels to see how Jesus lived and spoke and what activities he considered most important.

REMAIN IN CHRIST'S LOVE

It is the very nature of love to make us seek the presence of the person we love, and to delight in their company and conversation.

Scripture

“As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.” JOHN 15:9

Prayer

Loving Savior, there is great depth and beauty and truth to this seemingly simple invitation to remain in your love. More than a casual suggestion or a fleeting bit of comfort tossed my way on a difficult day, this is your offer to hold the whole of my life, body, soul, and spirit, for all time and through every season. Thank you for drawing me into your presence—to remain, stay, abide, and dwell forever in your love and your life. Amen.

Practical

I will seek Christ's continual presence in the sacraments, his wisdom in Scripture, his loving company as I work, and his conversation in prayer.

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

We must pray literally without ceasing—in every occurrence and employment of our lives—that prayer of the heart which is independent of place or situation, or which is rather a habit of lifting up the heart to God as in a constant communication with him.

Scripture

Pray without ceasing. **1 THESSALONIANS 5:17**

Prayer

Help me to be in a constant attitude of prayer, dear God, even when I am occupied with work or family. Of course, I desire regular times every day when I am consciously listening to you or fully focused on speaking to you about the needs of others as well as my personal concerns. But I ask that your Spirit might continually pray through me no matter where I am or what I am doing. Please use me this way. Amen.

Practical

I will daily invite the Holy Spirit to pray without ceasing through me according to the Father's perfect will.

EVERYTHING I NEED

We know certainly that our God calls us to a holy life. We know that he gives us every grace, every abundant grace; and though we are so weak of ourselves, this grace is able to carry us through every obstacle and difficulty.

Scripture

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness, through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

2 PETER 1:3

Prayer

Beloved God, you provide by your divine power everything I need to live a holy life, whether in my fruitful seasons or in my weak and struggling seasons. These gifts are ready for me to receive. I open my heart to every grace you generously provide to sustain me. Let my life tell of your glory and goodness. Amen.

Practical

I will look expectantly for God's provision of grace to meet each circumstance with holy strength.

GOD'S WILL

The first end I propose in our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills it; and thirdly, to do it because it is his will.

Scripture

Whatever you do, do from the heart, as for the Lord and not for others. **COLOSSIANS 3:23**

Prayer

Sovereign Lord, no business is more important for me than doing your will. Human plans, undirected by you, arise from flawed vision and self-interest, but your plans spring from divine wisdom, perfection, and love. Teach me what you desire of me, and I will strive to do it with the strength you supply—and to do it with integrity, enthusiasm, and excellence. Amen.

Practical

I will do what is God's clear will for everyone and pray to also discern and carry out the unique expressions of it as I walk my own path of faith. Delighting him will be my life's work.

GOD'S ATOM

*The Father, most tender, Father of all,
my immense God. I, his atom.*

Scripture

For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it. You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living. **WISDOM 11:24, 26**

Prayer

Loving Father, you have made me in your true and tender mercy. Your creation of every person, and of me, is the loving fruitfulness of your self-giving. Divine love has made me, upholds me, and draws me always to you. Compared to the greatness of your galaxies, I am small, a tiny atom. Yet you do not despise me or tolerate me only from a distance. You sent Christ to make me your child. I give you thanks! Amen.

Practical

I will think about each way the Father's love is evident to me.

CHILD OF THE CHURCH

Be children of the church. Be children of the church.

Scripture

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. **ACTS 2:42**

Prayer

Dear Jesus, your church is your bride, and you have given yourself to make her holy, clean, radiant, and blameless. You have made me a child of this loving union. St. Elizabeth reminds me with her dying words that there is no higher calling and no more worthy devotion to you than to joyfully partake of every privilege of your beloved church. Thank you for making me a part of your family. Amen.

Practical

I will express my enjoyment of being a child of the church by studying its teachings, growing in my relationships within God's family, gladly participating in the Eucharist, and striving to live in an attitude of continual prayer.