

# Making Space for God

## Elemental Spirituality—Refuge

### Opening Prayer

I arise today through a mighty strength:  
God's power to guide me,  
God's might to uphold me,  
God's eyes to watch over me;  
God's ear to hear me,  
God's word to give me speech,  
God's hand to guard me,  
God's way to lie before me,  
God's shield to shelter me,  
God's host to secure me.

*First millennium - Brigid of Gael*



### Arrival

Take five minutes to settle yourself by breathing deeply. Inhale for the count of five through your nose and as you do so pray silently, “I belong to Jesus.” Exhale through your mouth for the count of ten and as you do so pray silently “Body and Soul, in this life and the next.” Once you feel relaxed invite the Lord to guide and direct your thoughts for the day. Think back over where you have been in the last eight weeks. What burdens, emotions, and concerns do you carry? What are you thankful for? Offer these to the Lord.

### Refuge

Growing up on a farm, it was our after dinner routine during the summer months. My siblings and I, along with the other children in the neighborhood, would gather in the front yard and play tag until dark. In the middle of the yard were three birch trees. Anyone who made it to the birch tree circle without being touched was safe. The circle was the refuge where one could stop running. It was the protected space where one was no longer prey to the person who was “It.” And as dusk turned to darkness and our fatigue grew, it was the safe place everyone most wanted to find.

For many of us, the “It” of childhood morphed into something more forbidding. Vindictive bosses, corrupt governments, disease and pestilence, violence and poverty make the adult world a scary place. So where do we run to—fat retirements accounts, elegant homes, concrete border walls, expensive healthcare systems?

The ancient Hebrews, who knew a thing or two about enemies, offer us an alternative. Yahweh was their refuge, their rock, their fortress, their defense against a foe, their safe place where they were always welcome. Those who sought him found protection from the storms of life in the shadow of his wings. Take some time to reflect on Psalm 91. Identify areas of your life where you feel unsafe and tell that to the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

### Psalm 91

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

<sup>2</sup> I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my  
fortress,  
my God, in whom I trust.”

<sup>3</sup> Surely he will save you  
from the fowler’s snare  
and from the deadly pestilence.

<sup>4</sup> He will cover you with his feathers,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;

<sup>1</sup> **New International Version (NIV)** Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.](http://www.biblica.com)® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

<sup>2</sup> Reflection and Painting by Steven Stuckey 2018

his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

<sup>5</sup>You will not fear the terror of night,  
nor the arrow that flies by day,

<sup>6</sup>nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,  
nor the plague that destroys at midday.

<sup>7</sup>A thousand may fall at your side,  
ten thousand at your right hand,  
but it will not come near you.

<sup>8</sup>You will only observe with your eyes  
and see the punishment of the wicked.

<sup>9</sup>If you say, "The LORD is my refuge,"  
and you make the Most High your dwelling,

<sup>10</sup>no harm will overtake you,  
no disaster will come near your tent.

<sup>11</sup>For he will command his angels concerning  
you

to guard you in all your ways;

<sup>12</sup>they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a  
stone.

<sup>13</sup>You will tread on the lion and the cobra;  
you will trample the great lion and the  
serpent.

<sup>14</sup>"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will  
rescue him;

I will protect him, for he acknowledges my  
name.

<sup>15</sup>He will call on me, and I will answer him;  
I will be with him in trouble,

I will deliver him and honor him.

<sup>16</sup>With long life I will satisfy him  
and show him my salvation."

### Reading for Reflection

This passage makes it abundantly clear that Yahweh is not a great marshmallow in the sky. He is not a God who plays softball. Nor is he the god of the philosophers, a gorgeous but impotent force in heaven. He is a warrior who fights to win, and deception is part of his art of holy war... He is straight with the straight, merciful to the humble, but cunning with the wicked (Psalm 18:25-26), the God who catches the wicked in their own devices, who leads his enemies into the very traps that they set for the righteous. This is a God to be loved. But he is also a God to be feared. One should be grateful to be and remain in his good graces, for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of this God. Yahweh is the ultimate trickster that outfoxes all human attempts to escape him. Yahweh is not only cunning. He is transcendentally, infinitely cunning. The conclusion that God employs deception against deceivers should not lead to distrust or anxiety. There is a simple way to avoid falling into the trap of the infinitely cunning God: humbly trust him, for his is merciful to the merciful, and to the pure his is pure.

*Peter Leithart in Brazos Theological Commentary of 1 & 2 Kings, Page 164 commenting on 1 Kings 22:1-40 and God's deception of Ahab.*

The Celts were a poetic people, especially at prayer. Simple prose was neither good enough nor ornate enough to address the power at the center of their lives. Poetry was the medium of their deepening love affair with God. As humans cherish God more, they abandon common language in favor of more ornate phrases of praise. The God of the Celts was too personal and too exalted to be praised with measured words that fell too spontaneously from the tongue. God must be sung to with carefully formed words that are rehearsed. One must not jabber in the presence of royalty.

Calvin Miller in *The Path of Celtic Prayer*, page 39-40

### Benediction

Hide us under the shadow of your wings O Lord. Keep our eyes on you, our Rock and our Fortress. We know that we can trust you as the one who is the creator of all that is good and the one who suffers all that is evil. Thank you for your presence with us. Amen