

VISUAL & ACROSTIC POETRY AS PRAYER

I will stand like a guard and watch. I will wait to see what the LORD will say to me. I will wait and learn how he answers my questions. The LORD answered me, "Write down what I show you. Write it clearly on a sign so that the message will be easy to read." (Habakkuk 2:1-2 ERV)

The prophet Habakkuk describes prayer as an act of watching, waiting, learning, and writing. Visual poetry (or *concrete poetry*) can also portray this act by using the placement and shape of words on the page as part of the poem's meaning. Words might form a recognizable image, radiate from a point, circle an empty space, scatter across the page, or invite the eye to move in multiple directions. Unlike a poem meant to be read top to bottom, a visual poem lets the eye choose where to begin, where to linger, and which connections to make.

A blank center might hold the mystery of God's presence or our experience of His absence. Lines can be read in different orders, allowing them hold the tension and mystery of faith and doubt, gratitude and grief, certainty and questioning. Depending on the order in which we read them, lines can be statements and questions.

WRITE *YOUR* PRAYER POEM

Try writing prayer poems in different shapes. Let the words fall like rain, rise like praise, circle a question, follow the curve of a tear, or leave space between them for silence. Let the shape become part of the prayer. Watch, wait, listen, and let what God brings to your attention find its place on the page.

WRITE A SUNBURST POEM

Choose a word, phrase, question, or blank space as the center of your poem. Around it, write short lines radiating outward. Consider starting each line with the same word or phrase: *God, Where..., How do I..., Why..., or How long...*. Turn the page as you write so the lines extend at different angles. There is no first or last line, so the poem can be read from any point on the page. When the poem feels complete, read the prayer from several starting points. Notice what meanings emerge where the lines meet, diverge, and surround the center.

ACROSTIC PRAYER POEMS

An acrostic poem uses letters to provide structure. Each line begins with a specific letter, and when read from top to bottom, those letters form a word, phrase, or pattern.

Acrostics have deep roots in Scripture. Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145, Proverbs 31:10-31; and Lamentations 1-4, were written using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalm 119 is the most elaborate example. It is divided into twenty-two sections, each section containing eight verses, and each verse in a section begins with that section's letter.

On days when our thoughts wander or words are hard to find, an acrostic gently prompts us, by providing the first letter of each line.

WRITE AN ALPHABET ACROSTIC

Following the pattern of the biblical acrostics, consider writing a n alphabet acrostic. Begin your first line with A, your second with B, your third with C, and continue through the alphabet. Let your lines express praise, gratitude, doubt, confession, grief, anger, sadness, love, hope, joy, and courage. Quick A-Z ideas to get you started:

Accepted	Hope	Openness	Vulnerable
Brave	Isolated	Purpose	Worthy
Curious	Joy	Question	Xenial (friendly)
Delight	Kindness	Regret	Yearning
Emptiness	Loneliness	Shame	Zeal
Fear	Mercy	Temptation	
Gratitude	Need	Unique	

BEGIN WITH A WORD

Choose a prayer word (such as PRAYER, PRAISE, THANKS, GRACE, PEACE, or HOPE) and write it vertically down the side of the page. Let each letter begin a new line in your prayer. You might choose a word that reflects what you need from God, what you want to offer God, or what you are struggling to pray about.

Sometimes the constraints of acrostic poetry awaken new possibilities. A single letter can lead us toward a word we might not otherwise have chosen. The structure provides a place to begin while leaving room for honesty and creativity. Let the letters guide you into a deeper conversation with God.