

LITERARY PORTALS TO PRAYER

# JANE AUSTEN



50  
PRAYER  
STARTERS

ILLUMINATED BY

THE MESSAGE<sup>®</sup>

COMPILED AND INTRODUCED BY  
RACHEL HART WINTER

How quick come the reasons  
for approving what we like.

JANE AUSTEN



*Don't indulge your ego  
at the expense of your soul.*

THE MESSAGE

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## CONTENTS



A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER / 9

INTRODUCTION / 11

SOURCES / 15

PORTALS TO PRAYER / 16

VARIOUS WAYS.....	16
ULTIMATE HONEY AND SWEET MILK.....	18
A PLACE IN THE SUN.....	20
STAY THE COURSE.....	22
SQUINTING IN A FOG.....	24
TASTE AND SAVOR	
HIS DELICIOUS LOVE.....	26
BORN FROM ABOVE.....	28
NOTHING BUT SMOKE.....	30
AND SPITTING INTO THE WIND.....	32
MY DEAR LOST LOVE.....	34
MANY GREAT THINGS.....	36
DO YOU KNOW THE WAY?.....	38
LET'S PRACTICE REAL LOVE.....	40
NO LONGER CONDEMNING	
OURSELVES.....	42
FROM THE VERY FIRST DAY.....	44
BUY EDUCATION.....	46
REKINDLING BURNED-OUT LIVES.....	48
FEARLESS NO MATTER WHAT.....	50
QUIETLY AND UNOBTRUSIVELY.....	52
DON'T FOOL YOURSELF.....	54
LET ME CATCH MY BREATH.....	56
EVERYTHING NEW.....	58

NEVER FORGET .....	60
IT MIGHT BE GOOD THEATER .....	62
THE INTEGRITY OF YOUR TEACHERS.....	64
THE TUNE I DANCE TO.....	66
I RELISH EVERYTHING .....	68
LOVE NEVER LOOKS BACK.....	70
OUR INCOMPLETES WILL BE	
CANCELLED.....	72
LEAVE YOUR SECLUSION .....	74
SET YOUR INSTRUCTIONS TO MUSIC .....	76
WE HAVE TO CELEBRATE .....	78
WORDS CAN BE YOUR DAMNATION.....	80
YOU'VE CAPTURED MY HEART .....	82
BE ALERT .....	84
YOU'RE SO STEADY.....	86
DOWN TO THE LAST DETAIL.....	88
KNOWING THE SCORE.....	90
JOY IN THE NOW .....	92
NEVER PATRONIZING,	
NEVER CONDESCENDING.....	94
FREE TO LIVE A FREE LIFE .....	96
DON'T INDULGE YOUR EGO.....	98
SMOOTH SAILING.....	100
BE GLAD IN YOUR GOD .....	102
SEND ME!.....	104
LOYAL COMMITMENTS.....	106
MEDITATE DAY AND NIGHT.....	108
YOUR LIFE COUNTS FOR PLENTY .....	110
WHAT GOD DOES AND WHAT YOU DO....	112
SET THE WORLD RIGHT .....	114

## SCRIPTURE INDEX / 117

ABOUT RACHEL HART WINTER / 119

## A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER



Prayer is sometimes difficult. Perhaps we need spiritual inspiration. Something to reignite our spiritual life. A way to initiate a new and fruitful spiritual direction.

Great literature can do these things: inspire, ignite, and initiate.

Which is why ACTA Publications is publishing a series of “Literary Portals to Prayer.” The idea is simple: take insightful passages from great authors whose work has stood the test of time and illuminate each selection with a well-chosen quotation from the Bible on the same theme.

To do this, we use a relatively new translation by Eugene Peterson called *The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition*. It is a fresh, compelling, challenging, and faith-filled translation of the Scriptures from ancient languages into contemporary American English that sounds as if it was written yesterday. *The Message* may be new to you, or you may already know it well, but see if it doesn’t illuminate these writings of Jane Austen in delightful ways.

We publish the books in this series in a size that can easily fit in pocket or purse and find a spot on kitchen table, bed stand, work bench, study desk, or exercise machine. These books are meant to be used in a variety of ways. And we feature a variety of authors so you can find the one or ones that can kick-start your prayer life.

So enjoy these portals to prayer by Jane Austen illuminated by *The Message*. And look for others in this series, including Louisa May Alcott, Hans Christian Andersen, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Herman Melville, William Shakespeare, Edith Wharton, Walt Whitman, and others. Consider them, if you will, literary *lectio divina*.

Gregory F. Augustine Pierce  
President and Publisher  
ACTA Publications



REGARDING SPELLING, PUNCTUATION,  
AND CAPITALIZATION IN AUSTEN'S WORK

In very few instances, we have changed British spellings of words to American versions. Punctuation and capitalization we have left alone, unless it might confuse the modern reader. Where we start a quote in mid-sentence or add a word for clarity, we merely do so, rather than distract the reader with ellipses or brackets. First names have been inserted where a pronoun needs clarification.

## INTRODUCTION



I have always believed that reading literature is much like prayer. Words on the written page have the ability to cause me to shout for joy, sadness, excitement, despair—all of the things we often share with God in our prayers and hold in the deepest places of our heart and soul. Somehow when a talented author like Jane Austen says things so eloquently and prophetically that it captures exactly what we are feeling, it seems only right to sing out in gratitude that we are not alone on this journey in life, that perhaps some of the things we are experiencing are as timeless as the biblical authors referred to in their day.

Austen speaks to the truth of her time in a way that is a lesson for all of us. There is a reason many of us remember our first time reading Austen. She helped us see and understand the world, and as a result we become better able to know ourselves and God. She pays deep attention to the ordinary details of our lives. As many theologians, wise scholars, and authors remind us, it is in these ordinary, everyday moments that we are often invited into the presence of God. Austen reminds us that one of the gifts of any life, but certainly the spiritual life, is the ability to notice the people, places, and beauty around us.

Biblical authors, excellent literary figures, and poets over the ages share in common the need to pay attention to the details of the world around us. Slowing down enough to



observe, exhibiting enough courage, taking time to express our love, and offering deep gratitude to our God—these are the things that seem to underpin a life well lived. Austen lived courageously, writing in a time when women were not a part of the literary community. She lived authentically, knowing her talent and sharing it in books, in prayers, and in a vast collection of letters. She lived faithfully, sharing with all of us over the centuries her celebration of words. More than ever today we need attentive descriptions of faith to find meaning in our lives. Austen can be our guide, and we are lucky to be the recipients of her wit and wisdom.

In re-reading Jane Austen over the past few months in preparation for this book, I encountered a favorite author from my youth at a new moment in my life. I am now a mother of three. Austen's care for and love of family are found throughout her writings. It is that devotion to family that impacts me most at present. She was extremely close to her family, her siblings, her nieces, her parents. She was a woman with a strong faith, surrounded by people of faith as the daughter of an Anglican minister and herself the author of profound prayers. Her passion for literary art mirrored her love of humanity and the world around her. She used her pen and paper to share that love with the world, and centuries later we are still recipients of her love and grace.

Austen “cared a great deal about accuracy” and wanted her novels to be “true to life.” For this reason she has been compared to Charles Darwin—albeit his skill was as a naturalist and hers as a novelist. Author Peter Graham

describes both as “keen observers of the world before them, who excelled in noticing microscopic particulars and in understanding the cosmic significance of those small details.” It is Austen’s ability to penetrate the ordinary encounters of life and to describe them in a way that offers new meaning that invite us to find our own meaning again and again in her novels.

Austen cuts to the heart of the human condition, revealing our deepest sense of who we are, the relationships we value, and even the natural world we occupy. It is her acute sense of the real that she conveys on the page—for example, describing a strawberry in a way that invites readers to consider again the simple pleasures in life. Her ability to describe the emotions we all experience as humans—from love and longing to sadness and lament—and her precision and clarity of expression allow us to relate in new ways to the world and to one another.

Austen offers one of the best depictions of the human person recorded in literature. The beautiful way she reveals for us character development—her sense of love and commitment, her ability to share the experience of loss and longing—all of these lend themselves to her incredible perspective on both the wisdom and wit of the human community.

Join me, then, as we explore some of her most profound passages alongside the equally compelling and relevant translation of the Bible—*The Message* by Eugene Peterson. *The Message* is appropriate as an “illumination” of literature because it speaks to us in a language accessible for people

today, in the same way that Jane Austen has spoken to generations of readers across the last two centuries.

Rachel Hart Winter  
Dominican University  
River Forest, Illinois

ACTA SAMPLE

JANE AUSTEN



SELECTIONS FROM

*Sense and Sensibility*, 1811

*Pride and Prejudice*, 1813

*Mansfield Park*, 1814

*Emma*, 1815

*Northanger Abbey*, 1818\*

*Persuasion*, 1818\*

*Minor Works*, 1818\*

\*published posthumously

ACTA SAMPLE

VARIOUS WAYS

Elinor, this eldest daughter whose advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother, and enabled her frequently to counteract, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind in Mrs. Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them: it was a knowledge which her mother had yet to learn, and which one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught. Marianne's abilities were, in many respects, quite equal to Elinor's. She was sensible and clever; but eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY, CHAPTER I



VARIOUS WAYS

*What I want to talk about now is the various ways God's Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often misunderstood, but I want you to be informed and knowledgeable....*

*God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people!*

*The variety is wonderful: wise counsel, clear understanding, simple trust, healing the sick, miraculous acts, proclamation, distinguishing between spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues. All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.*

I CORINTHIANS I, 4-11



ULTIMATE HONEY AND SWEET MILK

A continuance in a place where everything reminded her of former delight, was exactly what suited her mind. In seasons of cheerfulness, no temper could be more cheerful than hers, or possess, in a greater degree, that sanguine expectation of happiness which is happiness itself. But in sorrow she must be equally carried away by her fancy, and as far beyond consolation as in pleasure she was beyond alloy.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY, CHAPTER 2



ACTA SAMPLE

ULTIMATE HONEY AND SWEET MILK

*It's fanfares, ruffles and flourishes—hail to Lady Wisdom! God echoes her praises, and so do all the people. The presence of the Most High she's well acquainted with, in plain view of God she conducts herself nicely. In the assembly of the most low, she feels most at home: in the holy places she's well-received. In the company of the elect, she's welcome: among the blessed she's a role model.*

*Lady Wisdom has to say....*

*"Come over here to me, one and all, who can't wait to see me. Have I got something for you! I've got bushels and bushels from my garden. My teaching is ultimate honey; my heritage is sweet milk. Who eats me satisfies a hunger; who drinks me quenches a thirst; who hears me fulfills a longing; who works with me won't commit a sin; who makes sense out of me will have eternal life."*

SIRACH 24:1-4, 26-31





SET THE HILLS TO DANCING

The whole country about them abounded in beautiful walks. The high downs which invited them from almost every window of the cottage to seek the exquisite enjoyment of air on their summits, were a happy alternative when the dirt of the valleys beneath shut up their superior beauties; and towards one of these hills did Marianne and Margaret one memorable morning direct their steps, attracted by the partial sunshine of a showery sky, and unable longer to bear the confinement which the settled rain of the two preceding days had occasioned.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY, CHAPTER 9

SET THE HILLS TO DANCING

*Oh, visit the earth,  
ask her to join the dance!  
Deck her out in spring showers,  
fill the God-River with living water.  
Paint the wheat fields golden.  
Creation was made for this!  
Drench the plowed fields,  
soak the dirt clods  
With rainfall as harrow and rake  
bring her to blossom and fruit.  
Snow-crown the peaks with splendor,  
scatter rose petals down your paths,  
All through the wild meadows, rose petals.  
Set the hills to dancing.*

PSALM 65:9-12



Rachel Hart Winter brings a wealth of experience in scholarly research, higher education administration and teaching, and pastoral ministry to her work as director of St. Catherine of Siena Center at Dominican University, River Forest, Illinois. She also serves as adjunct professor at Dominican University, where she teaches classes on biomedical and healthcare ethics. Her academic credits include a BA in Behavioral Neuroscience from Lehigh University, and a Master of Theological Studies and a PhD from Loyola University Chicago. Her theological interests lie at the intersection of ecology and theology, drawing from the Bible, Catholic social teaching, ecotheology, and feminist theory. She is a co-author of *Healing Earth* through the International Jesuit Ecology Project and has written various articles and chapters for publication. She is married to Patrick Winter and has three children: Joseph, Thomas, and Catherine. She loves to read and has always enjoyed using literature, poetry, and music as creative entry points to prayer and meditation.



## LITERARY PORTALS TO PRAYER™

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**LITERARY:** pertaining to or of the nature of books and writing, especially those classed as literature

**PORTAL:** a door, gate, or entrance, especially one of imposing power or utility

**PRAYER:** the lifting up of the mind and heart to divine reality

**TO ILLUMINATE:** to brighten, light up, make lucid or clear



Jane Austen says things so eloquently and prophetically that it seems only right to sing out in gratitude that perhaps some of the things we are experiencing are as timeless as the Bible says they are. Austen cuts to the heart of the human condition, revealing our deepest sense of who we are, the relationships we value, and even the natural world we occupy. In this volume of *Literary Portals to Prayer*, each verso (left) page contains an excerpt from one of her works and the opposite recto (right) page illuminates the selection with a Bible verse from *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene H. Peterson.

This book is the perfect gift for fans of Austen, as well as those who have yet to discover some of her writings, and will serve as a welcome resource for those seeking a way to reignite their prayer life. Think of it as literary *lectio divina*.

Other volumes in this series include Louisa May Alcott, Hans Christian Andersen, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Herman Melville, William Shakespeare, Edith Wharton, and Walt Whitman.

Prayer/Literary



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