

On A Bench of Wood

*Reflections
of God's Grace*

DARYL MADDEN

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First Edition

*To Sister Mary Ellen,
who sees with joyful eyes and
listens with a compassionate heart,
and whose spirit guides with wisdom
rooted in an enduring, grateful heart,
radiating the love of our Savior.*

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Contents

Introduction	7
Love	10
And Still...	13
My Rock	16
Old Chapel	18
Living Now	20
Walls	21
Purpose	23
Who Is God Sending to Me?	24
Help Me	26
Transfer of Hope	27
Grant Me	29
May You Find	30
Refocus	32
My Own Little Swamp	34
Prayer for the Life in the Spirit Group	36
Senses of the Soul	38
Refocusing	40
Which	41
Grace	43
And I Fall...	44
A Connection of Grace	48
A Moment of Light	50
Stop	51
Blessed Wisdom	52

Transformation 53

Good Morning Again 54

Turn to God 56

The Crossing 58

Surrender 60

Every Cell 61

Decision 63

Rescue Me 64

Twilight 65

Trust 66

Deep Silence 68

Building Trust 69

Ship at Night 70

Comfort Me in Trust 72

Battle of Will 73

Brokenness 74

Burden 78

Crying for the Connection 79

Consolation 80

Hope 81

Knowledge of the Little 82

On a Bench of Wood 84

Let It Go 86

Beauty 88

The Beauty of the Forest 89

Solemnity of Autumn 90

Soft Breeze 91

Bridge Bench 92

Closing 93

Keeper of the Gifts 96

Introduction

I am not a religious. I am not a theologian. I am not even a writer.

Several years ago I'd have described myself as a good Christian: I went to church, I prayed most nights, and compared to others I was a good person. But I felt a constant drawing, a need to do more.

I now realize what a shallow spiritual life that was and how much I was missing—how God wants so much more and that, if we take little steps forward in faith, he will lead us into knowing him on a more intimate level.

One Lent I decided that, rather than watching twenty minutes of the *Today* show while eating my morning cereal, I would go for a walk in the woods away from the noise and daily distractions. I would totally give the time to having a conversation with God.

I quickly realized that this time would be useless unless I was completely honest, so I began with thoughts of “I don’t think I really love you.” And God took me by the hand and showed me his beauty,

comfort, and love. I took the time to stop, sit, wonder, open my eyes and ears, and give the thought to God.

Some days I'd get a thought and just have to write it down. This book contains forty-five of those reflections organized by theme: Love, Purpose, Refocus, Grace, Transformation, Surrender, Trust, Brokenness, Hope, and Beauty. My prayer is that you will open your mind and heart, take a step toward Christ, ask him to change you, and have the faith to persevere and trust in him. This is the greatest lesson I've learned: to take time each day, set aside time to be—just *be*—with God.

Take your time with this book. Read it slowly. Use each reflection to begin your time alone with God, either in a pew before Christ or away from the distractions of daily life.

One amazing aspect of God is that he is always available. There are billions of us, and he wants to be with each of us at every moment. He's not only available—he's *fully present*:

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*Come to me.
I am here.
I accept, I forgive, I cherish.*

*In the garden of my safety
of holy intimacy,
take off your cloak and be.*

*With eternal ears,
with endless compassion
and infinite love,*

I am fully present for you.

God doesn't focus on how you say the words or how you pray; it's the desire or intent of your heart he delights in. So often we think our prayers are meaningless, that God doesn't care, or that we can just pray later. But the creator of the universe is waiting right now, fully present for you.

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Love

Isn't the need to love and to be loved ingrained in the deepest part of our being? Love—*isn't that who God is?*

And that is where we begin.

Knowing to our core that God loves us is the foundation of our Christian faith. Our world constantly bombards us: *you're not good enough, you're not smart enough, you're not beautiful enough, you're not rich enough, you're not important.*

But, as a wise person once said, "God made you, and God is no dummy."

Our God is love. God loves you, he delights in you, and you are precious to him. Once I saw a newspaper photo of a house covered with thousands of Christmas lights. I thought about all the cost and work someone had put into the house in that photo.

The next morning I went for a walk to spend time with God. The sun was just rising, and each blade of grass in the field was covered in frost. The sun reflected off each blade in an incredible display of sparkling light. As I moved through the field, the bright, pure light reflected in new ways. In just one morning, in just these few moments in just this

one little place in all the world, God created this magnificent display.

I've always loved to see the sun shining on water—there's something so special about one light reflecting in so many ways and in so many moments.

*Sunlight dancing on the water
playfully brings joy to my soul.
Brilliant flashes of pure light
sparkle in infinite ways,
each one bringing a gift of love to the world.
The sun, the water, and the reflection,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
drawing me into their love.*

I always pause to appreciate moments of sunlight on the water, my thoughts turning to the millennia it took to get to that point: the creation of the sun, the aligning of the solar system, the formation of glaciers, the rain that fell hundreds of miles away that filled the river. And the words came to me: "I would do this all for you."

Physical creation is just a simple action for God. And it's even more amazing that in the ultimate act of humility, grace, and love, God sent his son to us. Even more than that, Jesus lived in perfect obedience to his Father and was crucified for the forgiveness of our sins, all out of love for each of us.

The world bombards us with negative thoughts, but any thought that derails us from the knowledge that God does love us is from the evil one, so it's a constant effort to remind ourselves of the truth.

Just be present for God—be available for him. Just sit in his presence and be with him to develop the practice of letting you be loved. Once we set our foot on that path, everything else can grow out of it.

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