



PRAYING WITH  
**SAINTE**  
**PATRICK**

Prayers and Devotions Inspired by  
the Irish Hero of the Faith

AARON BURNS & MATT MIKALATOS

Praying with saint Patrick



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*To my Mom, Tracey, for instilling in me a  
love for history, books, and prayer.*

*—Aaron*

*To my parents, Pete and Maggie, for their lifelong  
example of praying for me and all their loved ones.*

*—Matt*



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## Introduction

**O**ver a thousand years ago, a disgruntled Irish monk stole a manuscript from the shelf of a monastic library. It was eventually recovered, but when the king of Ireland heard what had happened, he was not content to let a document of such importance be left to the whim of history. So he entrusted it to the keeping of one family, christening their line MacMoyre, or “Son of the Keeper.”

As the years passed, the true story contained in the document faded from memory, as hearsay, myth, and legend grew in its place. Nearly six hundred years after being entrusted with this sacred charge, the MacMoyre family fell on hard times . . . and young Florence MacMoyre pawned the manuscript for a mere £5—probably about \$900 dollars today.

What, you may ask, was contained in the manuscript? The writings of Saint Patrick himself.

## The Book of Armagh

When you think of Saint Patrick today, what comes to mind? A stone statue? A three-leaf clover? Perhaps green beer or green rivers? Parades with leprechauns and rainbows?

While eventually the MacMoyres' manuscript was recovered (it's called the *Book of Armagh*, and you can see it today on display in Trinity College, Dublin), the true legacy of Patrick and what God did in and through him is still lost to many of the billions who celebrate him every March 17.

Patrick lived in the transition time between the decline of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Dark Ages. Much of this era's history has been lost forever, making what we do know about Patrick quite remarkable. The *Book of Armagh* contains copies of two letters ("Confession" and "Letter to Coroticus") that historians agree were written by Patrick himself. It also contains a prayer (called, among other titles, "Patrick's Breastplate") that is attributed to Patrick but may have been written in part by one of his later followers. In addition to these sources, we have some archaeological and corroborating historical evidence of his life and the impact of his ministry. Finally, we have many legends about this Irish hero, some that seem plausible, and others that were clearly manufactured by later churchmen or politicians seeking to build their own credibility by leaning on Patrick's legacy.

These fascinating letters and other sources reveal the outline of Patrick's story. Patrick was born not in Ireland, but in western Britain. While the exact dates and locations are

unknown, a good guess is around AD 390 near modern-day Wales. We do know that his father taught him the Christian faith, which Patrick rejected. In a great raid, Irish barbarians swept down on his coastal village and carted sixteen-year-old Patrick across the Irish Sea to slavery. While tending sheep in Ireland, he turned to God, and after six years he eventually escaped back to Britain. But before long, God used a dream to call Patrick to return to the people who had enslaved him to share the love and forgiveness of Christ.

### Patrick the Man

While many details of his life are missing, in Patrick's writings we meet a surprisingly relatable human, a person with struggles, disappointments, passions, and dreams—a far cry from either the stained-glass-window saint or the hard-drinking leprechaun cartoon.

Patrick was undereducated and blue collar. His writing is simple and straightforward, and he often apologizes for lacking the flowery language of his contemporaries. A rebel and a rule breaker, he was chided by his peers for paying bribes to local chieftains to protect his parishes and missionaries, declining some gifts offered to his ministry, and breaking with the Church tradition of his time by not selling priestly ordinations.

He was a man of deep desires and passions, he freely confessed that he committed major sin in his youth, and he was honest about his continuing struggles. But Patrick

experienced God's forgiveness and justification, and he finished well through deep suffering, betrayal, conflict, and trials.

Patrick was illuminated with a passion for God, God's Word, and God's people. He was a man of prayer, and while his letters don't include some of the more legendary events, such as driving snakes out of Ireland, they do show God moving and working miraculously in an inspirational story of God's real power. He was steeped in Scripture—his letters overflow with scriptural references and allusions. Patrick's life was characterized by risk-taking in the service of others—particularly women, slaves, and the poor.

Patrick was one of the first cross-cultural missionaries since the apostle Paul, breaking from the prejudice of his era. Patrick's method of ministry was relational first; he adapted orthodox Christianity to Irish culture. Patrick connected the story of Christianity to the myths the Irish already believed, demonstrating the gospel's relevance to his adopted people.

### Patrick's Prayers

In his "Confession," Patrick prays that his life's work would be an inspiration for future generations. This prayer was answered with a resounding *yes*, as the hundreds of churches that Patrick planted continued to expand. Historians have labeled the three centuries following Patrick "Ireland's Golden Age." The slave trade that had victimized young Patrick, as well as pagan human sacrifice, largely came to an

end. Literature, art, research, and learning flourished across the island. Missionaries inspired by Patrick sailed beyond the shores of Ireland to share Christ's love with the continent of Europe, which had been devastated by barbarian raids and war.

Patrick closes the "Confession" with a prayer that anyone who hears of the amazing works that were accomplished in Ireland would not think of him but would exalt his God.

Our aim in this book is to introduce you to Patrick's writings and his story, and to inspire you to think, pray, and change the world like he did.





## How to Use This Book

**P**atrick's father and grandfather were heavily involved with their church, a practice Patrick didn't think much of in his youth. But once he was enslaved in Ireland, he found himself praying all the time—praying for freedom, for a warm place to sleep, to return home, or to escape a beating. He never stopped. His life was soaked in prayer. It was something he did with great intentionality, but also in the breath between one task and the next.

In this book, we want to learn to pray with Patrick, to pray our own prayers alongside him, and to find ourselves in his story. Here are three suggestions of ways you could use this book.

### 1. Follow Patrick's journey day by day.

We've organized the book into four sections (Son, Slave, Student, and Saint) that follow the life of Patrick from his

childhood, through his time as a slave in Ireland, then his time preparing for ministry back home in Britain, and finally his return to Ireland and long life of service as a missionary, priest, and bishop there. One option is to read this book straight through, beginning by reading Patrick's own words and then moving into the devotion and original prayer we've written inspired by his life and words.

## 2. Find the entry you need for today.

Patrick's life—though exceptional in many ways—was much like our lives. He had moments of anger, grief, despair, joy, and happiness. Using the entry titles in the table of contents, you can look for prayers that fit the day you are having. Need encouragement in a time of loss? Visit “A Prayer in Times of Weeping.” Not sure what God is saying to you, or maybe God is saying something difficult? Read “A Prayer for When You Struggle to Accept God's Direction.” Patrick had those moments, too, and we offer up our own prayers in each devotion to reflect his walk of faith.

## 3. Develop new prayer practices with Patrick.

There is much to be said for joining Patrick on his journey and experiencing prayer as we explore his story (like in suggestion 1). But you could also choose to read this book intentionally as a way to grow in prayer. As you read Patrick's words in each epigraph, consider ways in which Patrick's

prayer life may have been different from your own. What practices did he have that you can adopt? What values did he show? What can you learn by praying the way Patrick prayed?

Our hope is that this book will draw you deeper into conversation with a God who cares deeply about you and your needs, concerns, and worries. Just as Patrick experienced God's presence in the rugged wilds of Ireland, may you experience God's presence in a powerful and vibrant way as you read this book. Blessings and peace to you.





## Son

*My name is Patrick. I am a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers. I am looked down upon by many. My father was Calpornius.*

*He was a deacon; his father was Potitus, a priest, who lived at Bannavem Taburniae.*

PATRICK, "CONFESSION," I

# A Prayer

for When We Don't Have  
Words of Our Own



*At that time, I did not know the true God.*

PATRICK, "CONFESSION," 1

*Teach us to pray.*

LUKE 11:1

**B**efore he was a saint, Patrick was an undisciplined schoolboy. His father was a deacon in the church, and his grandfather a priest. He did not know God, did not care to know God, and the words of the priests and holy teachers—perhaps most of all those in his family—held no interest for him.

Still, his father made him sit in church and sing the songs, recite the creeds, and pray the prayers. He listened as the priests droned on in Latin. He crossed himself at the

appropriate times. He stood up, sat down, bowed his knees, and filed out again to the real world, where none of these words touched him, where none of it mattered for a moment.

And though he didn't know God or believe in Christ, he was taught the ancient practices. He learned the prayer that Jesus taught his followers. He knew the pattern of the words, well worn by years of repetition, words that he did not remember learning, could not recall being taught. These words, chiseled on his heart, could not be taken away by time or hardship or slavers, a blessing that would bring him comfort in years to come.

There are times, perhaps, when we are not sure of God. We do not have the energy to cut through our own emotions to form our own thoughts, our own words to express our needs and wants to God. In those times, we can pray the words Patrick learned as a child, words that held little meaning in the moment but later became deeply important.

The followers of Jesus came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray." And Jesus prayed these words, the words that have been prayed by Christians in every culture and every age they have inhabited since that day:



*Our Father who art in Heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth,  
as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the Kingdom,  
and the power and the glory for ever.  
Amen.<sup>1</sup>*

# A Prayer

for Compassion

When Remembering Our Failures



*I turned with all my heart to the Lord my God,  
and he looked down on my lowliness and had mercy  
on my youthful ignorance.*

PATRICK, "CONFESSION," 2

*Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth.  
Remember me in the light of your unfailing love,  
for you are merciful, O LORD.*

PSALM 25:7, NLT

**Y**ears later when Patrick thought back on his childhood, there were moments that made him cringe. Unkind words he had spoken that made him blush. Unwise actions that caused him to burn with shame. He, like all of us, had done things he regretted.

However, in the journey to becoming like Christ he came to realize that he must look on his youthful ignorance in the same way God did. What he had done he had done, yes,

but those things were forgiven and erased, and he had been transformed. He was wiser, less impulsive, kinder, and more aware of the consequences of his own failings on himself as well as on those around him.

Still, it was hard not to look at himself with condemnation. Sins that God had forgotten Patrick remembered in vivid detail. So he was held captive not to his sin, but to the remembrance of his sin. He needed to turn his past over to God, who was more merciful than Patrick himself. On the days when his past hung heavily over him, Patrick called on God for relief.

What regrets weigh on you today? Are there words you have spoken, things you have done today or in your past for which you need forgiveness, either from yourself or others? Our merciful God offers forgiveness to all.

*O Lord, you know the suffering  
I have created with my own foolish behaviors.  
How often I have regretted my words and my actions.  
I find it hard to forgive myself,  
and harder still to forget the things that I have done.  
Have mercy on my ignorance.  
Teach me to have compassion for myself.  
I ask too, God, that you would remind me  
of your unfailing love,  
and teach me to love myself as you love me.*