

# Lenten Poetry Companion: Poems for Prayer and Pondering

## How to Pray with Poetry:

Using poetry as a companion for prayer can be a rich and engaging endeavor. Poetry as an art form uses the cadences of the spoken word, the nuances of language, the signals of punctuation, and the employment of metaphors to invite the listener into participation in the unfolding of layers of meaning. Words can provide a bridge to experiences that are beyond words. This Lent, we have prepared a Lenten Poetry Companion which offers an additional resource for your Lenten journey.



Below are some simple suggestions for engaging poetry as a means of leading you into prayer:

1. Seek a quiet space where you can minimize interruptions and take a few moments to enter into the silence. Let yourself sink deeply into the quiet. Invite God in.
2. Read just the title of the poem and ponder what this encounter might be about.
3. Read the poem aloud. Pay attention to the words, the sounds, the punctuation, and what you are hearing in the poem.
4. Now read the poem silently and slowly letting the poem reveal new truths. As you listen again notice which words or phrases catch your attention. Underline them.
5. Journal your thoughts or impressions:
  - What new ways of seeing or hearing are opening for you in this poem?
  - What truth do you hear in the poem that intersects with the unfolding of your life?
  - What parts of the poem call you to be present or to see in an entirely different way?
  - How does this poem intersect or resonate with your own experience? With your work for justice? With what you know to be true about God? What insights does it spark?
6. Reread the poem once more out loud. Let the poem filter through you.
7. Compose your own short prayer as response.

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“Poetry is  
the rhythmic  
creation of  
beauty in words.”

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*Edgar Allan Poe*

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## An Invitation to Be Still and Know

*Wednesday, February 26*

### Poem for Lent

By Joyce Rupp

The cosmos dreams in me  
while I wait in stillness,  
ready to lean a little further  
into the heart of the Holy.

I, a little blip of life,  
a wisp of unassuming love,  
a quickly passing breeze,  
come once more into Lent.

No need to sign me  
with the black bleeding ash  
of palms, fried and baked.  
I know my humus place.

This Lent I will sail  
on the graced wings of desire,  
yearning to go deeper  
to the place where  
I am one in the One.

Oh, may I go there soon,  
in the same breath  
that takes me to the stars  
when the cosmos dreams in me.

### Journaling

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*Thursday, February 27*

### Absolutely Clear

By Shams al-Din Hafiz

Don't surrender your loneliness  
So quickly.  
Let it cut more deep.

Let it ferment and season you  
As few human  
Or even divine ingredients can.

Something missing in my heart tonight  
Has made my eyes so soft,  
My voice  
So tender,

My need of God  
Absolutely  
Clear.

### Journaling

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## An Invitation to Be Still and Know

Friday, February 28

### A Blessing of Solitude

By John O'Donohue

May you recognize in your life the presence,  
power and light of your soul.

May you realize that you are never alone,  
that your soul in its brightness and belonging  
connects you intimately with the rhythm of the  
universe.

May you have respect for your own individuality  
and difference.

May you realize that the shape of your soul is  
unique, that you have a special destiny here, that  
behind the facade of your life there is something  
beautiful, good, and eternal happening.

May you learn to see yourself with the same  
delight, pride, and expectation with which God  
sees you in every moment.

Source: *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom* by John  
O'Donohue

### Journaling

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Saturday, February 29

### Such Silence

By Mary Oliver

As deep as I ever went into the forest  
I came upon an old stone bench, very, very old,  
and around it a clearing, and beyond that  
trees taller and older than I had ever seen.

Such silence!

It really wasn't so far from a town, but it seemed  
all the clocks in the world had stopped counting.  
So it was hard to suppose the usual rules  
applied.

Sometimes there's only a hint, a possibility.  
What's magical, sometimes, has deeper roots  
than reason.

I hope everyone knows that.

I sat on the bench, waiting for something.  
An angel, perhaps.  
Or dancers with the legs of goats.

No, I didn't see either. But only, I think, because  
I didn't stay long enough.

Source: "Such Silence" from *Blue Horses* by Mary Oliver.  
New York, New York: Penguin Books 2014

### Journaling

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## An Invitation to Heal

*Sunday, March 1*

### Ode to Broken Things

By Pablo Neruda

Things get broken  
at home  
like they were pushed  
by an invisible, deliberate smasher.  
It's not my hands  
or yours  
It wasn't the girls  
with their hard fingernails  
or the motion of the planet.  
It wasn't anything or anybody  
It wasn't the wind  
It wasn't the orange-colored noontime  
Or night over the earth  
It wasn't even the nose or the elbow  
Or the hips getting bigger  
or the ankle  
or the air.  
The plate broke, the lamp fell  
All the flower pots tumbled over  
one by one. That pot  
which overflowed with scarlet  
in the middle of October,  
it got tired from all the violets  
and another empty one  
rolled round and round and round  
all through winter  
until it was only the powder  
of a flowerpot,  
a broken memory, shining dust.

And that clock  
whose sound  
was  
the voice of our lives,  
the secret  
thread of our weeks,  
which released  
one by one, so many hours  
for honey and silence  
for so many births and jobs,  
that clock also  
fell  
and its delicate blue guts  
vibrated  
among the broken glass  
its wide heart  
unsprung.

Life goes on grinding up  
glass, wearing out clothes  
making fragments  
breaking down  
forms  
and what lasts through time  
is like an island on a ship in the sea,  
perishable  
surrounded by dangerous fragility  
by merciless waters and threats.

Let's put all our treasures together  
-- the clocks, plates, cups cracked by the cold --  
into a sack and carry them  
to the sea  
and let our possessions sink  
into one alarming breaker  
that sounds like a river.  
May whatever breaks  
be reconstructed by the sea  
with the long labor of its tides.  
So many useless things  
which nobody broke  
but which got broken anyway.

### Journaling

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## An Invitation to Heal

*Sunday, March 1*

### **The Jounrey**

By Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew  
what you had to do, and began,  
though the voices around you  
kept shouting  
their bad advice --  
though the whole house  
began to tremble  
and you felt the old tug  
at your ankles.  
"Mend my life!"  
each voice cried.  
But you didn't stop.  
You knew what you had to do,  
though the wind pried  
with its stiff fingers  
at the very foundations,  
though their melancholy  
was terrible.  
It was already late

enough, and a wild night,  
and the road full of fallen  
branches and stones.  
But little by little,  
as you left their voice behind,  
the stars began to burn  
through the sheets of clouds,  
and there was a new voice  
which you slowly  
recognized as your own,  
that kept you company  
as you strode deeper and deeper  
into the world,  
determined to do  
the only thing you could do --  
determined to save  
the only life that you could save.

### **Journaling**

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## An Invitation to Heal

Tuesday, March 3

### Questo Muro

By Anita Barrows

You will come at a turning of the trail  
to a wall of flame  
After the hard climb & the exhausted dreaming  
you will come to a place where he  
with whom you have walked this far  
will stop will stand  
beside you on the treacherous steep path  
& stare as you shiver at the moving wall, the flame  
that blocks your vision of what comes after.  
And that one  
who you thought would accompany you always,  
who held your face  
tenderly a little while in his hands—  
who pressed the palms of his hands into drenched  
grass  
& washed from your cheeks, the tear-tracks—  
he is telling you now  
that all that stands between you  
& everything you have known since the beginning  
is this: this wall. Between yourself  
& the beloved, between yourself & your joy,  
the riverbank swaying with wildflowers, the shaft  
of sunlight on the rock, the song.  
Will you pass through it now, will you let it  
consume  
whatever solidness this is  
you call your life, & send  
you out, a tremor of heat,  
a radiance, a changed  
flickering thing?

### Journaling

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Wednesday, March 4

### What Will Save Us

By Alice Walker

The restoration to the cow  
Of her dignity.

The restoration to the pig  
Of his intelligence.

The restoration to the child  
Of her sacredness

The restoration to the woman  
Of her will.

The restoration to the man  
Of his tenderness.

Source: "What Will Save Us" from *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth* by Alice Walker. New York, New York: Random House Publishing Group 2007



### Journaling

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## REFLECTION

# An Invitation to Heal

*Thursday, March 5*

## For One Who is Exhausted, a Blessing

By John O'Donohue

When the rhythm of the heart becomes hectic,  
Time takes on the strain until it breaks;  
Then all the unattended stress falls in  
On the mind like an endless, increasing weight.

The light in the mind becomes dim.  
Things you could take in your stride before  
Now become laborsome events of will.

Weariness invades your spirit.  
Gravity begins falling inside you,  
Dragging down every bone.

The tide you never valued has gone out.  
And you are marooned on unsure ground.  
Something within you has closed down;  
And you cannot push yourself back to life.

You have been forced to enter empty time.  
The desire that drove you has relinquished.  
There is nothing else to do now but rest  
And patiently learn to receive the self  
You have forsaken in the race of days.

At first your thinking will darken  
And sadness take over like listless weather.  
The flow of unwept tears will frighten you.

You have traveled too fast over false ground;  
Now your soul has come to take you back.

Take refuge in your senses, open up  
To all the small miracles you rushed through.

Become inclined to watch the way of rain  
When it falls slow and free.

Imitate the habit of twilight,  
Taking time to open the well of color

That fostered the brightness of day.

Draw alongside the silence of stone  
Until its calmness can claim you.  
Be excessively gentle with yourself.

Stay clear of those vexed in spirit.  
Learn to linger around someone of ease  
Who feels they have all the time in the world.

Gradually, you will return to yourself,  
Having learned a new respect for your heart  
And the joy that dwells far within slow time.

## Journaling

[illegible]



# REFLECTION

## An Invitation to Heal

*Friday, March 6*

### **But for Sorrow**

By Rob Suarez

I might never have asked  
what could be

but for sorrow.

I might never have opened  
to the terrible  
vulnerability of love

but for tears.

I might never have begun  
this treacherous path to  
God

but for emptiness.

Source: "but for sorrow" by Rob Suarez from *America Magazine*, Vol. 184 No. 10. 2001.

### **Journaling**

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*Saturday, March 7*

### **Sweet Darkness**

By David Whyte

When your eyes are tired  
the world is tired also.

When your vision has gone,  
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark  
where the night has eyes  
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure  
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your home  
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon  
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.  
The world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds  
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet  
confinement of your aloneness  
to learn

anything or anyone  
that does not bring you alive  
is too small for you.

### **Journaling**

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# REFLECTION

## An Invitation to Peace

*Sunday, March 8*

### **The Avowal**

By Denise Levertov

As swimmers dare  
to lie face to the sky  
and water bears them,  
as hawks rest upon air  
and air sustains them,  
so would I learn to attain  
freefall, and float  
into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,  
knowing no effort earns  
that all-surrounding grace.

### **Journaling**

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*Monday, March 9*

### **The Guest House**

By Jellaludin Rumi

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.  
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whatever comes.  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

### **Journaling**

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## REFLECTION

## An Invitation to Peace

*Tuesday, March 10*

## Keeping Quiet

By Pablo Neruda

Now we will count to twelve  
and we will all keep still  
for once on the face of the earth,  
let's not speak in any language;  
let's stop for a second,  
and not move our arms so much.  
It would be an exotic moment  
without rush, without engines;  
we would all be together  
in a sudden strangeness.  
Fishermen in the cold sea  
would not harm whales  
and the man gathering salt  
would not look at his hurt hands.  
Those who prepare green wars,  
wars with gas, wars with fire,  
victories with no survivors,  
would put on clean clothes  
and walk about with their brothers  
in the shade, doing nothing.  
What I want should not be confused  
with total inactivity.  
Life is what it is about;  
I want no truck with death.  
If we were not so single-minded  
about keeping our lives moving,  
and for once could do nothing,  
perhaps a huge silence  
might interrupt this sadness  
of never understanding ourselves  
and of threatening ourselves with death.  
Perhaps the earth can teach us  
as when everything seems dead  
and later proves to be alive.  
Now I'll count up to twelve  
and you keep quiet and I will go.

## Journaling

[illegible]

# REFLECTION

## An Invitation to Peace

*Wednesday, March 11*

### **The Voice of God**

By Mary Karr

Ninety percent of what's wrong with you  
could be cured with a hot bath,  
says God from the bowels of the subway.  
but we want magic, to win  
the lottery we never bought a ticket for.  
(Tenderly, the monks chant, embrace  
the suffering.) The voice of God does not pander,  
offers no five year plan, no long-term  
solution, nary an edict. It is small & fond & local.  
Don't look for your initials in the geese  
honking overhead or to see thru the glass even  
darkly. It says the most obvious crap—  
put down that gun, you need a sandwich.

### **Journaling**

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*Thursday, March 12*

### **The Peace of Wild Things**

By Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me and I wake  
in the night at the least soundin fear of what my  
life and my children's lives may be,I go and lie down  
where the wood drakerests in his beauty on the  
water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax  
their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the  
presence of still water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with  
their light. For a timel rest in the grace of the world,  
and am free.

### **Journaling**

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## An Invitation to Peace

*Friday, March 13*

### Kindness

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things,  
feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth.  
What you held in your hand,  
what you counted and carefully saved,  
all this must go so you know  
how desolate the landscape can be  
between the regions of kindness.  
How you ride and ride  
thinking the bus will never stop,  
the passengers eating maize and chicken  
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness  
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho  
lies dead by the side of the road.  
You must see how this could be you,  
how he too was someone  
who journeyed through the night with plans  
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing  
inside,  
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.  
You must wake up with sorrow.  
You must speak to it till your voice  
catches the thread of all sorrows  
and you see the size of the cloth.  
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,  
only kindness that ties your shoes  
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,  
only kindness that raises its head  
from the crowd of the world to say  
It is I you have been looking for,  
and then goes with you everywhere  
like a shadow or a friend.

*Saturday, March 14*

### Peace

By Sara Teasdale

Peace flows into me  
As the tide to the pool by the shore;  
It is mine forevermore,  
It ebbs not back like the sea.

I am the pool of blue  
That worships the vivid sky;  
My hopes were heaven-high,  
They are all fulfilled in you.

I am the pool of gold  
When sunset burns and dies--  
You are my deepening skies,  
Give me your stars to hold.

### Journaling

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# REFLECTION

## An Invitation to Walk with God

*Sunday, March 15*

### Go to the Limits of Your Longing

By Rainer Maria Rilke

God speaks to each of us as he makes us,  
then walks with us silently out of the night.

These are the words we dimly hear:

You, sent out beyond your recall,  
go to the limits of your longing.  
Embody me.

Flare up like a flame  
and make big shadows I can move in.

Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.  
Just keep going. No feeling is final.  
Don't let yourself lose me.

Nearby is the country they call life.  
You will know it by its seriousness.

Give me your hand.

### Journaling

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*Monday, March 16*

### i carry your heart with me (i carry it in)

By e.e. cummings

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in  
my heart)i am never without it (anywhere  
i go you go,my dear; and whatever is done  
by only me is your doing,my darling)  
i fear

no fate (for you are my fate,my sweet) i want  
no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)  
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant  
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows  
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud  
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which  
grows  
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)  
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)

### Journaling

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## An Invitation to Walk with God

*Tuesday, March 17*

### Called Beyond Comfort Zone

By Walter Brueggemann

We are among your called.  
We have heard and answered your summons.  
You have addressed us in the deep places of our lives.

In responsive obedience we testify,  
as we are able, to your truth as it concerns our common life.

We thank you for the call,  
for the burden of that call,  
for the risk that goes with it,  
for the joy of words given us by your growing spirit,  
and for the newness that sometimes comes from our word.

We have indeed been in the counsel of your summoning spirit,  
and so we know some truth to speak.

But we are, as well, filled with rich imagination of our own,  
And our imagination is sometimes matched and overmatched  
by our cowardice,  
by our readiness to please,  
by our quest for well-being.

We are, on most days, a hard mix  
of true prophet and wayward voice,  
a mix of your call to justice  
and our hope for shalom.

Here we are, as we are,  
mixed but faithful,  
compromised but committed,  
anxious but devoted to you.

Use us and our gifts for  
your newness that pushed beyond all the we can  
say or imagine.  
We are grateful for words given us;  
We are more grateful for your word fleshed among  
us.

### Journaling

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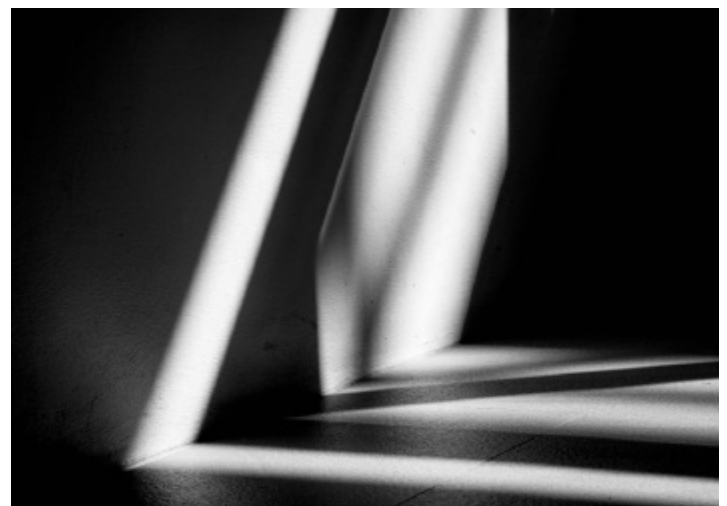
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## An Invitation to Walk with God

*Wednesday, March 18*

### The Ledge of Light

By Jessica Powers

I have climbed up out of a narrow darkness  
on to a ledge of light.

I am of God; I was not made for night.

Here there is room to lift my arms and sing.  
Oh, God is vast! With Him all space can come  
to hole or corner or cubiculum.

Though once I prayed, "O closed Hand holding  
me..."

I know Love, not a vise. I see aright,  
set free in morning on this ledge of light.

Yet not all truth I see. Since I am not  
yet one of God's partakers,  
I visualize Him now: a thousand acres.

God is a thousand acres to me now  
of high sweet-smelling April and the flow  
of windy light across a wide plateau.

Ah, but when love grows unitive I know  
joy will upsoar, my heart sing, far more free,  
having come home to God's infinity.

### Journaling

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*Thursday, March 19*

### The Way It Is

By William Stafford

There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.

But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.

### Journaling

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# REFLECTION

## An Invitation to Walk with God

*Friday, March 20*

### To Live in the Mercy of God

By Denise Levertov

To lie back under the tallest  
oldest trees. How far the stems  
rise, rise

before ribs of shelter  
open!

To live in the mercy of God. The complete  
sentence too adequate, has no give.  
Awe, not comfort. Stone, elbows of  
stony wood beneath lenient  
moss bed.

And awe suddenly  
passing beyond itself. Becomes  
a form of comfort.

Becomes the steady  
air you glide on, arms  
stretched like the wings of flying foxes.  
To hear the multiple silence  
of trees, the rainy  
forest depths of their listening.

To float, upheld,  
as salt water  
would hold you,  
once you dared.

To live in the mercy of God.

To feel vibrate the enraptured

waterfall flinging itself  
unabating down and down  
to clenched fists of rock.

Swiftness of plunge,  
hour after year after century,  
O or Ah

uninterrupted, voice  
many-stranded.

To breathe  
spray. The smoke of it.  
Arcs  
of steelwhite foam, glissades  
of fugitive jade barely perceptible. Such passion—  
rage or joy?

Thus, not mild, not temperate,  
God's love for the world. Vast  
flood of mercy  
flung on resistance..

### Journaling

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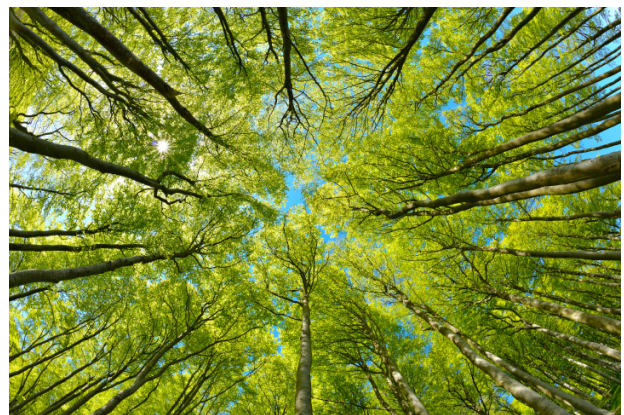
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## REFLECTION

## An Invitation to Walk with God

*Saturday, March 21*

# Alone

By Maya Angelou

Lying, thinking  
Last night  
How to find my soul a home  
Where water is not thirsty  
And bread loaf is not stone  
I came up with one thing  
And I don't believe I'm wrong  
That nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires  
With money they can't use  
Their wives run round like banshees  
Their children sing the blues  
They've got expensive doctors  
To cure their hearts of stone.  
But nobody  
No, nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely  
I'll tell you what I know  
Storm clouds are gathering  
The wind is gonna blow  
The race of man is suffering  
And I can hear the moan,  
'Cause nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

## Journaling

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