

# All That Is Made

## *The Comfort of Contemplative Prayer*

### Study Guide by Sarah Law

#### INTRODUCTION

This is a study guide to *All That Is Made: The Comfort of Contemplative Prayer* by Keren Dibbens-Wyatt. You are welcome to use these prompts for prayer and reflection in whichever way is helpful for you; perhaps selecting one question per chapter to journal about, or perhaps joining others for a discussion. The prompts reflect the contents of each chapter and invite you to consider contemplative prayer as an accessible way of experiencing God's care and love for creation, and to contemplate Christ's great joy in Julian of Norwich and also in us, her fellow Christians.

#### CHAPTER 1: **Meeting Julian of Norwich**

1. Consider the life of a medieval anchoress. Would you cherish such an emphasis on solitude and silence, or find it disturbing? How might you include more periods of withdrawal and contemplation in your daily life in a way that supports you?
2. Julian drew great solace from gazing at a crucifix during a time of her own physical suffering. How has this image of the suffering Christ "spoken" to you as you pray?
3. The author writes about first encountering Julian's writings during a difficult period in her life. If you already know about Julian's *shewings*, how have they helped, or challenged, you in the past?
4. Whether or not you are new to Julian, reflect on your own life as it is now, and how spending time with Julian's visions and wisdom might provide insight into your current circumstances.

## CHAPTER 2: **My Journey into Contemplative Prayer**

1. Reflect on your own prayer journey so far in your life. Which traditions and denominations have nourished you? What particular people—past and present—inspire you to grow in prayer and explore new ways of praying?
2. In this chapter, the author distinguishes between contemplation (being quietly present with and attentive to God) and mysticism (having an experience of God, perhaps through inner visions or locutions), although she stresses that each has equal spiritual value. Which of these prayerful experiences are you drawn to, whether now or in the past?
3. Contemplation, the author tells us, is about “giving ourselves the space and silence to really look at things and understand what they are telling us” (pp. 30–31). How might you give yourself some contemplative space and silence, and what things might you look at through this contemplative lens?
4. The author stresses the importance for Christians to anchor contemplative practice in Christ. In what ways might you do this: gazing at a cross or other Christian image, selecting a phrase from Scripture, framing your contemplative silence with a familiar prayer, or other practices?
5. Julian understood that she should share her visions and insights with her *evenchristen* (fellow Christians). How might you begin, or continue, to share your faith with others? Consider practical acts of charity, artistic and literary expression, and other approaches, remaining open to prayerful guidance.

## CHAPTER 3: **Julian and the Small Round Thing**

1. Like many Christian writers, Julian acknowledges and celebrates the Trinity with her use of threes. Her trinitarian thinking is woven through her writing; for example, God is maker, lover, and keeper of all that is. When you pray or journal, explore using threes in your reflections. For example, what three blessings can you thank God for today? What three intentions might you pray for? What three small commitments could you make to deepen your Christian commitment?
2. Echoing Julian’s precise but also paradoxical language, the author tells us that for her, the essence of prayer is to “keep our focus on the brightness and centrality of God that is everywhere” (p. 39). How might you cultivate this prayerful awareness of God’s perennial brightness and centrality in the world and in our lives? Consider strategies such as frequently and briefly pausing for recollection, visualizing God’s light and presence wherever you go and in whomever you encounter, or carrying a personal reminder with you—such as a hazelnut.
3. Julian drew on other natural and domestic imagery in her writing. The author, too, has found spiritual riches in the contemplation of “a feather, a pin, an acorn cap, a coin, a dandelion seed, a cherry blossom” (p. 42), all seen and cared for by God. Select some small objects from the natural or domestic world about you and consider how they speak of God.
4. Consider what might help you become quiet and receptive in the presence of the divine. You may not be familiar with the concept of adoration, which invites participants to pray silently before a consecrated eucharistic host (see p. 41). Perhaps you might visit a church which offers this devotional practice, or find an online livestream. Or you might prefer to sit in contemplative silence before a symbol of faith such as a cross, icon, or candle. Reflect on your experience and any insights gained. Could you make this a more regular practice?

# God's Creation Is . . .

## CHAPTER 4: **Small**

1. As well as mysteriously embodying the whole of creation in Julian's vision, a hazelnut or other small part of nature is loved and sustained by God for itself. How might we also care for nature through attention to its small, individual elements?
2. Julian and the author remind us that we, too, are diminutive and insignificant in the face of the cosmos and of divinity itself, yet we are cherished and sustained by God. "We have meaning because of the hand in which we are held" (p. 53). Reflect on recent or upcoming experiences for which this seems particularly true for you—how do they provide both purpose and comfort?
3. As life unfolds for us and those around us, we understand that we must all eventually "smallen." In what ways—practical, emotional, spiritual—can you consciously assent to and assist with this sacred process?

## CHAPTER 5: **Fragile**

1. Julian and the author remind us that while our human state is both fragile and mortal, we should see our life as a process of transformation during which we continue to be held safe by God. Take some time to consider this. Do any new insights emerge for you?
2. The author reminds us of Saint Teresa of Avila's metaphor of the silkworm. Can you think of any other images from nature that speak of both fragility and transformation?
3. As humans, we are all fragile, complex, created, and beloved by God. Reflect on some people you have encountered recently from this expansive perspective.
4. What work might God currently be calling you to do? Consider whether this work is practical, creative, spiritual, or other, perhaps seeking input from a trusted spiritual advisor.

## CHAPTER 6: **Round**

1. Prayer beads are used in many spiritual traditions and denominations. The most common in the Christian tradition is the rosary, with which Julian was familiar, where requests for Mary's prayers are made while contemplating events from the life of Christ and his mother. Consider exploring or developing your own use of prayer beads, perhaps pondering a resonant phrase from Julian's *shewings* as you hold each bead in turn.
2. Julian understood Jesus as our spiritual mother. Julian is not the first or only Christian writer to do so, although such a perspective is still unusual. In what ways do you understand the motherly and maternal qualities of Christ?
3. Reread the meditations on roundness on pages 93–94. Look out for (small) round things as you go about your day. Do any inspire you to reflect further on God's presence and care?

# God's Children Are . . .

## CHAPTER 7: **Made**

1. “We are creative creatures, made in the image of a Creator” (p. 102). How can you develop your own creativity and honor the creativity of others?
2. Sometimes we have the germ of a creative idea without a clear sense of how to develop it. Develop a practice of writing down these ideas, when possible, in a notebook. Review and pray over them from time to time: which do you feel called to nurture?
3. “Everything that is made has to crack open to grow,” the author observes (p. 104). Think of a time when your life or daily routines have cracked open only to grow in fresh and sometimes unexpected ways. Sometimes we only see the growth long after the event. Consider writing down some of your past experiences of cracking open and growing for future encouragement.

## CHAPTER 8: **Kept**

1. As God's precious creatures, we are “seen and watched over, not grasped in ownership” (p. 109). How might you echo this tender, non-grasping care in your stewardship of nature and the wider world, and in your relationships?
2. Reflect on the importance of our palms as physical focal points of trust, vulnerability, and care. How have your palms been used in any of these ways recently?
3. Consider the differences between incarceration and voluntary enclosure, between externally imposed restriction and withdrawal for rest and meditation. What experiences have you had of either state? Might they ever overlap?
4. For all our vulnerabilities, we are held safely in love. What might you do today or tomorrow with more confidence if you held this understanding in the forefront of your heart and mind?

## CHAPTER 9: **Loved**

1. The author reminds us that “these days the idea of divine love is not widely understood (p. 129).” What have you learned, or been reminded of, about divine love through your reading of this book and learning about Julian's *shewings*?
2. Consider the difference in emphasis between being “saved” and “restored.” How might the Koine Greek term *sozo*, which encompasses both terms, deepen your understanding of God's grace?
3. Think of a place or places where you have felt especially close to God—not necessarily a church! Consciously store these memories and experiences in your heart, to revisit interiorly when needed or desired.

# God Is . . .

## CHAPTER 10: **Heavenly**

1. The author reminds us that “we can begin to grow into our heavenly selves at any point” (p. 139). Consider some ways you can gently grow towards this heavenly self.
2. “We are seeds, and God is the gardener” (p. 142). This puts a different emphasis on our growing and shows us that we are reliant on God. Consider how you might position yourself to simply receive God’s care in the days ahead.
3. Julian was not afraid to ask God difficult questions—about sin, the future, and the nature of suffering. Knowing that God will listen with love and care, consider whether you have any difficult questions to place before God in prayer.
4. God’s answers to Julian were of love and reassurance, inviting us to trust. Take some time to think how these answers meet your own questions, encouraging you to see things differently, and to know that in the end, all will be well.

## CHAPTER 11: **Holy**

1. How would you describe the “holy goodness” of God (p. 152)? How does it differ from human goodness? Are there any parallels? (Remember, Julian draws on the concept of God’s motherly qualities.)
2. Julian and the author both understand that “the cross is the focal, central point of love’s song” (p. 155). How has reading this book and learning about Julian helped you consider the centrality of Christ’s cross in new ways?
3. On page 154, the author cites the “sinner’s prayer” (also known as the “Jesus prayer”): “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Prayerfully repeat these words to yourself as you go about your day, noticing how they may help anchor you or strengthen your faith.

## CHAPTER 12: **Home**

1. Julian believed that “it pleases him when we rest in him” (p. 157). The author reminds us that “we come to a place of rest in God by receiving it” (p. 158). How might you consciously rest more in God, knowing that it pleases God for us to accept this rest as a grace?
2. Julian acknowledged that we do not yet understand all the mysteries of God and the life to come. What are the challenges and the blessings of accepting this?
3. Who are the people in your life keeping you anchored to your faith and your current calling? How can you be a similar, steadying help to others?

## JULIAN’S PRAYER

We conclude the study guide as the author concludes the book on page 171, with Julian’s own prayer. May it be a comfort, a guide, and a blessing to you as it was for Julian:

“God, in your goodness, give me yourself, for you are enough for me, and I can ask for nothing less to fully worship you; and if I ask for anything less, I will always be lacking, for only in you do I have everything I need.”