

Nicolaes Maes, *Prayer without End*, 1656



****First Question First****

What is *your* immediate reaction to this artwork?

Trust it. Write about it. Use the guide sheet for help.

Continue reading for another perspective and journal questions.

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Gratitude. Thankful appreciation. The understanding that regardless of our planning or strategizing, we are all ultimately at the mercy of life, chance, or God, according to our individual beliefs. But, how our loved one died, if we were able to be with them to ease their passage and our broken heart may influence how we grieve. The end time may be so harrowing that to even mention the word “gratitude” can feel like an attack. It has become a popular word in our culture, loaded with meaning. It can have hints of a moralistic command, a “should” about it. According to where we are in our grief, any insinuation of thankfulness can add another layer of suffering onto our pile. Now we may feel like selfish, ungrateful wretches too!

And, yet every so often we may feel that perspective shift that wakes us up. “Wow, I was given this man as my father!” “We got to live 15 years with our beautiful daughter!” “This amazing woman chose to love me for 25 years, every day!” For those few precious moments the pain of our loss lets in the miracle of the gift we received in the first place. And to our own surprise we may hear ourselves whispering a quiet “thank you!”

Q.) What does the word “gratitude” bring up in you right now? Does it feel foreign or even offensive? Are you simultaneously experiencing moments of heartfelt appreciation?