

Woodworker and Wordworker

Willy is a man you are not likely to forget. He is streetwise, an inveterate salesman, and a talented woodworker. He turns rough blocks of wood into art in the Recovery Thru Art program at Holy Comforter's Friendship Center. He peddles his simple paper drawings on street corners in East Atlanta.

He is also a student, theologian*, and a man of prayer. He carries two or three heavy tote bags filled with books and papers. In one he keeps a tattered, word-laden spiral notebook. It holds, among other things, his prayers.

During a Noonday Prayer service, Willy offers an eloquent, compelling prayer. I am so taken that he easily entices me to listen to other prayers from his notebook. Here's one worth sharing:

I write a psalm like David wrote psalm.
Oh lord heal my illness in all my distress.
Please let me overcome my pain, problem and distress.
Let me be on a bed of roses.
Let not my wounds harm me.
Please lord heal me from all my distress.
Let me not worry at all.
Keep my health.
Let every worried bone in me heal.
Let not my flesh go unattended.
Help me in all my distress.
Help me overcome all pains and anguish.
Please let my pain be a bed of roses. Amen.

Holy Comforter is a community in which God's children who, like Willy, are marginalized by poverty and mental illness share their prayers.

A few months ago, Willy lost his battle with mental illness and addiction. His behavior became so troublesome that the owner of his personal care home, who had faithfully cared for him over the years, felt she had to evict him. Living on the streets, he was hit by a car and died.

Rest in a bed of roses, brother Willy!

Mike Tanner

**See my story "You can't go around Willy," in an earlier book in this series.*