

## What People Are Saying about Susan K. Williams Smith and *Rest for the Justice-Seeking Soul*:

In *Rest for the Justice-Seeking Soul*, Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith provides a deep pool of wellness and rejuvenation for those who yearn for freedom. Through these inspiring meditations, leaders of all sorts—people working in congregations, organizations, and grassroots communities around the country—will laugh, reflect, and ultimately be restored. If you are feeling “weary and heavy-laden,” make sure you purchase this book!

—Joshua DuBois

Former White House advisor to President Barack Obama  
CNN commentator; CEO, Values Partnerships

Rev. Susan K. Williams Smith's work is a revitalizing jolt to the heart and balm for the soul for those who are active in movements toward collective liberation. It's a must-read for those on the cusp of burnout in the struggle for justice.

—Rev. Jennifer Butler

Founding CEO, Faith in Public Life

Justice seekers, friends of the beloved community, come, taste, eat and drink the deep, divine wisdom within these pages—written for you so you might be spiritually nourished and inspired for the work before you. Blending biblical Scripture with stories about justice seekers from a beautiful range of backgrounds, Dr. Susan K. Williams Smith has created a life-giving book that will sustain those who are seeking new sources of strength in this challenging time. Whether you know it or not, you need this book.

—Rev. Paul Brandeis Raushenbush

Senior vice president and editor, *Voices*  
Auburn Seminary

Susan K. Smith knows what it means to stand in the center of the storm with hurting and struggling people. What does one need to do to hold on to the courage to be fully human in a world that punishes humanity and vulnerability? How does a leader stay grounded and balanced in the throes of a chaotic world? What does it mean for the weary and grieving leader to let God be God? Offered up from the wellspring of her own experiences, faithfulness, and wisdom, *Rest for the Justice-Seeking Soul* reaches deep into the places of the hearts of people who refuse to disengage or live in denial with exactly what our hearts need—daily—to weather difficult times and spaces: encouragement, prodding, challenge, laughter, hope, insight, balm, and grace.

—Rev. Dr. Emma Jordan-Simpson  
Executive director, Fellowship of Reconciliation USA



SUSAN K. WILLIAMS SMITH

**REST** FOR THE  
**JUSTICE**  
**SEEKING**  
**SOUL**

90 MEDITATIONS



WHITAKER  
HOUSE

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## REST FOR THE JUSTICE-SEEKING SOUL

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# DAY 1

## THE QUEST TO “HOPE” SOMEBODY

*Seek the LORD and live, or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire, and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it. Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground! The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD is his name, who makes destruction flash out against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress.*

—Amos 5:6–9

**W**elcome to this collection of short meditations for you who work for justice, stand in the breach, and lead sheep—some of whom don’t want to be led!

The Rev. Dr. William Barber tells a story about how his “Grandmamma and her nieces always cooked for the whole family (and for anyone else who happened to stop by). ...They also had a ritual whenever the food was done. Grandmamma would take a bottle of the anointing oil that she rubbed on people’s heads when she prayed for them and slip it into the front of her apron. She and the other ladies would take some money, a rag, and some of the food they’d cooked and they would say, ‘We’ll be back shortly. We’ve got to go and hope somebody.’”<sup>1</sup>

Of course, Rev. Barber, who was a wise little boy at the time, thought she was misspeaking. He thought she meant to say she was going to *help* somebody, but he was wrong. Grandmamma

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1. The Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II, *The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016), 3.

knew what she was saying. She wanted to take some *hope* to people who, like herself and everyone she knew, were struggling to survive. Barber writes, “My grandmamma knew that any prayers worth their salt had to be accompanied by food for the hungry.”<sup>2</sup>

We are instructed to “*seek the LORD and live.*” It is a fact that if we *do not* seek God, we will flail in the waters of injustice and run out of strength. God needs for us to seek God so we will be able to go and “hope” somebody. The work you are doing is like standing in the kitchen and preparing food for your flock, people in your community who have been tossed and turned by corrupt and uncaring forces. The work you are doing demands the strength that only hope provides, because the empire is striving to fight back—fighting long, hard, and dirty—to shut you down.

It cannot happen. It cannot go down that way.

*The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD is his name, who makes destruction flash out against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress.*

On this day, we pray, O God, that we remember the purpose for which You put us here. The arms of evil are too short to fight You; strengthen our arms so that we can sap evil of its strength. Stand with us as we affirm our faith in You and our determination to fight back against evil for the sake of “*the least of these*” (Matthew 25:40), who desperately need to know You are real. Help us to go out today and “hope” somebody.

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2. Ibid.

Amen and amen.

## DAY 2

### GOD IS WITH US

*Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my  
victorious right hand.*

—Isaiah 41:10

**G**od is with us.

So many people I've met have been dismayed and angry over the political division in this country. The seeds of racism, hatred, and oppression are now yielding a pervasive and destructive crop. America has dealt with racist attitudes and policies before. White supremacist power structures have always promoted policies that were harmful to people of color, to women, and to the poor. Yet, in spite of their inability or their lack of desire to care for "the least of these," God has always been with us, equipping and empowering His faithful people to carry on in spite of oppression and hatred.

Beneath the shadow of injustice and intentional cruelty, we still wrestle with questions: "Where is God in all of this?" "Why must 'the least of these' continue to endure and endure?" It is not just African Americans who suffer. It is also the poor in South and Central America, Palestinians in their own homeland, and indigenous Americans, isolated on long-neglected reservations, as well as countless other impoverished and powerless people around the globe. It can seem as though God is no longer present. It can feel as though God doesn't care about the very people He told us to care for.

But know this: even when the oppressors seem to have the upper hand, it is the downtrodden and the oppressed who walk with God's protection and presence. Were it not for God, the masses would not, could not, survive. God has given us backbones strong enough to stand up under the pressure of poverty, cruelty, and inequality. Those who have never had to endure such inequity often find they do not have the strength to withstand it. I remember stories of white people who killed themselves during the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression. Statistics tell us that the suicide rate in the United States increased from 17.0 per 100,000 people in 1929 to 21.3 in 1932. No doubt, black and brown people suffered even more, but over the centuries, they had grown strong spines to weather the pressure. Rather than seek the easy way out through death, they clung to life and tried to make the sun shine in a dark place. They knew how to do it because they had always had to do it.

God is with us. Should we wake up in the morning and find out that our candidate did not win an election or the ruling party once again attacked our civil rights, we need to know—beyond a doubt—that we will be all right, because we have always been all right. As the old hymn states, “Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal,” but it is also true that there is no evil, oppressive system that we cannot resist. We know how to do it because we have always had to do it.

In the book of Isaiah, the Lord says, through the prophet,

*I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your*

*bodies shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the LORD is with his servants. (Isaiah 66:12–14)*

There is no president greater than our God. Throughout history, oppressors have sought to weed us out, but they have not succeeded. The same people who, through their resistance, grew strong spines also have a lot of muscle. Those folks who knew how to make a pot of black-eyed peas last throughout the week, despite being forced to work to make their owners wealthy, are the same people who birthed us! We are progeny of people who knew this about God: “He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom” (Isaiah 40:11).

Oppression damages those it targets. It weakens them but it cannot kill or eliminate those who hold on to God. It is simply impossible.

God is with us.

Amen and amen.

## DAY 3

### A PRAYER FOR OUR NATION AND HER LEADERS

*I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.*

—1 Timothy 2:1–2

**G**od of us all,  
God of Christians and Jews and Muslims,

God of the people who believe in You and of the people who don't,

God of black, brown, yellow, red, and white people,

God of the rich and the poor,

It is to You, O God, to whom we pray this morning. We hold our hands out to You, lifting our hearts and asking You to incline Your ear toward us.

We need You.

We need Your guidance and Your presence.

We need Your voice and Your divine sight.

We know that nothing exists outside of You—even an election.

So we ask Your presence, Your Spirit, Your anointing, and Your divine presence for our leaders and our nation. On the Statue of Liberty are engraved these words: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore."

The Christian Scriptures say, "*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens*" (Matthew 11:28).

A favorite hymn of the black church says, "Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand. I am tired, I am weak, and worn."

We are tired, God. We are weak and worn. We are huddled masses yearning to breathe free in a land that is supposed to guarantee our freedom. We pray that You would pick leaders who will lead us through this weariness to a new strength.

The people who belong to You say, "Amen and amen."