

**Pastoral Prayer**  
**June 30, 1996**

Thank you, God, for things bent: for bird wing, [for] warped tree, cat crouch and conch shell; for runner's limbs, cellist's wrist, child's curled fingers.

...for the turn in the road, the bend in the river, the crook in the path; for question, doubt and query.

Rather than prayers for perfect clarity, O God, help us to accept limits...as lures that draw us into glad wonder and mystery... Make us lithe-minded...supple-hearted, the more readily to respond to your leading.

For as planets bend their travels to the sun, we would turn our lives to you, [O] God. Weigh us with your gravitational pull until we stoop to look closely into the faces of sad children and angry youths, [and] fearful strangers and hurting people everywhere, and stooping see your eyes looking back at us. Ah, God, it is hard thanks we give for this heavy recognition... "Do something!" is our cry... "Straighten this mess out!"

But what if, what if that were as foolish as straightening a planet's path? What if your desire is to curve us, instead, into closer orbit? What if suffering--ours, theirs, yours--is simply to bend us all nearer to you? God, what if?

Thank you, God, for things bent and bowed and humble, the branch beneath the snow, long grass in the wind, brook around embedded stone...

Bent and bending God, in this silence, gently hold the deep and hidden places of our hurt and our resistance.

Thank you, God, for things bent. Amen.

*Virginia Rickeman*

duration: c. 4:00

**Composer's note**

In my experience, pastoral prayers operate on several levels: the general prayerful hush in the worship space, the minister's words, and each individual's silent response to, and tangents away from, the spoken words. In this setting, these levels translate into wordless vocalizing to set the mood or bring the wayward mind back to the spoken prayer, a rather angular, "bent" syllabic setting of the text, and occasional word-painting to mirror the listener's sometimes agitated response.