



A Legacy of Faith

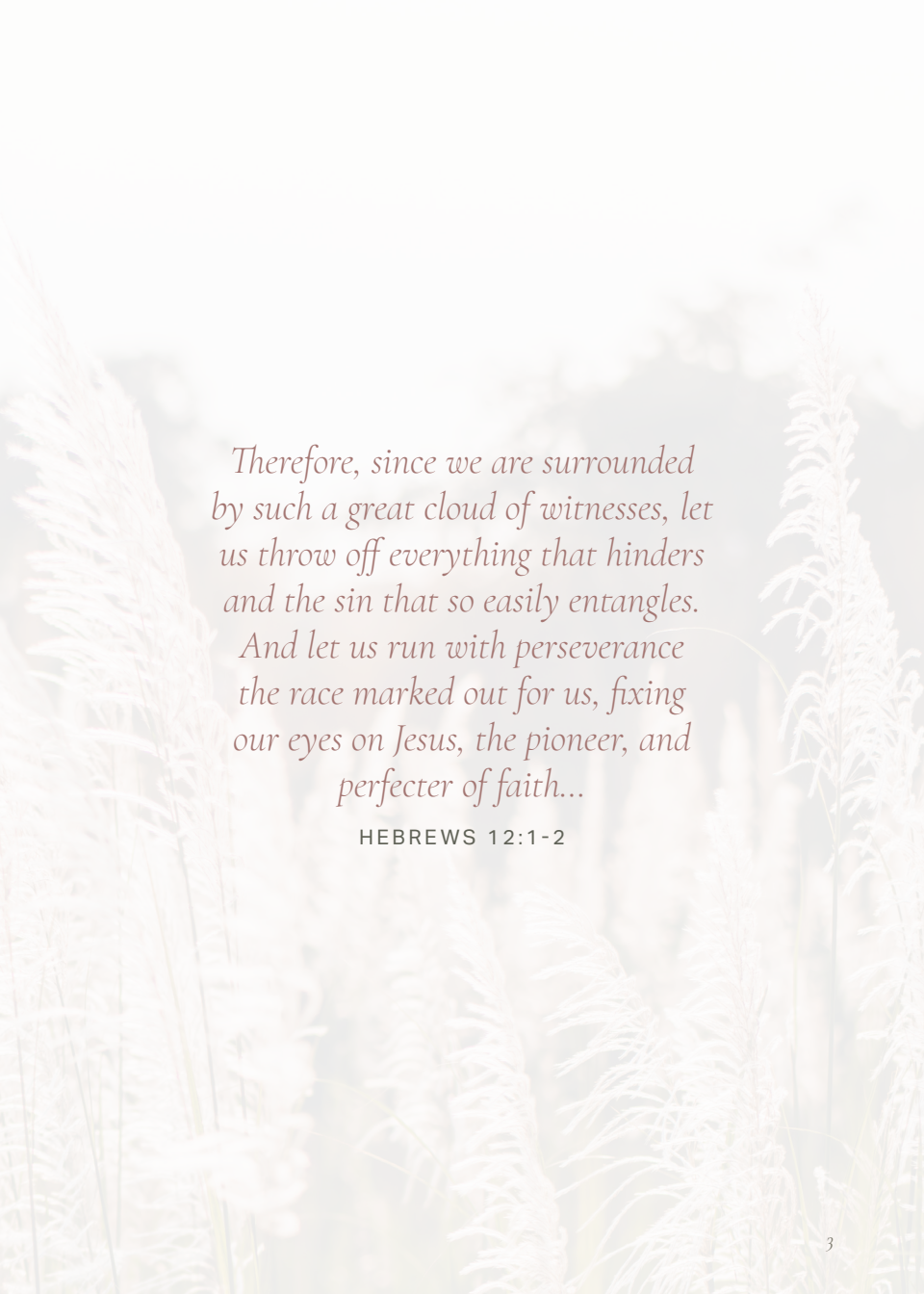
A 30-Day Devotional by Bethlehem Women

Intro

The idea of biblical womanhood is often defined by the various roles that women fulfill throughout our lifetimes. As seasons change and we transition from one role to another, we fulfill duties and wear titles such as daughter, sister, friend, wife, mom, stepmom, aunt, mentor, caregiver, widow, spiritual mom, and grandmother. True biblical womanhood, however, is more than a title, position, or any other role we perform or fulfill. Women were God's good and beautiful idea from the beginning, and by Him, we are fearfully and wonderfully made, first and foremost, to bear His image. Our roles may change, but our identity as daughters of the one true King remains fixed. We are grateful that His creation, redemption, and restoration plans have always involved women. All our longings are fulfilled in Him

and by Him as we rest and delight ourselves in Him and His unfailing love for us. You, dear daughter, were created by God on purpose and FOR a purpose. You were bought with an invaluable price by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and you are deeply loved more than you know.

We gathered some ladies from our staff and church body, who represent all seasons and stages of life – and who deeply love Jesus with all their hearts, souls, minds, and strength – and asked them to write a 30-day devotional of timeless truths they've learned. We hope this blesses you and encourages your faith, no matter what season you find yourself in, and you run the race that Jesus has marked out for you in this current season with joy and perseverance.



*Therefore, since we are surrounded
by such a great cloud of witnesses, let
us throw off everything that hinders
and the sin that so easily entangles.
And let us run with perseverance
the race marked out for us, fixing
our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer, and
perfector of faith...*

HEBREWS 12:1-2

YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

PSALM 139:13-14

by Abby Schmidt

Every day, you're bombarded with messages—from social media, people around you, and the values of your culture—telling you where you should find your identity. You're encouraged to compare yourself to other women who seem like they have it all together, who are more successful, attractive, and confident than you are. Their kids are more well-behaved. Their husbands are more attentive. Their families are more put together. It seems like an impossible standard to meet, but if you don't meet it, then the world gives you names: Failure. Unworthy. Insignificant. Unlovable. It's SO easy to internalize those names, believe them, and allow them to define you.

Everything in your life stems from where you find your identity. If your identity is in your family, you will put too much pressure on yourself and them to be perfect—when perfection is impossible. If

your identity is in your physical appearance, you will constantly and jealously compare yourself to other women. If your identity is in your achievements, you will feel like a failure when you don't measure up to the impossible standards you have set for yourself. If your identity is in your relationship, a failed relationship might just devastate your life to the point where you feel completely worthless and undeserving of love.

Here's the reality: Nothing in this volatile world can support the weight of your identity. Your family will argue and go through hard times. Your beauty will fade. Human beings will let you down. Your own skills and abilities will fail you.

There is only ONE place where your identity will be rock-solid, and that is in Jesus Christ. For every lie the world tells you, His voice of truth whispers something different. When the world calls you a failure,



*When the world calls
you worthless, He
tells you that you're
priceless in His sight.*

He says you have victory in Him. When the world calls you worthless, He tells you that you're priceless in His sight. When the world calls you insignificant, He tells you that you matter more than you could ever imagine. When the world calls you unlovable, He tells you that He loves you beyond measure—so much so that He gave His very life for you.

Psalm 139 is a beautiful picture of how God sees His children and how incredibly valuable we are to Him. Verses 13-14 say, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” God made you with so much care and intentionality, ordaining a purpose for your life before you ever took your first breath. Imagine, then, how much it must grieve His heart when His daughters allow

the world to dictate our identity—instead of the Creator who has each of our days written in His book (Psalm 139:16). His desire for you is that you walk forth in confidence in who you are in Him. As Ephesians 2:10 says, “We are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

When you are secure in your identity as a beloved daughter of the King, nothing in this world will be able to devastate you. So today, try to move that knowledge from your head to your heart. Remind yourself of the truth of who Jesus says you are, the purpose He has ordained for you, and the names **He** gives you. You are **loved**. You are **worthy**. You are **accepted**. You are **forgiven**. You are **chosen**. You are **enough**. And nothing the world says will ever change that.



TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR “IF ONLYS”

*Then Job replied to the LORD: “I know that you can do all things;
no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”*

JOB 42:1-2

by Meredith Carr

Our son was three years old when a stern-faced doctor doled out the news we’d suspected yet dreaded for months: a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, plus a rare genetic anomaly.

In the months and years that followed, it felt like I experienced little “deaths” everywhere I turned.

Meltdowns and embarrassing outings replaced dreams of lazy days at the park.

Aspirations of sweet birthday parties with dozens of kids swapped places with tantrums and tears brought on by overstimulation.

Visions of my child tearing it up in a sports arena faded in the face

of his performance anxiety and crippling fear.

I found myself taunted by thoughts of *if only*.

If only this weren't his reality, life could be great.

If only he didn't have autism, everything would be fine.

If only his genetic code were “normal,” God could do big things through him.

But fixating on the “if onlys” left me discouraged and devoid of hope for our future.

Maybe you can relate. Maybe your child’s diagnosis or struggle has you crying out to God with your own “if onlys!” Or perhaps you

aren't raising a unique child, but other circumstances—like your own diagnosis, job loss, broken relationship, or shattered dream—have you feeling the same way.

At the heart of my grief—and maybe at the heart of yours—sat the false belief that, because my child has special needs, somehow God's good and perfect plans no longer apply to his life.

However, nothing could be further from the truth! No diagnosis, heartache, or loss can thwart God's plans for your child (and you). My child's diagnosis marked the start of my long journey to fully understand this truth and rely on God's gracious heart and trustworthy sovereignty.

To learn, as Job did through his heart-wrenching journey of doubt and loss, that God will stop at nothing to accomplish His plans:

“Then Job replied to the LORD: ‘I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted’”
Job 42:1-2.

Dear one, we don't serve an “if only” God. Instead, we serve a God who only works good for us and our children—and He's able to use each tear, trial, and difficult circumstance to do just that.

God will use every facet of your

child's wiring to accomplish His plans:

Her genetic code.

His atypical brain.

Her unique struggles.

His limitations.

Parenting a special needs kid isn't a stop to a remarkable and beautiful life. It's a gift—for those willing to unwrap it.

It's a path that will free you from the false and exhausting pursuit of what the world calls “perfect.”

It's a route that will lead you into deeper, sweeter fellowship with your Creator than you thought possible.

And it's a journey that will give you a front-row seat to the Miracle Maker we call Father and Friend.

No diagnosis, shattered dream, or loss will stop God's plans for each of His fearfully and wonderfully made children. Therefore, we can fully trust our God, who takes all the broken pieces and weaves them into breathtaking redemption for our good and His glory.

May we stand on this truth today and walk forward in faith, one step at a time.



*“No diagnosis, shattered dream,
or loss will stop God’s plans
for each of His fearfully and
wonderfully made children.”*

LONELINESS

*In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord,
weeping bitterly.*

1 SAMUEL 1:10

by Cindy Fruitticher

“I feel so lonely.”

How many times have I written that in my journal? How many times have I poured out my heart to Jesus, feeling alone and forgotten? Honestly, too many to count. But God, in His kindness, showed me something that changed these moments for me.

1 Samuel 1 tells the story of Hannah, who was barren and longed for a child. These 20 verses look into the heart of a woman who feels alone and forgotten. This applicable moment begins with the place she takes her overwhelming emotions. Verse 10 reads, “In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly.” When Eli the priest observes her quietly moving her mouth, but making no sound, he believes she is drunk. Hannah’s honest reply sounds so much like my own words: “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do

not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”

Eli the priest’s reply was simple: “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

After this interaction, having been heard and encouraged, Hannah gave a simple, yet proactive response. Verses 18 - 19 read, “Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah.”

Did you catch the order of events? Hannah prayed to God, she spoke with wise counsel, she had a snack (YES!), she worshiped, then she went back to her daily routine, and I would go so far as to say she had a peaceful heart. Was the problem resolved? Not yet. Did the feelings come again? Probably—she was human. But because “her face was no longer downcast,” we know she

was walking in the peace Eli spoke over her and her perspective had changed.

The step I believe many of us overlook (and sadly it is not the snack!) is seeking out wise counsel. We think we are connected because we have SO many “friends” on social media, but pouring out my heart on social media is not inviting wise counsel to speak into my life. This false connectedness is actually isolation, and isolation feeds the feeling of loneliness (and comparison – but that’s a whole other devotion!).

Pause. Look around. Who is someone who walks with Jesus that is a step ahead of you in life or in the same season as you that you can reach out to? Who is the Lord bringing to mind right now that you trust to speak godly truth with love over you? Being vulnerable is not easy, but you need to have someone who consistently speaks into your life, encourages your faith, and helps change your perspective. You are NOT too much. Your struggles are NOT too much. And we are NOT meant to walk this life alone. Having a friend/mentor to turn to holds us accountable as we walk with Jesus and reminds us that these feelings of loneliness are just

that: feelings.

So, text her...this person the Lord is bringing to mind. Invite her to coffee and share with her. And as your perspective shifts, walk in the peace and confidence the Lord gives.





NOTHING TO PROVE

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

by **Kassie Breckon**

As a child, I was told you could lose your salvation if you sinned. I didn't realize it then, but that mistruth shaped every relationship I had from then on. I was taught that mistakes weren't forgivable and salvation wasn't eternal. I don't know if I've always been a performer by nature or if that lie shaped who I am today. Some might call it "driven," but I walk a fine line between selfish ambition and

servitude. I have a strong desire to earn people's love and affection, and I tend to try to do this through acts of service. For a long time, I struggled with forming healthy relationships. I always wondered if somebody liked me for what I did for them or what I could offer them. Was my performance what made me valuable or worthy?

Don't get me wrong: Doing for others is great, but having the heart

behind it matters. When I sign up to volunteer for an event or give to a cause, am I doing it from a heart of servitude and with generosity, or am I doing it for recognition and praise? When I say yes to something asked of me, is it to be the hands and feet of Jesus, or is it to prove my worth? As an adult, I'm learning to constantly give myself humility tests. I find God continually pressing into me and giving me tiny heart checks with everything I do. Through sermons from Pastor Jason, in my daily quiet time, and in conversations with mentors, the Holy Spirit asks me whether I'm trying to earn my salvation or believe in the power of the resurrection. Here's the truth I wasn't told as a child: Jesus is enough, so I don't have to be. The reality is I can't be good enough or worthy enough, but I can choose a heart of gratitude. I can choose humility. I can be free from the performance trap because Jesus is the reason for my salvation, not my lack of sin and mistakes and not all my acts of service. I hope that frees you up today and reminds you that God doesn't grade us on our performance or checklists; He cares most about the condition of our hearts. He only asks that we wholeheartedly pursue a

relationship with Him.

The world may teach us that we have something to prove and have to earn our worth, but that's not what Jesus says. It is a lie that we can lose salvation and that God expects perfection. He knows we can't be perfect, and that's exactly why He sent Jesus to earth to live a perfect life, die a shameful death, and conquer our sins through His resurrection. It wasn't for nothing. It was so we could be forgiven and have hope. So instead of trying to perform our way through life, I challenge you to give yourself grace today and come to God filled with gratitude for all He's done for us so we could have nothing to prove.

Jesus, thank You so much for the sacrifices You made. Thank You for being forsaken by God so we never had to be. Thank You, God, for knowing our faults and seeking us anyway. Thank You for loving us even though we could never earn or deserve it.



Journal

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DAUGHTER, YOU ARE HEALED

And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over.”

MARK 5:34

by Angela Buckland

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give an account of Jesus healing a well-known and respected synagogue leader's daughter. But if we take a closer look, in Mark 5:21-43, we see the healing of not just one, but two “daughters.” On the way to heal Jairus' 12-year-old dying little girl, Jesus encounters a woman who has suffered from an issue of constant bleeding for 12 years. She reaches out in faith, grabs the hem of His robe, and is instantly healed. She broke the rules and took a risk, touching a “holy man” when she was considered unclean (see Leviticus 15:19). But instead of the shame, scorn, or rebuke she expected, He praises her for her act of faith and calls her “daughter.”

These two miracles in Mark 5 occur in Jesus' home base of Capernaum just after He healed the demon-possessed man in the region of Gerasenes. After casting the demons out of the man and sending them into a herd of pigs, Jesus got into

a boat and returned to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, where a large crowd awaited Him on the shore. Jairus was among them, and he approached Jesus, fell at His feet, and begged Him to follow him home, where his 12-year-old daughter lay in bed dying. On the way to Jairus' house, the crowd presses into Jesus, and among them is the bleeding woman. She reached out in desperation to touch Jesus' robe because she believed that if she touched even just the hem of His garment, her bleeding would cease. She was right; after touching His robe, her bleeding instantly stopped. She was healed. Jesus felt the power leave His body, but He didn't see who touched Him because He was surrounded. He called out for her to reveal herself, and when she came forward in fear and trembling, instead of rebuking her, He praised her for her faith and said, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over.” While He was still



speaking to her, messengers arrived to tell Jairus that his daughter had died. Jesus comforts Jairus with the words, “Don’t be afraid. Just have faith.” Jesus arrives at Jairus’ house and takes Jairus, Jairus’ wife, and three of His disciples—James, John, and Peter—into the girl’s room. Jesus holds the girl’s hand, and says, “Talitha koum,” which means “Little girl, get up!” The girl stood up and was healed. The passage ends with Jesus giving everyone strict orders not to tell anyone what happened and then telling them to give her something to eat.

The parallels between the two women in this chapter are noteworthy and more than coincidental. We don’t know their names, but we know they are both daughters: Jesus calls the bleeding woman “daughter” while on His way to heal another daughter. Both healings in this passage share the number 12, a significant number throughout scripture. *This woman had been bleeding as long as Jairus’ daughter had been alive.* According to Mosaic Law, she would have been unclean for 12 whole years, not permitted to touch or hug anyone or receive any form of affection, for anyone she touched would have become unclean. When Jesus arrives at Jairus’ house, He picks up the little girl’s hand (verse 41) and appears to be touching a dead body, which would have also made Him unclean, according to Numbers 19:11. Both miracles would have defiled Him according to religious tradition. Yet, we see Jesus reversing the Law with these two significant acts: Rather than Jesus becoming unclean and contaminated by these two women, they are healed and made clean by Him. Instead of the shame, scorn, or rebuke we would expect to see here for “breaking the rules,” He calls them, heals them, and treats them as beloved

daughters. The tenderness and compassion that Jesus demonstrated invite us to reach out in faith and grab hold of Him for our healing, for we are His daughters, too.

Daughter, in what ways are you afraid to draw near to Jesus? Do you think you are too unclean or unholy to allow Him access to the darkest parts of your heart? We are all unclean, and not one of us is holy enough by our own standards. But Jesus is the standard; He is holiness,

and there is nothing you have ever done or can do, no good deed you can accomplish that will pay the price He already paid for you. His blood washes us clean, and we are made righteous by faith in the One who canceled our debt once and for all. Let His holiness be your healing. Draw near Him today, so you can hear His voice calling you “daughter,” calling you holy, calling you healed, and calling you home.

*“Daughter, your faith
has made you well.
Go in peace. Your
suffering is over.”*



PEACE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STORM

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.”*

MATTHEW 11:28

by Candy Greene

Ladies, I know that extra weight you carry - and I'm not talking about what the scale measures. I am talking about the unique characteristics that make you feminine, gifts from the Creator of the universe. The nurturer inside of you that you take with you everywhere you go. The willpower to keep going when you are sick because things still have to get done. The daughter that works all day yet still has to take care of her aging parents in the evening—the ability to fix anything for your kids and juggle all the places you must take them. The list goes on, and it's heavy. It's hard. When I reread the verse above recently, something stood out to me. It doesn't say, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will finish your to-do list.” Don't we sometimes accidentally view God as a genie who's there to grant wishes? In John 14:27, Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you...”

The gifts Jesus offers us aren't of this world. They aren't an escape from your reality. They aren't simply a better version of the things we experience daily. In the midst of an overwhelming to-do list, busy schedules, and heartache, He can provide you with rest, and He can give you peace.

I remember being amid a season in my life last year that can best be described as chaotic. The pace that I was going wasn't sustainable. The emotions I experienced were hard. I was living anxiously and hurriedly, and I was disappointed. Even with all of the good and godly characteristics I carried around, I also carried the heavy feeling of being tired and unsettled. One day, I just stood still briefly, and I told God that I needed Him. (Being still - that's hard to do, right?) I needed to see Him in the midst of the chaos. I wanted to experience His presence. And like the loving and caring Father that He is, He gave me a picture in my mind. I

was standing somewhere in the middle of a tornado. Things were literally swirling around me, but there in that spot, I was calm. I felt rested. I was at peace. Nothing happening around me bothered me or impacted me. I was still in the storm, but I wasn't worried or overwhelmed.

Likewise, I pray this over my friends and family when they go through difficult things. Like a consuming tornado, I pray that God's peace, presence, and healing engulfs them—that it surrounds them on every side, and they cannot mistake Who and What it is. Side note: From time to time, take inventory of your prayers and see how often you are praying for others. Sometimes it can be easier to linger on your personal requests and the things that you want for your household.

Months later, I can still see the same picture of the tornado in my head, and I just take a deep breath and remember that He is always present. It reminds me that life goes on around me. My current situation or circumstances might not change, but I can fix my eyes on Jesus in the midst of them and find rest.





NEW MERCIES

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in Him.”

LAMENTATIONS 3:21-24

by Rebekah Schroeder

I have experienced chronic pain for years, thinking it was normal. About a year ago, my husband sat me down to list out how I felt pain daily. As we looked over my laundry list of symptoms, I remember him saying that no amount of pain is normal—this blew my mind. I spent years assuming everyone felt like I did, but they were stronger and better at handling it. I assumed I was the problem, not the pain. This year, we started pursuing

a diagnosis. The process is complicated and overwhelming - looking toward the future fills me with anxiety, grief over the life I imagined for myself, and so many questions. Through this process, the Lord is clearly speaking two words over me: purpose and freedom. I know He has a purpose for my pain that is for my good and His glory. I also feel God pressing the idea of spiritual freedom beyond physical limitations - freedom at a heart and soul level.

Lamentations 3:19-24 beautifully depicts the real grief and hope of suffering. In v20, the author speaks of his intense pain: "My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me." His physical affliction is tied to his soul-level despair - he is open and honest about his emotional/mental state, directly resulting from his physical reality. Then, his posture noticeably shifts as he turns to hope (v21-24): "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope" (v21). Hope is a byproduct of actively setting our mind on Christ and remembering His character. The author focuses on God's steadfast love and unending mercy: "They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (v23).

I believe in the miraculous healing power of God, but what does healing look like in the absence of what we would consider a "miracle"? Maybe we experience more miracles and healing than we realize. Maybe God's mercy is the miracle, new every morning. God is present in every moment of your life, big and small, filling it with His mercy and steadfast love. Psalm 27:13 says, "I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Look for His goodness

and mercy, and you'll see miracles everywhere.

I want to speak specifically to women living with chronic pain and autoimmune disorders. The Creator of the universe sees your pain. It pains Him to see his children in pain, to see YOU in pain. Look further down at v33 of Lamentations: "For He does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men." The verses prior also focus on God's compassion in the face of our afflictions. If God is wholly good and loves you perfectly, then the only conclusion we can draw is that He must have a greater purpose for your pain, and that purpose will be what is best for you. You are not suffering in vain. Maybe He loves you so much that He values your affection for Him over your comfort. I have personally experienced an intimacy with God that is only known through pain and suffering. Here you'll find your soul-level freedom.

I don't know what the future holds for me, but this is what I do know: I can face the future without fear. God's steadfast love and unending mercy are new every day, carrying and sustaining me. The Lord is my portion, and therefore my soul hopes in Him.



UNDERSTANDING AND EMBRACING FORGIVENESS

But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

MATTHEW 6:15

by Nikki Williams

This Scripture takes forgiveness to a bolder level, beyond counsel of what we should work hard to do. Forgiveness is mentioned and taught all throughout Scripture

because it is the basis of our gift of salvation.

God sacrificed His Son to forgive us, and in acceptance of that gift of salvation, we are forgiven time and

time again, with no questions, good deeds owed, or repayment from us. As Jesus told Peter, we might even have to do this multiple times with the same person.

Forgiveness is an act that we tend to confuse with other actions or conditions that hinder us from forgiving or understanding forgiveness. First and foremost, forgetting is not a condition for forgiving! Many people tie the two together as if, in order to truly forgive, you must, at the same time, forget the wrongdoing. Some of us guilt ourselves into thinking we haven't truly forgiven if we can't forget. We can't make our minds forget, but we can direct how we cope emotionally and spiritually by choosing forgiveness that opens up the space for peace. Forgetting and "letting go" are also two different things. Forgiveness is also not the act of reconciling. It is, however, the first and necessary element to true reconciliation in which "letting go" by the power of His Spirit can occur. Forgiveness also doesn't mean there HAS to be reconciliation. Some cases cannot be reconciled. But no matter the case, as the Scripture says, forgiveness must occur. Forgiveness is the key to our spiritual and emotional health and

healing. Forgiveness is an act of our own accord and does not require or demand any action from the other person. We don't forgive as an expectation of our offender to pay a debt for the offense, just as we don't have to do anything to repay our debt of sin unto God. It is paid in full through Christ's resurrection!

Scripture tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). From our beginning, we are all in need of forgiveness. If you are familiar with the behavior of young children, you've witnessed examples of the most basic and initial behavioral sin that every human is guilty of at some point in our lives: We are selfish! Selfishness causes us to think of our own needs, wants, and desires first. To counter this requires intentionally putting the needs of others first. Some people may naturally find it easier to put the needs of others first, and sometimes at their own expense. However, it is never easy for anyone in a place of fear/anxiety or emotional self-protection to, in a moment, consider the other person before protecting themselves. Even the nicest of us can unintentionally sin against others in these moments.

**CONTINUED FROM 'UNDERSTANDING AND
EMBRACING FORGIVENESS'**

Lord, help me to forgive any past transgressions towards me and all there will be in the future. I seek You to help me do this with your spirit that is in me. I thank You, Lord, for all of the times You have forgiven me, and for all the times in the future. I ask that You help me to see my transgressors as You see them. Help me remember that You love them just as You love me and that I can forgive them just as You forgive them. I ask that You remind me of the peace that only You can give, and, in forgiveness, I seek that peace abundantly in my life. I ask that You use every occasion where I seek Your help in forgiving others to move me into a closer relationship with You. Amen.

Journal

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

ALL THE SINGLE LADIES

So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

GENESIS 22:14

by Lauren Jendrzejewski

When I was in college, people always said I should “enjoy my season of singleness.” They said it was a gift. I would counter that this gift was like an ugly sweater that my grandma knitted that’s itchy, two sizes too small, and that I never asked for in the first place. It’s uncomfortable, awkward, inconvenient, and definitely not what I wanted. In the years since, people have stopped saying it’s a gift and have started looking at me like an injured puppy—like something must be wrong with me to still be alone.

It used to make me so sad; I would look around at all the people who had somebody and feel a deficit in myself. People would always talk about God’s goodness in their spouse, so what was wrong with me that God would think I didn’t deserve this? I internalized these thoughts (which were from the enemy) and got so bitter. Why didn’t God think I was deserving? What was it in me that was lacking?

I went through a particularly hard

season with deaths in my family, and I was living alone. I remember thinking over and over, “God, this would be so much easier if I just had someone to hold my hand.” I would cry out to God, “Why are You making me do this by myself?” Gently and kindly, in a still small whisper, God reminded me: You were never doing this alone. You may feel alone, but you weren’t abandoned or forsaken, not for a second.

So I shifted my prayers. Instead of asking God for a husband to hold my hand, I’ll whisper: “Please hold my hand, Jesus.” If I’m scared, sad, or overwhelmed (all the times I would want support), I ask God to hold my hand, to fill the gap, to make my heart content, and to be with me and for me, which He always was. I had put my hope, and honestly my worth, in something that was never promised. Nowhere in the Bible does it say, “If you’re good, God will give you the husband of your dreams.” But it says



He is faithful and has good plans for me. That He is my Jehovah Jireh, my provider. That He is with me and for me.

So now, when people tell me, “Surely God still has someone for you,” I gently reply, “Maybe. But if He doesn’t, He is still good.” I’m resting on His promises, the guarantees. I’m trusting He is with me, for me, and loves me. I’m counting this for my good and His glory, knowing God will still use me. He has a reason and a purpose

for this, even if it’s more than just a season. I don’t need a spouse to be fulfilled in Christ, to live an abundant life, to make a difference, and leave a legacy for Him.

*My flesh and my heart
may fail,
But God is the strength
of my heart and my
portion forever. -Psalm 73:26*



THE BLESSING OF GODLY GRANDPARENTS

I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you.

2 TIMOTHY 1:5

by Darla Miller

I remember growing up and hearing my grandmother say, “There’s nothing better than grandchildren.” I never thought much about that statement until the Lord allowed me to take on the role of grandmother myself. And now, I 100% agree with her! My grands affectionately call me “MiMi”...a title that I don’t take for granted, and I realize that with the title

comes much responsibility.

In 2 Timothy, Paul writes to Timothy, “I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you.” In this passage, Paul refers to Timothy’s grandmother, Lois, passing on her faith to her

daughter Eunice, and after that, Eunice passes on her faith to Timothy. The demonstrations of our faithful walk with the Lord and our prayers for our children and grandchildren are powerful ways to pass on our faith to future generations.

In Deuteronomy 4, Moses cautions the Israelites to remember everything they have seen the Lord do and urges them to continue obeying His commands. He tells them, “Just make sure you stay alert. Keep watch over yourselves. Don’t forget anything of what you have seen. Don’t let your heart wander off. Stay vigilant as long as you live. Teach what you’ve seen and heard to your children and grandchildren.” Some may think it’s the parents’ sole responsibility to teach their children about the Lord, that it is all up to them, but Scripture clearly instructs us as grandparents. More than 50 references in the Bible of three generations (think about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) teach us to value any legacy of faith that we are fortunate to walk in and then intentionally pay that faith forward to the generations that follow us. We, as grandparents, are ideally positioned for great influence and spiritual impact.

Our responsibility, or rather our privilege, is to model a life that chases after the Lord. Roy Graham tells a story about his grandfather Billy Graham: “He walked out of his bedroom one time, walked by an open Bible, read two or three lines real quick—within seconds—then walked on up to the kitchen. My grandmother and I were sitting there by the fire, and I was adding more wood to it. He came back down, read a couple more sentences on the way back to his bedroom. And I asked him, ‘What could you have gotten out of that Bible in that short amount of time?’ He turned around and looked at me and said, ‘I sip on the Word of God all day long.’” Deuteronomy 6 instructs us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children (or grandchildren), and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” May we be like Billy Graham and “sip on God’s Word” all day long, may we talk about Him relentlessly, and may our grandchildren witness our commitment to follow His



teachings.

We are to pray **for** our grandchildren, and we are to pray **with** them as well! Pray for strong, healthy marriages for our children as they raise our grandchildren. Pray for parental wisdom as they raise our grandchildren in the admonition of the Lord. Pray that they have the wisdom to seek help and counsel when they need it. Pray that our children and grandchildren will not stay where they are in their relationship with the Lord but continue to grow “in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man,” just like Jesus did (Luke 2:52). Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Pray about everything!

Grandparents have a great opportunity and God-given responsibility to make a significant difference in the lives of their grandchildren. Being a grandparent is such a joy, and there is no love like the love of a grandparent! My grandmother was so right...there really is nothing better than having those littles run and jump in my arms and say, “I love you, MiMi!”

Journal

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

“Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon.”

ISAIAH 58:10

by Mary-Michal Han

There are many things I could title this, like “Loving Difficult People” or “Loving the Lost.” Those two phrases kept coming back to me, and I kept being told, “Lost people do not know they are lost, and difficult people do not know they are difficult.” The Lord brought me back to this sweet verse that is my go-to in ministry: to spend myself on behalf of those who are hungry for the Lord to help satisfy their needs. This is it. This is how you love “difficult and lost people.”

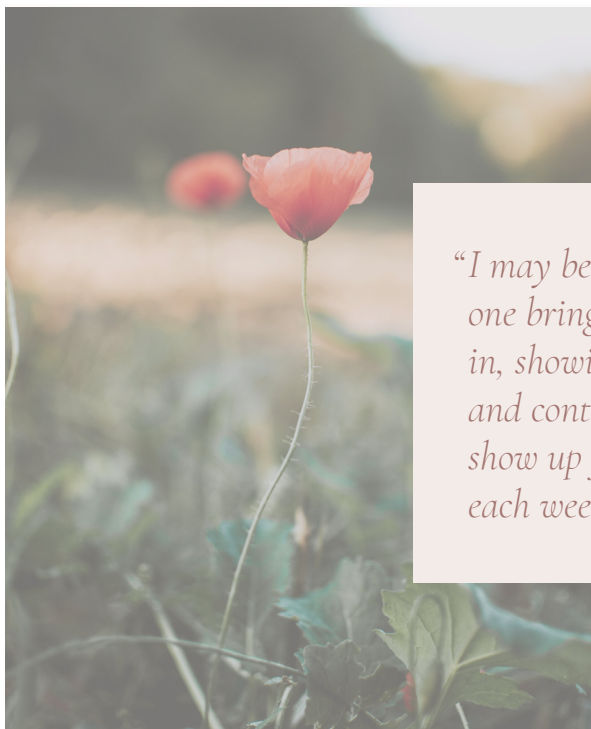
The only handbook I have for loving these people is Scripture. There is no right way to do it unless you do it exactly like Jesus did. The difficult and lost were the ones who He sought out the most. He was not looking for people who wanted His autograph; He was looking for those so desperate that they would find anyone who could help or heal them. Those were the ones He wanted.

I will be honest; writing on this is

difficult and painful. I wish I could tell you it is fun and easy to love people who do not know Jesus. It is not easy. To me, this is the most important thing you can do in this life, but you are loving people who do not know how to love back like Jesus. It is a one-way street love that you have to be invested in. It is love knowing you may be questioned, doubted, and unaccepted, but you love anyways.

I wish they could see it. I wish they could see the words I have written over them, the prayers I have prayed, the Scriptures, the tears...I hope they know. This is not a natural thing; it is just a command of God to love those who are lost and those who have nothing to give back to you.

In this season of loving the lost, the Lord has taught me that I may be the only one praying for them. I may be the only one bringing the light in, showing grace, and



“I may be the only one bringing the light in, showing grace, and continuing to show up for them each week.”

continuing to show up for them each week. I may be the only one showing them they don't have to carry it all on their own. I may be the only one that shows them they can change. It is not by words; it is by showing up. Time and time again. No matter what they said the week or the day before, you show up with open hands to what God wants to do in their lives.

You are on the most important

journey, turning people's eyes to Jesus just by how you love. It does not come with condemnation or judgment. It comes through love in action, reminders of their growth, praying on your knees for those friends/family members/coworkers, etc.

Turn your sadness and anger into prayer. God will break the chains. It is hard but worth it so that darkness can turn to light for them.



CONTENTMENT

“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:11-12

by Casey Cofer

Contentment. We all long for it, but as women, we tend to find ourselves in a state of comparison more often than contentment. Maybe you can relate to some of these statements:

If only I had a relationship with my mom like she does, then I would be more content.

If only I could find someone, I would feel better about myself.

If my husband and I could have the type of relationship that so-and-so have, then I would be happy.

Once I am a mom, I will be who I am supposed to be.

Yes, all of those statements are real things that we can pray for, but the problem comes in when we tie our worth to our current situation and are unable to be content. Every season we walk through is a gift and a blessing, yet we are so prone to want to move to the next season or get the next thing that we miss what God is doing NOW. I've heard it said before that you grow through what you go through, and that includes the hard seasons.

Who has the Lord placed in your life for you to be a light to or encourage? What you are walking through now may help you to relate to someone in the future and help them walk through the tough season with contentment. There is purpose in pain, and there is a good God who is with you every step of the way.

Our contentment, worth, identity, and peace are all found in Jesus and Jesus alone. Rest in His grace and His love today. Be content with who you are and where you are, and pray for God to use you to bless those around you because you will never be able to go back to the season you are in now.

In Philippians, the Apostle Paul tells us that it is possible to find contentment in whatever situation we find ourselves in. We will go

through times in our lives when we will be brought low and times when we will thrive, but the choice we have to make is whether we will choose to be content or compare ourselves with others.

So, maybe today, you are not in the relationship you want to be in or getting the news you want to hear and have prayed about for so long. But don't lose hope, don't quit praying and trusting God for those things, and don't miss out on where the Lord has you right now. I will tell you the same thing my Mamaw used to say: "If you ain't content in where you are, you'll never be content in where you are going."

"Who has the Lord placed in your life for you to be a light to or encourage?"

Journal

A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines spaced evenly down the page, intended for writing in a journal.



GOD CAN HANDLE THE HARD

And he said, “Thus saith the Lord, ‘Make this valley full of ditches.’”

2 KINGS 3:16

by Mandi Spitler

A while ago, my husband Michael and I decided to dig up the plants in the backyard the previous owners planted. It was too much upkeep, so we dug them up; it was HARD work. It was hot, we had blisters on our hands, Michael had a rash from one of the bushes, and I was dirty - like, gross dirty. You never know how deep and wide the roots of a plant are until you dig them up. We didn't consider the huge holes uprooting them would leave behind until our dog found one, and Michael nearly broke his ankle in another. Then it hit me.

In 2 Kings 3:16, the Lord tells Elisha to have the people dig ditches as a strategy to defeat their enemies. Their job was to trust God even though they didn't understand. The same goes for us. I've surrendered my past to the Lord and thought I dug up what needed healing. But I realized in a recent conversation with a friend that things in my past still affect me today. I dug up all the things and surrendered them all to

the Lord, but what I didn't do was seek God and allow Him to fill the holes with fresh water as He did for Elisha. The enemy wants to fill those holes with lies, bitterness, anger, resentment, and revenge, but God wants to fill them with His fresh, living water.

Empty holes can either leave room for God or for the enemy. I'm learning how to let God fill those holes with living water. As leaders, we are expected to be strong-minded, strategic, and courageous, caring for the people we lead with compassion and comforting those who are hurting. What we do with our hurts, our unfilled holes, is just as important—or even more important than—how we lead. And there is only one to Whom we can turn for our healing; friends and family are a big deal, and mentors are invaluable, but there are moments that only God can carry you through.

What is your practice in taking heavy things to God? Here are a few

things I have learned:

1. Don't delay. It might be one of your biggest mistakes. From the sheer pain you may be experiencing or the pressures or demands you have, you may feel incapable of even thinking about it. But know it's not going away, and if you bury it, it will only get worse. Take it to God today. Seek help from friends, family, or a counselor to process the journey with you.
2. Be honest and vulnerable before God; He already knows. Sometimes I think my troubles aren't as bad or large as someone else's, and I feel like I am whining or complaining to God. But my hurts are valid, no matter how they compare to someone else's. God wants us whole so that we can comfort others.
3. Pursue healing, but be patient with yourself. We want things fixed immediately, but I've been reminded that that isn't always how God works. The desire for personal wholeness and health is good but takes time. A good question to ask is, "Am I making progress?"

Questions for reflection: Is there anything in the past or present that you need to take to God today? What is holding you back? Is God filling the holes you've dug, or is the enemy?



NAVIGATING GRIEF

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

PSALM 73:26

by Beth Holmes

Grief. By definition, we all know what grief is, but once it's personal, it's different. We think we know, but we have no idea of grief's far-reaching impact. It's like when we see pictures of a tornado on the news; we can sympathize with those impacted, but once a tornado comes through and takes our house or

loved ones away, it's suddenly very personal. We can then feel empathy for that person or situation.

Quite simply, grief forever changes you. It rocks every single aspect of your existence. I've found it can make you question everything you've believed about God, and sometimes

you can feel angry, hurt, let down, or even betrayed by God because He didn't answer your prayers the way you wanted Him to, or He allowed events to happen that took away someone you loved. It's difficult to accept the concept of God's timing versus our timing. We often shut Him out when we disagree with His choices. With that in mind, it's important to remember that God understands our broken hearts, and He can take it when we're hurt, angry, or mad – He is patient to wait with us in our sorrow. Psalm 34:18 says, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” I can read those words and, while I am thankful for the promise of heaven, feel like heaven is a distant comfort most days since I lost my husband.

While grief challenges and stretches our faith, it also forces us to put our money where our mouth is, so to speak. Do you honestly believe God's promise never to leave or forsake you? In the good times, that's easy, but during the most challenging time of your life? This is where God wants to be our lifeline and build trust in our relationship with Him. We must choose to trust Him with our family, emotions, finances, decision-making, health,

eternity, and everything in between. Everyone's grief journey is personal, and while there are similarities, no two journeys look alike. Our only constant is Jesus. That's it. Finding support as we navigate grief is crucial. Again, this looks different for many, but having a church family with believers to help hold me up when I've been struggling has changed my life. The saying “you can't pour from an empty cup” feels super-sized when experiencing grief. A relationship with Jesus, a body of believers to support you, even joining a small group or talking with a counselor – all of these options fill your cup and help support your healing journey.

Here's what I've learned so far: There have been countless services I have sat through and felt God's Word penetrate my broken heart, but I've left with hope, healing, and a resolve to allow God to use my testimony to glorify Him. I cannot control the events that led to my husband's passing. I can simply control how I choose to allow Him to use my story to help and bless others walking the same road, praying that the God Who is my portion will comfort others as He has comforted me.



“WHAT ABOUT ME, GOD?”

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.

PSALM 23:1-2

by Holly Peters

You're getting into your car after grabbing lunch with your sister, and you see a text from one of your closest friends that her boyfriend proposed to her. Your first thought isn't, "Wow, I'm so excited for her!" Instead, it's, "When is it my turn? Have you forgotten about me, Lord?"

You're scrolling on social media while sitting on your couch after a long day of work, and you see your friend post about getting her dream job. Immediately you think, "God, why haven't I been able to get my dream job? Am I not good enough?"

Or your best friend shares how God answered prayers about her husband leading them spiritually. She tells you how he has prayed over her aloud for the past three nights. You want so badly to praise the Lord for this answered prayer, but you think, "Lord, I've been praying the same thing for my husband. When will my prayers be answered?"

It's easy to get caught in the hopeless cycle of comparison, and I have been there too! And it can be difficult to celebrate others while stuck in a rut of feeling like the Lord has abandoned you. I want to share a few things that have helped me to shift my focus away from myself and back to Jesus. Maybe these will help you too!

- Bring your frustrations to the Lord and allow Him to comfort you. He is a good Father who longs to meet you in your heartache and grief. Allow Him to hold you and whisper kind, loving words over you.
- Ask Him to reveal the lies you believe that are distorting your perspective of what's true. And this is hard, but identifying the lie is key to knowing how to fight against it.
- Going to Scripture to find truth

is so important. Finding a couple of verses to memorize will speak life into your soul. His Word is alive and active. It has the power to renew you, refresh you, and revive you!

- Writing down how you have experienced God's faithfulness is encouraging and reminds you that He loves you and hasn't forgotten you! Recognizing God's faithfulness in your life will show you how good and kind He has been to you. Seeing His hand in your life enables you to praise Him instead of question Him. Remembering His past faithfulness gives you hope for the future and frees you to celebrate those around you with joy and love instead of envy and bitterness.

Allowing myself to compare my life, my walk with Jesus, or my circumstances to those around me steals my joy and allows the enemy to have a foothold to feed me lies about myself and my Heavenly Father. These lies that pop up in our minds are taking away our ability to celebrate well with those we love. Being able to celebrate others doesn't mean that God is holding out on you or me. It means we

recognize how God is blessing those we love and choosing to rejoice with them. As a believer and follower of Jesus, you are God's child, and He loves you dearly. He wants to give you good gifts. When God blesses those around us, it doesn't mean that His supply is running low. There is plenty to go around. You haven't missed out on what the Lord has for you.

You are not alone, friend. You are not the only one who struggles with feeling forgotten or feeling like God isn't hearing your prayers. He hears you, He sees you, and He loves you. Resting in our Heavenly Father's love helps us celebrate others when they receive the blessings we long for because we trust He wants to bless us too.

“As a believer and follower of Jesus, you are God's child, and He loves you dearly.”



DO YOU FEEL WORTHY?

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5


by Amanda Lussiana

Have you ever felt like you just aren't worthy? Me too. Throughout my life, this has probably been what I've wrestled with the most. We are in this together, and frankly, we are in good company.

Do you want the good news or bad news first? I always want the bad news first, so here it is: You aren't worthy. Ouch, right? But here is the good news: Jesus is. That's it. I hate to make it sound overly simple, but

for me, it is.

We have a choice to make. We can spend our lives striving for worth, striving to be enough, or we can humble ourselves to the only One who is worthy: Jesus. We must decide that our worth is in Him alone, the One who came to show us love, to be crucified for our unworthiness, and to defeat death for our freedom. He offers us freedom from condemnation,



“But we will never go wrong when stepping into obedience and seeking God’s Kingdom first.”

shame, fear, and failure—freedom we could never earn.

The enemy will keep on whispering in our ears, “You aren’t worthy of that kind of love.” “Keep trying.” “You aren’t enough.” It’s our turn to claim Jesus boldly. He is enough so we don’t have to be.

We can find freedom in shifting our thoughts from worthlessness to worthiness, like 2 Corinthians 10:5 instructs us to do. This isn’t done through a series of religious “to-dos,” and it’s also not found through complacency or settling.

It’s time to seek His heart and depend on His love! We seek Him by reading His Word. Not to check a box, but to know His heart. We pray, not because we have to, but

to know Him and be known by Him. We actively participate in church, not because the church says it’s a good idea, but because God designed us for community with one another.

It’s not about the things we do but about the posture of our heart in doing them. We will never find our worth in the things of this world, not even the religious things. But we will never go wrong when stepping into obedience and seeking God’s Kingdom first.

It might sound crazy hard or even crazy simple. Either way, want to try it together? I promise I’m in this with you. Is it always easy? No. Is it always hard? No. Is it always worth it? Yes. Always yes.

Journal

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.





FOR THE EMPTY NESTER

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: ... a time to plant and a time to uproot.

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-2

by Mary McKinney

My husband and I have been empty nesters for four years. I won't lie and say it was an easy transition, because it came in layers. But through it all, God was so faithful to us.

The first two weeks, things were quiet: too quiet. No loud music or instruments were playing upstairs, no friends in the house, no junk food (OK, well, maybe a little), no cups upstairs, no extra laundry, and the dishwasher wasn't running nearly as much. It was an odd time of transition, but as the days and weeks went on, this became a peaceful thing.

I have always thought I was giving my kids to God and fully trusting that God had them in His hand. But when the last one moved out, the reality that I hadn't given them fully to God sunk in. We always want the best for our kids. We do whatever we need to do to bless them with a great life and teach and show them what it means to follow Jesus, but to truly give them up to God? Whew! That was harder than I thought.

All our kids were out of our hands and out in the world without us. I remember the day of this revelation, praying and telling God that I knew they were His, and I am so blessed

to be their mom, but God, this is so hard. My only choice was to give them over to Him completely. I prayed for peace, protection, godly influences in their lives, and that they would always put Jesus first. At that moment, a wave of peace came over me that wasn't there before; that peace is still here today. This doesn't mean that we don't help our kids if they come to us and ask - we do! It means that if they don't, I know God's got them, and He wants something better for them than we can give them, and that's Jesus!

In this verse from Ecclesiastes, the definition of uproot is to remove by pulling up—to pull up by the roots. Becoming an empty nester is a season, and it is uprooting! Our kids are uprooted from our homes and placed out into the world. But take heart, friend. God's got them, and God's got you!

And guess what?

This is the season to read your Bible all the way through without interruption!

This is the season to start that THING God has been prompting you to do!

This is the season to grow closer to your spouse!

This is the season to go on a trip with just the two of you!

This is the season to take up a new hobby!

I have grown to love being an empty nester. I feel closer to my husband and truly enjoy our time together. And let me tell you, when our kids come home or call, it's such a blessing! There is JOY in this season. Ask God to show you if you can't see it.

“I prayed for peace, protection, godly influences in their lives, and that they would always put Jesus first. At that moment, a wave of peace came over me that wasn't there before; that peace is still here today.”

A MOTHER'S PURPOSE

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split...

MATTHEW 27:51

by Kelsey Shadrach

I remember the first time I realized the meaning of “the veil was torn.” You know that older song – Jesus Messiah by Chris Tomlin? Go give it a listen. And don’t laugh at me! I was in college before someone used this song to help me make the connection.

How could I have missed something so pivotal to my faith in Christ? Before the veil was torn in the temple, it was there to separate people from going directly to God. I did not grow up in a Christian household. I also do not have a crazy hit-rock-bottom story either. I gave

my life to the Lord at the end of high school and, since then, have been trying to figure this all out. My parents did all they could to raise us in a good home, teach us right and wrong, and love us no matter what. All of that can get really hard to do without Jesus. When I became a mom, I slowly began to realize (and I’m still figuring it all out, don’t mistake that!) the answer to my own question – I had “missed it” simply because I was never taught. Having that thought and looking my daughter in the eyes is enough for me to change everything about how I was raised, to do everything

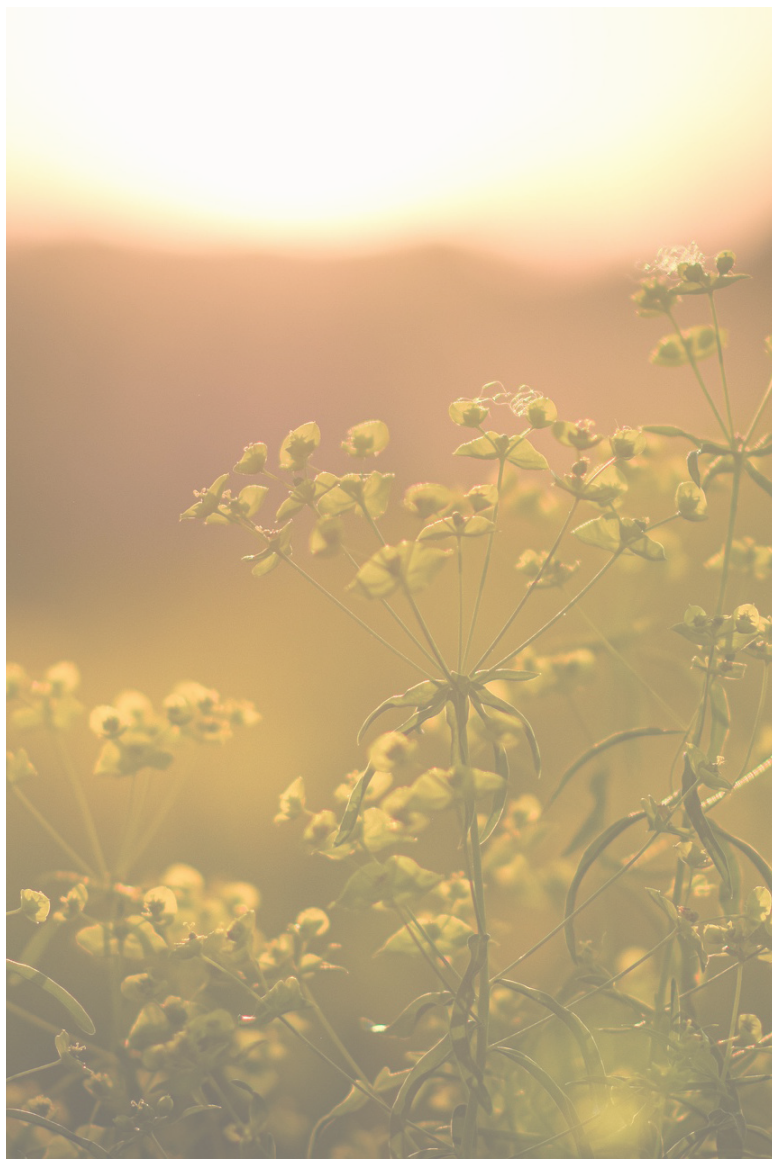
differently—enough for me to start with Jesus when teaching my children.

I am reading through the Bible for the first time this year, and I came across a passage in Judges that broke my heart. I read about one of the first (of several) times that we witness Israel disobey God. Joshua had taken over leadership of God's people and seen them into the Promised Land. The generation of God's people who saw ALL that God did in the days of Moses passed shortly after Joshua died. Then Scripture says this in Judges 2:10: "After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the LORD or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel..." Read that again, girl. The chapter goes on to say that they "abandoned" God. Can you believe that?! Take a guess as to why

this happened. Another generation grew up and did not know God... because they were not taught about God or anything He had done FOR them. So, so sad.

One of my deepest prayers is that this will not be said about my generation. With the Lord's help, I WILL tell my children what He has done for me. For us. And I believe that, as mothers of this next generation, that is our job. We get to prayerfully tell our children about Who Jesus is, what He sacrificed for us, and how He tore the veil so that we can have unlimited, intimate access to the Father. We get to house the Holy Spirit and be guided by Him as our Helper. This job is so important, so hard, but so sacred. Whatever season we are in, we can do this for our children and our children's children. We've got this, mamas!





Journal

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FORGIVENESS IN SHOE LEATHER

“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.”

JEREMIAH 1:5

by Susan Litchford

Several years ago, as the principal of a small private high school, I was substituting for the Spanish teacher who was out for a month. The class was small, the video boring, and the homework assignment large. When I gave the homework, one student, who always seemed to labor under a burden of “that’s not fair” or some form of negativity or disappointment, picked up her stack of books, slammed them on the desk, and spewed her anger and disgust. The “I am the principal of this school” attitude arose in me, and my thoughts sprang to what form of fear I could instill in her, followed by appropriate punishment...just enough to make the point but not alienate the class.

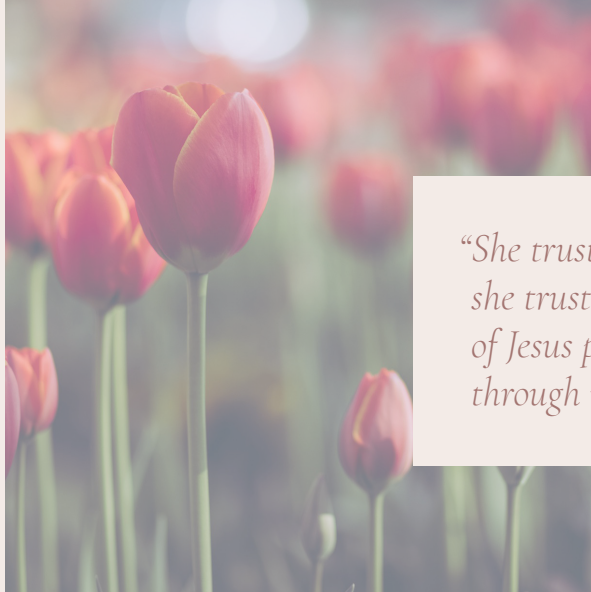
Before my mouth could open, the oddest thing happened. I felt a sort of tap to attention on the top of my head, and God inaudibly spoke, “I love her.” With a snarky attitude, as in, “God, you are bothering me right now,” I replied to that quiet voice inside, “I love her too.” Then, right

on the heels of that tap, He stated, “She’s my treasure.” Internally I blurted back, “She’s my treasure too.”

At that moment, from my head down through my mind, will, and emotions, I genuinely loved her too. My whole being loved her, and wisdom showed up in my heart. I looked at the class and said, “Class, is this too much homework?” To which the students replied, “Yes, Mrs. Litchford!”

We agreed on how much homework would be required to keep their grades the same or improve them. Should anyone’s grades drop, we would go back to the heavier workload. My angry student had her head on her books.

I looked at her and said, “Carol, what is going on?” She lifted her head and blurted between the tears that she couldn’t do it anymore. She worked until 9:00 pm, was trying to graduate early, and everything was just too much. Would I forgive her? Because I chose love for her, even with a questionable attitude myself,



“She trusted me, and she trusted the love of Jesus pouring through me.”

love spoke to her now.

I replied, “Carol, of course, I forgive you. Just know that you can always talk to me as a person.”

Carol’s saga continued the next year and a half, but she was not my enemy or a source of irritation; Carol remained a treasure to me. One calm, ordinary day, she wanted to talk to me with my office door closed. She said she had been so ugly to me, but I had been kind, and she asked for forgiveness. Then she disclosed to me her history of trauma. She trusted me, and she trusted the love of Jesus pouring through me. The school rules were the ones I kept, but not with fear

and punishment. Instead, I chose to honor, respect, and love.

Since learning this lesson during those days, my self-test in those situations with difficult people is, “Am I looking past the trash to the treasure in this person? Do I love this person in my life by design, not by accident, the way Jesus loves them...and me?”

God knew you and me before
He formed our beautiful,
unadulterated, loved selves in our
mother’s womb and also all of the
treasured individuals with whom we
get to be in life. Forgiveness wears
shoes and takes steps. May Jesus
bless us with a greater love!

WORTHLESS WONDER WOMAN

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

EPHESIANS 2:10

by Pam Duke

As my husband headed out the door to the store, I looked at him, still in my pajamas, with no makeup on and messy hair, and said, "I'm sorry I'm worthless." Without hesitation, he replied, "You're not worthless." Deep down in my heart, and I mean way deep down, I knew he was right. But, on days like today, I didn't feel anything but worthless. For the past three weeks, I had struggled with physical pain, fatigue, endurance, and overall malaise. In fact, the last couple of days had been really challenging. I attempted to pep myself up by forcing walks and running a few errands but found that did more harm than good. I thought I would feel better if I just got up and did something. Yeah, that didn't happen. In fact, I set myself back. So, after days of being pretty unproductive, I felt worthless. The not-so-great thing about having a chronic illness is the physical struggles wreak havoc on the mind. For me, that equates to my belief of being worthless.

What I have come to realize is the root of my feelings of being worthless are tied to my works and achievements. A successful career equaled worth. Being able to clean the house, do the laundry, run the errands, and cook the meals all in one day while still making it to my kids' events equaled worth. Taking care of others by providing meals and helping with yardwork and housework equaled worth. Leaping tall buildings... just kidding, but you get the idea; going and doing as much as I possibly could for everyone while being successful at it defined my worth. In fact, one year, I received a Mother's Day card praising me for how I was Wonder Woman, and receiving that card was like I had won a million dollars. I displayed it proudly on the kitchen counter. Super healthy, right?!? Now don't mishear me; doing good things to the best of our ability isn't bad. In fact, we are called to do good works (Ephesians 2:10), and one way I show my love is through serving

others. However, it becomes bad when I allow my work to define my worth. Here's a little transparency: I knew way before being diagnosed with Still's disease that I had a messed-up view of what, *or should I say who*, defined my worth. It's obviously still something I battle, but having Still's shone a big spotlight on it. This meant I had to go to work redefining what worth meant, then remind myself of the truth in future battles.

As my husband said, I'm not worthless. And before he ever said it, God did, and I just needed to remind myself of His truth. First, God made me in His image (Genesis 1:27). I could probably stop right there, because as my momma told me, "God didn't make no junk!" But in case being made in His image isn't enough proof that I am not worthless, Psalm 139:13 tells me that God knitted me in my mother's womb. Again, I am His creation; therefore, I ain't junk. And in being His handiwork (Ephesians 2:10), I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). Let that sink in for a minute: We are all fearfully and wonderfully made! Last, I am His beloved (Romans 9:25). God loves me. In fact, He loves **YOU** and me so much that He sent His Son for us

(John 3:16). My worth rests in Jesus. He alone defines me! Not my works. Not other people. Not my social media following, thank goodness for that! Not my awards and trophies or my Wonder Woman card. **Just Jesus!** Jesus defines my worth, and He says I am His beloved! So, on the days when I feel like Worthless Wonder Woman, I just need to dive back into His truth to remind myself who God says I am.

Sweet friend, I don't know if you are in the same kind of battle as I am, but my prayer, if you are looking for anything or anyone outside of Jesus to define your worth, is that you will stop your search at the voice of Jesus. He alone defines you. He says you are loved; you just need to believe. I pray you do!



Journal

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.





HOW TO BE THE PERFECT EVERYTHING

What delight comes to the one who follows God's ways... His passion is to remain true to the Word of "I AM," meditating day and night on the true revelation of light. He will be standing firm like a flourishing tree planted by God's design, deeply rooted by the brooks of bliss, bearing fruit in every season of life. He is never dry, never fainting, ever blessed, ever prosperous.

PSALM 1:1-3

by Martha Gano

If you're anything like me, that title got your attention with a subconscious zing of "Oh hey! Maybe this will tell me what I need to know! Maybe it's a simple answer after all!"

Because again, if you're like me, there's a browser running in the background of your life, constantly searching for how to be the perfect *everything*: Woman. Mom. Wife. Student. Daughter. Sister.

Employee. Christian. Body. You can fill in the blank.

And again, if you're like me, it's not just one of those, but usually most of them. Always searching, always running, even when I don't realize it, and like an open browser constantly spinning, it's consuming energy and bandwidth and focus ALL.THE.TIME.

It's exhausting.

I came across a meme recently that said, "I hate this whole 'women can be gorgeous at 50' narrative. At what age will society stop demanding I try to be a supermodel and let me turn into an old swamp witch, as nature intended?"

I laugh because, if I'm honest, I always thought the goal of life was to be perfect. I thought if I got it all right and put all the right coins into God's cosmic vending machine, then the perfect life would come down the chute. Perfect husband. Perfect marriage. Perfect kids. Perfect home. Perfect career. Perfect health. Perfect me.

And then, in His severe mercy, God let it all fall apart. Because in my heart, I had kind of said, "Hey, thanks for all the gifts, God. I'll take this 'life' thing from here."

That's not actually what He

intended when He created me. He doesn't hand us a "Life" Lego set in a box and send us off with a pat on the back and a "you go figure it out" and a "give God a good show" and a "make me proud!"

If He needed perfect, incredible, or excellent, He pretty much already had all that in the fullness of Himself. His name, after all, is God—the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present, all-amazing One.

"I've realized that I'm already exactly who He made me to be, and my best shot at growing into the fullness of everything He has for me is to listen to Him, rest and relax in Him, and learn to listen to His voice."

to have someone to do the things He couldn't get to. Not someone to save creation gone sour, like He didn't have a plan all along, from the day He put that one tree in the garden that opened up the possibility of bad choices.

He created me in His image to assemble the Lego set of life with me. I'm not alone. If it's going to be, it's not up to me.

My goal is no longer to be perfect, and that's one part of my personal definition of peace. Gone is the constant internal tension. The striving. The anxiety of whether or not I'm getting it right and what other people think about my efforts and results.

I've realized that I'm already exactly who He made me to be, and my best shot at growing into the fullness of everything He has for me is to listen to Him, rest and relax in Him, and learn to listen to His voice.

Like, for example, an apple tree, let's say. Have you ever walked by an apple tree and heard it grunting and groaning with all the incredible effort of making an apple?

We laugh because the apple tree simply does what it was created to do. It is what it was created to be. It sends down roots and draws in

water and nutrients. It opens its leaves to the sun and soaks in life, and as it simply is what it is, it does what its design causes to happen naturally.

What does that look like for you and me? We were made to be in a relationship with God, to walk closely with Him. That hunger is built into us, and if we can learn how to sink our roots deep into who He is and soak in the life that He's constantly pouring into us, how satisfied would our souls be?

Then as we fill up, that same love splashes out onto everyone in my life. Because they're not supposed to be amazed at all my awesomeness; they're supposed to be blown away by the incredible love that fills and flows through me from Him and for them.

And I was made for it.

We can stop all that grunting and groaning. It truly isn't at all about perfection. It's about a relationship that transforms us more and more into our original design, the one built into us from the beginning.



THE GREAT PROVIDER

You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

PSALM 145:16

by Candy Greene

This verse may be short, but it says SO. MANY. THINGS. I read it many months ago and thought, “Wow, that’s good.” Like a flower nurtured by the rainfall, I wanted to soak this verse in and let it feed my soul. I came across it again recently and knew something was in it for me. Or, rather, there were many nuggets of truth in it for me, and I hope they speak to you as well.

First, it reminds me of God’s sovereignty. Colossians 1:16-17 says, “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Phew, that’s a mouthful. Because He was first, nothing was created without Him; He is, in fact, greater than all things. God intentionally and purposefully created us in His image (Genesis 1:27) so that we might inherit the Kingdom of God (Galatians 4:7).

Everything you see was His idea. It all started with Him. And there’s nothing we can do that will surprise Him or catch Him off guard. Several things in my life have surprised me, but not in a good way. Sometimes it gives me peace just knowing that He’s not surprised. He’s already gone before me and faithfully walks with me through every situation.

Secondly, it reminds me of God’s bigness. He’s not small like us. In Job 38:4, God asks Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” We can’t even begin to imagine creating the universe. We will never walk in His shoes. We will never have His wisdom or understanding. Did you catch that in Psalm 145, it says He opens His “hand”? Not “hands” in the plural form. He literally opens one hand and meets our needs. Check out what it also says in Isaiah 40:12: “Who else has held the oceans in his hand?...” Think back to your last beach vacation, and it’s easy to visualize how vast the oceans

are. We can't even come close to comprehending God's size. Isn't it refreshing to know that He's not dependent on us?

Another principle this verse reminds me of is that God is our provider. In Deuteronomy 8, Moses reminds the Israelites of God's physical provision for them: how He led them out of Egypt, provided manna, kept them clothed, and how He was taking them to a new "good" land with abundance. There's something we miss, though, about provision. Sometimes we think our greatest need is physical, but it's actually spiritual. Deuteronomy 8 also mentions God humbled, tested, and disciplined the Israelites for their good. And, in verse 3, we're told, "people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." He wanted to remain their source for everything, physical and spiritual, because He knows best. I can share so many stories of God's provision in my life. I could tell you about how that unexpected check came in the mail at just the right time, and how I opened my Bible and read a verse of Scripture that was so timely and spoke to exactly what I needed.

Last but certainly not least, God is good and trustworthy, and He is for us. On this side of heaven, we'll never be able to comprehend "how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is" for us (Ephesians 3:18). He meets our desires because He is a good and loving father. The verse we all know, John 3:16, tells us that God gave us the greatest gift that has ever been given. Think about the greatest gift you have ever received or given to somebody. Even with the best intent and the seemingly most perfect gift, Matthew 7:11 tells us God's gifts are better.

If you have a need today, take it to the Lord. Because He's sovereign, He already knows what you need, and His plan for you may be greater than what you're asking for. Because He's big, He can handle your request. Because He is our provider, He will meet your needs (even if it looks different than what you requested). And, because He is good, His "desire is to prosper you, and not harm you" (Jeremiah 29:11). Bottom line: He is our source. Everything good is found in Him.





INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION

Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.


1 JOHN 3:18

by Lauren Jendrzejewski

In middle school, there were about 1,000 reasons I should have been someone who fell through the cracks. My family life was a dumpster fire, and I was looking for help and relief in all the wrong places. If I had continued down that path, I would not be here today; it would have been unfortunate but inevitable.

Except, the local church loved me fiercely. My youth pastor was the first person who told me I could be somebody. The older ladies took me to buy school clothes and

brought lasagnas to our house. My neighbor drove me to church every week. They loved me and pursued me when I was someone furthest away from who they “should have” gone after. It totally and radically changed the trajectory of my life. God used the local church to take care of me, to introduce Himself to me, and honestly to save my life. They taught me about Christ and sanctification and that I didn’t have to repeat my parent’s mistakes. So now, as an adult, I don’t have kids yet, but I believe it is my



“They need someone to tell them that Jesus loves them anyway.”

responsibility to fight fiercely for the next generation.

Kids and teenagers are learning so much about the world and forming opinions on everything, especially about faith. Something we say a lot at Bethlehem is, “Whoever fights for the next generation the hardest will get them.” They are searching for meaning and to be loved and wanted. We have an amazing opportunity to show them how much Christ loves them: to be the hands and feet of Jesus! If we have an opportunity to change the course of even one life, it is all worth it. Just imagine how many people that one person will touch in their life.

People often say, “I don’t want to help with middle school (or insert whatever other age) because that was an awful time for me.” Or, “Good luck; I was a horrible kid at that

age.” Exactly! It IS a horrible age! How much of a difference would some support and encouragement make? How impactful would it be for an adult to invest in them despite their behavior or attitude problems? These come from a place of self-consciousness and searching for meaning. They need someone to tell them that Jesus loves them anyway. They need someone to tell them that God wants to use them. And you have the opportunity to be that person!

In a world that tells these kids that they will never be enough, that shoves their flaws down their throats to sell more products, and that feeds them lie after lie from the enemy, God is entrusting us to do holy work. To teach these kids the truth and to be a light when they often need it most.

GOD'S GOODNESS IN UNRELENTING EMOTIONS

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”

MATTHEW 6:26

by **Amanda Lussiana**

Have you ever prayed for something, something good, something in line with God's will, and well, nothing happened? Or worse, maybe it kind of happened, but not like you wanted it to?

It could be a prayer for a husband, a baby, a job, a house, or a cure for cancer. There are endless things that could fall into this category of good things that you prayed for. For me, it was a baby.

Our prayers lined up with what we knew to be the heart of God. Already having a five- and nine-year-old, no one would have expected we might be trying to get pregnant. By all accounts, we appeared to be done making babies. But it was our secret, and a very fun one.

While it was easy to get pregnant with our first two kids, it took a whole year this time. A whole year before we saw “pregnant” on the test. The excitement and

anticipation quickly washed over us.

Unfortunately, it wasn't long before we lost the baby.

And a few months later. Again.

During tremendous grief over what we thought would be and now wouldn't be, I had to wrestle with God's goodness and find peace in the midst of unrelenting emotions.

“How do you navigate difficult emotions when the desires of your heart seem to line up with the heart of our Heavenly Father, yet the pain of this life persists?”

Honestly, I don't know. But I'll share how it's going for me. I have to



worship. I have to worship like my life depends on it. Because it does. This doesn't mean I walk around singing all the time. It means when it rains, I thank God for the rain and how He cares for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:25-34). It means I look for God in the air I breathe. I praise Him for the phone ringing at exactly the right time when a

friend is on the other side giving encouragement. I pray for others in need. I invite Him into my doubt.

I don't know much about God's timing. I know it has rarely lined up with mine. However, I will worship in the mess. I will worship in the middle. Will you join me? How can you worship Him in a new way today?

Journal

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.



MOTHERHOOD THROUGH THE SEASONS

Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

PSALM 143:8

by Betsy Jones


Where does the time go? The motherhood season of life is forever but always changing. I loved the early years when my kids were younger. Don't get me wrong; there were hard days and sleepless nights, but I wouldn't trade it for anything. Children are such a blessing from the Lord; sometimes, we need to be reminded of that.

Each stage or phase of your child's life has ups and downs, but choosing to have joy even in the toughest times is important. A young mom is told to enjoy all the moments, which is true; hard to do sometimes in the middle of all the chaos, but oh so worth it.

Being a mom in the next stage of life, with one son in college and one about to graduate from high school, feels scary and hard to believe that we are already here. We continue learning how to parent, even as we let go. Your heart and your head

are pulled in different directions as you allow them to grow up and try new things, but you also want to still be a part of their next steps. They have to experience their independence, whether good or bad, but this allows a better relationship if we allow them to learn things on their own. Every phase can be scary because of the unknown. Trust is a big part of parenting and is hard at every stage. Knowing that our kids are His anyways and that He has given us a gift to be able to take care of can seem like a huge responsibility, and it is.

As seasons change, our love does not. No matter what stage you are in with your children, trust that God is in control and knows their future. God has asked us to lead our families daily. We won't always get it right, but He only asks us to follow His ways. We can only do that through complete trust in Him. Enjoy all the moments!



“They have to experience their independence, whether good or bad, but this allows a better relationship if we allow them to learn things on their own.”

PEACE IN HARDSHIP

*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those
who are crushed in spirit.*

PSALM 34:18

by Laura Jones

Last year was a hard year for our family. Between the deaths of some very close family members, illness and surgeries that hospitalized my husband, and the loss of other important relationships in our lives, it was just plain difficult. Our lives completely changed in an instant, and we had some tough questions for God - Why would He allow this? Why would He take our loved ones from us? What good could possibly come out of this? What WAS His plan for us? We thought we were following His plan for our lives, but suddenly, it felt like the plan had changed. We were mad. We were hurting. We felt lost, alone, and confused.

Through community and lots of prayer, we started to see glimmers of hope over time. God slowly revealed more and more of His plan for us. Someone would say something encouraging in passing or offer a Bible verse here and there. Over and over again, we

saw reminders of God's goodness and His perfect timing. The plans we were trying to make weren't working out as we thought, but it was because God had something much bigger in store for us. We finally started to find peace in His promises for us.

There are a few Scriptures that we dwelled on last year and continue to go back to when the enemy tries to steal our peace:

1. Psalms 34:18 says, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." It's easy to feel broken and alone in the middle of hardship. But God is always by our side! He never leaves us and wants us to come to Him with our troubles.
2. Matthew 11:28-29 tells us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle

and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Weary and burdened? Yep! That hit the nail on the head! But God gives us rest. He is gentle, humble, and provides everything we need.

3. Jeremiah 29:11-13 says “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.’”. Sometimes this verse gets thrown out to people looking for a new career. But look at it again. It says He doesn’t plan to harm us. He wants to give us hope and a future. Go to Him with ALL of your heart. He is listening!

Friends, some of you may be facing some tough circumstances in your life right now. God doesn’t promise us a life full of sunshine and rainbows. Life is HARD. But know that God does promise us that He is always close to the brokenhearted. He promises that He has a better plan for our lives than we could ever imagine, and He is always with us.

Rest in Him. Take comfort in His promises. He is listening to you. He is not disappointed or angry with you because of your struggles or hardships. He is our perfect Father who loves us unconditionally.

I pray that you, too, can find peace in His promises.

“Our lives completely changed in an instant, and we had some tough questions for God - Why would He allow this? Why would He take our loved ones from us? What good could possibly come out of this? What WAS His plan for us?”



Journal

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

SEEING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN THE UNEXPECTED

*"See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
And streams in the wasteland."*

ISAIAH 43:19

by Savannah Clarke

In the spring of 2020, I got engaged the same weekend Covid-19 shut the world down. The peak of unpredictability happened in the season of life that I had pictured and practiced 1,000 times.

I just kept hearing the line from Bethlehem's worship song "It Ain't Over," where it says, "Your ways are better than mine." I'd hear it each time my mind went blank. In every mundane space of life. I thought, "Sure, God, Your ways are better than mine, but mine are OK... let's meet in the middle here, please. I know You can provide me with what I need. I know You hold the future, but I just can't see it right now."

And then my gut knew something was up, and I got the gift of two little pink lines on a pregnancy test... 35 days after my wedding day. It was unexpected. What a gift! But

my brand new husband and I were terrified. Unsure. Can we trust that God gave us this for a reason? Could it be OK that I am shocked, scared, and maybe even disappointed with this gift? This is not my plan, not what I intentionally asked for.

I know now, only three years later, that His ways are actually better than mine. He sees the whole picture and knows my feelings. And there is room for joy and grieving in the same situation. I have to choose gratitude daily for the gift I had not planned on receiving.

*Your ways are better than mine.
Your late is right on time.*

Wherever these words find you, in whatever joy AND pain you are sitting in right now, breathe in that He is holding that situation in His hands. He is not surprised or turned upside down, as you may feel.



FOR STAY-AT-HOME MOMS

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

COLOSSIANS 3:2

by Nan Britt

You may find yourself in a time of your life where you are staying at home with a new baby, little ones, or older kids. You may have stepped away from a career or just shifted into an entirely new season of life. However, you have entered into

this new phase, and it is one where you can easily feel discouraged and insecure. Amidst so much uncertainty, there is no greater time in our lives when we must stand firm on a foundation of faith. What are some practical ways we do this?

We must make a daily choice to set our mind on things above and not on earthly things.

It is important first to understand that you are always on the receiving end of two opposing messages that are informing who you are and how you live that out.

As followers of Jesus, you and your family belong to God's Kingdom. You must recognize that the world's kingdom (culture) is telling you a false message and measuring who you are and what you do very differently. Our culture measures success by accomplishment, outward appearances, efficiency, performance, career goals, promotion of self, money, and status, to name a few. It is critical to be aware of this to guard what you allow your mind to consume. It is fair to say that voices in culture, social media, podcasts, books, and the latest trends measure you as a mom by these standards. Clearly, this is not a time in your life where the speed, productivity, and pace of your home or you as an individual are scoring high on this list. If you allow this message to inform who you are, it is easy to see how quickly you can become defeated, discouraged, envious, jealous, or discontent. Let's take it one step

further. As a mom, you may be carrying unnecessary burdens or expectations from these cultural voices that have not even earned a place of respect or trust in your life.

Let me share the other message informing you who you are - and it is great news! God's Kingdom measures success by living a life of surrender, admitting that we need Him. This message tells you that your value and worth first come from God; it is not earned or based on your status. Receiving salvation and following the example of Jesus puts you in a place to serve your family and others, forgive others, and walk in humility. God's presence with you, His Holy Spirit, produces fruit in your life - the immeasurables! Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. When God's message informs your identity, your heart and mind are filled with peace, contentment, and perseverance, even amid the slow and steady journey of motherhood.

So today, consider how you are measuring success in your home. What messages are you listening to and allowing to fill your heart and mind?

Journal

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

YOUR THOUGHTS MATTER

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5

by Emma Parker

Sitting at a little table in Cracker Barrel a few years ago, I was battling anxiety and overcome by worry and, to be completely honest, depression. I was sad and broken, and even though my life was awesome, and I smiled and carried on as if nothing was wrong, my thoughts were a mess. Only those closest to me knew the internal battle I was experiencing. I loved Jesus and praised and worshiped Him, but I depended on my own strength. I was weak in the battle of spiritual warfare because I was fighting it on my own. I remember talking to my husband over dinner, and he said something I will always hold on to: "God's Word wouldn't say to take our thoughts captive if we couldn't do it."

That was a moment of awakening for me. That changed me. Taking

our thoughts captive with the help of Jesus and aligning them with the Word is imperative to living a life full of JOY and PEACE. This is something that I will forever be learning and working on. If you are in a dark place or feel numb, hold on to Jesus and give Him your thoughts. Give Him your worries. I promise you that you will experience clarity like never before. Arm yourself with Scripture and praise Him even when you don't feel like it because He is good and faithful. It's OK if you don't do everything. Busyness is not a badge of honor. There is no award for being overexerted or saying yes to everyone asking something of you. Give yourself time to pray and give it all to God. Be kind and watch things fall into place.

WHY GODLY COMMUNITY MATTERS

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10

by Holly Peters

God's design for us to be in community overflows from His kindness, goodness, and love for us. Many of us are afraid to seek out community due to past relationships gone wrong or wounds from our past. These feelings are valid. However, I can't say enough about the importance of surrounding yourself with other believers who will pray for you, encourage you, do life with you, and lovingly correct you. Being in a community of believers has been a big part of my story, and I want others to experience the full and abundant life that Jesus offers us.

Small groups are essential to how our church achieves community. How refreshing and encouraging it is to be around other believers and to prioritize going to group every week! I've learned much in a small group, including how to serve my local church best. God

has taught me how He has gifted me specifically and how much joy I have while serving. I've also learned how important it is to generously give back to God by tithing consistently and regularly to my local church so that the church can function the way God designed it.

I've learned Who the Holy Spirit is and His role in my life. I've learned to read and study the Bible and pray for myself and others. Being involved in a small group has taught me the importance of accountability, especially when I don't want it but need it most, by becoming friends with other believers who will sharpen me. I have learned much from those who are further along in their walks with Jesus by studying God's Word, sharing our stories, and hearing about God's faithfulness.

God designed us to be in community; we weren't created

to do life alone. We get to rejoice and mourn with one another. We can only do this if we're in close relationships with other believers. Beyond that, Jesus calls us to serve one another in love just as He served us. Doing life together allows us to honor and forgive one another just as Christ did for us. We learn these things together in community by putting Christ's teachings into practice. The enemy wants to devour, steal, kill, and destroy us. In community, we fight together alongside one another. We cannot fight the enemy alone.

Jumping into a small group can be intimidating, but I encourage you to do it anyway and see the Lord work

in your life. The rewards definitely outweigh the risks! Maybe you think you don't have time, but I encourage you to make joining a group a priority and see how much it blesses you. Being vulnerable with others can be challenging and scary, but I want to encourage you to be open and see how freeing it is to be seen and known by others. God wants you to be in a close relationship with Him and other believers. God loves us too much to let us do life alone. He is always with us, and He wants us to stick together as sisters in Christ as we navigate this world until we finally get to meet Jesus face to face.



“Doing life together allows us to honor and forgive one another just as Christ did for us.”

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