

Encouragement from the Voices of WaterBrook & Multnomah

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

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# LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

Best-selling author of The Women of Christmas

# Women Easter



Encounter the Savior with

Mary of Bethany, Mary of Nazareth,

and Mary Magdalene







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# LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

# Women Easter

Encounter the Savior with

Mary of Bethany, Mary of Nazareth,

and Mary Magdalene



### THE WOMEN OF EASTER

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Hardcover ISBN 978-1-60142-682-6 eBook ISBN 978-1-60142-683-3

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Cover design by Kelly L. Howard; photography by Georgianna Lane

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Higgs, Liz Curtis, author.

Title: The women of Easter: encounter the Savior with Mary of Bethany, Mary of Nazareth, and Mary Magdalene / Liz Curtis Higgs.

Description: First Edition. | Colorado Springs, Colorado : WaterBrook, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016044824 (print) | LCCN 2016046540 (ebook) | ISBN 9781601426826 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781601426833 (electronic)

Subjects: LCSH: Women in the Bible. | Mary, of Bethany, Saint. | Mary, Blessed Virgin, Saint. | Mary Magdalene, Saint. | Jesus Christ—Friends and associates.

Classification: LCC BS2445 .H54 2017 (print) | LCC BS2445 (ebook) | DDC 232.9/7082—dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016044824

Printed in the United States of America

2017—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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To my big sisters, Sarah Schwarz and Mary Dickinson, remembering our Easter mornings together, when we wore hats and gloves and Mom-made dresses.

Thanks for welcoming me into the family (even though we all know how that turned out).

Much love to you, dearies, every season of the year.

XOX

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# At the Cross Her Station Keeping

ary could hardly bear to look at her son, yet she couldn't take her eyes off Him. The face she'd scrubbed clean a thousand times was almost unrecognizable, so misshapen were His features. His head fell limp to the side, and His eyes were barely open, encrusted with blood and filth.

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, . . . John 19:25

She'd heard Him make a promise to the condemned man who hung beside Him. Could her son still hear? Still speak?

We can almost feel Mary's heart breaking and sense her thoughts, her emotions. Perhaps she remembered David weeping for his son—"My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you"1—and then nodded to herself, a fresh spate of tears running down her cheeks. Mary surely knew she never could have survived the scourging, the beating, the torturous crown of thorns. But, like any mother, she would have tried. For her son, she would have tried.

Her sister was there, perhaps resting a hand on her shoulder,

offering unspoken comfort. On this terrible day—worse than any she'd ever imagined—Mary no doubt drew strength from God above and from the women who remained by her side.

# ... his mother's sister, ... John 19:25

The Lord's "aunt" (TLB) is not named here in John. Over the centuries some scholars have identified her as Salome, in part because a woman named Salome was present at the cross on Friday and at Jesus's grave on Sunday morning. But to assume that Salome was Mary's sister would rest "on supposition built on supposition and cannot be held as any more than a possibility." However, we can be very certain of one thing: her nearness in this wretched scene assures us this unnamed woman cared deeply for Mary and would not let her suffer alone.

When my mother-in-law passed away while I was en route to a weekend conference, I immediately reached out to my closest friends who are also speakers, asking for their prayers. It's deeply instinctive, the need to share our grief, to seek solace from those who know us best and fully understand the situation. My friends buoyed my spirits just as Mary's sister must have comforted her.

On the crowded, dirty thoroughfare outside the city walls, strangers walked by her nephew, Jesus, hanging on the cross and gaped at Him, mocked Him, and degraded Him. She surely felt as helpless as Mary. And yet together these sisters stood and withstood. They didn't crouch in fear, they didn't turn their backs, they didn't slump on the ground in defeat, and they assuredly didn't walk away. They stood.

God calls us to do the same. To stand. To believe. To wait. To trust. "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let

nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."<sup>3</sup>

Help us stand and withstand, Father. Help us be like these women.

Earlier we saw four soldiers casting lots. Now we'll watch "four women keeping faith." Others were present, but these four stood especially close to the cross. Supporting one another. Supporting their Savior.

Along with Mary and her sister stood yet another Mary.

... Mary the wife of Clopas, ... John 19:25

The fact that we're given her name is noteworthy. And we're grateful to know who her husband was, just to keep all the Marys straight. Clopas was an Israelite, whose only claim to fame was being the husband of this particular Mary. No small thing, considering she must have been a woman of deep faith and strong loyalty, based on her presence that day.

One more brave woman stood among them.

... and Mary Magdalene. John 19:25

Famous or infamous, she was a woman to be reckoned with. No listing of children and no mention of a husband suggest that Mary was an independent woman of some means, allowing her a measure of freedom rare in that day. Mary Magdalene traveled with the followers of Christ, several of whom shared her spirit-filled history.

Luke's gospel gives us a glimpse of her past.

The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) . . . Luke 8:1-2

These "certain women" (KJV) who were "in their company" (MSG) were rather, um, special. They were females "from whom he had cast out demons or whom he had healed" (TLB). You'll recognize the Greek word for "cure"—therapeu65—as the source of our modern word therapeutic.

Rather than music therapy or art therapy, Jesus excelled at demon therapy, delivering those who were tormented by "wicked spirits" (WYC). Interesting that the Lord cured demon possession in the same way He healed "illnesses" (CJB) and "infirmities" (ESV): efficiently and effectively. Jesus "drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick." One word and these women were made whole, made new. No wonder they followed Him!

Mary Magdalene was known by her hometown, "the city of Magdala" (AMP). The place is little more than rubble today, barely noticeable "on the coast of the Sea of Galilee near Tiberias."7 Many writers and artists have portrayed Mary Magdalene as a harlot, but the Bible never calls her that (trust me, I've looked!). What the Word *does* tell us is that she was once possessed.

> ... from whom seven demons had come out; ... Luke 8:2

Seven is the number of perfection or completion. Mary Magdalene had been filled to the brim with those "seven evil spirits" (PHILLIPS). Her deliverance isn't described beyond this assurance that "seven demons had been expelled" (AMPC). The end.

As one of Jesus's most faithful followers, Mary Magdalene is mentioned by name *fourteen times* across all four gospel accounts. Extraordinary for any biblical character, but especially for a female in that culture. Now she stood with this impressive group of women—loyal, fearless, willing to do whatever was necessary to support their beloved Rabbi, even if it meant watching every agonizing minute of His execution.

Ancient tradition also places Martha and Mary of Bethany at the cross.<sup>8</sup> Certainly they were worthy of being present. They'd listened to His teaching, provided Him with lodging and meals, and anointed Him with oil of spikenard. Since Jesus loved both women and they worshiped Him in return, it's no stretch to imagine the Bethany sisters being there.

All around them were women who shared their faith, gazing at the cross from beneath their linen head coverings, unable to contain their grief, standing as close as they dared. When an enemy of the state was crucified, it was unsafe for family and friends to tarry nearby lest they be given the same terrible punishment for their innocent support of the condemned. These women were brave indeed, risking death to behold His sacrifice.

It's one thing to see a loved one quietly pass from this world to the next. It's quite another to be present at a brutal execution, watching a beloved friend writhe in agony, struggling for every breath.

Could I watch You suffer, Lord? Could I stand so near?

Roman crosses were no more than nine feet tall, so the feet of the condemned would have been about a yard above the ground. That meant Jesus could see the women's expressions and hear their anguished voices.

"Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" These women

had an answer. They were there. They were present. They were faithful. They didn't desert their Lord, as many had. If they looked away, we have no record of it. Even though their tears could not cleanse His wounds, the women were there. Even though their prayers could not stanch His bleeding, the women were there.

One commentator, reporting the reality of that era, wrote that women were "not highly regarded in Jewish society." 11 Even so, they were highly regarded by God. He observed their compassion, noted their courage, and treasured them as His daughters.

From the cross Jesus fixed His gaze on the woman who loved Him most.

When Jesus saw his mother there, . . . John 19:26

The Son of God had looked into Mary's eyes as a nursing infant and walked toward her outstretched arms as a toddling child. Now He watched her weeping in despair, a widow about to lose her firstborn son.

How did You bear it, Lord? How did she?

Next to Mary stood His beloved disciple, John—the only one of the Eleven named among the witnesses that day at Golgotha.

> ... and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, ... Iohn 19:26

Looking at both of them, Jesus finally spoke.

... he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," ... John 19:26

We sense the tenderness in His voice. "Dear woman" (NCV) or "dear lady" (ISV) captures it best. It's a personal word, a relational word, often translated as "wife." His love for His mother was abundantly clear. Aware of the invisible sword piercing her heart, Jesus tended to her wound in the best way possible—assuring her that she was not alone, that she would be cared for, provided for, and loved.

"Behold, thy son!" (ASV). Perhaps the apostle John was physically supporting Mary lest she collapse in grief. They were both close enough to hear Jesus above the murmuring crowd. "This man is now your son" (CEV), Jesus said.

Did Mary's heart skip a beat? There's a difference between knowing someone is dying and truly accepting that death is imminent. Perhaps for Mary that reality became painfully clear at that moment. She had a new son, because the son of her womb would soon be gone.

Jesus spoke directly to John as well.

... and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." *John* 19:27

The Lord once said those who followed Him were His true family.<sup>13</sup> This loving gesture at the cross must have reassured Mary that He still treasured her as His mother. He had not abandoned her and never would. Through this act of loving-kindness, "Jesus fulfilled one of the greatest commandments in the Torah: the commandment to honor one's parents."<sup>14</sup>

With her husband, Joseph, apparently no longer living and her resources likely meager, Mary could not manage alone. "Protect and provide for her" (AMP), Jesus instructed John. "She is now your mother" (CEV).

From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. *John 19:27* 

Since this is from John's gospel, written near the end of his earthly life, he could confirm that the Lord's final request was honored. The word *home* isn't in the original Greek; it's only implied. But John did something more tender still. He took Mary not only into his house but also into his heart. "From that moment the disciple accepted her as his own mother" (MSG), just as the Lord intended.

Then at high noon—the sixth hour of the Jewish day—darkness fell.

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. *Matthew 27:45* 

Centuries earlier "Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days." In a similar way, God stretched out His hand, and total darkness covered all Israel "from noon until three o'clock in the afternoon" (CJB). Whether the darkness arrived all at once or moved across the hills and plains of Judea like an approaching storm, "the whole earth was dark" (CEB) for *three full hours*. The black of night covered the light of day, even as the Light of the World bore the darkness of our sin.

Perhaps the crowd fell silent, afraid to move, dreading the

possibility of what might happen next. Were all ten plagues about to be visited upon Israel? Locusts and boils and far worse?

"Blackness hints at the deep judgment that was taking place." <sup>16</sup> Beneath the thick blanket of darkness, Jesus was held accountable for the countless sins of God's people. Those unmentionable things we did last month, last year, last decade? That thoughtless act we're going to do next week? Jesus paid the penalty for every one of those sins. All of them, for all time.

The punishment we just witnessed—the beating, the flogging, the mocking, the crown of thorns—was only the start. The worst of His torture came in the dark, when no one could see. Just as Satan tempted Him in the wilderness, <sup>17</sup> perhaps he tempted Jesus now under the cover of darkness. We can only imagine the evil schemes he used against the Lord to keep Him from completing His redemptive work. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world."<sup>18</sup>

For three more hours Jesus wrestled with the weight of our sin, with the designs of the Enemy, and with the silence from heaven.

When the end came, His anguished voice pierced the

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). Matthew 27:46

Alone. Jesus was alone.

The spiritual and emotional impact of the Son's complete separation from the Father is beyond the grasp of our finite minds.

"Why have you abandoned me?" (NCV), Jesus cried out.

No reply.

And yet, look how His words, drawn from the psalms, 19 begin: "My God, my God." In the original Greek, it's "God of me, God of me."20 Despite the silence from heaven, Jesus knew God was still His Father. "Even in the depth of his sufferings God was his God "21

What a word for us, beloved. Even when God seems far away, even when God is silent, He is still our Father, He is still our God, and He is still at work in our lives.

> Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." John 19:28

Again His words were drawn from the psalms: "For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."22 So Jesus, in obedience to His Word, said, "I thirst" (AMPC). Even the smallest prophecy came to fruition in Him.

> Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. Matthew 27:48

Water would have been better to relieve His parched mouth. Yet Jesus drank.

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." *John 19:30* 

Not "I am finished," but "it is finished." His supreme sacrifice was over. His mighty work of redemption was done. He came to earth to do the will of His Father, and He had accomplished that. Every pen stroke of His Word was fulfilled by Jesus's obedience.

In Greek the word translated as "finished" means "to bring to an end, complete, fulfill."<sup>23</sup> By His death Jesus abolished the ceremonial Law and all its obligations, stamping them *paid in full.* 

At last He could leave behind His ravaged body and put His spirit in safe hands.

Jesus called out with a loud voice, . . . Luke 23:46

He "gave a great cry" (PHILLIPS) with a supernatural strength accessible to Him now that He and the Father were reunited. This is what He shouted:

... "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." *Luke* 23:46

The last words He spoke were from the first line of Psalm 31:5, written by His ancestor David a thousand years earlier. To the very end Jesus demonstrated His sovereignty. When He said, "I put my life in your hands!" (ERV), He alone chose the time of His death. His life was not taken but given, then entrusted to His Father. "Into thine hands I commend my spirit" (GNV).

When he had said this, he breathed his last. Luke 23:46

His head slumped forward, and His arms, which were stretched across the wooden crosspiece, went limp as Jesus "gave up the ghost" (ASV) and "breathed forth the spirit" (YLT). Beautiful, poetic phrasing, but the translation closest to the original Greek is "He expired" (AMPC).

Yes. It is finished.

Those words land in my heart like a stone. We know how He died and why He died, but heavenly Father, did it have to be like this? So much pain and anguish! Is that what it took to break our yoke of sin?

Yes. And it is finished.

At that moment . . . Matthew 27:51

No sooner had the breath left His body than "lo!" (wyc) a remarkable chain of events was put into motion. "Suddenly" (ISV) some distance away at the temple in Jerusalem, "behold" (KJV) a miracle.

> ... the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Matthew 27:51

Imagine fine linen cloth, thickly woven with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, summarily "rent in twain" (KJV). If you've ever tried to tear, say, denim with your bare hands, you know what a feat of strength this was. No one but God Himself could have ripped the inner veil in two, starting at the top and tearing "all the way down to the bottom" (ICB).

Not only did this allow access to the Most Holy Place, where only the high priest had been permitted to go, and only once a year,<sup>24</sup> but the torn curtain also invited "open access to God."<sup>25</sup> No more separation. No more blood sacrifices. No more fear of death.

Because of Jesus, we can stand in God's holy presence and live!

And that was only the beginning.

The earth shook, the rocks split . . . *Matthew 27:51* 

Oh my. "The earth did quake, and the rocks were rent" (YLT). Jerusalem lies on a major fault line that rivals the San Andreas fault and has suffered many damaging earthquakes over the centuries. But none quite like this one when Jesus struck "the fatal blow . . . to the devil's kingdom." <sup>26</sup>

... and the tombs broke open. Matthew 27:52

Picture thousands of graves scattered across the Mount of Olives since the time of David suddenly breaking apart. To onlookers it must have appeared "the graves did open themselves" (GNV).

While the earth was quaking, the guards were shaking.

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, . . . *Matthew 27:54* 

If these men were able to see what was happening, then the darkness had vanished as quickly as it had appeared, just in time for them to watch the solid ground buckle and huge rocks split open. No wonder they were "extremely frightened" (LEB).

> ... and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" Matthew 27:54

When the Roman soldiers blurted out, "This was certainly God's Son" (CEB), you can be sure those were not their own words. Rather, they were provided by the Holy Spirit, since "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."27

Undone, the crowd "returned to their homes, beating their breasts,"28 a sign of repentance. After the darkness and then the earthquake, they had seen quite enough of this Jesus.

Now that He was gone, His followers no longer had a reason to tarry at the cross. His body did not belong to them. Pontius Pilate decided when and how the remains of the condemned were handled. Some bodies were taken down and left on the ground. Others were placed on a trash heap,<sup>29</sup> further extending the cruel and inhumane treatment inflicted by Rome.

Even so, the women remained.

They were farther away from the cross by this point in the afternoon. Perhaps they, too, had started for home but couldn't bear the thought of leaving Him and instead chose to stay.

> Many women were there, watching from a distance. Matthew 27:55

We don't know how many women were on hand. "Numerous" (AMPC) or "quite a few" (MSG) doesn't tell us much. Nor do we have any measure of how "afar off" ( $\kappa J V$ ) they were, "beholding" ( $\kappa J V$ ) the chaotic scene.

Matthew reminds his readers who these women were and why they'd come.

They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. *Matthew 27:55* 

I love the phrase "ministering to Him" (AMP). As if they were returning the favor, using the gifts they'd been given by Him.

Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons. *Matthew 27:56* 

Mary Magdalene is given pride of place here—older, wiser, devoted to her Lord. When Jesus set Mary free from her demons, her soul was His forever. By her side was Mary, the mother of James the disciple and his brother Joses or Joseph—same person, different spelling. And Salome, the wife of Zebedee and mother to his sons.<sup>30</sup>

I know. It's hard to keep all these women straight. What's amazing is that they're even mentioned. All four gospel writers captured the Lord's desire to honor these women—listing them, often naming them, and anchoring them in their families and communities.

As we shift to the book of John, we sense the forward motion in this journey. The sadness, the darkness, was receding as the women prepared, however unknowingly, for Easter. Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. John 19:31

The Sabbath would begin at sunset, about six o'clock.<sup>31</sup> At the scene of the execution, the legs of the two criminals were broken to hasten their deaths—a mercy of sorts—because the Jewish leaders didn't want the bodies to remain on the crosses after the start of the Sabbath.

> But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. John 19:33

This, too, was an unwitting mercy and a fulfillment of prophecy: "He [the LORD] protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken."32 Before Jesus's grieving followers could breathe a sigh of relief that His body was spared, a soldier reached for his lance, determined to make the Lord's death a certainty.

> One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. John 19:34

A line from a hymn comes to mind: "Sorrow and love flow mingled down."33 Yes. Great sorrow. Even greater love.

His body was not the only thing pierced. Surely Mary's heart also felt the point of that spear as she looked on in horror. What could be more devastating than watching her child executed for a crime He did not commit and then seeing His lifeless body mistreated?

This was God's Son and hers. Even at that terrible hour, Mary did not forsake Him.

The prophet Zechariah foretold this too: "They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."<sup>34</sup>

In the hours that followed, John may have escorted Mary to his lodging place, since we have no record of her presence in the next scene.

As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. *Matthew 27:57* 

Twilight lengthened the shadows as Joseph, "one of Jesus' followers" (TLB), appeared. He was "a prominent member of the Council,"<sup>35</sup> a member of the Sanhedrin, so we can be certain "his discipleship was secret."<sup>36</sup> Even so, this wealthy man, "who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body."<sup>37</sup>

Never mind Joseph's power and wealth. His request took a lot of courage. Wisely, he brought with him another man who was also a member of the Jewish ruling council<sup>38</sup> and a follower of Christ. His name was Nicodemus, and he came bearing gifts.

Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. *John 19:39* 

You read that correctly. *Seventy-five pounds*. Not pure nard, like Mary of Bethany's pound of ointment, but still costly. And heavy. Nicodemus arrived "bearing a medley of myrrh and aloes" (wyc), a generous offering.

Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. *John 19:40* 

Rather than covering His body with a single burial shroud, they "bound it in linen wrappings" (AMP). "It." This was no longer Jesus—only His lifeless body. Even though He was killed by Jews and mockingly called King of the Jews, Joseph and Nicodemus still followed "the burial custom of the Jews" (ESV).

At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, ... John 19:41

The story of humankind began in a garden, and so to a garden we return. Don't you love how the Lord fits everything together in a billion-piece puzzle only He can assemble? The first man and woman were born in the Garden of Eden. Now all God's people can be born again because of what was about to happen in this garden, this "grove of trees" (TLB) near the cross.

Where life became death, death will become life.

A sense of excitement is building inside me. *Is it Sunday yet?* We're so ready, Lord!

... and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. *John 19:41* 

Not a natural cave then, but a tomb "cut out of solid rock" (AMP) at some expense. "A new sepulcher" (GNV) that had "never been used before" (EXB). Every detail matters. The new, unused

tomb meant the Lord's flesh would not come in contact with anything corrupt. Even in death this Jewish law was observed.

... [Joseph] placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. *Matthew 27:60* 

The grave is identified as belonging to Joseph of Arimathea. Was he ill, making preparations for his death? Or was he the sort of man who planned ahead? Whatever reason Joseph might offer, we know this was God's perfect timing at work. A clean, empty tomb was needed for His Son, and here it was.

He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. *Matthew 27:60* 

Instead of a round, globe-shaped stone, this was a large, flat disc, rolled into place along a downward groove cut into the ground in front of the tomb. Such a design made the stone easy to roll into place and almost impossible to move. Almost.

The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. *Luke 23:55* 

Really, have you ever seen such perseverance? They stayed and they stayed and they stayed. This is one of the most important lessons these women teach us. Wherever He leads, follow Jesus. Whatever pain you are enduring, keep your eyes on Jesus. Even when hope seems gone, stay close to Jesus.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb. Matthew 27:61

Like Mary of Bethany sitting shivah, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary—the one with the sons whose names both start with the letter /—were seated across from the closed tomb. Since "no mourning was permitted for those executed under Roman law,"39 the women had to grieve in silence. No loud wailing, as was the custom.

Although the Lord had promised His followers He would rise again in three days, it must have been hard to see past the truth right in front of them: a tomb with the body of a young man who died in His early thirties. Focused on the inescapable facts before them, the women could not fathom the joy that would be theirs on the third day.

Jesus had repeatedly told His disciples this was going to happen. He'd also shown them resurrection was possible by raising Lazarus and others before him. Yet even when the evidence is clear, the most faithful among us, like these women, sometimes miss the truth. We believe only what we can understand or explain, only what seems possible, only what we can see.

Help us take the leap of faith that Easter requires, Lord. Help us believe.

Though Nicodemus had already anointed the Lord's body with myrrh and aloes, the women wanted to do their part. But the sun was setting, and the Sabbath was about to begin. Nothing more could be done at the tomb.

> Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. Luke 23:56

With little time left before *Shabbat*, the women quickly gathered the myrrh and other natural unguents needed for burial, mindful of the approaching darkness, careful to honor God's Word.

But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment. *Luke 23:56* 

How the waiting must have grieved them! Wanting to visit His resting place, wanting to pay their respects, wanting to anoint His body with "some sweet-smelling spices for his burial" (CEV).

Considering the large stone that Joseph of Arimathea had rolled in front of the Lord's tomb, I'm curious how the women planned to get inside. But they were not thinking about obstacles. They were thinking about Jesus.

Our sisters counted the hours until Saturday at sundown. Only then, after a full day of keeping the Sabbath holy, were they free to make their move.

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome . . . *Mark 16:1* 

Are these women coming into focus for you? We're given no physical descriptions of them in the Bible. No body types, no hair colors, no skin tones, no prominent features. If we're not careful, we might paint them all with the same brush.

Yet God saw them as unique, one of a kind. Not based on their outward appearance, which is often our main focus, but on their hearts, His only focus. God looks at us not as blondes or brunettes or redheads or silver-haired saints, not as tall or short market they went.

or big or small, not as gorgeous or pretty or average or homely. Those distinctions are human, not divine, and meaningless in the end.

What matters to God is the relationship we have with Him. The simplicity of it steals my breath. *That's it, Lord?* That's it. So we turn to our first-century role models and watch them express their love for Him through their actions on Saturday evening, prompted by the Holy Spirit. Apparently they didn't think they had sufficient oils and ointments on hand, so off to the night

> ... bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Mark 16:1

Almost every English translation uses the word bought or purchased, so it's clear they went shopping. In modern Jerusalem when the Sabbath ends, the shops open again for a short time. In much the same way, in ancient Jerusalem shoppers might have found a market stall offering silks and embroidered fabrics, another selling fruits and herbs, and a third displaying the "fragrant spices" (LEB) our sisters were looking for.

Task accomplished, the women returned home to sleep as best they could, planning to rise at dawn and hurry to the tomb.

The sad news? These faithful souls still expected to find a dead body in that tomb the next morning. The glad news? They were determined to care for the Lord. They had not forgotten Him, not abandoned Him, and not denied knowing Him.

For now, they could do nothing but wait for the morning light to usher in a new day. "Out of this thickest midnight, who can tell what dawn shall yet arise?"40

# WHISPER



How to Hear the Voice of God

# Mark Batterson

New York Times Best-Selling Author

# WHISPER



How to Hear the Voice of God

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### WHISPER

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Italics in Scripture quotations reflect the author's added emphasis.

Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

Hardcover ISBN 978-0-7352-9108-9 eBook ISBN 978-0-7352-9109-6

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Cover design by Mark D. Ford

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Published in the United States by Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Batterson, Mark, author.

Title: Whisper: how to hear the voice of God / Mark Batterson. Description: First Edition. | Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2017.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017028952 | ISBN 9780735291089 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780735291096 (electronic) Subjects: LCSH: Listening—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Spirituality—Christianity. | God

(Christianity)

Classification: LCC BV4647.L56 B38 2017 | DDC 248—dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017028952

Printed in the United States of America

2017—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Dedicated to Paul McGarvey, a mentor in ministry. You prayed a prayer in August of 1984 that God answered on July 2, 2016.

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# **JOYSTICK**

The Seventh Language: Pain

In the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are deserted, inhabited by neither people nor animals, there will be heard once more the sounds of joy and gladness.

—JEREMIAH 33:10-11

artin Pistorius was a happy, healthy little boy. But when he was twelve, a mysterious illness left him comatose for three years. When he finally woke up, he was unable to move, unable to speak. Locked-in syndrome paralyzes all the voluntary muscles in the body with one curious exception: vertical eye movement. Martin was reduced to a persistent vegetative state. Specialists told his parents that he had zero intelligence, zero awareness. The specialists were wrong, but Martin had no way of proving it. He had no capacity to communicate his thoughts or feelings with the outside world; he was a prisoner trapped inside his own body.

Martin was dropped off at a medical care center day after day, week after week, month after month for thirteen and a half years. When he was force-fed scalding-hot food, he couldn't voice how much it hurt. When he needed assistance, he couldn't even cry like a baby. And because the specialists thought his intelligence level was that of a toddler, Martin was placed in front of a television tuned to *Barney & Friends* and *Teletubbies*.

A silent witness to the world around him, Martin felt totally alone,

totally powerless. Well, almost. "I was completely entombed," says Martin in his memoir, *Ghost Boy.* "The only person who knew there was a boy within the useless shell was God, and I had no idea why I felt His presence so strongly. He was with me as my mind knitted itself back together. He was as present to me as air, as constant as breathing."

Everyone, even his mother and father, acted as if Martin didn't exist. No one thought he was there—no one except a nurse named Virna, who believed that Martin was more aware than anyone realized. Virna had seen a television program about a new technology that enabled stroke victims who couldn't speak to communicate with the help of an electronic device. Then she whispered words of hope: "Do you think you could do something like that, Martin? I'm sure you could." Because of Virna's persistence, Martin was taken to the Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Using infrared sensors that tracked eye movement, a doctor asked Martin to identify pictures on the screen: first a ball, then a dog, then a television. Martin used the one thing he could control—eye movement—to identify each and every object.

More than thirteen years after contracting the illness that trapped him inside his body, Martin learned to communicate with a computerized voice using a joystick. Two years later he got his first job. He went to college. He started his own company. He got married. He wrote a book. And he did it all with a joystick.

I know some of you reading this book feel a lot like Martin: so discouraged, so scared, so frustrated, so misunderstood. Even in a crowd you feel lonely. You have your good days, but they're short lived. And you never know when depression is going to come knocking.

You need to know that you're not alone.

There isn't one of us who doesn't wrestle with shameful secrets, debilitating fears, and bitter memories. If statistics hold true, 6.7 percent of us deal with depression, 8.7 percent have some sort of phobia, and 18 percent have an anxiety disorder.<sup>3</sup> Those emotional challenges are real, but so is hope.

#### Rock Bottom

The Bible is a book about real people with real problems who experienced real pain. It starts in the Garden of Eden with one sinful decision. The initial consequences were pain in childbirth and painful toil to produce food.<sup>4</sup> But the net effect is pain across the board: physical, emotional, and spiritual. The good news is that heaven is a pain-free zone.<sup>5</sup> But between here and there, pain is guaranteed.

The oldest book of the Bible is Job, and Job's life is the epitome of pain and suffering. Job lost his family to a catastrophe. He lost his wealth and his health. Worst of all, he lost hope. He was a defeated man and eventually asked God to end his life. But even in the most calamitous circumstances, he had a very thin thread of joy: "I would still have this consolation—my joy in unrelenting pain—that I had not denied the words of the Holy One."

The New American Standard Bible says, "I rejoice in unsparing pain."

The Holman Christian Standard Bible says, "I would leap for joy in unrelenting pain."

The English Standard Version says, "I would even exult in pain unsparing."

This Hebrew word for "joy" appears only once in Scripture—it's rare joy, extreme joy. It's a joy that doesn't deny reality, but it does defy it. It's triumphant elation in the face of staggering loss. The most literal translation is this: "to leap like a horse so stones spark." It's not just jumping for joy; it's dancing on disappointment.

Somehow Job took a small measure of pleasure despite the pain. Would he have changed the circumstances if he could have? In a heartbeat. But Job found joy in one simple fact: he didn't deny the words of the Holy One.

In the midst of tough times, we may feel as if the Almighty has turned His back on us. So what do we usually want to do? We tend to turn our back on Him. But that's when we need to lean in and lean on Him. And that's what Job did. He didn't cut God off; he didn't stop listening.

Can I challenge you to do the same?

Perhaps God is saying something that can't be heard any other way.

This is the toughest chapter for me to write, and it's probably the toughest one to read. Pain isn't pleasant. But C. S. Lewis was spot-on: "God whispers to us in our pleasures . . . but shouts in our pain."

Please hear me. Every pleasure known to man is a gift from God.

Sex? God's idea.

Food? God's idea.

Recreation? God's idea.

Those pleasures turn into pain when we misuse and abuse them, but make no mistake, every pleasure in its purest form is a gift from God. Yes, we can turn them into sinful pursuits when we try to meet legitimate needs in illegitimate ways. But pleasure is a gift from God nonetheless. He whispers through those pleasures, and we should give thanks for them. But we better pay close attention to pain too.

#### The Gift of Pain

Before we go any further, dare I mention that pain can be a gift? Without pain we would repeatedly reinjure ourselves in the same ways. Without pain we would simply maintain the status quo. Without pain we would ignore problems that can kill us.

In fact, pain saved my life on July 23, 2000. I woke up that Sunday morning with intense pain in my abdomen, but I ignored it. I tried to preach a sermon that Sunday, but it became the only sermon I didn't finish. Five minutes into it I was doubled over in pain. I ended up in the emergency room at Washington Hospital Center, where an MRI revealed ruptured intestines. I was immediately wheeled into surgery, where I could have and perhaps should have died. And I certainly would have died if it weren't for the intense pain I could not ignore.

I was on a respirator for two days, fighting for my life. I lost twenty-five pounds in seven days. Trust me, there are better ways to lose weight! And the net result is a foot-long scar that bisects my abdomen from top to bottom.

Sometimes the greatest joy follows the worst pain, as mothers of

newborns can attest. Few people inflict more pain on themselves than athletes, but the pain is forgotten in the thrill of victory.

Would I want to experience another brush with death like that? Not on my life! But I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. I don't take a single day for granted. And the presence of God during those difficult days was as real as anything I've ever felt. It's a presence that is felt and a voice that is heard most clearly during pain.

Remember Joseph in the Old Testament? He had zero emotional intelligence as a teenager, which isn't entirely uncommon. But thirteen years of suffering earned him a graduate degree in empathy. And it was one act of empathy—noticing a dejected look on the face of a fellow prisoner—that eventually led to saving two nations.

Pain can be a professor of theology.

Pain can be a marriage counselor.

Pain can be a life coach.

Nothing gets our full attention like pain. It breaks down false idols and purifies false motives. It reveals where we need to heal, where we need to grow. It refocuses priorities like nothing else. And pain is part and parcel of God's sanctification process in our lives.

Many lead actors and actresses in Scripture endured dark nights of the soul. Job lost everything. Sarah wrestled with infertility. Moses was a fugitive for forty years. David had a father-in-law who tried to kill him. Mary Magdalene was demon possessed. Peter struggled with self-doubt after he denied even knowing Jesus. And Paul had memories of murder seared into his soul. They also had one thing in common: they heard God's whisper in their darkest hours. And they all came out the other side by His grace.

My prayer for you isn't that you'd be pain-free; it's that you'd learn to discern God's loving voice in the midst of the pain. Is there a lesson He is trying to teach you? Is there some part of your character that can't be cultivated any other way?

I'm certainly not suggesting that all pain is caused by God. Pain is a result of the curse, and it's most often a symptom of sin. But sometimes it's

a gift from God. It's the language that can't be ignored. You can leave the Bible on your bedside table untouched. You can ignore desires, dreams, doors, promptings, and people. But you can't ignore pain, can you?

If you will stick with me through the next few pages, I promise that the following statement will make more sense: pain can be a gift from God that He uses for His glory and our good. He uses it to get us out of addictive behaviors. He uses it to get us out of adverse situations. He uses it to get us out of abusive relationships. Take note and get out.

The miracle that Jesus repeated perhaps more than any other was the healing of lepers. Have you ever stopped to consider what that miracle accomplished? Among other things, He was restoring their sense of touch. One curse of leprosy is the loss of feeling. Lepers can't feel pain or pleasure. They become numb to the physical world around them, and that's a dangerous way to live. So Jesus gave them the gift of touch again, a gift that includes both pleasure and pain.

# **Growing Pains**

The expression "No pain, no gain" is older than you might imagine. It didn't originate with Jane Fonda's workout videos in the 1980s. It dates back to a second-century Jewish rabbi who said, "According to the pain is the gain."

Let's be honest. Most of us prefer this philosophy: no pain, no pain. We opt for the path of least resistance, but that doesn't get us where God wants us to go. I'm certainly not suggesting that we need to seek out pain. Pain will find us soon enough. But when pain comes, we shouldn't try to go around it. Instead, we need to go through it and learn to discern what God is saying through pain, through grief, and through suffering.

If it serves a higher purpose, pain can actually produce a measure of pleasure. When God answered my bravest prayer and healed my asthma, I decided to celebrate and validate that healing miracle by training for my first marathon. The eighteen-week training plan is one of the hardest things I've ever done. I basically inflict more and more pain on myself by running

Joystick 175

longer and longer distances. But when I cross the finish line of the Chicago Marathon, the pain will be in the past. The memory of that accomplishment, however, will last forever.

When I work out, one of my soundtracks is the training montage from *Rocky IV*. It helps me get a few extra reps, a few extra steps. I've seen the movie so many times that I can picture Rocky Balboa running up a snow-covered mountain. Rocky saws wood, splits logs. He does dogsled bear crawls and walking lunges with a wooden beam through waist-deep snow. He does Roman chair sit-ups in an old barn, core work with an ox yoke, and the shoulder press with a horse carriage. Basically the same as your workout routine, right? Or not. But how else are you going to beat Ivan Drago?

Do you remember the two-word mantra repeated by Rocky's trainer, Duke, over and over again? I sometimes hear it in my head when I hit the wall during a workout. Four times in the barn and two times in the ring, Duke says, "No pain, no pain, no pain!" I don't think it's a denial of the excruciating pain that Rocky is inflicting on himself; it's a reminder that there is purpose beyond the pain. There is victory on the other side.

You can get through just about anything if there is a light at the end of the tunnel. And for a follower of Christ, there always is. But here's my caution: don't be so focused on getting out of difficult circumstances that you don't get anything out of them. Sometimes the circumstances we're trying to change are the very circumstances God is using to change us. So before you take a painkiller, listen carefully to what God is saying during the tough times.

That brings us back to Job and a few overarching lessons.

First, *let's not pretend that pain doesn't exist.* Whatever you do, don't fake it to make it. That doesn't do anybody any favors. It's okay to not be okay! That admission is the first step in the healing process. Generally speaking, Americans aren't good at sackcloth and ashes. But there is an appropriate time to tear your robe in grief, shave your head, and fall to the ground in worship. When we fail to grieve, wounds remain open. Grieving is part of the healing process. It's an emotional antiseptic that cleans the wound. And different people grieve in different ways, so please give others a little latitude.

Second, *let's not explain pain away with trite truisms*. It's worth noting that Job's friends were a great comfort to him as long as they kept their mouths shut. When someone is suffering or grieving, we feel pressure to say the right words. My advice? Say less and listen more. You can say a lot by saying little.

# Dark Night

Mother Teresa devoted her life to loving the sick, the poor, and the dying in the slums of Calcutta, India. In 1979 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2003 she was beatified by the Catholic Church. With those kind of accolades, it's easy to think of her as existing in a category by herself: beyond doubt, beyond discouragement. But Mother Teresa's private diaries tell a different story. She wrote, "I am told God lives in me—and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul."

That sounds a little like Job, doesn't it?

Even Jesus said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When Jesus was on the cross, he felt farthest from the heavenly Father, yet that is when He was closest to accomplishing God's purposes. We shouldn't be deceived. When it seems as if God is letting us down, He is setting us up for something that may be beyond our ability to comprehend at the present moment.

I don't know if this is heartening or disheartening; maybe it's a little bit of both. If Mother Teresa wasn't immune to dark nights of the soul, we probably won't be either. Since Jesus had moments when the Father felt distant, we probably will too. May I offer a reminder? Faith isn't flying above the storm; it's weathering the storm. It's trusting God's heart even when we can't see His hand. It's understanding that sometimes the obstacle is the way!

If you want to know where God will use you, you need look no further than your pain. We help others in the places where we've been hurt. Our trials become our platforms. And our weakness is actually our strength because that's where God's power is made perfect.<sup>13</sup>

If Job endured "long and weary nights" and "months of frustration," <sup>14</sup> there's a good chance we will too. But like him, we can come out on the other side more blessed than before.

The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part.<sup>15</sup>

Can I be so bold as to believe that for you and me?

I can't promise our lives will be pain-free, and I wouldn't promise it if I could. But I can promise that He who began a good work is going to carry it to completion. If I can also promise that in His presence is fullness of joy. But our spiritual journeys are anything but linear. They are full of zigs and zags, ups and downs. And it's often two steps forward, one step back. Yet God never stops loving us through every season of life.

God is working out His plan, whether we know it or not. But we have to work out our salvation "with fear and trembling." And by "work out," I'm thinking Rocky Balboa in Russia. God's gifts are free, but they aren't easy. The Promised Land was God's gift to His chosen people, but they still had to fight giants to take the land. You will too. And like them, you'll acquire some battle scars.

Pain is part of the curse, but that doesn't mean God can't redeem it, recycle it, and speak through it. It's a difficult language to discern, no doubt. But like every other language, it's a love language. And we dare not forget that we have a suffering Savior, who endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him.<sup>19</sup>

Pain in pursuit of a godly goal is endurable, as evidenced by the Cross. The most excruciating pain wasn't produced by a cat-o'-nine-tails<sup>20</sup> or seven-inch spikes;<sup>21</sup> it was the full weight of sin on His sinless shoulders. He who knew no sin became sin for us,<sup>22</sup> and one thing sustained him: you. Yes, our sin put Him there. But His love for us kept Him there. Simply put, you are

worth the Cross to Christ. And if He was willing to hang on His cross, we can certainly carry ours! The Word of God chose to die the most excruciatingly painful death to whisper His love to us loud and clear.

#### The Shadow of Death

Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler and her husband, Dan, couldn't wait to hear their baby's heartbeat. It was a routine prenatal checkup, but the look on the sonographer's face told them something was wrong, terribly wrong. That's how they discovered that their baby girl had Potter sequence, a rare disease in which a lack of amniotic fluid inhibits lung development. Jaime's baby had the most severe sort of sequence: bilateral kidney failure. Jaime was told that if she didn't terminate the pregnancy, she would miscarry, or the baby would be stillborn or would suffocate in her arms after birth.

Nothing prepares you for news like that.

What do you do when your doctor tells you that the chance of your baby surviving is zero? That your baby's disease is 100 percent fatal? That there has never been an exception to that prognosis?

While the doctor was delivering the news, Jaime felt her baby move. "To me that was a sign. I was not going to be the one to end this pregnancy," she said. Despite the 100 percent fatality rate, Dan and Jaime decided to give God the full pregnancy to perform a miracle. They also got a word from God in the Word of God.

Nothing will drop parents to their knees like a sick child, and that's precisely what happened to David after his affair with Bathsheba. He was picking up the pieces of his own shame when he got the news that his son was deathly ill. What did David do? He contended with God for the child. There isn't a happy ending to this Bible story. For seven days David put on sackcloth and didn't eat. Yet despite his best efforts, David's son died seven days later.<sup>23</sup>

Jaime and Dan decided to contend for their baby. In retrospect, they call it their "contending season." Their inclination was to grieve, but they

fought any feeling of hopelessness. And if you find yourself in similar circumstances, I'd challenge you to follow suit. In Dan's words, "Don't rob God of the opportunity to do a miracle."

Not long after announcing that their unborn baby had Potter sequence, *USA Today* ran a feature story about the Beutlers and their baby. Rob Volmer, a public-relations professional who doesn't normally read *USA Today*, happened to spot that article in a hotel lobby while waiting for a client. The article caught Rob's attention because he and his wife had a baby with a similar syndrome whose life was saved by amnio infusions of saline.

Random, right? Wrong! God is big enough to speak through newspaper articles. He is big enough to connect complete strangers. In this instance He did both.

Rob made contact with a mutual acquaintance and then with Jaime. He put the Beutlers in touch with Dr. Jessica Bienstock, a perinatologist at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. Dr. Bienstock was not optimistic when she saw the first ultrasound because of the baby's apparent deformities, but one week after the initial amnio infusions, the misshapen head, clubbed feet, and tiny chest looked normal.

There was a glimmer of hope. And in Dan's words, "The difference between 0 percent hope and .00001 percent hope is enormous." For the remainder of the pregnancy, Jaime and Dan lived in the valley of the shadow of death, but they pitched their tent in the land of hope.<sup>24</sup> They kept contending until July 11, 2013, the day their baby girl was born, two months premature. Abigail weighed in at two pounds, twelve ounces. But she let out a cry, and you can't cry if your lungs don't work! Jaime's first thought? *That's our miracle!* <sup>25</sup>

# Contending Season

When you get a diagnosis that is difficult to digest or a dream turns into a nightmare or your marriage is tearing apart at the seams, you have choices to make. You can stand down, or you can stand on the promises of God. You can give up by giving in to guilt or fear or anger, or you can contend by

praying as though it depends completely on God and working as if it depends completely on you.

For Jaime, contending meant waking at four o'clock in the morning for trips to Baltimore for infusions, followed by long days in Congress. For Dan, contending meant putting law school on hold to manage Abigail's nightly dialysis and eventually giving her one of his kidneys.

Contending for what you believe in is harder than conceding to what you're afraid of, but it's the only option if you want to live by faith.

Where have you given up on God?

Where has hope been reduced to nothing?

That's where you need to pitch your tent in the land of hope.

That's where you need to pray the bravest prayer.

It's time to contend.

Contend for your marriage.

Contend for your children.

Contend for your health.

Contend for your dream.

Contend for your faith.

Contend for that lost friend.

Contend for that mission field.

Contending isn't easy, but here's some good news: God is contending for you! Long before you woke up this morning, the Holy Spirit was interceding for you, and long after you go to sleep tonight, He'll still be interceding for you. He contends with those who contend against us.<sup>26</sup> And if you are contending for a righteous cause, I promise you, God is contending for you! By faith, He fights our battles for us.

Remember the sonic shield I referenced in the very first chapter? According to the psalmist, God is singing songs of deliverance all around us all the time.<sup>27</sup> Think of those surround-sound songs as our first line of defense. The intercession of the Holy Spirit is the second line of defense. And there is a third line of defense: Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding on our behalf.<sup>28</sup>

Quit living as if Jesus is still nailed on the cross.

The only thing nailed to the cross is our sin.<sup>29</sup>

Did you know that God never takes His eyes off you? Do you know why? Because you're the apple of His eye!<sup>30</sup> Not only that, His ear is tuned to your voice, so tuned that He hears more than words.

Listen to my words, LORD; consider my sighing.<sup>31</sup>

A sigh is a long, deep breath. It's a physiological response to sadness. And it's very similar to the gentle whisper of the still small voice. Sighing is what we do when we don't know what to say. But according to the psalmist, it's more than a low-frequency distress signal; it's a wordless prayer.

The death of my father-in-law, Bob Schmidgall, might rank as the greatest shock of my life. At fifty-five years of age, he was in the prime of life. He had even been given a clean bill of health by his doctor two days before the heart attack that took him home. During those days of intense grieving, I found myself sighing incessantly. That's when I happened upon three words that are some of the most comforting in all Scripture: "Consider my sighing."<sup>32</sup>

Even in our most profound pain, God hears us. He is so intimately tuned to us that He hears our wordless sighs. Not only that, He intercedes for us with wordless groans.<sup>33</sup> And that's precisely what we would hear if we could hear a little better. We'd also hear those surround-sound songs of deliverance. Just as His mercies are new every morning,<sup>34</sup> His loving intercessions never cease.

#### The Sacrifice of Praise

How did Job survive hell on earth? "He fell to the ground in worship." 35

If you want to make it through the tough times, you have to give God the sacrifice of praise. I know that's easier said than done, but there's no other way. And the hardest praise is often the highest praise.

That's how Job survived his dark night of the soul.

That's how David survived the wilderness years.

That's what got Paul and Silas out of prison.

I have a mantra that is repeated at our church all the time: *don't let what's wrong with you keep you from worshipping what's right with God.* Don't let the voice of condemnation keep you from worshipping God; sing over it. If your worship is based on your performance, you're not really worshipping God anyway. That kind of worship is a form of self-worship because it's based on what you do rather than who God is.

The only way to drown out the pain is to sing over it. Remember the Tomatis effect? In order to sing over it, you have to hear God's whisper.

During the long recuperation after my intestines ruptured, I learned to worship God by putting a song on repeat and singing it until I believed it. There is a Darrell Evans song that I played hundreds of times. It was my soundtrack, and it eventually became my reality:

I'm trading my sickness. I'm trading my pain.<sup>36</sup>

Let me make a few observations about worship.

First, the hardest praise is the highest praise. God loves us when we least expect it and least deserve it, but we have a hard time returning the favor. If you worship Him only when you *feel* like worshipping, you'll worship less and less. If you learn to praise Him in the toughest of times, the best is yet to come. And don't forget, you are His joy. Is He yours?

Second, whatever you don't turn into praise turns into pain. If you internalize pain, it only gets worse. A little offense can turn into a ton of bitterness over time, and before you know it, you're in a world of hurt. And if you complain about it, it turns into a compound fracture. The Enemy of your soul wants to keep you so bottled up that you alienate yourself from God and others. The best way to deal with pain is to verbalize it to the Lord. How? Sing over it. Sing through it.

Let me double all the way back to where we started. If your life is off-

key, maybe it's because you've been deafened by the negative self-talk that doesn't let God get a word in edgewise. Maybe you've listened to the voice of shame so long that you can't believe anything else about yourself. Or maybe it's the Enemy's voice of condemnation that speaks lies about who you really are.

It's hard to hear God's voice when pain is screaming in your ear. The way you silence those voices is by singing over them.

Finally, *sing it like you believe it.* Do we really believe what we're singing? Then perhaps we should notify our faces. While we're at it, let's notify our hands and our feet too. When you're excited about something, it's not easy to stand still. I don't think you have to dance in a grove of trees like my friend Dick Eastman. But if you believe it, don't just sing it. Declare it.

#### Declaration of Faith

I'll never forget the song we sang the week after I prayed the bravest prayer and God healed my asthma. It's the chorus of "Great Are You, Lord" by All Sons & Daughters: "It's Your breath in our lungs so we pour out our praise."<sup>37</sup> I almost lost it when I sang it. Why? Because I believed it.

We don't make admissions of faith.

We make professions of it.

Steve Foster, the pitching coach for the Colorado Rockies, recently shared a story that made me laugh out loud. When he was called up to the major leagues by the Cincinnati Reds almost three decades ago, they were playing the Montreal Expos. Steve had to meet the team in Canada, but he'd never been out of the country. The customs agent asked the standard question: "Why are you here, Mr. Foster?" Steve said, "I'm here to play against the Montreal Expos." The agent didn't look convinced, because Steve was all by his lonesome. Then the agent said, "What do you have to declare?" If you've ever gone through customs, that's par for the course. But Steve had no idea what he meant. Steve said, "Pardon me?" The agent asked

again, "What do you have to declare?" Steve said, "I'm proud to be an American?" Wrong answer! He was actually handcuffed and questioned, making him late to his first major league game!

Can I make a few declarations?

You aren't the mistakes you've made. You aren't the labels that have been put on you. And you aren't the lies the Enemy has tried to sell you.

You are who God says you are.

You are a child of God.

You are the apple of God's eye.

You are sought after.

You are more than a conqueror.

You are a new creation in Christ.

You are the righteousness of Christ.

One more thing. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.  $^{\rm 38}$ 

All our identity issues are fundamental misunderstandings of who God is.

Guilt issues are a misunderstanding of God's grace.

Control issues are a misunderstanding of God's sovereignty.

Anger issues are a misunderstanding of God's mercy.

Pride issues are a misunderstanding of God's greatness.

Trust issues are a misunderstanding of God's goodness.

If you struggle with any of those issues, it's time to let God be the loudest voice in your life!



Stopping the Spiral of Toxic Thoughts

JENNIE ALLEN

Best-Selling Author of Nothing to Prove

# GET OUT OF YOUR HEAD

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#### GET OUT OF YOUR HEAD

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Hardcover ISBN 978-1-60142-964-3 eBook ISBN 978-1-60142-966-7

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Cover design by Mark D. Ford and Kelly L. Howard

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Allen, Jennie, author.

Title: Get out of your head: stopping the spiral of toxic thoughts / Jennie Allen.

Description: First Edition. | Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2020. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019025074 | ISBN 9781601429643 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781601429667 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Christian women—Religious life. | Thought and thinking—Religious aspects—Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4527 .A448 2020 | DDC 248.4—dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019025074

Printed in the United States of America

2020—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Special Sales

Most WaterBrook books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please email specialmarketscms@penguinrandomhouse.com.

To the guy who always gets me out of my head.

Zac Allen, you rescue me from myself constantly and always point me to Jesus.
I love you and I like you.

Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

-ROMANS 12:2

This means it's possible.

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OF OUR MINDS

# **Drawing Battle Lines**

A S WE HEAD INTO THIS PART, I WANT TO PULL YOU SUPER close and tell you what's about to happen and why.

I'm going to train you to fight.

Remember, the greatest spiritual battle of our generation is being fought between our ears. This is the epicenter of the battle.

Before Eve ate the fruit, she had a thought: it was "pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom." And then "she took some and are it."

David, before he sinned with Bathsheba and had her husband killed, had a thought: "The woman was very beautiful." <sup>2</sup>

Before Mary birthed Jesus, she had a thought: "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word."

Before Jesus chose to go to the cross, He had a thought: "Father . . . not my will, but yours, be done."  $^4\,$ 

How we think shapes our lives.

Every great or horrible act we see in history and in our lives is preceded

by a thought. And that one thought multiplies into many thoughts that develop into a mind-set, often without our even realizing it. Our goal is to be aware of our thoughts and deliberately build them into mind-sets that lead to the outcomes we want and the outcomes God wants for us.

One God-honoring thought has the potential to change the trajectory of both history and eternity. Just as one uninterrupted lie in my head has the potential to bring about unimaginable destruction in the world around me.

The battleground is not you yelling at your kids or cheating on your taxes or staring at your phone for hours on end.

The battleground is not even you serving at the local homeless shelter or joining the parking team at your church.

The epicenter of the battleground—the source of every word and deed that comes out of your mouth and life—begins in your thought life.

You aren't what you eat.

You aren't what you do.

You are what you think.

The Bible says, "As he thinks in his heart, so is he."5

Satan knows that we are what we think—so if we are believing things that are not true about us, then we are believing what the devil wants us to believe instead of what God wants us to believe.

You probably know what that one most recurring thought is for you, the one sticky thought that more than any other informs your other thoughts and, yes, your actions. The enemy will tell you that change is hopeless, that you're a victim of your circumstances and your thought patterns.

The enemy wants you to settle, to find a way just to survive and be somewhat happy.

The enemy will urge you to accept that "this is just who you are," that your thinking is rooted too deeply in your personality or your upbringing to ever make a shift.

Your first objective is to capture the thought—to have the courage to face that defining, destructive thought and interrupt it: *I have a choice*.

Remember, this journey is not primarily about behavioral change, though that may be a by-product.

I can make no promises that this journey will change your circumstances. You may still lose your job, battle an autoimmune disease, or not find the perfect husband.

Taking every thought captive is not about what happens to us. It's about choosing to believe that God is with us, is for us, and loves us even when all hell comes against us.

But I have better news: capturing thoughts and then believing the truth will inform and shape every aspect of your life and give you peace and joy that transcend your circumstances. How? Because Jesus defeated sin, Satan, and death and rose from the grave, and because that same resurrection power indwells men and women who have been redeemed by the gospel.

This is a journey into joy that makes zero sense based on our circumstances.

This is a fight for clear, focused purpose amid rampant consumerism.

This is a God-given peace that surpasses understanding for our seasons of suffering.

This is redeeming the time amid unprecedented distraction and noise.

This is the beauty of esteeming others amid a narcissistic culture.

This is learning to speak the truth in love in a world that says we should never offend.

This is how you can breathe deeply and sleep peacefully in an anxiety-ridden society.

This is an otherworldly way to live.

You, as a believer, are a citizen of another reality. Let's learn to think like it.

In this part of the book, I want to offer a series of patterns that have helped position me for making the shift from negative, fleshly, worldly thinking to the supernatural but simple way the apostle Paul talked about—thinking that reflects the mind of Christ.

When we get confused about or distracted from the main point, we end up squabbling about inconsequential issues, using all our energy to fight the wrong enemy without realizing we've been duped. If we're not careful, we'll look up one day and realize we've been in the wrong battle all along. We'll find ourselves fighting against flesh and blood, when Scripture is clear in Ephesians that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

If one of the greatest tools of the enemy is *confusion*, when we're confused, he wins the day. So let me spell out with crystal clarity where we're headed in the next part of this book—the problem we face, the mission we embrace, and the victory that's ours in the end.

#### THE PROBLEM

Every toxic thought, spiraling emotional cycle, and trap of the enemy we fall for somehow deep down involves a wrong belief about God.

I don't want to overcomplicate the problem. Romans 8 lays it out so clearly: a mind set on the flesh leads to sin and death, and a mind set on the Spirit leads to life and peace.<sup>7</sup> That is the simple reality we face.

But shifting our minds from flesh to Spirit is an ongoing work of the spiritual life. It is not a one-time decision but a day-by-day, moment-by-moment choice to move from chaos and confusion toward the peace of Christ in various areas of our thought lives.

Every enemy we are going to discuss here traces back to a core reality, which is that a battle is being waged for our lives. Standing between us and victory is one of three barriers—or perhaps all three:

- the devil
- our wounds
- our sin

Sometimes attack comes directly from Satan, and his strategy is obvious. He tempts with evil and loves to inflict suffering. Usually, however, he is sneaky. He tempts with successes and hypnotizes with comforts until we are numb to and apathetic about all that matters.<sup>8</sup>

Equally true, since we live in a fallen world, brokenness is our home (for now, anyway). We see this reality everywhere. In broken families and in longings that never seem to be satisfied, circumstances befall us constantly that scream, "Things are not as they should be!" Yet we hardly notice because this is the only home we've known. We tend to carry around deep hurt from our brokenness, rarely noticing it, never dealing with it or healing from it.

But as difficult as the first two realities are, the most common trouble we face in this life takes the form of sin. Specifically *our* sin—as in the stuff that you and I do. Or *don't* do, whichever the case may be.

Most of the time, you and I won't be taken down by a massive demonic attack. Our own small choices are accomplishing everything the devil intends—our passivity and destruction—with zero effort on his part. He is out "to steal and kill and destroy."

Honestly it's often difficult to know which of the three is behind the attack, but bottom line: we are at war!

Hence the need for a targeted strategy.

## THE MISSION

To defend ourselves in the midst of battle, we will learn to name the specific enemies we each are facing. I have identified seven enemies I see rampant and warring against our minds. We will learn to employ the right weapons at the right time to overcome the enemy, enjoy renewed intimacy with Jesus, and walk in greater freedom than we have before.

Whew. Big task.

Thankfully for us: big God.

We will name the lies that threaten us. We will learn to spot the signs that we've been sucked into the enemy's trap. We will learn to fight the war against our minds. We will learn what happens when we choose to shift our thoughts to God, to the truth of who He is and the truth of who we are because of Him. We will learn to seize things like community and service and gratitude as we live out the truth. And we will stand victorious in the end.

Which brings me to the secret weapon that ensures the outcome of our mission.

### THE VICTORY THAT IS OURS

In Deuteronomy 20, God reminds Israel that He is with them in their battles and that He is with us:

Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, for the LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.<sup>10</sup>

Ready for the good news? Through Jesus's sacrifice on the cross, God has rendered the fights we face His fights too. Because of Jesus, every fight has been ultimately won. Victory? It's already yours. It's already mine.

What's left for us is to claim that victory. We are going to look at both the enemies of our minds and the truths that set us free. If God is in us and is for us, then you and I can choose to fight from a place of victory. We can stand confident that God will prevail.

We have talked about what it means to take every thought captive, and we have talked about the one interrupting thought: *I have a choice*. Now we are about to go to battle against the unfettered thoughts that define us. Once the thought has been interrupted, we enter neutral ground.

We then get to decide whether we are going to choose life and peace, the mind of Christ, the fruit of the Spirit—or sin and death, the mind of the flesh.

In each of the next seven chapters, we are going to retrain our minds to think about truth. As we go to war with each toxic, twisted thought, we will begin to see the fruit and freedom of believing truth, walking moment by moment in our identity as children of God. The spiraling, chaotic thoughts that have so long kept us trapped will give way to the peace and beauty and abundant life Jesus died to give us.

Yeah, right. Quiet time with God. Have you seen my schedule?

I'm not much of a space-and-solitude kind of person.

I go crazy if it's too quiet.

I'm sure God has better things to do than help me with my little problems.

I don't have time to slow down.

I'll feel better when I get through my to-do list. Notes 231

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- 7. Matthew 22:37-39.

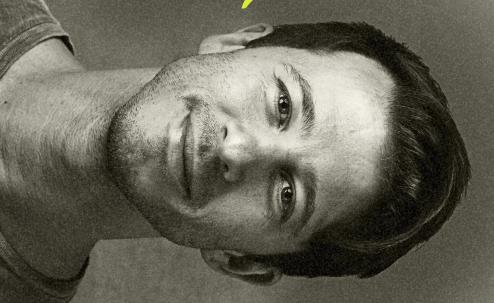
# Chapter 7

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- 3. Luke 1:38.
- 4. Luke 22:42.
- 5. Proverbs 23:7, NKJV.
- 6. Ephesians 6:12.
- 7. Romans 8:5–6.
- 8. 2 Corinthians 11:14.
- 9. James 1:14–15; John 10:10.
- 10. Deuteronomy 20:3-4.

# Chapter 8

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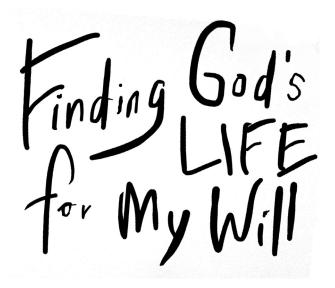
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HIS PRESENCE IS THE PLAN

# MIKE DONEHEY

OF TENTH AVENUE NORTH



HIS PRESENCE IS THE PLAN

# MIKE DONEHEY



#### FINDING GOD'S LIFE FOR MY WILL

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Italics in Scripture quotations reflect the author's added emphasis.

Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

Trade Paperback ISBN 978-0-525-65281-6 eBook ISBN 978-0-525-65282-3

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Cover design by Kristopher K. Orr; cover image by Jeremy Cowart

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

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The Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the Library of Congress.

Printed in the United States of America 2019—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

#### Special Sales

Most WaterBrook books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please email special marketscms@penguinrandomhouse.com or call 1-800-603-7051.

To Kelly, I love you more. Giant Squid.

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## Always Available Joy

The secret to joy is to keep seeking God where we doubt He is.

-ANN VOSKAMP, ONE THOUSAND GIFTS

s we follow Jesus into prayer, we may even find ourselves stumbling into gratitude. The more we lay our need before Him, the more we are able to recognize what He's doing in our lives. In turn, we become more grateful, and gratitude then gives birth to joy.

Of course, I believe the words "rejoice always" in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 are true and that it's always possible to find joy. However, we must hold those words in balance with the admonition to "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). Joy is always possible, but that doesn't mean we don't make our way to gratitude slowly and through a valley of tears.

Did you see the Pixar movie Inside Out? I love the scene

where Sadness helps Riley feel better, and Joy understands how important that is.1 Sometimes these emotions don't contradict each other but blend together to bring us a deeper sense of wholeness. One of my favorite Jars of Clay songs, "The Valley Song (Sing of Your Mercy)," soars, "I will sing of Your mercy that leads me through valleys of sorrow to rivers of joy." Gratitude and joy are points on the compass we direct our ship toward. Our hearts were made to feel both of these emotions. But sometimes we must walk through chaos to get there. The calm after the storm brings another kind of peace all its own. I learned what that meant ten years ago.

The band and I were on our first national tour. After years of playing summer camps, youth lock-ins, and hole-in-the-wall venues, we had made the "big time." I put that in quotation marks because I've now realized there is no such thing. We were opening up for the well-established and much heralded CCM rock band, Sanctus Real. Kelly and I were newlyweds and lived in a fivehundred-square-foot apartment in the front half of a duplex. Our band had signed a record deal, and we had recently celebrated newfound radio success. However, we were still living paycheck to paycheck. In fact, financially we were barely scraping by. Up to that point, we had never done a traditional-style tour. We usually played retreats, camps, or special events, meaning we'd drive for a day or two, but then we'd have a couple of days to settle in and hang out. We had never performed in a different city every night for months on end. We were in for a rude awakening.

We spent three months following a tour bus in our fifteenpassenger van. If you've ever been in a band, you know the drill. This is the rite of passage, as it were. I bought a little camping air mattress to wedge down on the floor between the bench and the two front captain seats. Even though the space was cramped, I honestly slept better on the floor, and I could even hold Kelly's hand while we slept. Aww. With her on the bench seat above and me on the floor below, we covered almost every inch of the American interstate system. Yeah, this was the "big time."

#### Far from Fabulous

A few weeks before the tour started, Kelly and I discovered we were pregnant. I was stoked for sure but also understandably scared out of my mind. I didn't even know how we were going to pay for gas to get to the next show, let alone how I was going to provide for a family. But we had committed to the tour and had no other plan in place, so with a baby in her belly and a cooler full of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in the back of the van, we ventured out into the unknown world of full-time touring.

It was brutal.

Most nights we slept in the van. We followed the tour bus and became well acquainted with truck stops and bad coffee. Occasionally we could afford a luxury—maybe Starbucks or Subway but those nights were rare. Imagine living a sort of glorified "homeless" lifestyle. Sleeping on floors but getting applauded for thirty minutes every night. It was a strange reality. Mostly, we slogged through, running on copious amounts of caffeine and sleep-deprived delirium. Our coworkers at our new record label assured us things were going to get better. "Just you wait," they would say. "Things will be so much different come this time next year!" It turned out they were right, but I didn't believe them. We had songs topping the charts on national radio stations, and our records were supposedly being purchased by people we didn't know all across the country. But truthfully, we felt far from popular and more impoverished than ever.

One night three weeks into tour, Kelly whispered to me from the bench above. "Something's wrong." She was bleeding, which is not a good sign early in a pregnancy. My hands tingled. Time stood still. My face went pale. We were in the middle of an allnight drive to Colorado. We stopped at an ER in Kansas City. Hours later, in a cold and sterile examination room, a nurse flatly told us, "I can't find a heartbeat."

Our heads spun. Our hearts sank. "Are you sure?" We choked back tears.

"I don't know," she responded. "We can't tell you anything at this point. There could be plenty of reasons I can't find it. I'm sure everything is fine. There are no signs you'll lose the baby."

We pressed her for more answers. "Then why is she bleeding? Why does it feel like something's not right?"

She simply looked at us and told us we could pay at the front. To make matters worse, we couldn't do anything but keep driving. After singing the next night in what felt like a numbing fog, we set off for our next show. Two more weeks of tour passed, but I don't recall much of it. What I do remember is huddling with my sweet wife under the privacy of a blanket on the van's front bench, weeping together until there were no tears left.

When we arrived in Northern California, her pain increased,

and despite our prayers and pleas with God to heal our baby, we feared the worst. We made another hospital visit in Santa Ana, but this time it was as if God Himself personally trained the entire staff. A nurse bearing sleeve tattoos stopped and prayed with us. Several nurses who weren't assigned to us stopped in to offer empathy and asked if there was anything they could do. A kind and gracious doctor, whose name I've sadly forgotten, came in shortly after we arrived. He gently and compassionately broke the news to us that Kelly was in the beginning stages of a miscarriage.

Miscarriage. Though we suspected it was coming, it was the first time we had heard the word, and it hit us with hammer-like force

Even though it happens more than most realize, it's just not a word you're ready to have in your vocabulary. We sat in a daze for what felt like hours and let the news slowly sink in. But even in that moment, we were overwhelmed by the startlingly different attitude and love of the doctors at this hospital. In the very moment we were crying out to God, asking, "Where are You?" those doctors and nurses in that California hospital were His very hands and feet to us. To this day, I thank God for dressing up in blue scrubs and caring for us through them.

Wrecked, poor, and not sure of what to do next, we mechanically discussed our options. Do we stay here? Do we fly home? Do we cancel the tour? Unsure of how soon Kelly would lose the baby, and lacking the means to do anything about it, we drove on to the next city. We staggered into the venue sometime in the afternoon and were met with even more compassion. The boys in Sanctus Real heard what was happening and graciously bought Kelly a plane ticket home. We were beyond relieved. The only problem was that it was already too late to get a flight out that night, so we had to drive through the night yet again to get her to LAX the next morning.

We arrived at five o'clock in the morning, three hours before her departure time. At this point, she was cramping badly, and I was growing increasingly anxious. She was miraculously calm. She held my face in her hands and assured me she was going to be all right. I remember how impossibly steady her hands were. Mine wouldn't stop shaking.

She had spoken to God the night before, she told me. He had told her that this baby was going to be home with Him. She also had been singing the words of the Sanctus Real song "Whatever You're Doing (Something Heavenly)" to herself. I had heard them sing it every night of the tour, yet the words didn't really hit me until that moment: "Whatever you're doing inside of me, it feels like chaos but somehow there's peace, and though it's hard to surrender to what I can't see, I'm giving in to something heavenly."<sup>3</sup>

We had to leave her at seven, and somewhere around seven fifteen, I received this text: "I passed the baby in the toilet. I held him in my hands and thanked God for his life. I know he's home now."

Even as I type this, I'm choking back tears. Ten years have passed, and I still can't tell you why our baby went home to heaven so soon. I also can't tell you why Kelly is certain it was a boy. But I can tell you, inexplicably, we experienced a supernatural peace that transcended understanding. Philippians 4:4, 6-7 has some insight on the matter:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. . . . Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

It's still a mystery to me, but this was one time that I saw this play out in real life. We thanked God for our baby's life. We thanked Him for the hospital staff. We thanked Him for all the kindness that was shown to us through so many people. We didn't get the answers we wanted, but we did receive the peace that we needed.

I want to add that I do not believe our baby died because we didn't have enough faith. I cling to the belief that what matters most isn't how much faith we have but who our faith is in. I believe we should never stop praying for and expecting miracles, but we should also keep believing God is good, even if we don't see a miracle.

I've even heard Todd White, who has become renowned for healing and miracles, say, "I have seen stuff not work out the way God says it would, but I'm not going to take my experience and rise it above what God's Word says. I'm not telling you it feels good. It doesn't feel good."4

That might sound strong, but I think it's beautiful. This type of thinking allows me to sit in the mystery that our God, the creator of life, allows death. I don't have to think that God wanted my baby to die. Rather, I can go on thanking God for my child's life, however brief, and thank Him for allowing my child to be in heaven. I can leave it at that.

I think it's okay to refrain from developing theology when God stays silent. Where God speaks, we speak. What He leaves a mystery, maybe we should too. It's okay not to have answers. Answers have rarely ever changed a heart. But a moment of knowing God is near, especially in the midst of pain, can set your heart on a new course.

Peace is still possible. It's possible to hate sickness and not curse God at the same time. It's possible to say, "I trust you, God," while also crying honestly, "I don't know why this happened." In our hardest moments, we can keep giving thanks for life while we go on hating death. I think God hates death too.

#### Gratitude Readies Us for Heartbreak

Being joyful in all things doesn't mean there is an absence of sorrow. Likewise, courage is not the absence of fear. There aren't always answers for tragedy. I cringe when someone is speaking at a funeral and says, "I know it was God's will to bring them home." I've heard all the arguments on both sides, but I don't believe we have to tidy up our grief. Yes, we should be glad our loved one is home in heaven, but maybe we aren't ready to celebrate it just yet. Maybe it's okay to grieve what we've lost. If Jesus wept at His friend Lazarus's tomb, then I think He'd understand when we cry at our loved ones' funerals too.

When Jesus hung on the cross, He cried out with His last breaths, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark

15:34). Doesn't that seem to tell us, Even in your confusion, even in your questions, I am there! I, too, hate death, and when you feel like the Father has left you, take heart; I've felt that too? I don't think you and I will ever comprehend why some people are healed and others aren't, at least not this side of heaven. But I can tell you this: There is a supernatural grace to help us give thanks in all circumstances. It's possible. The Holy Spirit is far more powerful than we give Him credit for. He is able to comfort us. He is able to lessen the sting of loss with His sweetness. In our simple act of giving thanks, not only do we protect our hearts from the danger of ingratitude, but we also open ourselves up to the presence of God.

Gratitude is a shield protecting our hearts from bitterness. I've seen it in my own life over and over. When I do not stop to name the blessings in my life or express my thankfulness, I eventually feel entitled. In essence, the act of giving thanks is like armor we put around our hearts, protecting us from feeling like God owes us something. In that sense, gratitude readies us for heartbreak. It loosens our iron grip on that which was never ours to keep in the first place. This reminds me of how A. W. Tozer described Abraham in The Pursuit of God. After Abraham took Isaac up on the mountainside to sacrifice him in obedience to God, he was a changed man. He may have gone up the mountain clinging to his son and the promise he represented, but coming down the mountain, he had far more than he went up with. Abraham came down with the "blessedness of possessing nothing."5

Thanksgiving is the gate that opens onto our path to joy. Through thanksgiving, we can find joy in the midst of our suffering. To praise God in the middle of heartbreak is to begin to find

nourishment in trusting Him. Giving thanks means clinging to hope when all hope seems to be lost. It means accepting that this world is not as it should be but one day all will be well. One day, God will make everything right, and all that is sad will come untrue. In the meantime, giving thanks is surrendering our demands and our need for things to go our way. That's why thanksgiving is a sacrifice (see Psalm 50:23). We are putting our will on the altar and choosing to let go of the belief that God can't redeem what we're walking through. We let go of the assumption that God got it wrong or the suffocating suspicion that He won't get it right. To say "thank you" is to surrender control.

My friend Daniel's church just did a series on a similar idea. They called it "It's Just a Phase." The preachers talked about how so many of us say to one another, "It's just a phase. You'll get through it." But we ought to say, "It's just a phase. Don't miss it." Often we're so concerned with changing the outcome of what we're going through, or having our pain relieved, we tend to miss the supernatural healing God is offering us. We miss the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "Blessed be the . . . God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

#### Good Friday Was the Worst Friday

In some supernatural place, Kelly was able to thank God when we lost our first child. I can only assume she found the strength to do so in knowing God, too, had lost a child. He knew exactly how she felt. Have you considered this in the pain of your own story? When disaster strikes, we can so quickly react by asking, "Why would a good God let bad things happen to good people?" when maybe we should marvel at the fact that a good God has allowed Himself to feel our pain.

On Good Friday, our Father in heaven delivered a death blow to the "bad things happen to good people" rhetoric. In light of the Cross, God can respond, Why do you call Good Friday good? Good Friday wasn't the day a bad thing happened to a good person; it was the day the worst things happened to the best person, and you call it good? Most of us would barely blink. For some reason or another, we can accept Jesus walking through the fire of the crucifixion, but we are confounded when God asks us to do the same.

And yes, we do live on the other side of Easter. We live in the reality that Jesus bore abuse and beatings so we could be healed and that He died to give us life. We live in the revelation of sin atoned for and our Messiah's victory over the curse. But why aren't we nervous when we read of Christ's unthinkable march toward death? Why do we scoff at the disciples' unbelief as they scattered and ran? "Don't they know what's happening?" we cry. "Don't they remember Jesus saying He'd rise again? Don't they know it's all gonna be all right?"

It's amazing what we can understand in hindsight, isn't it? With the clarity of distance, we know the answers to God's questions. Good Friday is good because Sunday came! We can see grace in both triumph and tragedy. Maybe it's the same for you and me. In this life or the next, we'll be able to look back on certain "worst Fridays" of our own and see God was up to something

beautiful, even then. Maybe one day all our worst Fridays will be good Fridays because we'll see them against the backdrop of God's kingdom come. I won't lie, though. It's not usually the Fridays when I lose hope. It's the Saturdays. Saturday is the day in between. It's the day of waiting. It's the day when hope wears thin, and the cynics seem correct. I've often been confounded by the fact that Jesus felt the need to be dead until Sunday.

I'm sure there is a lot of cultural and historical relevance here. I know the Jews didn't consider you fully dead until the third day,<sup>6</sup> but I can't help but think, Why couldn't Jesus have just been dead till Saturday? Why did God make the disciples wait that whole extra day? Why make us wait in the middle of our suffering? Last Easter, as I was reading and questioning, it was almost as if God was calling out to me from the pages of the Bible.

Don't you see, My child? You're not the only one who has walked through Saturdays. You're not the only one who's felt the waiting's gone on too long. You're not alone in your longing for redemption. You're not alone in your questions, in your hopelessness, in your doubts. You're not too worn out, even on your worst Friday. You're not alone, even as you walk through Easter Saturdays. Give Me enough time, and I will make even these days good.

Romans 8:18 says, "The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." How would it change the way we follow God through tragedy if we really believed the best is yet to come? What if we believed, however fragile the belief, that God was really able to redeem all things into something good? I mean, if He was able to work salvation for the human race out of the worst day in human history, then

maybe—just maybe—He can bring something beautiful out of the chaos of our lives.

When our first daughter was born a year later, there were simultaneous tears of joy and tears of sorrow. But the pain of love was worth it. The pain of trust and the sacrifice of praise were enough to break down the dangerous walls of bitterness that so easily could have built up around my heart. I pray I can remember this more often. No matter how hard it is, I don't want to be one of the nine lepers who didn't think to praise God (Luke 17:11–19). To quote the song "Even When It Hurts (Praise Song)" by Hillsong United: "Even when it hurts like hell, I'll praise you." It was no coincidence that on that same tour, I came across some of my favorite words in all of literature. In Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel The Brothers Karamazov, the following words shone brighter than my best attempts to sum up my thoughts:

I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage . . . in the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, for all the blood that they've shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but justify all that has happened.<sup>7</sup>

My church has a beautiful tradition each Easter weekend. At the beginning of the Good Friday silent service, they hand out three-inch nails to every congregant. As we sit there in hushed reverence, feeling the cold steel in our hands, engrossed by the inevitable clang of a mishandled nail dropping against the cement floor, the haunting echoes resurrect haunting memories of our own mishandling. Readings and musical interludes follow, but no words are ever spoken by congregants. The hour-long service concludes with an invitation to walk to the front of the church, where we hammer our nails and regrets to the cross before receiving communion. The sound of hammers on metal is a fitting soundtrack as we admit our part in our Lord's gruesome demise.

On Easter morning, we are greeted with a new visceral experience. The cross that bore all our nails just two days before has been placed at the front of the church. As the worship team erupts into praise, every child in the church is handed fistfuls of bright yellow flowers. As the music crescendos, kids race to the cross to place their bouquets in the holes the nails left behind. It's a stunning and incendiary visual for gratitude. Those flaming bright petals remind me that suffering and death are making room for the birth of new life

I want to give thanks in every season because I believe the places where the nails were driven deepest are the same places a future flower's roots can grow the deepest. Something far more beautiful than a hundred daisies is coming. The realization that we will one day see true beauty face to face not only makes it possible to get through our tragedies but also enables us to thank God for them. We already do it every Easter, don't we? We thank God for Good Friday. In doing so, we testify that His greatest tragedy was our greatest victory.

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#### Chapter 12: Always Available Joy

- Inside Out, directed by Peter Doctor, Pixar Animation, 2015.
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# ANNE GRAHAM LOTZ

# 

Experiencing the Holy Spirit as a Constant Companion

# JESUS IN ME

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# JESUS IN ME

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#### Jesus in Me

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Hardcover ISBN 978-0-525-65104-8 eBook ISBN 978-0-525-65108-6

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Jacket design by Kristopher K. Orr

Author is represented by Alive Literary Agency, 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80920, www.aliveliterary.com.

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Published in the United States by Multnomah, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lotz, Anne Graham, 1948- author.

Title: Jesus in me: experiencing the Holy Spirit as a constant companion / Anne Graham Lotz.

Description: Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018058173 | ISBN 9780525651048 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780525651086 (electronic)

Subjects: LCSH: Holy Spirit. | Spirituality—Christianity.

Classification: LCC BT121.3 .L68 2019 | DDC 231/.3—dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018058173

Printed in the United States of America

2019—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Special Sales

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To them God has chosen to make known . . . the glorious riches of this mystery, which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory.

-Colossians 1:27

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## His Presence in Eternity

It was Christmas Eve 1968. Three astronauts were on board the *Apollo 8* spacecraft as it orbited the moon in the first-ever mission of its kind. With cameras transmitting the view from the window of the space capsule, the astronauts' experience was shared with the world in the most-watched television broadcast of that time. The crew of three, Bill Anders, Jim Lovell, and Frank Borman, said they had a message for all the people back on Earth. With the barren gray lunar landscape below them and planet Earth dangling like a blue marble in the blackness of space in the far distance beyond them, tens of millions of people watched and listened to the crackly voices of the astronauts transmitted by radio frequency from outer space. Each took a turn reading Genesis 1:1–10 from the King James Version of the Bible . . . . <sup>1</sup>

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

#### Enjoying the Presence of the Holy Spirit

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.

I will forever applaud those three men who led the entire world in an incredibly powerful, unparalleled moment of worship. I wonder, though, how many people listened to the Bible's timeless description of Creation but missed the presence of the Holy Spirit described in the second verse? "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The truth hidden in plain sight is that the Holy Spirit was already present at Creation. Where did He come from? The answer: He didn't. He always has been, and He always will be. The verse

plainly states He is the Spirit of God, and thus, He is eternal. He had no beginning and He will have no end.

As an eternal person, the Spirit of God has always been present for all time and in all places. In fact, there is no place in the entire universe where He has not, is not, or will not always be fully present.<sup>2</sup>

While the Bible doesn't use the word *Trinity* to refer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, many passages in Scripture reference all three persons of the Godhead. While the first three verses of Genesis give us a subtle glimpse into this mystery, verses 26 and 27 are startling as they change pronouns from the plural as God speaks—"Let us make man in our image, in our likeness"—to the singular—"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him"—indicating that God is one God yet more than one.

All three persons of the Godhead are clearly designated in the Great Commission as the One in whose name Jesus commanded us to baptize and make disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup>

As the apostle Peter opened his first letter to the churches in Asia Minor, he wrote that the believers there could rest assured that all three persons of the Trinity were involved in their salvation as well as their subsequent spiritual growth. He revealed that they "have been chosen according to the fore-knowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ."

Another clear picture of this mystery can be seen at the baptism of Jesus. Matthew bore witness that the persons of the Trinity (the names of whom I've italicized) were present: "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the *Spirit* of *God* descending like a dove<sup>5</sup> and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my *Son*, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'"

I don't understand the mystery of the Trinity, nor can I explain it.<sup>7</sup> It's been said that if our God were small enough for us to understand, He wouldn't be big

#### Enjoying the Presence of the Holy Spirit

enough to save us. So I simply bow my heart before Him in worshipful adoration of the Father, who loved me so much that even though He knew I would sin, He planned for my redemption, then sent His Son as the atoning sacrifice for my sin. I love the Son, who, when the Father sent Him, got up from Heaven's throne, took off His glory robes, came all the way down to earth, went all the way to the cross, then rose up from the dead to open Heaven for me. And I am learning to love and enjoy the companionship of the dear Holy Spirit, who is Jesus within me, every moment of every day. Praise God, I don't have to understand Him in order to experience and enjoy His presence.

Just make time to worship and adore the One who was present in the beginning, hovering over our planet, energizing it to be transformed into a place of beauty.

## His Presence in History

The Holy Spirit, who is present in eternity, has also been present in time and space throughout human history.

If we have any familiarity with the Holy Spirit at all, our knowledge may be primarily based on the New Testament. But we find tantalizing glimpses of His presence throughout the Old Testament.

#### THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

An interesting contrast to note regarding how the Holy Spirit related to God's people in the Old Testament and then in the New Testament is perhaps best observed through the use of prepositions. Because in the Old Testament He came *upon* certain people to empower and equip them for certain tasks. When the task was completed or when the Spirit no longer could use the person, He would remove Himself. He seemed to come and go with no permanent attachment.<sup>1</sup>

#### His Presence Coming upon Individuals

The following examples in the Old Testament give a sampling of why His presence came upon a person:

- He equipped workers with necessary skills to build the tent of meeting.<sup>2</sup>
- He gave wisdom to Israel's elders so they could help Moses judge the people.<sup>3</sup>
- He gave Gideon favor in the eyes of God's people and the courage to defeat the enemy.<sup>4</sup>
- He gave physical strength to Samson.<sup>5</sup>
- He gave King David detailed plans for the temple that his son Solomon would build.<sup>6</sup>
- He anointed Isaiah to preach.<sup>7</sup>
- He lifted Ezekiel up out of his circumstances and placed him where God wanted him to be.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most notable examples in the Old Testament of the Holy Spirit's presence coming *upon* someone is that of Saul, the son of Kish. When the prophet Samuel anointed Saul as the one God had chosen to be the first king of Israel, "the Spirit of God came upon him in power," enabling him to transition from being a keeper of donkeys to being a leader of a nation. The presence of the Spirit of God upon Saul was evident as he became a valiant warrior who delivered Israel from some of her fiercest enemies.

One day God spoke to King Saul through the prophet Samuel, commanding him to utterly destroy one enemy in particular, the Amalekites. Saul obeyed but only partially. Instead of destroying everything as God had said, he looted some of the best plunder for himself and for his men.<sup>10</sup> The consequences were disastrous. God rejected Saul as king and removed the Holy Spirit from him.<sup>11</sup>

Saul continued to reign as king of Israel but without the presence of God's Spirit. As a result, he lost a measure of his sanity; he was helpless before the enemy's greatest fighter, the giant Goliath; he was humiliated by a young shepherd boy who gained victory over Goliath and thus the entire Philistine army with a slingshot; his national popularity was transferred to the boy who had slain Goliath; and he was ultimately defeated in battle, where he lost his life.<sup>12</sup>

#### His Presence Coming upon David

When the Spirit was removed from Saul, almost simultaneously He came *upon* the young shepherd boy, David, when Samuel anointed him the second king of Israel.<sup>13</sup> But the presence of the Holy Spirit was no guarantee of a smooth ride or a problem-free life. It has been estimated that fifteen to twenty years passed from the time David was anointed until he actually took possession of the throne. Years and years of fighting battles, running from Saul, engaging in guerilla warfare, and developing a band of mighty men who, in time, would be the leaders of his elite army.<sup>14</sup> Yet in the midst of all the difficulties and disappointments, the Bible describes David as a man after God's own heart.<sup>15</sup> Every king thereafter was measured by the standard that David set.

The prayers and songs that David wrote in Psalms were truly inspired by the Spirit of God, evidenced by the fact that they have a permanent place in God's Word. David's psalms reveal his heartfelt love for the Lord and his absolute trust in Him. They have been used as models for the prayers of God's people for generations. David's articulate words seem to express our own despair, anguish, fear, hope, anger, joy, and trust.

Without Psalms we would be spiritually impoverished. Think of the familiar lines that David penned when out in the fields, keeping watch over his father's sheep, watching a spectacular sunrise or sunset: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." Or leading his sheep out to pasture, meditating on "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want." Was it when the Philistines came against him that he wrote, "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?" When he reached one of the lowest points of his life, he revealed from firsthand experience, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Running from his enemies, hiding in the caves and the rocks, he prayed, "In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me." 16

David's spiritual sensitivity and maturity were remarkable. He was a man's man, a leader's leader, a king whose greater Son would one day sit on his throne forever.<sup>17</sup> All of which makes David's downfall even more devastating.

Several years after David was securely enthroned, at a time when kings went off to war, David stayed home. He was complacent, at ease, off guard, dangerously vulnerable to temptation. It came in the form of a beautiful woman who was bathing in full view as the king gazed over the city from the roof of his palace. After inquiring, he was told she was the wife of one of his own mighty men, Uriah, who at that moment was fighting David's enemies. David sent for her, slept with her, impregnated her, manipulated circumstances to arrange for Uriah to be killed, then took her as his wife. What an astounding free fall that sends a warning that reverberates down through the centuries. If David could plummet to the depths of sin and disgrace, it could happen to anyone. Especially when we are spiritually complacent, at ease, off guard, and have time on our hands. That's the time to be on guard!

As horrific as David's moral collapse was, he seemed to brush it aside. The woman bore him a son, and for a time, everything on the surface seemed good. But underneath the facade, his spirit was in agony as he lost his peace and spiraled downward into a state of physical, emotional, and spiritual weakness. He gave sober insight into his condition as a warning to all unrepentant sinners when he confessed in Psalm 32, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." While he may have put on a good front, day and night he was miserable and barely able to cope with his load of guilt.

God had mercy on David and did not leave him to wallow in his guilt or wither away in his anguish. He sent His spokesperson, Nathan, to confront him.<sup>20</sup> David's sin was finally out in the open. To his credit, he did not deny what he had done, make excuses, or blame others. With a face that must have burned with shame and a heart that was shattered, he manned up. He replied to Nathan's blistering indictment, "I have sinned against the LORD."<sup>21</sup>

If you, too, have had a sickening knot in the pit of your stomach that comes from well-deserved guilt from which you can get no relief, echo David's words as your own prayer: "I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." God is merciful and forgiving to those who come to Him in true repentance. Don't play games with the labels you give your sin, to make it seem less sinful. Call it what it is. It's fornication, not safe sex. It's adultery, not an affair of the heart. It's lying, not exaggeration. It's murder, not a right to choose. It's stealing a person's reputation, not gossip. It's slander, not a pious prayer request. God promises that if you and I honestly, sincerely, humbly confess our sin—call it out for what it is in His eyes—He will forgive and cleanse us. 23

Three thousand years after David's deeply moving prayer of confession in Psalm 51, his words are still used by penitent sinners as they seek God's forgiveness and mercy, because "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Praise God! God receives anyone and everyone who comes to Him with a humble, contrite heart.

But notice David's heart-stopping plea in verse 11: "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." David knew the Holy Spirit could be given and the Holy Spirit could be taken away. He had seen firsthand what happened to Saul when God's Spirit was removed. He knew he did not deserve the continued presence of the Holy Spirit, so he specifically cried out to God to give him what he did not deserve.

God, who is gracious to sinners, responded to David's honest confession and heartfelt plea. While He allowed David to experience the consequences of his horrific actions, the Spirit of God was not removed but remained on his life.

I can't help but wonder whether you, too, have succumbed to the temptation that led to David's downfall. Were you tempted to go outside your marriage for sexual pleasure, and you did? Or maybe you succumbed to the temptation to follow the crowd around you and pursue sexual experiences before marriage? Or are you addicted to pornography, needing more and more deviant images to satisfy your craving that has become insatiable? Or maybe you gave in to the

temptation to overspend, overindulge, overeat, overdrink . . . to lie, cheat, steal, bribe, betray, abuse . . . to \_\_\_\_\_\_ (you fill in the blank). While you have adopted the world's attitude that it's okay and everyone does it, is your load of guilt heavy underneath? Robbing you of real happiness? Have you come to hate yourself and the web of sin and deceit you have woven that now traps you, yet you cover up with a casual, carefree countenance?

Do you, like David, fear losing your salvation? Do you live with a fake smile pasted on your face to cover up the emptiness you feel inside? Are you convinced that your sin and guilt disqualify you from the supreme privilege of having God's Spirit in your life? That you are not worthy of Him? In the Old Testament, that would have been probable. But everything dramatically changed following the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus to Heaven. Our relationship to the Holy Spirit permanently changed two thousand years ago on the Feast of Pentecost when He entered history in a radical new way.

#### THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Right before the death of Jesus on the cross, after supper on the same Thursday evening He was betrayed, He began to prepare His disciples for His departure. In an upstairs room somewhere close to the temple in Jerusalem, as night was falling, He poured truth into His small band of beloved, handpicked followers. He taught them about humility in service as He washed their feet, including the feet of Judas before He dismissed him from the table. Jesus then taught the eleven remaining disciples about Heaven, the place He called His Father's house, which He was going to get ready for them, telling them plainly how they could get there; about the persecution they would face because of their association with Him; and about fulfilling His Father's demand for much eternal fruit if they would abide in Him as a branch abides in the vine.<sup>25</sup>

The faces of the eleven men must have drained of color as they began to take in what He was saying. He was getting ready to leave! With wide-eyed

consternation, they also began to understand that He expected them to continue His ministry in His physical absence! On the inside they must have been screaming in protest, No! No! We can't possibly carry on without You. Don't leave us! Please!

Seeing their expressions of protest and grief, Jesus quickly reassured them, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. . . . But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." How astounding! What Jesus declared stops me and grips my thoughts. He said it would be to the disciples' advantage for Him—Jesus—to go away. How could that possibly be? What could be better than having Jesus physically present with them? Apparently, having the Holy Spirit would be better! Again and again that evening, He revealed He would come to them in the form of the Holy Spirit, whom the Father would send to them.

Given that the Holy Spirit has been present since before time began and that He was present throughout the Old Testament, coming upon certain people to equip them for the responsibility God had placed upon them, how would this coming of the Holy Spirit be different? What was Jesus referring to?

#### His Coming at Pentecost

Jesus was referring to a day as historically significant as the day He was born in Bethlehem, as the day He was crucified on Calvary, as the day He was raised from the grave, and as the day He ascended back into Heaven. He was referring to a day fifty days after His death and resurrection and ten days after His ascension, when the Father would send down the Holy Spirit, not to come *upon* His people but to actually come *into* them.

Following His resurrection, Jesus continued to heighten the expectation of His disciples for the unique advent of the third person of the Trinity. He had given them a temporary measure of His Spirit to help them in His absence before Pentecost; He had instructed them not to leave Jerusalem until the Spirit was given; and He had encouraged them by revealing that when the Holy Spirit came, He would give them the power to carry on His ministry throughout the world.<sup>27</sup>

But then, after Jesus ascended into Heaven, nothing happened. For ten days, one hundred and twenty of His followers met for prayer in an upstairs room that was very likely the same room where the disciples had gathered with Him for supper the night He was betrayed. While we are told, "They all joined together constantly in prayer," we are not told what they prayed or how they prayed. But it's safe to assume they were praying fervently, sincerely, almost desperately—without ceasing—for Jesus to keep His promise and come to them in Spirit form. What we know for sure is that their prayers were answered on the day of the Feast of Pentecost.

From the description given in Acts 2, as the morning of the feast day unfolded, His followers were in the upstairs room sitting together. Perhaps they were praying or reading Scripture or discussing the last instructions they had received from Jesus. At nine in the morning, without warning, there was the sound of a violent wind. The trees were not bending, clothing was not billowing, and curtains hanging in the open windows were not moving. It was just the sound of a hurricane-force wind. Before they could react to what they heard, they were electrified by what they saw: on each person's head appeared a flame! Then they were each filled with an intense awareness of the presence of Jesus. In fact, He had never felt so close. They must have felt wrapped in Him! Saturated in Him! Filled with Him! Without any doubt, they knew Jesus had come to them just as He said He would. But His presence was now in them in the person of the invisible Holy Spirit. The Father had kept His promise! And without any conscious effort, the enormous relief . . . the ecstatic joy . . . the electric thrill that they experienced rose up from their hearts and poured out of their lips in a symphony of praise!<sup>29</sup>

In their state of euphoria, the followers of Jesus must have moved to the nearby temple area. They were quickly surrounded by thousands of people who had converged on the city to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit's supernatural presence was revealed when the curious onlookers determined that

#### His Presence in History

the disciples were speaking in each listeners' own language! "Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? . . . What does this mean?' "30

Backed by the other disciples, Peter assumed the leadership responsibility, stood up, and addressed the onlookers with authority. He told them plainly that in fulfillment of Scripture, God had poured out His Spirit. And then, in the first public, verbal presentation of the gospel, he boldly described the life, the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus to which he and the other disciples were eyewitnesses. He concluded by declaring that Jesus, "exalted to the right hand of God . . . has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear." 32

Then Peter proclaimed truth . . .

- ... to some of the very people who had stood by and done nothing while Jesus suffered the worst crime ever perpetrated in human history.
- - ... to some of the very men who had nailed Jesus to the cross.<sup>34</sup>

Peter shouted for all to hear, "Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ [Messiah]." <sup>35</sup>

Amazingly, the crowd did not erupt in a riot or rush Peter in a rage nor drag him off to be stoned. Instead, they were cut to the heart and asked what they could do. Peter's response marked a pivot in history: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." About three thousand people responded! Repented! And received the Holy Spirit! On that historic day, the church was born!

So, dear sinner. What have you done that you feel puts you beyond the realm of God's forgiveness and redemption?

If He could forgive the very people who had stood by and done nothing when Jesus was arrested, tried, tortured, then crucified,

- ... if He could forgive the very people who had consented to His death and delivered Him for execution,
- ... if He could forgive the very people who had gathered at the governor's judgment hall and shouted "Crucify him!"
- ... if He could forgive the very Romans who had carried out the death sentence and nailed Jesus to the cross,
- ... if He could forgive the very same crowd of people that was guilty of the worst crime ever perpetrated in human history past, present, or future, why do you think He won't forgive you? Like those in the crowd on the temple steps, simply cry out to Him. Throw yourself on His mercy. If you lack words, perhaps the following will help:

#### Merciful God,

I cry out to You. Now. I know I'm a sinner. I have rationalized my sin, defended it, excused it, denied it, but I cannot rid myself of the guilt. While I put on a confident air in public, on the inside I'm ashamed . . . empty . . . hopeless. But I've come to the end of pretending. I'm so very tired of being tired of carrying this burden of guilt. My sin keeps coming to mind. I long to be free . . . genuine . . . real . . . with nothing to hide. Before You and before others. I know I don't deserve Your attention, much less forgiveness, but within me now is a small spark of hope. If You could forgive those who crucified Jesus, then would You also forgive me? You have said that You will not despise a broken, contrite heart. 37 So please, God of King David, do not despise or reject my cry.

I confess to You my \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).

I'm so sorry. Like David, I know I have sinned against You, not just against myself or others. Cleanse me within. I long to experience

#### His Presence in History

freedom from guilt and freedom from the fear of Your judgment. Create in me a pure heart. I invite You to enter my life as I surrender to Your full authority. Redeem me. Use me. For Your glory.

The specific words aren't as important as the cry in your heart and the sincerity of your faith as you turn to God, and God alone, for forgiveness and redemption. He will forgive you. He will redeem you. That's why He sent His only Son. His very name—Jesus—means He will save you from your sin.<sup>38</sup> But in addition, because you are living on this side of Pentecost, it gets even better.

#### Chapter 6: Our Strengthener

- 1. 2 Corinthians 12:10.
- 2. Genesis 37.
- 3. Genesis 39.
- 4. Psalm 105:18, YLT.
- 5. Genesis 41.
- 6. Jeremiah 1:18–19.
- 7. Isaiah 41:10-12.
- 8. Revelation 3:7-13.
- 9. Daniel 9:4-19.

#### Chapter 7: Our Standby

- Each one of these examples comes from my own extended family.
- 2. Mark 6:45-48.
- 3. Mark 6:48.

# Part 2: Enjoying the Presence of the Holy Spirit

- 1. John 14:16-17.
- 2. John 14:26.

# Chapter 8: His Presence in Eternity

- "Apollo 8: Christmas at the Moon," NASA, December 19, 2014, www.nasa.gov/topics /history/features/apollo\_8.html.
- 2. Psalm 139:7.
- 3. Matthew 28:19.
- 4. 1 Peter 1:2.
- 5. The symbol of the dove at the baptism of Jesus has often led to the misconception that the Holy Spirit is a dove. In the same way, the flames that rested on the

- heads of disciples at Pentecost cause some people to mistakenly believe that the Holy Spirit is a fire. But the Holy Spirit is a spirit. He does not have a visible form. So in Scripture symbols are often used to indicate His presence. See Genesis 15:17; Zechariah 4:1–6; Acts 2:3–4; Revelation 4:5.
- 6. Matthew 3:16-17.
- 7. You can explore further the topic of the Trinity in the book *Life in the Trinity* by Dr. Donald Fairbairn, the theological reviewer of this book. He also recommends *Delighting in the Trinity* by Michael Reeves and *The Deep Things of God* by Fred Sanders.
- 8. "Apollo 8's Christmas Eve 1968 Message," December 24, 1968, video, 2:01, May 19, 2013, www .youtube.com/watch?v=ToH hQUhdyBY.

# Chapter 9: His Presence in History

- 1. In chapter 18 we will explore ways the indwelling Holy Spirit equips believers today.
- 2. Exodus 31:3; 35:31.
- 3. Numbers 11:16–17.
- 4. Judges 6:33-35.
- 5. Judges 14:5–6.
- 6. 1 Chronicles 28:11–12.
- 7. Isaiah 61:1.
- 8. Ezekiel 3:10–15.

#### About the Author

Called "the best preacher in the family" by her late father, Billy Graham, Anne Graham Lotz speaks around the globe with the wisdom and authority of years spent studying God's Word.

The *New York Times* named Anne one of the five most influential evangelists of her generation. Her Just Give Me Jesus revivals have been held in more than thirty cities in twelve countries, with hundreds of thousands of attendees.

Anne is a best-selling and award-winning author of seventeen books. She is the president of AnGeL Ministries in Raleigh, North Carolina, and served as chairman of the National Day of Prayer Task Force from 2016 to 2017.

Whether a delegate to the World Economic Forum's annual meeting, a commentator in the *Washington Post*, or a groundbreaking speaker on platforms throughout the world, Anne's aim is clear: to bring revival to the hearts of God's people. And her message is consistent: calling people into a personal relationship with God through His Word.



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