

EVERYDAY JOYS

Devotional

40 Days of Reflecting on the
Intersection of Ordinary and Divine

TAMA FORTNER



Ink &
Willow

**SNEAK
PEEK**

**UNCORRECTED
PROOF**

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DEAR FRIEND

I'M SO GRATEFUL YOU'VE CHOSEN TO JOIN ME HERE on this journey of seeking and discovering the wonder and beauty hidden in *all* the moments of life. The truth is, this little collection of what I hope are joy-filled essays actually has its roots in a less-than-joyful time. It was a time when all the many pieces of my life were crumbling and caving in on me. Or so it seemed.

Changes in the seasons of life—my own and others—had thrown me off balance and out of my routines. A once-full nest began to empty as my children grew up and into their own lives, giving me a little too much quiet time. Some relationships and responsibilities changed—and not in the way I'd hoped or planned. A pandemic came and took away gatherings and celebrations, leaving more than a little loneliness in their place. The world became overwhelming. I lost my grandmother (the last of my grandparents). I lost my dog. And I lost my sense of self and purpose. It was . . . *crushing*. Largely because it was all beyond my control.

But—and isn't that such a lovely word?—as I was walking one morning, deep in desperation, I found myself praying, "Lord, show me the joy. I need to see Your joy. I need it to be a light for my path through these overwhelming days."

And God answered my prayer.

Instantly.

That doesn't usually happen. Yet, on this day, His answer appeared right before my eyes. Literally. God pointed me to the birds who never escape His notice, the trees that clap out His praise as the wind whips through their leaves, and the wildflowers He so carefully and splendidly clothes. Did the crosses I was asked to bear disappear? No. But their heaviness was lightened by those all-around-me evidences of Him.

That morning, I began to see intersections of ordinary and divine, and now I can't stop seeing them. These glimpses of God remind me that He is at work and that I am not alone. And the knowledge of His presence—personal and purposeful—has filled me with peace and joy ever since.

Of course, this *seeing* requires intentionality. I don't know about you, but I can get caught up in the blur of life—the distractions of busyness, the weight of worries, the loss and loneliness, even the lull of leisure. I then so easily miss the gifts just waiting to be discovered in all the ordinary and not-so-ordinary moments of life. As one day fades into another, I sometimes still catch myself wondering, *Have I really lived this day? Or have I missed what matters most?*

On that morning's walk, in that desperate call to God, He opened my eyes to a new way of seeing, and I don't ever want to *not see* again. He so carefully and thoughtfully fills each moment of my life—even the dark ones and the most seemingly insignificant ones—with reasons to be joyful and discoveries to delight in, if I will simply stop to see and savor them.

Will you walk with me through these forty days of seeking and finding Him in the ordinary moments of life? You won't ever find me claiming to have it completely figured out, but I'm learning. Day by day and moment by moment. I'm learning to seek, to see, and to settle into His presence. And what I'm finding there is so wonderful I can't keep it to myself.

So, I invite you to . . .

- Pause and read one devotion each day, each week, or whenever you need a moment of rest and reconnection.
- Ponder the words and meditate on the reflection. How might it apply to your own moments?
- Pray the simple prayers.
- Consider the journaling prompts and record your thoughts and insights.
- Embrace the challenge and seek Him in the moment.

As you journey through these forty devotions, I hope and pray you'll find—as I have—that . . .

Life is best lived at the intersection of ordinary and divine.

Much love,

Tama

LIVING AT THE INTERSECTION OF ORDINARY AND DIVINE

Day 1

JOSHUA 1:9

The LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.



THESE DAYS, I am trying to remember to invite God into *all* the moments of my life. Not just the big, the extraordinary, or the most desperate, but the everyday, the ordinary, and even the mundane moments as well. I want to seek His presence over Monday's breakfast and on Thursday afternoons. I've made it my goal to turn to His Word first thing each morning and to ask Him to bless my rest each night. I talk to Him in the car, in the shower, and as I write. And to my utter delight, I'm finding that He is always there. Just as He has promised to be.

Seeking God in all the many moments of my day is a practice I've been, well, *practicing* for a while now. But I didn't always. It took a few years and a few trips through the Bible to convince myself that my continual chatter and turning to Him was not just tolerated but sought, welcomed, and even treasured. (*By the Lord of All Creation! I mean, how amazing is that?*)

Of course, I'm still learning and practicing this total dependence on God. I suspect that I will be all the days of my life. But the one thing I'm seeing over and over again—the thing I am just so in awe of—is the way He always seeks to meet with me. Even when I neglect and forget Him, He pours His divine presence into my oh-so-ordinary life.

The words of Psalm 23 offer a glimpse of just how pervasive His presence is. As Christians, I sometimes think we turn to this psalm so often that it's become overly familiar, and we miss the depth of its power and promise. Just look at some of the verbs that describe what God does for us, like *leads*, *refreshes*, and *guides*. And the places He is with us: beside quiet waters, in the darkest valleys, and in the presence of enemies.

As God's children, we are never beyond His reach or out of His presence. And when we seek Him, there is nowhere He will not be found. We are always at the intersection of ordinary and divine.



Lord, thank You for the
divine You pour into
every moment and place
of my life. Amen.

Reflect

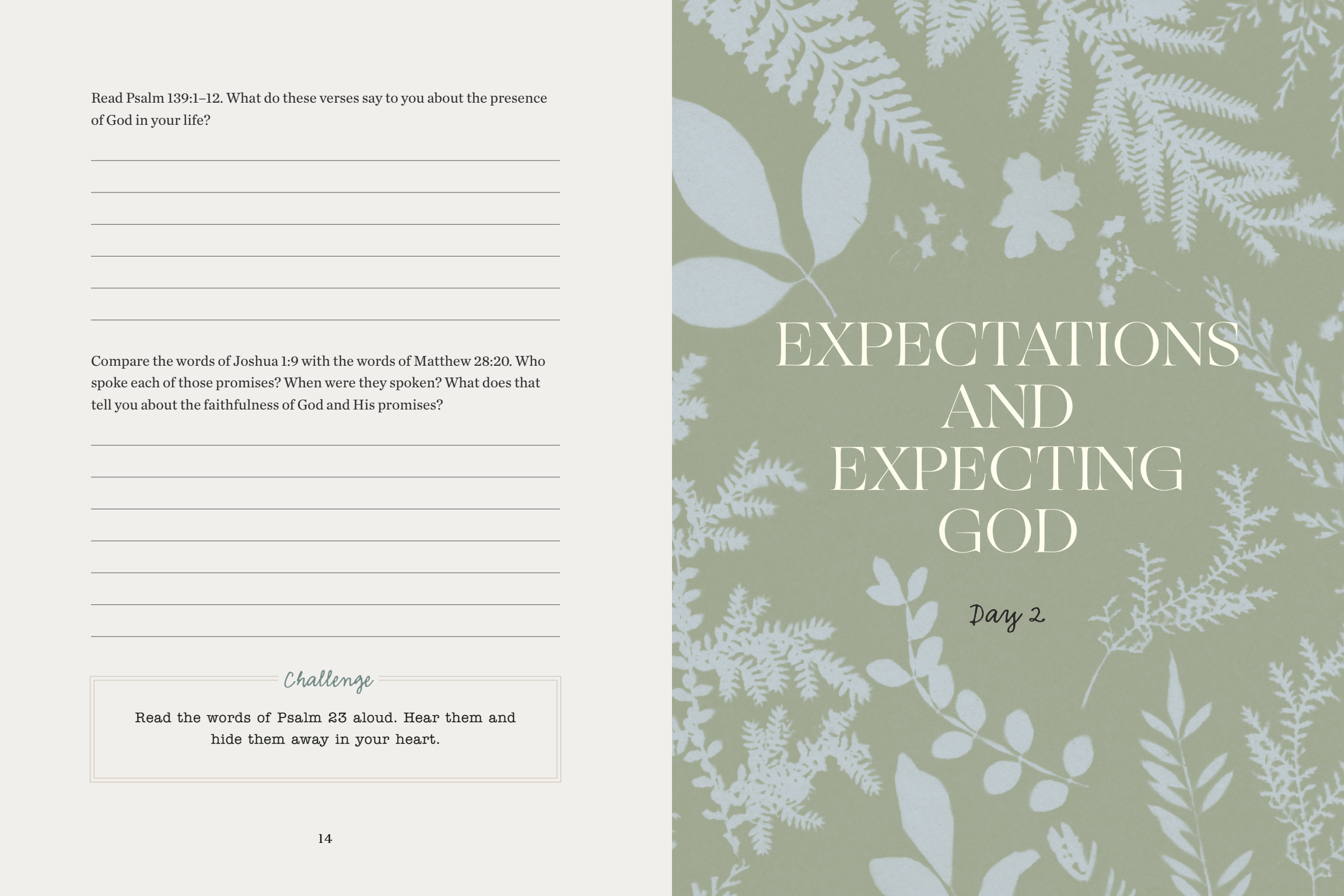
God does not merely tolerate our presence. He seeks,
welcomes, and treasures time spent with us!

Read Psalm 139:1–12. What do these verses say to you about the presence of God in your life?

Compare the words of Joshua 1:9 with the words of Matthew 28:20. Who spoke each of those promises? When were they spoken? What does that tell you about the faithfulness of God and His promises?

Challenge

Read the words of Psalm 23 aloud. Hear them and hide them away in your heart.



EXPECTATIONS AND EXPECTING GOD

Day 2

MATTHEW 7:7

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.



SOMETIMES I HAVE unrealistic expectations. The vacation spot doesn't quite live up to the photos or reviews on the website. The cookies don't turn out quite like those perfect pictures. People don't give quite as much as they take.

Merriam-Webster defines *expectation* as “the act or state of expecting.”¹ Okay, well, thanks for clearing that right up. Let's try the definition of “expect,” then, shall we? To *expect* is “to consider probable or certain,” or “to anticipate or look forward to the coming or occurrence of.”² Yes, that's much more helpful.

What does all that have to do with God?

Recently, I've gotten into the habit of beginning each day with a verse. Before I ever get out of bed, I roll over, grab my phone, and open my Bible app. (I know experts say not to keep your phone next to your bed, but I'm guessing they don't have kids hours away at college or living on the other side of town.) As I read the verse of the day, I've come to expect God to gift me with just the right words of wisdom. Somehow, in a way only He could orchestrate, His words are always just what I need or just what I've been wanting to think about, even if I didn't know it yet.

Because God has so faithfully met with me for so many mornings, I am learning to expect Him. *To expect Him to meet me.* And, to my utter delight, I am discovering that—unlike those vacation spots, cookies, and draining

¹ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “expectation (n.),” accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/expectation>.

² Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “expect (v.),” accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/expect>.

people—my expectations are not unrealistic. And they are not unmet. In fact, God faithfully meets with me in *all* the moments of my life—when I open my eyes to recognize His presence.

So, I'm cultivating a habit of seeking and searching for Him, of expecting Him and learning to expect Him. And as I seek out and search for Him, He meets my expectations again and again and again, far beyond anything I could ask for or imagine or expect . . . at every intersection of ordinary and divine.



Thank You, God, for
always being found. Help
my heart to never stop
looking for You and to
You. Amen.

Reflect

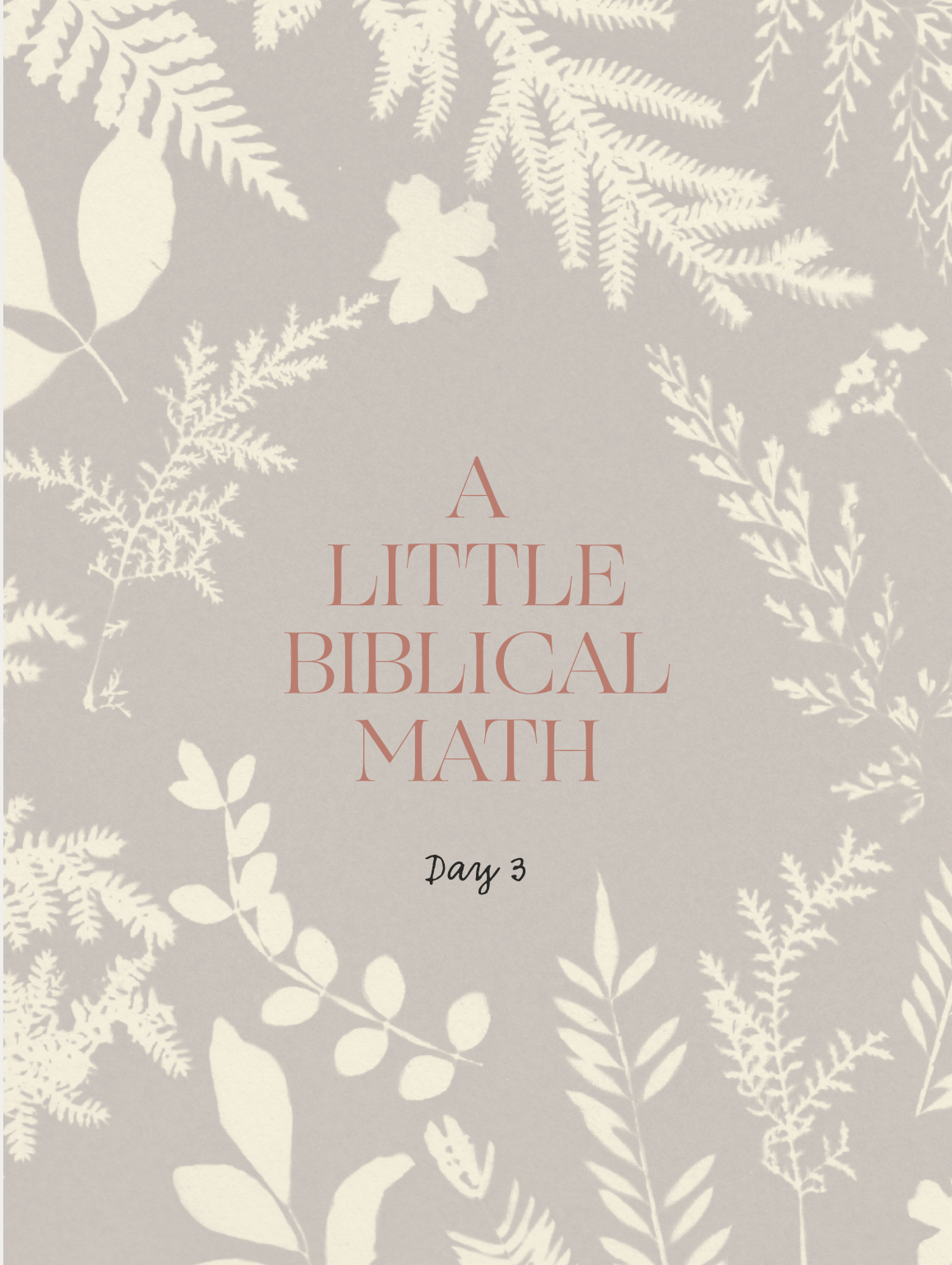
When we expect to find God in all the moments
of our lives, He does not disappoint.

Read Matthew 7:7 and Jeremiah 29:13. What promises do these verses offer that we can expect God to keep? What is our role—according to these verses—in God’s keeping of His promises?

Where do you expect to see God? How can you cultivate a habit of seeking Him in all the moments of life?

Challenge

Expect to see God today.



EXODUS 3:5

Take off your sandals, for the place where you
are standing is holy ground.



WHILE I SPEND MOST DAYS working with words, there's a part of me that loves math. Especially algebra. Crazy, right? (Although, when words and math join forces to create seemingly-impossible-to-solve problems about trains, speeds, and . . . Why are people taking my apples anyway? *That* I do not love.)

Perhaps it's the simple certainty of math that's so appealing. The way the numbers, letters, and unknowns resolve themselves into an orderly series of steps that lead straight to the one-and-only answer. I like one-and-only answers.

So it wasn't a complete surprise when, one day, I found myself studying a bit of Scripture—one I'd read a thousand times before—and suddenly applying a math formula to it.

If A equals B and B equals C, then A also equals C.

It's called the transitive law. I think.

The Scripture was Exodus 3. Moses had stepped up to the burning bush. (Because who wouldn't want a closer look at something like that?) Then the voice of God called out to him and said, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

Holy ground. Ground made holy by the presence of God.

Hold on to that thought and fast forward a few thousand years to the new covenant of Christ. As Jesus prepared to return to His Father, He promised a gift to us as believers: the Holy Spirit of God would come *to live inside us*. We would become His dwelling place (1 Corinthians 6:19). Which means that where we go, He goes. Every step of the way. So then . . . every step of the way becomes holy ground.

In other words:

If I am the dwelling place of God's presence and God's presence equals holy ground, then wherever I go is holy ground. Because He is with me.

Just a little beautiful, biblical math found at the intersection of ordinary and divine.



Lord, teach me to live
as if every step is holy
ground.

Reflect

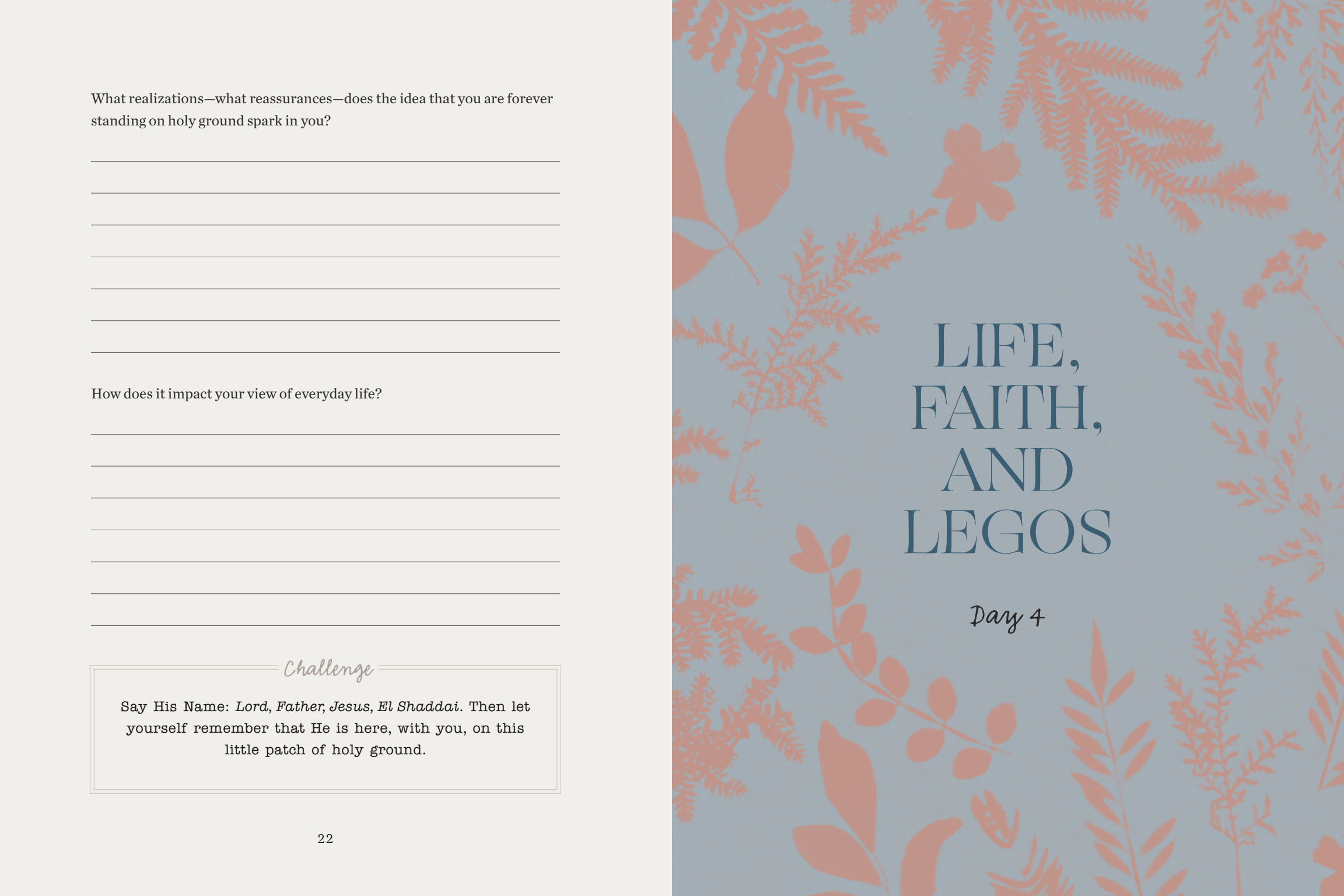
Sit for a few moments in this bit of truth:
As a follower of Christ, the Spirit of God is
with you and within you. You are standing
on holy ground.

What realizations—what reassurances—does the idea that you are forever standing on holy ground spark in you?

How does it impact your view of everyday life?

Challenge

Say His Name: *Lord, Father, Jesus, El Shaddai*. Then let yourself remember that He is here, with you, on this little patch of holy ground.



LIFE, FAITH, AND LEGOS

Day 4

JOHN 10:10

I have come that they may have life,
and have it to the full.



I LOVE LEGOS. I may or may not have bought Lego sets so that I could help my kids put them together. I may or may not still do this. Kids may or may not be involved. (No judgments here, right?)

There's something about the way Legos click and connect together that makes me smile. And then there's the way those piles of seemingly random little blocks—with all their odd shapes and sizes—join together to create something bigger. Something greater than all the pieces. Something with design and purpose. *Hmm.*

I'm starting to see that so much of life and faith and God—like those little Legos—comes down to connections. The more I read and study God's Word, the more connections I see. Old Testament to New Testament. Promises given and promises kept. And that “full,” “rich and satisfying” (NLT) life that Jesus offers in John 10:10 with the words and mindset of Acts 17:28: “For in him we live and move and have our being.”

I am convinced that the full, rich, and satisfying life is found only when we live and move and have our being in Christ. When we rise and sleep in Him, breathe and eat in Him, when each step, each movement is infused with an awareness of the presence of Him.

Even though those “big” mountaintop-moments of faith are wonderful and amazing, they don't happen every day. But embracing the living, moving, breathing moments of a life lived in connection with Him? This is possible every day.

I'm finding that when I do choose to live this way, those seemingly little random moments—with all their odd shapes and sizes—join together to

create something bigger. Something greater than all the pieces. Something of His design, fulfilling His purpose in and for me.

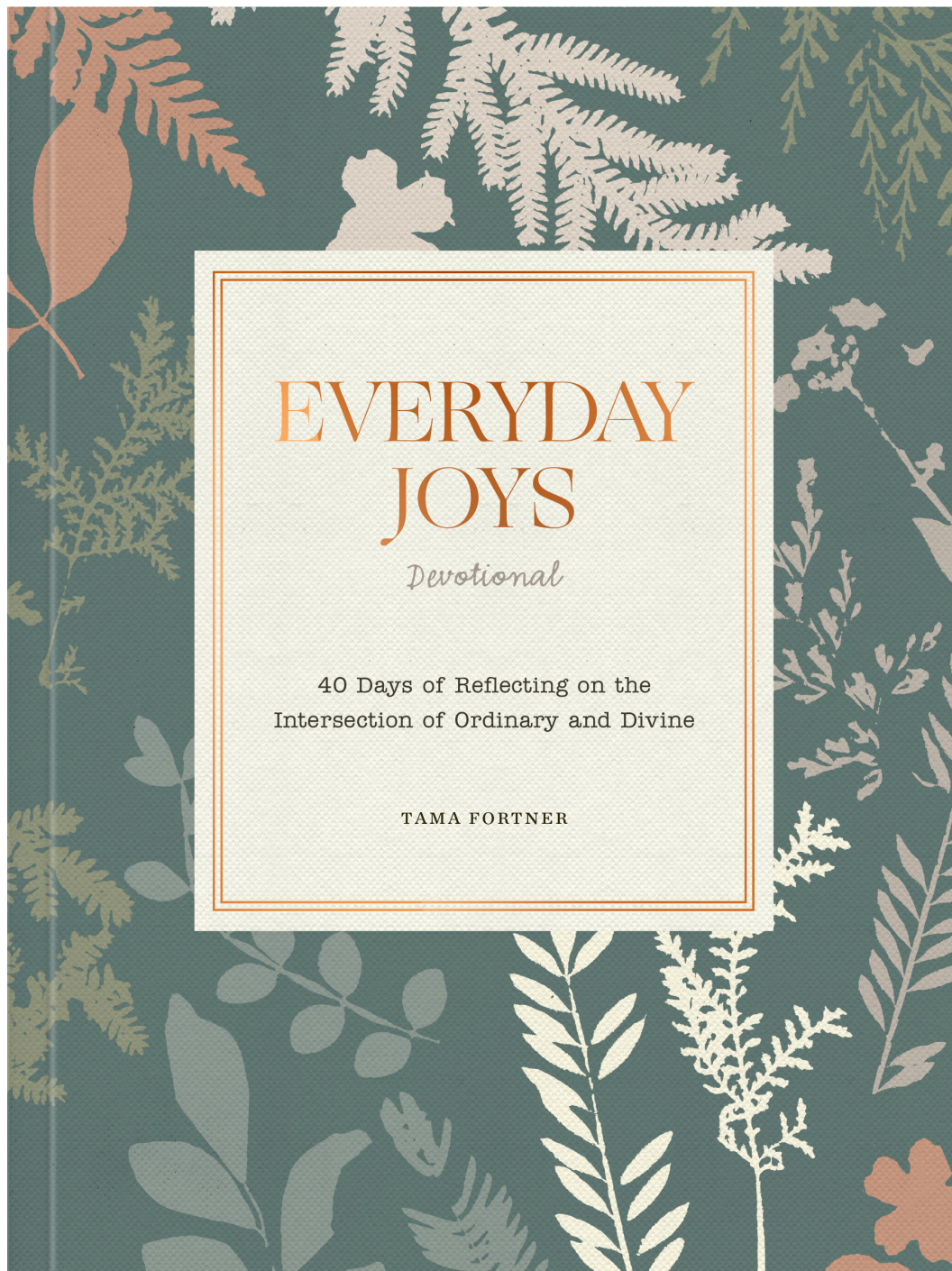
Even in the smallest moments, here at the intersection of ordinary and divine.



Lord, teach me how
to live a life more fully
connected to You.

Reflect

Read John 15:1–17 and spend a few moments
contemplating this idea of connection.



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