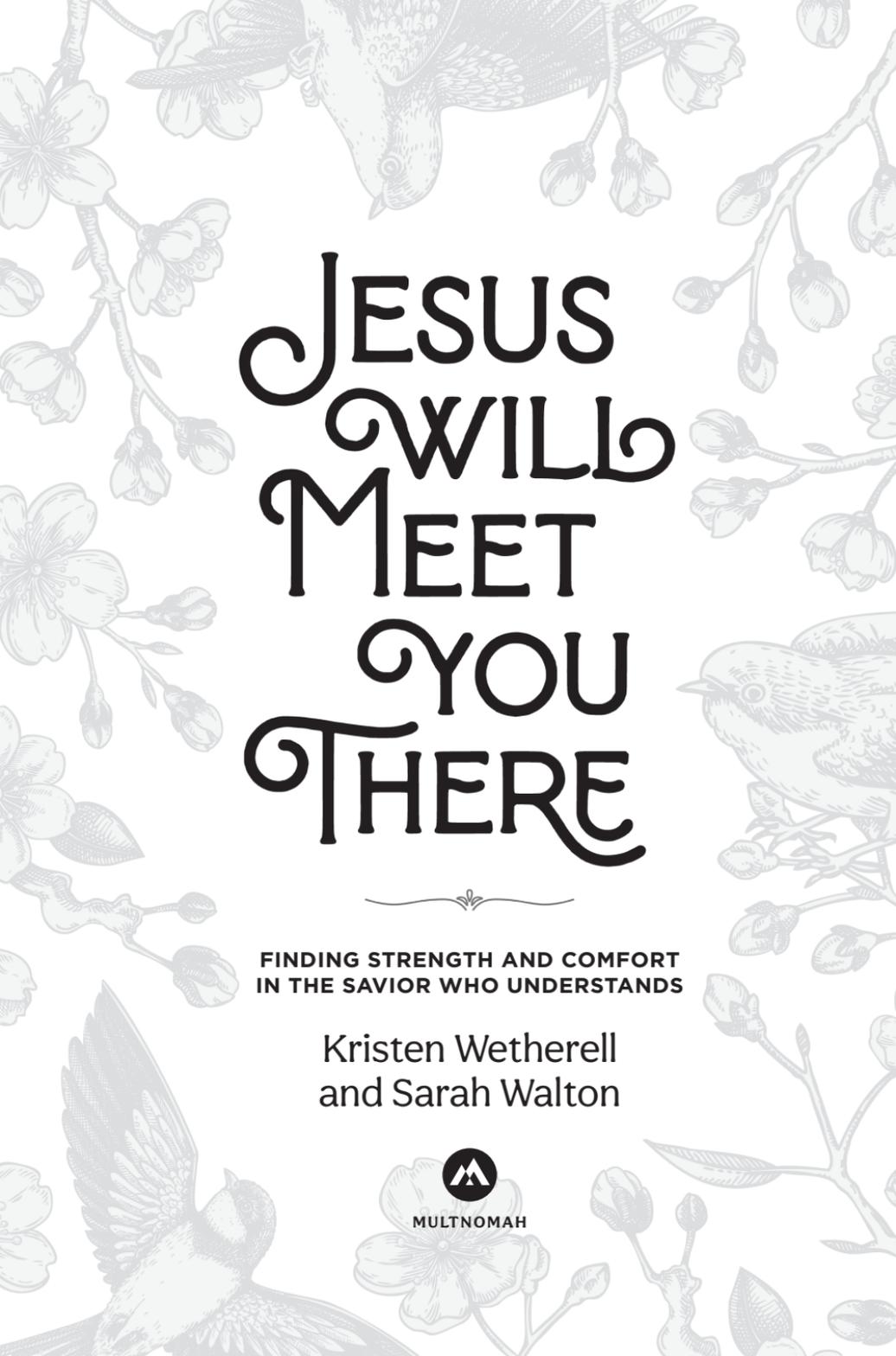
The book cover features a teal background with a repeating pattern of white and yellow floral branches and birds. A central dark teal rectangle with a gold border contains the title and authors' names. The title 'JESUS WILL MEET YOU THERE' is written in a large, white, decorative serif font. The authors' names 'KRISTEN WETHERELL & SARAH WALTON' are in a smaller, white, sans-serif font above the title. Below the title is a small gold flourish. At the bottom of the central rectangle, the subtitle 'FINDING STRENGTH AND COMFORT IN THE SAVIOR WHO UNDERSTANDS' is written in a white, sans-serif font. A circular seal on the right side of the central rectangle contains the text 'SNEAK PEEK' at the top and 'UNCORRECTED PROOF' at the bottom, with a stylized mountain logo in the center.

KRISTEN WETHERELL
& SARAH WALTON

JESUS
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FINDING STRENGTH AND
COMFORT IN THE SAVIOR
WHO UNDERSTANDS





JESUS WILL MEET YOU THERE

FINDING STRENGTH AND COMFORT
IN THE SAVIOR WHO UNDERSTANDS

Kristen Wetherell
and Sarah Walton



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To our loving Lord and Savior, Jesus.
Your nearness is our good (Psalm 73:28).



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Introduction

Let's drop the facade for a moment, shall we? You know the one—where we all strive to convince ourselves (and one another) that we have it all together when, deep down, we're painfully aware we don't.

Underneath that veneer, we have far more in common than we realize.

We all long to be known and loved. Even more—to feel worthy of love. We exhaust ourselves trying to prove that we are, in fact, deserving of such adoration. So what do we do? We despise the weaknesses that reveal the cracks in our strength, we loathe the failures that eat away at our confidence, and we're afraid of being exposed for who we really are: limited and flawed humans.

But *why*? Why are we so ashamed to admit such an obvious, undeniable reality?

The answer is simple but hardly simplistic. It's *hard* to be human. Finite, imperfect, sinful human beings living in a world of unknowns, disappointments, pain, highs and lows, twists and turns. And that is far from easy.

We know this, but still we wonder, *Is it just me? Does anyone really understand the struggles inside me and the challenges coming at me from all sides?*

More importantly—*does God?*

Maybe you've heard the truth about Jesus or even walked faithfully with him for years, but still you wonder, *Is Jesus really present*

and invested in every aspect of my life? The Christian answer, of course, is yes. But what does that look like in real life—in the trenches, past the clichés—in moments of desperation when God feels distant? If God cares for us but our circumstances don't change, what then? *Does Jesus personally draw near and empathize with me, even in the messy, undesirable, broken parts of my story?* These questions matter because we will trust God only to the extent that we believe he truly knows and loves us.

But if Jesus really does understand us and meet us in the seen and unseen places, the joyful and sorrowful ones, and the nitty-gritty corners of our humanity—this makes all the difference. We're here to tell you the answer is yes, Jesus is right beside you as one who's lived it himself. But first, we have to face reality.

FRAGILE AS DUST

We are as fragile and passing as dust (Genesis 3:19). We're here one moment, gone the next. We're painfully aware of this fact, but to our core, we despise it and desperately try to ignore it. We do everything we can to mask it. We try to control the uncontrollable. We try to protect our stoic independence. And avoid anything that exposes our vulnerability.

Throughout our lives, we find ourselves in a race against time. We strive to leave our mark on this temporary world, abhorring our limitations and, underneath it all, longing for a place to belong. All the while, we work hard to distract ourselves from anything that might bear evidence to our fragility. But try as we might, the reality of our humanness confronts us around every corner.

This, in part, is what drew Kristen and me (Sarah) together ten years ago. After we connected through our church in the Chicagoland area, we discovered we were both struggling with chronic health issues, which eventually led to a diagnosis of Lyme disease for each of us. At the same time, I discovered that all my children carried

the same disease, which I'd unknowingly passed on through gestation. As Kristen and I bonded over the limitations of our illness, along with countless other struggles—financial, special needs, and disability, to name a few—the Lord provided the opportunity to co-write our first book, *Hope When It Hurts: Biblical Reflections to Help You Grasp God's Purpose in Your Suffering*. It wasn't an easy endeavor with the challenges at hand, but our faithful God grew a passion within each of us to share how the hope of Jesus meets us in every aspect of life—especially in the difficulties.

Since those early days, the Lord has kept us dependent on him. I have since moved across the country, and Kristen has added kids to her family, and while much has changed, much has stayed the same. As we talked recently, we realized the Lord, once again, was placing on both our hearts a desire to grapple with our limitations. *What is God doing in our weakness and pain? Does faith mean trusting what I can understand or trusting God with what I can't?*

The burden of this book became clear to us both as we continued to wrestle through our endless questions and the struggles of living in a human frame.

Can you relate? Ask yourself . . .

- Do I despise my failures, frustrated by all the ways I fall short?
- Am I weighed down by doubt, pain, grief, or loneliness?
- Do I wonder, *Does anyone really care about me?*
- Do I fear letting go of control?
- Am I always striving for the elusive promise of happiness in the world around me?
- Does my sense of worth ebb and flow with my performance and the opinions of others?
- Do I struggle to believe God cares about the details—the overwhelming to-do list, the strained relationship, or the

day's disappointments?

- Am I frustrated by the limitations of my humanity?

Limitations are part of being human. They're what make us creatures, not the Creator. More importantly, every one of the above questions (and more) are meant to lead us to the One who is—to the God who draws near to the very humanity we so often despise.

BETTER THAN YOU KNOW YOURSELF

What if our humanity isn't something to run from, though? Although we despise our weakness, what if being weak is the very thing that will lead us to experience a strength beyond our own? And what if being needy doesn't make us repulsive to God but actually tugs on his heartstrings? Maybe the things that we believe make us unlovable are, in fact, the very things that draw Jesus *toward* us in the first place.

Friend, if we stop striving to be something we're not, we'll find the Someone we most need. And in finding him, we'll find who we are meant to be. We'll discover that every fragile, beautifully complex part of us is *already* fully known and loved by God—the One who not only created us but also became like us.

And *that* is where our hope is found. In Jesus.

As we'll learn together in the pages ahead, God isn't a distant, uncaring God. His death and resurrection saved us, but his heart for us didn't end there. Jesus *became* like us in every way (other than sin), allowing him to now *sympathize* with us in every way.

He knows the frustrating limitations of your weakness.

He feels the torment of your fear and shame.

He bears the silent suffering of your loneliness.

He endures the weariness of relentless pain.

He gets the battle against doubt.

He suffers the agonies of profound grief.

Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. And because he fully knows us, he is most able to care for us:

As a father shows compassion to his children,
 so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.
 For he knows our frame;
 he remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:13-14)

HE WILL MEET YOU THERE

If we're honest, though, it doesn't always *feel* like God is near or compassionate, especially when life hits us square in the face or our prayers seem to go unanswered. Like us, maybe you've struggled to make sense of the pain God has allowed, and right now you're wondering if he's stored up his compassion for everyone but you.

It's okay to acknowledge your lingering questions, to remove the veneer of "acceptable Christianity." We won't be ready to trust God with everything if we haven't actually brought him everything, including the stuff that's confusing and messy. It's not until we're honest with ourselves, and with God, that we'll be ready to receive the truth: We have a Father who not only remembers our frame and feels compassion for us but also came to do something about it.

That hope is why this book has been written.

And it's what we'll explore in the chapters ahead as we journey through the New Testament, holding up a magnifying glass to the life of Jesus as he meets people just like us. We'll see how he experienced the depth of our humanity in his own body and how he was drawn personally and compassionately to the humanity of others.

Here you'll find short, accessible chapters, which can be read in the order they appear or in whatever order seems most applicable to you right now. You can read the book alone or walk through it with a friend or group, and you can personally apply each chapter by engaging with the reflection questions at the end. However you read it,

our prayer is that you'll close this book with a renewed sense of Jesus's presence with you. And more than anything else, we pray that you'll have a greater understanding of who Jesus is and how personal he really is.

That he *really* knows you and that you can *really* know him.

We don't write from a place of theory; we write from the trenches of our daily realities. We're not here to offer you motivational fluff or false hope. We're here to walk alongside you, human to human, as we encounter the real, life-changing truth of who Jesus has shown himself to be in the Gospels. We're here to dwell on rock-solid, substantial truth that brings tangible hope and draws us near to the very heartbeat of God through the life of his Son.

Friend, regardless of the strength of your faith, the burdens you carry, the pain you endure, the temptations you battle, the doubts you're trying to push aside, or the grief that's left a gaping hole in your heart, you aren't alone. There's a place for you here. So don't leave your humanity at the door, but in the pages ahead let our Lord Jesus infuse comfort and strength into every ounce of your being.

Wherever you find yourself right now, rest assured, he will meet you there.

With love,

Kristen and Sarah

PART 1



WEAKNESS



When You Despise Your Weakness

Hebrews 4:15



I'm going to take a long shot here and assume that you, the one holding this book in your hands, are a living, breathing *human*. I may not know much else about you, but I do know this: You are not a random blob of atoms thrown together by chance. You have a heart that pumps with precision, lungs that rise and fall with each breath, emotions that ebb and flow, a mind that thinks, and a face that resembles some others but is entirely unique.

You and I are profoundly complex—body, mind, and soul—intricate beyond what the brightest minds can comprehend. And yet, whether or not we like to admit it, we're also painfully limited and dependent beings. Without air, we cease breathing. Without precise electrical pulses, our hearts stop beating. Without proper immune systems, microscopic germs wreak havoc. We're vulnerable to the world around us and at war with the passions within us. Our earthly frames are carefully and intentionally designed yet fragile to the core—exposed and battered by the elements of a sin-ravaged world and fractured by weakness, sin, and suffering.

The irony is, we invest endless resources trying to convince our-



selves we're something we're not. We strive to delay aging and the dreaded reality that death will one day knock on our door. We equate self-sufficiency with a life well lived. And we spend our whole lives searching for meaning and striving for what's lasting, while running from the very One who holds both in his hands.

It's exhausting, isn't it?

Like a hamster on a wheel, we run ourselves ragged, avoiding anything that reminds us of how temporal and not in control we really are.

WEAKNESS ISN'T OUR ENEMY

I imagine you've arrived at this section on weakness with one of two perspectives. Maybe you feel your limitations acutely because of physical challenges or other heavy circumstances that have sucked your capacity dry. You're reminded of your weaknesses around every corner.

Or maybe you feel pretty good about life right now, confident in who you are and what you've accomplished. You may not *feel* particularly weak, but you have a chronic, low-grade fear that you're one mistake or calamity away from losing everything you've worked so hard to achieve.

Whether you're plagued with weakness or running from it, eventually you'll have to face your humanity head-on.

Eventually, we all wonder, *Where did I go wrong? Why can't I get it together?* If you're a Christian, you're faced with even deeper questions: *If God truly loves me, why does he allow me to struggle in the first place? Is he patient toward my limitations, or is he annoyed by my weaknesses and failings?*

Thankfully, we don't have to wonder.

FORCED TO DIG DEEPER

Several years ago, trials came like unrelenting waves. Chronic illness

knocked me down every day, and on top of that, disappointment and struggle kept crashing on my family. First, my husband lost his job, draining our finances as the needs multiplied. To make matters worse, our young son's neurodiverse challenges worsened by the day, and in my weariness, I pleaded with God to show me his favor and compassion. I was desperate for reassurance that he truly cared about me and what our family was walking through. But what followed was *not* the answer I was hoping for.

Not long after we'd taken our son to a long-awaited specialist who we'd been referred to, we learned this medical practice was impersonating the *actual* specialist we thought we were seeing. They had duped dozens of desperate families like ours in the process. By the time the truth came to light, we were out thousands of dollars and could no longer afford to see the real specialist. It hit like a gut punch, and in all honesty, God didn't just feel absent—he felt cruel.

As I scoured the Scriptures, desperate for a lifeline to keep my head above the waves, simplistic Christian slogans that once made sense now seemed to taunt me: *Just have faith and trust that it will all work out. God won't give you more than you can handle. There's a good purpose to all this.*

Even true statements like “God is good” are easy to believe when circumstances match our idea of goodness. But what do we do when life falls apart and disrupts what once made sense?

We're forced to dig deeper.

The moment we're tempted to pull back from Jesus is the very moment we must lean in. Because if we look closely at the life of Christ, we'll encounter the very nature and character of God. Not only are we sinners who need a Savior; we're also sufferers who need a Comforter and Redeemer.

There are times, however, we may know this in our heads, but for some reason, it hits a brick wall at the heart level. Usually, it's when we find ourselves at a crossroads between *knowing* the truth

about God and *staking* our entire life on it. This point often comes when life unravels and our perception of God is shaken to the core.

For example, until our faith is tested, we're more likely to rest our confidence on simplistic interpretations of God's promises in passages like Matthew 7:9–11: "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (NIV).

I don't know about you, but my interpretation of "bread and fish" usually corresponds to what seems good to me at the moment. Therefore, when God acts outside the bounds of those perceptions, it feels like he's giving me a stone or a snake.

If you find yourself at that crossroads right now, you're in good company. The pages of this book stem from a deeply rooted desire to grasp how God is both powerful *and* personal—how he's *really* for us. And there's no greater way to see the heart of God than to see it lived out through the life of Jesus.

WHY JESUS'S HUMANITY AND DEITY BOTH MATTER

Think about a past or present difficulty in your life. When it comes to suffering or disappointment, how do you and I tend to respond? Naturally, we want out. We avoid it at all costs or push it to our mental back burner—believing the path *around* pain and weakness is what's best for us.

Now consider Jesus. Unlike us, he *willingly* left the comforts and glories of heaven and became human. He did this fully aware of the suffering he would endure on our behalf. It defies logic: Why would a loving Father send his Son into a harsh world to save those who hate him? It sounds a lot like a father giving his son a stone or a snake.

Yes, God could have left us to ourselves—to the consequences

of our own rebellious hearts and the pain that comes from living in a fallen world. But he didn't. He is Immanuel, God with us. His love took on human form in Jesus.

Here's what's striking to me: Jesus could have descended to earth as a thirty-year-old man, begun his three years of ministry, and died on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins. But he didn't. Instead, he came into the world as we all do, dependent on earthly parents, enduring the full limitations and pain of humanity. He willingly chose this path. Why?

Because Jesus needed to experience the full extent of our humanity in order to redeem it.

Therefore, we must hold Jesus's humanity and deity carefully together. If we lose sight of his deity, we reduce him to a sympathetic man who is powerless to save. If we lose sight of his humanity, we have a God who can save but who lacks firsthand experience of the realities of this fallen world.

So it's the profound truth of both Jesus's humanity and his deity that gives us both eternal and present hope. He isn't distant, uncaring, or out of touch. He feels what we feel. He knows the full extent of the human experience—even to the point of death. He knows the full scale of suffering this world brings.

And yet Jesus doesn't stop at forgiving our sins and comforting our sorrows. He draws near. He gives us his Holy Spirit, not only to strengthen and comfort us in our humanity . . . but also to redeem it.

WHAT MAKES YOU HUMAN

Weakness is a constant reminder of our finiteness. We aren't unbreakable. We aren't infallible. And we certainly have to depend on people besides ourselves.

In other words, we aren't God.

But consider this: Maybe God isn't as disappointed and frustrated by our weaknesses as we are. In fact, maybe God knows that

our determination to avoid weakness is actually a greater threat to us than weakness itself. He knows that we only hurt ourselves by trying to live as if we were made to be independent, when he designed us to be creatures dependent on him for all things.

As humans, we rely on sleep. Without it, we grow tired. We rely on nourishment for our bodies to function effectively. In sickness and injury, we're often dependent on medicine, treatment, and the wisdom of others. As Christians, we rely on knowing the truth of the Bible in order to recognize deception in a world full of lies. And above all, we're dependent on God not only for eternal salvation but also for the very breath that sustains our life one moment at a time.

You and I aren't disappointments or failures because we're inherently limited by our humanity. We're simply human, designed to be dependent on the One who created us.

Therefore, because Jesus walked this earth as a limited being, he has compassion toward us, knowing what it's like to give up his unlimited deity and take on the limitations and weaknesses of a human frame.

We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. (Hebrews 4:15, NIV)

Not only does Jesus know your weakness, he also empathizes with it. Not only does he have compassion toward your weakness, he is also able and willing to draw near to you with his strength.

WEAKNESS IS THE BEGINNING OF STRENGTH

Friend, we won't always understand the "why" behind God's ways or be able to make sense of the limitations that hinder us from the life we long for, but we can be confident in this: Jesus loved us enough to

become human and endure the pain of this world. He knew he'd be forsaken by his Father, while suffering the most horrendous death we could imagine, to call us his own. For "greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13, NIV).

Your limitations don't push God away. They are exactly what lead you to the One who has everything you need. As we'll see in the chapters ahead, Jesus is drawn to needy people. Until you see your weakness, you can't receive the strength of Jesus.

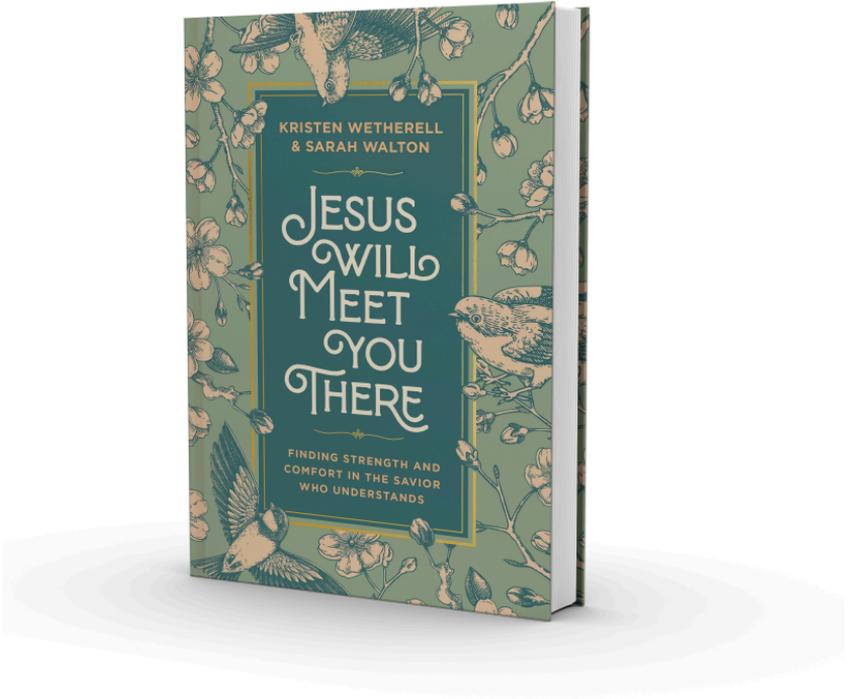
Do you feel weak today? I know I do.

Jesus invites us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28–29, NIV).

Though we may not always understand his ways, because of Jesus, we can know without a doubt that the heart of God is for us—breathing hope and redemption into every facet of our humanity, including the weaknesses we so often despise.

✧ Meeting with Jesus ✧

1. How have you responded to your weaknesses and limitations lately? Have they led you toward shame, embarrassment, self-accusation, or anger, or have they led you to lean on Jesus as your strength?
2. Why does our world despise weakness? How does acknowledging your weakness lead to freedom?
3. How would your relationship with Jesus change if you fully believed he empathizes with you? Read 2 Corinthians 12:9. Write or pray your thoughts, questions, or concerns to the Lord and ask for his grace in each one.



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