



Sanctuary FOR MY Soul

Meeting
God Through
the Psalms

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TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN

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the fruit of the womb a reward."*

—Psalm 127:3 (ESV)



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How to Use This Devotional

Amid all the demands made on your life and all the responsibilities you juggle, one thing is ever true: God loves you, and he is present with you no matter what you face. *Sanctuary for My Soul* will help you draw closer to him through a **4-week** exploration of the Psalms.

- With **6 devotions per week**, you can reflect on a psalm each day (Monday through Friday) and another on the weekend.
- Alternately, you could journey through the **24** devotions in this resource at your own pace.

Our hope and prayer is that this resource will lead you to the true sanctuary we can find only in our loving God.

Sanctuary for My Soul: Meeting God Through the Psalms

From *Today's Christian Woman*

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TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN

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WORDS TO Encourage & Inspire




Bestselling author, blogger, and life coach **Holley Gerth** has already impacted over 100,000 women through her book *You're Already Amazing*—now this new *You're Already Amazing LifeGrowth Guide* and DVD offer more practical tools and wisdom for even greater life transformation. Designed to be used individually or in a small group, this six-week study will encourage and empower women to embrace who they are and become all God created them to be.

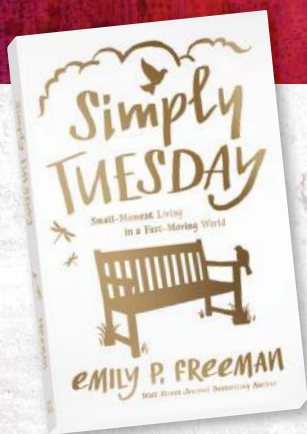
Jessica N. Turner empowers you to take back the fringe hours—those little pockets of time you *already have in your day*—in order to make time for your passions and practice self-care.



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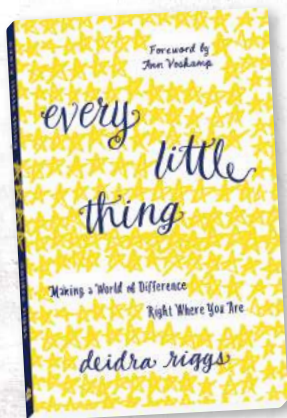
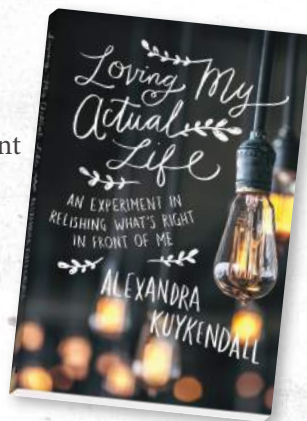
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WORDS TO Live & Love By



R real life happens in the small moments we find on the most ordinary day of the week. Tuesday holds secrets we can't see in a hurry—secrets not just for our schedules but for our souls. **Emily Freeman** invites us to sit on the bench and rest.

Alexandra Kuykendall shares her adventure of her nine-month experiment to declutter her crazy-busy life, helping women discover what it means to love themselves, find refreshment, and cherish every day.



In this encouraging and empowering book, **Deidra Riggs** calls you to accept God's invitation to join him in making a difference right where you are, right now.

Praising God with Our Lives

*“Let everything that breathes sing praises to the LORD!”
(Psalm 150:6)*

It was a late December evening in St. Louis, but the wind, rain, and chill outside were no match for the warmth and energy exuded by my 16,000 fellow Urbana Missions Conference attendees. Our collective voices rang through the darkened stadium with joy and gladness. A worship team led us through songs featuring various languages and styles to reflect the beauty of the diversity amongst God’s created people. And when it was over, I caught myself in a wistful sigh, wishing I could linger in this foretaste of heaven forever.

But the following day, instead of being filled with the songs of the nations, I was back to my everyday, mundane tasks such as laundry, lunch-making, and seeking all the lost library books that my kids had scattered about the house in my absence. Giving God his due praise was much harder when daily stresses and realities began to fill my days.



When it feels as though it’s hard to worship God due to challenges occurring in my life, I remember the majesty and inspiration that appear in Psalm 150. Every time I read this psalm, I notice not just the repetition of the word *praise* but also the word *with*. The psalmist described various ways to praise God—*with* ram’s horn, *with* lyre, *with* cymbals. Or, perhaps more fitting for our time: *with* laundry, *with* lunch-making, *with* library-book-seeking.

We don’t have to wait for wondrous worship experiences in order to praise God. Instead, our very lives can sing praises to God as we pursue all that we do with hearts focused on “his mighty works” and “his unequalled greatness” (verse 2). And we will find that the foretaste of heaven that comes from praising God can happen right within our own home. ●

Read: Read Psalm 150. **Reflect:** How do you feel right now about your own worship posture toward God? In what ways can you praise him more consistently through your daily activities?

Helen Lee is an associate editor at InterVarsity Press and an advisor for *Today’s Christian Woman*. She’s also the author of *The Missional Mom*.

Honest Faith in Hard Times

“From the ends of the earth, I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the towering rock of safety.” (Psalm 61:2)

Last summer our daughter was overcome by an illness that left doctors baffled. I have never felt more powerless than I did during the nights when our daughter was bent over with abdominal pain.

While stroking her back, I tried to believe what I’d been taught:

“God is in control.”

“There’s purpose in suffering.”

But the truth felt far away when it was *my* girl suffering. My prayers seemed anemic.

During one particularly hard night, my helplessness peaked. This prayer tumbled out:

“God! Get down here!”

It was a fiery cry from an overwhelmed heart begging God to do something, *anything*.

Immediately, I felt shame for my gruffness.

Then the Holy Spirit reminded me: God is not put off by bluntness. The truth is we need not feel shame when our prayers are high-pitched cries erupting from hurting hearts.

One reason I love the Psalms so much is that they show us what it looks like to get honest with God. Psalm 61 is a powerful example. “I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed,” David prayed. David did not restrain himself. His anguish led him to cry out and ask God to lead him to safety.

Charles Spurgeon writes in *The Treasury of David*, “It is hard to pray when the very heart is drowning, yet gracious men plead best at such times. Tribulation brings us to God and brings God to us.”

God is not offended by an honest cry for him to “get down here!” Long ago, Jesus made the ultimate get-down-here move. He came to live on the inside of every hurt, every mess, every valley we could imagine. In Gethsemane, he showed us what it means to cry out with an anguished heart.

My prayer that night did not bring an immediate cure for my girl. But it did remind me that I don’t have to restrain myself before God, who already knows what I’m facing and feeling. He met me in the midst of it. God isn’t asking for our politeness; he’s asking for our honest hearts—no matter how overwhelmed they are. ●

Read: Psalm 61. **Reflect:** How comfortable are you praying honest prayers to God? How has God led you to “a towering rock of safety” in the midst of trial?

Jennifer Dukes Lee is a blogger and writer for Dayspring’s (in)courage. She is the author of *Love Idol* and the forthcoming book *The Happiness Dare*. Connect with her at JenniferDukesLee.com or on Twitter at @dukeslee.

An Undivided Heart

“Teach me your ways, LORD, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.” (Psalm 86:11, NIV)

In *Anne of Green Gables*, Rachel Lynde was of the opinion that we all have a besetting sin—even the minister. In a conversation with her bosom friend, Diana, Anne Shirley admitted that her own besetting sin was letting her imagination run away with her and often forgetting her responsibilities. Me? My besetting sin, the lifelong struggle to which I am most susceptible, is people-pleasing. Almost every act of sin and deep sense of regret in my life traces its way back to my need for approval from someone other than God.

As a result, my life became fragmented. I was one person at work, another person at church, and even more versions of me existed in each of my many relationships. These divisions in my heart were exhausting because I lost my truest self, my God-given self. And in the midst of all that, how could I please God?

It wasn't until I began to follow Jesus—really, truly follow Jesus, not some carefully curated Sunday school version of Jesus, not the popular Christian celebrity's way of following Jesus, not strict adherence to a set of boundary markers—that I began to heal those divisions in my heart.

I practiced uniting my heart with my body and my mind like it was a spiritual discipline. It was through friendship with God, through the abiding in the vine that Jesus spoke of in John 15, that the masks began to fall off and my inauthenticity began to heal and the continents of my identity began to shift to their proper place in the universe. I felt the rest and grace of God with every reorienting of my soul back to my truest God-breathed self. Jesus restores what it means to be truly human to us, to draw us back into that intimacy and unity with God, so that we can be who we were meant to be all along.

And so who are we really? We are more than our performance, more than our roles, more than our titles, more than our labels, more than our schedules, more than our money, more than our besetting sins, more than our masks, more than our social media persona, more than our past or our present.

I believe an undivided heart is a heart made whole by Christ. Watch what the Spirit can do with that. Here is the truth to unite our hearts, minds, and bodies: We are beloved. We are deeply and unconditionally loved by a good and forgiving God. Made in that image of love, of whom shall we be afraid? ●

Read: Psalm 86:11–12. **Reflect:** Are you fragmented? How is God teaching you to rely on his faithfulness?

Sarah Bessey is the author of *Out of Sorts: Making Peace with an Evolving Faith* and *Jesus Feminist*. She lives in Abbotsford, British Columbia, with her husband and their four tinies. You can find her online at SarahBessey.com or on Twitter at @sarahbessey.

Belonging to God

“Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand.” (Psalm 73:23)

I felt as if I were barely keeping my head above water in those first months after having a baby. Thankfully, a handful of my friends had their first babies too. We went through that early season of motherhood together, figuring everything out side by side.

One of those friends seemed to have it together. Whenever I went to her house, her home was spotless. I was shocked; my house was always a mess!

I kept thinking, *She’s got it all together! I’m struggling to learn how to be a mom, and she has this lovely house that she manages to keep clean, even with a newborn.* I was envious of her sparkling house, and I felt like a failure because I couldn’t do the same.



In Psalm 73, Asaph struggled with envy too. He looked around and saw people who seemed to have it all together: “I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside” (verse 21). But instead of focusing on others’ seeming successes, Asaph looked to God: “Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand” (verse 23). He realized his deepest desire was not for earthly gain but for God himself: “I desire you more than anything on earth” (verse 25).

As I was leaving my friend’s house one day, I saw a team of cleaners heading to her door. She had help, and lots of it! I was humbled: I was envious of something I didn’t understand.

God showed me that appearances aren’t always what they seem, and I shouldn’t be envious of what appears to be successful. While I may never have a perfectly spotless house, I still belong to God—and that is the greatest treasure I will ever have, no matter how many dust bunnies are under my couch. ●

Read: Psalm 73:21–28. **Reflect:** Where is your soul bitter? How can you repent and turn to God in that place, remembering that he is what your heart truly desires most of all?

Ann Swindell is a regular contributor for *Today’s Christian Woman* and is passionate about seeing women set free by the love of Christ. Connect with her at AnnSwindell.com or on Twitter at [@annswindell](https://twitter.com/annswindell).

Waiting for God to Speak

"Listen to my prayer for mercy as I cry out to you for help, as I lift my hands toward your holy sanctuary." (Psalm 28:2)

My husband crawls to my side of the bed and kneels on the floor beside me. It's daybreak. Our daily prayer time. So I scoot out of the covers and fall to my knees beside him. Still in our pajamas, we lean in to each other, read our devotional, and Dan starts to pray, "O God!"

Does God hear us? We don't even ask that question. After 40 years of marriage, we're finally willing to learn a little something about patience. About waiting on the Lord. About God's curious tendency to delay his replies.

So we're not panicked today for quick answers. We're humbled that God would even take time to listen to us. We were married 35 years before we started praying together like this. If God would wait that long for a distracted wife and husband to finally seek him together for their marriage, for family members, for life questions and more—then patiently reveal his answers—we have no doubt that God is good and God hears.

Call it amazing. Maybe that's why David frames his plea in Psalm 28 by first acknowledging who God is: "my rock." Not like the chalky caves near the Valley of Elah; God, in David's eyes, is as enduring as the granite peaks of Sinai. He still is.

Like a silent rock, however, "Do not turn a deaf ear to me," David begs God. "For if you are silent, I might as well give up and die" (verse 1).

Talk about a desperate prayer. But my husband and I can relate. Our youngest daughter has left the church and refuses to return—a situation that keeps us on our knees daily. If God were silent, we'd give up and die, indeed.

But God isn't silent after all. He speaks in his Word, our Christ, and through his great promises, but also in his world. As I write this, the morning after a frosty weekend, I gaze out of my window to the audacious warmth of piercing sunshine.

Have hope, the beautiful day is saying. And in the sun's glowing rays, I can hear the Divine. Kneeling with my husband today, letting him pray this time for both of us instead of jumping in to change his words, I gain humility and assurance.

As the late Dallas Willard wrote in *Hearing God*, "Learning how to hear God is to be sought only as a part of a certain kind of life, a life of loving fellowship with the King and his other subjects within the kingdom of the heavens." It's a journey, this business of hearing God. But what a trip! Let us not hurry our way through it. ●

Read: Psalm 28. **Reflect:** Am I rushing God for answers? How can I slow down to hear God well?

Patricia Raybon is a regular contributor for *Today's Christian Woman* and an award-winning author of books and essays on mountain-moving faith, including her prayer memoir, *I Told the Mountain to Move*. Learn more at PatriciaRaybon.com.

When Worries Come True

“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)

Do you tend to worry about worst-case scenarios like, *What if my child gets knocked down and breaks a bone? What if my loved one is in an accident? What if that lump is malignant?*

It’s easy to allow our minds to wander to the dark side of the moon. When I was 20 weeks pregnant with my second child, I heard the words no woman wants to hear from her doctor: “Your baby has serious chromosomal defects, and she isn’t going to make it. She will probably die in the womb in the next few days.”

My hopes were violently shaken, yet I clung to the verse I had read that morning from Proverbs 3:5, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.” My understanding was saying, *The worst-case scenario is coming true!* In the words of the psalmist in Psalm 46:2, it was as if the earth was quaking underneath me and the mountains were crumbling into the sea. Yet amidst chaos and trouble, God was there.



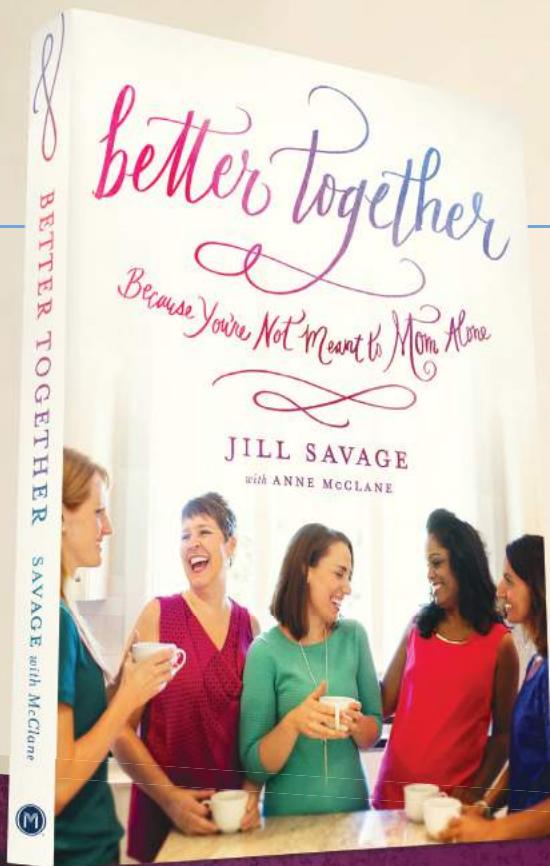
Perhaps the hard times of life are when God reveals himself most clearly. During my troubled pregnancy, I sensed his presence in a powerful way. God brought peace and comfort I cannot explain. My baby kept living past the doctor’s expectations, but eventually her heart stopped beating.

God was my refuge during that stinging time of loss, and I know he can be your refuge too. Even when worst-case scenarios come upon us, God can be trusted. The worrisome what ifs cannot overturn God’s faithfulness. ●

Read: Psalm 46. **Reflect:** When has God been your refuge and strength? Take a moment to “be still, and know” that he is God, as verse 10 commands.

Arlene Pellicane is a speaker and author of several books, including *31 Days to Becoming a Happy Mom*. You can find free resources to have a happier home at ArlenePellicane.com

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The God Who Leads

*“He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way.”
(Psalm 25:9)*

I remember as a teenager sitting with a wise friend as I poured out my heart. My question? “How do I find the exact person God wants me to marry? What if I’m in the bathroom when he walks by and I miss him?”

My friend smiled. Instead of answering my question, she asked me another: “Sherry, how much does God love you?”

It’s a big concept to wrestle with, especially as I’ve faced other big decisions through the years. Should we move across the country for that job opportunity? Should we buy that house? Should we try to convince our daughter to stay in school?

In my heart I have whispered the words, *God, don’t let me screw this up!* I’ve asked, even pleaded, for specific answers. *Just tell me what to do, and whatever it is, I’ll do it!* Sometimes in those moments God feels distant.

Recently a friend reminded me that I serve a God who isn’t just waiting for me to make the wrong choice and then condemn me with the words, *Well, you certainly messed that up!* In Psalm 25:8–10, David reminds us, “The LORD is good and does what is right; he shows the proper path to those who go astray. He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way. The LORD leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all who keep his covenant and obey his demands.”

I’m learning from these words that God is not demanding my perfection; he’s asking for my devotion. He’s not expecting me to perfectly guess his will; he’s asking me to trust him and be faithful. He’s not watching from a distance, waiting for me to mess up. He’s close, ready to speak through his perfect love. I can read his Word, talk to wise and godly friends he places in my path, and then do the next right thing as best I see it.

I love the words of David that begin this passage: “O LORD, I give my life to you. I trust in you, my God!” (Psalm 25:1–2). As I follow David’s example, I can choose a path confidently, knowing that God *is* leading me, not from a distance but from the most intimate places of my heart. He truly loves me. ●

Read: Psalm 25:1–10. **Reflect:** Think about the phrase, “He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way.” How have you experienced God’s gentle leading?

Sherry Surratt is a regular contributor to *Today’s Christian Woman* and the author of *Brave Mom*. You can find her at SherrySurratt.com or on Twitter at @sherrysurratt.

A Candle for the Darkness

“For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.” (Psalm 103:11)

It’s hard to find your way in the dark. Darkness can take the shape of shame, or guilt, or feelings of failure and not measuring up. And, once the darkness seeps through, it’s hard to remember light scatters the darkness. We get used to the darkness; so much so, that when someone enters the room and opens the blinds, we raise a hand to shield our eyes from all the brightness. We blink back the light as our body adjusts to the brilliant flood.

Sometimes, even the fact that we find ourselves in the darkness feels like a shroud of shame and failure. We get tangled in the stickiness of it all, and we believe the taunting words of doubt and hopelessness that make their way in through the cracks.

I’m speaking from experience.

The first time the darkness pressed in on me, blocking out the light, it took me totally by surprise. There are pictures of me, taken around that time, at various family events. I don’t know if anyone else can see it when they look at those pictures, but I can. I can see the hopelessness and the sadness and the fear of never being whole again. It’s right behind my eyes in those pictures. But, in those pictures, I’m also surrounded by my husband and by my children, so I am pressing through—doing my best to keep putting one foot in front of the other. Have you been there?

When we’re in the dark the way I was (and the way you may have been, or still may be), it’s hard to hear verses like the ones in Psalm 103—verses that remind us of God’s love. It’s difficult to find a way to wrap yourself around the truth that the love God has for us is unfailing (verse 8), or that God’s love is as high as the heavens above the earth (verse 11).

One night, during my first period of darkness, I laid in the bed next to my sleeping husband. The lights in the room were turned off, and the sun had set hours before. Darkness had become my comfortable companion. As I willed myself into the warmth of the mattress beneath and the weight of the comforter that covered me, I somehow recalled these words, and I believed them to be true: “I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3).

The love of God *rescues* us. It rescues me—and it rescues you.

Are you in the darkness? May I hold this candle in your direction? The love of God, the light of the world, forever and always, pressing back the dark. ●

Read: Psalm 103. **Reflect:** Is there one word or phrase in this psalm that feels like a light in the darkness? How has God’s love rescued you?

Deidra Riggs is the author of *Every Little Thing: Making a World of Difference Right Where You Are*. You can find her at DeidraRiggs.com.

Learning to Trust

“O my people, trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge.” (Psalm 62:8)

She turned away from me and ran upstairs to her bedroom. I flinched at the slammed door. I slowly followed and stood outside her room with my head bowed, both palms flat on the door, as if to move the wall between us.

Parenting is hard. It is a beautiful, broken road with detours and obstacles and lovely stops along the way. I scolded myself for the angry words we had tossed back and forth. I didn't understand what my daughter was going through, and I think that hurt her the most.

I wiped away the single tear that balanced on the edge of my chin, and I opened her door. She didn't look up. I said the hardest words. “Will you forgive me?” I whispered.



The dam broke. I think she was expecting a lecture, not an apology. She cried, and I curled beside my daughter on her bed. She didn't move away. We didn't say anything for a long time; she was a little girl clinging to her mother. I couldn't change the challenging and discouraging situation she was facing, but I could remind her she wasn't alone.

This picture of a child trusting a mother and a parent providing refuge to her child is the reality God offers us. When I feel alone or afraid or uncertain, this is what God does for me: *Come, daughter, pour out your heart to me. You can trust me. I am your refuge.*

We can trust him at *all* times—in sickness, in sorrow, in parenting victories and defeats. He doesn't always remove the challenges, but he's always with us in them; he's our refuge. ●

Read: Psalm 62:5–8. **Reflect:** How can you lean on God and not your own understanding in hard times?

Kristen Welch blogs at WeAreThatFamily.com and has written several books, including *Raising Grateful Kids in an Entitled World*. She is the founder of the Mercy House, a nonprofit that works globally to empower women set free by the love of Christ.

He Watches Over the Overlooked

"The LoRd lifts up those who are bowed down." (Psalm 146:8, NIV)

As a working mom whose job requires travel, every minute at home counts. When I'm in town, there are still activities I'm balancing. This week alone I forgot to eat one day, shower the next, and cancel the babysitter another.

I've found that most of the people at the center of my world are in the same socioeconomic background as myself. Most of the concerns at my center are immediate issues I see and experience daily. Yet every so often that pattern gets disrupted. The other day I was parked on the curb waiting for a friend of mine to grab us a quick lunch when I was disrupted by a knock on my window. I heard the woman's voice ask, "Do you have fifty cents?" I quickly said, "No, sorry. I don't have change."

As I watched the disoriented woman walk down the street in her puffy lavender house slippers and light coat in the frigid weather I thought, *I should get out of my car and see if she's okay.* She was someone's mother, aunt, *abuela*, or *hermana*. But all I did was watch her. I wanted to move, so why didn't I? Honestly, I was busy. I had a report due by the end of the day and preparation for a church function, so I let her walk out of my sight while simultaneously wanting to scream out of my window, "God sees you, *señora*! I see you, ma'am! You are not alone." Yet my busyness paralyzed me.

Whether it's someone on the street, children who fear the deportation of their parents, or refugees, God watches over them. He sustains, upholds, and lifts up the overlooked. He gives them food, freedom, and sight. Psalm 146 makes clear that God created all things, and he is concerned for the parts of his creation that are overlooked by those of us who are too busy, preoccupied, or focused on our "center" to notice. God's faithfulness, love, and justice for the oppressed is repeated not only in the Psalms but throughout Scripture.

Sometimes we need moments of "disruption" because they cause us to really ask ourselves how we prioritize those who are overlooked in society. While we can't care for all of the needs of the world, would people who know you say you display compassion for those in the margins? Psalm 146 reminds us that God loves the righteous and reigns forever; therefore, we should never get weary of centering our lives on what God centers. ●

Read: Psalm 146. **Reflect:** What are you putting at the center of your life right now? In what ways can you care for those who are overlooked in society?

Sandra Maria Van Opstal is the executive pastor of Grace and Peace Community, an advisor for *Today's Christian Woman*, and the author of several books, including *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*.

Lord, Calm My Heart

"I cried out, 'I am slipping!' but your unfailing love, O Lord, supported me." (Psalm 94:18)

I was on one side of the police barricade, looking down the block at our children's school. I'd been on my way to after-school pickup, and suddenly things weren't going as expected.

"Do you know what's going on?" I blurted out to a fellow mom standing on her porch.

"The school's on lockdown. Kids are inside. There's an active shooter outside the building."

Just as she said the last sentence we heard the gunfire. *Rat-a-tat-tat*. Immediately we retreated to this mom's living room, where I lay on the floor, my forehead pressed to the hardwood as I prayed, "Lord, help us." My worst nightmare was unfolding. And I couldn't breathe.

I needed reassurance that God was still in control—that he was with my children when I couldn't be. So I cried out in the most guttural way possible, "Lord, please!"



I've had anxiety take over before, keeping me up in the wee hours of the night. But I can always cry out, "Lord, my foot is slipping!" Though God's comfort doesn't always eradicate my fear, it does reassure me that he is the same regardless of the circumstances.

An hour and a half later, I was reunited with my daughters who had been in the locked-down school. They were safe, though an officer was in surgery and a suspect had been killed outside their school. As we walked past the point of the earlier barricade where I'd parked my car hours before, I thanked God for meeting me in that terror-filled moment.

Whether our anxiety is based on a real threat or a perceived danger, God always hears us and meets us, ready to comfort. ●

Read: Psalm 94:16–19. **Reflect:** Where do you turn for comfort? When have you experienced God's protection?

Alexandra Kuykendall is the author of *Loving My Actual Life* and *The Artist's Daughter*. She lives in the shadow of Denver with her husband and four daughters. Connect with her at AlexandraKuykendall.com.

Loved by a Listening Father

"O LORD, I am calling to you. Please hurry! Listen when I cry to you for help!" (Psalm 141:1)

I'm just about to drift off to sleep when the phone on my bedside table rings. I sleepily answer and hear the voice of my 22-year-old daughter on the other end of the line. She's had a hard day and needs to talk.

I prop myself up with a pillow and try to listen. *Lord*, I silently pray, *Please help me know what to say*. I worry I'm too groggy to offer any kind of coherent wisdom. But after a few minutes, she says she's feeling better, and I realize she didn't need advice; she just needed a reminder that she's loved.

You see, my daughter became ours just after she turned 21. Before she became part of our family, her experience had been that there isn't always an answer when you call for help. There isn't always someone ready and willing to listen. There isn't always someone to say, "I love you."

It breaks my heart to know she lived that way for so many years. Yet sometimes I act as if that's my reality as well. I have a difficult day and want to call on my heavenly Father for help, but then negative thoughts interfere. I think of mistakes I've made. I wonder if I should just try harder on my own. I imagine God might be disappointed in me or simply busy with more important matters.

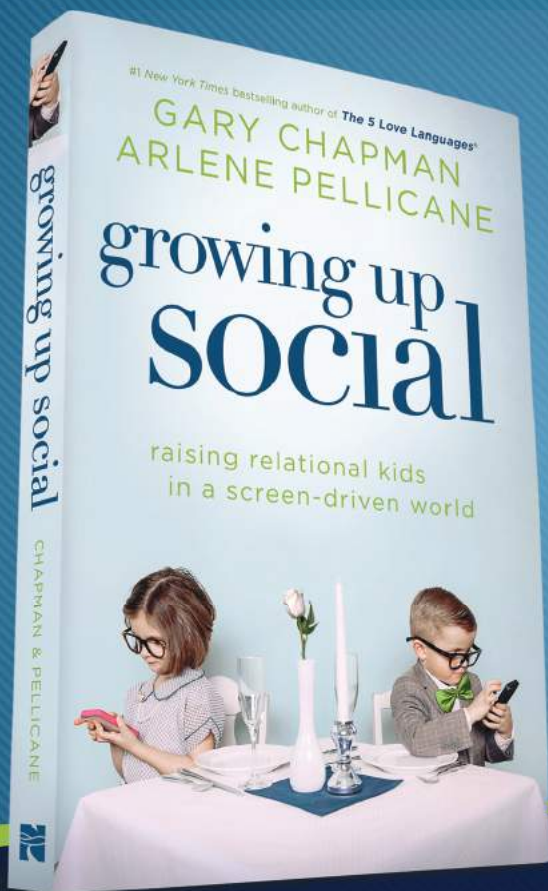
It brings me great joy every time my daughter trusts that we will be there for her. Surely it's the same for God and his kids! The psalmist seemed to have childlike faith when he insistently declared, "I am calling to you! Please hurry! Listen when I cry to you for help!" (Psalm 141:1). Those are words of someone who is confident he is loved. And they remind me of other words given to us in Hebrews 4:16: "So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most."

As women, we're good at being there for everyone else. We're glad to offer a listening ear or a helping hand. But sometimes we need to remember there's help available to us as well. We have a heavenly Father who doesn't sleep. He is always watching over us, always waiting for us to call for him, and always willing to remind us how much we're loved. Let's give him the opportunity to answer the cry of our hearts today. ●

Read: Psalm 141. **Reflect:** What do you want to share with God today? With honesty and vulnerability, like the psalmist, don't hold back your feelings.

Holley Gerth is the *Wall Street Journal* best-selling author of *You're Already Amazing* as well as several other books. You can connect with her through HolleyGerth.com.

IS TECHNOLOGY DRAWING YOUR FAMILY CLOSER TOGETHER or farther apart



IT'S NO SECRET that technology has a huge presence in our lives, but how can we keep it from harming a healthy family culture, specifically our children's development?

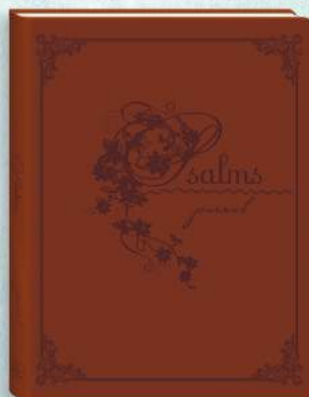
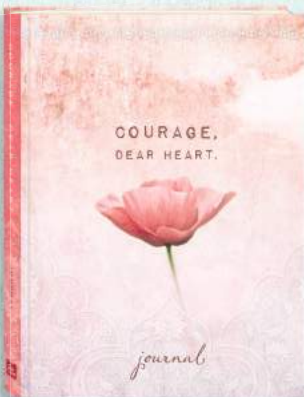
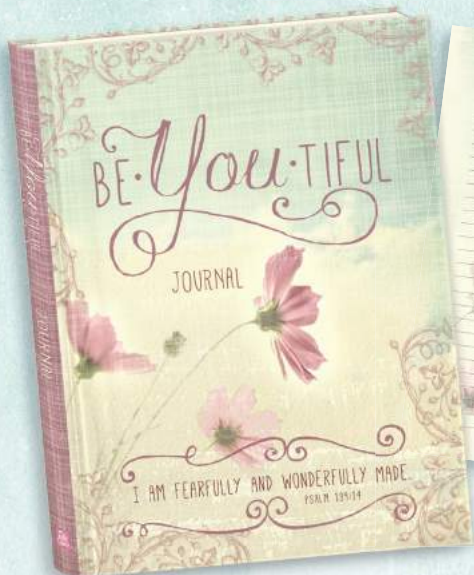
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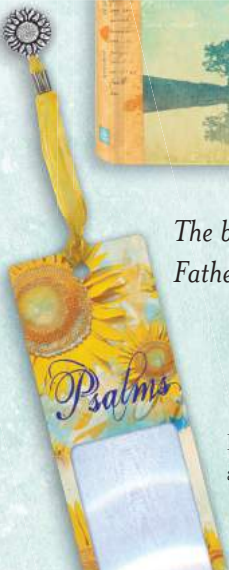
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The Good Shepherd

“The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.” (Psalm 23:1)

At first it seems strange that David’s primary character in Psalm 23 is a talking sheep. Yet if anyone understood sheep, it was David. He spent his formative years out in the open Judean pastureland shepherding his family’s flocks. His experience taught him that sheep were prone to wander and were stubborn at times. He knew their needs and their weaknesses; he was aware of their vulnerability to the heat and dust storms, to snakes and wild animals.



David knew that sheep needed guidance and protection, a shepherding voice that reassured them and led them to safety. They needed a shepherd who would find lush green grass they could eat and would search for still water they could drink. The sheep would then finally lie down and rest, secure with the shepherd, who took care of all their needs. Hundreds of years later, this talking sheep is the voice behind the Bible’s most famous psalm.

It’s humbling to compare myself to a sheep, but I see David’s parallels. When I journey through everyday life—work commitments, family, marriage, community—in my own strength, I get conflicted, worn down, overwhelmed. Sometimes I stubbornly carry on, striving to present a picture-perfect life. I want to prove that I can “do it all.” My weary soul paints a more honest picture: I’m tired, empty, and vulnerable. I’m like a sheep without a shepherd.

Amid so many conflicting thoughts and feelings, I need guidance from a voice I recognize and trust. Only one will do. I need the Good Shepherd. He will lead me to a place of rest. I lay my life down again and he restores my soul. In our magnificent highs and our significant lows, the Lord *is* our shepherd. He sees us, he knows us. He feeds and nurtures us. He leads us forward. Rest in him, and restore your life. ●

Read: Psalm 23. **Reflect:** What area of your life do you need the Lord to shepherd?

Jo Saxton is a wife and mom, pastor, a speaker and author, and an advisor to *Today’s Christian Woman*. You can find her at JoSaxton.com or on Twitter at [@josaxton](https://twitter.com/josaxton).

God Never Sleeps

“He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber.” (Psalm 121:3, NIV)

Tuesdays are my busiest day of the week. I take my three children to their various schools (which, of course, all start at the same time). Then I start the evening’s dinner in the slow cooker before beginning my work for the day. Tuesday is the day reserved for phone calls, Skype meetings, and email inbox processing. Once those are done, I squeeze out first drafts of my week’s writing assignments until it’s time to pick up the kids. Then, I take one child to his speech and occupational therapy for two hours before heading home in the dark to finally sit down to a dinner with my family, where I watch my youngest struggle to keep his eyes open before bedtime.

It’s a typical day for many women, I’d wager. Tuesdays are certainly not my personal favorite.

Most fellow women I know struggle with doing too much. Sun up to sun down, in our comings and goings, our lives beg us for busyness—errands, drop-offs, pickups, sign-offs, deadlines, dinner on the table, dragging our bodies to bed far too late at night. We have more than enough to do.

No, our struggle isn’t with not having enough opportunities to fill our plates. Our struggle is with overfilling our plates to the point of overflow. We glance at our commitments on one side, glance at our capacity on the other, and we hope that they somehow, miraculously, squeeze together with enough left for us to eat, shower, and sleep.

God reminds us in Psalm 121 that in all our small laundry lists, he is there, keeping our feet steady. He will not let us be moved. And better still—while our human, mortal bodies recover from the day’s crazy with the sleep we desperately crave, God remains awake, all-powerful, all-divine, and all-loving, keeping watch over it all as the perfect sustainer he is. The perfect sustainer we need.

As we go out and come in, now and forevermore, God keeps us. We are kept. Nothing is unnoticed. Nothing in God’s plan for us is done without his help.

We are daughters who, in the weight of the world’s busyness and on our repetitive Tuesdays, have a God who keeps us from slipping, from getting burned by the sun, from being overtaken by it all. We can rest soundly in this truth while God never, ever, ever tires. ●

Read: Psalm 121. **Reflect:** When did God keep your foot from slipping? What encouragement do you find in knowing that God never sleeps?

Tsh Oxenreider is the author of *Notes from a Blue Bike* and the founder of TheArtOfSimple.net, a community blog about simple living.

The Hope in My Despair

*“But each day the LORD pours his unfailing love upon me.”
(Psalm 42:8)*

To an unknowing ear, my son’s bedtime lullabies are simply a cute way to end the day. But to me, those songs are God wrapping me in his arms, saying, “Remember what I did for you.”

Like many other women, I suffered a miscarriage. After that miscarriage, my predictable monthly cycle turned upside down. For months I lived on an emotional teeter-totter of great hope followed by great disappointment.

I was angry at God for making me go through something so painful, and I was angry at myself for being angry at God. Emotionally exhausted, I struggled daily with an array of feelings I did not want. I was frustrated with my helplessness to remedy the situation.

In Psalm 42 David acknowledged his despondency and frustration, yet he prayed in hope. Like David, I decided to acknowledge my despair and pray my way through it. I prayed through the grief, the anger, the self-pity. I found that the more I chose hope, the closer I felt to the God who was holding my lost baby in his arms.



God heard my prayers and answered with a sweet boy who even now, at eight years old, still sings himself to sleep most nights. His songs are an ongoing reminder to me that hoping in God can lift me up out of the pit of despair—and that he does indeed give life.

Each of us will go through seasons of great struggle and discouragement. It’s when we find a way to hope in God and continue to praise him through our hardships that we experience a sweet communion with our Creator who “pours his unfailing love” upon us. ●

Read: Psalm 42:3–8. **Reflect:** What are some things you can do to keep your hope in God when circumstances cause you to despair?

Kim Harms is a *Today’s Christian Woman* regular contributor and freelance writer. She lives in Iowa with her husband and three sons. Connect with her at KimHarms.net or on Twitter at [@kimharmsboymom](https://twitter.com/kimharmsboymom).

The Faithful Love of the Lord

“Those who are wise will take all this to heart; they will see in our history the faithful love of the Lord.” (Psalm 107:43)

Julia singing last night—“How does Harold’s angels sing? . . . I don’t get it.”

Thanks to a nifty feature on Facebook, I’m frequently reminded of lost memories like this one of my teenage daughter, Julia. If I close my eyes I still can picture her at six years old singing those words with abandon, twirling by the Christmas tree, then stopping and tilting her head in confusion.

Little did we know that just two days later my routine mammogram would turn into a three-hour ordeal. From mammogram to ultrasound to core biopsy, our lives would suddenly be derailed by a bewildering avalanche of events. The following week the suspicious lump had a name: *invasive lobular carcinoma*. I began to wake up every morning wondering if it all was a nightmare, only to find I was still facing the stark reality of breast cancer. I trusted God, but what would trust look like in the face of surgery, chemotherapy, hair loss, radiation, and the unknown?

Psalm 107 paints life in contrasts—describing both the dark times and the blessing of God’s peace that his people experienced throughout their history. The psalmist repeatedly described God’s goodness, his faithful love, his deliverance, and most of all, his presence. The psalmist instructed God’s people to thank the Lord and remember all the ways he showed lovingkindness. In this way, they would see in their history the faithful love of the Lord.

My cancer diagnosis came out of nowhere and caught our family completely off-guard. Often, storms like that come into our lives without warning. Whether we’re entering a storm, in a storm, or finally coming out of a storm, the longer we live and the longer we actively trust God, the more we recall of his faithfulness. We can see God in our own history as we walk by faith. As he was with Israel, he is with us.

In that period of facing cancer I experienced new freedom in being honest with God about fear and confusion in the midst of the unknown. And when my own faith ran out, God used others around me to trust *for* me. The concept of Christian community took on deeper meaning for me as our family—along with our church, ministry partners, and fellow staff who rallied around—learned more of what it means to trust God and lean hard on his character.

Even when I didn’t know what was ahead, God was faithful. And like God’s people in this psalm, my family and I can look back and see how we experienced the faithful love of the Lord in our history *together*. ●

Read: Psalm 107. **Reflect:** What do you learn about God’s character? How have you seen the faithful love of the Lord throughout your history?

Vivian Mabuni serves as National Director of Field Ministry for Epic (the Asian American ministry of Cru). A writer, speaker, and the author of *Warrior in Pink*, you can find Vivian on Twitter at @vivmabuni.

Guzzling Grace

“LORD, if you kept a record of our sins, who, O Lord, could ever survive?” (Psalm 130:3)

Before I became a mother, I sipped from God’s grace. Now I guzzle it like I’m drinking from a fire hose. As the mother of three sons, I’ve been surprised by the number of Lego bricks I can step on in a day and how quickly little boys can find the nearest mud puddle, but the real shocker has been my own capacity to sin against the children I’d lay down my life for.

At the end of the day, when the little feet have finally stopped pitter-pattering, I often make a mental checklist of the ways I missed the mark. Anger? Check. Selfishness? Check. Lack of self-control? Check.

When our mama sins start to pile up, it’s easy to wonder if God’s grace has run dry—if we’ve exceeded our maximum forgiveness limit. That’s why we need God’s Word so desperately.



If God has a tally sheet for every angry word, annoyed sigh, impatient remark, or selfish indulgence, I’d rather die than look at it. But no list exists. (*Phew!*) God’s Word teaches that true love “keeps no record of being wronged” (1 Corinthians 13:5). Since God is love (1 John 4:8), we can know he doesn’t have a ledger book for our mom-sins.

God’s reflex toward our sin is grace. Psalm 130:4 proclaims, “But you offer forgiveness, that we might learn to fear you.” When we fall short, God offers forgiveness. When we say and do hurtful things, God offers forgiveness. Though we are selfish at our core, struggling to put other’s needs ahead of our own, God offers forgiveness.

There is no shutoff valve on the flow of forgiveness from God’s throne. Toss out your list of failures and guzzle God’s unquenchable grace. ●

Read: Psalm 130. **Reflect:** What is your response to God’s reflex of grace?

Erin Davis is a blogger, speaker, and writer of several books, including *Beyond Bath Time: Embracing Motherhood as a Sacred Role*. She chases chickens and children on her small farm in the Midwest.

Comfort in the Midst of Change

“For the LORD God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory.” (Psalm 84:11)

We bought our first house a few years after my husband and I were married and our twins were born. It was located on a quiet street in the same neighborhood where my sister lived with her husband and three young boys.

Those days were sweet, walking only half a block to get to each other’s houses. I spent many mornings at my sister’s house just because I could. I would stop in just for a minute to give her feedback on a wall color. If I needed advice or perspective or a cup of sugar in the rain, she would pull up in her white SUV and deliver it to my door.

It’s what sisters do when they live around the corner.

At the time, it was all so normal that I didn’t think to cherish those days. We assumed our kids were going to grow up together, go to the same schools, and ride their bikes together in the neighborhood until they were old enough to drive.

But after only a year and a half of living nearby, my sister’s family moved two hours away.

In the scope of life, it didn’t seem like that big a deal, so I failed to pay attention to how sad I was about the whole thing. That was a mistake.

To brush away the ordinary grief that often accompanies us is dishonoring to the presence of God. God never said he comes to heal the brokenhearted only if that broken heart is a really big deal. Instead, his presence is constant and reliable, in both the heavy troubles and the normal changes of life.

Reading Psalm 84:11, I’m comforted by these words: “For the LORD God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory.” The sun is constant, warm, and dependable while a shield is strong, protective, and ready.

I need the warm, dependability of God as well as his strong, protective covering. In the midst of change, it helps to remember that my deepest hope comes not from the circumstances around me but from the strong and steady life of God within me.

It’s unlikely I’ll experience that comfort if I’m unwilling to admit I need it.

These days I purposely spend some time paying attention to what’s happening within me so that I’ll be more fully present to what’s happening around me.

God is patient and kind with our grief—no matter how small we think it is—promising grace and joy when we trust in him. ●

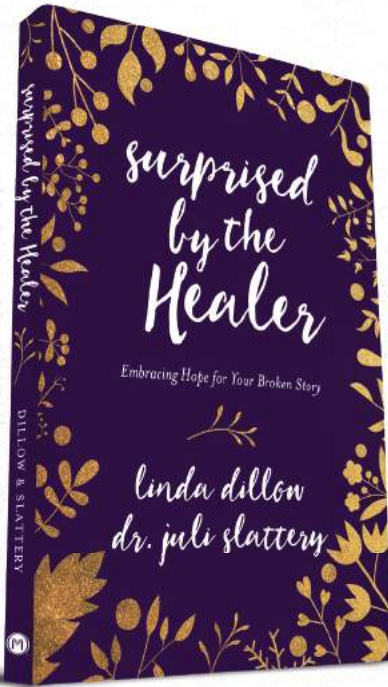
Read: Psalm 84:10–12. **Reflect:** Is there a seemingly ordinary sadness that you have considered too small to trust God with? Take time to name it. Might you be willing to pull it out into the kind presence of God?

Emily P. Freeman is the author of several books, including the *Wall Street Journal* best-seller *Grace for the Good Girl* and her most recent release, *Simply Tuesday*. She writes at EmilyPFreeman.com.

“O LORD my God,
I cried to you for help,
*and you have
healed me.*”

– Psalm 30:2

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Mercy for My Mistakes

“Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins.” (Psalm 51:1)

The folded laundry sat on their beds, mocking me, despite several requests to put it away. Wet sneakers littered the foyer I had spent the morning tidying, again. The lizard’s cage hadn’t been cleaned in weeks. Everywhere I looked I saw defiance. And then I saw red.

“Boys! Get in here!” With that blaring call began my tirade, my litany of grievances. My wrath knew no bounds as I reprimanded my sons for weeks of missteps culminating in the current state of affairs. When I came up for air, I saw two frightened children, tears swelling in their eyes as they scurried off to “fix all the things they had done wrong.”



I wanted to feel vindicated. Instead I felt dreadful. I had lost my temper with those I love most, covering them with mean-spirited words. I was overcome with shame and guilt.

While I know “we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23), my personal track record of unjustly dealing with my children can make me feel like a bad mother. Time and again, instead of seeking God’s compassionate example, I attack.

Blessedly, while we are imperfect, we serve a perfect God. Our God hears our frequent cries for his mercy, and instead of building a case against us, he erases any record of our sins and makes us clean again. Instead of berating myself for being an ill-equipped mother, I am free to trust his divine plan and work on disciplining my children with compassion instead of contempt. Because God keeps no record of wrongdoing, neither should I—not against my children, or against myself. ●

Read: Psalm 51:1–10. **Reflect:** What sins have you been hiding from God? How can you seek God’s merciful forgiveness in these areas?

Helen Coronato is the author of several books, a regular contributor to *Today’s Christian Woman*, and blogs at HelenCoronato.com.

The Truth That Endures

"Your eternal word, O LORD, stands firm in heaven. Your faithfulness extends to every generation." (Psalm 119:89-90)

The older I get, the more I realize that everything will fade away. Death has invaded our home more times than we'd like to count. Friends have disappeared. And even as I look at my two small, beautiful children, I realize that one day they, too, will leave.

Nothing in this world is promised to last. It's a pity that so often I place so much of my stock in it. I place my hope and trust in unfaithful people, circumstances that change in an instant, and even silly things like my car that breaks down. It's a wonder that we even find the strength to get up every morning.

That is one way to look at this world. But I'm thankful that the Lord has put eternity in our hearts and has given us hope through the gospel and his Word. We have hope because we know that though heaven and earth will pass away, God's words will never pass away (Matthew 24:35). We have hope because we know that God is faithful, not only to you and me today but also to generations to come.



God's Word has endured and will endure. "I have known from my earliest days that your laws will last forever" (Psalm 119:152). If we read the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation, we see a God who has made promises and has never broken one.

In my own life, I see those same faithful testimonies. Darkness comes, yet God never leaves me there. He brings light and shines truth, mercy, and love into the darkness. He is faithful. His words are faithful. And for eternity we will experience our good, loving, and faithful God. ●

Read: Psalm 119:89-112. **Reflect:** Where do you see God's faithfulness to you through his Word and his character?

Trillia Newbell is a regular contributor for *Today's Christian Woman* and the author of *Fear and Faith* and *United*. You can find her at TrilliaNewbell.com and follow her on Twitter at [@trillianewbell](https://twitter.com/trillianewbell).

Up Against Our Wounds

“He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds.” (Psalm 147:3)

I can say it in one sentence now: We were married for 12 years before God opened my womb.

There. As quick as I can order a latte, I can summarize one of the most layered and painful parts of my story.

Before I conceived, I received dozens of baby shower invites. I visited the fourth floor of the hospital to hold the new babies of friends more times than I could count. I used and discarded many months' worth of pregnancy tests. Each one of these served as a reminder of the wound that had not yet healed. And like the careless brush against a new scab, each one made my heart bleed.

But then I felt a hand pressing up against the bleeding. Someone else was tending to the scab that just wouldn't heal. He was near. The baby showers started to feel different. The scab was still open, bleeding, but with a tender hand attending to it, my heart began to heal.

I moved from mad to sad, letting myself unravel before God instead of hardening toward him. He was a medic, and I was no longer a soldier in his army but a patient in his care. He was nearer than I'd ever known him. I needed him not to instantly heal my wound so that I could get on with life but to bandage it.

Psalm 147:3 reveals the heart of the healer: “He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds.” When we want a quick fix so we can return to our carefully planned lives, instead he offers the nearness of one who tends, one who bandages.

I came to know God as healer long before he actually healed my body. My brokenness allowed me to know the kind of nearness to God for which my heart had always craved.

The waiting room of life—the pause button on those things we think we need and most want— isn't all that it seems. Often it is there, with open wounds and bleeding hearts and the sweat that comes when life doesn't heal as we expected it would, that we see the most tender side of God.

If we let them, our eyes can finally see a healer when our heart breaks. ●

Read: Psalm 147:1–11. **Reflect:** What area of your life feels most broken right now? What side of God have you not yet seen? From this place of brokenness, ask him to reveal that side to you.

Sara Hagerty is a wife to Nate and a mother of five whose arms stretched wide across the expanse between the United States and Africa. After almost a decade of Christian life she was introduced to pain and perplexity and, ultimately, intimacy with Jesus. Her book, *Every Bitter Thing Is Sweet*, tells the story. You can find her at EveryBitterThingsIsSweet.com.

Seeing Light in Your Darkness

“Darkness is my closest friend.” (Psalm 88:18)

I plunged into a black hole of depression during the spring semester of my freshman year of college. My depression was the culmination of years of pent-up anger and sadness over my chaotic upbringing, poverty's effect on my life, the fear of having to leave college because of a lack of finances, and my own bad decisions with a high school boyfriend.

The weight of the depression combined with my inability to feel joy and my acute sensitivity to persistent anguish left me feeling buried alive. I could easily identify with the psalmist who said he felt like a living corpse and “as good as dead” (Psalm 88:4, 5).

The diagnosis was clinical depression. It explained my exhaustion, mental confusion, sadness, and inability to concentrate. Even so, having a diagnosis didn't produce a quick turnaround. For about a year and a half, darkness was my closest friend.

I experienced deep depression only once. But like most, I've had my share of down times. In either case—a diagnosed condition or a period of “the blues”—this is a frequent experience for people of faith, as indicated by the psalmists' many cries of emotional anguish.

How do we claw our way out of a casket when we feel paralyzed by terror? What do we do when we feel forgotten by God, or like his punching bag, the object of his wrath?

There's no quick-and-easy fix for depression. Indeed, some will struggle with it throughout their entire lives. However, here are four practices that have helped me and others regain a sense of wholeness.

First, remember that depression lies, like the devil (John 8:44). While depressed, we are prone to latch on to lies like “God must hate me,” “I'm a loser,” or “I'll never get better.” We combat death-dealing lies by repeatedly telling ourselves truth from God's Word, even when we can't feel those truths. Truth slowly renews our minds and combats depression.

Second, move toward the dawn as you confide in trusted friends. Others can pray and care for you in concrete ways only when they know what's going on. They pray when you cannot. Moreover, in telling others, you may discover you're not alone.

Third, be active. Depression affects your body. Even minimal exercise can jolt your numbed senses.

Fourth, take medication if needed. God gave doctors and others wisdom to help us. There's no shame in taking needed medication. It can function as one of God's good and perfect gifts (James 1:17).

Remember, God loves you deeply. You are not alone. ●

Read: Psalm 88. **Reflect:** Can you identify with the psalmist's sentiments? What is one thing you can do to combat the lies depression whispers?

Marlena Graves is the author of *A Beautiful Disaster: Finding Hope in the Midst of Brokenness*. She is a writer for *Christianity Today* and *Our Daily Bread*.

Unexpected Gifts

“Children are a gift from the Lord.” (Psalm 127:3)

“He was a gift.” The nurse in the hospital spoke those words a few hours after our daughter Penny was born and diagnosed with Down syndrome. She was talking about her own son, who had special needs, the son she told me had died “a long time ago.”

The idea that every baby is a gift from above had always sounded trite, so then it became especially hard for me to consider our daughter a gift. But over the ten years since she was born, the truth of that statement has become clearer. Early on in Penny's life, a friend quoted Jesus when she said, “Anyone who receives this child in my name receives me” (Mark 9:37). Penny was a gift from God, and to the degree that I could receive her, welcome her, and look for God's creative hand within her, I was able to receive more and more of the Spirit in my own life. Children *are* gifts—undeserved and unpredictable—gifts to be received, not projects to be completed, not problems to be solved, not even artworks to be created.



What is true of Penny is true of all children, though her unexpected diagnosis made it more clear to me. All children come as undeserved gifts; they surprise us (and frustrate, amuse, bewilder, and anger us) with their unpredictability. Jesus echoes the psalmist when he speaks about their importance. He tells grownups to model their faith after that of children. He tells them to become like little children. He also calls grownups children, and over and over again he teaches grownups to call God by the intimate name of *Abba Father*.

Children are gifts in and of themselves. They also offer the gift of showing us who we are to God, and they teach us how to turn toward God as the Father of all good gifts. ●

Read: Psalm 127:3. **Reflect:** Today, how can you more wholeheartedly receive and treasure the gifts of children or family members that God has given you?

Amy Julia Becker is the author of *Small Talk* and *A Good and Perfect Gift*. You can find her online at AmyJuliaBecker.com or on Twitter at @amyjuliabecker.

Remembering What Matters

“LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered—how fleeting my life is.” (Psalm 39:4)

This past year, my family threw a birthday party for my son Ezra who'd just turned one. About 20 friends joined us, and all of our kids were running amok around the house.

Amid the mayhem, a friend shared with me her pain. She'd suffered a miscarriage six months earlier. Although she had plans to attend a support group, she still cried about it often and yearned for another child. I stood listening while the rest of the party faded away from my mind. I grasped for words, but none came, so I just hugged her and said I loved her.



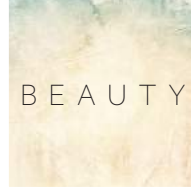
I thought about my friend in the days that followed, her circumstances and how in recent months I had not been the friend whom she needed. During that period of time I had been incredibly busy with my work and family. I had left little margin for anything else.

Days and months raced by in the blink of an eye, and my busyness caused both my relationships and my health to suffer. Psalm 39 was a wake-up call to remember the fleeting nature of my life. I realized I must be intentional with what I've been given, that I must be intentional with the relationships in my life.

My conversation with my friend reminded me to not let work and busyness take over. I want to invest in the people God has placed in my life so that I can love my neighbor as myself as Mark 12:31 says I should. It also was a reminder of the importance of practicing self-care, even in those little fringe hours found sporadically in our days. These important habits lead to a rich, meaningful life. ●

Read: Psalm Psalm 39:1–7. **Reflect:** How can you slow down to appreciate the relationships and gifts in your life?

Jessica N. Turner is the author of the best-selling book *The Fringe Hours: Making Time for You*, and she's the founder of the lifestyle blog TheMomCreative.com.



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