

TRULY



The TRULY Co.

The Intentionality Issue | Volume No. 2 | Issue No. 1

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Isaiah 41:13

For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.



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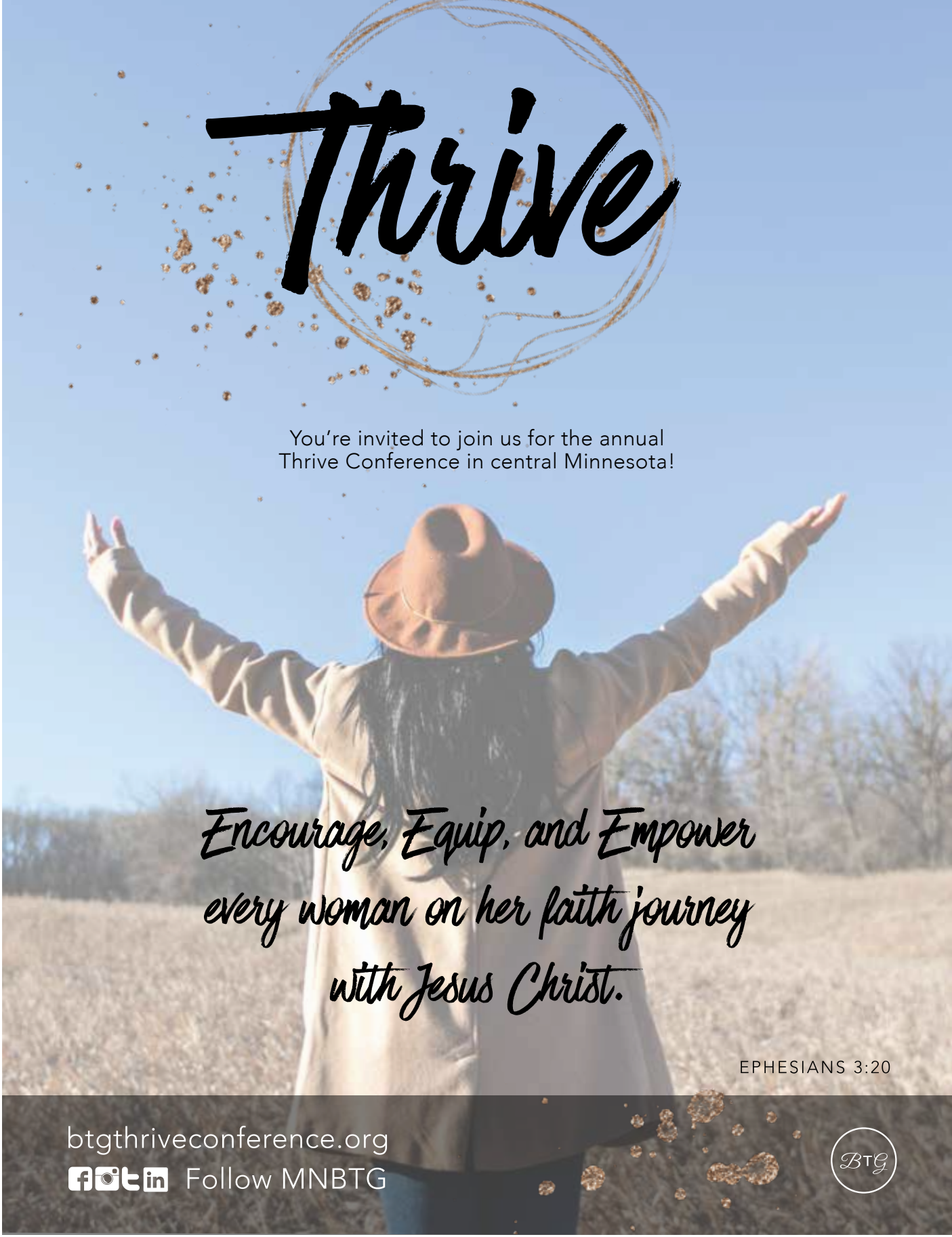
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EPHESIANS 3:20

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Letter FROM THE Publisher



In times of trial and confusion, we long for understanding. At the time of this issue's release, the world is experiencing a shaking. A global pandemic, economic insecurity, and clashing belief systems have triggered an aftershock of questions about where we place our faith and trust. We're experiencing a shake-up, but our call and purpose is still the same as we process the events happening around us and what they will mean for our future.

The human mind is complex and curious, longing to understand why things are the way they are. Curiosity and longings are wired into our DNA. In the very beginning, Eve, with her husband, longed for wisdom and reached out to consume from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. She attempted to satisfy her desire for understanding on her own, and the rest is history.

In Scripture, the word *intention* consists of four senses: purpose (as in anticipated outcome), desire, determination, and intent of the mind, which makes decisions. God planted these capabilities within us. The pursuit of understanding our purpose (and God's plans for us) is beautiful, and the way we seek it and where we find it is what matters most.

We wade in the murky depths of confusion, assumptions, and judgment when we attempt to examine someone else's intent. *Intent* is a court term, after all. It's easy to pronounce a verdict when examining the lives of those around us. We judge people for the things they do without actually knowing what motivated their decisions. This is messy territory. Who can understand the intentions of a heart except God (see Proverbs 21:2)?

We don't always see clearly when it comes to our own lives. Why do we do the things we do? How can we interact with the world around us in a way that brings

honor to the Lord? While it's fruitless to attempt to judge the actions and mindsets of others, we can choose to examine our own lives carefully and ask God to reveal to us what we can't see on our own.

When we face challenges in the valleys and blessings on the mountaintops, we can rest confidently, knowing that our lives are in the hands of our Creator, who is continually shaping, guiding, and transforming us by his grace, regardless of the circumstances around us. You were fashioned for a beautiful purpose. You are adored by your Creator. You were bought at a price, and you carry the Holy Spirit within you (see 1 Corinthians 6:19–20). He will not let you fall (see Psalm 46:5).

I DECLARE THE END FROM THE BEGINNING,
AND FROM LONG AGO WHAT IS NOT YET
DONE, SAYING: MY PLAN WILL TAKE PLACE,
AND I WILL DO MY WILL. —ISAIAH 46:10 CSB

Regardless of the intent of the rulers of this world, our hope remains secure. Our desire is that this issue challenges you to understand that God's purposes and intentions are good. In light of his grace and the eternal hope we have in Jesus, we can find peace and believe that our human experiences will ultimately work out for his good (see Romans 8:28). Every wrong can be made right because of God's love. ■


LINDSAY MAY
PUBLISHER & FOUNDER

WHAT'S A LITTLE OIL GOING TO DO?

HOW GOD USES OUR LIMITED
RESOURCES FOR HIS GLORY

WRITTEN BY *Kelly Jo Flaa*

Insufficient. Not enough. It's embarrassing how often these words echo in the chambers of my mind and heart. Most days I have a deficit of energy and patience, minimal amounts of talent or drive to pursue dreams and goals, and too little time and money to meet all the demands. How can God use me when I don't have enough to go around?

Second Kings 4:1–7 tells the story of a woman faced with her own insufficiency. She'd recently been widowed and left with a sizable debt. Her sons would soon become slaves for those to whom she owed money. She went in great desperation to Elisha the prophet, asking for God's help. Elisha immediately asked, "Tell me, what do you have in your house?" And she replied, "Nothing at all, except a flask of olive oil" (verse 2 NLT).

But what's a little oil going to do?

Elisha directed her to collect all the jars she could find and to start pouring the little bit of oil from her flask into every container gathered. When all were filled to the brim, she sold the oil, repaid her creditors, and still had money left to live on.

Like this woman, I often take the right first step by going to God. He provides, empowers, and guides. But when he asks what I already have in my house, do I measure what he's asking me to do using human standards? My bank account lacks extra funds and my modest home boasts no large rooms to comfortably host gatherings. By my

assessment, there's simply not enough.

As we strive to live with purpose and intention, let's take stock in what we've already been given and stop dismissing our possible contributions as not enough. No dream or ability is wasted with God. No snippet of time is too narrow, no gift too simplistic or intangible. However small or seemingly insignificant something seems, it becomes altogether plentiful and potent in the hands of our mighty God.

God wanted to do more with the little bit of oil the woman possessed. He could have supernaturally produced enough to fill every jar, but he didn't. He chose to involve her and told her to pour it out. When she acted in faith, the results far exceeded her expectations and abilities.

My "limited resources" never hold God back. But my unwillingness to use them can get in the way. It's time to act with intentionality, fueled by faith in our creative God.

What can God do with your little bit of oil? ■



*KELLY JO FLAA, HER HUSBAND, AND FOUR SPICY KIDS RESIDE IN MINNESOTA. FROM COACHING YOUTH SPORTS TO WORKING AT HER LOCAL CHURCH, SHE INTENTIONALLY POINTS HER COMMUNITY TO JESUS CHRIST. @KELLYJOFLAA

Let's take stock in what we've already been given and stop dismissing our possible contributions as not enough.

PHOTO BY *Madi Reimer*

If X, Then Y: When Obedience Doesn't Bring Blessing

WRITTEN BY *Ali Gray*

PHOTO BY *Anna Marum*

GODLY LIVING DOESN'T ALWAYS BRING EARTHLY FAVOR.

“God’s not done with you. Are you done with him?” a friend asked as I dried my tears and stood to leave. I refrained from rolling my eyes, unsure how to respond.

When I was growing up, that would’ve been a preposterous thing to ask me. I believed that obedience brought blessing. Not in a God-will-give-you-a-private-jet-prosperity-gospel kind of way, but I figured that walking with God would bring good to my life.

Not anymore. My friend’s question left me silent.

As I drove home in a haze of headlights, an angry, familiar prayer crossed my lips: “Haven’t I done enough to receive favor? My years in ministry, serving with my whole heart, giving of myself . . . don’t I deserve to come out of the valley?” This seemed to be the only conversation I had with God anymore. I wanted answered prayers more than anything—more than intimate communion with him. But it wasn’t always that way. I didn’t always strive for blessing.

During a traumatic and public family crisis, when our newborn daughter was in and out of the hospital, I held my hands high in worship. Drowning in postpartum depression, I was prescribed a drug that left me with 30 percent lung function. Seventeen doctors and cross-country surgeries later, I declared that God was for me even though I found no healing.

For three years, I prayed on my knees. Tearful shouts fell into the carpet of my apartment. I contended with mustard-seed faith until, a few months later, I lay hemorrhaging in a hospital bed, losing my son in a late-term miscarriage. Something snapped. I no longer understood God’s nature. This is what happens when I walk with him?

It’s as though I had been seeking some elusive equation to blessing, assuming that if I lived for Jesus, life would look a certain way. I placed expectations on the One whose ways are higher than mine. People continually told me to

“cling to God’s promises.” But his promises aren’t wealth, health, and happiness. They are salvation, heaven, and the Holy Spirit. They are mighty gifts I do not earn or control.

As much as I hesitated to admit my human fragility and lack of control, I had to face the truth. Godly living doesn’t always bring earthly favor. It’s proven throughout Scripture. Those who walked with the Lord experienced darkness: imprisonment, famine, torture, even death. It proves that the appearance of good things in life is not a direct correlation to the goodness of God.

To answer my friend’s question, I am not done with God, but I am done with striving. He’s always faithful even when faithfulness isn’t what I pictured. When I allow my unmet list of requests to shape how I view God, confusion becomes a weapon I wield, a “justified” excuse for falling away from intimacy. But he is unchanging in nature and steady in the storm. Because of his love, I can lay down expectations and come to him, even with balled-up fists. I seek him—not the things he can give me. ■



*ALI GRAY SPENDS HER DAYS DOING CREATIVE THINGS ON THE COAST. SHE’S PASSIONATE ABOUT MAKING A CHERISHED HOME FOR HER FAMILY AND ANYONE ELSE WHO ENDS UP AROUND THEIR TABLE. @ALIKGRAY

ACTING ON OUR *Amen*

Owning Up to Our Sins and Repenting

WRITTEN BY *Lucrecia Slater*

ARTWORK BY *Ashtyn Sibinski*

I have sat in several churches throughout my life. From non-air-conditioned churches with wooden pews in the Deep South to the ultramodern, coffee-shop-in-the-lobby churches with cushy chairs. “Amen, church” thunders from the platforms as pastors make their groundbreaking points. In unison, the congregants respond, “Amen!” In that moment, we’re using that one word to imply that we agree with the Bible and that our lives reflect what it says.

But what if there is a disconnect between what we’re agreeing with and how we’re living? We have become comfortable with changing how we appear on the outside without working toward real change on the inside. Are we simply adjusting our behavior, or are we truly repenting, asking God to cleanse our hearts?

Repentance causes us to take ownership of our sins and destroys the yoke of our modified outward behavior. When we confess, God sanctifies our hearts. In Ephesians 4:22–24 (NLT), Paul urges, “Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.”

Taking the agreement of amen into our lives may cost us greatly, however. In Luke 14:27–33, Jesus explains the

cost of following him. Following Jesus means giving up our ways and desires and choosing his. True change can happen when we read God’s Word, allowing it to penetrate the deepest parts of our hearts. It can also happen when we establish accountability with women more tenured on their faith journey, and when we stay in a posture of repentance when we’re caught up in our sinful ways. Jesus is reflected in our lives when we’re working toward that amen.

Confessing our sins allows God to cleanse us from the inside out, and the Bible tells us we don’t have to keep this to ourselves or process it alone. James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” Let’s use our pastors’ “Amen, church” as an opportunity to examine what we’re agreeing with and how it’s playing out in our lives. ■



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PHOTO BY Anna Marum

How Loss Led to Life

FINDING MY FAITH THROUGH GRIEF

WRITTEN BY *Janna Murphy*

I was twenty-two when my mother called to tell me that if I wanted to say good-bye to my father, I needed to come home. In advanced stages of lung cancer, he had been admitted to the ICU. It would take me six hours to get to my family, and I had no idea what was going to happen. I grabbed my purse and jacket and began the journey home.

Six hours later, I walked through the hospital doors, everything moving in slow motion, and saw my mom and three brothers with sadness and pain on their faces. I had never been one to pray, but I begged God to look after my dad and to heal our soon-to-be-broken hearts.

My father died that day. He had waited for everyone to arrive and say good-bye, and then just like that, he was gone. The hardest part about death is you see and feel this terrible pain, but then you're supposed to turn around and function as if nothing has happened. How are you supposed to do that when someone you love is no longer there? I couldn't have prepared myself for how and when grief, pain, and anger would come into my life. I felt as if no one could see me.

During that time, a kind friend at work took me aside to listen, hug me, and tell me that God was always available. What did I know about talking with God? I had no faith and didn't know how to talk to God, yet I knew I needed something. Where would I even start? I needed to be able to

breathe again, and it started with my accepting people's acts of kindness and support.

THE LORD IS CLOSE TO THE
BROKENHEARTED AND SAVES THOSE
WHO ARE CRUSHED IN SPIRIT.
—PSALM 34:18

Days went by, but my friend's words clung to my heart, and I decided to act on them. I visited a church and sat in the back row. I wept the entire time. It was as if the message was made for me that day. Not knowing what to do with all the feelings and pain, I filled out the prayer card and left. Later, I spoke with the pastor, who guided me to the right people to help me process my dad's death. They helped me heal and see that there is life after death. That I didn't need to forget my dad, but that I could thrive for him.

I am forever grateful to all the people who saw me broken, bruised, and at a low point in my life. They picked me up and spoke life into me. Their intentionality allowed my eyes to open and see life in a new way. ■



*JANNA MURPHY IS MARRIED TO HER BEST FRIEND AND HAS THREE AMAZING LITTLE HUMANS WHO MAKE HER LAUGH AND CRY. SHE LOVES TREATS, CRAFTING, AND SERVING OTHERS. @JOSIEANDLEO

Five Ways to *Love a Friend* Experiencing a Hard Time

WRITTEN BY *Kendra Roehl*

We all walk through hard seasons when we need others to come alongside us and encourage us. Here are some simple ways to support a friend when she's in difficult seasons of her own.

01

Send weekly texts

to let her know you are thinking about and praying for her. When our son was going through a particularly hard season, I had one friend who would always check in on me or text me to let me know she was praying for our family. Her messages were always encouraging.

02

Drop off a small gift

on her doorstep. I have a friend who battled cancer several years ago, and a few days before her annual checkup, I drop off a goodie basket of things she can take along to her appointment—magazines, chocolate, and coffee. These little gifts help her feel loved and supported.

03

Invite her for a cup of coffee

at your house or a local coffee shop. Conversations with friends are beneficial, but sometimes a little extra nudge is needed to meet with others. Even on the days I hesitate, I always leave feeling encouraged.

04

Listen without offering solutions

or platitudes. One of the best things a friend did for me when we found out my sister's cancer was terminal was to listen to my heartache and simply say that she was sorry for all that I was experiencing. It was comforting to have someone hold space for my grief without trying to offer clichéd advice.

05

Keep reaching out

even when she doesn't respond in a timely manner. When someone is experiencing difficulties, it can take energy just to respond, but that doesn't mean she doesn't appreciate your messages and prayers. Continue offering support. I promise you, your encouragement is making a difference in her day.

We have the unique opportunity to love our friends when they experience the best and worst this life has to offer. By taking small steps to let a friend know that she is loved and cared for, we can be small rays of light in the darkest seasons of the soul.



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PHOTOS BY *Anna Marum*



The Healing Power of Hotdish

WRITTEN BY *Brianna Gray*

I was twenty-seven years old when I had my first baby. Too hungry to avoid the refrigerator in the middle of the night, I was happy to open the door, eyeing the vintage ceramic bakeware full of hotdish that my grandma had delivered earlier that day. Hotdish is an Upper Midwest tradition from generations past that is simply made by mixing together ingredients like cheese, cream-based soups, and rice or pasta and baking until the sides are golden and bubbly.

In the quiet of the night, I'd scoop a few spoonfuls into a small bowl, pop it into the microwave, and eat while resting my body against the kitchen counter. Whatever the time of day, a few spoonfuls of that warm hotdish somehow healed my overwhelmed, exhausted, and sometimes lonely new-mom heart.

My grandma delivered hotdish and other goodies to my front door over the years. Sometimes the food delivery was a bag of groceries that she and my grandpa picked up for my husband and me when we were newlyweds. Other times we received homemade chocolate spritz cookies perfectly placed in a Christmas-themed tin. When I'd pull the cover off the tin, ready to enjoy what I knew I already loved, the smell instantly transported me back to Grandma's dining room on Christmas Eve.

Although the food and reason for the delivery varied, her message was always the same: *I see you, and I love you.*

There is something healing about hotdish showing up on your doorstep. Whether the delivery comes in celebration, with sympathy, or just because, the message remains constant. Friends become family when they see our joy and pain, and love us by nourishing our bodies and souls. Cozy hotdish, fresh cookies, bread and jam, hot coffee, or a gift card for a favorite local restaurant act as the words we sometimes can't find. When we aren't sure what to say, we get to carry our friends and family with food.

I was thirty-eight when my grandma passed away peacefully and joined Jesus in heaven. A few days later, a friend showed up on my snowy doorstep holding a grocery bag containing enough food to feed my now family of five for several days. She didn't have many words, but the way she handed the brown paper bag over to me said, *I see you, and I love you.* While I didn't reheat that food in the middle of the night like I did my grandma's hotdish, the lunches and dinners it provided began to heal my longing heart.

Coming alongside the people in our lives is a beautiful way to reflect the love of Jesus. Living and loving like him, with a hotdish in hand, is how I hope to live out my grandma's legacy.

Bringing food to someone's doorstep or having something delivered is a simple way to let people know we see them on the good days and the harder days. Food doesn't have to be complicated.

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS
TO GET YOU STARTED.

COLD BREAKFAST
fresh bagels
cream cheese
iced coffee
(ordered for delivery from a local shop)

HOT BREAKFAST
your favorite egg bake recipe
cinnamon rolls or doughnuts
pre-cut fruit

COFFEE BREAK
bag of coffee grounds
dark chocolate
fresh flowers

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

DOES THIS PERSON HAVE CHILDREN?
BRING SOMETHING KID-FRIENDLY
AND FUN LIKE MACARONI AND CHEESE
AND APPLESAUCE POUCHES.

DOES SOMEONE IN THIS PERSON'S
HOUSEHOLD HAVE FOOD ALLERGIES?
TAKE CARE TO ASK QUESTIONS AND
COOK SAFELY, AND MAKE A LIST OF WHAT
INGREDIENTS AND BRANDS YOU USED.

MAKE CLEAN-UP EASY!
DELIVER FOOD IN CONTAINERS
YOU DON'T NEED RETURNED.

BREAD BASKET
your favorite bread recipe
a wedge of good cheese
jams and spreads
butter

TACO BAR
seasoned ground meat
taco shells or tortillas
lettuce, tomatoes, cheese, and black beans
salsa, sour cream, and guacamole

A COZY NIGHT IN
your favorite lasagna recipe
your favorite beverage
fresh garden salad
crusty French bread
brownies

THE EASY DINNER
roisserie chicken
store-bought mashed potatoes
bagged salad mix
dinner rolls

JUST FOR FUN
a bag of popcorn
their favorite candy
sparkling water



*BRIANNA GRAY LIVES IN MINNESOTA WITH HER HUSBAND AND THREE KIDS. SHE IS THE EDITORIAL CONTENT DIRECTOR FOR THE TRULY CO AND ENJOYS WRITING, FAMILY DINNERS, AND CYCLING.

When God Says No

Embracing Our Pain to Find His Yes

WRITTEN BY *Mary B. Safrit*

PHOTOS & DIRECTION BY *Sanetra Nere Longuo*

In John 11, Jesus made a series of intentional choices. Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick. They described Lazarus as “the one you love,” and Jesus replied that the sickness would not lead to death. He stayed with his disciples for two days before deciding it was time to go to Lazarus in Judea—a place where Jesus had recently almost been killed. In spite of the disciples’ pushback, Jesus insisted. He explained that Lazarus needed to be woken from his sleep. When his disciples failed to understand the significance of his words, Jesus stated, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him” (John 11:14–15).

Jesus arrived knowing he would raise Lazarus from the dead and that it would bring his Father glory. But when Jesus was confronted by the grief of the mourners and the sisters, whom he loved, he was “deeply moved in his spirit and troubled” (verse 33). And then, even though he knew what was about to happen, “Jesus wept” (verse 35).

There are times when we are asked to say no to something so we can say yes to God’s ultimate good. In college, God prompted me to end a dating relationship with the guy I believed I would marry. I didn’t want to lose him, but the leading of the Holy Spirit was clear. I couldn’t see how toxic the relationship had become or the direction in which God would lead me in the coming years—a direction marriage would have inhibited. I was just devastated by the loss.

Perhaps for you it meant walking away from a killer job opportunity or saying good-bye to a friend whom God has called to move away. Following God sometimes means saying no to something that is good (or at least seems good). Healing Lazarus while he was still alive would have been a

good thing. But that’s not what Jesus did. He chose to wait. He chose resurrection.

I often feel a conflicted sense of loss in these types of situations, and maybe you do too. We trust that God is good, is for us, and wants good things for us. We know that God is ultimately transforming us “with ever-increasing glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18). He is always doing a new thing (see Isaiah 43:19). But we are still sad about what we have lost or given up.

When experiencing a loss, it can be tempting to gloss over it with spiritual platitudes and out-of-context verses. As humans, we do all we can to run from the experiences of pain and discomfort. In Jesus we see a different model. We see a Savior who chose a humiliating death instead of a throne of political power. We see the author and perfecter of our faith waiting, then weeping with his friends before calling Lazarus out of the grave. He felt and expressed his hard emotions, and he honored the will of his Father.

Living intentionally out of the hope of the gospel does not mean we will never feel sad or experience pain along our path. It means the pain doesn’t get the final say. To feel the extent of our losses and disappointments is to be human, an experience our Savior didn’t skip. Instead of minimizing our pain, what if we choose to engage with it, to let it connect us with our need for God’s love? As we seek to live lives of intention, let us remember that the Savior who calls us is the same Savior who weeps with us. ■



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THERE ARE TIMES
WHEN WE ARE
ASKED TO SAY NO
TO SOMETHING SO
WE CAN SAY
YES TO GOD’S
ULTIMATE GOOD.



SHADOW AND LIGHT

Finding Fulfillment in the Steady Nature of God

WRITTEN BY *Kareena Rineer*

There's something so enchanting about the way the clouds establish pockets of shadow and light on the terrain below, particularly on the mountains. And the way that, from a distance, the bigger picture is displayed. In an evolving patchwork quilt of the brilliant and the dim, light will soon find shadow, and shadow will find light. But the terrain is constant, the mountains never changing.

In a way, this image mirrors the essence of being human in relationship with God: finding the delicate balance of experiencing the ever-changing depths of both shadow and light, while remaining somewhere that is constant. In the Constant One.

Ecclesiastes declares that there is a time for everything. A time to dance in the sunlight, and a time to throw fists into the darkness. A time to experience great joy, and a time to lament.

A time for shadow, and a time for light.

The ebb and flow of life remind us that we are vulnerable humans. We are raw. In the shadow, we learn to appreciate light. And in the light, we recognize the brilliance in contrast to the shadow we were once under. Both have their own time of existing, each with unique purpose.

The raw and vulnerable moments remind us that we are human and that each season has its place. They remind us that we are alive, encouraging depth in our humanness. To feel. To experience. And to be present. To know that each feeling has its time, and no moment should go to waste. We were intricately crafted by the most intentional Creator; our humanness and our feelings, therefore, must hold value.

But how do we find value, even in the depths of the shadows?

When we get caught up in the madness of change, of the highs and the lows, we forget that our feet are standing on a firm foundation. We spend so much time looking up at the shifting clouds that we begin to believe all things are swirling around us in inevitable change. We forget

there is a constant amid the continual transitions of life.

Being aware of our human experience is important. Feeling. Unpacking. Understanding. But to truly find value in both the shadow and the light, we need something that is constant. Someone who is constant. That is why it is so important to recognize God's magnificent glory—his fingerprint—in all things. When we find him, we gain a richer sense of wisdom and a deeper notion of rest.

John 15 recognizes that it is only when we abide in the Father that we can bear fruit. As advised as we can be sifting through the wreckage of life, we cannot bear the fruit of truth and divine insight unless we are aware of and present in that constant place. In him.

This present, fruit-producing abiding is rooted in our purpose. And our purpose is to praise, knowing that his fingerprint is evident in all things. To live in a way that points back to our Maker, whether in shadow or light, for we know that he is in both. If a season is dragging your soul through the mud, abide in the constant and find the glory. If your miracle has not come, abide in the constant and find the glory. If it has, abide in the constant and find the glory. It is in the Constant One that we are able to keep a clear mind and continue on. It is in the Constant One that we can be sure to have something steady to lean on in this life, in our human experience.

Although we cannot choose how the clouds disperse the light, we can choose to abide on the mountain. To abide in the truth and the fingerprint of God in each moment, and hold firm to his steady nature. ■



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Fundamental Orientations | of the Heart

CREATING WORLDVIEWS CENTERED
AROUND CHRIST AND THE CROSS

WRITTEN BY *Shiloh Gideon-Sjostrom*

While visiting my husband's family in southern Sweden, I saw something I had never seen before. I had to take a look, so we pulled over, and I stood at the edge of a field. Before me lay a sea of red. The bright red poppy flowers were in full bloom as far as my eyes could see. In that moment, every color except the red faded from view, and the gently swaying field became my view of the world. But when my eyes took time to adjust, many other beautiful things came into focus—the green grass, a majestic oak tree, and a myriad of purple and yellow wildflowers growing in the rich soil.

The memory of that vibrant and lush field of colors gives me a point of reflection. I imagine for a moment that the beautiful field was the worldview God wants me to cultivate.

James W. Sire, author of *The Universe Next Door*, defines worldview as “a fundamental orientation of the heart.” My strongest views of the world have been cultivated within the Christian communities I have been a part of around the world. My love for God, community, justice, and the Bible were created in those circles, reflecting in my life the beauty of that poppy field. But “worldview” is a big topic, and cultivating an intentional Christian worldview can be a daunting task. Asking ourselves these two questions can help us evaluate our existing worldviews:

1. Are my worldviews centered around Christ and the cross (Christocentric)?
2. Do my worldviews increase affection for Christ (Christophilic)?

Christocentric and *Christophilic* might seem like big theological terms, but they have become a compass to direct my worldviews. When I begin an inventory of my worldviews as they relate to culture, politics, social status, or even the desire for economic well-being, I recognize that my views may not all be Christocentric or Christophilic. I have to confront the truth that this world and my experiences have altered the fundamental orientation of my heart from the eternal to the temporal.

Matthew 6:21 says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The fundamental orientation of my heart dictates where my treasure is. I have to work out the answers to difficult, life-altering questions. And while I am learning to wrestle with these soul-searching questions within my church and my faith communities, I take comfort in the metaphor of that poppy field. The gospel of Jesus is like the rich, fertile soil, and all the flowers growing out of it represent how my worldviews should increase my affection for him. Both this world and my time in it are fleeting; only my commitment to Christ and the cross has eternal implications. ■



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INTENTIONAL DESIGN | OIL ON LINEN PANEL



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Caring for Others by Caring for Yourself

WRITTEN BY *Jenni Kahmeyer*
ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Krista Dumire*

Life is busy. Responsibilities come flying at us faster than we can manage, and self-care often falls to the end of our ever-growing to-do list. As a mental health therapist, I frequently encourage my clients to engage in self-care activities throughout their week as a way to decrease anxiety and manage stress. If I’m being honest with myself, however, I know that this is an area in which I struggle. It has become even more difficult to find time for self-care practices after giving birth to my first baby in May 2020.

How can I justify this time away from family, friends, and other responsibilities without feeling a sense of shame? Have you felt this way too? When it comes to self-care, I often think there is too much to do, I don’t deserve it, and I should put the needs of others, especially my family, ahead of my own.

The term *self-care* can feel like a trend or even frivolous at times, so in order to identify what was really getting in my way, I decided to consider what was at the root of the problem. What I discovered was a resistance to practicing self-compassion (treating myself as I would treat a friend). Saying to a friend, “You’re going to let your family down if you take thirty minutes to read a good book,” does not sit well on my tongue. “You don’t deserve it,” sounds equally severe. So why do I continue to say these things to myself?

Self-compassion isn’t just about the self-care activities you do, but the way you treat yourself in your own mind. In Matthew 22:39, Jesus says the second greatest commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself.” As Christian women, we quickly volunteer to care for others, yet we hesitate to treat ourselves the same way. Pausing and slowing down in the midst of a busy life can seem counterintuitive to the world’s fast pace.

This makes me wonder: *How can we truly love and care for others if we don’t take time to care for ourselves?*

Upon reflection, I surmise that God might want us to love ourselves so that we can love and care for others more

effectively. From my experience, I’ve found that I can be more present for others in my life and better able to meet their needs when I stop judging and shaming myself and start treating myself like a friend. Could it be possible that it’s not only necessary, but also godly to have a mindset geared toward self-compassion? I think the answer is simply yes.

How can you respond to thoughts of criticism or self-judgment?

Notice your thoughts and be honest with yourself. This includes identifying the judgments you make about yourself and how you think you “should” spend your time. Talk to yourself as you would talk to a good friend.

Ask for help. You were not designed to do life alone. There are people in your life who probably want to support you as much as you want to support them. If a friend can help you with a task so you can have a few moments for self-care, she would probably be happy to offer you that opportunity.

Know your limits and when to say no. Making the decision not to take on another task does not make you a bad friend, wife, mom, etc. In fact, saying no might be exactly what you need so that you have the energy to say yes the next time.

Take a look at the list of self-care practices included with this article. It includes activities you can engage in throughout your week. Some will take only a few minutes, while others require more time. Do you notice any resistance or hesitation coming up when you consider setting aside time to pause or unwind? Choose one or two activities that look as though they would suit you and try them out this week. When you find one that makes the biggest difference in helping you feel calm or less stressed, be sure to utilize that activity the next time you feel overwhelmed or sense you need to recharge. Notice how you feel both before and after to discover how much of an impact the activity has on your mind and body. ■

HOW CAN WE
TRULY LOVE
AND CARE FOR
OTHERS IF WE
DON'T TAKE
TIME TO CARE
FOR OURSELVES?

TAKE A BUBBLE BATH OR HOT SHOWER.	STRETCH FOR TEN MINUTES.		GO FOR A WALK.
GO TO BED THIRTY MINUTES EARLY.		GET A MASSAGE.	MEET WITH A COUNSELOR.
LISTEN TO YOUR FAVORITE MUSIC WHILE YOU MAKE DINNER.	WRITE DOWN THINGS YOU ARE GRATEFUL FOR AT THE END OF THE DAY.		EAT YOUR FAVORITE SNACK MINDFULLY (REALLY NOTICE EACH BITE AND FLAVOR).
ORGANIZE AN AREA OF YOUR HOME.		TAKE TEN DEEP BREATHS (FULLY INHALE AND EXHALE).	DRAW, PAINT, OR DOODLE.
DO YOUR NAILS OR GIVE YOURSELF A FACIAL.	BUY YOURSELF FLOWERS.		ATTEND AN EXERCISE CLASS OR WORK OUT AT HOME.
LIGHT A CANDLE OR DIFFUSE ESSENTIAL OILS WHILE YOU READ A BOOK OR MAGAZINE.		DANCE AROUND YOUR HOME, ALONE OR WITH YOUR FAMILY.	WATCH A MOVIE OR YOUR FAVORITE TV SHOW (WITHOUT YOUR PHONE NEARBY).
WATCH THE SUNRISE IN THE MORNING OR GO STARGAZING AT NIGHT.	DRINK YOUR FAVORITE TYPE OF COFFEE OR TEA, AND READ A CHAPTER OF SCRIPTURE.		SIGN UP FOR A CLASS (POTTERY, PAINTING, GARDENING, ETC.).
EXPLORE A PARK AND TAKE PICTURES.		BOOK A WEEKEND GETAWAY.	PLAY WITH YOUR DOG, CAT, ETC.



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Faith Stories

“TO LOOK AT MYSELF
WITH MORE MERCY.
I NEED TO BE CARED FOR
AND BE WELL IN ORDER
TO CARE FOR OTHERS.”

ALEXSANDRA
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FERNANDES

“ENJOYING QUIET AND
STILLNESS. APPRECIATING
PEACEFUL MOMENTS
WITHOUT BACKGROUND
NOISE.”

GABBY GORDON, 23
BOSTON, MA

@GABRIELLA
GORDONPHOTO

“IN WHAT AREA OF YOUR LIFE IS GOD CALLING YOU TO BE MORE INTENTIONAL?”

“READING FROM THE
BIBLE EVERY DAY.”

ROCHELLE BAUER, 43,
FERTILE, MN

@ROCHELLE_BAUER_
AUTHOR

“MENTORSHIP. LEARNING
WISDOM FROM OTHERS
AND SHARING WITH
OTHERS WHAT I’VE
LEARNED.”

STEPHANIE MACDONALD, 30
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#TRULYFAITHSTORY @THETRULYCO

Deciding What to Wear

HOW OUR CHOICES CREATE A LASTING IMPACT

WRITTEN BY *Madi Reimer*

PHOTO BY *Madi Reimer*

I’ve come to believe that God gives everyone a nudge in their heart to be intentional about a daily practice that could be having a ripple effect on people and our planet. Some are passionate about composting and avoid single-use plastics, while others have decided to value clean skincare and household products in their everyday lives. In my own journey of being conscious of my everyday practices, God first nudged my heart toward sustainable fashion.

When I was in college, I spent hours at the mall trying to figure out the best deals and how I could buy the most items for the least amount of money. I wrestled with always wanting more and felt like I needed to keep up with quick trends and other women in my life. But the cheap clothes looked worn after one wear, and my internal world struggled with the constant comparison game. The Holy Spirit slowly trickled in a fresh perspective, and I began to see that my relationship with fashion was not healthy.

Although that realization didn’t immediately stop my fast-fashion purchases, it did start a process of personal research. I began to see the greater effects of my decisions.

Sustainable fashion can briefly be defined as clothing, accessories, or shoes that are manufactured with the environment and people as a priority. Before deciding what to buy or wear, I ask myself some questions and consider different options.

CARING FOR THE PLANET

How is the environment treated in the manufacturing process for this clothing item? Is there a lot of factory pollution, such as chemicals seeping into water systems? What is the textile, and how is it produced? Instead of old clothes going to a landfill, is there a local shelter they can be donated to?

CARING FOR PEOPLE

Who made my clothes? Are they paid a liveable wage, and do they work in a fair environment? Find a documentary, podcast, book, or social media account to learn more about garment workers and how they're taken care of. We can provide community support by both shopping local and purchasing from brands who partner with workers in other countries.

CARING FOR THE MINDSET OF THE CONSUMER

What do I really need? Do I want this because it's a trend, or is it true to who I am? What is the quality and lifespan of this item? We are constantly targeted to buy new things, so it's easy to become envious or bored with our wardrobes. Let's take a moment to breathe, slow down our shopping habits, reimagine our closets, and re-wear what we love.

My desire is to intentionally live out the values in Matthew 22:39: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This verse reminds me that my decisions impact not only my health and well-being, but the health and well-being of people around the world. With the leading of the Holy Spirit, I can stay curious and ask questions about even the smallest of these things.

What daily routine or practice is the Holy Spirit revealing a fresh perspective on for you? ■



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WITH THE LEADING OF
THE HOLY SPIRIT, I CAN
STAY CURIOUS AND
ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT
EVEN THE SMALLEST
OF THESE THINGS.

THE ARTIST'S WORK



HOW GOD'S BRUSHWORK REVEALS HIS GOODNESS

WRITTEN BY *Lindsay May*

PHOTOS BY *Anna Marum*

We are God's masterpieces, living works of art who are being perfected as we live out our stories (see Ephesians 2:10). We are unique from the start, underpainted canvases in the Master's book. Layer upon layer, the details and textures emerge with life's experiences. We hope for calm pastels to sweep across our woven fabric and for joyous bright shapes to frame our stories. But life's struggles break up our perfectly blended surface with splatters of darkness—chronic illness, a car accident, the loss of a job. . . . We try to paint over the dark stains, but these are the tones that add depth and dimension when transformed by the Artist's brushwork.

In New Testament times, Greek artists would signify that their craftsmanship was finished with the word *tetelestai*, meaning, "It is finished." The word implied that nothing could be added or taken away. The work was complete and final, a portrait of perfection. The word wouldn't be uttered until just the right hues and tones told the work's story.

Reflecting on the complexities on our canvas, the juxtaposition of light and dark draw the mind like a magnet. We are shaped by the jagged edges and sharp lines that disrupt our lives, but we are not defined by them, no matter how deeply they pull at our attention. It's our choice whether we allow God to transform our hearts in the crossroad moments of our personal lives and as we observe

events throughout the world.

We are all a work in progress, adding new pigments to our story every day. In the middle of dark moments, the process of transformation is beautiful and good because God declares it so (see Genesis 1). He is continually creating and transforming all things, drawing us and others to him as he perfects his masterpieces. Where there is darkness, God will always speak light and abundant life. His brushwork reveals his goodness.

How beautiful to reflect on the words of Jesus, the Light of the World, spoken just before he died: "It is finished." *Tetelestai*. Echoing his completed work on the sixth day of creation, God's perfect redemptive plan was fully accomplished. Beautifully orchestrated from the beginning of time, Jesus's death blotted out the power of sin and condemnation forever.

Still today, God continues the good work he started in you until it is completed (see Philippians 1:6). Let us intentionally fix our eyes on the beauty of his story and the work he is doing around us. "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things" (Philippians 4:8 CSB).



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FEATURE ARTIST
COURTNEY FEIA MODELS
THIS TENSION OF
DARKNESS AND LIGHT IN
HER COVER ART PAINTING.

COURTNEY FEIA, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

“

Keeping the light in the middle, we intentionally focus on God in everything we do. Creative work can easily take on much of an artist's personality, putting the focus on herself. After working in the creative industry for a long time, I felt God begin to lead me to paint Scripture to keep the focus on him. Before beginning a new painting, I spend time reading Scripture. Bible reading is sacred, and it's something I can ground myself and my work in.

”

A LIGHT TO MY PATH

Medium: Oil on Canvas

FIGHTING *for Our* MENTAL HEALTH

Allowing God to Walk with Us
in Our Darkest Moments

WRITTEN BY *Monique Schmitt*

ART BY *Hillary Steinberger*

Trigger warning: This article talks about suicide.

I locked myself in the dark bathroom closet. The tile was cold on my skin as I curled up on the floor under a shelf of toddler toys. I was preparing to take my own life, but it didn't go exactly as I planned.

The last ten years felt like a blur. Between college, moving several times, and marrying my husband, I never felt like I had a moment to pause and process where my life was going. My lifestyle choices were sputtering remnants from whatever I had left in my tank, and my spiritual life was riding on the coattails of my younger self. I wasn't pursuing curiosity in my faith or journaling my dreams and poems like I used to, sometimes in bed at 2:00 a.m. Instead, I became codependent on my spouse to lead me in my spiritual life, and then undermining him when he didn't do things a certain way.

More recently, I was waking up feeling numb, unable to move. But my kids would be crying in the room across the hall, and I had no choice but to show up with a caring smile and open arms. I needed to be strong, pick myself up, and just get it done. Truth is, I needed to do a lot of things and be a lot of things, but my strength was running on fumes, and I had nothing left to give.

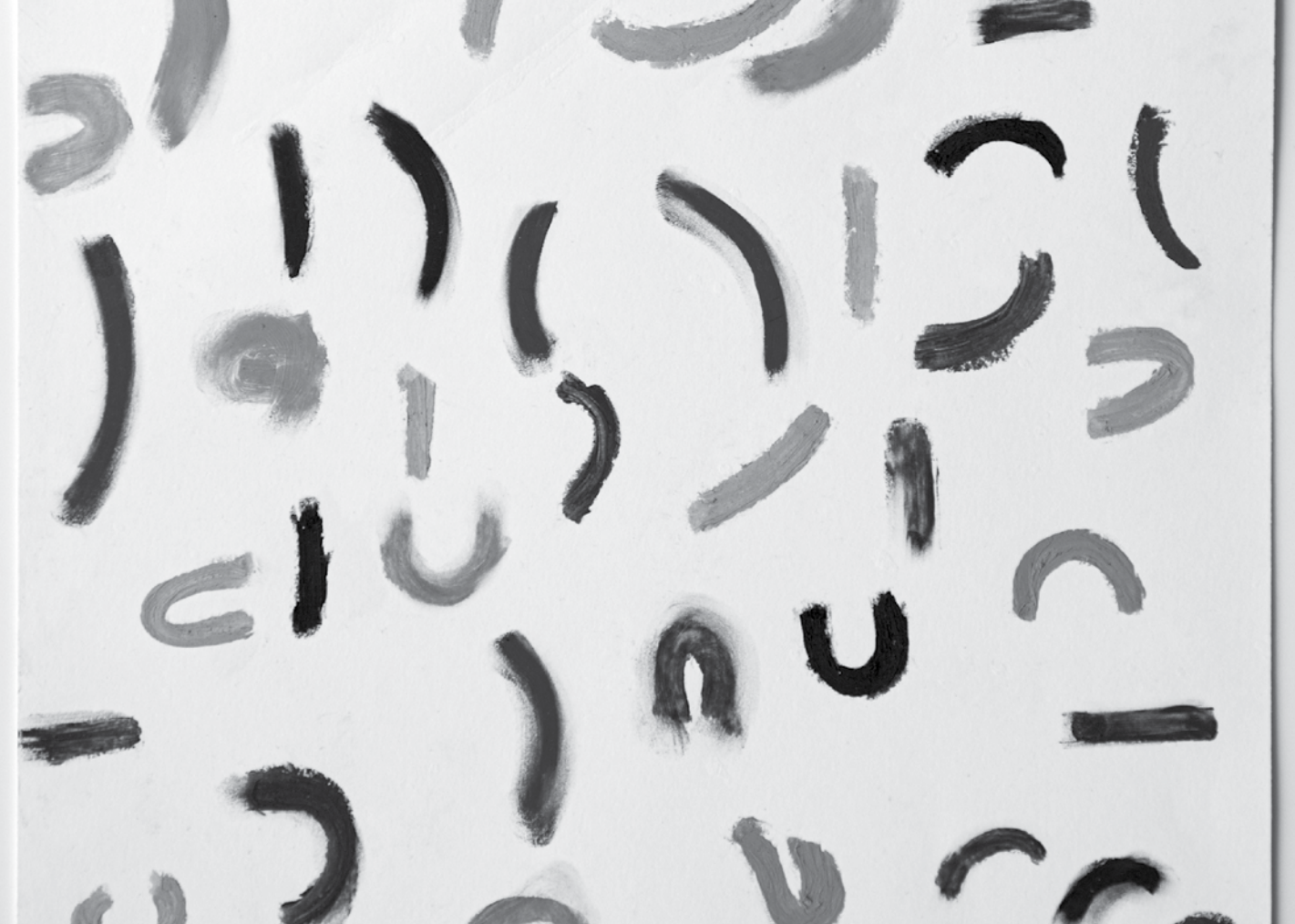
And now, with my husband and kids outside the

bathroom yelling, "Don't do it!" there was no longer any way to hide the void that had been festering in my soul. I couldn't think of any Bible verse that would make me feel better, so I relied heavily on the one thing I knew to be true: God's grace is sufficient.

I wanted to stay in that bathroom closet, but I knew I needed to come out eventually, so I finally faced my reality. My therapist of two years advised that I go to the emergency room, and within two weeks, I was given short-term disability from work and placed into a local program that helps mothers suffering from postpartum depression.

The months leading to my moment in the bathroom closet were filled with trying to solve problems on my own. When I messed up, I attempted to rectify myself, unknowingly dethroning God as Lord of my life. I tried to do it all on my own, and I failed and fell hard. But God used those desperate moments to break down the foundations I once held and began rebuilding me to accept one truth: that I'm human and I need help.

I GOD BEGAN REBUILDING ME TO
ACCEPT ONE TRUTH: THAT I'M
HUMAN AND I NEED HELP.



UNTITLED | OIL PASTELS ON PAPER

God says that he walks with me in my darkest moments. When I live my faith trying to suppress my emotions and intrusive thoughts, I rob God from the relationship he desires to have with me. He wants to be the one holding back my hair as I vomit out the poisonous lies filled with self-hate and bitterness. He is not just sitting on high looking down at us, but is actually walking with us in the valley. When we don't resist the valley, we mature in our faith and relationship with him. The Lord sees us in our humanity. He knows we can't do it all or achieve perfection, and that's why he sent Jesus.

It's been a year since my attempt.

The debilitating depression I've struggled with answers to my God. When I release the "I need to" language from my internal dictionary, giving God the authority over my spirit, he then reminds me, "It is finished and it is done."

There is nothing else I need to do except to rest in his grace and abide in his Word daily. There are times I close my eyes and I'm back in the bathroom closet, still hearing my

voice cry out for healing. I can't erase that part of me. But God, in his everlasting kindness, takes my hand, lifts me from the closet, opens the metal door, and holds me in his love and mercy. ■

If you or anyone you know needs help finding support or crisis resources, please visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org or call 1-800-273-8255.



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Let's Become Interruptible

EMBRACING INCONVENIENCES AND
SHOWING UP FOR OTHER PEOPLE

WRITTEN BY *Deidre Braley*

Steam rose from my coffee mug. I watched the tendrils curl into the morning air as the minutes passed and my opportunity to enjoy it slowly slipped away. Finally, the coffee became cold as it sat still and grew bitter on the coffee table.

I had intended to drink it slowly with my Bible in my lap and do some writing I'd been trying to get to since the birth of our second child. But that day, just after I laid her down, a gurgling cry erupted from her small body. I picked her back up as she squirmed against my chest and cried out again.

I would like to say that my first instinct was to set everything down and rock her until she felt better. But I looked longingly over at my computer screen, the cursor blinking on a blank page. I thought about how long it had been since I had opened my Bible, sat in silence, or drank my coffee while it was still hot. I knew that holding her would soothe her, but it would also mean losing the time to do these things.

Interruptions are terribly inconvenient. Being interrupted breaks our concentration, slows our momentum, and forfeits our valuable time. It asks us to

stop what we are doing, change our plans, and sacrifice something of ourselves for someone else.

Interruptions force us to choose: Will I bully past my interrupters so I can keep up the pace and productivity? Or will I allow myself to stop and gaze into their eyes, looking long enough to recognize their humanity and pleas for compassion?

Being interruptible is counter to our culture's glorification of hustle. It means slowing down when the world screams, "You don't have time!" and noticing the needs of others even though our hearts cry, "But what about me?" It means setting down our preoccupations in order to become more aware of the lives that intersect our own.

Jesus spent his days being interrupted. Scripture is filled with accounts of Jesus being stopped mid-journey by the blind, the demon-possessed, the rich, the poor, the hypocrites, the lepers, and the adulterers.

"Jesus, heal us!" they cried out.

"Jesus, help us understand!" they pleaded.

"Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!" His name arose from the crowds that followed him in a collective cry for compassion.

Everybody wanted a piece of him, and here's the



PHOTO BY *Anna Marum*

beautiful, hard-to-believe thing: He gave himself to them.

Jesus said, "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (Matthew 5:41–42 CSB). So when our co-workers, friends, enemies, children, and parents come to us at the worst times, when we are just about to settle in with a cup of coffee, our to-do lists are a mile long, or we are already running late, Jesus tells us not to turn away, though that may be our first instinct. Instead, he says to give them whatever they ask of us. Whether that is attention, prayer, assistance, or being held all day, Jesus calls us to quit our multitasking and look up, ready to love.

But how do we walk away from our promised rest, deadlines, or dreams without feeling resentful? How can we offer ourselves as living sacrifices without getting burned out? How do we set aside the demands of our own lives without becoming completely overwhelmed?

We've got to follow Jesus's example. While it's true that he spent substantial time healing and serving, he balanced that time with frequent retreats from the crowds to pray and be with his Father. After these retreats, he was able to

return to the crowds with a clear vision of whom to serve, how to serve, and how long to serve (see Matthew 14:13–21).

We need this constant guidance from our Father too. Following Jesus's lead and retreating with God each day will give us the fuel we need to serve without growing resentful or weary. Asking him to show us who and how he wants us to serve will help focus our efforts on what is most important to him.

Cold coffee can be reheated. Blinking cursors on blank computer screens can wait. When God gives us interruptions, let us see them as opportunities to choose people over productivity. Let us ask him to nourish our souls so that we have the strength to walk that mile with our interrupters, and then to keep going. Let us give whatever is asked of us, and in doing so, become the embodiment of Jesus's love. ■



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Prayer: It's As Much about Him As It Is about You

WRITTEN BY *Carrie Robaina*

Simply put, prayer is the way God communicates with his people. Scripture says that God not only hears our prayers, but also answers them. The outcome may not always be what we desired or hoped for, but it is always what we need. Even if the answer to prayer is unexpected, David reminds us in Psalm 62:8 to pour out the desires, griefs, and cares of our hearts to God anyway because it is in him we find safety and refuge.

Knowing prayer is a key component of the Christian faith, have you ever wondered what God's intention for it is?

God directs our hearts in our everyday tasks and responsibilities. He promises to guide us throughout our entire lives, and one way he does this is through prayer (see Psalm 48:14). When we seek God through prayer, it is easier to focus on the plans and purposes he has for our lives—rather than trying to figure them out on our own.

Scripture tells us we can be certain to experience the peace of God in our hearts (see Philippians 4:7). Although peace from God is not easily explained in the natural world, God wants to give it to us even when we're anxious, in pain, hurting, or going through difficult circumstances. When our will is aligned with God's will, the things that delight our heavenly Father become the joy of our hearts too, in spite of the troubles we face (see Psalm 37:4).

Have you ever wondered why God wants to communicate with us?

God wants to be in fellowship with us, and prayer is one way that we can get to know him. One day it may look like

snuggling up in your favorite spot with a cozy blanket and a cup of coffee, and the next day it may be desperately crying out to God for help when it seems you've lost your way. Sometimes prayer means cranking up the worship tunes and dancing around the living room, while later that evening you're talking to God on a walk. Prayer allows us to praise him, bring him glory, worship him, and gain insight into his heart. It's also a way for the Lord to impart wisdom to us (see James 1:5).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples how to have deep, intentional communion with God through the Lord's Prayer (see Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:1–4). This well-known passage of Scripture is a model for us to follow as we seek to know God better and build spiritual discipline (see Psalm 100:4; Matthew 7:7–11). There are times in life when we don't have the words or don't know what to pray, and reciting or reading the Lord's Prayer is a wonderful way to still talk to God.

God intended prayer as a way for us to get to know him. Prayer helps keep us focused on what matters most in life. Through prayer, we honor God and submit to his will, and in return, we receive everything we need to live a hope-filled life. ■

HAVE YOU EVER
WONDERED
WHY GOD
WANTS TO
COMMUNICATE
WITH US?



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The Lord's Prayer

Therefore, you should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,
your name be honored as holy.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

Matthew 6:9–13 CSB

Living in the TENSION

SEEING OUR STRUGGLE
FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

WRITTEN BY *Allison Lee*

We lay awake in bed, my husband and I, quiet. Looking around the room, we struggled to put words to the uneasiness we had both been feeling. Uncertainty, maybe, but we weren't quite sure what to call it. The world appeared upended, and the life that we had normalized had up and left with no sign of return. You know that fair ride where every whirl pushes and pulls you in a different direction? And eventually your head catches up to your body and you expect to have a second to breathe, but instead your gag reflex kicks in? That was the feeling.

Until now, for most of our marriage, we'd been headed in one direction. Everything was fairly predictable. Not just predictable, though. Life was carefully and very particularly paved. The way forward was cleared of as much uncertainty as possible because we took great care to identify, remedy, and remove all of it. Living with uncertainty and leaving it to its own devices seems simply absurd when we have such capabilities. Humans are inventors and problem solvers. We are scrappy. We will innovate for the sake of overcoming—

at all costs. Humans are good at this. I am good at this.

I am a classic type A: planner, organizer, thinker-of-everything, don't-miss-anything extraordinaire. Ms. Lee, expert curator of occasions, at your service. Sounds exhausting, no? Actually, I love it. But what happens when I can't fix or plan something away? What happens when paved roads suddenly turn to gravel ones? Gravel roads in the dark in a storm, to be more clear. There is a tension that lingers now. I am not able to remedy the situation, and quite possibly I am not supposed to. The strength it takes for us to navigate these conditions is not easily acquired. The tension we feel requires something almost absurd to survive it—tension itself.

A lot of us have forgotten, or have never known, how to live in tension. I practically break out in hives when someone looks at me the wrong way. So let's pause and consider an idea: Maybe we have put too high a value on removing tension. Perhaps we have given the act of "fixing" too high a meaning and a purpose it was not meant to have.

PHOTOS BY *Corina Straub*



Our perspective needs a little tending to, I think, because we aren't seeing tension for what it is or for what it is worth. When there is tension, we are forced to wrestle. And when we wrestle, we gain muscle. Being able to effectively wrestle with life is an art that is lost in an age of solutions. We live in a world where removing obstacles is the ultimate goal, and we are trading away very valuable things for it. Strength, perspective, deep faith, extreme gratitude—these things can be very elusive without tension.

God's plan for his people is maturity. A maturity that will never be reached as the work will never be completed. God didn't heal the sick, rescue men from a lions' den, demolish enemies, and radically provide for our needs so that we could be comfortable. Struggle is always for his glory. And it is so that we can wipe our brows, turn around, and face it again. Let's not confuse the ultimate purpose of our problems as things to be fixed so that we can get back to our life—they are life. And deliverance from them is a glorious sidenote at best. Perhaps we will have to learn

how to do some new things now—some harder things. Living with tension will remind us of what we've forgotten and help us get back some of the things we traded away. Happiness may have come too easily. Joy may have been a little too shallow. Solving problems may have become our priority instead of growing from them.

So as we lay in bed, we decided that instead of trying to get back to life as we used to know it, we wanted to settle into the tension. But not just that. We wanted to thrive in it, learn from it, and mature the way God calls us to. While the world around us changes on a whim, God remains constant, as does our purpose to live well in the tension for his glory. ■



*ALLISON LEE SPENDS HER DAYS PARTNERING WITH HER HUSBAND TO GUIDE THEIR THREE KIDS IN THE DIRECTION OF KNOWING GOD. THEY ENJOY HIKING, BIKING, AND BEING CHRIST TO THOSE AROUND THEM. @ALAYNELEE

Do the Unexpected Thing

GOING BEYOND SOCIAL NORMS TO BLESS OTHERS

WRITTEN BY *Portia Allen*



Jesus walked this earth full of intentionality. He was known as someone who knew God because of the miracles he performed, and he explained Scripture with authority and passion unlike the religious leaders'. Surely, people did not expect Jesus to spend his time with known sinners. But he did. Jesus focused on people suffering from physical ailments, spiritual prisons, and social rejection. He gave his attention where it was least expected.

In the book of John, we read that Jesus had to go through Samaria, and when sitting to rest at the well, he met a Samaritan woman (see John 4:7). The Bible doesn't make it clear to us why Jesus had to go through Samaria, but it does let us in on the fact that Samaritans were despised by the Jews (see Luke 10). When Jesus engaged the woman in conversation, she was surprised not just that Jesus asked for a drink from the well, but also that he was speaking to her at all. The woman came to draw water in the middle of the day, not in the earlier, cooler part of the day. Meeting anyone at the well at this time would be highly unlikely, so to encounter a Jewish man who initiated conversation with her threw all sorts of social norms out the window.

Jesus did the unexpected thing and engaged in conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. We often assume that our lives need to be perfect, or at least good, for Jesus to engage with us, to love and save us. But he didn't come to save just the people who follow the rules—he came because we all need a Savior.

How can we intentionally love people the way Jesus did, the people we are expected to love and also those who may cause us to raise an eyebrow or two? Demonstrating God's love often looks like turning our attention to those overlooked by society and those who are different in race, ethnicity, and life choice. God can do powerful things when we pay attention to and engage with people we encounter, because our hope in Jesus has the potential to make an eternal impact. ■



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THE TROUBLE WITH JERICH0

RECONCILING GOD'S ACTIONS WHEN THEY
DON'T LINE UP WITH OUR UNDERSTANDING

WRITTEN BY *Ashley Loren*

ARTWORK BY *Tasha Branham*

The story of Jericho is a well-known and uplifting passage of Scripture. Like David and Goliath, it's a sermon favorite, a biblical reminder of how powerful our God is. While I love the miraculous "walls falling down" part of the story that is often celebrated in Christian culture, there's this one part—one verse—that has always tripped me up. It's a verse stuck between the miracle of the crumbling walls (see Joshua 6:20) and the redemption of Rahab. It's a verse that no one talks or preaches about, probably because it's not incredibly uplifting.

[The Israelites] completely destroyed everything in the city with the sword—every man and woman, both young and old, and every ox, sheep, and donkey.

Joshua 6:21 CSB

This was a command given to the Israelites by God, a command of utter annihilation that I could never quite reconcile with the merciful, loving God I know, and I'm sure I'm not the only one who's been in this predicament.

There are many passages in Scripture that cause people to question the character of God, especially in the Old Testament. But in the midst of my own confusion and doubt, God graciously shared with me the most important thing I have ever learned about intentional Bible study thus far: the essentiality of lining up his Word with his character. The Bible says that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (see Hebrews 13:8). So how can we not apply such an unwavering biblical principle about his unchanging character to our study time? If God was as loving and merciful then as he is to us now—if his heart has always been bent toward the redemption of mankind—then these stories and Scriptures should testify to that. Filtering the story of Jericho through the lens of God's character allowed me to see the parts of God I'd been missing in the narrative.

See, the Israelites had been wandering the desert for forty years; their reputation preceded them. They were the people fed from the hand of God; they were the ones who crossed the Red Sea on dry land. The people of Jericho knew the land they occupied was not their own; they knew who the Israelites were and who God was (see Joshua 2:9–11). Jericho had forty years of warning, and they still chose to ignore the conviction that would lead them to repentance. How do I know this? Rahab.

Rahab was a prostitute who lived in Jericho, an outcast in society and a woman who most would consider to be beyond redemption. She was also the evidence that God's mercy was available to every person in Jericho no matter their social status or sin. In Joshua 2, Rahab helps two Israelite spies by hiding them from her king and helping them escape. Her words to the Israelite spies at the end of the chapter are the testimony of her people. She tells them that her people know the Lord has given Israel their land, and she acknowledges God's sovereignty, "for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below" (Joshua 2:11 CSB).

Hebrews 11:31 states that it was Rahab's faith that saved her and her family from being destroyed along with "those who were disobedient," and it was her faith that God counted as precious enough to establish her in the lineage of Jesus Christ. Rahab's story of recognition and redemption could've been the story of her people too, but they chose rebellion. In my study of Joshua 6, I had been missing the truth of who God is for all people, that he doesn't want anyone to perish (see 2 Peter 3:9), including those nations outside of Israel. Jericho is not a symbol of God's cruelty; Jericho is a heartbreaking symbol of what unrepentance and willful ignorance cost an entire nation of people.

God's reasoning is often beyond human understanding, and he doesn't owe us an explanation for his actions or



NEVER LET GO | ACRYLIC AND PEN ON CANVAS

thoughts (see Isaiah 55:8–9). But God has made his character evident throughout Scripture for a reason. He wants us to know him and trust in who he is. At face value, the annihilation of Jericho's inhabitants can make God seem harsh and merciless, but Rahab is the proof that God's grace was there in astounding measure. She's our evidence that God's character never changes, even when we can't see it.

There will always be things in Scripture that give us pause, and we will inevitably deal with doubts and questions in our journey of faith. But in the midst of that, it's so important to intentionally refocus on the truth of who God is and never let go. ■



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The Truly Co on Intentionality



MADI



PORTIA



LINDSAY

WHAT IS A STRATEGY
FOR SIMPLIFYING
YOUR LIFE THAT HAS
WORKED FOR YOU?

MY BRAIN FUNCTIONS
MORE CLEARLY WHEN I
CREATE PROPER SYSTEMS
FOR EVERYTHING TO
HAVE A HOME OR
PLACE TO LAND.

I WRITE OUT WHAT'S
GOING ON IN LIFE SO I
CAN VISUALLY ASSESS
IF THERE IS MARGIN
IN MY LIFE.

DECLUTTERING MY HOME.
WHEN I TOSS OR DONATE
THINGS WE NO LONGER
NEED, I FEEL FREEDOM
MENTALLY AND
PHYSICALLY.

ONE GOAL
YOU CONTINUALLY
WORK TOWARD
IS . . .

USING TIME WISELY,
AND CONTINUALLY
REIMAGINING WHAT
THAT EVEN MEANS.

RESPONDING IN GRACE
EVEN WHEN I AM
FRUSTRATED.

STRETCHING MYSELF
CREATIVELY—TRYING A
NEW ACTIVITY AND NOT
NEEDING IT TO TURN OUT
PERFECT OR BE THE BEST.

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN
GOD PERSONALLY
CONNECT WITH YOU?

SITTING IN SILENT
MEDITATION—BREATHING
IN THANKFULNESS AND
BREATHING OUT PEACE
INTO THE ATMOSPHERE.

EVERY TIME I HAVE
BEEN AT MY MOST
VULNERABLE, GOD HAS
WHISPERED HIS PEACE
AND CALM TO MY HEART.

GOD HAS GIVEN ME
SPECIFIC WORDS AND
PHRASES FOR SEASONS IN
MY LIFE. THE WORDS TEACH
ME AND BRING PEACE.

DESCRIBE YOUR
SELF-CARE
STRATEGY.

WHATEVER CONNECTS THE
PHYSICAL TO EMOTIONAL
AND SPIRITUAL—A BATH, A
BARRE3 CLASS, HEALTHY
FOOD, A SKIN-CARE
ROUTINE, JOURNALING.

SELF-CARE FOR ME IS
STAYING CONNECTED
TO GOD, GOING TO BED
ON TIME, AND STAYING
HYDRATED EACH DAY.

EXERCISE DOES WONDERS
FOR ME MENTALLY,
PHYSICALLY, AND
SPIRITUALLY. I PRAY DURING
WORKOUTS AND DUMP THE
THINGS I'VE BEEN CARRYING.

SHARE ONE UNIQUE
GIFT GOD HAS GIVEN
YOU TO LIVE OUT
YOUR CALL.

CURIOSITY ABOUT THE
INTERNAL WORLD, AND
HOW PAST EXPERIENCES
HAVE INFLUENCED OUR
CURRENT SELVES.

BEING ABLE TO READ/
FEEL THE ROOM HELPS
ME TO COMMUNICATE
AND ENCOURAGE
EFFECTIVELY.

I'M A CONNECTOR AND
LOVE HELPING PEOPLE
FIND OPPORTUNITIES TO
USE THEIR GIFTS AND
FIND NEW FRIENDS.

WHAT
BRINGS JOY
TO YOUR LIFE?

ACCOMPLISHING
SOMETHING I WORKED
REALLY HARD FOR. AS A
4WING3 (ENNEAGRAM
TALK), I FIND IMMENSE
EUPHORIC JOY IN THIS.

THIS MAY SOUND CORNY,
BUT COMPLETING MY
PLAN FOR THE DAY
BRINGS ME *GREAT JOY*!

EXPLORING THE GREAT
OUTDOORS WITH MY
FAMILY, ESPECIALLY BY
WATER. ADVENTURE IS
ALWAYS CALLING FOR ME!



KRISTI



BRIANNA



NATASHA

WHAT IS A STRATEGY
FOR SIMPLIFYING
YOUR LIFE THAT HAS
WORKED FOR YOU?

WE USE A WHITEBOARD
TO LIST ALL THE THINGS
WE SEEM TO AVOID
DOING, AND *ATTEMPT*
ONE A WEEK.

CREATING GOOD
BOUNDARIES. I AM ABLE
TO SAY NO TO SOMETHING
WITHOUT FEELING GUILTY
ABOUT MY DECISION.

I TRY TO THINK
CAREFULLY ABOUT THE
THINGS I ACQUIRE—IS
THE STORAGE, CLEANING,
MAINTENANCE, ETC.
WORTH IT?

ONE GOAL
YOU CONTINUALLY
WORK TOWARD
IS . . .

RELEASING THE NEED TO
CONTROL—FINDING NEW
OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN TO
SERVE INSTEAD OF DIRECT.
10/10 WOULD RECOMMEND.

BECOMING THE KIND
OF WIFE AND MOM
THAT GOD DESIRES
ME TO BE.

UNDERSTANDING OTHERS'
POINTS OF VIEW. WE MAY
NOT AGREE, BUT I TRY TO
LEARN HOW SOMEONE
ARRIVED AT AN OPINION.

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN
GOD PERSONALLY
CONNECT WITH YOU?

THROUGH MENTORING
AND BEING MENTORED.
GOD HAS BEEN SPEAKING
TO ME IN BOTH LOUD
AND QUIET WAYS.

WHEN MY WRITING GETS
PEOPLE CURIOUS ABOUT GOD,
I KNOW I'VE LISTENED TO
HIS NUDGE TO WRITE WHAT
HE'S PUT ON MY HEART.

I'LL SEE OR HEAR THE SAME
WORD, PHRASE, TOPIC,
ETC. EVERYWHERE AND
REALIZE GOD IS TRYING TO
GET MY ATTENTION.

DESCRIBE YOUR
SELF-CARE
STRATEGY.

THIS EXTROVERT HAS
LEARNED TO TAKE SOLO
WALKS WITH AUDIOBOOKS
AS A BREAK IN THE MIDDLE
OF MY WORKDAY.

RIDING MY BIKE AND
TRYING TO ADD MILES
AND SPEED EACH TIME I
HIT THE ROAD. I CAN'T
HELP BUT SMILE!

MAINTAINING ROUTINES.
DISRUPTIONS ARE INEVITABLE,
BUT I HANDLE THEM BETTER—
AND EVEN WELCOME THEM—
WHEN THEY'RE FRAMED
BY ROUTINE.

SHARE ONE UNIQUE
GIFT GOD HAS GIVEN
YOU TO LIVE OUT
YOUR CALL.

HEARING PEOPLE'S PAIN
AND SITTING WITH THEM
IN IT. I BELIEVE EMPATHY
IS A SIGNIFICANT TRAIT
OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

I'M A GOOD QUESTION-
ASKER. I CAN SEE THE
BIG PICTURE. SLOW THE
TRAIN DOWN, AND HELP
PEOPLE PROCESS THEIR
THOUGHTS.

I'M A REFINER. I LOVE TO
TAKE SOMETHING THAT IS
GOOD AND HELP TO MAKE
IT EXCELLENT.

WHAT
BRINGS JOY
TO YOUR LIFE?

LETTING GO OF MY OWN
DESIRES AND FOCUSING
ON OTHERS HAS BEEN
MY GOLDEN TICKET TO
EXPERIENCING JOY.

LISTENING TO GREAT
MUSIC WHILE COOKING
FOR MY FAMILY AND
FRIENDS.

FIGURING OUT A
SOLUTION TO A TOUGH
PROBLEM—WHEN I GET TO
THAT FIST-PUMPING
YES! MOMENT.

Ditching the To-Do Life

EXAMINING THE MOTIVES
BEHIND OUR INTENTIONS

WRITTEN BY *Katrina McCain*

Lists have become a way of life. We have a five-year plan for almost everything, access to master classes with outlines to follow, how-to instructions for everything under the sun, and check boxes in our minds to make sure we’ve done it all correctly, professionally, and genuinely. Intentionality is necessary in order to check off all the things, but is our effort to achieve and accomplish taking a toll on our real relationships?

DON'T LOOK OUT ONLY FOR YOUR OWN INTERESTS, BUT TAKE AN INTEREST IN OTHERS, TOO.
—PHILIPPIANS 2:4 NLT

Loving others should never be motivated by a to-do list. Christ calls us to love with a pure heart, not out of ulterior motives. Treating people well shouldn’t be for our personal gain, but rather to draw people to Jesus.

Loving is more than listing. We’ve been called to draw others to Jesus by the way we love them (see John 13:35). The Bible gives us lovely instructions on how to live with intentionality in order to honor God and honor the people he has missioned us to influence. The way we love, respect, celebrate, and encourage others is a deliberate choice of the heart. It takes the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and the maturity gained through the Word of God to move past living out of performance. When acquiring accomplishments or accolades is our motivation, we will miss the mark of making a real difference for the Lord.

Intentionality cuts through the pretense and challenges our hearts to consider whether our actions are for God’s glory or for our own. Through the truth of God’s Word and the influence of the Holy Spirit, we can ditch our to-do lists in order to examine the motives behind our intentions.

- Am I giving advice because I desire to point to God’s truth, or am I looking to make someone feel good about what I have to say?
- Do I allow space to create new relationships, or am I content in my comfort zone?
- Am I offering my help out of sincerity or because I desire expected praise?
- Have I taken time to seek the voice of God, or have I rationalized what seems good on my own?
- Am I volunteering because I feel led to do so or because I feel obligated?
- Am I being the friend that Christ has been to me, or am I extending relationships to validate myself?
- Is my quiet time for me, or am I sharing it to gain attention and likes on social media?
- Are my words full of hope and kindness, or are they being influenced by popular opinion?
- Is my lifestyle in pursuit to please people or to please Jesus?
- Am I living authentically or living on trend? ■



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Choose the narrow path.

ONCE YOU ENTER... HELP OTHERS FIND IT.



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Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it.

Matthew 7:13-14 CSB



MAY THE LORD BLESS YOU
AND PROTECT YOU.

MAY THE LORD SMILE ON YOU
AND BE GRACIOUS TO YOU.

MAY THE LORD SHOW YOU HIS FAVOR
AND GIVE YOU HIS PEACE.

NUMBERS 6:24-26 NLT