

# TRULY



the TRULY Co.

*The Pursuit Issue | Volume No. 2 | Issue No. 2*

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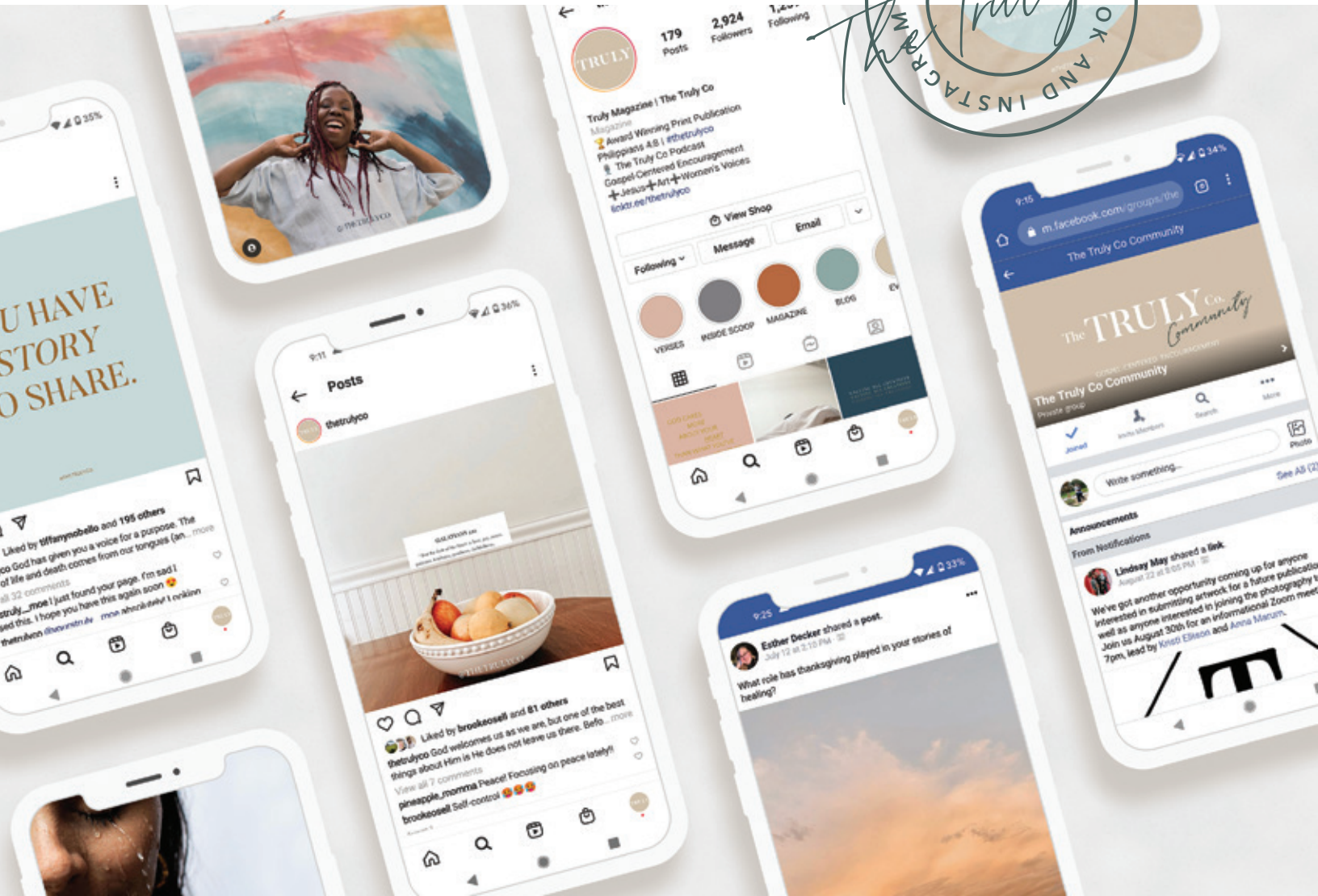
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FOR ENCOURAGEMENT AND INSPIRATION.



## Letter FROM THE Publisher

We are all in pursuit of something. It's at the core of who we are, created to pursue the things that stir our hearts. When we were small, we willed our legs to wobble forward for a toy on the other side of the room. Anything within sight grabbed our attention, and we stopped at nothing to obtain what was in front of us. Our determination propelled us toward the object of our affection.

As adults, we seek and chase more sophisticated concepts, and our hearts seem to be on a long quest for something always ahead but not quite within our grasp. We're constantly on the lookout for the next step—a pursuit of the unseen yet hoped for. Many of us also “follow after” the people we admire, mirroring their actions and mimicking their behaviors and attitudes.

While our desires have morphed since childhood, our purpose has remained the same. We are still people on the move, growing and changing. Our faith stretches and transforms in this way as we're in pursuit of our holy assignments. As Christians, we are called to be restorers of this fallen world and bring order into the chaos. We are called to bring peace and love. We are called to pursue righteousness, justice, and goodness. We are called to pursue holiness. And God has work for us to do.

This issue feels personal to me because The Truly Co is a product of pursuit. Several years ago, I felt a stirring in my heart to create a platform that would proclaim God's goodness and truth. Little by little, Truly was formed. When the dream felt insurmountable, I took one tiny step forward. When people told me it wouldn't be worth the effort, I kept going. When I received criticism in Truly's earliest stages, I got on my knees and cried lots of tears, asking, “God, is this still the path you want me to take?”

You see, God is walking with us wherever we go. When we prioritize our pursuit of God as we live out our lives, we will find him in the most wonderful ways. We'll worship him with our work because we're doing it to glorify him. We'll find creative solutions to problems

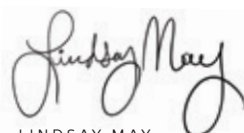


when we are inspired by his presence. And we can hold our dreams in our open palms, trusting God to give and take what only he sees fit in his infinite wisdom.

WE CAN HOLD OUR DREAMS IN OUR OPEN PALMS, TRUSTING GOD TO GIVE AND TAKE WHAT ONLY HE SEES FIT IN HIS INFINITE WISDOM.

Friends, there is a longing in our hearts that we can try to satisfy with all kinds of quick fixes. There are plenty of opportunities that pull at our hearts and promise to meet every need. But in the words of Solomon the wise, “‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless’” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). We can work ourselves dry, try to reinvent our identities, and seek after the wants of the world, but by design, these longings are meant to point us back to our original purpose—being in holy relationship with our Creator.

We're not promised a perfect life. In fact, we're guaranteed trouble (see John 16:33). Embrace the messy life and never give up on doing good! Opposition does not mean it's time to give up—it's an opportunity to pursue his presence. In my experience, facing opposition is where the fun starts. It is an agent that helps us grow, reminds us where our trust lies, makes space for God to intervene on our behalf, and turns our pursuits heavenward. The closest way for our hearts to feel fully satisfied on this side of heaven is to pursue God's presence. ■

  
LINDSAY MAY  
PUBLISHER & FOUNDER

# God's Vision of Pursuit

What I Have Planned vs. Where God Is Leading Me

WRITTEN BY *Jonna Meidal*

PHOTOS BY *Tara Brose*





Think of a dream you'd like to pursue. What steps would you take to reach that goal? What lists would you write out, and who would you consult? At what point in the process would you include God?

People tend to think of success and progress vertically, with the beginning at the bottom and the goal at the top. But what if God looks at it differently? He's not bound by any one culture, denomination, or experience, nor does he think or act like us (see Isaiah 55:9–10). So it would behoove us, then, to consult him first before pursuing our dreams. And that's exactly what God challenged me to do recently during some prayer time with him.

I had been praying about a particular dream I have—one that feels unattainable—and God gave me an image. I saw myself climbing up a mountain on an extremely tall ladder where at the top was my dream. The higher I climbed, the more perpendicular the ladder became, until suddenly I was climbing at a ninety-degree angle. The terrain ahead seemed treacherous, and I knew with one next step I'd slip and fall. So I asked God to show me his way to achieve my dream.

Immediately, I climbed off the ladder and went into what looked like a small cave. I sat down on the ground and held a small candle in my hand . . . and waited. The longer I faithfully sat there, the brighter the light became, until eventually I could see the surface I was sitting on . . . and it had been the top of that mountain the whole time!

In that moment, God showed me how his vision of

**PURSUIT REQUIRES  
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FRUSTRATION, OR SHAME.**

pursuit looks nothing like mine. It isn't vertical, and it isn't scary or overwhelming. Pursuit is faith-filled and manageable. It requires patience and diligence, yes, but it's not shrouded in strife, frustration, or shame. In fact, it's not even a ladder to climb, because God knows we only "arrive" once we get to heaven!

So whatever goals and dreams you have right now, spend time praying to God first. The Bible says, "We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps" (Proverbs 16:9 NLT). Ask your heavenly Father what one next step you should take before continuing on, and then do it! Be faithful in your pursuit of him, and watch as he illuminates the mountain you wish to climb. ■



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# The Perfect Tool

Asking the Holy Spirit to Lead Us in Our Pursuits

WRITTEN BY *Erin Sprunger*

PHOTOS & DIRECTION BY *Madi Reimer and Krista Dumire*

Bob Ross’s “happy trees” evaded me as a childhood artist. My mother often found me hidden away in my room, drawing for hours, attempting to re-create the scenes I’d observed Bob joyfully crafting on TV—colored pencil, crayon, or watercolor brush poised in my determined hand. I loved Bob. I loved his “happy little trees.” I loved creating. So why couldn’t I create the same finished masterpiece?

Sure, there’s something to be said for skill and experience. Bob learned techniques over the years that culminated in special moments on his show. At the root of his techniques, however, is the bare necessity of using the right tools at the right time. This was something my ingenuity didn’t account for. I genuinely believed I could use what I had in my sacred desk of kid-safe Crayola tools. I was seeing him create, but trying to do it my way.

The story of creation finds humankind in much the same place. In Genesis 3:1–5, Satan had Eve convinced she could access godlikeness and wisdom on her own. She believed wisdom did not require the time and experience of being in relationship with God. While believers are later promised and given a helper through the Holy Spirit, the harm of this mindset reverberates through history.

In today’s society, we celebrate the tenacity demonstrated when someone finds success by their own making. A phrase used by YouTube sensation Marie Forleo, “Everything is figureoutable,” comes to mind—centering the idea of

self-determination to make a way through all our pursuits.

The link between my childhood creativity and Eve is our fallen approach to pursuing what we desire. There is nothing wrong with desiring excellence or wisdom. These are both godly traits. The failure is in missing the right tools needed to pursue the end result. By our very nature we are created to need outside our own gifts and skills to achieve success. An athlete needs a coach to pursue a gold medal. An artist needs the right tools to craft a masterpiece. A chef needs the right ingredients to achieve a Michelin star. A Christ follower needs the Holy Spirit to lead a life like what Jesus calls us to.

When our endeavors find us scribbling away with crayons or colored pencils rather than oil paints, could it be that we are operating from our own understanding? When our pursuit of freedom finds us hiding in shame, could it be that our flesh led us down the wrong path? A heart surrendered to Jesus will find a helper who is the very essence of the right tool to pursue excellence or wisdom—the Holy Spirit. ■



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A HEART SURRENDERED TO  
JESUS WILL FIND A HELPER  
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THE RIGHT TOOL TO PURSUE  
EXCELLENCE OR WISDOM—THE  
HOLY SPIRIT.



WE WILL BOTH MOVE AGAIN | COLLAGE AND MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER

COLLAGE BY *Sarah Buezis*

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# GOD'S GOODNESS *and* MERCY

His Greatness Chases after Us

WRITTEN BY *Carol Graft*

“Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord as long as I live” (Psalm 23:6 CSB).

Have you ever watched a suspenseful TV show or read a novel that has a scene with the antagonist in hot pursuit of the protagonist? In the show or novel, it may not necessarily end well. In this verse from Psalm 23, it is not an enemy pursuing David. David wrote Psalm 23 from his view of being a shepherd and through his lens as a king. He knew God's protection and provision.

David fully gives himself over and extols the benefits of staying close to God. *Goodness* is translated from the Hebrew *tov*, meaning “good things.” We may strive for things that we think are good, but this Psalm says that the goodness of God is chasing us. We get so caught up in seeking the good things we think we need and want, it appears we are running away from the good things God has for us.

*Mercy* comes from the Hebrew word *hesed*, “loving-kindness.” Yes, we should extend mercy to others, but as

this verse shows, the mercy pursuing us is for us. We can beat ourselves up over our past and present, and we can worry for our future, but God in his greatness keeps trying to overtake us with mercy.

When we seek after God and choose to live according to his Word, we will be pursued by his goodness and mercy. Maybe all we must do is look behind us and stay steadfast in God, allowing them to catch up to us. ■



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# Embracing Curiosity

Rekindling a Wonder about  
God's Sovereignty and Love

WRITTEN BY *Julie Fisk*

PHOTO BY *Madi Reimer*

“But why, Mama?”

I wondered what to say in response. I'd answered my toddler's first three questions about ducks and feathers and swimming successfully, but I'd officially exhausted my knowledge on the topic.

“That's a great question. I don't know the answer, but I know where we can look. Can you wait until we are home?”

“Yes!” His enthusiastic little voice from my van's back seat was followed by a beat of silence before he launched into his next set of questions.

There was a season when *why* was perennially on my toddler's lips. His questions were my constant companion, a fact that was both endearing and exhausting, often at the

same time. His insatiable curiosity began to slowly rekindle my own wonder at the world around me, and it was a game changer in my relationship with God. What did I rediscover in my curiosity?

## God's Sovereignty

Pausing to ask how and why about creation often leaves me a bit breathless in wonderment at both the bigness of God and his intimate attention to the tiniest of details. I find him as I survey the world from atop a mountain and as I bend low to examine the intricate white banding weaving concentric circles around a small agate. God names the stars and numbers the hairs on our heads (see Psalm 147:4; Luke



12:7), and his ability to do both simultaneously reminds me that he is in control, even when the world feels topsy-turvy.

### **God's Love for All Humanity**

Reading Scripture with *why* on my lips had me investigating why the heavenly host appeared to the shepherds. It had never before occurred to me to ask why the Messiah's birth was declared to shepherds and his resurrection was declared to women—both were people groups of such low societal standing that they could not serve as witnesses in court. Our influence and standing matters not one bit when God looks for whom he might use to accomplish his kingdom's work. In fact, Scripture is

replete with stories of God using nobodies. We are loved not for what we might accomplish for God, but simply for who we are.

Without curiosity, I miss these daily reminders of who God is and what God says about me—both his unmerited love for me and his ability to use me. But when I seek God, when I engage my curiosity, when I ask why, I am reminded of who God is and who I am in him. ■



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IN PURSUIT OF PEACE | ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



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# Pursuing Healthy Conflict

## LEARNING TO DISAGREE WELL

WRITTEN BY *Jenn Schultz* | ART BY *Jennifer Williams*

Are you someone who loves a good fight? Or do you loathe the skin-crawling feeling of conflict like me?

However you answered, I don't necessarily think disagreement is a bad thing. It prompts us to take action. It makes us consider and defend what we believe, and we walk away with either a stronger belief or a perspective shift. Hopefully with resolve as well.

Jesus knew we would face disputes. In his epic prayer in John 17, he specifically prayed for our unity, saying, "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (verses 22–23).

What is the result of this kind of unity among the church? That we reflect God's love and prove to the world the validity of Jesus's message. What a powerful impact we can have—if we can learn how to work out our disagreement well.

So how do we engage in healthy conflict and strive for peace and unity?

**HAVE I PRAYED ABOUT IT?** Before anything else—before I've talked about it, overthought it, taken action on it—have I gone to God about it? Prayer aligns our will and perspective with God's. The Holy Spirit is our go-between, interceding for us before God (see Romans 8:26–27). Prayer quiets our mind and allows us to hear the Spirit.

**IS THIS A QUARREL?** A quarrel is defined as a heated argument or disagreement, usually about something unimportant. I get heated when my emotions pull me a little more strongly than facts do. The Bible warns against quarrels multiple times (see Philippians 2:14; 2 Timothy 2:22; Titus 3:10–11). These passages indicate that quarrels are started for selfish reasons, go against all reason, and are often started by people in the habit of being scornful or stirring up disagreement.

**IS THIS A DISPUTABLE MATTER?** Romans 14 draws a dividing line between actual scriptural sin and a belief or

action that is not so clearly defined. In this chapter, Paul basically says, "Major in the majors; minor in the minors." At that time, there was much conflict in the church over which foods were "clean" and "unclean" and which days were special and which weren't. We can find disagreements like this today. In Paul's opinion, the actual sin is judging our brothers and sisters. Not acting in love turns into foolish and fruitless arguments. If it doesn't matter to God, we don't need to make it a big deal either.

**IS THIS BIBLICAL OR PERSONAL?** Ephesians 4 is an excellent chapter for practicals on working through our issues with one another. When it comes to sin within the church, we need to take it seriously. Verses 22–25 command us to identify what is corrupting us and throw it off. Sometimes, in our constant decision to be made new, we need an outside perspective to help us identify these things.

**AM I BEING QUICK TO LISTEN, SLOW TO SPEAK, AND SLOW TO BECOME ANGRY?** James 1:19–20 highlights this attitude, "because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." Are we quieting ourselves before someone else and taking the opportunity to listen? Or are we rushing to prove our points and defend ourselves?

**HOW AM I WORKING TOWARD PEACE, RECONCILIATION, AND UNITY?** Ephesians 4:3 says, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." What are your goals for this disagreement? Are you pursuing peace or selfish gain?

**HAVE I DONE WHAT I CAN?** Conflict is tricky, especially when it comes to two or more different people with their own perspectives and opinions. The Bible acknowledges this in Romans 12:18: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." We can't control how other people act or react. All we can do is the best we can on our end. ■

W O R T H Y A L R  
 W O R T H Y A L R  
 W O R T H Y A L R  
 W O R T H Y A L R

SAYING YES TO THE JOURNEY WITH JESUS

WRITTEN BY *Lauren E. P. Fallas*

Marriage was the dream. Yet nearly thirty years into hinging my story on its beginning, I knew I had to release it. My life was paused, and every year I wasn't married, I was waiting to live it.

My marriage dream had become my excuse for deferring my destiny, even to God, as if this one good thing was the condition on which all other good things were depending. I'd made the walk of my wedding day the start of my story and had lost sight of the greatest love story that was already given to me. Eventually, like in all pursuits of anything other than Jesus, I reached the end of me. I had to surrender my grip and spent much of the next year crying on my knees.

Maybe you know this ache—of a broken marriage, of never being married, or of a marriage-over-everything mindset. It was beyond me to carry, so I started the long road of laying down my disappointments day by day. I wanted to be chosen, pursued, worthy, loved, positioned, and purposed. I said each out loud, sobbing. I wanted to not be alone in this thing.

Yet each day that passed, I turned down the noise of the TV fantasies and got lost in the Word of my King. The voids that once dictated what my life *should be* began to fill by recognizing all that my life already was and what it *could be*—even if and anyway. I began to release the images of

the people I thought must be in my story in order for it to be worthy, and made room for the people who were already entrusted before me. I began to live out big dreams.

In those small, daily surrenders came life-shifting choices. I chose to no longer identify my purpose by the pursuit of a man who may or may not come to be. I chose to believe that the redemption of my story was already resolved on Calvary, not still waiting. I chose to pursue the One who was and is and always would be. And it changed everything. The crux of my story shifted from marriage to Jesus. He was the change agent, the position determiner, and the greatest dream. He was the one waiting at the end of this walk and walking it with me. He was the One I was heading home to. He was the turn of this story.

Brick by brick, as I began to reroute my walk and heart to Jesus-over-everything, I began to find that every one of the things I had hinged my life's beginning on had already been offered to me. Every core ache of the marriage dream I had laid at his feet in sobbing, he had written as my destiny. Chosen. Pursued. Positioned. Loved. Redeemed. Even if and anyway—this is our story. We've been given the greatest love story of all time by a God who chose us by name, pursued us across galaxies, and deemed us worthy of love beyond the grave. We've been pursued in love and



E A D Y  
 E A D Y  
 E A D Y  
 E A D Y

purposed for love, either way. Even if no one else ever picks us. Even if they do, and then they don't. Even if, already, and come what may.

The question is never about whether or not we are chosen; it is simply if we say yes. Yes when it looks like what we dreamed it would be. Yes when it doesn't. Yes to the journey with Jesus that promises it will be costly, painfully hard, and unimaginably better than we could dream. In this yes of full surrender, with all our dreams laid at his feet, is the abundant life we've been waiting to start living. When we lose our grip on the life we planned for, we make room for the ones we were purposed for; ones that change not only our circumstances, but our spheres; not only our earthly titles, but our eternal ones. Yes to Jesus doesn't mean we give up on our dreams; it means we give them up to him. Up to his ways, to his love, and to his lead. It means we say, "Jesus, you're enough for me. Make your dreams my dreams." We believe our yes to him is the greatest we will ever say. We believe in the proposal we've already received. We walk worthy, in his love and with his love, starting today.

I had to surrender my dream of marriage to God in order to put him back in his rightful place; up, over everything, before I could start living. This included every hope for my story. And years later, when I was chasing Jesus while on a

mission teaching women in the red-light district of San Jose, I met a man who went on to become my husband. Marriage became a part of my story in the way it was meant to be—purposed for God's glory, not my saving. That belonged to Jesus, and so do we.

When we live in the upside-down kingdom, what we lose, we gain. Not always in the way we hoped and dreamed, but better. Someday, we'll see.

And until then, as you and I wade through celebration and grief, single pains and married strains, rejections and losses, and unseen dreams, we surrender what we may lose in order to gain what we cannot afford to: Jesus, first and always. We remember that either way this thing goes down, we're worthy and redeemed, loved and chosen, pursued and purposed to love greatly. We remember that the greatest position we'll ever have, no man can make or break.

We remember that we are part of the greatest love story this world will ever see—even if and anyway. ■



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# Why It Matters

*USING ART IN PROTEST OF BEAUTY*

WRITTEN BY *Sara Groves*

ART BY *Meg Gustafson*



ABIDE | ACRYLIC ON WOOD PANEL

Almost twenty years ago, I was asking hard questions about my faith and my own life's work and meaning. As a songwriter and someone who works with words, I was frustrated and disillusioned. What is the point? There are so many words. I thought that maybe I should get into a line of work that was more tangibly helpful, like becoming a nurse (for the record, I faint at the sight of blood and would make a terrible nurse) or a human rights attorney. I shared these thoughts with a friend who has also made his living in the arts, and in reply, he told me the story of the Cellist of Sarajevo.

In 1992, a cellist in the Sarajevo Orchestra named Vedran Smailović was living near a market square where, one day, a stray bomb fell and took the lives of twenty-two people who were standing in a bread line. They were innocent victims in a horrific war. Smailović responded by taking his cello into the ruins and playing Albinoni's Adagio in G Minor every day for twenty-two days, sometimes under the threat of sniper fire, to commemorate each person who had died there. Many people were drawn to this unexpected protest of beauty, and some have said that the media attention hastened the end of the war.

In this act, I saw a mobilizing metaphor for life. The cellist entered suffering that was not his own and put his gifts, something beautiful, into that space. My friend and I talked that night about how easy it is to stand at the edge of a bomb crater and talk about how it got there, about its dimensions, and whose fault it is. It takes a special person—a generative person—to climb down into that crater and build or sing or play or make something beautiful. Smailović was not just playing music, acting as a detached artist; he physically entered the story.

As we tell it, Jesus himself leaves perfection to come down into the middle of our bomb crater and plays the most beautiful song ever heard—a song of reconciliation, friendship, forgiveness, and love. He enters suffering that is not his own and says, "Follow me."

We do not have to go far to find bombed-out places or people in need of care. I can enter in with what I have been given, with my songwriting, but also with my very self. In 2011, my husband and I were motivated by this thought and bought an old church in St. Paul, Minnesota, to begin the work that is now Art House North. We work with many partners, artists, and neighbors under our motto, Creative Community for the Common Good. It is our attempt to show up with our protest of beauty. In the days after

hearing the story, I wrote a song called "Why It Matters."

We can all take what we have been given—our gifts and our places of pain—and ask ourselves *and* God, "How can I use this today for your purpose?" Sometimes the answers come in surprising ways, like a protest of beauty, and how it matters. ■

## WHY IT MATTERS

Written by Sara Groves

SIT WITH ME AND TELL ME ONCE AGAIN  
OF THE STORY THAT'S BEEN TOLD US  
OF THE POWER THAT WILL HOLD US  
OF ITS BEAUTY AND WHY IT MATTERS

SPEAK TO ME UNTIL I UNDERSTAND  
WHY OUR THINKING AND CREATING  
AND OUR EFFORTS OF NARRATING  
ABOUT THE BEAUTY AND WHY IT MATTERS

LIKE A STATUE IN A PARK OF A WAR TORN TOWN  
AND ITS PROTEST OF THE DARKNESS  
AND THIS CHAOS ALL AROUND  
WITH ITS BEAUTY HOW IT MATTERS

SHOW ME THE LOVE THAT NEVER FAILS  
THE COMPASSION AND ATTENTION  
MIDST CONFUSION AND DISSENSION  
LIKE SMALL RAMPARTS FOR THE SOUL  
HOW IT MATTERS  
LIKE A SINGLE CUP OF WATER  
HOW IT MATTERS

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\*MEG GUSTAFSON FINDS INSPIRATION IN THE JOY AND SIMPLICITY OF EVERYDAY LIVING, PAINTING THOSE FEELINGS AND SCENES TO SHARE JOY. @PINKCHARCOAL\_ART

# SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

Finding Hope in the Healer,  
Not in the Healing

WRITTEN BY *Patricia Bowman*

PHOTO BY *Madi Reimer*

If the ten lepers who encountered Jesus in Luke 17 were alive today, I wonder how many times they would have Googled “How to heal leprosy.” They had an incurable disease that not only plagued their bodies, but also ostracized them from their surrounding community and deemed them unworthy. I’m sure they would try any remedy that offered hope. Quarantine was a normal way of life for these men. If only they could get their hands on a cure, surely it would be their ticket to wholeness and their pathway to freedom. They heard about a man who was a healer, and maybe they were skeptical at first, but willing to try just about anything. So they waited for him.

As someone who has done some desperate Google searches about an incurable disease that struck my husband, I can relate to the dire need these men must have felt. Where do you turn when all avenues have been exhausted and little hope remains?

Jesus entered the lepers’ village, and they cried out to him from a distance, “Master, have pity on us” (Luke 17:13). Jesus instructed all ten men to go and show themselves to the priest. Odd instructions for men who weren’t allowed at the temple due to their uncleanness, but they were willing

to go. While on their way, they were healed. Just like that. Out of the ten, however, one man had a different response than the rest. One healed leper turned back to pursue Jesus and praise him for the miraculous work he had done. This man fell down at the feet of his healer, gave thanks, and worshiped him. Clearly, this one healed man recognized the gravity of what he had experienced and whom he had met, and he responded accordingly.

Jesus had an interesting response to this. After noting that the other nine didn’t return to give praise, Jesus told the healed man, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well” (Luke 17:19). While ten men experienced physical healing that day, only one was declared by Jesus to have been made well.

What, specifically, did Jesus mean by that one word, *well*? It doesn’t sound like he was referring to the fact that the man didn’t have leprosy anymore. Jesus didn’t say it was his healing that made him well, but rather it was his faith that made him well. So what was *well*? I think there’s something profound to see here.

We know ten men had an encounter with Jesus. A life-changing one! The merciful Son of God who came to seek

and to save gave them the miracle they were so desperately hoping for. But only one really got it. The one man who turned back understood the true miracle wasn't just the healing itself, but the healer. The nine men who kept walking missed the eternally greater gift: the giver himself.

Sometimes the healing we search for doesn't come, and the gift we so desperately desire is withheld. But we still have access to the healer and the giver. He's enough. His presence alone is the best miracle imaginable. The psalmist sings that God's "love is better than life" (Psalm 63:3). Simply his love.

Our Google searches returned void—for my husband, that is. Treatment after treatment took its toll, and endless prayers were seemingly met with silence. He passed away in a hospice bed while we held hands and listened to singer Amos Lee. The physical healing didn't happen, but like the one leper who turned back, my strong husband did get to fall and worship at the feet of Jesus that November day—whole and free. I fell at the feet of our bed and wept. It took me some time to realize it, but Jesus was there with me too, and he was enough. He is enough.

Truth is, I think we are all pursuing *well*, but the more tangible forms of it. I'd love to ask Jesus how he would

define this Luke 17 version of *well*, because I know he would have the perfect words, and mine fall short. But I believe the *well* Jesus wants for you and for me is at the heart level more than anything else. Something needs to stop us in our tracks and turn us to Jesus.

May we truly start to understand who he is and what he's done, and then respond accordingly. May we praise him and worship him with gratitude and unconditional love. He is enough. Nine times out of ten, when we receive the tangible versions of what we want, we miss what we actually need. Healing is a blessing, but it's not the hope. The hope can only be found in surrendering our broken, diseased hearts to the Lord Jesus, who by grace through faith promises the miracle of a spiritual healing, and the birth of a new creation—with him. *Well* in the purest way. ■



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# Worn Paths

FINDING GOD IN THE RHYTHMS OF HABIT

WRITTEN BY *Jennifer Trautmann*

PHOTOS BY *Mariab Brink*

I tie my sneakers and notice the caked mud on the sole, evidence of the trail I tramped and tiptoed through during previous afternoon runs. I stand up, stretch, and press play on the same playlist I listen to on every run. The same first song begins, the lyrics describing God as our comforter in times when sorrow is so deep that it's hard to breathe or speak.

I am full of grief. My mother-in-law passed from COVID-19. We said good-bye via Zoom, unable to hold her hand, kiss her head, or comfort her during her last fighting breaths. I had to really trust that Jesus was with her in the deep. My heart is broken.

As the first song plays, I lift and plant my heavy feet until my run becomes a prayer. My speed and stride express my anguish; my slowing expresses my willingness to listen; my stopping opens my eyes to the world around me. I have space to breathe.

I start up again on the trail, expressing gratitude in the present even though some parts of my heart are too hard to feel it. On occasion, a still, small voice penetrates my soul where I thought the tears of grief had dried up. Sometimes it is a thought, a Scripture verse, or a word. Other times it is the feeling of sudden cold air on my face near the lake. A deer turns back to look me in the eye, and I have a deep

intuition that I belong to God just as she does. She prances off glorifying God in her gait.

I don't run for distance, body shape, or speed. I run to lose sight of time and meet my God in his garden of cattails, creatures, and well-worn paths. In these rhythms of ritual and routine, I have created my own well-worn path, a habit with exponential reward. It is my rhythm to tie the same shoes, listen to the same playlist, and run the same lake.

My constants help me recognize a slow transformation in my soul from unbearable grief to deep peace in the midst of trials. There is even an external transformation.

My body now sustains me as I run for miles. My lungs are stronger. My breath, more steady. The greatest benefit, though, is making space to connect with God outside of my other routines. And in that space, there is a grace to be present with the Creator. ■

IN THESE RHYTHMS  
OF RITUAL AND  
ROUTINE, I HAVE  
CREATED MY OWN  
WELL-WORN PATH.  
A HABIT WITH  
EXPONENTIAL  
REWARD.



\*JENNIFER TRAUTMANN IS A MINNEAPOLIS-BASED MOMPREENEUR WHO LIVES IN A HOUSE OF RAMBUNCTIOUS BOYS YET STRIVES TO CREATE POCKETS OF PEACE WHEREVER SHE FINDS HERSELF. @GRATITUDEPHOTOMPLS



MODEL Dawn Miller



# *From Chaos to Shalom*

ACTIVELY ENGAGING WITH THE ONE WHO BRINGS PEACE

WRITTEN BY *Leslie Konbauser*

“Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14). In the mainstream Christian world, this verse appears to be everywhere, filling Pinterest boards and gracing coffee cups and T-shirts. It seems that we are in love with the idea of seeking peace and pursuing it. Though in reality, evidenced by our conversations and Instagram posts, it also seems that this verse is further from our hearts than one might expect.

When Christians are talking about peace, we are usually lamenting the lack of it. We are discontent about a situation, distressed over very real and measurable problems in life, or waiting for resolution of a conflict. In each of these scenarios, the tone of the message communicates that we are waiting for peace to fall into our laps. Or, in a paradoxical flip-side perspective, we are spending our time and emotional resources pursuing the things that we think will make our life peaceful.

Unfortunately, as a careful study of the book of Ecclesiastes may reveal, our waiting behaviors and pursuit of the things “under the sun” are often the very things that rob us of lasting peace and keep us stuck in a cycle of discontentment and frustration. When I mindfully read Psalm 34:14, though, I see it asking God’s people to be intentional about our pursuit of peace. To be mindful. Rather than a passive “waiting” for peace to simply come to us, or a twisted and striving pursuit of that which is not peace, we are invited to consider what (or who) peace really is.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). To a nation that had fallen headlong into mindless religious services and forsaking true faith in the living God, the prophet Isaiah gives words of lament and warning, and then follows them with the promise of restoration. Our post-resurrection hindsight recognizes this promised child as Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Prince of Peace. I wonder what it might be like for us to adopt an active engagement in the pursuit of peace by pursuing the Prince of Peace himself. What would a pursuit like that produce in our relationships, in our internal sense of peace and contentment, in our efforts to share the good news of the kingdom with the world around us?

Let’s commit to release our grasp on the pursuit of that which does not bring peace, and focus instead on the open and surrendered pursuit of the One who can and will bring peace.

Start by noticing. Set your mind to pay attention to your internal and external cues. What warning signs are on the dashboard telling you there’s a lack of peace? For some, it’s a shrinking space between shoulders and earlobes. For others, it’s migraine headaches originating in a clenched jaw. Irritability, insomnia, and stomachaches are the red flags for others. Get in the habit of paying attention and noticing those things as signs of needing peace. As you notice these warning signs, you may sense your heart drifting toward messages of shame. “I shouldn’t be so anxious,” or, “Irritability is a sin. I need to get rid of it.” Notice these messages of shame without sinking your grasp into them. If you need to, take some time to reflect on the names used to describe Jesus in Isaiah 9:6. Wonderful



Counselor, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Let your mind settle into his identity instead of your messages of shame.

Then, spend some time naming the source. Ask yourself this series of questions and journal or pray until you've isolated a few things that might be stealing your peace: "What expectations of mine aren't being met?" "What am I believing to be true about myself or others?" "What resources are being taxed?" "Is there a need that isn't being met?"

Next, decide to release your internal sense of control and striving even as you tend to your needs. Most of the time when we are lacking peace, there is a greater need to release than to do something. Imagine each of the things you named as bubbles floating in front of you. As you decide which named things need to be tended to, imagine the posture it would take to hold the bubble without popping it. Allow your spirit to take hold of each bubble with a gentle and open posture. Release the rest to the creator of the universe.

Allow the rest of the bubbles to float upward to the everlasting Father, who loves you. Say a prayer for each bubble as it floats up and away out of your grasp. Postural changes may be helpful. Turn your palms upward, and rest the backs of your hands gently on a sturdy surface. Remember that you are held, and allow that knowledge to settle your heart and your striving.

Finally, as you feel a sense of internal peace returning, finish with some breath prayer to bring your body and spirit in line with one another. ■

#### BREATHE IN

*The Lord makes me lie down  
in green pastures. . . .*

#### BREATHE OUT

*He leads me beside  
still waters.*

#### BREATHE IN

*The Lord will never leave me. . . .*

#### BREATHE OUT

*Or forsake me.*

#### BREATHE IN

*Cease striving. . . .*

#### BREATHE OUT

*And know that he is God.*

#### BREATHE IN

*This is the day the Lord  
has made. . . .*

#### BREATHE OUT

*I will rejoice in it.*



\*LESLIE KONHAEUSER IS A WRITER, BIBLE TEACHER, AND REAL-LIFE MOM INSPIRING WOMEN TO REKINDLE THE FLAME OF FAITH RIGHT IN THE THICK OF IT.  
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# THE BREATH THAT FILLS *My Soul*

WRITTEN BY *Allison Lee*

Pause. Deep breath. The kind of breath where you don't stop inhaling until you feel the air reach the bottommost parts of your lungs. Yes, the air feels right. Like it knows something and it's pulling you closer. One deep breath of the stuff will fill your soul.

Today. It will be a perfect day.

Conditions are ripe for perfection. The things movies are made of.

An imagination soaked up in these things, at the height of expectancy. Anticipation of happiness riding on the crisp wind.

Piece by piece the framework is set. Very carefully the details chosen and the people placed. They are unaware of their script and the part they play.

And then rain. Wet shoes. Unruly hair. A spilled latte. A misconstrued sentiment from another. Reality. Tears to start the day and tears to end it. Such sorrow from losing something that was never had. Pain very real to a curator of occasions.

Pursuing perfect moments and remembering old ones with rose-colored glasses. So much weight placed on things and feelings. And people. Any excuse to cultivate happiness into existence—birthdays, date nights, holidays, Tuesdays.

But devastation and bliss seem to come and go as they please.

Happiness trades itself for exhaustion, satisfaction for disappointment. A very sore soul remains. It aches all over. Wounds received from falling framework and hurts sustained from unwilling participants in the fragile production. Innocent bystanders in the whole thing.

Deep down, the whole time knowing that this is not what life is. This is not real happiness. My head knows the

truth, but my heart won't have any part of it.

Unfair expectations of myself. That I should carry the weight of creating this gift only heaven can give. Unfair expectations of others. That they should bear the responsibility of my rise and fall. Unfair expectations of God. Whose honor it is to bestow such a gift on those who delight in him.

Life wasted in pursuit of an unobtainable thing. Life anew in pursuit of an obtainable God. Happiness is a byproduct, a gift. Impossible to hold in itself and, quite honestly, worth only pennies by itself.

Delight in,  
commit to,  
pursue  
him.

This is the pursuit of your life. This is the stuff that movies cannot even begin to be made of. One breath of this. This. Will fill your soul.

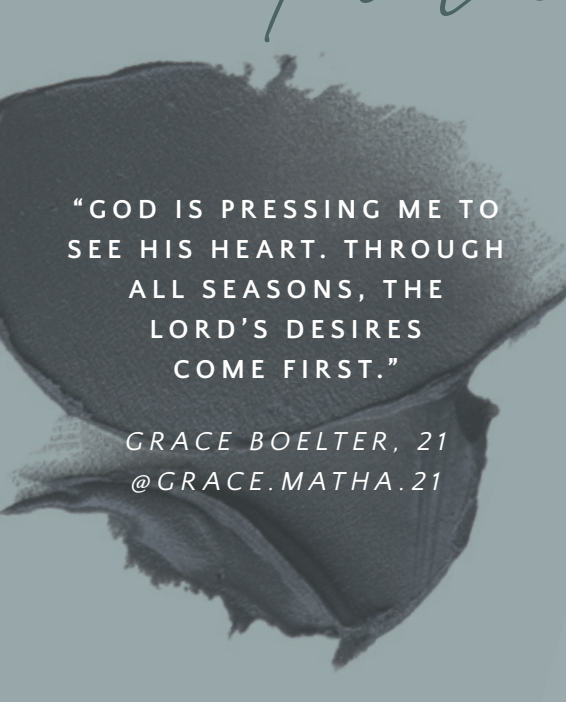
He is the wind, beckoning you to follow. Whispering truths in your ear, ever so softly, drawing you closer to hear. He is the perfect moment. Without notice, and thanks to no effort man can muster, God-aligned desires are fulfilled.

Real happiness shows up and makes itself at home. ■



\*AS MINNESOTA NATIVES, ALLISON LEE, HER HUSBAND, AND THREE KIDS ARE USUALLY OUTSIDE ENJOYING EACH SEASON OR TRAVELING TO FIND MORE ADVENTURES.  
@ALAYNELEE

# Faith Stories



"GOD IS PRESSING ME TO  
SEE HIS HEART. THROUGH  
ALL SEASONS, THE  
LORD'S DESIRES  
COME FIRST."


GRACE BOELTER, 21  
@GRACE.MATHA.21



"TRUST THAT DARKNESS  
CANNOT HIDE THE LIGHT.  
GOD SHOWS US THAT  
LIGHT WILL TRIUMPH."

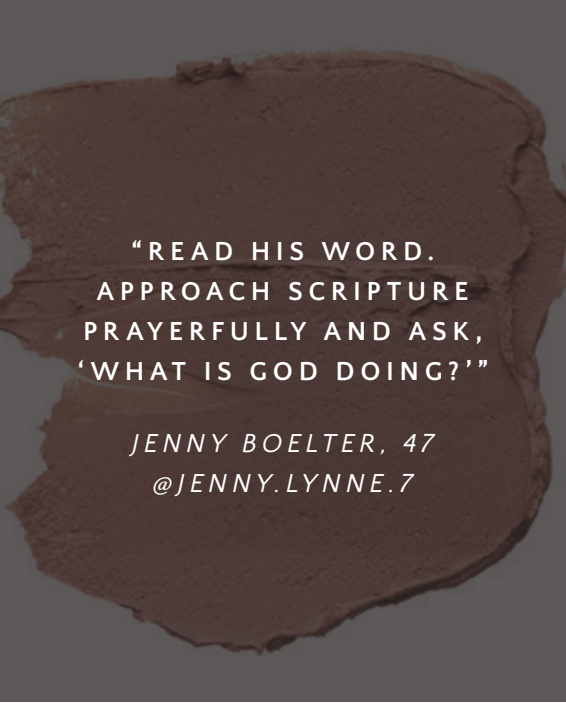
JODI PRIP, 50  
@JODIPRIP

WHAT IS GOD ASKING YOU TO PURSUE IN THIS SEASON?



"IN THIS SEASON,  
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO  
PURSUE REAL, GENUINE  
RELATIONSHIPS."

KENYA JOROENSEN, 18  
@\_JOROENSEN\_



"READ HIS WORD.  
APPROACH SCRIPTURE  
PRAYERFULLY AND ASK,  
'WHAT IS GOD DOING?'"

JENNY BOELTER, 47  
@JENNY.LYNNE.7

SHARE YOUR FAITH STORY WITH US ON INSTAGRAM.

#TRULYFAITHSTORY @THETRULYCO

# Flexible THINKING

ADJUSTING OUR APPROACH TO  
HOW WE HANDLE SITUATIONS

WRITTEN BY *Karen Gilmore*

PHOTO BY *Mariah Brink*

I struggled for many years with all-or-nothing thinking. The “all good vs. all bad” way of seeing a situation or people. Thinking this way got me into some difficult situations and kept me stuck. It damaged relationships and caused me to judge myself and others. I even fell into the trap of thinking something was ruined if it was not quite perfect.

One day while praying and thinking about my somewhat distorted thought process, it occurred to me that I could change the language I was using. I began to explore some options and landed on two words: helpful and unhelpful.

I visualized myself holding my hands, palms up, in the middle of the all-or-nothing spectrum. I could slide them one way or the other, yet stay toward the center. Then I visualized what would go into my hands as a situation unfolded in front of me. For example, when someone disappointed me, I began to ask myself, “What is helpful and unhelpful about this behavior and situation?”

Once I sorted these things into the two categories, I could ask myself if there was anything about the unhelpful parts that could be shifted toward the helpful side. If my

answer was no, then the problem was not mine to solve and I could discard it. If my answer was yes, then I could work to figure out how to shift the behavior or situation to the helpful side. I even began to curiously explore how I might shift the parts I previously labeled as helpful to be even more helpful. Situations that used to keep me pinned down suddenly became flexible and moveable.

Applying this visual strategy helps me pay closer attention when I fall into that all-or-nothing trap for both internal and external scenarios. It allows me to watch for dips in my self-esteem and categorize my thoughts as helpful or unhelpful.

Creativity and generosity have a chance to grow when we give ourselves permission to change our approach to situations and our relationships. ■



\*KAREN GILMORE IS A MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST IN A MEDICAL OFFICE. SHE ENJOYS WRITING AND SPEAKING.





# WONDER *over* W A V E R

Marveling at What God Has  
Done and What He Will Do

WRITTEN BY *Jenn Schultz*

ART BY *Kendra Duevel*

After moving across the country to the Pacific Northwest, one of the things I noticed right away was the sky.

A PNW sky can change in minutes, from a gloomy, will-the-sun-ever-appear-again dark gray to a brilliant, blinding blue. The clouds take many forms: giant and poofy, feathery and brushlike, heavy and creeping. Sunsets color clouds into brilliant shades of purple and pink. I marvel at the sky, stopping and taking pictures of it, because it never seems to look the same twice. It's hard to marvel at the gray sky, though. Sometimes it seems like the dark clouds will last forever.

What was the last thing you marveled at? Maybe it was a glorious view. A perfect meal. Relief after a good run. Something beautifully designed. Those are the kinds of moments we look back on that make choosing joy simple, where we can easily identify God's fingerprints in the details.

I marvel at the sunsets, but I don't usually wonder about the miracles God has in the works. And in dark moments, I'm not often curious if he is equipping and sustaining me.

How does wonder help us marvel at who God is? How does curiosity deepen our faith?

So often in Scripture, God calls ordinary people to do extraordinary things through him—usually at very bleak or

inconvenient times. It's interesting to look at the responses people give to God when he calls. For example, Zechariah and Mary in Luke 1. Both get the news that they will become parents. It's good news, but also complicated. One wavers; one wonders.

Zechariah and his wife are “very old,” as the passage says. Way past diaper changes and through-the-night feedings. They have tried for years with no results and are probably used to the disappointment by now.

Mary, on the other hand, is very young and unmarried, although pledged to be married to an unsuspecting Joseph. To have a baby means breaking social and cultural standards that could cost her engagement, or her life. Mary has a lot more at risk.

Zechariah wavers, nervously asking the angel, “How can I be sure of this?” (Luke 1:18). Mary wonders, curiously asking, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” (verse 34).

Interestingly, both questions include the same Greek word, *ginōskō*, which means “to know.” Zechariah uses it because he is seeking out certainty. For Mary, it has to do with the one thing she didn't know that made a big difference—intimacy with a man. Zechariah wanted to know everything because he wanted assurance. Mary only needed to know one thing, for logistical purposes.



I react more like Zechariah when God is directing me toward something. Give me the details, God. The lowdown, the complete game plan. I need to weigh my options. I need to know the risks and potential rewards. Show me the fine print before I sign.

If you respond that way, you're in good company, not just with Zechariah and me, but also with Moses, when God calls him to confront Pharaoh; with Gideon, when God calls him to lead an army against Israel's powerful enemies; with Jeremiah, when God calls him to be a prophet.

How can we respond to God with wonder instead of waver? How can we be curious about what he's doing even when the skies are gray? We can start by remembering.

Remember every detail and detour that God has already worked out—the gray skies turned colorful sunsets that he's painted in your life. Remember what you're grateful for right now—the joy and the marvel of this moment. Remember the promises that are ongoing—even when it all looks dark.

Even though it is easier said than done, God gently calls us back to faith. Faith that he will deliver, that he will equip us, and that he will make the miracles happen.

Before you start to waver, marvel with God in the now, and wonder about what is to come. ■



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\*JENN SCHULTZ IS A DISCIPLE OF JESUS, A WIFE, A MOM, AND A SELF-PROCLAIMED JOYFUL MESS. SHE WRITES ABOUT LIVING LOVED AND WHOLEHEARTED RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE. @WHATYOUMAKEITBLOG



\*KENDRA DUEVEL IS A RESIN ART ENTHUSIAST, FOLLOWER OF JESUS, ENNEAGRAM 1, WIFE, MOTHER, AND LOVER OF TRAVELING, COOKING, AND MOVIE NIGHTS. @ARTWORKBYKENDRA

# Holding Pain's Hand

PURSUING INCLUSION TO CREATE A WHOLE CHURCH

WRITTEN BY *Tera Bradham DeNeui* | ART BY *Rebecca Wynia*

She carried her hand tucked between her stomach and her arm. Hidden. Ashamed. I didn't know what it was like to have a lame hand, but I did know what it was like to carry an arm as a burden. Thousands of miles across land and sea, I had felt the weight of my shoulder on my neck as it hung in a post-op sling three separate times. I knew what it was like to beg God to let me die because of pain doctors couldn't solve. I knew what it meant to choose what I did not choose, only to have others define me by my limitations anyway.

But there in that Bolivian village, my arm extended in empathy toward the burden this girl still carried. I took her hand in mine. With the same hand that used to throb with searing nerve pain, I stroked a vibrant aqua onto the nails of the hand she had been taught to view as damaged. I couldn't tell Susanna why that manicure meant so much to me, but in the realm where heart speaks to heart, she knew. The lack of reservation with which I grabbed her hand told her the truth: She was loved and she was whole.

Pain is not beautiful, but for me, it has been purposeful. Pain grabs our hand to tell us something we need to know, something that isn't right. So often, we don't get to choose when pain enters our lives. Sometimes we're born with a condition the world labels a deformity, like Susanna, or sometimes a freak accident leaves us with a rotting biceps, like me.

Pain does not discriminate; it affects us all without favoritism. Pain without purpose sucks us dry; pain in isolation melts away the resolve to live. We feel despair when we grab pain with both hands and don't leave one free to take Jesus's hand. But Jesus came so that instead of holding pain with both hands, we could hold his hand and pain at the same time. Sometimes Jesus will command pain to drop our hand and give us peace as it departs from us, but more often than not, he walks with us as he lets pain lead the way.

What would it look like if the church followed the example of Jesus, our Savior? When we decide that another's pain is too difficult to understand or someone is too disabled for our pews, we lose the very miracle that is the body of Christ. Maybe in our own pain we can be a warm,

sweaty hand noticing and reaching for another's hand with a jar of nail polish.

God told Moses that he was the one who created the mute and the blind (see Exodus 4:11), yet we dismiss the parts of his creation who seem too messy to love. God is calling us to rise up and become the radically inclusive church. As long as we refuse to see who is missing from our chairs and absent from our small groups, the painful irony is that the church will walk with a limp. Allowing the disabled to remain marginalized, the church becomes disabled itself.

AS LONG AS WE REFUSE TO SEE WHO IS MISSING FROM OUR CHAIRS AND ABSENT FROM OUR SMALL GROUPS, THE PAINFUL IRONY IS THAT THE CHURCH WILL WALK WITH A LIMP.

With practical action, the daunting task of inclusion can be achieved through small acts of obedience. If we drive our blind neighbor to church, take the person we meet at the coffee shop to her chemo appointments, or address from the pulpit the complexities of healing from which our complacency runs, the church's body will begin to heal. If we take Susanna's hand without hesitation, perhaps she will carry it without shame.

It's time for us to take the hand of Jesus and open our arms to the ones who need us. Jesus already held pain with both hands; he felt the eternal despair of being separated from God for our sake, and he rose again so that we could grab his hand and show others how to do the same. ■



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\*REBECCA WYNIA IS AN ARTIST BASED IN MINNEAPOLIS. SHE ALSO TEACHES SPANISH AND OVERSEES MENTOR A MENTOR, A MINISTRY IN NORTHERN MEXICO, WITH HER HUSBAND, JAVIER. @REBECCAWYNIAART





INTERTWINED | ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

Rebecca Lygia

# Eat with Love

## A Nourishing Smoothie Recipe

WRITTEN BY *Brooke D. Peterson*

A donut eaten in love is better than a plateful of kale eaten in fear. What you think about while you eat matters as much as what you eat! As someone who secretly battled disordered eating for over a decade, I know the misery of tight-fisted control in hopes to procure physical perfection and others' approval.

Just like organic arugula, willpower has an expiration date. Eventually, tense muscles must relax. I reached a breaking point as God's love pursued me to a deeper revelation of heaven's reality, and with it, two keys for kingdom well-being.

"Beloved, I pray that in every way you may succeed and prosper and be in good health [physically], just as [I know] your soul prospers [spiritually]" (3 John 1:2 AMP).

First, John revealed the Father's heart for every believer—good health! Second, physical well-being is in direct proportion to the health of the soul.

The body has two main operating systems that can be summarized into "fight or flight" and "rest and digest." Studies reveal numerous consequences of eating in a state of anxiety, including poor digestion, weight gain, and hormone imbalance. Eating in a relaxed state leads to better absorption of key nutrients, proper digestion, and improved metabolism.

We are created to *oper-eat* from a place of love (rest and digestion). Here I was, believing that white-knuckling a perfect wellness protocol was the ticket to well-being, when all along God's desire for me was to prosper and be in good health. As I yield to his loving pursuit, I am compelled to nourish my body to embrace the life of purpose he has prepared for me (see Ephesians 2:10).

Fear of food is replaced by daily invitations to joyfully feast in God's goodness as I confidently declare that his desires for me and my health are "berry good"!

Enjoy this nourishing, whole-food smoothie as a simple breakfast or afternoon snack! ■



\*BROOKE D. PETERSON IS AN AUTHOR, A PODCAST HOST, AND THE FOUNDER OF WELL WOMEN CO. SHE AND HER FAMILY LIVE IN MINNEAPOLIS, MN, AND LOVE TO EXPLORE. @WELLWOMENCO



PHOTOS BY *Madi Reimer*

## BERRY GOOD PEANUT BUTTER SMOOTHIE

- ½ BANANA
- 1 CUP FROZEN MIXED BERRIES
- 1 TABLESPOON CHIA SEEDS  
(SOAK FOR 10 MINUTES)
- 1-2 TABLESPOONS PEANUT BUTTER  
(OR SUBSTITUTE YOUR NUT BUTTER OF CHOICE)
- 1 CUP MILK OF CHOICE  
(I PREFER ALMOND MILK)
- 2 SCOOPS PROTEIN POWDER OR  
COLLAGEN PEPTIDES
- 3 LARGE HANDFULS OF LEAFY GREENS
- 5-10 ICE CUBES

COMBINE AND BLEND ALL INGREDIENTS IN A HIGH-POWERED BLENDER UNTIL SMOOTH. ADD MORE LIQUID IF NEEDED.

TOPPING IDEAS: OTHER HALF OF THE BANANA (SLICED), FLAXSEED, DRIED COCONUT, HONEY, HEMP SEEDS, CACAO NIBS, GRANOLA.



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FROM  
THE  
TRULY  
CO

FOLLOW *THE TRULY CO* PODCAST ON ALL MAJOR  
PODCAST PLATFORMS FOR INTERVIEWS WITH  
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OUR PODCAST EPISODES OFFER DEEPER  
CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE TOPICS WE WRITE  
ABOUT IN *TRULY* MAGAZINE AND ON OUR BLOG.



# Nothing Is Wasted

AN INSIDE LOOK: THE PURSUIT ISSUE COVER ART

WRITTEN BY *Madi Reimer* | PHOTOS BY *Lydia Toll*



My favorite passage of the Bible has the word *pursue* in it.

So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, *act* like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from *his* perspective.

Colossians 3:1–2 MSG

Since I became a mother, my head has been clouded

with how to care for my child and keep her alive, and there doesn't appear to be room for my dreams or ideas. Thinking about a cover concept to embody pursuit was hilarious because I felt like, "Well, what am *I* even pursuing?" In different seasons, I've felt reprimanded by that word, like what I've done wasn't enough. My value had been dependent upon how much I pursued measurable success.

In those last two sentences of the Colossians passage, I see Christ bending down low and gently lifting my chin, giving me the chance to see his perspective of humanity around him. It is good.



*Pursuit* can be exemplified by the action of embodying the perspective of Christ. This kind of pursuit isn't a task ranked by checklists, but a way of life that can be shown through love and the art of making. For me, this means all my vocations matter (paycheck or not). Nothing is wasted. It is good.

In Makoto Fujimura's book *Art and Faith* (Yale University Press, 2020), he brings attention to the act of Mary pouring the expensive perfume on Jesus in Mark 14. "What Mary did was good and beautiful. What the disciples deemed a waste, Jesus called the most necessary" (p. 114). Know that your art, work, and dreams not yet acted upon matter and are seen as action steps already. I wanted to make something beautiful for the cover shoot that displayed *this* kind of pursuit. That something with no utilitarian purpose is beautiful and necessary and is valued by God. Our inherent design to make and create comes from the ultimate Maker.

*Let us see the beauty and value of everything we do from Christ's perspective.* ■

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JESSICA MALONG @JSSCAMLNG,  
JANA MURPHY @JOSIEANDLEO,  
JENNIFER TRAUTMANN  
@GRATITUDEPHOTOMPLS



\*MADI REIMER IS AN ENNEAGRAM 4 WITH A CURIOSITY FOR THE ARTFUL, FAITHFUL LIFE, AND WORKS FOR THE NONPROFIT ART HOUSE NORTH. @MADIREIMER



# I'm Not Done

GOD'S ENCOURAGEMENT WHEN WE CAN'T SEE CLEARLY

WRITTEN BY *Katie Axelson* | ILLUSTRATION BY *Krista Dumire*

I moved last week. My life is filled with boxes and half-finished projects. The bathroom cleaning supplies are half put away. The dishes are half-washed. The laundry is half-sorted. It gets worse. The school paper is half-written, the book half-read, and the video half-watched. Surely halfway counts for something, right? It's good, but is it good enough? Halfway isn't peaceful. It's not guest-ready. It's not okay long-term.

Thankfully, Jesus doesn't leave his projects half-finished.

In Mark 8, Jesus heals a blind man. Except he doesn't do it right away. First, Jesus puts spit on the man's eyes, and all the man sees are trees walking around. Jesus could have said, "Good enough." Or, "Yup, people and trees have the same basic shape." Nope. Jesus didn't leave the project half-finished. He touched the man's eyes again. Mark writes, "Then [the man's] eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly" (8:25).

Does this mean that Jesus didn't get it right the first time? Or does it mean that sometimes healing comes in phases? Either way, it means that Jesus wasn't finished until the man saw everything clearly. Everything. Clearly.

The half-finished projects throughout my house will eventually get done. The boxes will get unpacked, the dishes will get washed, and the organization of my home will happen. Same with the growth and healing that needs to happen in my heart from difficult experiences in the past. Those memories will eventually be laid to rest—they won't haunt me anymore. They'll be redeemed—their purpose revealed.

My healing will be brought to completion because Jesus doesn't abandon half-finished projects. God does not give up, and he's not even irritated with the fact that I'm sitting here half-finished, my heart

still boxed up, and my emotions still a mess. I picture him sitting here next to me smiling peacefully, asking me about my experience, and inviting me into deeper intimacy with him. Today and always.

Even when I feel half-finished, even when I feel like giving up, even when I feel like all I see are trees walking, that's when God says, "I'm not done." Not with me and not with you. Take a deep breath and let those words sink into your heart for a minute. When God looks at you in all of your brokenness, in your half-finishedness, and in your mess, he says, "Beloved, I'm not done." ■

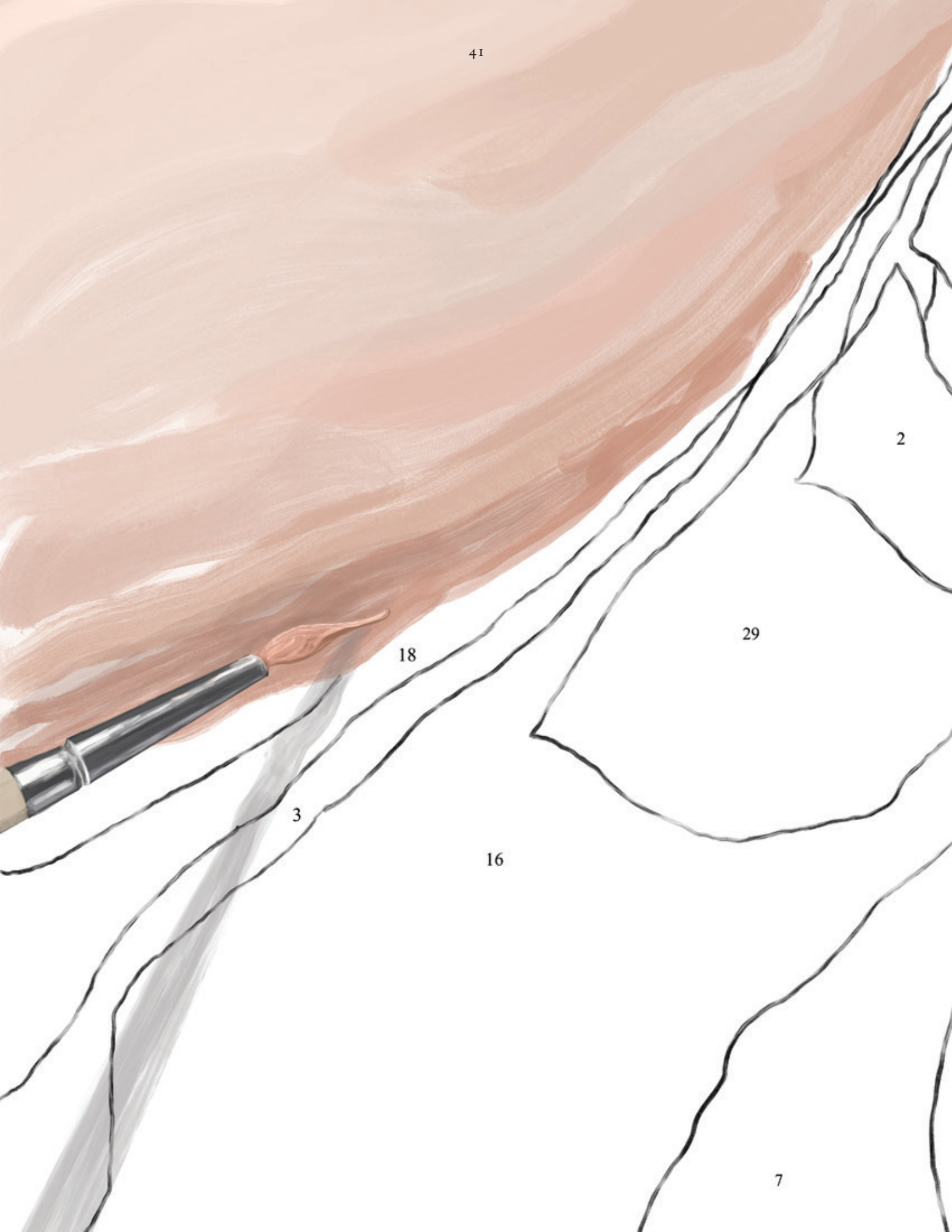


\*KATIE AXELSON IS AN AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND PASTOR WHO LOVES TO LINK ARMS WITH WOMEN AND HELP THEM DRAW CLOSER TO JESUS. @KATIEAXELSON



\*KRISTA DUMIRE IS AN ILLUSTRATOR FOR THE TRULY CO. SHE'S AN AMBIVERT WHO LOVES A GOOD BONFIRE AND ADVENTURING WITH HER HUSBAND, AARON. @K.DUMES





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MODEL *Victoria Womack*

# LIVING IN MY BROKEN STORY

TRUSTING GOD FOR A HOPEFUL ENDING

WRITTEN BY *Chloe Doebbeling*

PHOTOS BY *Madi Reimer*

Every story has seasons of darkness. There are always winters to trudge through, some much colder and longer than others. Always a chapter when the floor that we are so confident is beneath us falls through. We all fall, yet some people seem to land on steady ground, with sturdy legs. They land eager to get back up and keep going. This is the part, the standing-back-up part, that is so impossible to understand. Because as tragic and devastating as these stories are, how do people sincerely trust for their hopeful ending?

I often wonder when my doubt will turn into courage and when spring will come for me. I question where the floor went that I was so sure was holding me up. I feel as if I've been in a constant state of free fall, reaching out to the wrong hands to help me up. With flailing arms, I listen to tales of people crawling their way back from rock bottom, wondering when I'll get my grit too.

But mostly, I wonder how my world collapsed and if I'll ever find a promising ending to my story. That, and I feel as if I don't have a valid enough excuse to be lying on my back with the wind knocked out of me. I've tried to keep my head down. Insecurity will get you eaten alive in this world, and mine decorates itself like Christmas lights in the gold flecks of my brown eyes. I've made "wit" my middle name, making people laugh before they can hear the anxiety in my voice. Anything to look like a human who has it all put together, on the outside at least.

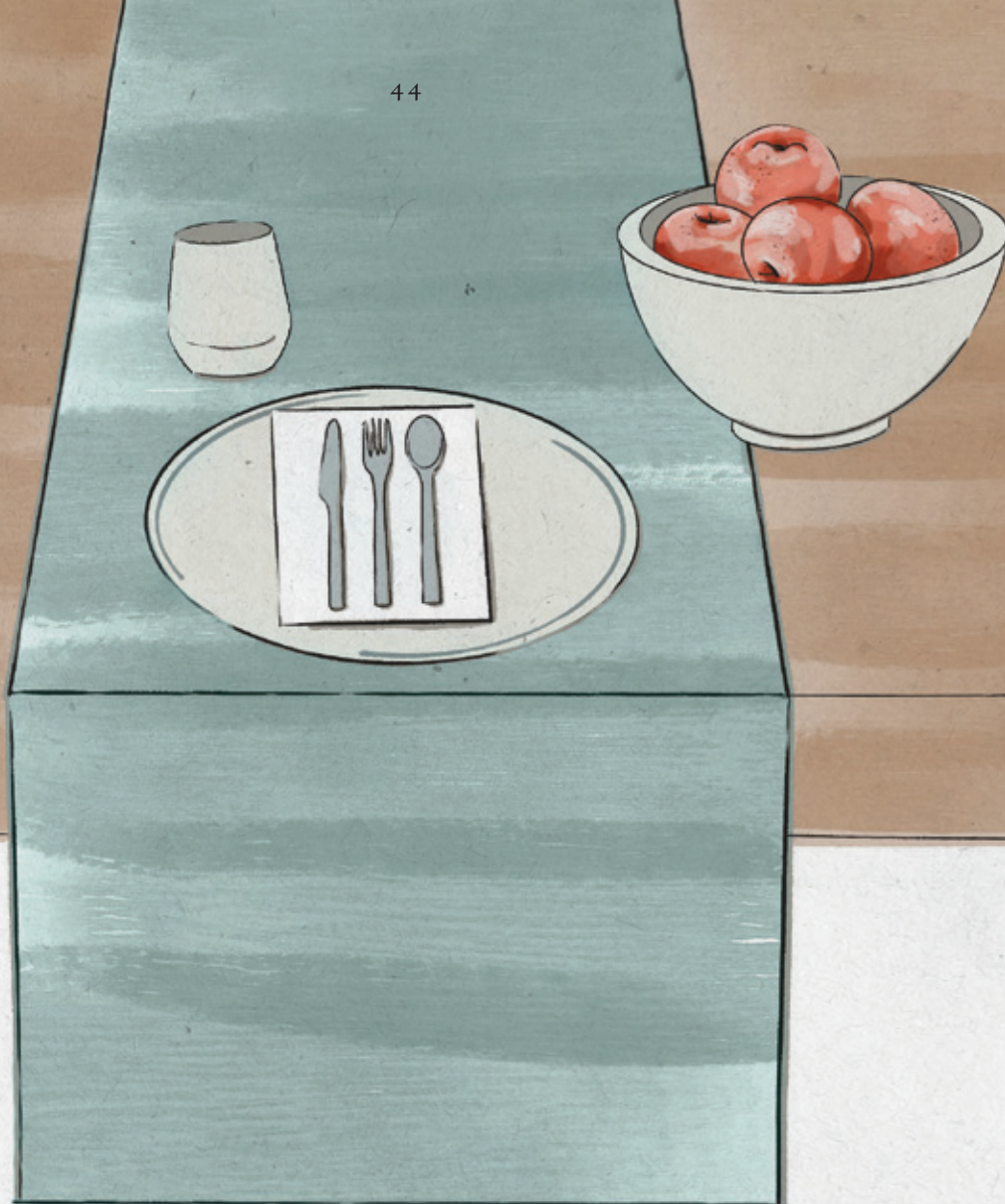
But somewhere along the way, better hands have caught me in my plummeting. Softer hearts have listened, helping me to put my faith in something again. As I've begun to lift my head back up, I'm looking less and seeing more. Hearing less and listening more. Shouting less and whispering more. And what I've found is a bunch of misfit people just trying to look like humans who have it all together. Good people hoping for their good endings.

I listen to people pray that just showing up will somehow be enough, because it's all they can do. I see people make light of the harshness of this world, all while sitting empathetically with others in the dark parts of their stories. Especially the dark parts. I see people giving the shirts off their backs when it's all they have left. I see tired people trying—really trying. I've found the saddest souls making the rest of the world laugh, and the most resilient hearts are the ones with every reason to give up. I've felt the most love created through devastation—broken hearts beginning again.

And what I've found, if anything, is that this is my hopeful ending. ■



\*CHLOE DOEBBELING HAS A PASSION FOR CREATING. AND WORDS ARE HER FAVORITE WAY TO EXPRESS THAT. SHE IS FIXING UP AN OLD FARMHOUSE WITH HER FAMILY. @CHLOEFAITHDOEB

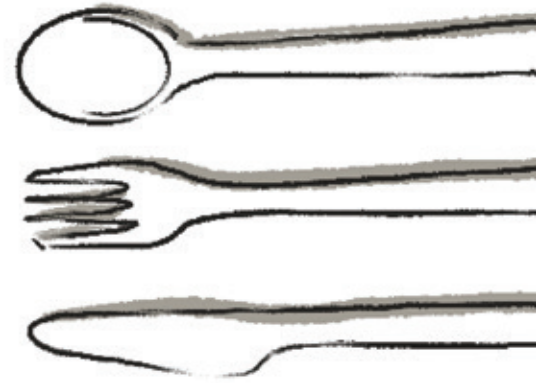


# Setting an Extra Place at the Table

HOW THE CHURCH CAN DEMONSTRATE  
LOVE THROUGH FOSTER CARE

WRITTEN BY *Rachal Pollard*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Krista Dumire*



According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, more than 423,000 children are currently in foster care in the United States, with over 120,000 waiting for adoption. For many of us, seeing the statistics can be overwhelming, and any impact we could make may feel out of reach. What if we shifted our perspective from being overwhelmed by this social issue to viewing foster care as biblical hospitality, allowing us to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable children in our communities?

So let's take the focus off the perfect space or timing to say yes to foster care, and instead look at the resources we do have. Church, this is our responsibility. Our purpose is to love God and make him known. If we are truly doing this every day in our lives, how can we look at the needs of these children and the impact that being in foster care will make on their future and not step in and demonstrate the love of God in any way possible?

When we said yes to opening our home over ten years ago, I wasn't thinking of practicing biblical hospitality. I was thinking of growing our family. There were children who needed families, and we had room at the table, in our home, and in our hearts. But in the last ten years, I've learned that saying yes was about more than what we would gain or give as a family. God was demonstrating his love for us and the love he has for others through us.

There are many ways we can practice hospitality and make a difference in the lives of others. As it relates to foster care, it's about more than opening your home to children and youth who need a safe, caring family to live with while their parents work to get them back. Seeking opportunities to support biological families through

mentorship programs, taking a foster mom to coffee, or becoming a respite provider for your friends who are an adoptive family are all examples of how you can practice what we are called to do. Showing support to social workers, foster families, and biological families can relieve stress and make a difference.

Foster care and other social justice issues can be positively impacted when the church steps up and chooses to engage. The single act of opening our homes means saying yes to getting attached, supporting relationships with people who you would not normally interact with, and showing the love of Christ to everyone involved in a hard situation.

The notion of being hospitable can seem confusing. On one hand, to welcome others, we think we need to have the perfect home, with the perfect entertaining space and charcuterie board. On the other hand, it can seem that we are being irresponsible with our lives if we stop to say a kind word to a neighbor. Yet we are called to open our hearts, homes, and lives to others in order to demonstrate our true devotion to God by caring for orphans and widows (see James 1:27) and spreading the gospel of Christ. When we say, "Yes, here I am, Lord," we can let him handle the rest. ■



\*RACHAL POLLARD IS A WIFE, A HOMESCHOOLING MOM OF FIVE, THE CO-FOUNDER OF REDEEMED NETWORK, AND A MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE COACH CURRENTLY LIVING ON HER FARMETTE IN VIRGINIA. @POLLARDMAMA93



# A WELL-BUILT HOUSE

RECONSTRUCTING A FAITH FOUNDATION

WRITTEN BY *Shiloh Gideon-Sjostrom*

PHOTOS BY *Mariah Brink*

“Oh, that roof has got to go!” “This load-bearing wall is crumbling.” “Mold issues.” “Termite infestation.” “Rotting baseboards.” “Major water damage in the basement.” These are statements I would hate to hear about my own home, but I love watching someone else’s home being transformed on a home-remodeling show. I enjoy anticipating the reactions of the big reveal.

These shows serve as an analogy about the structure

of my Christian faith. I wonder how strong my spiritual foundation is, and what needs to be demolished and built again. I hesitate to use the phrase *deconstructing faith*, because for many Christians this has become synonymous with “walking away” from the faith. *Deconstruction* is often accompanied by air quotes, eye rolls, and unadulterated scorn. But the reality is, deconstruction has been the way to preserve a foundation of faith while replacing some of the rotten structures we’ve built ourselves or allowed others to help us build.

Imagine Jesus telling the parable of the wise and foolish men and the houses they built (see Luke 6:46–49). The houses might both *look* the same, but when we examine their foundations, we know one house will fall and the other will stand. What does your own house look like? How strong is the house you are helping others build? The answers to these questions have become unnecessarily complicated. The first is answered simply by loving



Deconstruction has been the way to preserve a foundation of faith while replacing some of the rotten structures we've built ourselves or allowed others to help us build.

God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The second answer has to do with loving your neighbor and is exemplified in 1 Peter 4:8 (NLT), "Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins."

When someone confides in you that they are struggling with aspects of their Christian faith, rather than show scorn, continue to show deep love. Offer to walk not one mile, but two. Ask questions. Listen. Recognize that you might find some rotting boards in your own house along the way. Imitate Jesus. Each of us, as well as the entire church, is being sanctified, continually being made holy. We are to "work hard to show the results of your salvation,

obeying God with deep reverence and fear" (Philippians 2:12 NLT).

Pursuing a well-built house doesn't mean we won't have setbacks and discouragements with the whole process. It means persevering and looking forward to the day we can hear the words from Jesus's parable in Matthew 25:23 (NLT), "Well done, my good and faithful servant." ■



\*SHILOH GIDEON-SJOSTROM HAS BEEN IN CHURCH MINISTRY FOR MOST OF HER LIFE. SHE IS PURSUING HER PHD IN INTERCULTURAL STUDIES AT BIOLA UNIVERSITY AND ALSO TEACHES AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE.

# The Truly Co on Pursuit



KRISTA  
LEAD ILLUSTRATOR



PORTIA  
ADVISOR



ANNA  
LEAD PHOTOGRAPHER

WHAT IS GOD CALLING YOU TO PURSUE IN THIS SEASON?

SEEKING AND TRUSTING THAT WHAT HE HAS FOR ME IS WHAT HE HAS DESIGNED ME FOR.

I'M PURSUING BEING A VOICE TO THE CHURCH AROUND ISSUES OF RACE, JUSTICE, AND UNITY.

TO EMBRACE THE GIFT OF RIGHT NOW, UNRUSHED AND UNPLUGGED.

DESCRIBE A TIME YOU FELT GOD PURSUE YOU.

WHEN I HAVE CHOSEN TO PRESS INTO HIS PROMISES, GOD HAS MET ME.

GOD PURSUED ME WITH THE PHRASE "CHOOSE LIFE" TO KEEP ME FROM MAKING A HUGE MISTAKE.

I DROVE ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO FIGURE LIFE OUT, AND GOD MET ME THERE.

HOW DO YOU SEEK WISDOM?

I PRAY FOR WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT DAILY AND ASK QUESTIONS TO PEOPLE I TRUST.

FROM GOD'S WORD, GODLY COUNSEL, AND SOMETIMES A GOOD DOSE OF RESEARCH.

FROM GOD AND SCRIPTURE, AND FROM THOSE HE'S PLACED AROUND ME.

SHARE A GOAL YOU'VE RECENTLY ACCOMPLISHED.

I WANTED TO MAKE SOME ART FOR THE EMPTY WALLS IN MY HOUSE. IT LOOKS LIKE A MUSEUM!

FOR MY PERSONAL SANITY, I REORGANIZED MY CLOSET.

I LOVE DREAMING UP HOUSE PROJECTS, AND I'VE KNOCKED OUT QUITE A FEW!

A HOBBY YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO EXPLORE IS . . .

FINDING AND NAMING COLORS FOR PROMINENT PAINT BRANDS.

HIKING: BEING IN NATURE, WORKING OUT, AND OVERCOMING FEARS OF ALL THINGS CRAWLY.

I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT LEARNING TO FLY WOULD BE THE COOLEST.

SOMEDAY YOU WANT TO ASK GOD . . .

I ASK GOD A LOT OF QUESTIONS—WHY WAIT? BUT, WHY MOSQUITOES?

I'D LIKE TO ASK HIM IF I COULD WATCH CREATION.

WHAT DO YOU THINK WHEN YOU WATCH HISTORY UNFOLD?





SHILOH  
ADVISOR AND WRITER



BROOKE  
PROJECT MANAGER



ALLISON  
ONLINE CONTENT EDITOR

WHAT IS GOD CALLING YOU TO PURSUE IN THIS SEASON?

IN A FRANTIC SEASON OF BUSYNESS, I FEEL I MUST PURSUE QUIETUDE.

I TEND TO OVERCOMMIT, WHICH CAUSES STRESS AND ANXIETY. HE IS ASKING ME TO PURSUE BALANCE.

LIVING IN THE NOW AND COVERING EACH MOMENT WITH GRATITUDE.

DESCRIBE A TIME YOU FELT GOD PURSUE YOU.

WHILE READING FRANCIS THOMPSON'S POEM "THE HOUND OF HEAVEN." GOD IS ALWAYS IN PURSUIT OF ME.

I MOVED ALONE TO A NEW CITY AND WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF MY HARDEST SEASON. GOD WAS THERE.

EVERY MERCY HE SHOWS ME IN MY DAILY FAILINGS ARE BIDS TO REMAIN IN HIM.

HOW DO YOU SEEK WISDOM?

SOMETHING MY WISE MOTHER TAUGHT ME BY EXAMPLE. READ THE BOOK OF PROVERBS OVER AND OVER.

RESEARCH, ASK QUESTIONS, VERBALLY PROCESS WITH OTHERS, AND PRAY, PRAY, PRAY.

GOD'S WISDOM APPEARS WHEN I GIVE HIM ALL MY FIRSTFRUITS—MY ENERGIES, MY DREAMS, MY CARES.

SHARE A GOAL YOU'VE RECENTLY ACCOMPLISHED.

I COMPLETED THREE YEARS OF MY PHD PROGRAM. I HAVE ANOTHER TWO LEFT, BUT WHO'S COUNTING?

MY HUSBAND AND I BECAME DEBT-FREE!

I SAID YES TO SOMETHING NEW AND CHALLENGING. THIS WAS A BIG GOAL FOR ME.

A HOBBY YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO EXPLORE IS . . .

CRUISE SHIP DIRECTOR. I GOT THAT RESULT DOING AN INVENTORY ONCE. PERFECT HOBBY, RIGHT?!

PLAYING ACOUSTIC GUITAR. I HAVE THE TOOLS, I JUST NEED TO USE THEM.

POTTERY HAS ALWAYS BEEN ON MY HEART'S LIST OF THINGS TO ATTEMPT. I ADORE CERAMICS.

SOMEDAY YOU WANT TO ASK GOD . . .

LOADS AND LOADS OF QUESTIONS. BUT I SUSPECT I'LL BE SPEECHLESS. FINALLY!

WHAT DID JESUS WRITE IN THE SAND IN JOHN 8?

DID I SERVE YOU WELL AND LIVE UP TO THE PLANS YOU HAD FOR ME?

# WHAT'S MY MOTIVATION?

SURRENDERING TO GOD'S PLAN OVER MY OWN

WRITTEN BY *Tyra Greene*

ART BY *Kristi Ellison*

For several weeks I had been studying for my nurse entrance exams to apply for the next level of my nursing career. The acceptance letter finally arrived, and I opened it while clenching my jaw yet trying to remain hopeful. I needed this opportunity because it was the golden ticket to my future. And there it was. *Alternate*. That one word appeared where *accepted* would have been, and my mouth dropped open. I wondered, "Why, God? We talked about this."

When I first started my journey, the conversation with God went like this: "If I receive a status of alternate, I'm turning it down, so I need to see accepted." I'm sure God laughed at that one. My counselor encouraged me to reapply the next semester, and she was positive I had a chance of acceptance if I could increase my scores. On test day, my scores went up by forty-eight points, and I knew I was in there. As I gathered all my paperwork for application day, I became nervous, and now my conversation with God went more like, "Is this really what you want me to do?"

And that's when everything changed. The week I was set to reapply, my husband was hospitalized with COVID-19. I was crushed and fearful for my husband, but to be honest, I was even more angry about my school situation. God knew the desire of my heart, and I knew he cared, but I didn't understand why something I wholeheartedly pursued wasn't working out. "What am I missing, God?" I asked.

I started to realize that I had been pursuing what my education could do for me more than what my Savior promised for my life. I was pursuing a secure bank account

rather than pursuing the security from the one who provides. I was pursuing what gave me instant gratification rather than allowing God's plan to sustain me through my journey. If we are constantly pursuing our own agendas, we will miss what God has for us.

How can we be more intentional about pursuing God's plans over our own? Here are a few simple practices I use. First, pray and ask God to reveal what his desires would be for your life. Then, be honest with God about your dreams and goals, because he cares and wants to hear from you. Next, be available to listen to the Holy Spirit and be obedient. Finally, keep an open heart and mind. God uses many forms of communication to get our attention, sometimes where we least expect it.

Take some time to evaluate what you're pursuing, and even if it seems confusing at times, consider that what God has planned for you may end up being better than what's on your own agenda. ■



\*TYRA GREENE'S PASSION IS TO SHARE GOD'S TRUTH WITH WOMEN THROUGH ENCOURAGING AND MOTIVATIONAL WRITING THAT POINTS THEM BACK TO JESUS FOR HIS GLORY. @TYRAGREENE4



\*KRISTI ELLISON IS A TWIN CITIES GRAPHIC DESIGNER WORKING AT A LOCAL UNIVERSITY. DEEP TALKS AND LATE NIGHT COFFEE FILL HER HEART. @KLEE\_ELLISON



FINALLY BROTHERS AND SISTERS,  
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