
INTRODUCTION

There are some stories that change your life. This is one of them for me.

Thirteen years ago, I was sitting across the table from a friend of mine who battles depression. As I listened to this friend share her heart with me, I was struck by how many lies she was believing.

Lies about who she was.

Lies about who God was.

Lies about how He loved us.

And the more I listened to her talk, the more I realized that there were so many lies I was believing too . . .

All of the sudden, my heart was pounding in my chest. I started to get angry because I remembered that there is an enemy, and he's called the father of lies (John 8:44). What does that mean? It means that when he speaks, lies are his native language—that *punk*.

I remember sitting there with my friend and thinking, "I am so sick of the enemy stealing our joy, our peace, our hope, our John 10:10 'life to the full' that God came to offer us, and I am *not* going down without a fight! God calls His Word a sword, and we're gonna use it!"

In that moment, I realized that it might not be enough to just acknowledge the lies we so often believe. More than that, we desperately needed to ground ourselves in the *truth*.

I grabbed my Bible and did what sometimes you do when you feel desperate for truth: I started flipping through the pages looking for *anything* I had ever underlined before because I thought, "If I underlined it at some point, it must be good!" I remember almost shouting at my friend as I frantically flipped through my Bible, "WRITE THESE DOWN!"

It all makes me laugh now, because I was being awfully bossy, but my friend scribbled down the reference to every verse I spoke. I remember saying, "We are gonna start memorizing these verses together. These are gonna be our *fighting words*, and we're going

to use 'em when the enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy. We're gonna kick back at the darkness with the light."

So we started memorizing Scripture, and truth be told, we're not very good at it. (Insert cry-laughing face here.) But I can tell you this for sure: God's Word changed us. It didn't necessarily change our circumstances, but it changed us from the inside out because it gave us solid ground to stand on when the shame storms started rolling in. It was a shelter and a shield and an anchor and a light and a balm and a song that we began to sing into the shadows. We realized that God isn't lying when He says that His Word is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. He isn't blowing smoke when He says that just like the rains that fall from the heavens don't return to the heavens until they cause the earth to bud and flourish, so is the word that goes out of His mouth. It *will* accomplish the purposes for which He sent it (Isa. 55:10-11). Y'all! That is a PROMISE, and I dare you to believe it. It will change your life. It's for sure changed mine.

I won't pretend to understand it all. God's Word is confounding and mysterious to me at times, but it also tells the most beautiful story I know: the story of a lowly God-man who entered our mess of a world so that we could know we're *never* alone and that our brokenness and suffering never have the final word. The story of a God who loves us enough to not leave us as we are, and who invites us into being a part of something much bigger than ourselves . . . a kingdom that's coming. At the end of the day, even though I don't always understand everything in the Bible, what I have experienced is this: God's Word is alive, and it's brought me to life over and over again, which is what brings us here.

I don't know how this book got into your hands. I don't know where you are on the journey. Maybe you're struggling through a season of dreams that didn't come true. Maybe you're battling depression yourself or someone you love is deeply hurting. Maybe you are weary and wounded and angry that God hasn't seemed to follow through for you. Maybe you're just busy and tired of moving aimlessly from thing to thing on your to-do list. Maybe you feel burnt out or burned by the church. Maybe you feel trapped, or maybe you just want more than what you've experienced with God and with this life that so often breaks your heart. Maybe you're a mom with young kids and you love them, but you feel like you've lost yourself as you've

cared for them. Maybe you want to be a mom but can't get pregnant. Maybe you are exhausted. Maybe you're lonely. Maybe you just want some truth to help get you through your crazy day.

Whoever you are and wherever you're coming from, I'm so glad you're here. These pages hold my fighting words. They hold the promises of God that I have clung to over the years, that have grounded me when I felt lost, and that have filled me with hope when I felt hopeless.

I hope you'll pick up these verses and hold onto them with all you've got.

I hope you'll use them to kick back at the shadows with the light.

I hope you'll let the promises on these pages sink deep into your heart.

I hope you'll have the courage to memorize a few of them with me, so that no matter where you are, you'll have the truth to cover, guide, and comfort.

I hope that these verses will become your fighting words, and that we'll all start walking right up to the darkness in our own hearts and in the weary world around us to speak God's love and light and truth.

I can't wait to see how God shows up for you, to hear how His Word leads, consoles, calms, heals, and transforms you. Maybe I'll meet you someday and get to hear stories of how you've found fighting words of your own, and how they've helped remind you that there's hope for sure, and that you have a God who loves you, cherishes you, and helps you fight the good fight.

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

JOHN 8:32



HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

Dear Fellow Sojourner,

This is the part of the book where I look you in the eyes. Pretend we're in my kitchen . . . this is where all my favorite conversations happen. We also have good coffee in hand. You also look great. Okay, here's my pep talk/what I want to say: I love you.

This book you're holding? It isn't really a book. It's an invitation. I'm inviting you to join me for a 100-day journey of anchoring down in the promises of God. Here's the game plan. I'm feeling like a coach today, so I've got 3 P's for you:

PROMISES

These pages hold 100 different verses and promises of God that have grounded me over the years. I've printed them out for you on every day so you can return to them again and again. We'll hold onto these truths together.

PROCESS AND PRAY

I'll process how each verse has encouraged, transformed, or comforted me, but I've included questions to invite you into the processing. In my mind, the main content of this book is God's Word—and YOUR HEART! God's Word is alive, but He also gives us a Guide, the Holy Spirit, whose role is to guide us into all truth (John 16:13). I hope you'll take time to really process these promises of God, whether that looks like prayer, journaling, pouring out your heart, or writing out the truth so you can come back to it for perspective when the lies start creeping in. I encourage you to invite the Spirit to lead you on this journey as He instills these truths down deep in your heart, like a balm to the places that need healing, like light to the places that are covered up in shadows. (Also . . . I'm not the boss of you, but I'd encourage you to have a journal at the ready so you can engage with God's Word as you're reading through and keep a record of all the good things He is showing you!)

PERMANENCE

You'll find ten pages in this book with verses beautifully printed on them. These are ten different invitations to Scripture memorization. God's Word is a treasure, and I want to invite you to bury some of it in your heart. Don't feel like you have to memorize these perfectly, but what might happen if you simply made an effort to try? I left a space next to each of these verses for you to write down the stories of how that specific promise has brought life and light to your life as you commit it to memory. It's like you'll have a permanent supply of light and hope to reach for, even through your darkest nights. (I'd also like to add here in a whisper that it has helped me so much to memorize Scripture in the context of community. Ask a friend to join you in the memorizing . . . that way you've got some accountability and someone to share the wonderful stories of how God uses this verse for flourishing in your life. I think this makes the whole process even more fun.)

I've got one last note before we dive into this adventure together. You may not know this, but I'm a musician. You'll find in this devotional that I end up quoting or referencing my own songs a lot. I hope you know that I only do that because my songs are like journals that chronicle my wrestling with God, my deepest aches, my darkest doubts, and the ways that I've tried to let the truth shine light into those weary and wounded places in my own story. So if I reference my own song, please know I'm not trying to sell you anything or say that my music is something you need in your life. I'm simply saying that I needed to write, sing, pray, or believe it for myself. Don't get me wrong, I always hope the songs I write will be sweet reminders of God's truth to all who hear them, including you; but I just need you to know I'm not trying to get you to buy my records. When I make connections to songs I've written, I'm wanting to connect you to the way God has used His Word to revive my heart again and again.

I can't wait to hear all the stories of how God shows up as you invite the Spirit to be your guide and steep your soul in God's living Word! If you could see me now, I'd be beaming . . . eyes lit up with the kind of excitement that comes when you know something good is in store.

Blessings on the journey.

Love, Ellie

DAY

1

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7 CSB

I love this promise from God's Word, but the command "Rejoice in the Lord always" can sometimes feel cruel in light of some of the pain and suffering life can throw at us. There are times when I wonder, "I'm supposed to rejoice in the middle of this mess?! I don't feel like rejoicing. I feel like weeping." But then crashing into that command to rejoice is one of the sweetest promises of all: "The Lord is near."

The nearness of God has been a balm to my weary and wounded soul over and over again, and when I remember that God promises He'll be near me always, I don't have to worry, and I always have a reason to sing and to rejoice. In fact, this is the verse that inspired "Find You Here," the song I wrote in the wake of my dad's cancer diagnosis.

Nobody is ever ready for that call. A week after receiving that very scary news, my mom and dad had a worship night at their house. I'll never forget it. I stood at the edge of the room that night, almost frozen in fear, but as I watched my mom and dad run into all the darkness and all the unknown ahead of them on this cancer journey with their hands raised in the air, praising God, the invitation to join them was almost irresistible. I ended up in the middle of the room praising God right beside them, and we encountered the peace and

the presence of God that night in a way that will mark me forever. We didn't have any answers or guarantees about my dad's health. But we had peace. The Lord was near. I wrote these words to "Find You Here" the next day:

*It's not the news that any of us hoped that we would hear
It's not the road we would have chosen
The only thing that we can see is darkness up ahead,
But You're asking us to lay our worries
down and sing a song instead*

*And I didn't know I'd find You here
In the middle of my deepest fear
But You are drawing near, You are overwhelming me with peace*

My dad is now cancer-free, and we're all so grateful, but I know my parents would have me say two things in light of their story: 1) Not all hard stories end this way (My family knows this well even in our own family history outside of my dad's journey.); and 2) There are no guarantees except for the faithfulness and love of Jesus, which has seen us through all the way to the cross and beyond into resurrection life that is waiting for us on the other side. Because we have that, we can look suffering dead in the eye and say, "I see you, but because of who Jesus is and because of what He did on the cross and because He walked out of the grave, you do not get the final word. Love wins in the end, and this is why we can 'rejoice always.' This is why we've always got a reason to sing."

I'm so grateful that God's promises are not only true today and every day for us, but they infuse us with the strength we need to keep rejoicing right in the face of our worries. We may be tempted to believe the lies that God isn't with us, that worrying will do more than approaching Him in prayer, that joy just isn't possible in this place. But here's the truth: *God is near*. He promises that, and in His presence, as we lay our needs and heart before Him, we can have both joy and peace. We really can. Lord, may Your nearness grant us peace and joy in the most unexpected places, even today.

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- What circumstances in your life make it difficult to “rejoice always”?
 - Have you ever experienced a peace or nearness from God that was unexplainable to your friends and family? What was that like?
 - I’ve heard Beth Moore say that these verses are like God’s prescription for peace. Take some time and write down the opposite of this truth. (For example, you could start off with “Complain in the Lord always. I will say it again: Complain!”) After you do this, take inventory. Does your life look like you are taking a prescription for peace or for anxiety?

🔥 Father, I pray You’ll grant me trust that You are near me in the midst of my worries, give me courage to present my needs and heart before You in total honesty, and infuse me with a deep gratitude that shifts my perspective in a drastic way. I thank You for the promise of peace that will come when I choose to rejoice in who You are no matter what I face.

REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS.

I WILL SAY IT AGAIN: REJOICE!

LET YOUR GENTLENESS BE EVIDENT TO ALL.

THE LORD IS NEAR.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING,
BUT IN EVERYTHING, THROUGH

PRAYER & PETITION
WITH THANKSGIVING

PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD.

AND
THE PEACE OF GOD,

WHICH SURPASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING, WILL

GUARD YOUR HEARTS & MINDS

IN CHRIST JESUS.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7 CSB



DAY

2

Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.

PSALM 143:8

So often I begin my days thinking through all the things that need to be done and all the things I've left undone. Is this sometimes true for you too? Don't get me wrong. I love knocking out a to-do list, but there are many days that I end up with a pile of unchecked boxes. Some days it feels like I'll never be able to get enough done to feel at peace. There are loose ends that need tying up, and balls that get dropped.

Beginning my days with the intention of all I will accomplish in a day usually sets me up for failure. It's not that this intention is bad. It's just that when I start my days like that, I end up measuring my worth by how much I get done or by how many boxes I check off that day; and if that's where my worth or value is coming from, it is far from secure.

I love how this prayer from Psalm 143 flips all of that on its head. Instead of beginning my days with a goal I need to reach to prove my worth or value, I can begin my day remembering that I am a beloved child, held in the arms of Unfailing Love. Instead of putting my hope in my ability to handle "all the things," I can put my hope in the One who holds all things together in the palm of His hand. What if the first thing we meditated on in the morning was God's trustworthiness and His powerful ability to lead us by His Spirit at every turn? What if that was our starting place?

The good news for us is that it can be. Each morning, the sun comes up, reminding us that God's unfailing love is waiting for us, and that His Spirit is able to show us the way we should go. A love like this? It won't ever fail, no matter what the to-do list looks like. What might happen if we began our days drenched in the love of God, and had open hands and hearts to simply go where He leads?

- How do you typically start your days?
 - What sort of messages come flooding in your mind when you wake up in the morning?
 - How can you ensure that your heart and mind hear a "word of God's unfailing love" on a daily basis?
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🔥 Lord, help me to begin my days reminding my forgetful soul of Your unfailing love. And from that place of knowing I'm loved, would You lead me through each moment and remind me that my trust is not in myself or in others or in my circumstances, but in You? I surrender my moments and my time to You today.

DAY

3

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

JOHN 8:12

This verse from John reminds me of a day I’ll never forget. We were visiting our cousin, who homeschools her children in Texas, and I overheard her read this verse from Psalm 139 to her children:

“If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,’ even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you” (Ps. 139:11–12).

She asked her boys, “If y’all are in a dark room, and you turn on a flashlight, what are you going to see?” They both piped in energetically, “The light!!” She said, “That’s right, boys, don’t you ever forget that the light is *always* stronger than the darkness.”

That simple and beautiful truth has stuck with me over the years. It has deeply encouraged me on some of the dark nights of the soul that I’ve walked through. It’s also been a truth I’ve shared with younger kids in my life. I’ll never forget the day I was explaining to a few six-year-old boys that light was always stronger than the darkness, and how they did *not* believe me! So I had them go test it out. I found a flashlight and said, “Go take this and turn it on in every dark place you can think of and let me know what you see!”

So they took that flashlight inside closets, under couches, and in bathrooms with the lights turned off. And you know what? *Every* time, they would scream, “Ellie!! The light IS stronger! We can see it!!”

I wrote a song about this on one of my kids’ EPs called “Light’s Always Stronger.” And really, I wrote it for every person, big and small, who has felt overwhelmed or lost in the darkness at times. My


prayer is that the song itself—and this beautiful verse that inspired the song from John 8:12—would remind us all that there is always hope because of Jesus. Here’s the chorus of that song. This is truth that I need to sing to myself over and over again, especially when I’m walking through those dark nights of the soul:

*The light is strong
Nothing can keep it from shining
Even here, here in the darkest night
No matter what, nothing can keep it from shining
No matter how scared we are,
The light’s always stronger.
The light’s always stronger than the dark.*

He’s the Light of the world who shines bright, no matter how dark the night gets. What if we really believed that about Jesus today? What if we spoke this truth into the dark places of our souls and lives, and watched just how strong the light of Christ can be for us? What if we held onto this verse, and spoke it into our loneliest nights, our deepest fears, and our hardest circumstances? I believe that we’d start exclaiming with a child-like, giddy delight,

“The light is stronger! We can see it!”

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- Why do you think it’s sometimes so hard to believe that light can overpower darkness?
 - In what certain situations do you sometimes choose to dwell in the dark instead of walking in the light?
 - How has Jesus been the “light of life” for you? How have you seen Him be “stronger” than the darkness for you?

 Lord, help me follow You, so that even in my darkest nights, I will have the “light of life.” Help me remember that Jesus is the Light of the world, and that He can scatter any darkness even when it feels like it’s closing in around me.

DAY

4

Jesus answered, “*It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’*”

MATTHEW 4:4, emphasis mine

Right after Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River, when the Spirit descends like a dove on Him and God says, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17), we read that Jesus is then led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1). I’m not sure about you, but this does not sound like the way we have celebrated baptisms in my family! It’s been forty days of fasting, and the enemy comes in with lies and temptations . . . isn’t that just like Satan? Coming in for the attack when we are tired, weary, lonely, and even hungry. (If it were me, I would have been HANGRY . . . the angry kind of hungry, if you know what I mean.)

This passage has always been hard for me to wrap my head around. Why on earth would Jesus begin His active ministry on earth after His baptism by wandering alone in the desert, being tempted by Satan? When I started memorizing Scripture over a decade ago, I remember telling my friend Sara how powerful it had been for me to be able to fight so many of the lies that I believe with God’s Word. I’ll never forget how she responded. She said, “That makes total sense. That’s how Jesus fought the lies of the enemy too. Remember in the desert? He’s out there for forty days wandering, hungry, and to every lie that the enemy whispers, Jesus responds with ‘It is written . . .’ and then He quotes Scripture. So really, you’re just following in His footsteps!”

My mouth dropped open. Of course Jesus would do this for us. He went first. He wandered in the wilderness and modeled what it looks like to shut down the attempts of the enemy for us. The weapon of choice? God's Word. "It is written." If Jesus used the Word of God to silence the enemy's lies, then that must mean that we can and should use God's Word in the same way, for we do "not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

Let's continue to feed our souls the words that come from the mouth of God, and hold tight to them when the enemy comes with every kind of lie or temptation. Thank You, God, that You provide for us, both physically and spiritually. Help us feast on Your Word and follow in the footsteps of Jesus, speaking the truth even when we're lost in the wilderness.

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- Describe a time in your life that felt like wandering in the wilderness. Were there any lies about God or yourself that you were tempted to believe, especially as you were walking through a seemingly desolate place?
 - Make a list of some of the lies you are prone to believe about yourself and about God, especially during wilderness seasons (if you can do this on notecards, even better!).
 - For every lie you write down, go find a verse that speaks truth over that lie. If you wrote the lies on notecards, write the truth on the back of the card. I call this an "It is Written" list, and it has been such a beautiful way for me to speak light into the darkness of the lies I am prone to believe. These are generally good verses to memorize as well, so you have them tucked in your heart for easy access when you need them the most.
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🔥 Thank You, God, that when we walk through wilderness seasons, we are not alone. Thank You for Your Word that speaks a stronger truth over any lie we'll ever be tempted to believe, and thank You for Your Son, the LIVING Word, who modeled out for us the way to hold onto the truth and speak it into the darkness. Help me to fight the lies that I so often believe with the truth from Your Word.

DAY

5

**“I have it all planned out.
Plans to take care of you, not abandon you.
Plans to give you the future you hope for.”**

JEREMIAH 29:11 MSG

Remember that famous scene in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* from The Chronicles of Narnia series? The one where Susan is surprised that the king of Narnia is a lion, and so she asks Mr. Beaver if Aslan is a *safe* lion? The answer is one of the best lines in all of literature: “Safe? . . . Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s *good*. He’s the King, I tell you.”¹


Some days I really need that reminder. Because life doesn’t feel safe in every single moment. In fact, it can feel so unsafe and unsteady some days that I start wondering if God is really and truly and deeply and fully good. And, by extension, I start wondering if His *plans* are good. I’m like Susan, wondering what sort of King this really is. Is He for me? Will He abandon me? Are His plans to be trusted?

Man, if I can remember that our King is good. That God’s heart toward me is kindness. That, just like this verse promises, *all* His plans for me are in my best interest. That, ultimately, His plans are good because *He* is good. Trusting these things would change the way I face my future . . . all the unknowns, and especially the way I walk through storms and trials in my life that feel shaky or unsafe.

I’m so thankful the King loves us enough to give us a hopeful future, and that His plans for us are good. When the lie closes in that tries to convince us of the opposite—that He really isn’t kind or that His plans are for our harm—let’s walk forward together holding on to this truth. Good kings make good plans. And our King? He’s really and

truly and deeply and fully good. That means any plan He makes can be trusted, including the one He has for us.

- What unsteady circumstances sometimes tempt you to believe God isn't good?
 - Do you believe God's heart toward you is kindness? Why or why not?
 - Look back over key moments in your own story. What parts of the journey seemed like God must've had the plans all wrong—only to find out later that His plan was actually far better for you than you ever could have seen in the moment?
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 Lord, help me believe that You are good all the way through, and that because of this, all Your plans for me will certainly be used somehow for my good. Help me to trust Your heart for me, even when I can't see all the ways this leg of the journey will play out.

DAY 6

But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I’ve called you by name, you are mine.”

ISAIAH 43:1

I started memorizing the last part of this verse with my little girl when she was just two years old! She was having a hard time memorizing it, so I made up a little song and started to sing it to her. We would sing it together on the nights that the dark felt scary and she couldn’t go to sleep. Sometimes it was a bad dream she had, and sometimes she was just afraid that there might be monsters under her bed.

As I’ve thought about my little girl’s fear, I’ve realized that her struggle isn’t isolated to childhood. Adults can live just as scared as little ones do. Instead of lurking under our bed, grown-up monsters tend to lurk in the shadows of our mind in the form of worst-case scenarios, don’t they? I know that’s true for me. My mom has also struggled with this. Once, when she was battling through a lot of fear, her counselor and pastor asked her this: “Debbie, what is the worst thing that could happen in this situation?”

She explained in detail what that would be, and then he said this: “Okay, if that happens—that worst-case scenario that you just laid out—would God still love you?”

She replied, “Yes.”

And then he asked, “Would you still love God?”


She answered again, “Yes.”

“Then I can tell you for certain that you are going to be okay because if you have the love of God to surround and support you, you can face anything.”

This particular promise from God’s Word helps me so much in the wildness of real life because, like that kind pastor pointed out to my mom, it doesn’t guarantee that we won’t be afraid or that scary circumstances will never come our way. It speaks a stronger truth into any fear that we might face. It reminds us that, even in the dark places where fear consumes us, nothing changes the fact that God has redeemed us, that He knows us, and that no matter how the story ends, we belong to Him. We are safe in Him now and forever, for His love surrounds us and supports us. Even in the worst of scenarios. *Especially* there. Singing this promise over my daughter and with her over the years has helped me lean into His safety in moments when fear is gripping me tight.

I’m so grateful that no matter how scared we are, God’s love and strength will hold us tighter than fear can. If I can remember that I am held in my scariest places, it changes everything and it helps me carry on with more courage than I could ever muster up on my own.

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- What are some unhealthy reactions you’ve previously had to fear? What are some healthy reactions you’ve seen in yourself?
 - How does it feel to know that in the middle of such scariness, God calls you by name? How does it change things to know you are His?
 - Even if your worst fear came true, would it change what is true about God?

 Father, thank You for meeting me in the darkness, calling me by name, and reminding me that I belong to You, even when life feels scary. Give me the strength to trust Your love in the dark, in the fear, and in the flood.

DAY

7

... And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

EPHESIANS 3:17–19

“Filled to the measure.” That is what I want for my broken heart: to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God's love. Can you imagine what the world could look like if this was true for all of us?

I have always adored this verse. I've prayed this prayer over so many people in my life, including myself. I've seen God answer this prayer too, time and time again, helping me and others understand just how deep His love runs for us. Deeper than our biggest fears, our worst failures, and our most painful wounds. Further above the highest level of love we've ever felt for someone else. Wider than the lengths we'd go for our own flesh and blood.

Like so many of my “fighting words” verses, it was such a joy when I wrote this verse into a song called “Wide, High, Long, Deep” for one of my children's EPs. Why? It's the truth that changes me the most, so in a sense, this truth is the kind of “song” that I actually want to get stuck in my head and my kids' heads, one that sings God's promise of abundant love over us! So often I feel like I'm unworthy and unable to make the mark. Unlovable and unlovely. And living in that state of mind forces me to go out into the world, looking for something to fill me up with value and worth and “okayness.” Wherever I go for that stuff, I find that it leaks out of my heart faster than I can put it in! But when I go back to the foundational truth of how high and wide

and long and deep the love of God is for me—all without me trying to make myself lovely before Him—I approach life from a place of fullness rather emptiness, of “loved” instead of “unloved,” of “valued” instead of “worthless.” It fills me up to the measure, and instead of looking to the world to fill me up or validate me, I am able to walk into the world with something to give away.

This is the verse I pray over myself when I am nervous about going to a gathering or an event. Do you ever feel that way, like sometimes you walk into a scenario as an adult that makes you feel like you’re smack-dab, back in a middle school cafeteria again . . . unsure of who you are, if you belong, and who to talk to or connect with? Maybe that’s just me, but this verse shifts my perspective beautifully whenever I am feeling insecure. It reminds me that because of who God is, I can feel lonely, and yet I’m never really alone. I can feel awkward, and yet know that I’m embraced. I can feel unsteady about who I am and remember that even on the days I forget who I am and who God made me to be, I am grounded and anchored in Love. It’s my favorite party trick, because all of the sudden my focus goes off of my insecurities to the secure and steady nature of God’s love for me, and once I land there. I’m able to stop thinking about myself so much and get to the business of really seeing other people more clearly and loving them abundantly, in the same way God loves me.

Let’s pray today that we would remain “rooted and established” in God’s *love*. Let’s think on how high and wide and deep this *love* really goes. May *love* fill in all the gaps, and as we meditate on and ground ourselves in how much He loves us, may it transform our broken hearts into cups that run over with love.

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- In what areas of life do you feel unlovable or unlovely?
 - In what ways do you sometimes go out into the world in search of its love and validation?
 - Have you ever had a season where God’s love was taking up so much space in your heart and mind that you felt “filled to the measure”? What was that like?
 - How can you seek to be filled up by God’s love today?
-

🔥 Lord, pour out Your love on me today, and help it overflow in my own heart and into the lives of others. Help me approach life from a place of Your fullness and validation instead of looking to other places to make me feel worthy. Help me grasp how wide and high and long and deep Your love is for me, because when I truly understand that, everything changes.

DAY

8

The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

PSALM 27:1

Of all my “fighting words” verses, I’ll never forget how this one ended up in my life. I began memorizing this verse many years ago after someone had broken into our home and stolen our TV and some other things. Has that ever happened to you—a break-in? If so, you probably remember that day as one where it wasn’t just a person who broke into your home, but when fear broke into your heart, which is something that lingers a lot longer than thieves do.

After the break-in, I was frozen in fear as I went to bed each night, but I had a friend tell me that if I would continue proclaiming God’s Word, even when I didn’t feel like or trust that it was true, that His Word would prevail. I said this verse out loud many nights, for months, over and over again, and still felt terrified. I wrote this verse and several others on cards and taped them up all over the house so I could be reminded of the truth, and while those cards were wonderful reminders, I still felt fearful. But one night, something finally clicked, and I felt this weight lift off of my chest because I actually started believing that God was my stronghold. If the Lord is truly the One holding onto me, then there is nothing I have to fear.

Whatever it is that is breaking into your life right now, trying to steal your joy and peace, my prayer is that you’ll hold on to His promises, friend. Because when *those* break into your life, nothing can hold you captive any longer. He is faithful. He’s a stronghold. He’s a light. We don’t have to be afraid.

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- What situation in your life feels like it is “breaking in” to steal your joy and peace?
 - Do you give God the same room in your life to “break in” compared to the room you allow for fear to break in? Why or why not?
 - A stronghold is “a place that has been fortified so as to protect it against attack.” Think of the picture of God as a stronghold. How does the image of God as a stronghold relate to the lies that try to break into your heart?
 - Take some time to write this verse and a few others out on cards to hang up around your home. What might happen for you if you had reminders of the truth in front of your eyes on a regular basis?

🔥 Lord, break in. Break into my fear and my worries. Break into the places I feel paralyzed, and replace my terror with trust. Help me remember that You are my faithful stronghold, my light, no matter how deep the darkness is around me.

DAY

9

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. . . . Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

ISAIAH 53:3A, 4-5

Have you ever had seasons full of pain and loss? My husband, Drew, and I walked through a season of about four years of seemingly senseless suffering and sorrow. We have a vibrant community, but in that period of time, so many different people we love dearly walked through deeply painful circumstances. We had dear friends experience everything from anxiety to depression to years of infertility to addiction to a cancer diagnosis to a divorce, and we walked with two different families who lost children. We were raw and weary as we journeyed through blow after heart-breaking blow with our people.

It was during that excruciatingly painful season that I began to cling tightly to this verse. It was such a comfort to know that even as our hearts were breaking, God broke too. He sent His Son to be broken for us so we could know we would never be alone in the brokenness. During that difficult season, we encountered the companionship and comfort of the Man of Sorrows Himself. We often didn't know the right words to pray during that season, but we did experience healing, as God met our aching hearts with His very presence, and it was this that inspired Drew and I to write the song "Man of Sorrows":


*Lord, You're aching with me
Help me to believe
That when my soul is lost in the storm
You're acquainted with my grief*

*Man of Sorrows, what a name
Bore our suffering, bore all of our shame
Man of Sorrows, broken sinners to reclaim
You overcame the darkness, and walked out of the grave*

One of our friends who lost his little boy just days after he was born has said this: "I think God's answer to suffering might be, 'Me too.'" Isn't that powerful? God suffered too. He suffered for us, so we could know that suffering never gets the final word. Jesus was broken for us, so we could know our brokenness is never the end of the story. He walked out of a grave with scars on His resurrected body, so we could know that this scarred God-man defeated death. "By his wounds, we are healed."

Lord, help us remember that this verse carries both the promise of ultimate healing, but also the promise of the companionship and comfort in the middle of our deepest places of sorrow.

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- Whatever pain or loss you're facing (or have faced), how does it encourage you to know that your God deeply understands what suffering is like?
 - Who are your people, and what kind of sorrows do they carry today? How might God be leading you to simply show up for them right now?
 - We all face seasons of "blow after heart-breaking blow." What ultimate blow did Christ take for you? How does this truth change the way you face hard seasons?
-

 Jesus, I praise You for choosing the way of suffering that I might have a companion in my own journey through it. You know the sorrows I carry today, and I entrust them to You right now, for You understand the depth of them even more than I do. Help me remember that You endured the greatest version of pain and loss on the cross—on my behalf! Let Your endurance through sorrow empower mine today and use me as an instrument of comfort in the lives of others.

DAY
10

“And surely I am with you always,
to the very end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:20

I don't know what the Covid-19 pandemic was like for you. But goodness, for me, I felt so isolated. I missed hugging people. I missed proximity to others. I missed going to concerts, being in a room full of other people singing along to songs they know and love. I missed being at church and standing in line as we waited to take communion together. I missed busy restaurants and children playing happily with other kids at the playground. I missed gathering with our friends and families on holidays and birthdays.

Maybe you missed the same things. And maybe, even today, there are a whole host of other reasons outside of a global pandemic that you feel alone. After all, viruses aren't the only things in this world that make a person feel isolated. No matter the reason behind our feelings of loneliness, Jesus speaks this truth over us loud and clear: YOU ARE NOT ALONE. I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS.

It's true. We're not alone! I know it *felt* that way for such a long time, and probably still feels that way. Pandemic or not, these days can feel isolated for so many reasons, and if you are feeling that way right now, I hope you'll lean in close to hear the truth . . . *Love is with you.*


God is love, and while you may not be able to feel Him some days, it doesn't change the truth that He's got you right in the palm of His hand. When we pray for our friends and family, a lot of times my kids will ask if we can just sing “He's got the whole world in His hands,” but they put our friends' and family's names in the song. “He's got Bebe and Pop Pop in His hands.” Maybe it's just the singer

in me, and maybe you'll think it's silly, but I cannot *help* imagining what it would be like if we sung this over ourselves right now. Even if it seems strange at first, try singing it over yourself . . . or speaking it, if singing feels too uncomfortable for you! (Or whisper-sing if you are in a public place and do not want anyone to hear you!) No matter what, just sit in this truth for a moment:

*“He’s got (put your name here) in His hands!
He’s got (put your name in here) in His hands!
He’s got (put your name in here) in His hands!
He’s got the whole world in His hands!”*

I know you may not have liked how that sounded or that you might have felt too self-conscious to sing that out loud, but more than anything, I hope we can let this simple song carry a simple truth deep into our souls. I hope you can sense today that beneath you and around you are Everlasting arms, and I hope you'll lean into them and let out the sadness and fear and worry. He can take and hold it all. It's okay for us to lament and grieve what we have lost. Considering everything we have faced as a globe, it's appropriate for goodness sake; but it's also so appropriate and important to hold onto the hope that: we aren't on our own, God's got full control of the world and its future, and suffering has an expiration date!

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- When Covid-19 descended upon the world, what was it like for you?
 - How does Jesus' promise in this verse give you hope for today and tomorrow?
 - How might you walk differently through seasons of isolation if you believed that this verse was true?

 God, I feel so alone sometimes. But I give You praise and thanks for being with me always, regardless of how I feel. Thank You for holding me in Your everlasting arms, not just today, but “to the very end of the age.”

DAY 11

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

JAMES 1:5


I cannot tell you the amount of times I've fixated on a problem, let a conflict or decision circle around and around in my head, and asked everyone and their mother what they thought that I should do about it, all in an effort to search for wisdom from the people I trust. Maybe you can relate.

I'm not saying that seeking wise counsel from others is wrong, because the wisdom of others can be a wonderful gift. But when I recently read this promise from God's Word, I was undone. So often, God seems to be the *last* person I turn to when I am really needing wisdom, and here is this promise, plain as day, saying that He gives wisdom generously to all without finding fault! He doesn't get frustrated when we don't have the wisdom we need for all the things life throws at us! This verse actually presumes that we will lack wisdom at times, and the good news is that when we ask Him for wisdom, His Word says He will give it . . . *generously*.

This verse has helped me immensely. It's not that I never ask trusted mentors and friends for advice or for wisdom anymore; it's just that God is becoming my first ask. And you know what? I've found that even the act of bringing the decision or conflict or situation before Him calms my fretful heart.

Do you need wisdom today? So do I. Let's ask God for it. He'll give it to us!

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- When you evaluate your life right now, in what areas or circumstances do you lack wisdom?
 - How does it feel to know that God is not frustrated with you for lacking the wisdom, but instead, desires to give it to you generously?
 - In which situations of life are you seeking the wisdom of people before the wisdom of God? Why?
 - How might your life and conflicts look different if God was your first ask?
-

 God, help me remember that when I lack wisdom, You long to generously fill that lack. Give me the courage to come to You and ask you for wisdom first before seeking out the thoughts of others. In all the situations that are on my mind, please fill me with Your wisdom and send Your Word to be a “lamp for my feet, a light for my path” (Ps. 119:105).

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JAMES 1:5 NIV

