



HOPE IN THE MIDST OF ANXIETY

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VOLUME 4 of *Tyndale Voices* features thought-provoking content from books on anxiety. As you read, listen to the heart of each author and respond to the challenges offered through their words.



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IT'S ALL UNDER CONTROL

JENNIFER DUKES LEE NEVER THOUGHT she struggled with control. As long as everything went exactly the way she wanted it to, she was *totally flexible*. But then Jennifer discovered what happens when you try to wrap your arms around everything, thinking it's all on you: You get burned out on hustle. You toss and turn more at night, and you laugh less during the day. You're so busy—caring, serving, working, and trying so hard—that you can't even hear God's voice anymore.

It's time to get our control under control. Fellow control freak Jennifer Dukes Lee will help you discover a new way of living that will free you to be *you*, and finally experience the peace of knowing a God who truly has it **all under control**. In chapter 5, "Hang On," Jennifer explains why "let go and let God" is sometimes bad advice.



JENNIFER DUKES LEE is the author of *The Happiness Dare* and *Love Idol*. She is a popular blogger, a writer for DaySpring's (in)courage, and a speaker at women's conferences across the United States. Her words have been featured on numerous podcasts and radio programs, as well as Proverbs 31 Ministries, Fox News *Opinion*, and *Today's Christian Woman*. Jennifer and her husband live on the family farm, where they raise crops, pigs, and two humans. She attends a small country church where some Sundays you'll find her spinning tunes as the church deejay. She's a big fan of dark chocolate, emojis, eighties music, bright lipstick, and Netflix binges. She wants to live in such a way that you can't help but want more of Jesus.

Hang On

Finding the Courage to Do Really Hard Things

Sometimes “let go and let God” is bad advice.

Let’s all take a deep breath and not let that sentence scare us.

You probably picked up this book because you’re tired of feeling like you’re on the hook for everything. Yet “let go and let God” sounds impractical. What does that even mean?

I asked myself the same question after I said yes to that irresistible invitation from Jesus. After accepting his offer, I knew I needed to open my hands to him. God can’t put anything into these hands when they are tightened into fists.

I want to trust God with all that I have and all that I am. I don’t want to keep my fists closed around my preferences. There’s definitely stuff I need to let go of. My inner Driver needs to let go of worry, outcomes, an overscheduled life, my ideas of success. My inner Devoter needs to let go of the belief that I’m single-handedly in charge of my kids’ spiritual growth. And my inner Darling needs to let go of the desire to win your approval.

Yet I can’t shake this truth: It’s anti-gospel to simply “let go” of it all. Picking up crosses and following Jesus is the hardest work we will ever know. We can’t divorce ourselves from responsibility, nor would we want to. We are the women who aren’t afraid of a challenge, who

aren't afraid of hard work, and who make an impact on this world when we operate with our God-given superpowers as Drivers, Devoters, and Darlings.

Furthermore, some of what we're called to do on a daily basis is actually quite satisfying, and I don't feel like God wants me to "let go" of that. (I don't apologize for the fact that I am as excited at eight o'clock on a Monday morning as some people are at five o'clock on a Friday afternoon.)

The question, then, is this: When do we let go, and when do we hang on?

Most Christians I know are very uncomfortable with the idea that God might actually want us to hang on to anything at all. It feels like an affront to his sovereignty. I know this because I have been one of those people. I own a mug that says, "Let Go and Let God." I have titled several blog posts using those five words. I've probably whispered that phrase to a dozen friends over the years. They needed more than a cliché, but it's all I had at the time. And as a result, I probably have some apologizing to do.

I understand why "letting go" becomes our default phrase when we want to live surrendered to Jesus. "Letting go" definitely sounds more Jesus-approved than "hanging on." Hanging on feels tight and squeezed. It feels like someone stuffed eight bags of kitty litter in a duffel bag and asked us to carry it across Manhattan. It feels like we're trying to run the show or like we think God clocked out for the weekend. It's all on you and me, baby.

But the phrase "let go and let God" continues to befuddle so many women I know (though we might be afraid to confess it during Tuesday night Bible study). We don't know how to practically *do* what those words ask of us. We can't walk away from every difficult relationship, for instance. We can't ignore the phone, the list of obligations, our God-given calling to help take care of our square of the earth and dependent humans in diapers.

Imagine you are standing at a crossroads with signs pointing in two directions. One is marked “Let go.” The other is marked “Hang on.” You think you have to pick one direction and walk that way forever. That’s not true.

Here’s the truth that no one ever tells us—or at least that no one ever told me: You don’t have to pick one road and walk that path for the rest of your life. Gospel living is not an either/or question. It’s both/and. It’s coming back to that fork in the road every day—with every decision, every obligation, and every relationship—and asking God to help you choose.

This is the crossroads where we finally learn what’s ours to control, and what’s not. To be truly surrendered to Christ, sometimes you’ve got to walk the road that says “Hang on.” When you walk that road, you will have to hang on tighter than you thought you could. Other times, you’ll have to walk the road of letting go.

How will you know which way to walk? You’ll know because you don’t stand at the crossroads alone, left to your own devices. “Your teacher will be right there, local and on the job, urging you on whenever you wander left or right: ‘This is the right road. Walk down this road’” (Isaiah 30:21, MSG).

In a moment of clarity, you will know which way to go. That direction may come after reading Scripture or praying, talking with a trusted friend or mentor, or experiencing a change in circumstances. (In chapter 6, I’ll also introduce you to the Decision Tree, a tool I use to filter requests for my time or attention.) When that clarity comes, trust the wisdom that God has given you, as scary as it is, and then take the next step. As you step out in faith, God’s peace will prevail—and that peace can come both in the letting go and in the hanging on. Sometimes the Spirit will guide you to let go, even though you’ve always thought the only godly response was to hang on. You’ve got to know that there are times in your life when what you’re hanging on to is unhealthy. We’ll talk about letting go in the next chapter.

But sometimes, the Spirit will say to you, *Don't you dare let go. I will help you hang on tight.* As the great prophet Kenny Rogers once said, "You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em."

THE HARD WORK OF HANGING ON

The day was cool and foggy, like all the clouds had fallen to kiss the streets of San Francisco. I had come to this iconic city with girlfriends, and we took it all in: the wharf, the bridges, the blue Pacific stretching out to forever. We lingered at sidewalk cafés and little flower stands. A lifelong Iowan, I felt like I had landed on a new planet: a shimmering city set on a thousand hills, all enveloped by mist. We took several trips on cable cars, riding up and down hilly tracks. The view from the cable car was, of course, spectacular. If there was room for me on the cable car platform, I loved standing on it, right on the edge, holding tightly to the shiny handles, skimming over the streets while the wind whistled in my ears. As we crested each hill, San Francisco opened her arms wider, revealing more and more of the breathtaking bay and Alcatraz Island, which rose up like a fortress from the water.

During one cable car trip, there was no room for me on the platform, so I sat near the driver, watching with interest as he operated it. Cable car drivers are called gripmen because, as the name suggests, they are in charge of a lever that controls the "grip," a viselike mechanism that latches on to the cable like a giant pair of pliers. The job of latching on to the cable requires terrific upper body strength from the gripmen, who hold the lever. If their hold on the lever is too weak, the grip mechanism will not be able to grab the cable tightly, and it will slip on the cable. When that happens, the gripmen have to stop, back the car down the hill, and start over.

There comes a point when the gripmen will eventually let go of the lever in their hands, but for long stretches of the journey, they have to do this: hang on tight.

That's the way it is for us.

There will be times when you simply can't let go. You've got to hang on tight, as if your life depends upon it. It will feel like you've hitched a ride on the back side of a hurricane. Your hands will get calloused and cramped. This isn't the kind of surrender we usually hear about, is it? This kind of sweat-on-the-brow surrender is fiery and wild. It will ask so much of you that it will hurt.

Perhaps you will be able to let go later. But not yet.

Don't let go when it gets difficult. Let go only when it's time.

Until then, hang on.

I understand how tempting it is to quit, especially when it's hard.

Let's have a frank conversation here about "letting go." Letting go can easily become a defeatist response to avoid the pain of holding on. It can be a knee-jerk reaction when we are certain that we don't have it in us to hang on anymore. Honestly, when we talk ourselves into "letting go," sometimes it's a way of spiritualizing an exit from the hard stuff.

Think back to times when you've heard (or said) comments like these:

"I thought God wanted me to pursue grad school, but it's so hard, and I can't keep up with the work. Maybe I should quit and trust that God has another door open for me." So we let go.

"This election is a disaster, so I'm not voting. I'm going to 'let go and let God' because he's got it all under control." Again, we let go.

"I'm so mad at my church friends. Starting next Sunday, I'm done with this church." Once more, we let go.

"What's happening in [insert name of developing country] is really sad. I'm glad God has this situation under control." You can see where this is headed. Feeling absolved by God's sovereignty, people might brush their hands together, avert their eyes, and walk away without taking needed action.

Do we let go because it's too hard to hang on? Do we let go because it's too messy? "Letting go" can be the escape hatch we take so that we feel justified in backing away.

"I'm done," we say. "God's got this."

It's absolutely true that our sovereign God is in control of our relationships, kids, and finances. It's also true that God can single-handedly do anything he chooses to resolve social injustice and world hunger. But before you let go, ask yourself if God is calling you into the hard work of hanging on. In this age, he tends to use Spirit-empowered people to do his work—*the hard work of hanging on*—to make a broken world better.

God can perform any miracle he wants, but what if that miracle is you? What if God is calling you to be an everyday gripman, to partner with him to keep the car on the track?

God works in so many ways, and quite often, he does that work through *actual human beings* who are willing to show up when it's inconvenient. We can't afford to hide behind God's sovereignty when he's calling us onto the battlefield.

That truth is vividly illustrated in a parable-like story I heard years ago about a Christian man caught in a storm with extreme flooding. Despite warnings to leave his home, the man decided to wait the storm out and trust God to save him through divine intervention.

Neighbors offered to drive the man away from oncoming floodwaters. But he declined, saying he had faith God would save him.

Next, someone in a canoe paddled by his house, offering him a ride as the waters continued to rise. The man declined, saying he had faith God would save him.

The waters rose higher, so he climbed onto his roof. A helicopter pilot dropped a rope ladder, but still the man refused, saying he had faith God would save him.

The man drowned.

In heaven, the man asked God, “I put my faith in you, so why didn’t you save me?”

God responded, “I sent you a car. I sent you a canoe. I sent you a helicopter. What else were you looking for?”

God sends help through ordinary people called into service. Sometimes you will be the miracle for other people. Sometimes other people will be the miracle for you. They will show up with a car, a ladder, a foil-covered casserole dish, a hug. And in that moment, you’ll be so grateful that someone cared enough to commit to the hard work of hanging on. For you.

WHEN THE MIDDLE IS THE HARDEST

I know how hard it is. Hanging on is painful, especially when you’re in the middle.

For instance, in work projects, I’m a great starter. And if I get to the end, I’m a decent finisher. But I can be downright awful in the middle—when the sparkle of the beginning has long since faded and the finish line is a speck in the distance.

Take marriage, for instance.

I remember the picture-perfect start after my wedding to Scott:

Our reception was held in an old gymnasium in Marathon, Iowa, a block from the home where I grew up. It was the gym where I played seventh-grade basketball, where I attended my first prom. With a small army of volunteers, we transformed the gym into a wedding hall. Miles of crepe paper were draped around that stinky gym in an act of decorating prowess that would have sent Pinterest into a tailspin of horror. Our dinner reception was served by a bunch of middle-aged fellows wearing greasy aprons who worked with Dad at the farmers’ grain cooperative. They grilled turkey fillets. Potato salad was heaped in cumulonimbus clumps upon flimsy plastic plates.

To us, it felt first-class fancy—this unglamorous wedding reception,

lit up with thousands of twinkling lights strung from the basketball hoops to the fake ficus trees. It was a fairy-tale beginning to what—we hoped—would be our happily ever after.

We danced until midnight under the rafters. When the band slowed things down a bit, I nestled my head under Scott's chin, feeling his warm breath coming out in long exhales into my hair, as the vocalist crooned into the microphone, "Could I have this dance for the rest of my life?"

That was the beginning. Hanging on looked romantic, effortless.

Then came the middle.

The needle scratched across the record. It didn't happen in a day, but in a series of months that turned to years. We woke up and realized that someone had short-circuited the electricity in the marriage, and we both blamed the other person for faulty wiring.

The middle was hard. There were nights where we yelled the dreaded *d*-word—*divorce*—even though neither of us truly meant it. Whole seasons passed where it seemed as if we couldn't agree on anything: next steps in the career, the color of the drapes, politics. In the midst of heated arguments, it felt like letting go would have been the easier choice—particularly the week we decided to work together to tile and grout the bathroom floor. (Pro tip: If you care about your marriage, don't take on a tiling project together.)

Yes, hanging on is hard in the middle. At the altar, we pledged "for better or for worse." In the midst of the struggle, we discovered that sometimes, the better comes *after* the worse.

Technically, Scott and I are still in the "middle." We are more than two decades past our grand start, and, God willing, we are still decades from the finish.

This is what's keeping our marriage strong in the middle: the hard work of hanging on. This is not prescriptive for those of you who are in abusive relationships. By all means, *no*. What I am saying is this: Just

because something is hard work doesn't mean it's wrong or should be abandoned.

Maybe one of these situations sounds familiar to you:

You start a new job with great anticipation, but you are suddenly overwhelmed by the responsibility. *It's hard work.*

You begin writing a book, starting an overseas mission, getting your degree, but when you think you're close to a breakthrough, you see a giant hill up ahead. *It's hard work.*

At the starting line of a marriage, your "I do" carries all of your best hopes. But months or years later, marriage isn't all that you thought it would be. *It's hard work.*

When hard times come, the temptation to quit will be great. In those moments, most of us will ask God to take the hardest parts away. But deep inside of us, we want more than an easier life: We want Jesus to prove himself bigger than the struggle.

When you want to quit, hear God speak with blazing urgency: "Do not give up" (2 Chronicles 15:7, NIV).

I love how those verses are translated in the English Standard Version: "But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded."

Refuse to give in to the temptation to give up. Refuse to pray only for the hard to go away. Pray for a faith bigger than the hard. "Do not let your hands be weak." Pray for hands that will grip tight when God tells you to hang on.

Hang on. Yes, it's hard, but it might not be time to let go.

Hang on. You might be the miracle someone was praying for.

Hang on. This might be only a season, with relief around the corner.

Hang on. A great crowd of witnesses is cheering for you.

Hang on. When you hang on with bravery, you emotionally strengthen others who are struggling to hang on themselves. You're showing them that it's possible to do hard things.

Hang on. If you are uniquely positioned to do something to make the world a better place, even if it's hard, you should do it.

Hang on. For your marriage. For your kids. For your church. For the people that your ministry bravely serves. For the hurting. For your friends who don't know if they can hang on anymore.

Hang on. Because Jesus will meet you in the middle of your hardest battles.

Some struggles aren't resolved in a day. Many heartfelt prayers aren't quickly answered. In that moment you want to quit, wait one moment longer because that's often when the miracle happens.

Hang on.

DON'T GIVE UP

Scott and I had to hang on tight a few years ago when uncertainty hit our farm like a punch to the gut. Four days after my accident on that icy highway, Scott's father, Paul, died of leukemia. This meant that Scott would not only grieve the loss of his father and business partner, he would also care for the land alone. A law-school graduate who had only recently decided to return to the farm, Scott was still fairly new to the business. Sure, he'd grown up on this fourth-generation Lee family farm. But it's one thing to haul grain and feed pigs when you're a teenager. It's quite another to make decisions about what kind of seed to use, when to sell your grain, and what to do when your pigs—your own investment—start getting sick.

Paul died in the cold of winter. That spring, we were so grateful for the mercy of God during this trying time. Our crops grew tall, thickening over the rows so everything green was touching. There was something so beautiful and hopeful about that. It felt like everything was going to be okay, even though Paul's old John Deere cap drooped, sad, on a nail by the back door.

We had hope.

But then October came. Not a single plant had been harvested when we awoke one morning to find a thick white blanket of snow covering all the crops. The snow stole the hopefulness we'd felt earlier that year.

Late that afternoon, a farmer who lived a few miles away tapped his knuckles on the back door. I opened it and found him standing on the doormat with his fists shoved into a thick quilted jacket with a corduroy collar. He showed up at our house on a really hard day, during a really hard year.

The farmer's eyes looked softer than I'd remembered.

"Scott home yet?" he asked.

"No," I told him. "Still doing chores."

"Well," the farmer continued, "you just tell him that I stopped by because I want him to know something for certain. I want him to know that the harvest always comes. You'll let him know?"

I nodded my head, feeling a catch in my throat.

The farmer had come to remind us, in his own way, what the Bible says about hope in hard times. "At the proper time we will reap a harvest *if we do not give up*" (Galatians 6:9, NIV, emphasis added).

Friend, I don't know what harvest you're waiting for. I don't know what storm has stolen your hope. Maybe you're reading these words when you're on your last dime, at the end of your frayed rope, or on the ragged brink of your sanity as a stay-at-home mom. God sees you. He sees how you've been pouring into the people you love and what you've been pouring into your everyday work. And he wants you to know that your dedication is not in vain. "At the proper time we will reap a harvest *if we do not give up.*"

Don't give up.

Today I'm the friend at your back door, tapping my knuckles to see if you're home. I'm standing here on your doormat to tell you the same thing the old farmer told me: "The harvest always comes."

And I'm here to tell you that the farmer was right. Weeks after he stood on our stoop, the harvest *did* come. The snow melted, and Scott

drove the old green combine back and forth across a gently sloping hill the color of a lion's mane and sheared it all.

Don't give up, friend. Hang on when God tells you to hang on. He is still in this.

Today's the day to believe it: At the proper time, you will reap a harvest, just as he promised.

CRACKING THE CONTROL CODE

At the crossroads. When something is really hard, it can be difficult to know whether God wants you to stop or push harder.

Often God will offer a moment of clarity. Sometimes it will come through the wise counsel of a friend, a Scripture verse, or a message from a trusted preacher. Sometimes you will need to take a break in order to gain proper perspective.

Do you have something you're wondering if you need to hang on to? On a slip of paper, write down a word or phrase to represent the situation you're in or the decision you need to make. Stick it in the pages of your Bible like a bookmark near Isaiah 30:21, which reads: "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it'" (NIV). Or you can find a beautiful printable of this verse on my website, www.ItsAllUnderControlBook.com/Resources. Print off the verse and post it in a place where you can read it every day.

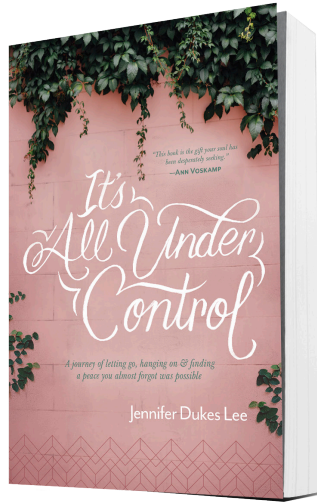
Each morning for one week, read that verse. Ask God's guidance about the situation on your paper.

If, after a week, you're still having difficulty discerning whether you should hang on or let go, ask yourself these questions:

- *If I let go, will I regret it?*
- *Is the end goal (and the required work) in alignment with my values and biblical principles?*
- *Do I want to stop because it's hard or because it's time?*
- *How do I envision this situation in ten hours? In ten days? In ten years?*
- *Can I envision God, who began a good work in me, carrying this out to completion?*

You may need to consult with people who will be honest with you about whether it's time to quit or keep going. Just because something's hard doesn't mean it's wrong or a mistake. It can be easy to quit when you're discouraged, especially when you don't see desired results.

However, if you are hanging on to something that isn't good for you—such as a toxic or damaging relationship—you may be too close to the situation to see clearly. Ask a counselor or trusted adviser to help you see what you can't see on your own.



It's All Under Control is a book for every woman who is hanging on tight and trying to get each day right—yet finding that life often feels out of control and chaotic. Join Jennifer on the journey of learning how to:

Overcome the anxieties and worries that burden your heart

Prioritize your busy life so you can make choices that align with God's best for you

Find freedom through a new “Do, Delegate, or Dismiss” approach to your daily tasks

Let go of what God has *not* asked you to do, so you can shine at what he *has*.

<https://www.tyndale.com/p/its-all-under-control/9781496430465>

COURAGE, DEAR HEART

OUR WORLD IS CHAOTIC and often feels dark and devoid of hope. And it's not just the headlines we see every day. Our relationships are broken. A loved one's health is failing. We're disoriented and restless and wrestling with fear. These things are the reality of living in a fallen world. But our God is over that world. He is present in the midst of the daily ache of life. He loves us in the midst of that ache.

In a series of eleven letters, Rebecca Reynolds writes to the lonely, the weary, the restless and afraid—anyone who feels the ache of our broken world and their broken life—and provides perspective and hope to find where God is in the midst of it. “God hasn’t promised us a trouble-free walk on earth,” says Reynolds, “but He has promised to make our troubles meaningful. I’ve been lonely, but I believe God can use my loneliness to minister to yours. You’ve been lonely, but I believe God can use your loneliness to minister to someone else’s.” In her book, *Courage, Dear Heart*, Rebecca Reynolds uses imagery to breathe truth to the lonely, the weary, the restless, and afraid. In chapter 3, “Bird with a Broken Wing”, she writes from personal experience to those who are suffering deep in their spirit and need to express their pain, sharing what she has learned about how to relate to God in the midst of pain.



REBECCA K. REYNOLDS spends most weekdays teaching rhetoric, philosophy, and literature to high school juniors and seniors. As a humanities instructor in a classical Christian school, she has been given the opportunity to keep a finger on the pulse of the upcoming generation. As the lyricist for Ron Block of Alison Krauss and Union Station, Rebecca has also had the opportunity to play with words and culture for a broader audience. In her free time, Rebecca also writes for award-winning music artist Andrew Peterson's website, *The Rabbit Room*, and sister website, *Story Warren*. She has been a featured speaker at their annual national gatherings, Hutchmoot and Inkwel.

LETTER 3

Bird with a Broken Wing: A Letter to the Long-Suffering

She told me about a line of locust trees that stood outside her bedroom. On the first day that he hurt her, she said, her mind left her body to climb those branches so she could hide far off the earth—so far that she wouldn't feel anything at all. When her father hit her mother in the kitchen, she hid behind the living-room couch and traced the upholstery pattern with her finger. It was one of those old-school, bark-cloth couches that make your bare legs sweat and itch in the summer—a '70s cowboys-and-Indians print, with arms made out of wood.

“I don't know why I remember that stuff,” she said, almost apologizing. I told her remembering made sense to me. Ivan Ilych, Tolstoy's dying protagonist, turns his face to the back of a couch so that he can stare at a button. Zooming in makes an unbearable world feel small enough to manage.

Six years ago, we needed to board a rickety plane owned by the second-most-deadly airline in the world. Hurricane warnings were all over the news that day, and train tracks were being washed away by floods. We couldn't wait the storm out—we had to fly to pick up the son we were adopting, but I could barely move my legs to walk up the ramp, they were shaking so badly.

We made our ascent through black skies, and I thought the turbulence would shake my teeth out of their sockets. As we broke through the worst of the clouds, the seams of the plane gasped and creaked, and out the window, everything below was a sea of purple for miles and miles and miles. Sunlight falling on those clouds was otherworldly, a sick, pale, iridescent yellow. The storm was made of mammoth Fibonacci twists—inky indigos bloodied by red-plum stains, foamy amethysts, dirty billows ignited by flashes of internal fire.

This was Prospero's brew from *The Tempest*, and I knew I was going to die. My whole body went weak. I thought that I should pray, but all I could do was whisper, "Save us," and then count slowly: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 . . . forward and backward, pinching my second finger and thumb together in a pulse. Sometimes you freeze and count to ten, or you stare at a button, or you hide behind the couch and trace the lines of the upholstery.

My friend said, "Yes. That's what it's like. That's exactly it."

She took a deep breath and walked me inside the home where he had hurt her. Time had worn it down, turned it so fragile that even our breath seemed to make the walls of her memories shudder. As she shut the door behind us, I saw her hand flutter, searching for something. It landed on a light switch, and she flipped it on as if she were pulling the pin of a grenade. A dud. No electricity. We'd have to make our way in the dark. I hit my iPhone flashlight, and she grabbed my arm so I could follow her.

"Here's the kitchen," she said. As she yanked a ratty curtain to the side, a window over the sink let in a wash of gray light. She pulled the refrigerator door open. No food inside, no hum of current. A dead fly. We breathed in air that had been trapped inside a metal box for two decades.

The sink was ringed with a brown line. Her mom and dad had yelled at each other in that room, severe words that turned like dirty water caught in an eternal drain, flying round and round but never leaving the room.

Down the hall was the bathroom where my friend used to cry in the shower until she puked. She ran her hands over the hot and cold

taps, cranking them until they made dry heaves. Cave crickets launched themselves like men from cannons, blasting their little brains against the cold ceramic.

She told me she was nine here once, making a naked ball of herself while the water hit her back in needles. She told me how she rocked back and forth on her toes and sucked the tears off her own knees until she made four purple marks. The water tasted like salt and Irish Spring soap, and she wanted to stay behind that locked door forever.

We walked down steps into the crude basement where words shot like bullets. These shelves had once held canning jars full of skinless peaches and blanched tomatoes. Now there were just four half-empty gallons of white paint with their lids rusted shut. They sat at the base of the wall where he had held her by the throat.

Back up the staircase, we climbed against the creak and groan of that old place. She showed me the closet where she went to hide—a sweet darkness where she learned to make herself invisible. “It would have been easier if I hadn’t loved them,” she said, “but children kiss the hand that strikes them.”

“Show me where you prayed for Jesus to stop it,” I asked. She took me to the living room, and we both knelt down in that spot. I prayed for her there, and I cried for her pain. Here we talked to God straight without cutting any corners or making any excuses.

My God, my God, why did you forsake her?

Why were you so far from saving her,
so far from her cries of anguish?

My God, she cried out by day, but you did not answer,
by night, but she found no rest.

ADAPTED FROM PSALM 22:1-2, NIV

We didn’t force an answer; we just talked to the Lord. Then, when we were finished, we left the house behind us. The front door wouldn’t shut easily, so we slammed it until the frame shuddered.

Outside in the sun, we sat on the grass and watched a northern harrier stretch his wings against the summer currents, sailing like a ship on good seas. We'd been breathing shallow, so we leaned back and inhaled deeply, sizing that house up from the outside while the August heat made the oil on our faces shine.

SPEAKING PAIN OUT LOUD

When I was in my midthirties, friends began telling me stories of long-term abuse that they had suffered as children. Fathers, uncles, and fellow church members were the perpetrators—adults who should have been trustworthy. I had studied the origin of evil in theology classes, but these first-person accounts made my old conclusions feel shallow and evasive. It's one thing to sit in a classroom and talk about atrocities done to strangers; it's another to listen while a good friend tells you that she was seven when she begged Jesus to make the rapes stop—a prayer that wasn't answered for a decade, when she finally left home for good.

Sickness and death are hard enough wounds to process in faith, but child abuse is even more difficult. Because I was a young mother when I heard these stories, I knew what it meant to protect a child, so I couldn't understand how any parent—especially a divine Father—could stand by while a little one was being wounded. I'd rip somebody's face off if he tried to hurt my baby. How could anyone just sit and watch? As the ugly reality of abuse grew inside me, I found it increasingly difficult to trust a God who had the ability to stop pain but who chose to wait instead.

So I began to work back through theories of evil with my heart instead of just my mind. Some of the ideas I read only made me angrier. Now that I had a personal context for suffering, I couldn't give credence to scholars who addressed sorrow with cold mathematics. Bedside manner matters in a theologian just as much as it does in a doctor, and posture tends to reveal as much about a scholar as his arguments.

The worst theories reminded me of that proud oncologist who walked into the exam room when one of my grandfathers was suffering from cancer. “He’s going to die an excruciating death,” that doctor said, “and there’s nothing I can do about it.” It was a cruel thing for a physician to say, but I’ve seen theologians adopt a similar attitude when dealing with the agony of a broken world. “Sin broke everything. People hurt people. It is what it is.”

There’s no way around it—some truths of the Bible are difficult to hear. But if there is no compassion when communicating the theology of suffering—if there is only systematic, Vulcan resolve—that scholar doesn’t reflect the heart of Christ, no matter what information has been crammed into his head. Even when God is severe, he does not project indifference.

Finally, I stumbled into *A Grief Observed*, a book C. S. Lewis wrote after his wife died. Here was the horrified roar I needed. As I read about Lewis’s suffering, I realized that he wasn’t just offering the cerebral facts of his theology but his emotional vulnerability; here was a real human speaking as a lonely husband still reeling from sorrow. What Lewis didn’t write was as important to me as what he did. He didn’t recite platitudes like “God works in mysterious ways!” or “Rejoice in all things!” He didn’t hold doctrine up like a Hula-Hoop for a little dog to jump through. He wrote in the spirit of David in Psalm 22:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.

VERSES 1-2, NIV

In this psalm, we find a believer who didn’t make excuses for a distant God. Instead, he cried out, expecting the Lord to engage, pouring out the whole awful story of how it felt to suffer. David even went so

far as to accuse God of doing something that the Lord would never do: forsaking one of his children.

The psalmist didn't try to pretend like the silence of God was sweet. He wailed in his lonely devastation, trusting the Lord enough to be vulnerable with him instead of trying to pass off the dishonest lingo of faked religious submission. If this sort of confrontation doesn't feel like trust to you, remember that we tend to hide our real selves from people we don't love; only our oldest, dearest friends usually get the full scoop. God got the full scoop from David, and he got the full scoop from C. S. Lewis.

In his sermon series on praying through the emotions, Tim Keller warned us against “nicely manicured and managed little theologically correct confessional prayers.” Instead, he said that our engagement with God should express our feelings “pre-reflectively.”¹ This means that before we try to figure everything out, we should run to our Father and pour our hearts out to him. This also means it's okay if what we need to say to him is messy. According to Keller, both religious and secular viewpoints can adopt unhealthy, extreme stances about feelings. The religious try to deny strong emotions while the secular world uses feelings to validate behavior. The mature believer, however, walks a middle road of vivid expression lived out in a context of trust and obedience.

David's psalms show us how healthy it is to take our feelings to the Lord, who loves us enough to engage with who we really are. I used to try to shield God from my frustrations with him, but I don't do that as much anymore. Now when I am hurting, or after I sit with friends who are traumatized, I take every detail directly to the Lord who hasn't intervened. Instead of lying to God about how much I trust him (if I don't), praying forced prayers (that I don't really mean), and trying to pull the wool over God's eyes and my own, I bring my doubt, weakness, and sorrow straight to my Maker and let him be the Father he is.

My God, my God, you shut the mouths of lions, stilled a storm on the sea, and healed the blind. But you didn't help my friend.

I know you are good. I know you will dry every tear. But you had the ability to stop the abuse of a child—a child who cried to you for help!—and you held back. Where were you? Why did you forsake her? I can't even sleep at night, thinking about it.

Even as I am pouring out my pain to the Lord, I know that he always has the authority and the power to respond to my suffering as he responded to Job's. Job was devastated by losing all his kids, his money, his health, and the respect of his wife—far more of a loss than Lewis or David ever faced—yet God was still verbally severe with him: “Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?”² On and on those chapters go, rising into a holy crescendo. They are terrifying, relentless, and wonderful, some of my favorite chapters in the whole Bible. But while the roar of God's response to Job shows me the rights of my sovereign ruler, the story of Lazarus shows me a God who chose to weep beside the tomb of a friend. Unapologetically, the Bible offers both sides of our complex Lord.

Have you ever noticed how differently grief works through Lazarus's two sisters, Mary and Martha? After saying, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died,” type A Martha managed to say the right religious words: “But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.”³

Mary didn't get that far; instead, she blubbered out the same phrase Martha spoke—a phrase their whole family had probably been whispering in sickrooms for days—the sort of phrase that becomes a chorus when you are hoping against hope for a loved one. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died,” Mary said to Jesus.⁴ Hadn't she and Martha used this thought to comfort one another while waiting for the Savior to arrive? “When Jesus gets here, it will all be okay. Jesus won't let him die. Hold out, Mary. Hold out, Martha. Jesus will come.”

Then future tense became past perfect tense. “He will be here” was

suddenly “If you had been here . . .” and Mary cried honestly before the Christ, who was too late.

How did Jesus respond in the presence of her raw grief? John said, “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.”⁵ Then, even though resurrection was imminent, the Messiah sat down to weep with a friend who was weeping.

Had Job not complained honestly to the Lord, he might have missed the most stunning poetic defense of all time. Had Mary not complained honestly to the Lord, she might have missed a chance to learn about her Maker’s compassion. Both walked away richer because they were vulnerable with a God who could take it.

THE GOD WHO DIDN'T

My questions about the kindness of God became personal when our daughter was born with a heart defect. I’m embarrassed to tell you about this because I’ve seen friends face more excruciating circumstances with much greater strength, but a hole in my baby’s septum was all it took to crush me. In the wake of this news, I spent more than a thousand nights appealing to God, kneeling beside my daughter’s bed while she was sleeping. I would put my hand on her chest, feeling her little heart beat three inches from my palm, growing increasingly frustrated with her Creator.

Why would he spin the rings of Saturn and not bother to fix a nickel-sized flaw inside my child? Involuntarily, I’d reach one hand up in the pitch dark, thinking about the red storms of Jupiter, trying not to ask him why he was more interested in the “wow” factor than in the health of my precious child. Did he want praise from the masses instead of one desperate mother’s gratitude? Accusations bubbled secretly inside my soul, but I tried not to feel them. I was determined to keep a right attitude, in part because I didn’t understand the magnitude of the gospel. I was still trying to earn God’s blessings by proving my faith to him. I thought that

if I could prop my belief up during this trial, keeping my trust in perfect submission, God might reward me by healing my daughter.

Each time we went in for checkups, every muscle in my back tensed up as I waited for news that the miracle I wanted (and had earned?) had been performed. In a dark room, while a stranger pressed a sonogram wand into my baby's soft, pink body, my eyes fixated on the cardiac monitor. The blood flow sloshed in red and blue pixels, but the motion was all wrong. I could see the leak. The defect hadn't been healed; in fact, her heart was enlarging. I felt fear and fury rise in my chest. *Why not, God? What is your deal?* But I pushed that anger down. I pushed it away.

When my daughter was six years old, doctors told us it was time for surgery. As we stood with her in the prep room, every maternal impulse screamed that I should stay beside her, but as the anesthesia took over her tiny body, my husband put his arm around me, and he walked me into the lobby. I had been as brave as all mothers are in such circumstances, smiling and kissing her while those pretty eyes fluttered to sleep, but the sight of my daughter breathing through a mask, then passing into a drug-induced stupor, had been too much for me to bear. In the waiting room, I slumped forward in a metal chair without my baby, feeling utterly helpless before a God who hadn't given me the most important thing I had ever asked him to do.

George Orwell's book *1984* details the torture of rebellious humans—torture that persists until citizens are finally forced to “love” Big Brother. Beneath my paralytic fear, I felt a similar sort of entrapment. Did I really have the freedom to embrace or reject him? He held all the power. What kind of love could I give someone who left me no other option but devotion? This thought felt terrifyingly rebellious, and it shamed me as it flickered around in my consciousness. I didn't want God to see what I was tempted to believe.

Unfortunately, I didn't respond to my doubt as David responded to his. I didn't trust God enough to get real with him. Instead, I tried to hide my naked resentment. I was like Adam and Eve, holding up

ridiculous handfuls of fig leaves, thinking I could prevent God from seeing the truth about my feelings. I held my faith as I held my breath—but how long can a person hold either of those? We're only mortals, after all.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE WOUNDED

After walking through the squeeze of those years, it makes more sense to me when those who have suffered emerge from trauma asking, “If God is all-powerful—if he’s all-good—why didn’t he keep me safe?” Long-term grief can help us understand why single friends are angry after years of being told that they would be given a godly spouse if they would just trust the Lord and stay sexually pure. It can show us why their hearts break after agonizing, lonely years of online dating. It can show us why they want to scream at other people’s baby showers, and why they threaten to give up, and why they threaten to rebel. It can show us why they wonder if God sees them at all.

Long-term pain can show us why the guy who just lost his third job and his wife of twenty years feels too ashamed and too angry to show up at church on Sunday morning. Sure, he shouldn’t have punched a hole in the drywall in his garage, but we also know why he did it. Once we have suffered, we can imagine the unbearable pressure this man feels to keep smiling in public because “weak” men can’t start over. We know why he’s scared that God won’t catch him because life so far has been pretty darn hard.

Technically, of course, our suffering shouldn’t be a surprise. God’s Word tells us that life on planet Earth is going to hurt, but a warning can’t always prepare us for the jolt of real pain. Until we’ve *known* deep, long agony, we might not wonder how the Lord’s promises to care for our needs reconcile with the hard facts. When suffering gets real, the seams of our faith groan under the strain. We find out how hard it is to come home to an empty house night after night. We find out how brutal it is

to survive divorce. We wake up another morning choking in the wake of betrayal. We fall in bed exhausted after a day of humiliating failure. We limp after abuse. We shudder in the throes of disease. The hours and days of such experiences stir up questions we don't want to ask.

When health, wealth, and prosperity teachers promise that God wants us all to be happy, they speak in direct contradiction to thousands of lives of faithful men and women who have lived in long and profound difficulty. They also ignore the confession of the apostle Paul, a believer who was allowed to grow so discouraged during one point of his ministry that he despaired even of life.⁶ Whatever God meant by providing for our needs has to allow room for all of this.

On Facebook and Instagram, I regularly see Christians using the hashtag #blessed to celebrate a caramel latte or a beach vacation. I don't doubt God's generosity in the little things, but I do have trouble knowing how to process these blessings when another friend sits in a hospital room, tending a child whose body weakens under a critical prognosis. Extravagant, beautiful things happen on planet Earth, but terrible, unbearable things do too.

When I am hurting deeply, formal theological explanations of suffering never seem to calm my restless soul because long-term pain isn't something that logic alone can fix. If the Lord is going to allow the world to be this brutal, I need more than the math of things. I need to know that my Father feels pain intensely as I do and that his love for me will prove stronger than any single moment of weakness that suffering evokes. I need to be free to cry out to him, knowing that he sees me and that he cares.

THOSE WHO CANNOT KEEP THEMSELVES ALIVE

If God detests the frantic outcry of the broken, I don't know why he would have allowed Psalm 22 to remain in the Bible or why Jesus would have quoted it. Instead, the Lord seems to be showing us that the passion

of human grief doesn't shock him. In fact, by citing Psalm 22 on the cross, I think Jesus is showing us how he took all human abuse into his own flesh. *Jesus says the words we say because he felt the pain we feel.* He not only hurt for us but also as us. Then, as he shuddered as one abused, he pointed us along the rails of Psalm 22 to the fulfillment of all suffering.

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.⁷

“Those who cannot keep themselves alive.” I need those six words desperately because they describe me. Don't they describe you? We cannot keep ourselves alive when we sit in hospital chairs, unable to breathe, waiting for news from the surgeon. We cannot keep ourselves alive when we grieve beside the unbelief of our children. We cannot keep ourselves alive when we are subject to injustice, to abuse, to pain, and to murder. We cannot keep ourselves alive when we are lonely, ashamed, scared. We cannot keep ourselves alive when those who should shield us ravage us instead.

We know what it means to give up the ghost of our strength at the hands of overwhelming odds, and that is a terrifying feeling—but David tells us that one day we dead and dying will rise and feast. Maybe today we can't choke down a crappy cup of waiting-room coffee because the earth's grip has tightened around our throats, but a time will come for us to celebrate because the Jesus who died for us—the same Jesus who also cried out, “My God, why have you forsaken me?”—knows and provides for our limits.

One of my favorite old Christian myths has origins that predate Christianity. It's the story of a mother pelican who faces a time of famine, but rather than watch her children starve, she wounds her body, feeding her babies with her own flesh and blood. In times of intense suffering, I have gone back to that image over and again, reminding

myself that this is the sort of God I am accusing of indifference. My pain might temporarily blind me to his pain, but here is a God who willingly entered the drought lands to harm himself so that we might live. When I accuse him of being distant, of not caring, of not feeling, I am not seeing what he has truly done for and with me. When I feed off my God, I feed off his own agony, willingly offered.

As my daughter was waiting for her heart surgery, well-meaning religious people said the oddest things to me. Some told me that if we prayed “the right way,” Jesus would heal her. Some told me that God allowed my baby’s heart to be damaged because of our sin, so I needed to confess things I couldn’t remember doing. These comments made me feel rebuked, isolated, angry, and lonely. My daughter was in danger, and I didn’t have the strength to maintain a performance for God.

I didn’t need a locker-room pep talk, and I didn’t need threats. My suffering wasn’t a reality show with a cash reward at the end of the season. I needed to be reminded that my God suffered with me and that he was real, close, and big enough to carry me through the darkness of all my doubts and fears, no matter how weak I was at any given moment. For years, Christian leaders told me to put my faith in the facts and my feelings would follow, but they didn’t tell me that God would still carry me even when my emotions were stronger than my faith. I have been so relieved to find an engaged God at the end of myself, a Savior who upholds me, instead of a wooden idol who constantly needs to be kept from toppling over.

If you are walking with long-term sorrow, if you fear the strength of the pain you’ve pushed down and out of sight, I think it’s okay to cry out, “My God, my God! Where have you been? If you had been here, I wouldn’t have died!” When that question is rolling around inside you, God knows it’s there. You don’t fool him by trying to repress it, and you’re not going to shock him by admitting what you feel. Trusting him means trusting him with your whole self.

He knows when you are mad, scared, damaged, tied in a knot. He

knows when you need to walk back through the house of your trauma and name the nightmares room by room. If you've been carrying a painful load forever, it's probably going to be tough to learn this sort of vulnerability. Especially if you have spent most of your life trying to be strong, trying to hold everything together for everybody, learning to rely upon a God who doesn't need you to be the load-bearing agent may be slow going. But as you go through the process of exchanging a yoke that is heavy for a yoke that is light,⁸ you're going to find a God who can handle the real you, no matter how messed up pain has left you. Not all friendships can stomach this level of authenticity, but your friendship with Jesus can.

The Lord might not coddle you, of course. Instead, he might roar to restore your withering heart as he roared at Job. He might throw the curtain back on idols that you need to smash. He might expose unhealthy demands that you need to let go. More often than not, however, his approach seems to be gentle—especially with the long-suffering, for he is a shield about the grieving, the lifter of their heads.⁹ A broken and contrite heart, he does not despise.¹⁰ He gives grace to the humble.¹¹ “A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.”¹² This is the Physician we approach, and while we cannot know which surgery he will perform until we approach him in truth, what we can know is that he will operate in love and that his care will do us good.

In 1961, a Soviet doctor named Leonid Rogozov found himself stranded in Antarctica with appendicitis. To survive, he had to perform his own appendectomy. It was a horrific, nearly two-hour ordeal, performed without gloves and mostly by feeling around in his own abdomen, since mirrors confused him. Every five minutes, he took breaks because the pain and nausea were so intense.¹³ I can't imagine attempting such a thing, and yet, every time I read Rogozov's story, I think about how many Christians are trying to become more Christlike by straining to repair their own insides. No surgeon would choose self-surgery

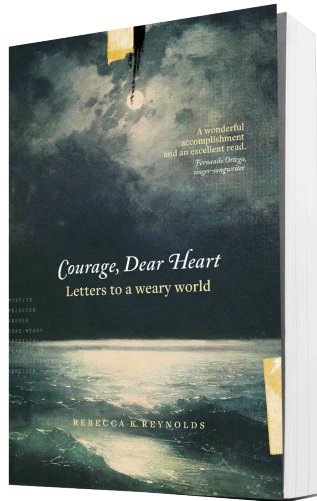
if another option were available—and yet Christians make this very choice every single day.

God never meant for the Christian life to be one bright day of salvation followed by four decades of pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps, trying harder to be better. In fact, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul sharply confronted Christians who were trying to heal themselves by saying, “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”¹⁴ By saying this, Paul wasn’t being cruel. He was trying to shock hurting people awake—people who would eventually self-destruct if they kept trying to manage healing on their own. “Apart from me you can do nothing,” Jesus said¹⁵—and that includes healing from long-term pain.

So go to him in honest despair like David. Go in honest disappointment like Mary. Go in anger. Go in shame. Go in doubt. Tell him those words that repeat over and over again inside your mind. If you’re scared to go, hold your breath if you need to; count to ten; walk shaking. But slowly begin to rest the impossible burden that is weighing you down at his feet. This won’t be the end of your complex journey with suffering, of course, but it is the right beginning.

ENDNOTES

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2. Job 38:3-4, NIV.
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6. See 2 Corinthians 1:8, ESV.
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8. See Matthew 11:30, ESV.
9. See Psalm 3:3, ESV.
10. See Psalm 51:17, ESV.
11. See James 4:6, ESV.
12. Isaiah 42:3, ESV.
13. Sara Lentati, “The Man Who Cut Out His Own Appendix,” *BBC News*, May 5, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32481442>.
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15. John 15:5, ESV.



If you feel the ache of brokenness, you will be refreshed by the source of all courage illuminated in these pages. God is available and wants to join you in the midst of any mess. You can take heart. As Aslan of Narnia whispered (and only Lucy heard), *Courage, Dear Heart*.

<https://www.tyndale.com/p/courage-dear-heart/9781631467684>

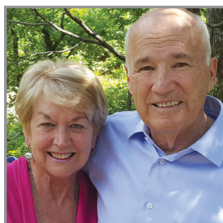


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CALM MY ANXIOUS HEART

IMAGINE WHAT YOUR LIFE WOULD be like without worry. Women worry a lot. We worry about our children, our friends, our careers, our families, our spouses—the list could go on and on. Yes, we want to be content and trust God with our worries, but it’s a struggle to let go and free ourselves from the burden of anxiety.

If you’re tired of worrying about all the *what-ifs* in your life and want to experience the calm and contentment promised in Scripture, *Calm My Anxious Heart* is what you’ve been looking for. Filled with encouragement and practical help for overcoming anxiety, *Calm My Anxious Heart*, a **12-session** Bible study for women, explains what God says about contentment and offers ways to apply it to daily life. In chapter 8, “Worry is Like a Rocking Chair,” Linda Dillow shares from her experiences with worry, anxiety, and something she calls an Anxiety Box.



LINDA DILLOW is the author or coauthor of numerous bestselling books, including *Satisfy My Thirsty Soul*, *A Deeper Kind of Calm*, *Creative Counterpart*, *Intimate Issues*, and *Intimacy Ignited*. Linda and her husband, Jody, lived in Europe and Asia for seventeen years training Christian leaders with Biblical Education by Extension. Linda now speaks frequently at women's conferences. The Dillows, who have four grown children and seven grandchildren, live in Monument, Colorado.

CHAPTER 8

Worry Is Like a Rocking Chair

I collect quotes about worry. Can you identify with these?

Worry is like a rocking chair; it will give you something to do but it won't get you anywhere.

We have moments absolutely free from worry. These brief respites are called panic!

These sayings about worry make me laugh, but the following statements on worry make me think.

George Müller said, "The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith. The beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety."

All our fret and worry are caused by calculating without God.

When we worry, we're saying, "God can't." If we are walking in anxiety, we're not walking in faith. We want to be women of faith, yet often *worry* becomes our middle name. We know the agony of its clutches. We're familiar with the small trickle of fear that meanders through our minds until it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained. We *must* conquer this "God can't" disease.

I've done a lot of thinking about worry because it's an area God is determined to work on in my life. And as I've surveyed women and asked them what they worry about, they answer *everything!* But the most prevalent worries they mention are listed below, with money being the most worrisome.

Money—How are we going to pay the mortgage this month? Can I afford to send my children to a good college? How can I afford another car?

Parenting—Will I be able to have a baby? Will I be a good mother? Will my kids put me through as much grief as I put my parents through?

Marriage—Will I ever find a man I want to marry? Will my marriage last; will it be vital? Will my husband remain faithful?

Health—Will I or someone I love get cancer or Alzheimer's?

Job security—Should I work or be a stay-at-home mom? If I work, will I keep the job?

Weight—Will I look as fat as I feel in my bathing suit?

Threats—Will I be raped? Will my child be sexually abused? Will my plane be bombed by some lunatic?

When I ask women why they worry, they give three reasons:

- The world is out of control.
- Families are out of control.
- My life is out of control.

I can identify with all these concerns, but as I look back on my life, my greatest anxieties have revolved around my four children.

SOBBING IN A NEW YORK AIRPORT

I picked up the ringing phone in our apartment in Hong Kong. It was my daughter, Robin. “Mom, something terrible is happening to my body. . . . We were at a wedding and one minute I was eating a french fry and the next, Miku (Robin’s husband) was carrying me out. I was sobbing but I didn’t know why. I was scared, as I could tell something was going on in my body over which I had no control. Mom, it was awful and it happened again, in the elevator. What is it? I’m so scared. My friend said it was a panic attack, but why would I have a panic attack?”

This conversation was followed by another a few weeks later.

“Mom, I have great news. I’m not having panic attacks but seizures. Isn’t that great? It’s not emotional, it’s physical! I’m having an MRI and a CAT scan tomorrow. Aren’t you glad, Mom?”

I wasn’t exactly glad. Seizures in a young adult can mean lots of things, none of them too pleasant. I remember telling Jody, “Robin isn’t having panic attacks. She’s having seizures and she thinks that’s good.” I knew that seizures could mean a brain tumor, and dread began to fill my mind. My perspective wasn’t helped by the fact that I had recently attended the funeral of a friend’s son who had died of a brain tumor.

The trickle of fear that meandered through my mind became a torrential flood. It definitely cut a channel into which all my thoughts drained. I prayed and committed the situation to God but found myself dwelling on it five minutes later. “God, teach me to trust You,” became my prayer.

Several days passed and we learned that Robin’s tests showed she didn’t have a brain tumor. We thanked God. The diagnosis was epilepsy, and she was put on medication to control the seizures.

My daughter was an ocean and a continent away in Philadelphia. Only a mother can understand how very far that is. I longed to see

her—to hug her. Being a champion bargain hunter, I found a courier flight from Hong Kong to New York for \$500 round trip and spent a week with Robin in Philadelphia. It was difficult to see the effects of the medication on her, but it seemed to be controlling the seizures. When I left on the train to catch my return flight to Hong Kong, I was grateful.

Before I boarded my plane, I called Robin because I wanted to hear her voice one last time. The voice that answered the phone was weak, barely discernible. When I said, “Honey, what’s wrong?” she burst into tears. “Mom, I’ve had a horrible reaction to the medication. I am so sick. I’ve never been this sick in my life. I have a high fever, a rash all over my body, and my lymph glands are huge. The doctor says I have to go abruptly off the medication and it means the seizures will return.”

As I imagined my precious daughter alone (they couldn’t locate her husband at the university) and sick, I did what any self-respecting mother would do: I stood in a corner of the New York airport alone and cried my eyes out. My heart was filled with feelings of helplessness. My daughter needed me and I wasn’t there.

I remembered a quote I had memorized: “Quiet tension is not trust. It is simply compressed anxiety.”¹ My insides definitely felt squashed together with anxiety!

ANXIETY DEFINED

Every woman I know has, at one point or another, struggled with anxiety. I have friends who have experienced anxiety attacks due to a chemical imbalance in their brains and must be on medication to control their anxiety. This is a physical problem over which they have little control. This is not the kind of anxiety to which I am referring. I’m talking about the everyday worry we allow to control our lives.

According to Dr. Frank Minirth and Dr. Paul Meier, in their book *Worry-Free Living*, anxiety is currently the number-one mental health disorder in America.² Yet if you asked ten women to describe anxiety,

you would get ten different answers. Here are answers from some of the women I asked to define anxiety.

- It's when I pace the floor half the night because I can't sleep.
- It's a horrible restlessness when I can't sit still, and I can't concentrate long enough to get anything done.
- It's a pain in the neck that starts in my shoulders and creeps up my neck.

These answers are all accurate, but they focus on the result of anxiety instead of defining it. So what is anxiety?

The word *worry* is derived from an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning “to strangle or choke.” The stranglehold of worry keeps a woman from enjoying a life of contentment and peace.

Anxiety is that which divides and distracts the soul, that which diverts us from present duty to weary calculations of how to meet conditions that may never arrive. It's the habit of crossing bridges before we reach them.

Worry has more to do with perspective than with circumstances. In similar situations, one woman can be anxious and another peaceful. A woman worries when she perceives a threat or a danger. I use the word *perceive* because the danger can be real or imagined. When my child is standing in the middle of the street, and a car is coming, the danger is real; thus anxiety is a good thing, a warning system that will help me save my child from harm. If I worry that my child *might* take drugs, that my daughter *might* get pregnant, that my husband *might* be unfaithful, that I *might* get breast cancer, that we *might* be unable to pay our bills next month, the danger is imagined.

The French philosopher Montaigne said, “My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened.” When we spend precious time worrying about what *might* happen, anxiety becomes

negative baggage that weighs us down, saps our energy, and leaves us ineffective.

Women sometimes confuse anxiety and depression. According to Minirth and Meier, anxiety is linked more to the future, while depression is linked to the past. Depression is the past superimposed on the present, and anxiety is the future superimposed on the present.³ One woman said that worry is the advance interest you pay on troubles that seldom come. How true, and yet we women are chronic worriers. Christian women are among the worst. *We say with one breath that we trust God and with the next breath how worried we are!* Worry and anxiety give a small thing a big shadow, and this shadow creates problems, not just in the soul and spirit, but in the body.

WORRY IS DESTRUCTIVE

It seems unbelievable, but people can literally worry themselves to death. A thirty-two-year study reported in *Circulation* found that men who were anxious were four and a half times more likely to suffer heart attacks than their worry-free counterparts. Modern medical research has proven that worry breaks down resistance to disease. More than that, it actually diseases the nervous system, and particularly affects the digestive organs and the heart. When we add to this the toll of sleepless nights and days void of contentment, we glimpse the stranglehold worry has on the human heart. Worry doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.

We know worry is destructive, and yet we continue to be choked by anxiety over what might happen. One man, looking for a solution to worry, drew up what he called a Worry Chart, in which he kept a record of his worries. He discovered that 40 percent of them were about things that probably would never happen; 30 percent concerned past decisions that he could not now unmake; 12 percent dealt with other people's criticism of him; and 10 percent were worries

about his health. He concluded that only 8 percent of his worries were really legitimate!⁴

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of worry is its absolute impotence. Worry never changes a single thing except the worrier. History has no record of worry warding off disaster. No tornado has been prevented, no drought averted, no plane kept from crashing, no child kept from falling off his bike, no teenager stopped from skipping classes or trying drugs. No heart attacks have ever been avoided through worry (though a great number have been caused by it). Worry is definitely counterproductive. Like our earlier illustration of a rocking chair, it doesn't get us anywhere, but at least it gives us something to do, and women like to *do* something!

How many of our hours, our days, are spent worrying about things over which we have no control and things that will never happen? There's no disputing the fact that, nine times out of ten, worrying about a thing does more damage to our body, soul, and spirit than the actual thing itself.

IS ANXIETY A SIN?

Fortunately, God's Word offers a more effective cure. We can be certain there's a cure because Jesus commanded us to avoid anxiety. This is clearly seen in the warnings in the Sermon on the Mount, particularly in Matthew 6:25-34 where Jesus says, "Stop worrying."

"Therefore I tell you, *do not worry* about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you *by worrying* can add a single hour to his life?

And *why do you worry* about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So *do not worry*, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore *do not worry* about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (NIV, emphasis mine)

Jesus tells us *five* times in this passage to *stop worrying*. Do you think He wants us to get the message?

In these verses, Jesus labels worry, or anxiety, a sign of a faith problem. He forbids anxiety and commands us to be women of faith (verse 30). Instead of being anxious, we are to fix our focus on God and His righteousness. Verse 34 gives a key to worry-free living. *The Living Bible* makes it crystal clear: “So don’t be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time.” Certainly, we are to pray, plan, and prepare for tomorrow, but we are not to worry about what *might* happen. The load of tomorrow added to that of yesterday, carried today, makes even the strongest woman stumble. We are to entrust all our tomorrows to Him and live just today. Walking with God through today’s twenty-four hours is difficult enough.

In *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, Kenneth Wuest wrote, “God commands us to ‘Stop perpetually worrying about even one thing.’ We commit sin when we worry. We do not trust God when we worry. We do not receive answers to prayer when we worry, because we are not trusting.”⁵ Bishop Fulton J. Sheen went even further when he said, “All worry

is atheism, because it is a want of trust in God.”⁶ When I ask women if they think anxiety is a sin, they either look shocked or they gasp in disbelief. One woman said, “Well, mothers are supposed to worry.”

It’s easy to deceive ourselves into thinking, *I’m just concerned*, and gloss over the ugly reality that worry is sin. Worry says, “I don’t trust God, I don’t believe in His ability to handle my child, my marriage, my health, my job, or my loneliness.” Oswald Chambers called worry infidelity: “It is not only wrong to worry, it is infidelity, because worrying means that we do not think that God can look after the details of our lives, and it is never anything else that worries us.”⁷

CAST YOUR ANXIETY ON JESUS

Both Jesus and Paul commanded us to “not be anxious,” but if so many people worry, and it seems so natural, how can we obey this command? The apostle Peter showed us how this is possible, and in 1 Peter 5:6-7 gave us an alternative to carrying the anxiety ourselves.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you (NIV).

The French version says literally, “Unload on Him all your cares.” The Greek word for *cast* means “to hurl.” The Phillips translation of verse 7 is my personal favorite: “You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon him, for you are his personal concern.” It is a glorious truth!

Many of us have memorized 1 Peter 5:7 and tucked it away to be pulled out whenever we have a problem. Too often, though, in applying the wonderful part about “casting all your cares,” we forget the first part about “humbling ourselves under the sovereign, mighty hand of God.” Not only are the two verses one thought, they are one sentence! They must be read together and applied together.

What does it mean to humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God? Humility means to have total trust in God alone. It is the surrender of our total being—intellect, emotion, will, plans, and judgments. It is relinquishing everything. For me, humbling myself involves yielding to God as the Blessed Controller of whatever situation or person is causing me anxiety.

Let's go back to the corner of the New York airport and to my moment of deep distress. No words can adequately express what I felt. I wanted to throw my plane ticket away and get back on the train and return to my daughter. I felt sick to my stomach, anxious in my spirit. I stood there distraught and sobbing. As I prayed, God brought this beautiful passage from 1 Peter 5:6-7 to mind. I had been teaching the book of 1 Peter and these verses were fresh in my heart. I prayed through them and yielded my precious daughter to Him.

Oh God, you see me here. You know my deep pain. No words can express what I feel, but You know. I don't understand why Robin was fine all week and as soon as I left she became very ill, but God, I know You are the Blessed Controller of all things. You care personally and lovingly for my daughter. You are intimately acquainted with all her ways, with her brain waves, her reaction to the medication. Father, she belongs to You. Her times are in Your Mighty Hands. I humbly entrust her, my precious treasure, to You, and I hurl all my anxiety on You because You personally care for me, just as You care for Robin.

As I prayed, a picture formed in my mind.

God, You know I am afraid of heights, but right now I'm visualizing myself on the tallest high-rise in Hong Kong. I am walking to the edge of the building and I have my Robin in my

arms. Holy Father, as I look over the edge, I see You standing below with Your arms outstretched, waiting for me to jump, to cast all my anxiety on You. God, I'm just one big anxiety, but I'm jumping now into Your arms.

Twenty minutes after jumping into God's arms and unloading all my cares on Him, I boarded the plane. I was at peace. I am not by nature a peaceful person, yet I was at peace. This was a miracle!

The episode in the New York airport was only the beginning of trusting my daughter to the Lord. Robin and I still lived half a world apart. During the next two years she experienced numerous medical problems: two cancer scares, one biopsy, more medication reactions, and uncontrolled seizures. Because of the medication, she became depressed and felt "zombie-like." She and her husband had continual financial stress and then a serious automobile accident. More stress.

What did I experience? I continually (that means over and over) had to release my daughter to God. Every time the phone rang I had to mentally fall to my knees and again release her to the Blessed Controller who loves her. Instead of worrying about her and letting my mind race with fears about what might happen, I chose to pray and ask God to watch over her. This was not easy; it was a choice I made daily, sometimes moment by moment. There was one visual aid that helped me.

MY ANXIETY BOX

Heart-shaped and tied with a ribbon, my Anxiety Box sits on the bookcase above my desk. If I shake it, I can hear the pieces of paper rustling inside. When anxiety takes over my mind, I take a small piece of paper and write out what is causing my anxiety. I date the paper and put it in my Anxiety Box. As I untie the ribbon and open the lid, I pray: "God, I am giving You this worry that's tearing me apart. As I place it in the box, I'm saying to You that it's Yours. I give it to You. You can deal with

it much better than I can.” I close the box, retie the ribbon, and thank God that the worry is now His.

Every time I see the box, stuffed with my worries, I’m reminded that God is carrying them, not me. Once or twice a year I open my box and read through the worries. I thank God for the ones He has taken care of. The others I put back in the heart-shaped box and entrust them to His timing.

Judy used a different kind of box to encourage her to yield her teenager to God. This huge box was beautifully and lovingly wrapped and tied with a velvet ribbon. Standing at the foot of her staircase with the box in her arms, Judy slowly walked up the stairs, saying, “God, this box represents my child—the child who has torn my heart apart. I’ve tried to surrender him to You, but I keep taking him back. I’m walking up these stairs and I’m leaving the box at the top. He is Yours, a gift You entrusted to me when he was born. I now, once and for all, give him back to You. Every time I walk up these stairs I will remember and thank You that he is in Your hands.”

Perhaps the idea of an Anxiety Box or walking up a staircase with a huge box in your arms doesn’t appeal to you. However, I challenge you to *do* something visible that encourages you to trust God.

Life is full of potential problems and pain. But we have a choice. We can worry or we can trust the Trustworthy One. We can’t do both. When I feel anxious and worried about my daughter—or anything else in my life—I ask myself, “What am I trying to control instead of trusting God?”

We can benefit from those who have struggled with anxiety before us and learned the wonderful truth that God is in all our tomorrows. Listen to the words of George MacDonald.

It has been well said that no man ever sank under the burden of the day. It’s when tomorrow’s burden is added to the burden of today that the weight is more than a man can bear. Never

load yourselves so, my friends. If you find yourselves so loaded, at least remember this: it is your own doing, not God's. He begs you to leave the future to Him and to mind the present.⁸

F. B. Meyer made this truth plain when he said, "This is the blessed life—not anxious to see far in front, nor eager to choose the path, but quietly following behind the Shepherd, one step at a time. The Shepherd was always out in front of the sheep. He was down in front. Any attack upon them had to take him into account. Now God is down in front. He is in the tomorrows. It is tomorrow that fills men with dread, God is there already. All the tomorrows of our life have to pass Him before they can get to us."⁹

Did you catch what Meyer said? *God is already in my tomorrows, in Robin's tomorrows, in your tomorrows.* That's why we can trust them to Him and give Him the heavy load of all that *might* happen. We can leave the burden on His strong shoulders. He is much more able to carry it than we are. If we aren't worried about tomorrow, we can concentrate on trusting God for today.

FREEDOM FROM WORRY IS A PROCESS

The apostle Peter, formerly the fisherman Peter, encourages me in my journey to contentment. He is the man who instructed us to humble ourselves and trust everything to our Mighty Lord, to cast all worries into His strong arms. Yet this same Peter had been a worrier.

I think of Peter in his earlier years as "impulsive Peter, worried Peter." Walking upon the water toward Jesus, Peter became so worried that he began to sink (Matthew 14:30). He worried about who would betray Jesus; he even rebuked Jesus because he was worried that Jesus might have to suffer. Yet in his first epistle, Peter, the great worrier, tells others to hurl their anxieties on the Lord Jesus. If Peter can increase in trust and decrease in anxiety, so can you and I! It was a process for Peter; it is a process for us.

The process begins when you:

1. Acknowledge that anxiety is sin and confess it as such to God.
2. Yield to God's sovereignty. Thank Him that He is the Blessed Controller of your problems.
3. Choose to cast your anxiety on God.
4. Choose to trust God with your tomorrows and live for today.

CHANGE MY NAME TO "WORRY-FREE"

You've probably never heard of Titedios Amerimnos, but he is a man I want to emulate. We read of him in an early Greek manuscript of the Christian era. *Titedios* is his proper given name, but the second part, *Amerimnos*, is made up of the Greek word for "worry" plus the prefix meaning "not" or "never." In other words, his second name is a descriptive epithet like the second part of "Alexander the Great" or "James the Just." It is assumed that Titedios was an anxious man who became a trusting man when he met Christ and stopped worrying. So he was named "Titedios, the man who never worries."¹⁰

I long to have my name become "Linda, the woman who never worries." It's not as important what a woman is as what she's *becoming*, for we shall be what we are now *becoming*! If God can take a woman like me, who likes control and becomes easily anxious, and begin to transform her into a woman who is trusting God and choosing not to be anxious, He can do the same with you. Let's pray that God will change our names!

DAHLIA

Paul was definitely a catch. With good looks, brains, and brawn, he could have had his pick of young ladies, and he chose Dahlia to be his bride. Their hope was a life of service together for Christ. Never could Dahlia have imagined what lay ahead.

Paul, even in his youth, was a dynamic speaker and revered Christian leader. The problem was that Paul and Dahlia were

Romanians living under a Communist regime. While the Christians respected Paul, the Securitate (secret police) plotted to destroy him.

Time after time, Paul was summoned to the police station and interrogated. House searches and constant harassment left the young family exhausted. Dahlia feared for Paul, for her children, for herself. And her fears were one day realized.

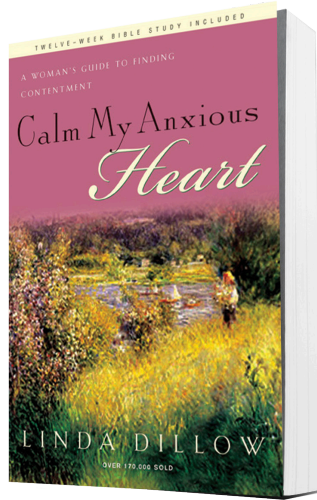
During a rainstorm, Paul looked up as he walked the narrow path around the corner of his house. Shock! Disbelief! And trembling fear. Electrical lines had been wired to the drain trough of his home—electrocution was just a few seconds and a few inches away. Only God's grace saved him from certain death. When Dahlia learned of it she cried to God, "They will stop at nothing! Must we daily live in fear of what the Securitate will do next?"

I remember a special evening with Dahlia and Paul. Before we had finished eating dinner, a man rushed in and said, "The secret police are at the hotel looking for Jody Dillow! Jody, you and Linda can't go back there. Give us your hotel key, we'll get your belongings and meet you, then you must drive for the border—fast!"

As Jody and I rushed out the door, Dahlia put her hand on my arm and smiled a smile of peace that said, "Linda, I understand. Harassment, fear, and interrogation are part of our life. Trust our Great God! He is trustworthy."

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UNBURDENED

IN HIS WORD, God promises us freedom from worry. Wouldn't it be nice if we actually believed him? What would happen if you took the concerns that grip you, that keep you awake at night, that clench your stomach in knots . . . and truly handed them over to his keeping?

Like no other writer can do, bestselling author Chris Tiegreen opens your eyes and heart to a better, more weightless way to live. He shares the secret to letting God carry the things that weigh you down. *Unburdened* is about taking the burdens you currently carry and making them much, much lighter. It's about transferring the weight of your responsibilities from the weak shoulders of your flesh to the strong fingertips of God. It's about learning to live in deep-down, heart-level freedom. No one who reads *Unburdened* will walk away unchanged. In chapter 3, "Loads," he goes through a list of burdens and points out the common thread that links them.



CHRIS TIEGREEN has inspired thousands of people through *The One Year At His Feet Devotional*, *The One Year Walk with God Devotional*, *The One Year Worship the King Devotional*, and *The One Year Wonder of the Cross Devotional*, as well as through his books *Fixing Abraham*, *Feeling like God*, *Violent Prayer*, and *Creative Prayer*. His experiences as a missionary, pastor, journalist, photographer, and university instructor bring a unique perspective to his writing. He and his wife, Hannah, live in the Atlanta area, where he is currently the editor for *indeed* magazine at Walk Thru the Bible.

CHAPTER 3

Loads

There are few perfect metaphors for life, but commuting on an urban interstate may be one of them. Masses of cars weave in and out of lanes, but they are usually moving in generally the same direction, and everyone seems to be headed somewhere. Some people want to get to their destinations in a hurry, and others seem just to enjoy the ride. Most know exactly where they want to go, but others don't seem to have a clue. Occasionally you'll see a driver who appears to be enjoying the adventure, but the vast majority are simply going through the motions and seem resigned to their daily routes.

On the highway, you'll see a few legalists who insist on doing everything *exactly* by the rules, even when abiding by the letter of the law is more hazardous than following the spirit of it. But more people ignore the rules altogether—or at least the rules most convenient to ignore at any given moment. And some people are downright hypocritical, expecting everyone else to obey the law but honking at any hint of a suggestion that they should do the same.

As in life, some drivers are highly skilled and others aren't. Some use their gifts wisely; others, recklessly. Some are pushy tailgaters or rude line breakers; others are nice enough to let you in front of them. Some drivers give you a friendly wave, but most just mind their own business. Some people travel in groups; others, alone. You see a lot of pride and competition on the highway, as some people speed up just so you can't

pass them. You see a lot of unfairness there, but law enforcers come along occasionally to make sure everything goes generally according to plan. Even so, sometimes tragedy occurs and halts someone prematurely at the side of the road.

You'll see rich vehicles and poor vehicles, healthy ones and sick ones, those that are well dressed and others that are a little disheveled, and even some that are seriously down-and-out. There's a diversity of shapes, sizes, and colors, and almost always an oddball or two to make things really interesting. The roads are sometimes smooth and sometimes rough, and occasionally you have to make an unexpected detour. Some days go pretty smoothly, and others seem bumper to bumper from beginning to end. But you can always find a commentator on the airwaves telling you how it's all going.

I've found that the morning commute, like life, can be pretty stressful. But I've also found that a lot of the stress comes from my own attitude toward other drivers. I get really offended, for example, at the pushy people who want to cut in front of me without signaling or gesturing (nicely) or warning me at all. My hostility toward them, which usually turns into disgust for the rudeness of the entire human race, can set me on edge before I ever get to work—even though their actions have set me back only by approximately two seconds. For some reason, I seem to think that a few seconds here and there make an enormous difference in how much I'm going to accomplish on any given day. Perhaps that's why I keep inching closer toward the bumper in front of me—a behavior that has been scientifically proven both to increase stress dramatically and to save absolutely no time whatsoever. I have perspectives and habits that add burdens without accomplishing anything good.

I like using the highways as a parable for life because nearly every human emotion can emerge when we're behind the wheel. We can relax and enjoy the breeze, get frustrated and curse at our problems, celebrate the sights we see and the passengers we're with, look at others

with either compassion or anger, lament the minor tragedies of flat tires and the major tragedies of serious accidents, and so on. This metaphor has a way of putting my own issues into perspective. I've found that attitudes I stuff down in normal life come out much more readily and honestly when I'm behind the wheel. If, for example, I get offended easily at the mistakes of other drivers, I'm probably getting offended at coworkers or family members more often than I'd like to think. If I'm completely self-absorbed in my mission to get to a certain place at a certain time, that usually translates into an overall self-absorption in what I'm trying to accomplish in that particular season of life. Whatever I've stuffed in real relationships comes out in my "relationships" with other cars. My temperament on the highway is a snapshot of the bigger picture, a diagnostic tool with startling accuracy.

Knowing that has helped me see the source of much of the weightiness that I and others carry around. We'd like to think that our burdens are primarily about people and circumstances, but our own attitudes and perspectives are a big part of the problem. On the highway, for example, what would happen if I just decided to let people cut in front of me? if I backed off and added some space between my front bumper and the other car's back bumper? if I looked for opportunities to let others go first? What would I have to lose? A few seconds of my day? I'd gladly trade a few seconds for a peaceful heart. But for some reason, that's a hard attitude to implement—especially when the context is the big issues of life and not a morning commute.

I want most of this book to focus on the solutions to our burdensome lives, not on the problem itself. And we're getting there. But before we dive deeper into the answers, we need to spend another chapter looking at our burdens. Somehow just seeing where they come from helps to lighten them, or at least prepares us to deal with

them appropriately. When we're able to identify them, their power begins to dissipate.

HEAVY WEIGHTS

Many of our burdens come from our misperceptions and distorted thinking—we'll look at those in a bit—but some of them simply come during the normal course of life. We can be entirely in the will of God in our outward circumstances and inner desires yet still be burdened about the issues we have to deal with. Even with a clean conscience, we can have major stresses.

Decisions and direction

Professionals who study consumer behavior talk about the problem of “overchoice,” but it really applies to every area of life. Never in the history of the world have we had as many choices as we have now. “Offering more choices by itself seems like a positive development,” says the Wikipedia entry on overchoice. “In fact, however, it hides an underlying problem: faced with too many choices, consumers have trouble making optimal satisfying choices, and thus as a result can be indecisive, unhappy, and even refrain from making the choice (purchase) at all.”¹

Of course, the problem of making a decision is nothing new. When faced with a variety of options, we can rule many out right away, but others seem good. We are starved for direction from God. We want a peek into the future, an exhaustive and infallible list of pros and cons, or some supernatural guidance that will just tell us what to do. That's why horoscopes are so appealing to so many people. They claim to offer inside information on what's coming down the road. We crave that kind of advantage when we have to make a decision. We look for anything that will take some of the pressure off.

The responsibility of making decisions can be oppressive. We can't

escape the need to decide. Life is full of choices; even choosing not to make them is a choice. An awareness that minor decisions today may have major repercussions tomorrow—it takes a small rudder to determine the direction of an entire ship—only adds to the weight. That weight can really stress us out.

Responsibilities and workload

Is there any way around this? Certain seasons of life seem heavy with extra responsibilities. That's normal. The problem is when seasons expand into years or even decades. Some careers or family roles can be overwhelming in their demands. A forty-hour-a-week job can easily turn into a fifty- or sixty-hour obligation, and family members can require long periods of intense attention or long-term care. Most Christians have a strong desire to be faithful in all of their duties. But duties that become a drain on time, energy, or resources create a lot of worries.

This is especially true when you are responsible for the welfare of other people. It's sobering to know that your decisions at work can eventually determine whether a number of people will be able to keep their jobs, their health insurance, and their houses. Some people are able to make decisions about layoffs and firings easily; others get ulcers about such decisions. In an interdependent society in which each person affects many others, our choices can be an overwhelming responsibility.

Finances

We live in the wealthiest era in history, and most people reading this book are from a society with the highest standard of living in this era. That puts us in the most economically advantageous position human beings have ever experienced—and still hardly anyone thinks they have enough money. Our incomes aren't quite large enough, our budgets are always a little too tight, and in spite of all of our assets, most of us

carry some kind of debt. On top of that, we worry about our financial security in the future.

This is a strange phenomenon. It seems the more we acquire, the more concerned we are about maintaining it. The more diverse our personal economies are, the more scattered our thoughts are about them. The more opportunities we have to invest or spend, the more decisions we need to make. Those who have relatively little are preoccupied with financial issues; and those with obscenely large bank accounts are preoccupied with financial issues. Few people have learned how to deal with their money without stress.

Health

Half an hour before I began writing this section, several of us at the office got news that one of our coworkers was just diagnosed with stage-three cancer. One of our colleagues died a couple of years ago from the same kind of cancer. Both were relatively young women—and completely surprised—when they came face-to-face with the frightening news of their condition. Neither had any reason to suspect that she would be hit with a dreaded disease.

Most of us are aware that even robust health can be taken away from us at a moment's notice. Some of us actually spend time worrying about that possibility. But even if we aren't concerned with life-threatening illness for ourselves, we're concerned about it for someone. We all have family members, friends, and/or coworkers who have had to battle with an out-of-the-blue injury or illness. It's a lingering threat in the back of our minds that can weigh us down.

Relationships

There's virtually no end to the ways we can worry about relationships. When we're single, we spend a lot of energy thinking about finding the right person to marry. When we're married, we spend a lot of energy

thinking about how to improve our marriage or even hold on to it. If we have children, we worry about their welfare. We may worry about finding friends, relating to them, impressing them, not offending them, and more. We stress about conflict and how to resolve it—or if a relationship is already broken, how it can be healed or whether it even should be. Negative themes woven in and out of many of our relationships can include mistrust, blame, guilt, boredom, and insensitivity. Relationships can be the most complicating aspect of our lives.

HEAVIER WEIGHTS

Another category of burdens involves the stresses we inflict on ourselves, usually unintentionally. These come from having an unbalanced perspective, having dysfunctional patterns of thought and behavior, or focusing on the wrong issues. Nearly everyone encounters some of these at some point in life, but none of them are necessary. Unlike the stresses above—decisions, responsibilities, finances, health, and relationships—these aren't inevitable. Even so, nearly all of us are affected by the following burdens in degrees ranging from very minor to all-consuming.

Materialism, wealth, and a comfortable lifestyle

Striving for a certain lifestyle can be stressful. There's nothing wrong with wanting to live in a certain way, but the drive to get there often becomes much more important to us than it should. The American dream can be a terrible burden to bear—and, at certain seasons in life, very difficult to maintain. We have a vision for the kind of home we want to live in, the things we want to be able to do and buy, and all the trappings that come along with that picture. And we often just assume that this is a realistic vision and that anything that falls short of it is failure. There's a lot of pressure involved in accomplishing that goal, and there's even more involved in maintaining it. A lot of people are outwardly living the life they envisioned but being drained of all their

energy by the rat race necessary to maintain the lifestyle. There's no joy in that way of life.

It's amazing how absurdly we behave sometimes without even realizing how senseless we look. In a consumer society, we are constantly acquiring more. Then the size of our homes has to catch up with the amount of stuff we have; we need bigger places. And if we acquired our stuff with credit, our incomes have to catch up with the amount of stuff we have too; we need more money. So we work harder in order to expand our incomes, our properties, and our possessions—and then feel the weight of an overextended lifestyle.

The storage-unit phenomenon is a visible symptom of this dynamic. I know there are plenty of valid reasons for renting storage units from time to time because I've done it myself. But I read somewhere that most units are rented for an average of eighteen months, at the end of which time most renters decide to sell all their stuff anyway. In other words, we pay far more than our possessions are worth just to house them, and when we finally figure out the absurdity of that situation—thousands of dollars later—we get rid of our things, just as we could have done in the first place. Meanwhile, we carry a lot of mental stress just by having more than we need.

Pride, self-promotion, reputation, and image

One of the most tragically humorous characters in the Bible is Haman, the villain in the book of Esther. Completely self-absorbed and obsessed about his own status, he could have enjoyed all the benefits of his position in the king's court. Instead, he had to tirelessly promote himself and couldn't even enjoy a banquet for long because he was eaten up with bitterness toward a rival. His pride drove him to seek fulfillment in his own glory, but prohibited him from enjoying even a taste of the glory he sought.

Few of us are infected with that degree of pride, but many of us

are overly concerned with our own images and reputations. If you've done even a little bit of image management for yourself, you know how exhausting it can be. It makes you feel like the Wizard of Oz—pulling levers and pushing buttons as fast as you can, desperately hoping no one pulls the curtain back to expose the real you. Sure, it might be stressful to let people see us as we really are. But it's a much bigger burden to cover up our flaws.

Pride in any form is a high-maintenance attitude. It forces us to do things to impress people, tell half-truths or even outright lies to build ourselves up or tear someone else down, accomplish things that don't really interest us but look good to others, buy things we can't afford in order to convey a certain image, accept jobs for the status they carry rather than the actual mission they fulfill, and so on. We may not think of humility as a fulfilling virtue, but it's easy to maintain and much better than the alternative. Pride can make us downright miserable.

Agendas and expectations

Everyone has dreams, goals, and plans. But if they aren't God-given dreams, goals, and plans, they can consume our lives and eat away at our sense of satisfaction. It has been said that an expectation is a "predetermined resentment," and there's some truth in that. Not all expectations set us up for resentment, but a lot of them do. When we, other people, or circumstances don't meet them, we get very frustrated. We try to pressure people to cooperate and force situations to work out the way we want. The desire to control and manipulate greatly complicates our relationships and causes us to feel very weighed down. Staying "on top" of things is a dizzying lifestyle.

Most of us have known people (or *been* people) who have such a strong agenda for their lives and the people around them that they can't help but be miserable. It's a heavy burden to expect so much and, inevitably, be disappointed by all the ways life doesn't work out as expected.

A strong agenda is an asset when it's a God-given mission—and even then, only when we trust God to fulfill that mission—but it's a heavy liability when it's an inflexible personal ambition. It's bound to feel futile eventually.

Judgments, criticisms, and offenses

A well-known professional basketball player recently got into some verbal sparring with a former coach through the media. In one of his comments to an interviewer, the player said very emphatically that he “demanded” respect because of his long and storied career. Aside from the obvious fact that you can't demand respect from others—they either give it to you or they don't—the cocky player was venting a common sentiment that most of us let simmer beneath the surface. We have a nearly endless capacity to nurture offenses and grudges.

Think of the variety of ways we do this. Someone ahead of us in line at the grocery store has unloaded her cart when she suddenly remembers she forgot to pick up a gallon of milk. She casually asks the bagger to run and get her one and doesn't even hint at an apologetic glance in our direction. Though that means we will have to wait an additional two minutes to begin unloading our purchases, it really doesn't have any other effect at all—other than offending us. Someone forgets to acknowledge a contribution we've made at work or at church, and though it doesn't actually cause anyone to think less of us, the apparent lack of appreciation really gets under our skin. Someone questions a decision we made, and immediately we get defensive—as though that person's lack of support makes any difference as to whether we are right or wrong. And we don't just get defensive, we go on the offense pretty frequently, making snap judgments about other people and mentally putting them down. The point is that many of us seem to have an unspoken, internal competition between ourselves and everyone around us.

Urgency and busyness

Back in 1967, Charles Hummel wrote about “The Tyranny of the Urgent” in a booklet for InterVarsity Press, and it seems that our increasing pace of life has only intensified the problem. Technology has made communication easier, but “easy” doesn’t help when you’re trying to create margin in your life. It only increases the speed of the demands placed on us. We’re busier than ever.

Hummel pointed out that our time-crunch problems are usually a matter of having misplaced priorities. We sacrifice the things that are important for whatever is urgent. The result is a very stressful schedule dictated by the demands of the moment. We think our schedules are full of necessary activities and obligations, but that’s only because of our definition of “necessary.” We are almost always busier than God intends for us to be.

Most of us want more hours in the day, but I have a hunch that even if we got them, they would fill up with the same kinds of activities that already weigh us down, and we still wouldn’t have enough time. The answer to feeling overextended isn’t spreading our overextension into a longer day. It’s in developing the right priorities in the time we have.

Fear of loss or misfortune

Most of us can find things to worry about if we try. A hint of a symptom might cause us to imagine all the dire illnesses that could be stirring within us. A single financial setback can stimulate all sorts of thinking about how we would manage a major financial crisis. Hearing about someone else’s accident almost begs us to think of how the same thing could happen to us. We have a tendency to turn molehill difficulties into mountains of crisis long before anything actually happens to us.

Regrets

We all have things in our pasts we would do differently if we got another chance. Some of those can turn into huge regrets—decisions that we

know have dramatically and negatively altered the course of our lives. Seeing the damage we've caused makes us wish we could turn back time. We wonder what life would be like if we hadn't done the things we did. Regrets are heavy loads to bear.

Sin, addictions, and guilt

The wages of sin may be death, but it demands an even greater payment than that. Sin always has consequences that complicate our lives, especially when it involves a habitual dependence that can be expensive, time-consuming, or damaging to our health. Beyond the outward consequences of sin is one devilish burden that can outweigh all others: guilt. When we're carrying a sense of guilt around, every other area of life can seem overwhelmingly heavy. If we want to live an unburdened life, we have to understand and apply the solution to our sin and guilt.

Unfortunately, the weight of guilt is just as painful when the guilt is false. The sense of shame many people carry within them because of some past abuse or trauma is as crippling as the real thing, even though the bearer didn't do anything wrong. The remedy for false guilt is different than the remedy for true guilt—you don't need to confess and repent for being abused or having shattered self-esteem—but the need to deal with it is just as great. It's impossible to live with a sense of weightlessness while holding on to shame.

SOULS STRETCHED THIN

Jesus told twin parables about people giving up all they had in order to gain something of much greater value. One was a man who found a treasure hidden in a field. With joy, he went and sold all that he had and bought the field. The other was a merchant who discovered an extremely valuable pearl. He, too, sold all he had and bought the pearl.² These parables describe the exchange we make in order to come into God's Kingdom; we have to be willing to lose everything in order

to gain Christ. But they also describe a by-product of coming into his Kingdom—the unburdened life. God gives us an amazing offer: we can trade all of our complications for his peace, all of our stresses for his strength, all of our neediness for his supply. We turn over our burdens to him, and he takes them. What we receive in return is himself.

That’s a no-brainer of an exchange. We’ll talk more about what it entails and how we actually apply it to real life, but the point is that we have a choice to make. On one hand, we can continue to worry about things we can’t control, be driven by petty slights or overinflated agendas, get irritated by people we don’t want to deal with, or be burdened by work we don’t want to do. On the other hand, we can relinquish the key to our lives to someone much more capable of managing them. Sure, we’ll have to radically submit to his plan, but considering how well our own plans work for us, that shouldn’t be a hard decision to make. Transferring the weight that holds us down to someone much stronger is a real, viable option.

When we do that decisively—and it really does require a forceful, resolute decision—we exchange our scattered interests for one overriding passion. The problem is that we have diversified souls. We’re jugglers trying to manage life and treat a multitude of symptoms, some of which we hardly even know are there. Like the man who found a treasure in a field and the merchant who found a valuable pearl, we can trade in multiple concerns for a single one. When we learn how to focus our diversified souls on one master, we find our burdens a lot less weighty.

THE “AFTER” PICTURE

Infomercials for weight-loss plans invariably show a multitude of before and after pictures to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program. In other words, they show you pictures of the promise. In a sense, the Bible does the same thing. It tells us what kind of people we can be when we

surrender our burdens to God. It also tells us God's solution and shows us his promises for each of the burdens in our lives.

We can see this if we go through the same categories of burdens listed above and apply biblical truth to them. What we'll find in virtually every case is that our worries are lying to us. They directly contradict biblical promises and principles.

Decisions and direction

Is there any shortage in the Bible of promises assuring us that God will guide us if we let him? If we look to him and not to our own understanding, he'll lead us wherever he wants us to go.³ His sheep hear his voice.⁴ Even when we aren't sure of the direction we're going, we're told that he will determine our steps.⁵ The question isn't whether God will give us direction; it's whether we believe that he is when he's doing it. His desire is to lead us into his purposes.

Responsibilities and workload

God built at least one solution for this into his plan: the Sabbath. It's a never-revoked command—a "permanent" law⁶—that he himself modeled for us at Creation. Most people think they are too busy to take a Sabbath rest, much like we often think we don't have enough money to give a regular offering to God. But in God's economy, taking time off (and giving a portion of one's income) generally makes life more efficient. And for those responsibilities that aren't addressed by a once-a-week rest, God offers his strength to help us carry them. His desire is for us to be empowered by him in all we do.

Finances

Jesus told us not to worry about the necessities of life, and Paul assured the Philippians that God would provide all their needs according to his riches.⁷ There's no need to spiritualize this promise. Though it certainly

applies to the range of human need, including spiritual needs, the context of Paul's statement was finances. God's desire is for us to trust him and expect his provision.

Health

God calls himself our Healer,⁸ and Jesus spent quite a bit of his ministry healing people. So did the apostles. I've seen God do dramatic miracles of healing in our day too. I can't explain why he doesn't in every case, but I'm convinced he wants us to seek him for healing in any situation in which we need it. His Word invites us—practically pleads with us—to come to him in faith when we're sick and hurting. His desire is for us to depend on him physically as well as spiritually.

Relationships

God is relational at his core, from the fellowship of the Trinity to his enormous love for the world. Jesus came to reconcile us to God, and he gave us a ministry of reconciliation. His Spirit strengthens us in his love. The two greatest commandments are meant to establish our relationships with God and with each other. From Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, God is concerned with the quality of relationships. His desire is to help us establish them, strengthen them, and heal the ones that need healing. We can count on him to do that.

Materialism, wealth, and a comfortable lifestyle

The reason we have a hard time trusting God for our well-being is that "hard master" syndrome we discussed in the last chapter. We know he'll provide for our needs, but is he generous? Does he ever give us our wants? Or do we have to go after those on our own? The testimony of Scripture is that God gives good gifts⁹ and blesses people like Abraham, David, Solomon, and quite a few other people with wealth and other pleasures and comforts. That doesn't mean wealth is an inherent part of the gospel, but it

does prove that God isn't stingy. His desire is for us to trust him to give us exactly what he wants to give us. That's often much more than we think.

Pride, self-promotion, reputation, and image

Throughout Scripture, God defends the humble but opposes the proud.¹⁰ For some reason, many of us have a deep-seated drive to elevate ourselves. The fundamental problem is that we don't trust him to support us. What we don't realize is that this drive directly opposes the way God wants to work with us. Our regard for our own images and status brings us into conflict with him, but he provides ample strength and status to those who humbly depend on him.¹¹ In other words, the way up in the Kingdom of God is to go down. God's desire is for us to live completely unassuming, unpretentious lives and let him lift us up whenever and however he wants.

Agendas and expectations

God makes it clear that he has plans and purposes for our lives. When we live willfully, focused on our own agendas and fixed on rigid expectations, we're directing ourselves rather than letting him direct us. The fundamental problem is that we don't trust God to accomplish his will—or that we don't trust that his will is better than our own will. When we find ourselves taking matters into our own hands, we're revealing a lack of confidence in his ability or willingness to accomplish his good purposes for us. But his desire is for us to trust him to be in the driver's seat of our lives.

Judgments, criticisms, and offenses

If we had the humility and trust we are supposed to have, we'd have no need to criticize others or to be offended when we feel slighted. When we have a strong competitive reaction to those around us, we're revealing a deep insecurity about our position in God's Kingdom. Our fundamental problem is a lack of trust that he will defend us and establish

us in the roles he wants us to have. But as children of God and heirs of his Kingdom, we don't need to have a sense of rivalry with anyone. His desire is for us to relax, enjoy his favor, and trust him to defend us and position us where he wants to.

Urgency and busyness

Jesus never seemed to be in a hurry, even when one of his closest friends was at the point of death and needed him.¹² Yet somehow he was able to accomplish more in three years than anyone else has ever accomplished in a lifetime. Why? Because he allowed God to direct his schedule. We can do that too. We may deal with the reality of nine-to-five jobs and calendar appointments, but we can still live without a sense of urgency. The reason we don't is that we rarely trust that God is sovereignly guiding us. We often don't recognize the "divine appointments" he sets up for us, and we often wouldn't be able to respond to them even if we did recognize them because our schedules are so filled with unnecessary clutter. God's desire is for us to have enough margin in our lives that we can go wherever he leads at any time.

Fear of loss or misfortune

God is the gatekeeper of our lives. In the context of our faith in him, we can't gain anything he doesn't provide, and we can't lose anything he doesn't allow us to lose. Even Job, who suffered unusual loss, acknowledged that the Lord gives and he takes away.¹³ Though few of us are likely to ever experience Job's degree of loss, we still fear misfortune. And the Bible never guarantees us that we won't have Job-like experiences. But it does guarantee that we can trust God in every twist and turn of our lives. We can never experience any kind of loss that he does not have some kind of provision for. Our problem is worrying that we might experience hardship without finding his grace sufficient. That's a lack of trust in his provision. His desire is for us to be able to handle any event with the clear confidence that he is present with us and helping us through it.

Regrets

We don't really understand how Romans 8:28 works—how God works everything together for the good of those who love him. But that verse applies even to our own bad choices. Joseph applied this principle to the evil betrayal of his brothers. They meant to do harm, but God used it for good.¹⁴ We're tempted in our regrets to nurture a sense of bitterness, and it's easy to do. That's because we don't see God's hand in every event, and we don't really trust his ability to work all things for our good. We live with a sneaking suspicion that we'll get his consolation prizes in life, not his best gifts. His desire is for us to be able to live with complete confidence in his ability to redeem everything in our pasts.

Sin, addictions, and guilt

God's solution for these burdens is well known by anyone with even a basic familiarity with the gospel. But how easily does it sink in? The truth of our complete forgiveness and the complete removal of guilt and shame is hard to fully embrace. Many of us suspect that what we've done is too bad, or that we've done it for too long, for God to really give us a clean slate. We know his mercy as an objective fact but not as a personal experience. We often don't live as though we deeply know it. We don't allow it to heal all of our emotional wounds and scars. But God wants us to experience his power over sin—not just the truth of our forgiveness, but God's removal of all of its effects in our lives. Our problem is a lack of trust that sin's power is fully broken. Even after we've been Christians for years, we still tend to talk about the power of the old nature more than his power to overcome it. But if the Son sets you free, you will be thoroughly free.¹⁵ God's desire is for us to experience real freedom in the depths of our souls.

THE COMMON DENOMINATOR

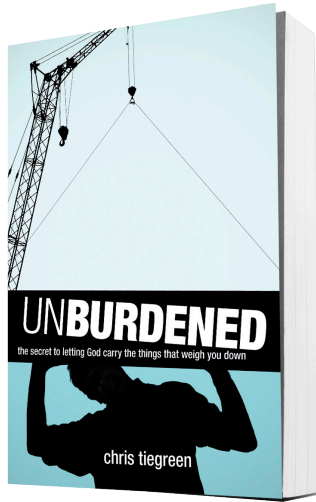
Do you see a common thread running throughout these burdens? The key variable when we don't experience freedom from them is a lack of

trust. Whenever we feel the weight of our burdens, there's some aspect of God's character or some truth from his Word that we aren't fully trusting. That's the area of our lives we need to focus on if we're ever going to feel free. In order to go through life with the lightness God wants us to have, we have to actually believe what he has told us.

We'll try to get to the root of our mistrust in the next chapter because we can't go any further toward getting rid of our worries until we do. That forceful, resolute decision to let go of the things that weigh us down can't be made in a vacuum. In order for it to stick we have to make it in complete confidence that God is there to handle the things we're letting go of. Deep down inside, we need to be able to rely on him to meet us at every point of need.

ENDNOTES

1. "Overchoice," Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overchoice> (accessed March 12, 2009).
2. Matthew 13:44-46.
3. Proverbs 3:5-6.
4. John 10:27.
5. Proverbs 16:9.
6. Exodus 31:13-17; Leviticus 23:3.
7. Philippians 4:19.
8. Exodus 15:26.
9. Psalm 84:11; James 1:17.
10. Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5.
11. Psalm 138:6; Proverbs 15:33; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2.
12. John 11:3-6.
13. Job 1:21.
14. Genesis 50:20.
15. John 8:36.



The burdens you carry will be made lighter as you learn to live in “deep-down, heart-level freedom.” Read the rest of *Unburdened* and you will not walk away unchanged.

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AN ARTICLE FROM THE BEYOND SUFFERING BIBLE

DEAR FRIEND,

Every day, we're reminded of suffering, hopelessness, and fear in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Often, we don't know where to turn. We understand in a vague way that the Bible probably contains answers, but we don't know where to look. How do we move beyond suffering and into real hope? The answer is why I am so excited about the *Beyond Suffering Bible*. At the heart of God's Word is a wellspring of wisdom and consolation that can draw people beyond pain and chronic conditions to a happy embrace of the God of hope. This Bible can be our guide. —*Joni Eareckson Tada*

In the words of Joni: "The *Beyond Suffering Bible* has been carefully and lovingly crafted by our team at Joni and Friends International Disability Center, and it's the first Bible ever created specifically for people who suffer and those who care about them." The special features of this Bible include profiles that explore significant themes related to suffering. This one is titled "Howard: The Cost of Denial," and it explores the importance of feelings in the life of one who suffers.



JONI EARECKSON TADA is the founder of Joni and Friends International Disability Center, a nonprofit ministry with a global outreach. A diving accident in 1967 left Joni, then 17, a quadriplegic in a wheelchair. Since then, Joni's wisdom and influence have been shared with the world through bestselling books, radio programs, television programs, and frequent speaking engagements.

THE CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY (CID) exists to impact the church, Christian and public institutions, and societies with a biblical worldview and life-giving truth on issues pertaining to life, dignity, justice, and equality that affect people with disabilities. Through education, training, missions, and internships, the CID is empowering students in all disciplines to evangelize, include, and disciple people affected by disability.

HOWARD

The Cost of Denial

What's the point of feelings anyway? People seem to talk about their feelings either too much or too little. It's hard to find a happy medium. Feelings can be embarrassing and even hard to control at times. But trying to avoid our feelings altogether can lead to a world of emotional problems, as Howard discovered the hard way.

Howard was a successful businessman, husband, and devoted father. In his mid-forties, he was paralyzed in a car accident. After the accident, he determined to recover quickly and not see himself as a victim. Howard's positive, upbeat attitude impressed everyone. Soon, he was back at work, maneuvering his wheelchair through airports on business trips, not letting anything stand in his way. But Howard had a secret—he was struggling with increasing anxiety. A severe panic attack ultimately sent him to the hospital and into therapy.

Howard's determination to overcome his life-changing accident caused him to deny his crushed spirit and his grief. His unexpressed emotions created anxiety that became too great to control. Howard's positive attitude ended up hurting him! His "outer self" took the significant life change in stride, but his "inner self" was in deep pain.

Through therapy, Howard learned to accept his feelings, especially the painful ones. He learned that his anxiety was a signal that he needed to pay attention to his crushed spirit and not try to suppress his feelings. You see, sometimes emotions function just like the pain receptors in the

body. Physical pain can be a gift from God to warn us that our bodies are being harmed. Similarly, our emotions can be God-given indicators that something is wrong and needs to be addressed.

Expressing and acknowledging our emotions in a healthy way can also help us to connect with God and others. Paul said, “He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us” (2 Corinthians 1:4, NLT). We live in a world with emotional suffering, but we do not have to go through it alone.



The *Beyond Suffering Bible* is filled with thousands of notes and features that invite readers into a conversation about suffering and its place in each person's life. Each feature has been carefully created to provide readers with valuable information, meaningful encouragement, and challenging applications as they encounter God's Word.

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