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IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE THIS WAY

finding unexpected strength when
disappointments leave you shattered

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

Chapter 1

B E T W E E N T W O G A R D E N S

GOING to the WELL

The human heart was created in the context of the perfection of the garden of Eden. But we don't live there now.

R E M E M B E R :

- Sometimes to get your life back, you have to face the death of what you thought your life would look like.
- Disappointment is that feeling things should be better than they are.
- Disappointment isn't proof that God is withholding good things from us. Sometimes it's His way of leading us Home.
- If the enemy can isolate us, he can influence us.
- We will never appreciate or even desire the hope of our True Love if lesser loves don't disappoint.
- God knows before we eternally dwell we will have to learn how to wrestle well.
- In the new Eden we won't need to wrestle well, because we will be well.

RECEIVE:

“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:3–5)

REFLECT:

- What disappointments are you currently facing?
- Are there any long-standing untruths you’ve been believing about your disappointments?
- As you look back and consider the past, what gifts have come out of your disappointments?
- In what ways can you learn to wrestle well in the midst of your right-now life?
- How does this teaching on the garden of Eden help you have a better understanding of what you’re going through?

Father,

Living in the messy middle between two gardens is so trying at times. Teach me to wrestle well between my faith and my feelings when life disappoints in ways I never imagined. My disappointments don’t feel like a gift at all, but I’m going to trust You—the Giver of good gifts. Release an atmosphere of hope in my right-now life, I pray.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

Chapter 2

DUST

GOING to the WELL

Dust doesn't have to signify the end. Dust is often what must be present for the new to begin.

REMEMBER:

- We live in a broken world where broken things happen.
- Dust is the exact ingredient God loves to use.
- God speaks in a language of freedom; Satan speaks in a language of restriction.
- God is our only source of perfection on this side of eternity. And He sees a perfect plan for our dust.
- If I want His promises, I have to trust His process.
- God isn't ever going to forsake you, but He will go to great lengths to remake you.
- What if disappointment is really the exact appointment your soul needs to radically encounter God?

R E C E I V E :

Yet You, LORD, are our Father.

We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

(Isaiah 64:8)

Also read:

Genesis 2–3

Jeremiah 18:6

John 9:5–6

2 Corinthians 5:1–5

Revelation 21:5

R E F L E C T :

- When has your life felt shattered to the point of dust?
- How do you relate to the story of Adam and Eve's disobedience?
- Where are you hoping for a new beginning?
- In what ways are you willing to trust God's process for your life?

Father,

This world is broken and broken things happen—yes. Even still, I can't help but feel utterly shattered and disillusioned when heartbreak is a part of my story. I don't like this—I don't like dust. But dust is one of Your favorite ingredients to use when making something new, and I believe You are working right now to do this very thing in my life. I know You will never forsake me, but that You will go to great lengths to remake me. Thank You.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 3

BUT HOW DO I GET THROUGH
THE NEXT 86,400 SECONDS?

GOING to the WELL

God loves me too much to answer my prayers at any other time than the right time and in any other way than the right way.

R E M E M B E R :

- God will eventually make everything okay.
- The longer we avoid the feeling, the more we delay our healing.
- God doesn't want to be explained away; He wants to be invited in.
- Disappointments aren't a reason to run away. They are the reason to turn a different way.
- I find relief for my unbelief by laying down my human assessments and assumptions.

R E C E I V E :

Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

(Proverbs 13:12)

Also read:

Proverbs 13:12

Matthew 6:9–11

Mark 14:36

Hebrews 2:14–15, 17–18; 3:1; 5:7–9

REFLECT:

- Which of your prayers are going seemingly unanswered by God?
- How are you inviting the Lord into your everyday situations, and how can you improve in drawing near to Him?
- God is powerfully at work in your life and situation. What would it look like for you to rest in that truth today?

Father,

You are so very good. You can be trusted. Help me mark the hard moments of this day with declarations of my trust in You. There is more to what I'm facing today than what my physical eyes can see. When my pain feels too deep and when I don't think I can take one more second of suffering, help me recognize Your plan and protection. Help me trade my unbelief for the beautiful relief that I don't have to figure this out. I just have to fix my thoughts on Jesus and how He will lead me. I mark this moment as a moment of trust. I declare I don't have to understand. I just have to trust.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 4

TAN FEET

GOING to the WELL

When you live slow for a season, the Son has access to the parts of you normally covered up by everyday put-ons.

REMEMBER:

- I must learn to control how much I allow fear to have access to my life.
- The enemy wants us paralyzed and compromised by what-ifs, opinions, accusations, and misunderstandings.
- To dwell well in this life between two gardens requires us to make peace with being naked and unashamed.
- We must let God's Word become the words of our story.
- I am deeply loved by God, even in my most naked form.

R E C E I V E :

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (Genesis 2:25)

Also read:

Genesis 3:9, 11

2 Timothy 1:7

R E F L E C T :

- Whom have you given so much power to that their words about you being naked make you afraid? How have their words affected you?
- Have you ever feared dealing with your own covered-up places so much that you attempted to expose others instead? How has that played out?
- How are you living paralyzed by fear instead of in the reality that you are deeply loved by God?

Father,

I confess that I spend too much time mentally revisiting the hurtful words of others instead of purposefully reminding my soul of healing words from You. I come to You today with a soul that is tired. Tired of running. Tired of hiding. Tired of feeling like I'm never quite enough. Help me receive and believe the words that You say are true about me. That I am a treasure. That I am beautiful. That I am chosen and set apart. Even with all my flaws. Even with all these scars. Strip away every label, every lie, and even the masks I've desperately tried to hold in place, and help me simply stand before You today. Naked and unashamed. Fully known and lavishly loved.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 5

PAINTINGS AND PEOPLE

GOING to the WELL

We are imperfect because we are unfinished.

REMEMBER:

- While God converts with Truth, the enemy perverts the Truth.
- God wants us transformed, but Satan wants us paralyzed.
- To create means that I look a little bit like my Creator.
- God doesn't expect perfection, so we shouldn't expect it from ourselves and others.
- We must get to a place of self-compassion if we hope to ever have true, deep compassion for others.
- Quiet moments of compassion are epic moments of battle.
- We must trade our “live up” mentality for a “show up” one.
- People need to know God’s compassion is alive and well and winning the epic battle of good versus evil.

R E C E I V E :

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)

Also read:

Colossians 3:12

Revelation 12:11

R E F L E C T :

- When people see you, do they see the compassion of their Creator? How so?
- How many times have you let imperfections cause you to be too hard on yourself and too harsh with others?
- What might it look like in your daily life for you to bring compassion as you show up for others?

Father,

I don't want to let disappointment and heartbreak cause me to approach this life more cautious than creative. More critical than compassionate. More cynical than surrendered. Thank You for the ways You tenderly meet me in my brokenness and my pain. And thank You for reminding me that I still have light and beauty to offer to this world. Today, I am choosing to grab the brush. No attempts at perfection. No apologizing or strategizing. Just me. Lighting this world with my color. Showing up with Your compassion and grace.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 6

A LITTLE TOO LONG AND A LOT TOO HARD

GOING to the WELL

To hope is to acknowledge reality in the very same breath that I acknowledge God's sovereignty.

REMEMBER:

- When things stay hard for a long time, every day feels more like walking on a tightrope than a solid and secure road into the future.
- My hope is tied to the unchanging promise of God.
- I know I must walk through God's process before I see His fulfilled promise.
- God isn't picking on me. God is picking me to personally live out one of His promises.
- I've got to walk through the low places of the process before I'm perfectly equipped to live the promise.
- Not only is His presence in the process, but there's also a purpose in the process.
- The process isn't a cruel way to keep you from the promise; it's the exact preparation you'll need to handle the promise.
- God is far more interested in your being prepared than in your being comfortable.

R E C E I V E :

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. (1 Peter 5:10)

Also read:

- Job 42
- Psalm 40:1–4
- 2 Corinthians 12:9–10
- Colossians 1:9–11
- James 1:2–4

R E F L E C T :

- Think back on what we talked about regarding God's presence, process, purpose, preparation, and promise. How does this help you with your own disappointments?
- Consider the list of verses that speaks to the process. Which one resonates most deeply with you?
- What promises of God are you desperate to see fulfilled right now?

Father,

I confess there are days when it feels like You have forgotten me, maybe even abandoned me, because this battle has raged on for so long. And I confess there are times I get tired of hoping, weary from waiting, and I wonder just how much longer it will all go on. Thank You for reminding me that there is purpose to this process and that I'm not walking through any of this alone. You are my strength. You are my hope. You are my song. Help me fix my eyes once again on Your promises. And remind me to keep my hope tied to You and You alone.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 7

WHEN GOD GIVES YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE

GOING to the WELL

God doesn't expect us to handle this. He wants us to hand it over to Him.

REMEMBER:

- God doesn't want us to rally more of our own strength. He wants us to rely solely on His strength.
- If we keep walking around thinking that God won't give us more than we can handle, we set ourselves up to be suspicious of God.
- God is making something beautiful out of my life.
- Surrendering to God isn't giving in—it's giving up! Giving up carrying the weight of all that's too much for us to our God.
- It's our choice whether we stay stuck in our hurt or get renewed in our hearts.
- God isn't far off and distant. He's closer than we often realize.
- Is this news or truth?
- The restoration that is impossible with man's limitations is always possible for a limitless God.

RECEIVE:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life

WHEN GOD GIVES YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE

itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. (2 Corinthians 1:8–9)

Also read:

Job 2:7–10

Psalm 25:5

Isaiah 45:9; 46:3–4, 9–11

Jeremiah 29:10–14

Matthew 5:8

1 Corinthians 10:13

Truth verses: Psalm 32:7; 73:23; 146:6; Isaiah 41:10; John 14:6

REFLECT:

- In what ways are you questioning how God is making your life stronger and more beautiful than ever?
- What broken pieces do you need to surrender to God?

Father,

I come to You today, a woman worn out from trying to do everything in my own strength. A woman ready to accept Your invitation to surrender. Today I say that I give up. I give up carrying the weight of all that's too much for me. Take this, Lord. Take all of this hard and all of this hurt and shatter it just right, so I can be made stronger, more beautiful, and able to withstand fires like never before. I trust Your love for me. I trust Your plans for me. And I trust You will use all of this for good.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 8

LETTING GO OF WHAT'S HOLDING ME BACK

GOING to the WELL

What if the worst parts of your life are actually gateways to the very best parts you'd never want to do without?

REMEMBER:

- Sometimes hardship happens not because of what you've done but because of something God is doing.
- When you are chosen for suffering, you are chosen for the blessing of displaying the works of God.
- God isn't causing this pain and suffering—He's allowing it.
- Sin entangles and strangles our ability to run this race of life well.
- My deepest desperation can lead to a great revelation from God.
- God will use suffering to shape us, mold us, and make us even better prepared for our purpose.
- When we are afflicted, we are being made more effective!
- In the end, not only will our suffering produce perseverance—endurance for our race—but it will bring forth hope.

R E C E I V E :

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1–2)

Also read:

Psalm 51:1–15

John 9:1–7, 35–38

Romans 5:1–4

R E F L E C T :

- What heavy weights are hindering you and need to be thrown off? (Hebrews 12:1)
- What sins are easily entangling you? (Hebrews 12:1)
- What would it look like for you to persevere right now? (Hebrews 12:2)
- What joy has been set before you and will help you endure? (Hebrews 12:2)

Father,

This is what I want: to run with perseverance the race You have set before me. To keep moving forward even when the enemy's taunts are deafening and my own flesh is demanding that I give up and turn back. Open my eyes to see anything and everything that is hindering me. Search my heart. Examine my life. And help me grab firmly onto the truth that You are for me and not against me. You are not a God who picks on me. You are a God who has handpicked me. And I want to live a life that brings You glory. Help me catch my breath today, Lord. I'm ready to get moving once again.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 9

EXPOSING THE ENEMY

GOING to the WELL

If my Bible is collecting dust and my conscience is being hushed, then my heart is in danger of being crushed.

REMEMBER:

- Dangerous desires birthed inside our unsettled disappointments are nothing but a setup for a takedown.
- The enemy wants to tempt, deceive, and accuse you.
- Temptation only works if our enemy keeps the consequences hidden from us.
- Truth sheds light on darkness and helps us see what a horrible trap Satan is luring us into.
- Your soul is made by God to respond to Truth.
- God is the author of the Truth that empowers us. Satan is the author of the deception that imprisons us.
- The enemy's deception is hand-designed to draw your attention, affection, and worship away from God.
- If we are going to be true to ourselves, we'd better make sure we are being true to our most surrendered, healed, and healthy selves.
- God isn't expecting perfection. He just wants us to be perfectly surrendered to His way and His Word.
- If I forget my soul hunger can only be satisfied by daily doses of truth, I'm prone to snack on deception.
- Your story will not be wasted.

R E C E I V E :

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”
(1 Peter 1:13–16)

Also read:

Genesis 3:14

Psalm 18:30–32; 19:14

Jeremiah 17:9

John 10:10

1 Corinthians 10:23

Galatians 6:7–8

Ephesians 2:1–5

Hebrews 4:12–16

James 1:13–17, 21–22; 5:13–16

1 Peter 1:6–7

2 Peter 1:4; 2:17–19; 3:9

Revelation 12:10–11

REFLECT:

- If your temptations had warning labels on them, what would they say?
- What seemingly small ways are you allowing the enemy to enter your disappointments?
- Consider the three ways the enemy comes after us. Did any of these surprise you? How will you be more alert to his schemes?

Father,

I don't want to be someone the enemy can easily isolate or intimidate. A woman readily influenced by his lies and seduced by his crafty plans. I want to live this life free of his entanglements. That's why I'm so thankful for the incredible gift of Your Word. Guide me and teach me each day as I sit and read Your Truth. Let it prepare my heart and mind for battle. Enlightening and empowering me. Convicting and comforting me. Shedding light on the enemy's schemes and giving me the strength I need to stand. I declare today that while the enemy is vicious, he will not be victorious in my life. Not with You and Your truths working mightily in my heart and my life.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Chapter 10

FIGHTING WORDS

GOING to the WELL

Comfort isn't a solution to seek; rather it's a by-product we'll reap when we stay close to the Lord.

REMEMBER:

- Being lulled into a false sense of security is worse than going through the process of suffering.
- To be like Jesus, we must become more and more saturated with Him and less and less saturated with our human ways of processing circumstances.
- These disappointments we all go through are actually divine appointments to see God do a new thing.
- If we have a misunderstanding of God, we will most certainly have a wrong understanding of our circumstances.
- When we express God's truth, we depress the enemy's lies.
- Using God's truth as your fighting words will not change *what* you see, but it absolutely will change *how* you see.

RECEIVE:

God will strengthen you with his own great power so that you will not give up when troubles come, but you will be patient.
(Colossians 1:11 NCV)

Also read:

Numbers 23:19

Psalm 19:14; 91:14–15; 112:7; 138:1–3, 7; 145:18

Proverbs 4:25–27; 5:1–2

Isaiah 16:6–7, 10; 26:3; 43:1–5, 18–19

Jeremiah 24:7; 48:11

Lamentations 3:21–23

Matthew 6:33–34

John 16:12–15, 33

Romans 8:5–6; 12:2

Ephesians 2:10

Philippians 3:15–21; 4:1, 6–8

2 Thessalonians 2:15–17

Hebrews 3:1; 12:1–2

James 5:13

1 Peter 4:12–13; 5:8

1 John 2:16

R E F L E C T:

- What if your “I don’t know” is helping you, not hurting you? Even now, what positives can you see coming from your season of disappointment?
- What comforts and certainties are you craving right now that could possibly result in complacency down the road, drawing your heart further away from God?
- We all need to have some fighting words on hand so we can declare God’s truth over our difficult situations. Which declaration at the end of this chapter spoke to your heart and circumstance the most?

Father,

I want to look more and more like You. I want to think more and more like You. I want to act like I’ve spent more and more time with You. Pour me out of the dregs of wrong thinking, wrong processing, and wrong reactions. Pour me into circumstances that make me desperate for Your touch. I want to conform to You, so I can be transformed by absorbing Your essence. I believe You. I trust You. Make me more like You, I pray.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

Chapter 11

U P S I D E D O W N

GOING to the WELL

It will all be turned upside down in eternity. Grief will turn to joy. Heartbreak to shouts of thanksgiving. Crowns of thorns to crowns of gold fit for a king.

R E M E M B E R :

- It's better to wrestle with Truth than wallow in turmoil.
- To live is to love. To love is to risk pain. To risk pain is to live. It's what it means to truly be human.
- Tears are the truest connection we have with others, and trust is the truest connection we have with God.
- Trust. Trading our will for "Thy will," because we know He will.
- There's purpose in the pain and joy in the making of a life with Jesus.
- Everyone must try.
- Give yourself permission to not be perfect.
- Refuse to be intimidated by the process.
- The most beauty will emerge from the paintbrushes held by those who are most free from fear.
- No human should have to carry the weight of being their own god, but so many do.
- You will see what a gift it is that you've been entrusted with enough hurt to keep you humane.
- Perfection intimidates. Compassion inspires.

- There's someone else in the world who would drown in their own tears if not for seeing yours.
- When you make one other human simply see they aren't alone, you make the world a better place.
- Your whys have made you wise.

R E C E I V E :

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)

Also read:

James 1:2–4

R E F L E C T :

- Would you say you have been spending more time wallowing in turmoil lately or wrestling well with Truth?
- Are there any “ingredients” in your life right now—any difficult or disappointing situations—you wish you could just leave out?
- How does knowing there is purpose in all the pain help you consider where the joy might be?
- Does the hope of the crown of life change your perspective on your suffering? How would you feel

about laying that very crown at the feet of Jesus out of a deep gratitude?

- Who do you need to share your tears with? Who needs to know they aren't alone?
- The pain and confusion often found in this life lived between two gardens can leave us feeling suspicious of God, making us wonder if He is cruel and reckless. Ask yourself, *Am I willing to believe He is protecting me and preparing me for all that is ahead?*

Father,

I've needed this look at the devastations, disappointments, and dust that seem to gather in my life. I'm tired. I'm worn. But now, I'm also hopeful. You have good plans to remake me, and I know You'll never forsake me. Your Words are true and good, and for the first time in a long time, I believe them. With everything I am, I believe them. Thank You for scooping up my shattered pieces and making them into something even better—making me into something better. For Your glory. For my good. I can't say thank You enough. Today I hand over my dust and will step back to watch You work. And as You do, I pray You would mold me more and more into the likeness of Your Son.

It is in His holy name I pray, amen.

SCRIPTURES

INTRODUCTION

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57)

CHAPTER 1: BETWEEN TWO GARDENS

“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:3–5)

CHAPTER 2: DUST

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

“While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” After saying this, [Jesus] spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. (John 9:5–6)

Yet You, LORD, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
(Isaiah 64:8)

“Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.” (Jeremiah 18:6)

For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it’s not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. (2 Corinthians 5:1–5 NLT)

[God’s declaration about Eden restored:] “I am making everything new!”
(Revelation 21:5)

CHAPTER 3: BUT HOW DO I GET THROUGH THE NEXT 86,400 SECONDS?

During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. (Hebrews 5:7–9)

“Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:36)

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.”
(Matthew 6:9–11)

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death . . . For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Hebrews 2:14–15, 17–18)

Therefore, holy brother and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. (Hebrews 3:1)

Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.
(Proverbs 13:12)

CHAPTER 4: TAN FEET

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (Genesis 2:25)

But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” . . .

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” (Genesis 3:9, 11)

CHAPTER 5: PAINTINGS AND PEOPLE

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. (Revelation 12:11)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (Colossians 3:12)

CHAPTER 6: A LITTLE TOO LONG AND A LOT TOO HARD

I waited patiently for the LORD;

 he turned to me and heard my cry.

He lifted me out of the slimy pit,

 out of the mud and mire;

he set my feet on a rock

 and gave me a firm place to stand.

He put a new song in my mouth,

 a hymn of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear the LORD

 and put their trust in him.

Blessed is the one
who trusts in the LORD.
(Psalm 40:1–4)

After Job had prayed for his friends [the ones who misjudged Job, didn't tell the truth about God, and added so much hurt on top of Job's pain] the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. (Job 42:10)

The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part. (Job 42:12)

Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. (Job 42:16)

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. (1 Peter 5:10)

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience. (Colossians 1:9–11)

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecu-

tions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9–10)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2–4)

CHAPTER 7: WHEN GOD GIVES YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

For we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. (2 Corinthians 1:8–9)

Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, “What are you making?” Does your work say, “The potter has no hands”? (Isaiah 45:9)

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.

His wife said to him, “Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!”

He replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said. (Job 2:7–10)

When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you. (Jeremiah 29:10–14)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (Matthew 5:8)

Listen to me . . . you whom I have upheld since your birth, and have carried since you were born. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you. I will sustain you and I will rescue you . . . I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, “My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.” From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do. (Isaiah 46:3–4, 9–11)

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever. (Psalm 146:6)

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)

Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.
(Psalm 73:23)

You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.

(Psalm 32:7)

CHAPTER 8: LETTING GO OF WHAT'S HOLDING ME BACK

Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.
(Psalm 25:5)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1–2)

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we

must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. (John 9:1–7)

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

“Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. (John 9:35–38)

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.
Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

(Psalm 51:1–15)

Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that

exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls! (Hebrews 12:1–3 THE MESSAGE)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. (Romans 5:1–4)

CHAPTER 9: EXPOSING THE ENEMY

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters . . .

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (James 1:13–16, 21–22)

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
(Hebrews 4:12–16)

These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.” (2 Peter 2:17–19)

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7–8)

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial.

“I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. (1 Corinthians 10:23)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:1–5)

Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1:4)

Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (James 1:16–17)

The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.
Who can understand it?
(Jeremiah 17:9)

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.
(Psalm 19:14)

Now have come the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God,

and the authority of his Messiah.
For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
 who accuses them before our God day and night,
 has been hurled down.
They triumphed over him
 by the blood of the Lamb
 and by the word of their testimony;
they did not love their lives so much
 as to shrink from death.
(Revelation 12:10–11)

So the Lord God said to the serpent:

“Because you have done this,

You are cursed more than all cattle,

And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly you shall go,
And you shall eat dust

All the days of your life.”
(Genesis 3:14 NKJV)

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. **These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith**—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—**may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.** (1 Peter 1:6–7, emphasis mine)

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As

obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:13–16)

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (James 5:13–16)

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:13–17)

CHAPTER 10: FIGHTING WORDS

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

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.” (Matthew 6:33–34)

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12–13)

Moab has been at rest from youth, like wine left on its dregs, not poured from one jar to another—she has not gone into exile. So she tastes as she did, and her aroma is unchanged. (Jeremiah 48:11)

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. (Romans 8:5–6)

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

We have heard of the glories of Moab, of its excessive pride and its boasting, of its outbursts of false propaganda. For this shall the Moabites be made to lament, and all have cause to bewail Moab: they shall groan at the ruin of Kir Hareseth in utter dejection. . . . The joyful festivity will be gone from the orchards; no shouts of delight shall sound in the vineyards. The wine treaders will tread no wine in the presses; the vintage shout I will bring to an end. (Isaiah 16:6–7, 10 *HT*)

But now, this is what the LORD, your Creator says, O Jacob,
And He who formed you, O Israel,
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you [from captivity];
I have called you by name; you are Mine!

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you.
When you walk through fire, you will not be scorched,
Nor will the flame burn you.

“For I am the LORD your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I have given Egypt [to the Babylonians] as your ransom,
Cush (ancient Ethiopia) and Seba [its province] in exchange
for you.

“Because you are precious in My sight,
You are honored and I love you,
I will give *other* men in return for you and *other* peoples in
exchange for your life.

“Do not fear, for I am with you.”
(Isaiah 43:1–5 AMP)

Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.
(Isaiah 43:18–19)

God will strengthen you with his own great power so that you will not give up when troubles come, but you will be patient. (Colossians 1:11 NCV)

The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
(Psalm 145:18)

Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.

They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

(Lamentations 3:21–23)

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.” (John 16:12–15)

“Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.”
(Psalm 91:14–15)

“I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.” (Jeremiah 24:7)

They will have no fear of bad news;
their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD.
(Psalm 112:7)

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.
(Psalm 19:14)

Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. (James 5:13 NASB)

I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart;
before the “gods” I will sing your praise.
I will bow down toward your holy temple
and will praise your name
for your unfailing love and your faithfulness,
for you have so exalted your solemn decree
that it surpasses your fame.
When I called, you answered me;
you greatly emboldened me....

Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve my life.
You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes;
with your right hand you save me.
(Psalm 138:1–3, 7)

You will keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.
(Isaiah 26:3)

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

My son, pay attention to my wisdom,
turn your ear to my words of insight,
that you may maintain discretion
and your lips may preserve knowledge.
(Proverbs 5:1–2)

Let your eyes look directly ahead [toward the path of moral courage]
And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you [toward the path of integrity].

Consider well *and* watch carefully the path of your feet,
And all your ways will be steadfast *and* sure.

Do not turn away to the right nor to the left [where evil may lurk];
Turn your foot from [the path of] evil.
(Proverbs 4:25–27 AMP)

So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you'll see it yet! Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it.

Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running this same course, headed for this same goal. There are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them. I've warned you of them many times; sadly, I'm having to do it again. All they want is easy street. They hate Christ's Cross. But easy street is a dead-

end street. Those who live there make their bellies their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their appetites.

But there's far more to life for us. We're citizens of high heaven! We're waiting the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, who will transform our earthly bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He'll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him. (Philippians 3:15–21 THE MESSAGE)

For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. (1 John 2:16)

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. (Hebrews 3:1)

Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on *Jesus*, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's *there*, in the place of honor, right alongside God. (Hebrews 12:1–2 THE MESSAGE)

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace

gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (2 Thessalonians 2:15–17)

Therefore, my fellow believers, whom I love and long for, my delight and crown [my wreath of victory], in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved . . . Do not be anxious *or* worried about anything, but in everything [every circumstance and situation] by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, continue to make your [specific] requests known to God. And the peace of God [that peace which reassures the heart, that peace] which transcends all understanding, [that peace which] stands guard over your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus [is yours]. Finally, believers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable *and* worthy of respect, whatever is right *and* confirmed by God's word, whatever is pure *and* wholesome, whatever is lovely *and* brings peace, whatever is admirable *and* of good repute; if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think *continually* on these things [center your mind on them, and implant them in your heart]. (Philippians 4:1, 6–8 AMP)

God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? (Numbers 23:19)

CHAPTER 11: UPSIDE DOWN

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2–4)

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)