

Butter for the House of Bread: One Evangelical Daughter's Journey to Rediscover Her Father's Voice

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BUTTER FOR THE HOUSE OF BREAD: ONE EVANGELICAL
DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY TO REDISCOVER HER FATHER'S VOICE

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Prologue: The Story of the Two Houses



Once upon a time there lived a large family that was torn apart by a divorce. The one household was divided into two houses, and things that should never be separated were split up: one house got the bread, and the other house got the butter; one house got the pens, and the other house got the paper; one house got the music, the other house got the dancing.

Worst of all, the children were split up too.

And in the acrimony of that divorce, hurtful words were said, and hurt was answered with hurt. Names were called, and feelings were wounded, and each household of children began to refer to The Other House as *Them*. We don't do what *They* do. We don't say what *They* say. Maybe *They* aren't even really part of our family after all.

And the younger children didn't even remember meeting *Them*. They only knew the stories they had heard, that *They* were to be laughed at or feared.

In The House That Had Bread, the older children taught the younger ones to mock the relatives that lived in The House That Had Butter. "Do you know what they eat?" they would whisper with furtive giggles. "Plain butter! Nasty, slippery, slimy butter with no bread under it! They just slide it straight down their throats!"

While in The House That Had Butter, the brothers and sisters whispered, "Do you know what the children have to eat in The House That Has Bread? Plain, dry, bread with no butter on it! Ever. They don't even know what butter tastes like. They've never even had it. They don't even believe it exists! They just have to swallow the bread dry, even when it's toasted!"

And so the little ones grew up not knowing that they possessed only half their inheritance, half their legacy, half of all that was rightfully theirs. Only half of the aunts and uncles' photographs graced the wall of the stairway in the House That Had Butter. And only half of the aunts and uncles' pictures were

framed above the mantle in the House That Had Bread. The children thought they knew their relatives well. They could name all the aunts and uncles in the pictures and tell you what they all were good at. But they didn't even know of the existence of their equally close blood relations on The Other Side.

And only one person still saw the family as one family. Only one person was still welcome in both houses, and still called them both "home." Only one still acknowledged all the children in both houses as equally his own.

That person was the Grandfather.

Grandfather watched the tearing apart of his precious family, and he grieved, and he waited. He tolerated both happy groups of grandchildren grabbing his hand possessively and referring to him as "*Our* grandpa," not believing that They could ever love Grandfather as much. He watched the gifts he had given to his grandchildren be divided into two houses, until the children did not even know that some of them existed anymore. What one house played with every day, the other considered an ancient legend, lost in the dust of the past.

Grandfather watched, and waited, and loved.

He listened to the children speak of their blood brothers and sisters as Them, and call Them names behind their backs and laugh. Few of them noticed that he never joined in.



ONE LITTLE GIRL IN The House That Had Bread was too young to have any memories of her sisters and brothers in The House That Had Butter, or any of the things that they had taken with them when they moved away. She had only the foggiest notion that They existed, and did not know what They were like, except that she had heard there was something wrong with Them.

But what she did know was that she felt different in her own family, like there were parts of her that were not explained.

For one thing, she had bright red hair. None of the brothers and sisters in her house had bright red hair. Neither did any of the aunts and uncles in the pictures on the walls. Grandfather's hair was snowy white, and she couldn't tell what color it had once been.

For another thing, when she heard music playing, she wanted to move somehow. She didn't know why. She knew that Wasn't Done. Only They

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danced. If she moved around too much, everyone would think she was one of Them!

And sometimes, when all the children were studiously writing with their pens over and over on the tabletop that was covered with black ink, she wished she could have something of her own to write on, like a table top of her very own. Of course she wouldn't dream of writing on paper! She had heard stories of how They did their homework, tracing letters with their fingers on sheets of paper so nothing showed up, and then folding it all into paper airplanes and throwing them around wildly when they were done. But sometimes she wished for something more...

And some days, when she ate her bread, she wondered what it would taste like with butter on it. They *did* have butter in The House That Had Bread. (Both houses of children were prone to exaggeration.) But it was only for cooking, not for eating. The reason it was not for eating was that They did that, and They ate too much of it, and look how unhealthy that was!

Her favorite thing in all the world was when Grandfather would come and take her hand and take her, just her, on a special walk in the forest with him. He did this with each of his grandchildren sometimes. And only when she sat alone with him, her red head leaning on his white one, did she not feel strange anymore.

And this little girl was just as convinced as anyone, that what she had been taught about Them was true.

But one night, one of her sisters climbed into her bed, pulled the covers up over their heads like a tent, and whispered, "I have a secret. Don't tell anybody, but one time, when Grandfather took me to the forest and we had brought bread for a picnic, he spread butter on it and we ate it together. And it was amazing. But don't tell anybody, or they'll think I'm one of Them! I knew it would be ok to tell you. I knew you would understand."

And another night, another sister came to her and said, "When Grandfather took me to the park, he gave me a whole pad of paper and showed me how to write and draw on it! But don't tell anybody, because I don't want them to think I'm one of Them - and I'm not really, I'm still one of Us, I just drew flowers on the paper with Grandpa - but I knew you would be ok with it."

And once someone even told her, "Do you remember the bicycles in the old photos, and we were always told that they were destroyed long ago before

we were born? Well grandpa told me that they weren't, he still has them, and he showed one to me and he let me ride on it. He held it up with his hands, and when he took his hands off, I kept going! But don't tell anybody, because I know they won't believe me. The place where the bicycles were stored was in the shed behind Their house - Grandpa had a key to it - and so I don't want everyone to know. But They even came out to play with me, and They were nice! I knew that you would believe me."

The little girl honestly had no idea why they all thought that she would be ok with these things, because she wasn't, or that she would believe in these things, because she didn't. She was just as convinced as anyone else that eating butter and drawing on paper were naughty things to do, and that the bicycles didn't exist anymore, and that it wasn't a good idea to play with Them. She wondered if the reason her sisters felt safe to tell her their secrets was because of her red hair, or the way she had sniffed the butter when she put it away, or the way her hands twitched when she sang.

But one thing she knew: special time with Grandfather was sacred, and she would never, ever criticize what anyone shared about it, because anyone who told her about what they did with Grandfather had told her the deepest treasures of their heart. So she just listened reverently when they told her, and nodded, and smiled, and didn't tell them when she didn't believe it could really be true.

But she wondered. She didn't think her sisters would make these things up when they were so embarrassed about them! A crack began to form in the certainty in her heart.

And when she wandered in the meadow with Grandfather, and nobody else was there, and he sang, she danced.



SHE WAS ANGRY WHEN she discovered the truth. So angry. When her sister took her to the bicycle shed in the alley behind the House That Had Butter, and she met a few of Them, and discovered that They weren't stupid. That They were nice. That They even ate bread sometimes!

They had laughed at her when she gaped at them, pulling out sandwiches. "Of course we eat bread!" they'd said. "We just don't eat it without butter!"

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Some of the younger ones did put a *lot* of butter on a *very* little bread, but she didn't see anybody swallowing plain squares of butter like slippery eels.

They told her stories beyond her comprehension. They told her that there were medicines in the medicine cabinet in their house that cured diseases she had been told all her life were incurable. They told her about aunts and uncles that she couldn't believe she'd never heard of. She watched them wheeling around on their bicycles and wondered if she dared to believe her own eyes. Were those really the long-lost bicycles from Grandfather? And if not, where had they come from? They offered to teach her to ride, but she was too scared to try.

When she went home again, she didn't want to eat the plain bread anymore. She started to push it away and go hungry. She thought she'd eaten enough bread to last a lifetime anyway.

When her older brother tried to help her with her math homework, she didn't want to listen anymore. *You lied to me about Them.* She thought inside. *I wonder what else you lied to me about.*

When they all lined up to sing in rigid rows, she chafed and squirmed inside. When they scribbled on the tabletop, she quietly slipped away to write on her new notepad from Grandfather. She wandered farther and farther away.

She stopped eating bread. She stopped showing anyone her homework. She was too afraid for them to see that it was written on paper. She stopped showing anyone her heart.



SHE WASN'T OLD ENOUGH to travel across the city by herself.

She didn't know the way.

She was weak and faint from skipping dinner so many times.

But she was determined to find what had been missing her whole life.

And she was sure that nobody in her house would go with her. She was sure they would stop her if they knew.

So she ran away from home.

She didn't reach the other house.

She didn't even reach the other side of the busy street.

Grandfather found her after the car had hit her, and rode with her in the ambulance.

She was too confused even to trust him. Hadn't he given her the pad of paper? And hadn't that pad of paper somehow led to this, to worse pain than she had ever known before?

She was too badly hurt even to realize he was holding her hand.

So she never knew that he wept.

When she was finally released from the hospital, she was very obedient. She ate everything that was put in front of her, and she never ran away by herself. At Grandfather's urging, she came clean and confessed everything. She even told her family that she believed the bicycles were still real, and to her surprise, they didn't kick her out of the house. They just teased her gently sometimes and called her "Our sister who is the most like Them."

And she was realizing that that wasn't an insult anymore.

It took a while to learn to walk again. It took even longer before she dared to dance. Not because her legs were still too broken, but because her heart was now too afraid.

She understood now why some of the others were afraid to visit the House That Had Butter. Maybe they too had had accidents, or near accidents, with the cars in the street.

But she knew that the cars in the street were not the same thing as the brothers and sisters in the other house.

They were just the obstacles in the way.



SHE WAS BETTER, SO much better, the day Grandfather came with the most wonderful surprise of her life.

She had long ago started trusting him again. She still danced with him whenever they were alone. She even rode the bicycle he had brought over from the Other House and given to her for her birthday. She had trusted several of her brothers and sisters enough to show it to them and been surprised to discover how many of them did not doubt that bicycles still existed, as she had, though they had never ridden one. She rode the bicycle in tight tight circles in the driveway, since there was no room to see how fast it could really go.

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And then one day Grandfather came and took her by the hand and said, "Come."

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"Home," he said simply.

He held her hand, looked both ways, and led her safely across the street.

Doing it with him made all the difference in the world.

He took her all the way safely to the place she could never have reached by herself. He took her to the Other House, and he rang the bell.

The curtain of the window parted, and then fell shut again. She heard excited squealing from inside.

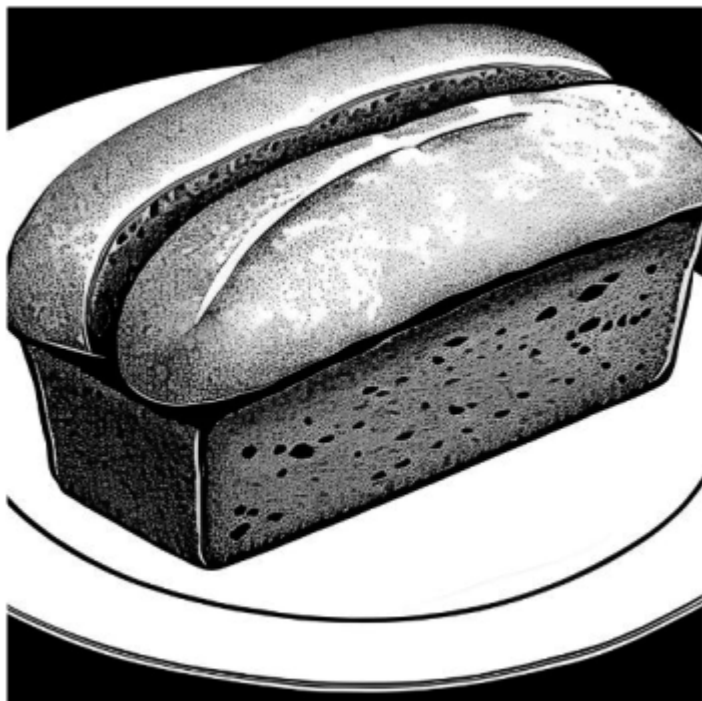
"Grandpa's home! Grandpa's home! Grandpa's home!"

The door flung open, and four eager little faces that she had never seen before popped out of it all at once to see what he had brought today.

And her tears caught in her throat. Because all four of them had bright red hair.



Part I: Secrets in the House That Had Bread





Chapter 1



It was about a lollipop, the first time I ever recognized the Voice of God. I was five. My sister, who had just tripped and fallen on the floor, was three. She wasn't injured, but she was screaming at the top of her lungs, to the distress of my tender little heart. Both my parents were trying – fruitlessly - to comfort her, leaving no one to comfort me. And, oh, how I wanted my sister to feel better and stop crying!

So I fled alone into the dimly lit dining room, sank to my little knees on the hardwood floor and cried aloud, “Jesus, please do something to make her stop screaming!”

Immediately a thought formed clearly in my mind. It was distinct, calm, loving, authoritative, and parental, quite unlike my own thoughts, which were currently distraught. It contained only four clear words: *Give her a lollipop.*

I jumped up from my knees and ran to the low brown kitchen cupboard where my parents kept the bag of Dum Dums reserved for “Sunday Candy.” It wasn't a Sunday, but I was pretty sure that for this purpose, mommy and daddy wouldn't mind. I grabbed a little lollipop in a purple and white wrapper and held it out as I ran back to the living room. My mother looked up and said, “Oh, good idea!” She unwrapped my offering and gave it to her screaming toddler.

My sister popped the lollipop into her mouth and fell instantly, utterly, completely silent.

Wow, I thought. God just spoke to me.

But many years would pass before I would recognize that Voice in my thoughts again.



THAT DOESN'T MEAN I didn't love Him all those years. I did. Or believe in Him. I did. Or miss Him, in a homesick kind of way. Maybe I did that, the most of all.

At the age when a lollipop could solve all my problems, I believed in two heroes: Jesus Christ and Barney the Purple Dinosaur. They both had made me promises.

I knew about Jesus from the big picture book, *The Sad Day and the Happy Day*, that my mother had begun reading to me before I had stopped drinking breast milk or started talking. On the "sad day," Jesus died. On the "happy day," Jesus had come back to life. Mommy said Jesus had promised to come forgive my sins, live in my heart, be with me always and take me to heaven when I died, if I asked Him. So I did.

I knew about Barney from the TV episodes that my grandmother recorded on VHS tapes for me to watch whenever I visited her. At the end of every show, Barney promised, "And remember kids, if you think real hard, I'll be there!" I believed him, too. I would go and shut myself in our blue closet-sized half bathroom, lock the door, squeeze my eyes shut, clench my fists as tightly as I could, and "think real hard." It never occurred to me that an enormous purple dinosaur wouldn't fit in that tiny bathroom if he did appear to me.

Barney never kept his promise, and Jesus never broke His. So eventually, I stopped believing in Barney, and I kept believing in Jesus.

Somehow I knew He was still there.



I ALWAYS WANTED TO jump into a story where Jesus was. I watched the *JESUS* film again and again, and I memorized all the places where there were little girls: the little girl in blue whose hair He tousled and the little girl in green who dared to reach out and tousle His. I would pretend they were me.

I wanted to sit on His lap, like the children in the pictures that decorated the covers of my picture Bibles and the walls of my Sunday School rooms. I liked these pictures best when they had a little girl seated in that closest place on His lap and not a little boy, so I could pretend to be her. I was especially happy if the little girl pictured had hair like mine. I would go and stand underneath

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the painting on the church basement wall, gaze up at the lucky little girl sitting on Jesus' lap, and wish she was me.

The only stories I knew outside of the covers of the Bible where people conversed with Jesus were the stories of Aslan in Narnia. I read them again and again. But like the *JESUS* film, they always ended, and I wanted more. I wished C. S. Lewis was not dead. I wished I could meet him and beg him to write more stories. He had dared to ask a question no one else I knew had ever dared to ask, let alone answer: "If I was a child and Jesus was a lion, and I met Him in another world, what would He say to me? What would I say to Him? What would we do together?" I didn't know we were allowed to imagine things like that; in fact, I had already picked up on the message in my environment that we were not.

So I got bigger. I went to church. I went to camp. I read the Bible every day. I prayed.

And I believed that lions stayed in wardrobes.



I WAS 18 WHEN I RECOGNIZED His voice the second time. This time, I had practically issued Him an ultimatum. The year before, at 17, I had fallen head over heels in love with a brown-eyed boy... who did not love me back. Nonetheless, I declared in my heart that I would love him and live for him forever and that nothing would ever induce me to give up loving him, unless God Himself spoke to me and told me to!

Graduating from high school meant I could go anywhere in the world except where I wanted to be: back in high school for another year where Ben was. All my other dreams, like studying foreign languages and becoming a missionary, had been slurped up by my longing to be with Ben. Graduating felt more like being expelled. But now I was in Bible college, 600 miles from home, pursuing the dreams I no longer cared about and decorating the closet door of my new dorm room with every photograph I had of me and Ben standing next to each other. My new roommate was hanging photos, too, but the guy in her pictures was actually her boyfriend.

I had written a lot of poetry about Ben over the last year, and I thought some of it was quite good. Of course, I would never dream of sending it to him.

But I had started to copy it out of the journals it was written in and onto loose-leaf paper so that I *could* send it to him. I wasn't *going* to. I just *could*. It was a lot of work, copying the poems by hand neatly enough that he could read them...even though he never would, of course.

My project was interrupted by an invitation: a group was driving to a Wednesday night student worship service in the city. I agreed to hop into someone's car full of other students and try it out.

My mom had met my dad at a Wednesday night church service her first week of college.

I met the Voice.

We were singing worship songs in an underground cafe, because apparently that was cool. We were seated at round tables lit only by candles, because apparently that was cool too. Then, whether it was cool or not, the same thing happened to me that had happened so long ago with the lollipop incident: a distinct, calm, loving, authoritative thought formed in my mind uninvited, unexpected, unrelated to anything around me. This time it said, *I want you to take those poems you copied and destroy them as a sacrifice to Me.*

Only this time I did not want to obey.

And this time I knew better. I was a big girl now, and that Voice couldn't fool me so easily. I had been taught how God communicates today, and nothing at this new Bible college had contradicted it. He could speak through the Bible He had written, properly interpreted and in context, and that was all. He was not allowed to speak as a Voice inside people's heads. Or at least if He tried, you didn't have to obey Him. I quickly filtered through all the Bible knowledge I had, searching for a verse that said, "Thou shalt destroy thine poetry copied for Ben saith the Lord thy God," found nothing, and triumphantly told Him so.

You're not allowed to talk to me like that! That's not in the Bible! You can not make me do anything that is not in the Bible!

Unfortunately, God had an advantage in a fight. He was bigger than I was; He could just kill me. I began to feel like He was trying. He had a fist around my conscience, and He was starting to squeeze. I felt guilt like the spiritual equivalent of nausea growing stronger by the minute. Did God really ask people to do things like this nowadays? I had never heard of it. I had just spent a lot of time recopying those poems! I tried bargaining, "What if I promise promise promise I will never let him read them; then can I keep them?" The pressure on my con-

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science did not relent. I was only reminded of what He had said He wanted: *I want you to take those poems you copied and destroy them as a sacrifice to Me.*

Now I realized there were two warring factions inside my own heart. One side was saying, “But wait, if the God of the universe really wants something from me bad enough to show up and say so, don’t I want to give it to Him? I love Him!”

I let myself picture kneeling on the floor of the bathroom in the girls’ dorm, shredding up the poems into the trash can as an act of worship. As I imagined it, the pressure began to recede. I began to feel peace.

“Phew! You feel peace! Now you do not have to actually do it. Maybe He only wanted to know if you were *willing* to do it,” said the side that a wiser Bible reader than I might have identified as “the flesh.”

The opposing side was actually disappointed. “Oh. I felt so loved that God would reach into my life and ask for something only I could give Him. I don’t want to give up the poems, but I wanted to give my Beloved a sacrifice He wanted from me.”

I loaded the two feuding sides of myself into the already crowded car to go home. They kept arguing inside of me all the way back to campus, while the guilt came like waves of car sickness. This was too confusing to handle alone. I marched to the door of the Resident Assistant at the end of the hall, a blonde upperclassman who was supposed to help us with our problems. She was not in her room. I lifted the felt-tipped purple marker from the sparkly magnets that held it to her door and scrawled on her little whiteboard that I was looking for her. Then I headed back to my own room.

But this decision just couldn’t wait for her. I could not keep fighting God—or whatever this was—any longer. I decided to just do it. I found myself kneeling on the red-brown bathroom tile tearing up little pieces of notebook paper into the trash can. And the guilt-nausea and confusion went into the trash can with them. I felt peace.

The Resident Assistant found my note on her whiteboard later that evening and came to find me. I told her what I had heard, felt and done, and my confusion about whether or not it had really been God. She replied,

“I think that was probably God, because I had a similar experience once. I was raised in a strict Presbyterian church where no one ever raised their hands, and I really judged people who raised their hands when they sang. Eventually

God convicted me of my judgmental attitude towards my brothers and sisters, and I repented. Then I was in a worship service where lots of people were raising their hands, and I felt like God wanted me to lift my hands, too, like it would be a sort of seal of my repentance. I did not want to at first, but I gave in and did it, and then I felt good.”

Her story reassured me that I wasn't going crazy. But unlike her “seal of repentance,” what I had just experienced wasn't the end of a battle; it was the beginning.



I HAD SAID THE YEAR before that I would only give up being in love with Ben if God Himself showed up and told me to. Apparently, God Himself had taken me up on it. The Voice would not go away.

First, the Voice asked me to take the photos of Ben off my wall. Then, to throw away the CDs Ben had burned for me. Then, to stop calling him whenever I felt down. And finally, to cut off all communication with him for the rest of the school year.

Each act of obedience felt like death. I fought back every time, wrestling with Him, sometimes for miserable hours, sometimes for miserable days. My idol was being drained of its blood. Slowly. Alive.

I always gave in eventually, under some combination of being overpowered by conviction and of wanting God more. Every time I gave in, I was flooded with the sweetest peace and sense of His nearness and love.

One night I demanded,

“If You talk, don't You ever say anything nice? Do You only ever just tell me to give up stuff?”

The Voice answered with more words than ever before. *I know why you love Ben so much, it began. I created him. I love him, too. Everything you love about him is something I made. I love you more than he ever could. I am for you and not against you. I want to set you free.*

I wrote all the words down in my velvety mint green journal. After that, He spoke kindly to me many times. Like the time I collapsed onto the carpet at the top of the stairs, because I was in too much emotional pain to go any farther. I just lay my head down on my heavy book bag and sobbed, “Lord, if I am hon-

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est, I am 99 percent sure I can never marry Ben, but I just keep living for that one percent chance because it is all I have left..."

Then the Voice whispered, so close and gentle, *Do you think I want My daughter living for a one percent chance? Just call it a zero percent chance, and then get up and follow Me.*

I answered, "Lord, I can not face the future without him. I could never love anybody else like this. I will never be able to marry another man. I just feel sick at the idea."

He said, *I am not asking you to marry another man. All I want you to do right now is get up and go to the cafeteria and eat dinner. Can you do that?*

He actually made me laugh! I said, "Yes Lord" and I got up and went.

I was in love with this God and at war with Him at the same time. In between our battles, He comforted me. He carried me through the grieving process, until I had given up not just Ben, but the hope of Ben. He sent me friends. He sent me teachers. He sent me a counselor. He sent me a church. He sang me songs that I heard on the radio. He gave me songs that I wrote for Him in response. He showed me a lake where I met Him every day. He painted me sunrises that I got up to watch with Him, because the idol I had been living for was gone; and I had no other reason to get out of bed at all. He spoke to me through my own poetry. He gave me pictures in my mind, pictures of a shepherd carrying a lost sheep home on His shoulder, pictures of a king fighting for a princess, a king who had pierced hands. The pictures turned into stories. The stories began to heal my memories.

And then the six months ended, and I came home from college and saw Ben again. And I found my heart had released what I had sworn it never would: I was not in love with Ben anymore.

After I saw Ben, I drove back to my parents' house in a daze. I simply did not know what to feel. Should I feel embarrassed? Relieved? Happy? Sad? In pain? Disappointed? Normal? Nothing? My feet pounded up the stairs, and my hand pushed open the door of the pale purple bedroom I shared with my little sister.

I stood alone in the middle of the room and said, "God, what should I do?"

The Voice answered, as tenderly as I had ever heard. *You need to just climb onto My lap and cry on My shoulder.*

The bottom bunk was mine. My beige corduroy reading pillow was on the bed. I felt God closer than I had ever imagined possible. I somehow knew that Jesus was sitting on my bed by that pillow; I knew it just as clearly and surely as if I could see Him, even though I could not. I knew where His head was. I knew where His shoulder was. I curled up in a ball on the bed where I knew Jesus' lap was, and I leaned my face against the pillow where I knew Jesus' shoulder was. I felt His warm presence all around me, as warm and real as if I could physically feel Him. When I tried to describe it later I could only say, "It wasn't physical but it was *tangible*." The tears came. Just as He'd told me to cry on His shoulder, I just rested and felt close to Him and cried, cried out all the feelings I couldn't understand or put into words. It was over, and He had won.

I could almost see the white sleeve my face was buried in. I could almost smell Him. I thought, *This must be the best moment of my entire life*. I knew I could not keep this moment. I had gone through almost a year of suffering and loss and obedience to get to this place, but it was worth it.

For those few precious minutes, I'd been in the Place I had always wanted, the Place I wanted more than Ben, more than anything, the Place I had dreamed of in the Sunday School pictures. I had been on Jesus' lap.

Deep in my heart, beneath the surface, I would spend the next five years trying to earn my way back into that Place again.



Chapter 2



Five summers later, now 23 years old, I lay stretched out on the sun-warmed grass. Not in the usual grass outside my own home, but the grass in a little garden outside a solitary cabin in the mountains. I was doing something I had never done before: staying alone in this cabin for a time of solitude, of seeking God.

I couldn't remember the last time I had been this still, this quiet. I closed my eyes and felt the sunlight resting like a warm blanket on my closed eyelids. I listened to the silence.

Suddenly that silence was shattered by a roaring sound right over my head. My first thought was that somebody had come to mow the grass and was coming right at me with an electric lawn mower. I opened my eyes, thinking I needed to jump up and get out of the way.

But it wasn't a lawnmower.

It was a three-inch ruby-throated hummingbird, hovering in the air above my head to drink from a flower, beating its tiny wings so fast that they made the roaring sound I had mistaken for an electric motor.

Now I was frozen in place by awe. I had never imagined a hovering hummingbird right up close could be that loud! And I could not believe I had become so still and quiet that the little bird came this close to me. Stillness had never brought such a treasure to me before.

I watched the living, breathing ruby, hanging mid-air before its desired flower like a Christmas tree ornament that didn't need a string, exerting so much energy to perform the hummingbird's special miracle in the air: staying still.



THE HUMMINGBIRD WAS seeking nectar. I was seeking God. When the bird finally moved on to another flowering bush, I returned to what I had been doing: taking stock of my life.

These last five years had been years of disappointment, I had to admit. My teenage self had been sure that by this time I would be married and on an overseas mission field. I was neither.

They had also been five years of confusion. Hearing the Voice of God about Ben had opened a can of worms that I could neither close nor handle. The worms were wriggling everywhere.

I had no category for what had happened to me. God had shown up and spoken to me to set me free from my hopeless obsession—that much was undeniable. But I wasn't sure if He'd really *wanted* to. After all, I had set those terms myself; I had said, "I will never give up loving Ben unless God Himself speaks to me and tells me to!" Did God really want to talk like that to people today, or had He only made an exception for me because I was being a stubborn idiot? Was that kind of intimacy with Him supposed to be normal?

It hadn't become my normal. That sweet season of feeling so close to God and hearing Him so easily had ended. The only strategy I knew of to bring it back was to identify whatever I loved most and find a way to sacrifice it for God, because wasn't that what He had wanted with Ben? I tried dropping my favorite class and avoiding my favorite teacher. Rather than feeling closer to God, I ended up a sobbing mess in the Dean's office, while the patient Dean reassured me that he did not think that it was God wanting me to do those things.

No one had ever taught me how to discern God's Voice as distinct from my own thoughts or the suggestions of the enemy; no one had ever taught me that God's Voice even existed to discern. So now, was every random thought that popped into my head a command from God? Did I have to obey them all? I tried living like that, and it confused and terrified me.

I asked the seminary student who drove me to church what she thought about hearing God's Voice—and whether or not you needed to obey. I asked the new psychology professor. I asked the young man who worked beside me in the dish pit after lunch. I bought books on the topic and even wrote my term paper in theology class about it. I collected a lot of opinions, and I could line them all up on a spectrum. On the farthest end of one side were my childhood pastor and some of the Reformed authors he quoted. They emphasized that we

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must never add anything to Scripture—adding anything to Scripture was accursed, “anathema.” And the teachers on this end of the spectrum considered a voice in your head to be adding to Scripture. In fact, they taught that even believing one Bible verse was jumping out at you as more relevant to your situation than the rest of the Bible, let alone that God had “spoken” a whole sentence not in the Bible, was adding to Scripture and was accursed.

On the other end of the spectrum was the student in the dish pit and his evangelistic buddies who believed that Jesus had heard His Father about *everything* and our experience should be the same, right down to hearing God speak about whether He wanted you to take the canned pears or the canned peaches in the salad bar line. Or at least being willing to obey Him if He did.

Which I would not have been. I did not like the idea that God could speak in my head any new command at any minute of any hour or day, and it would suddenly be a sin not to do it. I had not originally signed up for that. I’d thought the Bible was like a contract for a limited government—if He had not put it in the book, He could not ask you to do it.

But I wanted to hear that Voice saying He loved me. I wanted to feel that Presence again.

So I took advantage of the fact that after reading all those books and talking to all those people and even writing that paper, I still had no idea what the truth was. I simply moved up and down the spectrum of views as it served my purpose. If I felt like God was saying, *I love you*, I said, “Hurray! God speaks to me!” But if it seemed that God was asking me to do something, especially something I did not like, I responded with, “You can’t talk to me! That is not in the Bible!”

And now, in this grassy clearing in the little garden by the cabin in the mountains, I had five years of experiences to take stock of. Some were glorious, some were humiliating, and some were excruciatingly painful. There were:

The times I had heard God right and obeyed.

The times I had heard God right and disobeyed.

The times I had heard God wrong and tried to obey it.

The times I had heard God wrong and not tried to obey it.

Now sitting with my new hummingbird friend and looking at my life in those categories, I realized something: the only times I had ever gotten really

hurt were times I had disobeyed on purpose. The times I had been mistaken but tried to obey, like that time in the Dean's office, He had always rescued me.

Maybe I could actually trust Him.

So I kept sitting with Him. For three solitary weeks I sat with Him on my blanket in the grass, on the bank by the waterfall, and beside the iron wood stove at night; and somewhere in the silence I had a revelation. Telling God, "You are not allowed to talk to me! You can't tell me what to do if it is not in the Bible!" actually sounded...a little disrespectful? Well, all right, more than a little! I would never have dreamed of speaking to my earthly parents like that. They would have lovingly spanked me. And besides, I loved them too much and trusted them too much to talk to them like that.

Hadn't I signed up for Jesus to be *Lord*?

On my last night in the cabin in the woods, I sat on the handmade quilt on the sofa and spoke aloud into the silence, spoke to the only Person there.

"I'm sorry for being so disrespectful," I said. This felt good. I went on.

"I don't know how You want to communicate. I don't know if You want to speak in my head every five minutes for the rest of my life or never do it again. But I promise that no matter what You communicate, whenever I do know what You want, I will obey You."

I felt the confusion inside of me grow still and then turn into peace, conviction, certainty. I finally knew what I believed now, even though I still had no idea what the answers were. My problem had never been deciding whether God spoke or how God spoke. My problem had been deciding whether or not Jesus was Lord.

I didn't know what would happen in a life where Jesus was Lord like that, but I packed up my suitcase and drove back down the mountain with Him.



UPON ARRIVING HOME, almost the first thing I did was break my promise to obey Him. The previous fall I had taught a writing course at the inner-city community college where I was working as an English tutor. It was an incredible opportunity for a 22-year-old with only a Bachelor's degree. They were willing to take me back for the fall semester, and now as summer progressed I needed to decide.

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I wanted to teach again. I felt like God did not want me to. I did not see why.

Besides, I did not know how I would make ends meet financially if I did not teach. I had that fighting-with-God feeling that had become so familiar, but. . . but. . . Then I got the brilliant idea to try to manipulate God into letting me teach. From childhood I had been taught that it was wrong to ever break an agreement because of Psalm 15:4, which says the righteous man “swears to his own hurt and does not change” (NKJV). No feeling that purported to be from God was allowed to contradict the Bible, right? So if I just signed and mailed in the contract to teach this fall, I reasoned, I would have given my word. And then it would be wrong not to keep the agreement, and I’d have to do it.

I signed the contract to teach two classes. I took the sealed document to the blue metal mailbox outside the post office. I tilted the heavy metal lid open, put the envelope inside it, and let it fall shut again. Bang! When I opened it again, the envelope was gone. There was no way to get it back.

“There,” I thought triumphantly. “Now You will have to let me teach.”



A FEW MONTHS LATER, I was feeling depressed. The semester was turning out to be very stressful, and there was no escape. As the teacher, I couldn’t cut a class, or drop the course, or come in my pajamas and sit in the back row and fall asleep—even if I wanted to do those things when the students did them all!

I had two sections of students, and I created exactly the same lessons for both. The morning students were still attending while the afternoon students were disappearing like icicles in the sun, making me wonder what was wrong with me. But my biggest problem was that I did not trust the One I had called Lord. I wanted to leave Jesus in the parking garage every morning and pick Him up at the end of the day, because I did not know how He would “behave” in school. What would He ask me to do if I let Him be Lord out here in the secular world, in this place? Jesus only cared about “evangelism,” right? If I let Him tell me what to do in class, He would probably tell me to stand on my desk and preach the gospel instead of teaching English Composition! He wouldn’t care if I got fired, because it would glorify Him if I got in trouble and was persecuted, right?

Afraid to turn to Him, I hid myself in reading novels with all the spare time I did not have, and then I imagined that I was in the novels the rest of the time. I wanted to escape from my life.

But my life had Somebody in it who wanted me back.

A friend called. She invited me to visit her at the headquarters of her missions organization, so I went. I could somehow feel the presence of God in that place as soon as I drove up the driveway lined with autumn trees. And along with the feeling of that Presence came a sudden clarity that something was not right between me and the King in my heart.

When the golden trees parted, I saw a castle. Or at least it looked like a castle, with stone towers rising above its modern parking lot. A local millionaire had built it for his daughter a century ago, my friend explained, and it had fallen into disrepair after her death. Now the mission had fixed it up and turned it into the most romantic-looking headquarters I had ever seen.

I wandered the halls of the castle and found books written by missionaries of past generations, telling their stories. Flipping open a little booklet, I read a simple story of how the missionaries had discovered a demon problem in the grass hut they had moved into, had told the demon to leave in Jesus' name, and had no more such problems. My mind was reeling as I put the booklet back on the carved side table. I had never heard of such a thing happening outside the pages of the Bible—nor had I ever been warned that disobeying God could open us up to His enemies. The pastor who thought all Bible verses should be taken equally had also taught us that we must never, under any circumstances, speak to a demon, not even to tell it to leave in Jesus' name. And I'd never heard anybody else in my life address a demon either. I didn't think I could ever bring myself to rebuke a demon out loud like these missionaries had, even though I wondered if it might be a good idea.

I went home from the mission headquarters, and that night I had a dream. In my dream I was still in my room, still lying in my bed. I could see the moon outside my window. In the dream, I rebuked a demon. I wasn't afraid to do it in my sleep! I told it to leave in Jesus' name. And then I waited, breathless, to see what would happen, to see what would change.

The whole world turned upside down and then righted itself again.

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I didn't fall out of my bed, but I saw the moon through the window flipping the other way around and then back again. And while the world was upside down, I felt like something had fallen off of it.

When the world came right side up again, I found myself no longer lying in my bed but kneeling beside it, as if I was a child again and my parents had just spanked me; and now they were telling me they forgave me and still loved me. Only this time it was God saying those things, telling me what I had done and that He forgave me and still loved me.

And then I woke up.

I didn't know what had happened in my sleep, but I felt like something had really changed and I was determined that whatever it was, it was real, and it was going to last. I would take that novel I had gotten halfway through devouring yesterday, and I would return it to the campus library before class today!

I had *never* returned a story without finishing it. Ever. Stories captivated me to such an extent that if I started reading a novel, no matter how badly written it might turn out to be, I had to finish it or I would spend the rest of my life wondering how it ended! But not today. This one was going back to the library, because I had been reading it to escape from my life and I did not want to escape from my life anymore. I would be fully here, whatever happened here, because Jesus was here. God was here. God was in my real life, and I wanted to be with Him.

So I parked in front of another blue metal box, this time in front of the library. I pulled another handle open and laid the book inside it. When I let the handle go, the book would disappear, irretrievably, into the metal box. I prepared to release the lid. "The last time I did this, I was trying to escape Your will. This time, I am coming back to You." Bang!

I looked up from the library's book return box and noticed the world around me and that it was beautiful. The crumbling old bridge was resplendent with sunlight. The cracked asphalt parking lot was strewn with little golden seed pods fallen from the trees, now soggy in the rain. I was so happy that I could have gone skipping across them. God had created those seed pods, I realized, knowing I would walk on them today. He had known from eternity every seed pod I would step on, and when. He had created this day for me to live in with Him. He had dreamed of it longer ago than I could imagine. Now His dream had come true, and here we were. Together. I felt awe like a heavy weight

on my chest. How present He was to write my story, and how much He cared! This was the story *He* was writing—I got to live in this one! I felt like Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas morning who woke up with joy to his own dear real life - the joy of being granted a chance to repent. Even the trash in the parking lot was beautiful to me. It was real. I was real. God was real—and God was here. I was the happiest human alive. God knew me, and I knew God; and we got to be together in this moment. We got to be together all day long.

I nearly floated into the classroom. My spirit was skipping, holding His hand.



Chapter 3



God had gotten me to go to the cabin in the mountains through the influence of some very special people. Paul and Lydia were missionaries, like I had dreamed of becoming. They worked with the organization that was headquartered in the pretty castle. They spoke the same foreign language I had studied and were working in the same country that I had visited five times during high school and college, the country I still dreamed of moving to someday. Since we had so much in common, some mutual friends had introduced us the summer before I went to the cabin, the summer Paul and Lydia were back from the mission field, the summer I was just-turned-twenty-two.

We had sat together drinking hot tea out of delicate cups with pink roses on them, talking about life overseas, until one of my friends finally turned to Lydia and said, “Lydia, you should try to persuade Elizabeth to join our organization and join your team.” Lydia looked at me, smiled a sparkly sort of smile and answered, “Whenever I look at Elizabeth, I just know that God has big plans for her, and I don’t dare try to mess that up. He’ll show her what to do.”

What?! She had just said both of the two things I no longer believed. I did not believe God had any plans for my life anymore, let alone big ones. I was living with my parents after college, working a job that had never been my dream, with no sign on the horizon of God having any plans for me whatsoever. And Lydia believed He had *big* plans?

And not only that, but after all my confusion and fear and failure at hearing God, Lydia believed that He could tell them to me? That I could hear Him myself? I did not think I had ever met someone who really believed that. And not only did she believe these two things I had lost all hope about, but she believed them firmly enough to act on them? I had interacted with other missions personnel who tried so eagerly to get me to sign on the dotted line. Lydia refused to try to recruit me, because she really expected God to tell me what to do for

those “big plans.” I had never seen another person acting by faith on the Voice before. Let alone obeying the Voice about *me*.

I never forgot Lydia and her words. She gave me hope.

The following spring, a student walked into the gray-carpeted tutoring lab seeking my help with the essay assignment, “Where would you like to be in five years?” and I realized my own answer would be “working with Paul and Lydia overseas.” So that night I emailed them, asking if I could visit them and check out their work. It was another perfect opening for them to try to recruit me. Instead, Paul wrote back, “If you have the flexibility in your life where you could visit us, go somewhere and spend 40 days alone with God. You may never have the freedom to do that again, and you will get more out of the time with Him than you would ever get from visiting us.”

So I did. I went to that cabin in the mountains. And he was right.



NOW I WAS BACK FROM the cabin and back from being disobedient and back to dancing across the parking lot with the God who had created the ground beneath it. He had gotten me back, and the first thing He did with me was reconnect me with Paul and Lydia. He let me think it was my idea. *Maybe I should email them and tell them what a blessing that time in the cabin had been,* I thought, *since they had suggested it.*

Paul replied first. He told me Lydia would write soon. In fact, he added, Lydia had been praying for me ever since we’d met and had already been intending to write to me. I didn’t know what she had wanted to write to me about, but I was excited to hear from the woman who could see God’s big plans written all over my face.

A few days later, Lydia’s email came. It was an unsolicited, almost inexplicable outpouring of her heart. She wrote of her journey with God, from childhood until now, her struggles with sin, her revelations of grace, her thoughts about God, and also His thoughts about her. She was from a Presbyterian background—safe and familiar. But she had suffered from depression under the stress of the mission field until she had to come back for counseling at the headquarters in the castle. The counselor offered to try a form of prayer counseling

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that consisted of asking Jesus questions like, “Lord, how do You see me?” or “What do You want to say to me about this?” Lydia wrote,

I was never really very comfortable with the role of the Holy Spirit, since it was not very emphasized to me growing up. I thought I would give it a try, but I was skeptical as to whether it would work for me, because I really did not think that I could hear God speak that directly to me. It is basically letting God lead the counseling time we had together and to pray as each issue came up that God would get to the root of whatever it was, and then show me or tell me the truth. God really did answer me right away, while I was sitting there waiting, and best of all, He started to answer me in pictures. I had very rarely had that happen to me before; in fact, I cannot think of even one time it had. I guess I just didn't think it was possible, and so God never used it in my life.

But when He started giving me pictures of His truth, it was very powerful. I am a very visual person, and that is how I think, so it was like I was allowing God to use my heart language to communicate with me. One of the pictures He gave me was of myself, as a stiff and indignant door mat, just trembling with rage at BEING a door-mat. The doormat part was how I saw myself in God's eyes. Then the next picture He gave me was how He really saw me. I saw the typical “Footprints” poster scene, and there was Jesus walking along carrying me—all cuddled up in His arms—this rolled up door mat! Better yet, He was caressing its “head” like I did with my baby when she was nursing. He said to me, “OK, if you want to think of yourself as a doormat, go ahead, but this is how I am going to treat My ‘door-mat.’”

Lydia explained that the Lord had used the pictures to uncover and heal the root of her depression. And ever since then, she had continued to see pictures from Him and hear thoughts from Him; and she shared several pages worth of them with me. Her relationship with God was unlike anything I had ever heard of before. It was like it was... sparkly! It made me feel like Christmas in-

side. Jesus interjected His love into Lydia's day, and she noticed. She started sentences with phrases like, "I was having snuggly time with Jesus before I got out of bed this morning, and He said..." The Lord spoke to her in ways I was familiar with, like when He met her in her reading of Isaiah and used it to comfort her when a natural disaster hit her mission's people group or when He spoke to her through her friend who had been meditating on the life of Moses. But she also "chatted with Jesus" while she drank her tea, and He showed her how her favorite tea cup was a picture of how He saw her. He even spoke to her through crayons!

I asked God to show me a picture of His grace, because I just could not understand how He could keep forgiving me over and over. When I asked that, I got the memory of a day when I was 14 or so, and I was coloring. My Dad came into the room and completely innocently suggested that I try some of the shading techniques we had been learning in school. I am sure he did not mean it to affect me as it did, but my heart took it as criticism and as not doing a good enough job. I stopped coloring so much after that.

Then God gave me a picture of Him and me lying side-by-side on my bed, a blank notebook open between us. God took a purple crayon, gave me a big grin, and started scribbling all over the pages. (My mother had told me that when I was two, I only colored with the purple crayon and would turn page after page, scribbling and saying, 'puh-pouh' over and over.) When that image came into my mind, it was God telling me, *I accept you and love you for your purple scribbles. I delight in how I made you from the beginning, and My grace is this to you: however scribbly it is, I join in with you in scribbling and delight in the process of scribbling together. And so you will remember, here is a big box of crayons!*

And then I remembered that I had stashed away a huge box of crayons for the kids, the kind with 120 colors that I never had and always wanted when I was a kid. And God said that I did not have

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to share them, either! It sounds silly, but it spoke so directly to my heart. Now I have a box of colors to communicate to God with!”

I had never thought of asking God a question like, “Give me a picture of Your grace to me,” let alone imagined getting such a personalized answer. He had used a memory from when Lydia was two and another from when she was 14 and tied them together in a perfect bow and let Jesus meet her there—not to mention that He knew she had always wanted 120 crayons. But wasn’t that level of intimate knowledge what I should expect from our Creator? After all, He had been with her all her life.

Lydia’s unexpected email was one of the most beautiful and vulnerable things I had ever read in my life. But as I read it, I kept wondering, *Why is she suddenly writing all of this to me, a girl she has only met one time?* Then I found her two-sentence explanation at the very end of the letter:

“When I sat down to write to you today and asked God what to write, He said, *Pour out your heart.* So I have, as messy as it may be.”

Oh, that was why. When Lydia sat down to write emails, as well as to draw pictures or talk to a counselor or drink a cup of tea, she asked God questions. She had asked Him what to write to me. And expected to get an answer. And received one. And apparently, He had wanted to give me this.



JESUS AND I STILL HAD to finish the semester I had agreed to. It was still so stressful that I was having bad dreams many nights and struggling to eat anything, especially before class. The students were still dropping out. I begged God to let there always be at least three present, because I did not feel up to giving a lecture to fewer than three people. And He did it: three students were always sitting behind the desks on any given day by the time I started the class—even though they weren’t the same three!

After I got home and graded the papers and planned the next day’s lesson, I would write emails to Lydia. We talked about plans for the future and the possibility of me coming the next summer. We talked about the international students I was getting to share Jesus with in the tutoring lab. We started memorizing Isaiah 55 together. We talked about my questions on hearing from God, why it was Biblical, and what it was like. Paul chimed in and practically wrote

me a multi-chapter book in response to all my theological questions! I responded to Lydia's heart-sharing by sharing my own heart back, and she treasured me so much that moving towards her felt like walking under a waterfall of unconditional love. She loved me more than I had believed God loved me. So...God must actually love me even more than that?!

Writing to Lydia was making parts of me that I had forgotten about, or never even known about, come alive. She gave me a safe space to share things I didn't know I had to share. I found I did see the glory of God in my day all day long, and that metaphors came to me over lunch, kind of like Lydia's pictures. I did have thoughts that might be from God; I just hadn't recognized them until I imagined telling them to Lydia.

When I was 12, I had shared my deepest heart in journals that had names. Emmeline, Lillian, Patsy... each book had had a name carefully chosen to match how I felt about "her" cover. Now I was writing to this woman on the other side of the world the way I had once written to my cloth-bound imaginary friends. My day felt valuable when somebody knew it; my thoughts took shape when I put them into words. My life was a story I was aching to tell to someone. My moments sparkled when they were an email to Lydia in draft form.

And I had another realization swelling inside of me. *God wanted to be that kind of a friend to me.* I did not hear the thought in sentence form; my awareness just grew and grew. I could feel His longing, bordering on jealousy, as if I could feel the emotions of another Person who lived inside of me in addition to feeling my own. I was writing to Lydia the way He had always wanted me to write to Him. I was sharing my heart with her the way He wanted to know it, telling her about my day the way He wanted to hear it. He wanted to be Emmeline, Lillian, and Patsy. He wanted to be the place where the grown-up me was known and valued and loved. He wanted to listen. He was the Author of my days; He also wanted to be the Reader.

Lydia gave you hope, said the Voice. Now plant it firmly in Me.

And so I ended up the proud possessor of another journal. I didn't give it a name, because this time Jesus was to be Co-Author, Hero, and Reader all at once. Its cover was a photograph of blazing pink tulips imprinted with, "He turns the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings. Psalm 107:35." My first entry was entitled, *The Day You Gave Me This Book.* It read:

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The day You gave me this book was a Wednesday in November. I was at the community college, returning to teach. In between classes, to shelter from the rain, I was sitting with You at a picnic table under the library's overhanging roof. I knew I wanted rest; I knew I wanted to replace the habit of thinking all my thoughts as if I am imagining speaking to Lydia—and then feeling the need to actually tell her all of them and get her response—with a new habit of processing my thoughts with You.

I wanted to tell Lydia that I needed and wanted to take a break from writing her until after the Thanksgiving holiday. (Is it a hopeful sign, Papa, that what I need and what I want are starting to overlap a little bit more?) I went up to the computer lab and did that, and You helped me. I paused a moment before I hit 'send,' because then that step would be taken; but I did it with the fullest peace and joy.

Then I turned to You - I really looked up from the computer screen and turned my head as if You were right there beside me - and I said, "All right, I'm coming to You."

And then it was as if You were eager, as if excitement lit up Your face and You said, *Really? Let's go!* and grabbed my hand and pulled me, laughing down the stairs.

I had been asking You to help me start a habit of journaling so I could process reality with You and stay in the story with You without having to tell Lydia everything. I had been asking You for wisdom whether it would be better on the computer or in a book like this.

And then, somehow, I knew what You wanted, just like I know what I want. You wanted to take me to the big bookstore-with-a-cafe at the shopping plaza and buy me the most beautiful journal for me to write to You in and maybe take me out to eat, too, because You loved me and wanted to take care of me. I felt so loved! I could not wait until I was done with work and could go there with You.

Then I felt like You wanted to go *now*, during lunch break, so I laughed and said, “No Lord, we don’t have time before I need to teach the next class!” But I felt bad saying, “No Lord” about anything—for ‘no’ and ‘Lord’ are two words that may not be joined, as my professor once said—and so I added, “Unless You want to do a miracle and make the sun stand still.” Yet still, as I was going outside again to spend the rest of my break with You, I felt like You wanted to go *now*. I realized if I did not go before class, I would not have the book for the afternoon in the tutoring lab (which is where I am writing this down now). Maybe that was why You wanted to go right away.

I stopped on the sidewalk and pulled out my phone. 12:10. That meant 40 more minutes until I should be in class—well, 50 minutes until class actually started. I was quickly calculating, *I would have to get on the highway, drive to the exit with the shopping plaza, find the journal, buy it, drive back...* “Ok,” I said, “We can do that!”

And then suddenly we were off, running, You and I, hand in hand across the parking lot, laughing as we ran. ‘Somebody forgot their umbrella,’ said a smiling man as I ran by. But I had never even noticed it was raining.

I trusted You. I worried when there were red lights, when there were long lines, and when I had to turn around. But I gave it to You because I knew You were taking me, and so I knew You would get me back in time for class. I asked You for a parking spot, and You gave me one. I found this book and saw the verse on the cover and thought of the deserts of disappointment I have been in and Jesus ending the desert, and I cried, “That one!”

I had no water bottle today. I was very thirsty, and I asked You in the car if we might get a drink at the bookstore cafe, too. That was when I got the idea You might want to get me food, too (and only later did I remember that people usually eat lunch on their lunch breaks!).

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You even got me the fancy, more expensive type of bottled water. I never buy water, but today even water reminded me of You. I got the biggest one. I asked You if I could get shortbread, too, and then I got chili for the “real food.” It was much more than I would normally spend, but You were paying. All my money You had given me, and I knew You wanted to do this. I was sure this was not money I would need later to go anywhere else You wanted me to go.

And You got me back for class at 1:00 pm—not 1:01 and not 12:59. I was impressed! And I remember thinking, *Well, men spend a lot of money when they are in love.*

Anyway, thank You. It was a beautiful day.”



Chapter 4



I continued to meet with God as I filled my new pink book—and then the gray book, and then the purple one. I filled their pages with meditations on Scripture, verses I was memorizing, stories of my days, and drawings in the margins. I addressed it all to Him—except when I heard the Voice insert a thought addressed to me. I wrote those down with quotation marks around them. We started to have short, tentative conversations.

“One of the most difficult things about teaching someone else to hear from God is making sure they do not just learn to hear from you!” Lydia wrote to me. God started showing both of us that now He wanted to teach me to hear Himself, Himself. He started pulling me away from Lydia and towards Himself.

I felt like He was asking me to write to Him first before I wrote emails to Lydia, to tell Him everything on my heart; and then we would decide together what we wanted to tell her. My heart was still overflowing with treasures to share with her, and so I had to write to God a lot! That took a lot of time I didn’t have, and I soon became backlogged and frustrated with piles and piles of things that I wanted to tell Lydia but hadn’t had time to first write to God about. I told Lydia that it felt like I was stuck behind a log jam... but I realized God must have a purpose in it, so I supposed it was more of a purposeful beaver dam than a meaningless log jam, even though I did not understand His purpose.

Lydia gave you hope. Now plant it firmly in Me.

In the end, He led us to stop communicating for a season of undetermined length. He showed Lydia His desire for this in another one of her beautiful pictures, picking up where my metaphor of the logs blocking my way to her had left off. She wrote:

This is what I have been praying for you as I have gone about my day: that God would take those logs and build you a cozy little log cab-

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in—as I had just done when I was playing Lincoln Logs with my six year old—just big enough for the two of you to sit with your backs against the logs and cuddle, that you would be able to sit in there with Him and just enjoy His presence, His company and His arms, and tell your story, His story back to Him, and delight in each other. I was praying that you would not want to, or try to peer over the walls, or heave the logs aside, or crawl over, but just rest in the spot that He has made for the two of you. I pray when He commissions you, for something little or big, that He will carry you right through the walls, deliver it with you, and return to the coziness of the little cabin He has built for you, until He sees the time fit to cut a doorway.

Lydia obeyed, and she prayed for me according to the picture He showed her, even though she knew it meant a sacrifice of not hearing from me for an unknown length of time. But God accomplished even more through that picture, and her sacrificial love in sending it, than she ever knew.

As soon as I read Lydia's description of a log cabin for me and Jesus, I knew that there was one little detail that she had gotten gloriously, wondrously wrong. There was one important thing that she didn't know about me. I bet my earthly father would know exactly what it was. He knew I was a daddy's girl, shamelessly still sitting on his lap when I was a teenager (in public)! I printed out Lydia's email, read that part to my dad and asked,

"You know what's wrong with that picture, right?" "Yes," he replied instantly. "You would never sit next to Jesus. You would be on His lap." "Exactly," I said. "That's what I was thinking, too."

In college I had read about the five "love languages," and I thought I had been given the worst "love language" a Christian could have. All the other love languages "worked" to give and receive love from God. Was your love language Words of Affirmation? You could find lots of affirming words from God in the Bible, and you could affirm Him back with your praises. Acts of Service? You could find God did lots of things for you, and you could serve Him, too. Gifts? God gave plenty of gifts! And you could easily give gifts back to Him. Quality Time? You could spend as much time as you wanted with God, and He would spend it right back with you. But for us Physical Touch people who wanted

nothing more than to give Him a hug. . . it looked like we would have to wait until we died and went to heaven to feel Him touch us. It did not seem fair.

Now I carried the printed-out email from Lydia upstairs and sat on the floor beside my bed to talk it over with God. My dad had known exactly who I was, what Lydia did not know about me: I was the girl who wanted to sit on Jesus' lap. Part of my identity was a Place, a Place I was longing for. I had tasted it once in that incredible experience of Jesus five years earlier, when I had "sat on Jesus' lap and cried on His shoulder" about Ben, but I did not know when, or how, I would ever get back to it. I suddenly understood that underneath the surface—underneath all my emotions and actions and words and choices and motives and everything I had thought I wanted—all I had really wanted for the past five years was to get back into that Place. I started to cry. I had been trying and trying and trying to earn my way into that Place again, as if earning it was the way to get there.

Someday, someday, someday... I pictured arriving in heaven, seeing Jesus on His throne, surrounded by myriads upon myriads of holy angels singing to Him and over a billion other Christians standing in line for their turn to get close to Him.

"Lord," I wondered to Him, "How long will it be from the time I arrive in heaven until the time that I get to hug You and sit on your lap?"

"Instantly." I could hardly believe that!

"But," I protested, "I'm afraid it will be irreverent and impossible when You'll be surrounded by all those angels singing to You..."

"What do you think they're singing about?"

What was He trying to say? "Are they singing about me sitting on Your lap?" I demanded. He just left that question hovering in the air.

I went back to Lydia's beautiful word picture. I imagined correcting the picture, imagined sitting with Jesus in this new cabin—not sitting on the grass in the yard, nor on the sofa by the woodstove, but sitting on His lap.

I hadn't pictured that I was sitting on Jesus' lap since that glorious moment, five years ago, when it had come with an overwhelming experience of almost seeing, almost hearing, almost touching Him. I had believed it was real. Now, I felt nothing, saw nothing; I just used my own vivid imagination to picture Lydia's cabin idea, and I pictured scrambling onto Jesus' knees instead of sitting beside Him.

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I realized, *This longing is the deepest thing I know about myself.* Others thought of me as the girl who had studied foreign languages, the girl who wanted to go overseas, the girl who was an American, the girl who was home-schooled, the girl who went to Bible college. Deeper down, I had known myself as the girl who loved Jesus. Then for a season, all my other identities had been sucked up into “the girl who loved Ben.” After the Lord had rescued me and taken that away, I thought of myself less as “the girl who loved Jesus” and more as “the girl Jesus loved.”

But “I am the girl who has always wanted to sit on Jesus’ lap” which was deeper than all the other things I had thought I was. I might never walk up to someone, shake their hand, and say, “Hi, I’m Elizabeth, and I have always wanted to sit on Jesus’ lap” —I didn’t know if I would ever be able to tell anyone. But this was who I really was, more than I had ever known who I really was before.

“No, *that is not the deepest thing you are,*” interrupted the Voice of the One I was imagining sitting on. “*You aren’t the girl who has always wanted to sit on My lap. You are the girl who always has been sitting on My lap.*”

“What?” I demanded. “What are You talking about? I am only imagining that I am sitting on Your lap!”

“No, you’re not *imagining,*” said the Voice. “You’re *believing. You are believing that you are in the Place where you already are.*”

What did He mean—I was already there? I knew the Bible said I was “in Christ.” I supposed being on His lap could not be any closer than being *in* Him! If I let myself picture sitting on His lap, was it just a way of picturing being in Christ, picturing what was true? And was picturing what was true somehow what it meant to believe?

The memory of a verse came to my mind. “No one has seen God at any time, but the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known” (John 1:18).

Jesus was “in the bosom of the Father”? Like, on His lap? In the Place?

I had also read that I was already somehow “seated with God in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 2:6). I was in that same Place with Jesus? Now?

I had even read that I was to “set my mind” on that Place “where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God,” because in some mysterious sense, I was already there, “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-4) *The place where I already am.*

Now the Voice pulled all those truths together, like pulling me into the hug I had been waiting for all my life:

“It was My Place, and I left it for you, so that you could be there with Me forever. When you picture it, you are not just ‘imagining’ it; you are believing what is true. You are believing you are in the Place where you already are. You are enjoying that you are in the Place where you really are. You are always on My lap. You always have been, and you always will be. You don’t have to do anything to get there. Just believe that you are in the Place where you really are.”

I could access the best moment of my life whenever I wanted to for the rest of my life? When I was scared, when I was bored, when I was hurt, when I was washing dishes—I could just picture being on His lap and believe it was true? I could just believe I was that close to Him and start enjoying it? Right now?

I let myself imagine my arms around His neck, His kiss on my forehead. I let myself bury my face in His shirt and smell Him. I let myself rest my head against His chest. I let myself whisper in His ear. And I let myself dare to believe it was true.



OF ALL THE DISCOVERIES I ever made, this discovery of “the Place” was the biggest shift. It took time to discover how much had changed. Before I let myself picture Jesus, I knew that He was *supposed* to be more desirable than my idols. Now for the first time He actually *was*.

I began to find the invitation to “see” the invisible truth in the Scriptures all over. Moses left Egypt “not fearing the wrath of the king” because he “endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27 NKJV). I had never noticed that before. Moses was more aware of an invisible God than of a visible person—even an angry person—even an angry person in power. Furrowed eyebrows, protruding veins, raised voice—none of that was able to control Moses’ emotions and his actions, because the Invisible One was more real to him. He endured *as if he saw*.

Paul survived using the same not-so-secret secret. “We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen,” he wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:18 (NKJV). How could I look at what was unseen without using my imagination? My imagination had to be a tool for my faith! Paul added

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that those visible things “are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” More real.

Like sitting on Jesus’ lap forever, starting now.

More real.

There were many such Scriptures, but I still hadn’t found any of them yet on the night picturing Jesus was almost stolen from me. I only knew that this was new and different and scary, that it was the most wonderful thing I had ever discovered, and that I still loved Jesus and wanted Him more. And I wondered if it was really OK to picture what was true.

So I just asked the Lord, “Is this OK to do?”

Immediately the thought popped into my head, *No, it’s not OK.*

Maybe it was me, repeating to myself what I was afraid of, or what I imagined that other people might say if they knew. Maybe it was a thief, terrified I would see Jesus and not fear anymore.

But I assumed it was Him.

I stopped letting myself picture Him.

It was the most painful sacrifice I had ever made for God. The previous night, I had fallen asleep feeling Jesus’ arms around me. This night, I lay in my bed and tried to meditate on every huggable verse of Scripture I could think of. “Underneath are the everlasting arms,” I repeated to myself over and over, refusing to let myself picture the arms. No arms, just words. “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people, both now and forevermore,” I tried, not letting myself picture Him around me, now as well as forevermore; only words. As I had believed all my life—no pictures—only words were allowed.

Cutting Ben out of my heart had hurt. But this felt like I was cutting out my heart itself. I could feel the comfort the Author of the words I was reciting wanted to give me, just out of reach, like a hug that I was pushing away. With every repetition of the beautiful promises, I felt like the picture I was refusing and the comfort it would have brought me were growing stronger. But I forced my mind to contain nothing but the words, and I felt nothing but longing and pain. I didn’t realize I was fighting Him; I thought I was fighting for Him. But I couldn’t keep it up. The pain was more than I could bear.

At last I cried, “I don’t know, Lord, if this is right or wrong, but I can’t do this anymore; it hurts too much; I have to let myself picture something!” As

soon as I let myself picture something, the picture rushed in, flooded my mind with relief and took over:

I saw that I was a little girl lying in a hospital bed, wounded with this pain. I saw Jesus come running in, like a parent who was frantic to find their child in the hospital, asking, “Will she be all right? Will My baby be all right?” There was a nurse standing by my bed. I heard her reassuring Him, “Don’t worry, Sir, your daughter is going to be just fine. But she would feel much better if you rocked her.”

I looked where she was looking and saw a rocking chair in the corner of my hospital room. I heard Jesus say joyfully, “I can do that!” I felt Him scoop me up out of the bed, felt myself sink down into His lap as He sat in the chair. All the pain I’d felt melted away into the hug He had wanted to give me. I could still feel Him holding me and rocking me when I fell asleep.

Was that what it *really* meant to “meditate” on a promise?

He wanted to be more to me than words inside my head.



Chapter 5



At long, long last came the December morning I was waiting for. It was not quite Christmas yet, but I woke up as joyful as if multiple Christmas mornings had been rolled into one. The final grades were submitted and the semester of teaching that I had bound myself to in disobedience to the Voice was finally over. Now I was free at last, and what I wanted to do with my freedom was get to know Him—Him, Him, Him! Paul had written in one of his emails to me that “There is a difference between knowing about God and knowing God. You know a lot about God, but how well do you know Him?” *Not very well*, I admitted, for the first time in my life. I was the Sunday School Superstar in Knowing About God, the kid who knew all the answers. But when I found that God was alive and at community college with me, I had not trusted Him any farther than I could throw Him. I’d had no idea what He would do.

Now the God who had started to show Himself to me in that physical cabin in the mountains had given me an invisible, spiritual cabin to meet Him in here and anywhere, and it seemed He wanted to pick right up where He had left off. So I told Him I would set aside the next six months just to get to know Him better. I did not think of it as learning to hear His *voice*. I just thought of it as getting to know Him, however He really was and however He wanted to be known. Of course, the whole time I was still desperately hoping that by the summer, He would let me go overseas and visit Lydia and Paul and their work! But first, I would let God teach me about Himself.

God seemed downright excited about the opportunity. He swiftly provided everything I would need. Four months ago, I hadn’t trusted Him to be able to provide for me if I didn’t teach. Now that I let Him, He showed me how easily He could have done it. My mother had just finished homeschooling her youngest child and had gone back to work. I offered to cook for my parents in her place if they would feed and house me for my season of not working, and

they happily agreed. Meanwhile, some enthusiastic local college students had just set up a prayer room in our church basement. I could cook every night and spend the rest of my time in the prayer room. After my stressful semester, six months of living like a contemplative monk sounded like a heavenly dream.

And it was not just the physical provision that suggested God was excited to be sought. He could not wait for me to get to the prayer room—or even to wake up in the morning! While I was still asleep on the first morning of my season of seeking Him, He sent me a dream:

I dreamed I was sitting with Jesus in a worship service that was more like a planetarium show. As we sang, pictures were shown on the screen: first pictures of our nation, then our planet, then our solar system, then our galaxy, and then the other galaxies, so that I began to feel smaller and smaller. Jesus had His arm around me and as we saw galaxy after galaxy, He kept whispering in my ear excitedly,

“I know that one! I know that one!”

I became afraid that if He was big enough to know all these galaxies, He would be too big to hold me anymore. At last, I cried out,

“How can You hold me in Your arms when You hold so much? How can I be so important to You when You are so big? I am too small!”

He answered, “It is not a matter of how big or small you are, but of My covenant with you and how much I paid for you. If I could have traded in a few or even all of My galaxies to save you instead of spending nine hours on a cross cut off from My Father, don’t you think I would have done it? But I could not, and so for you I paid Myself.”

I woke up and wrote the dream in my journal, adding, “That is why You have a covenant with me, and that is why You hold me. I imagine a world where you have taken down all Your galaxies and put them away, and the sky is black and devoid of stars. I realize it would be a world where less had been paid for redemption than in the story You have written here, and I know how costly is our love. Does it mean more than all the stars You have named, for You to hold me now?”



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ANOTHER OF PAUL'S EMAIL comments had been, "You seem to have a strong filter when you speak. Don't tell me what you think you are supposed to believe about God. What do you *actually* believe about God?" I had never before let myself admit that those two things could be different.

As I tried to listen to the Voice, still not even sure if this was allowed, I realized I had more than a "strong filter" —I had an entire board of Imaginary Reformed Church Elders inside my head! I could not think even one single thought without having to either defend to them why it was Biblical or, if I could not, apologize to them for it.

With many apologies to the scandalized Imaginary Reformed Church Elders, I was trying to pray in bed. My family was not heating our second floor this winter—just using electric mattress pads on our beds, and so anywhere outside of my bed was freezing. With even more apologies to the Imaginary Reformed Church Elders, I was trying to listen to the Voice of God. All I was hearing was just *Shhhhh*, like He was trying to shush me quiet.

"Oh God", I started, "If You would like to talk to me like this, would You please do so and teach me to hear Your voice."

Shhhhh.

"But not if it is wrong, Lord. Not if You don't want to speak this way".

Shhhhhhhhh.

"—and so please if it's a sin to be asking You this, would You please forgive me and show me and please do not let me be deceived, because I know You can hear me even if I can't hear You."

SHHHHHHHH!

In fact, 90% of what I had been hearing when I prayed, when I journaled, when I tried to talk to Him about the Bible, when I was in the prayer room, when I was at home, was "SHHHH," and 10% of it was everything else I had received put together.

In what relationship, with what sort of person, is "Shhh" 90% of what is said, and 10% of what is said is everything else?

I knew.

At once I saw myself in my cabin with Jesus again. He was bouncing me up and down; I was about six pounds and swaddled and screaming. All my fearful prayers, no matter what I tried to say, were only coming out as, "WAAAAAAH!"

And all He was answering was, *Shhhhh*.

I had been a Christian for over 20 years now. Surely this was not the right picture of me? But if it was, didn't I want to admit it and obey it so I could grow? If this was really how He saw me, didn't I want to meet Him there?

Lydia had no idea that Jesus was trapped in the doorless, windowless, four-foot log cabin she had prayed for with a newborn that had colic! In the picture He was giving me, I could not do anything but scream. I was afraid my screaming would annoy Him so badly that He would leave me—and the only thing I could do about it was scream even harder. I wanted to do something, anything, to make myself loveable, but all my efforts to be less obnoxious to Him just made my baby screams come out louder. I wanted to hold onto Him so He could not leave me; but I was helpless, unable to move my own arms or hold up my own head. I was utterly, completely, at His mercy. If He put me down and walked away, there would be nothing I could do. I would just die there. Alone.

Paul had asked me what I really believed about God. Stripped of all my right answers, I was just afraid He would leave me.



I SPENT A LOT OF THAT winter huddled on my electric mattress pad, meeting Jesus in my mental log cabin. I was a baby, screaming, terrified that He would put me down. But He never, ever did. He just bounced me and said *Shhhhh* and gently tried to put something that I was fighting into my mouth.

I knew that the baby metaphor was in the Bible. Even this picture of Jesus trying to get a bottle of milk in my mouth to get me to shut up reminded me of a Bible verse: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Peter 2:2-3 ESV).

And when I pictured my mouth being too full of milk to scream, I got quiet. When I got quiet, I could finally hear Him say something besides, *Shhhhh*. Could this possibly be part of what it meant to humble myself and become like a little child in order to enter the kingdom of God? We had learned about Piaget's stages of development in psychology class in college. I remembered that the very first stage, the newborn stage, was where you either learned to trust, or

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you did not learn to trust—which would keep you from every stage thereafter. You learned to trust if somebody was out there to pick you up when you cried. I was right back at square one, learning to trust Him.



Part II: Visits to The Bicycle Shed





Chapter 6



I didn't know there were Christians out there who had words for what I was experiencing. I didn't know they might have said I was "seeing in the Spirit," or that these pictures in my imagination might even count as what the Bible calls "visions." I could only clumsily say that God was giving me pictures, or that I was imagining something and He was helping me, or that I was imagining it but it was true. There were very few people I trusted enough to tell at all. When they asked me what it felt like, I had figured out my explanation:

"It doesn't feel like I'm watching a movie; it feels like I'm reading a novel. When you read in a novel that 'Amy had blonde hair,' and 'Amy walked down the street,' you picture a woman with blonde hair walking down a street. You don't see her facial features so clearly that you could identify her in a photograph. And you're picturing her in your own imagination, but your imagination is being led by something else, by the words you are reading. It's like that. I don't know what Jesus looks like any better than you do. I couldn't pick Him out of a line-up in a police station. I just have a picture in my mind that's about as subtle as when I read a novel, and it feels like I am imagining it myself but that my imagination is being led by Something Else. Only in this case, not by the words of the novel but by the Holy Spirit."

In fact, I once tried to keep my mind a blank screen and not let my own imagination contribute anything. I saw absolutely nothing on the blank screen for about five minutes. Then I heard the Voice suggest, *How about you control the story, and I control you?* So I never tried that again. Instead, I continued to meet God in my imagination, usually beginning in "my place" sitting on Jesus' lap. From that place, we told each other stories, which brought me more joy than I had ever experienced before.

But if I *had* known of the other Christians out there who had experienced what I was talking about, I would not have trusted them enough to receive from

them. I had heard positive comments being made about “Charismatic” and “Pentecostal” believers—positive comments like, “You know, I think they really might be saved too.” I didn’t know too much more about these people who might be saved too, except that they spoke in tongues, whatever that sounded like, and that anything that belonged to them could be written off forever. My perception was that all you had to do was slap the label “Charismatic” onto something and then you didn’t have to think about it anymore. You didn’t have to ask the questions of whether or not it was real or good or Scriptural or true or something God wanted to do to you. You could just call it “Charismatic” and the conversation would end. The item thus labeled would be automatically sent out to That Other World of Those Other People where it belonged. You would never have to deal with it again.

I did not want that label slapped onto me. Maybe then I would be rejected, too.

Paul and Lydia were not “Charismatic.” They lived in my spiritual culture, and they spoke my language, yet they could still hear God. Fearing that the people at home would reject me and fearing that those labeled “Charismatic” had something wrong with them, I believed Paul and Lydia were the only mentors in the world I could trust.

Two mentors—and one friend. I knew I could trust my “kindred spirit” friend, Julie, whom I had met in college. Julie had less prejudice to overcome than I did. Her parents, unlike mine, rarely spoke to her of spiritual things, so the Lord had raised Julie in many ways Himself. She grew up seeking her own spiritual nourishment by reading books and talking to Him. She was used to discipling herself. She was used to believing in things that nobody talked to her about except God.

So it was that we both had read the Bible on our own as youngsters, and we both had discovered 1 Corinthians 14:39: “Earnestly desire to prophesy” (ESV). My response had been one of horror. I did not know what it meant to “prophesy,” but I was pretty sure it was wrong and bad and had been supposed to stop in the Old Testament. I knew that nobody I’d met ever did it, and nobody ever talked about it. In fact, I had never heard anybody say that we were even *allowed* to desire it even a teensy weensy little bit, let alone be commanded to desire it earnestly! So I did not desire it; I wanted nothing to do with it. I

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was sure I wouldn't like it, whatever it was. I resented God commanding me to want whatever it was that nobody else wanted.

Julie also remembered reading that verse in childhood, but with a very different reaction. Little Julie had just looked up towards God with her huge trusting eyes and said, "Oh Daddy God, I have no idea what it means to prophesy, but You command me to earnestly desire it, so it must be wonderful. I want to please You, so please please please give it to me, whatever it is. I earnestly desire it, whatever it is!" Julie trusted Him enough to "earnestly desire" an unknown commodity based solely on His recommendation.

I did not.

During my season of seeking God, Julie drove up to visit me from five states away, sat cross-legged on my bedspread, and did an unusual amount of the talking. She was one of the best listeners in the world and usually let me dominate more than my fair share of the conversation, but this time she was overflowing with news, excited about something that she needed to tell somebody and didn't dare tell anybody but me. God was answering her childhood prayer about prophecy: she had met Christians who knew what it was and did it!

Her housemate's mother, Barbara, had taken Julie under her wing and had become the spiritual mother she'd never had. Julie was thriving under her care like a happy little bird. But it was a strange species of bird that had adopted my Julie. Barbara had taken Julie to see her favorite place, the Pentecostal Campground. At the meetings held there, people did "prophesy." They had prophesied over Julie, who had written down their words, eager to share them with me. People also got healed of physical illnesses at the Pentecostal Campground. People brought their relatives who had demons to get the demons cast out of them.

Julie sat on my bed and read to me all the notes in her purple journal (Julie's journals were *always* purple) and never dreamed I was uncomfortable. I carefully treasured her excitement, showing how honored I felt to be the one she shared this with. I trusted Julie too much to believe what she was sharing was wrong, but I distrusted the strange-sounding world of the Pentecostal Campground too much to believe it was right. I thought uncertainly, *If it was anybody but Julie getting into this, I would think it was wrong.* I decided to be both happy for her and relieved it was not me!

I did really like one thing she had read to me from the notes in her journal—something about a baby bottle:

“During worship at Barbara’s house church, she saw an image of a baby bottle and a tiny 0-2 month old infant. The significance of the bottle was that everything a tiny infant needs is in the milk. She also saw that the baby was held by God. God provides our nourishment to thrive and live the abundant life. Barbara said our perspective on God can be so wrong. In an effort to please Him and in thinking that we do not deserve much, we fail to see His character as it really is. We forget how He loves us, and we try to earn His love.”

How perfectly that fit into what He had been showing me! “Whose sermon was that baby bottle thing from again?” I asked.

“That wasn’t a sermon; that was Barbara’s prophetic vision,” said Julie.

I didn’t know to feel loved. It didn’t occur to me to think, *Wow, God might well have given her that specifically for me!* I just thought, *Oh no, if I want to believe that is from God, I will have to believe in ‘prophetic visions!’*

Julie was happily prattling on about her next revelation. I had missed whether it came from Barbara or some speaker at the Pentecostal Campground.

“—and they said that if you want to grow in the gift of prophecy, you need to ask God to help you overcome the fear of man, because you will need to have the courage to tell people whatever God tells you to say to them and not be afraid of their reactions, and so the gift of prophecy and the fear of man cannot coexist. And so now I am praying that God will take away all my fear of man so that He can give me the gift of prophecy! He said earnestly desire to prophesy, you know?”

I shuddered to think what sorts of horrible and embarrassing things God might make me do to take away my fear of man, or how unpredictable life would be without the fear of man to keep me behaving in socially acceptable ways (would I even wear clothes?), or what it would be like to have to tell whatever God said to whomever He said at any moment! *Yikes*, I thought. *If I cannot have both the gift of prophecy and the fear of man, I think I would rather have the fear of man!*



Chapter 7



God didn't let me visit Paul and Lydia that summer. But Julie did get me to visit the Pentecostal Campground.

I sat alone with God on Julie's not-purple-because-she-didn't-pick-it living room carpet and shared with Him how I felt about her plan. The plan was for us to stop and spend the night at the Pentecostal Campground as we drove across the five states between her home and mine.

I had heard that something happened at the Pentecostal Campground called "being slain in the Spirit." I had never seen it and didn't know exactly what to picture, but I had a vague idea that it involved the Holy Spirit knocking people over and throwing them on the floor. I remembered how an evil spirit had thrown the demonized boy on the ground in the *JESUS* film, and I did not want the Holy Spirit to do something to me that demons also did—how would I tell the difference? Besides, I did not think the Holy Spirit doing something that resembled killing me sounded like a fun way to be friends with Him.

"I'll go if You promise not to slay me," I told Him.

I promise, He said, clearly and immediately. I don't want to slay you; I just want to fill you. Would that be OK?

"That's fine," I agreed. So I went.

I got out of the car in hypervigilant mode. Everything I was going to experience here came from one of three sources: God, humans, or demons. I figured it was up to me to figure out which of the three was going on at all times before I got it wrong and a demon crawled down my throat. I wasn't sure that I could.

The first thing I noticed was that I was the racial minority. The majority did not seem to be African Americans, but rather, based on their accents and sometimes costumes, African *Africans*. The second thing I noticed—or couldn't escape from—was an elderly white man who came up to us almost as soon as we had stepped out of our car and asked us if we had received the gift of tongues

and, if not, would we like to. I took a step back from him while he talked to Julie and her boyfriend. I wasn't ready for *that*.

The only person I'd known who "spoke in tongues" was an Eastern European woman called Faith who had been my host mother when I studied abroad for a semester. She and her husband took in teenaged girls who had aged out of their city's orphanage system. Every night Faith would pray with me and the girls and sometimes end her prayer with a moment in tongues. This consisted primarily of making a rattling sound in the back of her throat and saying "Hallelujah" a bunch of times, which led me to conclude, *She sounds exactly like I would expect her to sound if she thought she could speak in another language, but she actually can't*. Faith was an amazing servant of God who took in girls that nobody else could handle, and her "tongues" habit seemed completely harmless, but I wasn't convinced it was *real*.

On the other hand, there had been my ballet teacher... Miss Judy had started a Christian dance studio in her basement, to which I had transferred from my secular ballet studio at age 13. I adored her. I felt so close to God when we danced, especially when we finished ballet exercises early enough that she put on a worship song for us to dance to. And after that finished, I would slip out and look up at the stars and do my own little dance, feeling so close to the One we had danced for. There had been one night especially that I had never forgotten, a summer night when it was so warm she slid open the basement's door out onto the hillside. The music of a cricket orchestra had come in through the opening, drawing me to it. I sat down in the doorway to listen, with the bright bustling studio behind me and the moonlit summer night in front of me, and I felt so much love for God. I started whispering out into the night to Him how wonderful He was. I started, and then it felt like I had opened up a waterfall inside of me, a waterfall that just kept pouring. Thought after thought after thought of praise from the Scriptures flowed effortlessly into my mind to tell Him, each one more wonderful than the last, and so I poured them all out to Him. I had never experienced anything like that before.

Nothing in the world made me happier than when I got to spend time with Miss Judy outside of class. One day she mysteriously whispered to me, "Don't tell everybody, because I do not want them to think I am one of 'them;' but sometimes when I am praying all by myself, I start speaking a language I don't know."

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I didn't know what to make of that. Miss Judy seemed too godly to be dabbling in the demonic and too embarrassed about this experience to have manufactured it! Logically, that implied that a prayer language from God could be real. I was not ready to commit to believing that, but her comment was like a doorstop that wedged the door one inch ajar. I never peeked through that door, but I couldn't shut it all the way.

Later I had met Mr. Carter, one of my foreign language professors, a Christian who was very skeptical of these so-called languages. He and his friend had gone into a church where people were saying things "in a tongue" and another man was "interpreting" it. Mr. Carter said that as a linguist, he could tell the things he was hearing were too repetitive to be real languages. He and his friend started speaking in Russian to see if the man leading would catch them by the power of the Holy Spirit or not. He just began "interpreting" their "tongue," causing Mr. Carter to roar, "No, that is not what I said! You are making these 'interpretations' up and deceiving all these people!"

The stories of Faith, Miss Judy, and Mr. Carter were the only three experiences I had to fall back on to make sense of whatever this white-haired man was going to do now—well, and the Scriptures. I shouldn't forget that God might actually have an opinion, too! I'd never heard anybody teach on this issue from the Scriptures, but I had read the *Four Views on Spiritual Gifts* book. I had read it in the chaos of the aftermath of the Ben experience, desperately wanting the "cessationist" position (the all-that-stuff-has-ceased-now position) to be right, so that God could not keep speaking in my head and telling me to give up stuff!

The Cessationist argument was the first chapter, and it had sounded wonderful: The canon is closed, the Bible is finished, and we cannot add to Scripture anymore. More revelation of any sort, whether the New Testament spiritual gift of prophecy, a tongue with an interpretation, or God speaking to you personally in your thoughts, would be adding to Scripture; therefore, these experiences cannot exist anymore now that the Bible is complete. *Hurray!* I thought. *God won't tell me which person on the street I have to talk to! I am free!*

"In a lawsuit the first to speak seems right, until someone comes forward and cross-examines," Solomon had written in Proverbs 18:17 (NIV). I'd been reminded of that proverb when I read chapters 2, 3, and 4! The closing of the canon was the first author's entire argument. If prophecy and tongues were not "adding to Scripture," if just that one premise was not true, then the whole thing

fell apart. I had to admit, that as much as I wanted the cessationist guy to be right, the authors from the other three positions had many Scriptural reasons for their beliefs that honestly sounded better. And to my greatest surprise—for I had already heard the stereotypes that such people were emotional instead of intellectual and were not careful with the Bible—the “Charismatic/Pentecostal” author sounded the most thorough and wise and scholarly and biblical of all!

By the end of the book, I was completely uncertain. The Bible nowhere clearly stated, “These gifts will cease.” I also did not see it stated anywhere, “These gifts will not cease.” So everyone ended up where they had chosen to begin. Whoever started out saying, “These gifts have ceased unless the Bible says they will continue” found no Bible verse about it and concluded that the gifts had ceased. On the other hand, whoever started out saying, “These gifts will continue unless the Bible says they will cease” also found no Bible verse about it and concluded that the gifts continued. Unless such a verse could be found, I guessed everyone believed what they wished to believe.

Now I was standing between the campground’s parking lot and the picnic tables, and the inescapable elderly man was telling Julie that since Jesus had promised that our good Father will give us the Holy Spirit when we ask Him, she could just ask and then start speaking sounds and trust that she was speaking in a tongue from the Holy Spirit because of Jesus’ promise. I stepped off the grass and onto the sawdust that surrounded the big meeting tent to get further away from this pushy old man. *Absolutely no way am I doing that!* Then I turned my thoughts towards heaven in a silent prayer. “Lord, You can give me whatever You want to,” I prayed, determined to please God even though I wanted whatever these people had about as much as I wanted a furry caterpillar stuffed down my throat. “But You have to be the One to do it, not me!”

The old man said that tongues were for worshipping the Lord and offered to demonstrate. I listened, to see if what he said would sound like Faith’s rattly hallelujah or like Mr. Carter’s repetitive hoax. It sounded like neither. It sounded like Tolkien’s elvish, only several times more regal and beautiful. Not one syllable repeated another. It was so clear I could have written down the words. It was so beautiful I would have listened for much longer, but the old man only got out a few words before he teared up, then choked up and then had to stop from weeping. “I am sorry,” he apologized. “I cannot just do it to demonstrate.

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God is too beautiful..." In complete shock I realized, *I think he can understand what he just said!*

Well, that certainly sounded like a real language! If God ever did that to me, I hoped mine would come out like that man's—and not be repetitive!

We went into the tent.

The old man urged us to sit in the front row so we would be close to "the river" and "the glory." I did not know what it meant to believe there was a "river" on the expanse of pale green carpet in front of the front row, but I was so glad we sat in front. Because the people danced!

How I had loved to dance for God in Miss Judy's dance studio, or in my bedroom, or in Julie's living room. But only once, in another country, had I gotten to dance for God in *church*. Now I danced like I might never get the opportunity again. There was a bucket of flags, and Julie found one that was purple. We danced and danced. To my surprise, as I danced, I saw more pictures from God in my mind.

This was like no church service I had ever been in. The children were not bored. Their parents did not have to bring coloring books to get them to sit still, because they did not have to sit still. All the children were down in the front waving flags and dancing around and jumping up and down as hard as they could. And instead of minding this, the grown-ups were doing it, too! I supposed this was how we would react if King Jesus really passed through the streets of the New Jerusalem on His white horse in a victory parade. But we were doing it now. *These people are playing "heaven" the way children play house, or doctor, or school, I thought, the way children line up their stuffed animals and pretend to do the things they really will do when they grow up. I suppose that is what worship is, really—pretending we are in heaven now. We sing His praises and practice what we will do there. And if it is as clumsy an imitation as a line of teddy bears playing 'school,' God probably thinks it is absolutely adorable and gets down on the floor to play with us... and His Presence with us makes it real.*



Chapter 8



I didn't see anybody at the Pentecostal Campground who looked like the Holy Spirit had "slain" them. The things I did see, I had no vocabulary for. I felt like a cultural anthropologist visiting a new tribe, notepad in hand, trying to take in the natives' customs of yet-to-be-discovered significance for which I had no terminology.

Most of my mental anthropological notes concerned The Adventures of Catcher Man and Scarf Lady. I didn't know how else to think of these colorful characters, so I eventually coined these titles for them.

Catcher Man appeared behind people's backs whenever a speaker was praying for them, whether during the singing and dancing time or after the messages. He kept vigilant watch for anyone who looked like they were going to pray for someone else, and he usually noticed them before I did. Then he would silently slip into his position behind them and hold out his hands. He was as wordless and reliable as a shadow and never failed to appear—which was a good thing, for about half the time the person being prayed for would gently tip themselves over backwards into his arms! Catcher Man always laid them carefully onto the floor. He never missed. And the people never turned around to be sure he was really there before they fell. Sometimes the person didn't tip over and Catcher Man just stood there waiting for nothing, but he never seemed offended.

Scarf Lady had a baby stroller with a baby in it and also a lot of scarves. Her little girl, who looked to be about eight, stayed close to the stroller while the other children danced. Whenever Catcher Man finished laying a person on the ground, Scarf Lady would go into action and come and lay a scarf over them. Then the person would lie there peacefully for a little while and eventually get up and give Scarf Lady her scarf back. The system worked great until somebody prayed for Scarf Lady herself. She too fell back into the hands of Catcher Man,

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and he laid her on the floor. At that point, the little girl by the baby stroller took over. She laid a scarf on top of her mother and took over laying scarves on other people until her mother got up again. I marveled, *How different would life be if this was your childhood, if this was your normal?* I could not imagine witnessing this at age eight. I could not imagine my mother falling to the floor and me not being scared and calmly knowing it was my responsibility now to be Scarf Lady.

I still didn't know why the people were tipping themselves over backwards when they were prayed for. But I was hungry for God. No, I was desperate. I was desperate because near the end of my beautiful six months of seeking God, He had told me that I was ready now and that He wanted me to go back to teaching in the fall.

I was terrified. The semester I'd signed up disobediently had been so stressful that I still felt queasy in the pit of my stomach when I even drove past the college's parking garage.

Lord, I proved I can't teach, I reminded Him. *The only way it could happen would be if You did it through me, Jesus. Do You want to teach developmental English composition at a community college in America this fall?*

When I asked that, I heard, **YES!!!**

The emotion in the Voice in that one syllable overwhelmed me. How could I disappoint Him when He was so excited? So I had asked people to pray for me in every church that we had visited on this summer vacation trip with Julie, churches of all sorts; and each time someone prayed, my terror died down a tiny bit more. So as weird as this Pentecostal Campground seemed, I would take as much help as He could give me here.

I saw the old man we'd met in the parking lot now worshipping near the front, and I thought I heard God say, *Ask him to pray for you to receive more of the Holy Spirit.* Quicker to obey than I used to be, I went over and tapped his shoulder. He asked me if I wanted tongues. I looked down. "Well. . . only if that is something God really wants to give me. . ." Either he perceived it himself, or the Holy Spirit whispered in his ear, *She's not ready,* because he immediately backed off about the tongues and never bothered me about it again, even though he continued to bother everybody else! He just put his hand on my head to pray for me. He leaned in a bit so I automatically took a little step back.

“No, don’t step back to catch yourself; there is someone behind you to catch you,” said the man. “Just let yourself go.”

I was ready now to follow whatever he told me to do to honor God in this place, so I obediently went limp. Catcher Man caught me and laid me on the floor. He caught me so quickly that tipping myself over backwards was not as scary as I would have thought it would be. As soon as I lay on the floor, Little Scarf Girl came trotting over and laid a scarf over me. I lay there as I had seen the others do. I still wasn’t sure what the point of lying down was, but I was glad I had been obedient.

When they transitioned from the worship time to a sermon, I got up and sat next to Julie in my front row chair again.

“Brothers and sisters, today I want to speak to you about hypocrisy,” began the preacher. “Any one of us can be tempted to deceive by the desire to appear spiritual to others. For example, I once fell into the sin of hypocrisy when we had a famous speaker come to this very place. I was standing in the prayer line and saw that every other person he prayed for was falling out in the Spirit. I was so afraid I would be the only one left standing and everyone would think I was less sensitive to the Spirit of God than the others. And sure enough, when he prayed for me I felt nothing. So I did something I am very ashamed of—I fell over backwards on purpose. Afterwards I was very convicted by the Holy Spirit of my hypocrisy!”

I was thunderstruck. *They weren’t doing it on purpose?* The Holy Spirit was *making* them fall over backwards? *That* was why sometimes they did it, and sometimes they did not? So was that gentle falling backwards what they called “being slain in the Spirit”? It looked nothing like violence and nothing like the demonized boy being hurled to the ground in the *JESUS* film. It was so gentle and peaceful looking that I had never guessed it came from a Power outside the person’s own volition. (I didn’t feel the least bit guilty of hypocrisy myself. God knew I hadn’t been trying to fake anything—only to do what I thought I had been told to do and what I had thought everyone had been doing!) And, of course, I wasn’t surprised that God had not made me fall down under His power—He had promised me He wouldn’t!



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I STILL MISSED LYDIA. Every day. The pile of things I yearned to share with her grew with my every discovery. Not a day went by without me thinking of her and looking forward to the day God would take me back to her to tell her all about it. I thought the whole reason God was teaching me to hear His Voice was to get me ready to work with Paul and Lydia. My life had gone from hopeless to meaningful when I met them, so I still thought they were kind of the meaning of life and pitied anyone who did not get the chance to be close to them!

Lydia gave you hope. Now plant it firmly in Me.

As long as I was obeying that, He said it was OK to miss her. He understood. Meanwhile, I was practicing listening to Him, and He was comforting me. One of Paul's suggestions had been that rather than coming to God with multiple choice questions (like, "Do You want me to go this event or stay home?" or "Should I talk to that person or keep walking?") or with yes-or-no questions (like, "Can I write to Lydia yet? Please? Please? Please?"), I should ask Him a nice open-ended question like, "Lord, what do You want to say to me today?" This practice was a life-saver. As soon as I asked God a yes-or-no question, of course I could not stop both the thoughts *yes* and *no* popping into my head at once! And if I asked, "Lord, can I please do this thing I really really want to instead of this thing I really really do not want to?" I would hear my desires roaring *YES!* and my fears roaring *NO!* before I could even finish the sentence.

But if I asked, "What is on Your heart today, Papa?" or, "What do You want to say to me about this situation?" or, "What will glorify You in this situation?" I could journal a page of what I heard Him reply! —especially the "What will glorify You in this?" question. I got an answer to that one every single time!

The very first time I tried asking, "Lord, what do You want to say to me today?" I heard, *Read My Word.*

So I opened my Bible with expectation. It opened to 1 Samuel 18:1: "The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (ESV). I read the whole chapter and into the next one to get the context and the story—how they had met, how they both loved and trusted God, how Jonathan risked himself to help David flee, how they were separated, and how God took care of David. When I finished, I came back to that first verse. I asked again,

“Lord, what do You want to say to me about this?” He didn’t tell me to do something I was afraid to do. In fact, He didn’t tell me to do anything at all. He just slipped the most comforting sentence I could imagine into the exact place my heart was hurting:

You are David. Lydia loves you as her own soul. And so do I.



IN ADDITION TO DANCING with flags and avoiding the gift of tongues and falling over backwards on purpose, I did hear prophecy for the first time at the Pentecostal Campground. That happened after the preacher who had spoken on hypocrisy also spoke about missions and invited anyone who felt called to go overseas for Jesus to come down to the front to be prayed for. Julie and I both ran down front for that invitation.

We stood with the other would-be missionaries in a side-by-side line at the front, and the preacher moved down the line praying for each one of us. Catcher Man followed along with him just in case. This time I knew not to throw myself into Catcher Man’s arms unless God made me do it. It did seem like they could save a lot of trouble for Catcher Man if they just didn’t pray standing up in the first place!

Sometimes the preacher stopped in front of a person and told them something God said about them, but not for everybody. Even though he stopped and prophesied over fewer than half of the people, he did it for all three of us. First he came to Julie’s boyfriend and said, “You are Joshua, and you will lead God’s people into the promised land.” That made sense; Julie and I both saw leadership skills in that boy. Then he said to Julie, “You are Esther, and you will get the people of God to begin to pray.” I could see that happening, too (especially since I had always seen Esther depicted as dressed in purple)! Then it was my turn. The preacher placed his hand on my head; and Catcher Man slipped into place behind me, because he didn’t know that God had promised me He would not do that slaying thing to me.

“You are David. You have gifts of creativity from God, and He wants you to know that they are not just inherited from your parents; they really are spiritual gifts, and as the hand of the enemy was broken when David played and sang, so the hand of the enemy will be broken when you use your creativity.”

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The meeting let out, and Julie dragged me off towards the campground office to pick up our room keys before we got locked out for the night while I was bubbling over, “That man knew nothing about me except what I look like and that I came tonight! He didn’t even know whether or not I am a Christian. He didn’t know that I love to dance and act and write plays and poems and stories and even write songs and try to play them on the guitar...” or that I had heard *You are David* that one beautiful time before.

I wasn’t sure what to do with prophecy, but I had to think that it could be real. At least this once.



Chapter 9



As summer ended, I returned from my adventures dancing with the Pentecostal tribe in their green-carpeted “river” to face my fears: it was time to take Jesus-in-me back to the community college, so He could teach this class He was so excited about teaching. Through me.

Never before had I done anything for Him that I was *this* afraid of. I was terrified to sign that contract again. The last time I had signed it in disobedience, and it had trapped me. Once I signed it, I could not get out of it, no matter how horrible teaching was. Besides, could I really hear Him well enough to obey Him out there in the real world, the secular world, and even the professional world? I still often could not tell if the thoughts that popped into my head were from Him. I still did crazy things thinking He had said them. I still got it wrong.

He reassured me that this time, He was going to sign the contract in me. I pointed out to Him that the document I handed in at the office still had to say “Elizabeth” on it. I could not sign, “I, Jesus Christ, agree to teach Basic Composition 2 and to cover all the course competencies in the syllabus for the fall semester dates...” But as I told Him this, a realization dawned on me like the first pink streaks of sunrise: when I had signed the contract in disobedience to Him, that was exactly what had happened. When I signed, He signed too. My attempts to manipulate Him had done exactly what I had thought I wanted: they had committed both of us. He was so committed to me that He had gone through that whole semester with me, carried me when I could not keep going, and made three different students show up every day. If He had done that for me when I dragged Him there disobediently, wouldn’t He go with me now that He was the One leading me there?

Maybe I could trust Him. Maybe I could even trust Him to really show up and do something through me that I couldn’t do by myself.

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Plan A was that Jesus would help me.

Once I signed the contract, I would have no Plan B.

The secretary had given me two copies of the contract; I was supposed to turn in the pink copy but keep the green copy for myself. I signed my own name on the dotted line on the pink sheet, but I wrote “Jesus Christ” in cursive on the dotted line on the green one. I scotch-taped the green contract to the wall over my bed. I pointed to it to show Him.

Even if nobody knows this but You and me, I said, You actually signed the contract, and You are actually the One teaching this course! I have proved I can't do this without You! This was all Your idea, it is all Your problem, and You promised to do everything on this list through me. You promised to teach these things on this syllabus, so if I have any thoughts popping into my head that I should be cutting class or wearing pajamas to school or preaching something else instead of the course competencies, I will know they are not from You, because nothing that contradicts this agreement—which You led me to make and which You made in me—can be from You!

Having that green contract on the wall to help me discern the Voice made me feel safer. I had a way of telling when crazy ideas were not from Him. Jesus had promised to teach composition, to show up every Tuesday and Thursday at 10am, to use the textbook, to follow the dress code, and to turn in His parking badge at the end of the semester. I was going to hold Him to it!

So we started preparing our class. Together. Jesus had lots of good ideas. Last time, I had been so terrified of “getting in trouble” that I had been afraid for people to even find out I was a Christian. Of course, I wouldn't get in trouble for just being a Christian, but I figured I might if I talked about it too much—and I had no idea how much would be too much. Now Jesus suggested I actually go to my supervisor's office and ask her.

So we showed up in the Dean of Humanities' bright little white office and sat in the two gray-blue chairs across from her wooden desk, Him and me. I knew she could only see me. So I asked the question He had given me:

“I am a Christian, and I wanted to ask you where you think the line of separation between church and state here actually is. I don't want to cross that line and be proselytizing my students instead of teaching them composition, but I do want to create an atmosphere of open discussion in my classroom where everyone can feel free to share what they really think on each topic, including

me. I think not knowing exactly where that line is has made me stop too far short of it. What do you think?"

The dean leaned in, intrigued. "That is a really good question, Elizabeth," she said. We discussed it for a while. I ran by her everything that Jesus and I had wanted to do. Was it OK to use the Bible as literature? She said, "yes." Could I offer to pray for students if they wanted it? "Yes." I went down my list of things I had been afraid to do, and she said she was fine with all of them.

"This has been a really interesting conversation," she said, as Jesus and I stood up to go. "I am going to be thinking about this for a long time." I went out, leaving more than half of the fear that had been on my shoulders in the waste basket by her office door. Jesus was a genius at this.

That was just the first day of a 75-day semester that I spent discovering how different life was when Jesus did it in me. I had never leaned on Him so hard. I refused to say a single sentence about teaching without adding "Jesus and me" instead of just "me." I couldn't face it if I didn't. I asked Him to drive the car in me. I asked Him to walk up the stairs in me. I asked Him to eat lunch in me. I needed Him to help me even to just chew and swallow. He did.

I discovered that Jesus loved those students. He loved each one of them so much. He knew they were busy, struggling, and overworked, that many of them were single parents, working moms, often poor, trying to get a better life. He wanted to love them well by teaching English well. He wanted to teach them what they needed to know and do what we'd agreed to do to the very best that we could.

He also wanted me to be real and free. On the first day, as I introduced myself, I told them what I'd been so afraid for them to guess: "I'm a Christian, and that means I pray about everything important in my life, including my job. And guess what—this semester you guys are my job! So if you would like me to pray about something specific for you, you can write it in your first journal entry assignment when you introduce yourself. But it that's weird to you, don't worry about it."

Over two-thirds of them took me up on it! Of course, I still prayed for the ones who didn't. I photocopied those journal entries, put them all into a folder, and highlighted every need I read about with a pink highlighter. That night, Jesus and I laid the folder open on my quilt, knelt down together beside the bed, and talked to our Father about these precious human beings and their pink

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highlighted needs. We did it again the next night, and every night of that semester. It was hard to be afraid of people He loved so much.

The Person I had met in the prayer room and in the visions of the log cabin had emerged out into the world with me and here He was, enabling me to do everything I had proved I couldn't do on my own. He was fearless. He said He wanted to show videos I disagreed with and discuss them. I was not fearless, but I risked it for Him because it was His class. When questions came up that I didn't know how to answer, He gave me brilliant ideas that left me in awe even as I drew them on the board. He knew how to back me up. Jesus was a good teacher (come to think of it, I did know that about Him). We never had to worry about whether there would be more than three students. We had fun that semester.

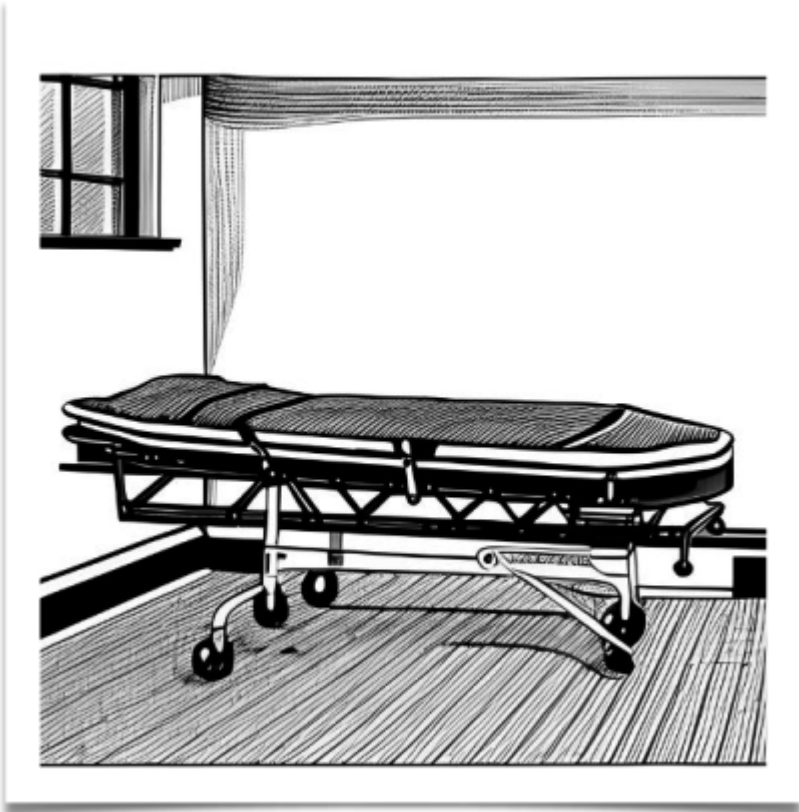
I remembered a sermon I'd heard in college on Hebrews 11, the chapter with the list of things people did "by faith." "It says that by faith Abraham did this and by faith Rahab did that," the preacher pointed out, and then asked us, "If you were on the list, what would it say about you? By faith you did what?" I had thought about it, and to my surprise I could only think of one thing: "By faith Elizabeth gave up Ben for Jesus." I hoped I would have more than one item on the list by the time I died.

And now I did have one more: *By faith Elizabeth went back to teach at the community college where she had proven to herself that she could not teach in her own strength, believing that Jesus wanted to teach in her and that He was real and alive and could speak to her and that He really would make a difference.*

And He did.



Part III: The Car Accident and the Hospital





Chapter 10



And then everything fell apart. I was halfway through the semester of Jesus-teaching-in-me when I felt the first tremor of the impending earthquake. The tremor came in the form of a brief email from Paul, sent to everyone in his address book: Lydia had collapsed from burnout. She'd been taken to the airport in a wheelchair and flown back to the castle-shaped headquarters an hour from my house. Paul was trying to pack up their lives and follow her with the children. I read it again, stunned, and then jumped up from the computer desk and ran to the Lord, as shaken with sorrow for Lydia as if she had collapsed in my arms. I collapsed into His.

Lydia's collapse didn't change anything she'd taught me about hearing from God, of course. But it did shake up some of the things she'd meant to me.

Lydia wasn't just a person who had taught me to hear God better. She was the person I wanted to hear God *for*. She had given me hope that I could be like her someday, that I could live overseas like her and with her and even for her. She had given me hope that all the dreams I'd had to put on hold could be restarted again. My highest aspiration in life now was to become her assistant someday—that was the prize and goal I was moving towards. I had thought God had said it, too, but none of that made as much sense now.

Lydia gave you hope. Now plant it firmly in Me.

Her burnout was just the first warning sign that any hope I kept in Lydia could be lost, like a house built on the sand. The rains and floods were coming; and with all the hope she had given me, only what I had transferred from her to Jesus would survive.



ONE OF THE VERY FIRST and most delightful things I'd discovered when I started letting Jesus talk to me each day was that He knew about modern

things. I hadn't known that. I thought Jesus could only tell stories about grain fields and fishing nets and masters with households of servants who had vineyards and threshing floors. But He'd invented those parables to reach the hearts of the people who were standing in front of Him then, and He knew my life just as well. He told me parables about car seats and diaper genies and cell phone chargers and traffic jams. Each one was perfectly crafted to penetrate the same truths into my heart.

Now as I taught and journaled and waited for Lydia to heal and for God to bring us together again, I began to feel a release from the Lord to send her some of the stories He was giving me. So I started to type up excerpts from the stories in my journals—stories of us as His babies and children and the endless adventures of the most Fantastic Daddy in the world. Sending Lydia these stories was not the same as telling her in person everything I had been dreaming of telling her for over a year now, but it was wonderful, and it blessed her.

I emailed the stories only to Lydia, to Paul, and sometimes to Julie or my Eastern European friend, Anna, a vibrant Jesus-loving immigrant I had met while tutoring ESL and whose entire family had adopted me. They were the only people I trusted with that sort of thing. I never dreamed of sharing the stories with anyone else in my life—my family, my church, or the friends I'd known since before I met Lydia and Paul. I was too afraid. They might not think God gave people stories like that today.

In fact, my heart had shut down at the church I "belonged to" (and had attended since I was two). As my parents had taught and modeled, I never missed a Sunday. My body was always compliantly present in one of the seats, but nowadays only my body was showing up.

Maybe it had all started at the Tuesday night prayer meeting. I didn't have to move a muscle to attend the Tuesday night prayer meeting, because it met in my house. I was seated on our plaid couch with the cushions the dog had torn up, when a hard-working, gray-haired couple shared a question with the group.

"Have you heard of these *Jesus Calling* books by Sarah Young? What do you think?" they asked, genuinely concerned. "She says she was a missionary who started writing down what she thought she heard God saying to her directly. She said just the Bible was not enough for her. She said she started to want something more. And even the Presbyterians are selling these books!"

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I appreciated the couple's concern about Sarah Young's books; I wasn't sure what to make of them either. One of my first email questions to Paul had been, "How can we hear from God in our hearts without adding to Scripture?" and he had written to me that he made a distinction between revelation that "is true for all times, in all circumstances, to all people" and "what is true only for a specific time, circumstance, or individuals." That helpful distinction had given me permission to listen. The Bible was for all people at all times and places. What I heard when I listened was the God of the Bible whispering to my heart an application just for me and just for right now. Clinging to Paul's distinction, I felt safe to do things I had never dared to do before, like... listen.

It sounded like Sarah Young had just done the same thing: listen and write down what she heard. So far, so good. But then she had published what she heard in a book, and it seemed like so many people were buying that book that it was almost getting treated as "for all people in all times and places!" The books were now available in leather covers with ribbons like Bibles, and it seemed that everyone I saw carrying a Bible had a *Jesus Calling* book next to it. That scared me. If Paul's distinction was not being preserved, what made what Sarah Young was doing OK?

But I didn't respond to the couple first. Another person did. The man who responded first was not representative of the church, or the group, or of anyone really besides himself. His theology was more extreme, and his sense of humor more sarcastic, by far, than anybody else's. Based on the couple's three-sentence description of Sarah Young's books, he gave a little scoff and answered,

"Well, that sounds like flatulence from the bowels of hell!"

My heart crawled back as far as it could into the furthest recesses of my torso, shut itself behind a door with iron bars, and padlocked it. And I made an inner vow. *I will never give him the opportunity to say that about what I hear from Jesus. I am never sharing anything with these people again.*

I started inventing places to be on Tuesday nights.



I WAS APPROACHING A castle in the spiritual realm, a fortress that had been stolen from my people. The castle was our birthright to hear our Father's

voice, like Jesus did, every minute of every day. It had been taken from us by our enemy, the Thief. It was fortified, occupied, and guarded.

I was getting too close for comfort to the enemy's stolen castle now. The enemy marksmen were looking for every chink in my armor.

They found one in the fact that I had internally cut myself off from the church, like the gazelle separated from the herd. Paul, Lydia, and Anna were the entire church to me now. Only these three people were benefiting from the developing spiritual gifts that had been given to me for the entire body. Only they knew anything of my walk with God and of my thoughts, feelings and heart.

The enemy archers found another armor-crack in my relationship with the Bible. My first journals at the beginning of my season of seeking God were chock-full of Scripture I was meditating on, memorizing, and talking to God about. But as time went by, I desired the Bible less and less. *The God who was talking to me in my head was more loving and kind than my interpretation of Scripture had been.* I liked Him better. I started to identify the idolatry of the Bible in my past, and I overreacted. I didn't want to read it anymore.

Having found these cracks, the enemy marksmen managed to fire a poisoned dart of pride into them. *If I had been right that God spoke and everyone else had been so wrong, what else might I be right about and everyone else wrong?* All those other people just didn't understand. I didn't need them anymore.

With these gaps in my armor and the dart-poison spreading through my system, I stepped close enough to the Truth to be in range of the squatters' outermost circle of defense: Deception.

I had no idea I was being deceived, of course. I had never been happier. This was the most joyous and peaceful season of my life so far. At long last, I had finally learned to identify the tormenting, fear-inspiring voice that whispered, *If you trust Jesus, He will make you do horrible and embarrassing things that you'll hate, and you'll be miserable and put to shame,* as the voice of the enemy to me over and over again all those years. I had exposed it as lies, all lies. I had dared to obey Jesus and let Him teach at the college through me, and He had proved how wrong that fear was. That menacing voice was what the enemy sounded like, and now I could identify and reject it. I had no idea they could also use a sweet and seductive voice, or that they could pretend to be Jesus.

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I was still picturing all the biblical metaphors I meditated on, whether God was the Daddy whose lap I was sitting on, or the Shepherd whose shoulders I was riding on, or the eagle who carried me on His pinions.

I knew another biblical metaphor was that of Bridegroom and Bride, or Husband and Wife. I had never gotten much comfort out of that one, because Jesus was married to “the church,” not me. My corporate experience of God was so so much less than my personal experience of God had been. I could not imagine a worse loss than to limit my relationship with Jesus to only what I had experienced with the rest of “the church.”

But what would happen if I did not picture Jesus as married to the church, but as married to me personally?

And somewhere (oh how much energy I would later waste trying to figure out exactly where!), the thing that everyone had feared most happened to me: another voice began to speak. Cut off from the Bible and other believers who could help me, I didn't recognize the difference in its tones. Its sickly-sweet flattery sounded just like His wholesome affirmation. Its seduction felt just like His comfort. It invited me to use that imagination He had given me to have sexual fantasies of Jesus. It told me that this was just the same as what I had been experiencing before, picturing a biblical metaphor and believing it was true. It told me that this was true worship, this was real faith, and this was what He wanted.

Unlike the real Voice, the other voice feared being tested. It feared the light. It wrapped me round and round in fear and pride like a boa constrictor ready to pull tightly. Nobody else would ever understand. If I ever told anyone what I was seeing and hearing and asked what they thought, they would judge me; and I would experience unspeakable shame. *From now on, our relationship needs to be a secret*, the lying voice insinuated. *You have found the truth*, it reassured me, *and nobody else will ever understand.*



AS I PROGRESSED FURTHER across the field of Deception, the level of Deception increased. The things I was picturing and seeing started out beautiful, full of meaning and Scriptural truth. As I returned to them again and again, they became uglier and uglier, more and more obscene. I thought, “Wow, if this was not from God, it would be really, really wrong!” But I would go along with

anything for Him and do anything for Him. I began to isolate myself further and further. I stopped reading the Bible almost entirely. I even stopped all my journaling. I became lost in my mind.

On the outside, it was the loveliest of summers. I was staying with Anna and her family while I taught summer classes, and after work we went swimming with the kids and built campfires. But Anna was noticing something wrong with me—the way I was isolating myself, the long hours I lay on my bed doing nothing, and the ways I seemed changed.

The Deception only lasted six weeks from the time it began to the time God stepped in and blew it to bits.

It took a lot longer than that to recover from.

Since only Paul, Lydia, and Anna were still functioning as the church to me, God used all of them. I was entirely convinced I was right, so He had to do something dramatic. So He did: He spoke to all three of them about me on the same day.

A few days before that dramatic day, Lydia wrote and asked me to pray for her; she said she was sensing something wrong in her spirit and needed to discern who it was for and what she should do about it. I prayed for her, not quite understanding what she meant. A few days later, she wrote again. She said the person she was sensing this concern about was me. She said some of the things I was sending to her that I was hearing from God didn't sound like God to her anymore, the way that all that came before this time had sounded like God. She said that demons were experts at taking the truth and twisting it just a little bit, and maybe one was doing that to me. She told me that anyone and everyone would be deceived if they let go of the safeguards of Scripture and other people and struck out alone.

She went on to say that Paul had received a word for me when he prayed that day, which made no sense to him. The word was "Counterfeit Lover." He asked her to pass it along to me if it made any sense to her.

The same day, as I was reeling from Lydia's email, Anna sat me down and confronted me with all that was worrying her about my life. "Something is wrong," she insisted. "Something is changing. It is like you have put just yourself and Jesus under this cap; and you are running out of oxygen in there, and you need to come out. I asked Him if I should talk to you about it and felt like He said 'yes.'"

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Shaken to the core, I went back to my bedroom, sat on my bed, and laid my hand on the pillow where I had spent so many hours picturing what I thought was coming from God. I said aloud what I had said in my dream long ago: “I command any voice or thought or spirit that does not come from Jesus to leave now in Jesus’ name!”

The seductive voice went silent.



Chapter 11



Anna was worried about me. She came and tucked me in that night as if I was one of her children. She opened her Bible and asked God for something for me. It opened to Psalm 23. She read that and prayed for me, and I went to sleep picturing that I was a little sheep on Jesus' lap again.

It was pure and clean, innocent and sweet. He was reaching for me. It did not take away the unutterable sense of loss.

I felt demoted from Wife to Sheep. I had thought Jesus loved me enough to want to marry me. Apparently He didn't.

This was what everyone was afraid of: that they would try to hear God, and it would not be God, like the nightmares children have when they are faced with two identical women, one who is the evil kidnapper and one who is their real mother.

False Jesus. Counterfeit Lover. Could there be any more horrific combination of words?

I was in the nightmare, and I couldn't wake up.



I COULDN'T GO ALL THE way back. I couldn't say, "This happened to me because I believed God could speak to me in a way besides me reading the Bible." The way He had rescued me prevented that. Paul had supernaturally heard Him expose my Deception, and so had Lydia. Even if hearing Him like that had never worked for me, even if I had made up everything in my whole entire life, He did sometimes speak that way to other people.



OF ALL THE THINGS I feared, what I feared the most was telling anyone what had really happened. Of all the people I feared telling, I feared telling An-

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na the most. We had experienced a few minor conflicts when I lived with her, and her cultural way of resolving conflict was more confrontational than mine. Now in my shame, those confrontations were blown out of all proportion. I was afraid that if I tried to tell her, she would attack me.

Besides, what would I confess? Gory details too hideous to contemplate? Words too drenched with shame to form in the brain, let alone release with the tongue? I could no more make those things come out of my mouth and into air and light than I could stab myself with a knife. Of the two unpleasant tasks, the latter sounded easier and less painful.

Anna wanted to be told. I could tell. She tried to draw me out. I kept hiding. I kept hiding until summer classes finished, and I left her and moved home again.



I WAS DRIVING IN THE car with my earthly father. He understood from my vague explanations that something bad had happened and it was somehow better now, though he did not understand exactly what it had been.

"Maybe it would be helpful to talk to Anna about it," he suggested. I physically screamed with terror. I started crying and screaming, "Don't make me tell her! Don't make me tell her!"

"I'm not making you do anything!" he said. "But if you are that afraid to tell another Christian anything, something is wrong!"



I FELT LIKE I WAS GOING to be sick and die if I didn't tell Anna. I also felt like I would be sick and die if I did. At the end of summer came another chance: I went back to her family's house for their church picnic and her sons' baptism. I was supposed to play songs I had written, and the boys would sing with me. Before we left for the picnic, Anna and I sat in the living room together, and she told me about a woman from her little rural church who had been secretly struggling with drinking for years. This week the woman had finally told others her secret. She was finally getting help. Her family was finally getting help. Anna tried wooing me with the story. People had secrets. They needed to bring

them out into the light. The church was learning to love and help, not judge, to open up and not pretend. They were learning this.

It would be so easy to take hold of the rope she was throwing to me. It would be so easy to say, “I have a secret like that, too.” I knew if I said that much, Anna would never let me go until I had told her what my trouble was, no matter how difficult it was for me to say.

No, not until after the baptism service, I decided. Who knew what it would do to me if I told her? I had to stay functional enough to play the guitar. After we got home again, I could tell her. Maybe.



THE ELDERLY LADY IN the wheelchair at the picnic had become like an adopted American grandmother to Anna. But now a degenerative disease was encroaching on her ability to walk, and she had to live in a nursing home. She could only come to church events when someone picked her up, as they had for this special day.

I sat with her while she ate her celery sticks and potato salad and told me how much she hated living in the nursing home. It had beautiful facilities and interesting activities, but every week somebody died. “God didn’t make us to live only with people who are at the end of their lives,” she said sadly. She missed her husband who had passed away.

“The only good thing is, Jesus is my husband now,” she said. “I am getting to know Jesus as my husband more and more. He is all I have left, and He is so wonderful,” she added, a shine in her sad eyes.

I envied the woman in the wheelchair. I envied her so much that I wanted to trade places. I would give her my young healthy life with most of its years ahead of me, my talents and gifts and potential—I was sure she would make good use of it—and take her place deteriorating in the nursing home if I could have Jesus as my Husband back the way she spoke of Him, in a good way I could describe shamelessly with shining eyes.

The pain washed over me like a wave that knocked me off my feet and into Anna’s waiting arms. I just barely made it home and into her bedroom before I collapsed, sobbing loudly, falling onto her bed. She wrapped her arms around me and tried to smother my sobs into her chest. “Cry as much as you want to,

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but please don't let the children hear. They love you so much dear. And please, please tell me what is wrong." I sobbed out that I had a secret like the woman in her church. "Please tell me," she begged.

I somehow managed to sob out what I thought I never could. I managed to get the word "sexual" and the word "thoughts" and the word "Jesus" into the same sentence.

Anna breathed a deep sigh of relief. "Is that all? I had guessed that much," she said. "And anyway," she added cheerfully, "Jesus forgives anything you have thought about Him!"

Jesus forgives anything you have thought about Him.

And that was all. That was everything I had thought I was so afraid of. That was all the light exposed.

I realized then that the fear I had felt of telling her wasn't my fear. I didn't need to fear hearing, "Jesus forgives anything you have thought about Him." It was my enemy's fear, desperately trying to persuade me that there was shame in telling her. They were terrified of me telling Anna, because they knew what she would really say. They knew how her one simple sentence would topple their house of cards.

I had broken through the fortifications of shame. I could see the light on the other side.



TELLING THE SECOND person was easier than the first.

That night, like every Thursday night, a hundred or so students gathered together at the big state university in town. They filled and overflowed twenty or so orange chairs, and then spilled onto the spirally-patterned carpets where they sat contentedly, jumping to their feet again to worship at the top of their lungs. I knew only a handful of faces in the crowd—the students who had started the prayer room in our church basement. But I still looked young enough to pass for a college student, and I was welcomed here at their fellowship. The worship was heartfelt, the teaching was life-giving, and I needed to reconnect with the body of Christ.

Every week, someone shared their testimony, and this week it was Hannah, the kind of sweet and kind girl that I couldn't imagine ever squished a bug in-

stead of releasing it outside. She told her story of a little girl's love for Jesus, a bigger girl's search for love in boyfriends, and Jesus' loving search for her — ending with the fiancé He had given her, now that her heart was safely His again. It was nothing like the bizarre story I had just survived, and yet it was so vulnerable that I felt a connection with her, a safety with her, and I thought, *I could tell her.*

So I did. After making sure that no more of the 18-year-olds that the meeting was supposed to be for were lining up to talk to her, I sat across from her on the funny chairs and told her my story. This time it came out almost easily.

And Hannah, the girl I could not imagine was capable of ever getting angry, got angry. Her earrings jingled.

“I just can't wait to see Satan burn in hell someday specifically for what he did to you!” she said.

I was floored. Hannah's anger supplied a piece that had been missing in my interpretation of events. It had never occurred to me that either God or humans would get angry at anyone except me. If gentle Hannah wanted to see me avenged against the deceiver, how much more must God?



I HAD NO IDEA THAT I was winning. I had pressed through Deception, the outer ring of enemy defenses around the castle and had come out the other side the day that Anna confronted me and I told the lying voice to leave in Jesus' name. I was wounded and bleeding as I limped across the inner ring of enemy defenses, where flaming arrows of Shame and the Fear of Shame pummeled me from every side. But I had triumphed, crashing through the fortification of the Fear of Shame when I told Anna, and later Hannah, too. At each stage, my deliverance came through confession, bringing the works of darkness into the light, and discovering that the loving brother or sister listening wanted to fight for me, not against me.

On the other side of Fear of Shame stood the enemy's last defense:

The Fear of Being Deceived Again.

God let this happen to you, said these voices. You trusted Him, and He did not protect you. He let you get this badly hurt. Apparently, His protection means nothing. You can't trust Him to protect you now. I knew perfectly well that these

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were demons talking to me. I knew it as well as if I could see them, sitting above my bed while I wept and writhed in pain, and poking me with instruments of torture for as long as I would let them. I listened to them anyway. The problem was, they were making a lot of sense. I had no other explanation besides the one they were tormenting me with. I believed them. I just believed them and cried.

Finally, I dragged myself outside into the backyard where my mother was. I had wiped away the tears, and she didn't know what a mess I was; she was reading her Bible and didn't want to be interrupted. I flopped down on the grass beside her lawn chair anyway.

"I'll read out loud if you like," she offered. That worked for me. I didn't want to have to talk about anything I was thinking just now. I lay on the grass and listened. She was reading John 17, Jesus' prayer to His Father. Jesus' relationship with God was not trashed and violated like mine was. Jesus hadn't been deceived. Jesus was pure. I could find a hiding place and a breathing space for a moment in forgetting my life and remembering His. My mother reached verse 15:

"I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the Evil One."

Something clicked inside of me. *Jesus prayed for this for me.* I had no faith that God would do anything for me if I asked Him to protect me from the Evil One myself, but I still believed He answered Jesus' prayers. If Jesus had asked His Father to protect me, something would happen. Somehow I would be okay again. . . okay enough to get up off the grass and stop crying and make it through today.

Today was the first day of the freshman girls' Bible study on the book of Matthew that Hannah and her roommate, Alana, had invited me to come help out with. I wondered if this, too, would be so good that the demons were scared of me going to it, since they had sure cranked up the heat today.

A half dozen girls crowded onto the sofa, chairs, and floor of the tiny apartment living room to read Matthew, chapter one, the genealogy of Jesus. It was mostly a list of unfamiliar ancient names that linked Abraham to David to Christ; but Hannah and Alana, unintimidated, led in asking questions to make "observations, interpretations, and applications" just as they had been taught. I was being re-fed the two foods I had starved myself from: I was surrounded by my sisters, and we were studying the Bible.

As we began poking at Matthew 1 with our forks, it flaked open like perfectly roasted fish. I suddenly saw more meaning than I could contain, more applications than I could count. I excitedly shared as many of my revelations as I could without dominating the discussion, but there were more. I went home and sat cross-legged on the couch and got out one of the beautiful journals I had gotten for my birthday but not touched. I would have to start journaling again. I began to journal page after page after page of all that I had seen.

What would it mean to Adam and Eve to read Matthew 1, to know that God had not given up on them after He had cursed them, to find out about their son named Abraham and his son named David and his son named Jesus, to see the list of names leading up to the Serpent Crusher? Or how would Abraham feel if, as he waited and waited to have just one child, he could read Matthew 1 and see the names of his promised offspring-like stars, forming the line of the One who blessed the world the most? If I could show them what I was holding in my hand, wouldn't Adam and Eve and Abraham fall weeping on that precious little thin bit of Bible paper and sleep with it under their heads all their days?

This God kept His promises, after we had sinned, failed, given up, been deceived, proved it was impossible, and stopped hoping. Matthew 1 showed He had sent Jesus to us after all of that. And He was beginning to heal me now.



HE KEPT RE-NOURISHING me on the church and the Scriptures, like a starvation patient in the hospital on His re-feeding program. Every day I read from an online “Bible in One Year” app that Anna read from and had shared with me. It included both Old and New Testament readings, Psalms, Proverbs, and devotional comments by Pastor Nicky Gumbel of the Holy Trinity Brompton church in London. I started going to church meetings in my own town five times a week—Hannah’s Bible study, the Thursday night student fellowship, and a student prayer meeting, as well my own church’s women’s Bible study and Sunday services. Then I just sat in front of my own open Bible and read, and read, and read. I read until I reached Hebrews 13:17:

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. . . .” That made me sit back

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and ask myself some questions. Which human beings is Jesus going to demand an account of my soul from? Who does He think is supposed to be watching over it? Is it really Paul and Lydia, or is it the leaders of my church? Whoever they are, they can't do what He is requiring of them. No one can keep watch over my soul, because I have not let anyone see my soul.

So I did something so brave that I couldn't believe I was doing it: I made an appointment with my pastor.



Chapter 12



Our pastor's office was in the basement of his home, a place where I had been countless times before, for prayer meetings, personal counseling, or just for a family lunch and a game of Scrabble. The walls were green, his favorite color, but the green was barely visible behind the bookcases that covered every wall, filled with his leather-bound friends. Many were beautiful volumes, some even valuable antiques, but none were mere decorations. Little notes inside them dated when they had been quoted in sermons and when they had been read. His favorite and most-quoted books were the many volumes of Charles Spurgeon's works, but a collection of my own youthful poetry was there, which he had valued, praised, and also quoted in sermons.

His antique model cars sat in their glass cases on the mantel over the fireplace, ready to be brought down and shown to new guests. On the broad leather desk was the cowboy hat that I had never seen him without, and nearby was his collection of cigars; his eyes always twinkled when he spoke of them. Holiness in his childhood had been defined as, "Don't smoke, don't drink, don't dance, don't chew, and don't go out with girls that do!" he often told us. He had discovered a richer definition of holiness since then, as well as a bigger God and a deeper grace, and he celebrated in many ways, including inviting everyone in the congregation to have a turn sitting on his porch and enjoying a cigar. I had sat on the porch and heard his explanation of how the cigar worked, but I was too chicken to try it.

Under the cowboy hat, his shoulder-length hair was salt and pepper; his beard was entirely salt. He called the beard his "friend catcher," explaining, "After I grew the beard, some people who had been friendly to me when I was clean-shaven wouldn't speak to me anymore. I decided I only wanted to be friends with those who would speak to me with the beard, so I have kept it ever since!" He had comfortable leather armchairs for counseling sessions, which he

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believed should never happen between two people separated by a desk. I had once found freedom from a year-long sorrow in one of those chairs. Beside the armchair sat his ESV Bible with three bookmarks in it, marking his current three read-throughs of the entire Bible. His goal was to read the whole Bible 100 times before he died, and he always was in three places at any given time. He had been on read-throughs number 54, 55, and 56 when he had explained this to me and the other young people he taught in the high-school Sunday School class. I wondered which numbers he was on now.

But somewhere between then and now, fear had crept into our relationship, a fear of being myself around this man who was always so thoroughly himself.



FIFTY SUNDAYS A YEAR for thirteen years, I heard him preach on many subjects. Only two or three times do I remember him addressing experiences of revelation that came through other means than reading the Bible, but they stuck with me because he denounced them in such strong terms:

“Anything else we place on the level of Scripture is ‘anathema,’ is accursed. Any vision or dream or ‘prophecy’ or personal feeling or sense of God speaking to us, that we place on the same level as Scripture, is from hell.”

He was always careful to include that phrase, “if placed on the same level as Scripture,” in what he was denouncing. So I wondered, well, what if it wasn’t on the level of Scripture? What if the revelatory experience was lower in authority than Scripture and was submitted to it? What then? He never said anything to affirm or condemn those cases, but was mysteriously silent. The last time I heard him denounce putting modern prophecy on the level of Scripture was right after Paul had written his explanation to me. So I approached him in the red-tiled church aisle that we all stood chatting in after the sermon and said, “I have friends who believe there is a New Testament gift of prophecy that *isn’t* on the level of Scripture. What about that?”

To my surprise, he immediately admitted, “That is an area I am weak in and need to grow in and be more open to, when it *isn’t* on the level of Scripture.”

But his strong words from the pulpit still scared me and strengthened my resolve to share nothing of my sweet experiences of Jesus with him or the people he had taught. And now I was sitting in his beautiful green study to try to

remedy that fact, now that I also had sour experiences of not-Jesus and no idea where the one had become the other.

My friend, Zach, a young seminary student, had “just happened” to be visiting our house right before I set out for this meeting. I had confided in him a little of how scared I was to open up to the pastor, and he prayed with me. Now feeling strengthened by that prayer, I began my story from the beginning, starting with what God had done about Ben. I felt like my listener was tracking with me until I got to the part about God using my dream to bring me to repentance. Then I could see on his face, if I read his face correctly, that he didn’t believe me anymore; but he still loved me and was listening.

Finally he said, “Elizabeth, the charismatic issue is a secondary issue. I can work in unity with those I disagree with about that. It isn’t about the gospel or how we are saved. So if you wanted to go to the mission field with a team of Charismatic Christians, I would be fine with that. But I need you to know why I denounced those things ‘on the level of Scripture’ so strongly. I know I came on strong and there is a reason.”

I listened, and he began his story.

“Many years ago, I pastored a church in which there was a sweet young girl. She was so beautiful, and she loved Jesus so much. When she grew older, I performed her wedding to a wonderful young man, and they had several little children. Then one day she came to me in distress. She had begun hanging out with Christians who claimed to hear God speaking directly to them, and they told her God had revealed to them about her future, that she was about to lose her salvation and would be unable to repent and be saved again, as described in Hebrews 6. She asked me what Hebrews 6 means. I sat down with her and went over it in context, explained to her why it doesn’t mean she could leave Jesus and lose her salvation and be unable to come back to Him. She felt better and went away.

But then she went back to those same people, and they told her, “No, but God told us this will happen.” So I went over it all with her again. But because she was putting what they told her as higher than the Scripture, nothing I could tell her about how unbiblical this was could stop her fear of it. And she didn’t want to leave Jesus. So... she hanged herself. In her house. I found her, the mother of those little children. Her beautiful face was purple. And her feet...” his voice broke, even now, with tears. “Her feet would have reached the floor if she

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had put them down. She could have put them down and lived, but she didn't. She kept them up because she wanted to die; she didn't want to live and leave Jesus.

“That is why I preach so hard against putting any personal sense from God on the level of Scripture, where Scripture cannot correct it. But I know I am out of balance on the possibility of such things that are not elevated above the word of God.”

I felt his trauma, and I felt my own fear of him draining out, washed away by compassion and sorrow. I understood now, and I was so glad to understand.



BUT I STILL HAD MY own new trauma to deal with. It was clear to me that the horror story that had traumatized my pastor did not invalidate the good I had experienced.

It was not so clear what to do with the horror story I had just lived through myself.



THE WOMAN'S GENTLE voice came through the phone I clutched against my head, speaking into my ear as if there were not over 600 miles between us.

“If we picture anything sexual, it will affect us. It will be so comforting, that we will want to turn to it whenever we need comfort, and it will become an addiction.”

It was Joelle, the counselor I had met with long ago in Bible college, speaking. I had finally, somehow, after much prayer with and from Anna, been able to make a phone appointment and tell even her. “That is why I think there is just a red line there,” she went on. “Picturing any of those things in our relationship with Jesus crosses the red line.”

On the one hand, that was the most helpful piece of advice, so easy, so simple. I could just know that there was a “red line” and honor that boundary in all my pictures of Jesus and be safe.

On the other hand, it made the fear and confusion suddenly so much worse. If the sexual pictures had been wrong from the beginning, why had it felt

to me like He initiated them? Where had He stopped and Something Else begun? Was the Something Else me or something evil outside of me?

Every attempt to ask, let alone answer, such questions made me feel like I was stabbing my stomach with a pair of scissors to try to find out what had gone wrong inside. I was making it worse by trying to figure it out, but I thought I needed to figure it out. I thought I needed to answer those questions before I could ever feel safe to hear from God again.



IT WAS THE MOST PERFECT weather: green grass, blue sky, and warm yellow sun. On the grassy lawn on the big university campus, young men and women in shorts threw frisbees to one another, like a magazine picture of happiness. Long rows of white tables were set up on the green. It was the university's festival to welcome this year's incoming freshmen to town, and between the sandwich shop's table and the hair salon's table, my father, Alana and I had set up our church's table where we handed out Gideon New Testaments or Gospel of John booklets to each student coming through.

Inside, I felt so unclean, so sick, and so much loss. When there was no one at our table, I stared into the bright blue sky and wondered if I would ever feel OK again. I was pretty sure I wouldn't and couldn't until after the end of my life on earth. I couldn't imagine anything that would make this better.

I knew there had been a real man named Jesus who had lived on earth 2000 years ago and had been crucified for my sins. I never doubted that.

But I no longer knew if any experience I had ever had during my life on earth had come from the Same Guy. And I didn't know if I ever would.

It felt like I had lost everything.



I WAS HOLDING HIM AT arm's length for His own protection. I didn't want to accidentally worship or obey anything else again. I never had wanted to. I felt like a loving wife, a faithful wife, a devoted wife, who had woken up one morning to discover somebody else dressed up as her husband was lying beside her. How long had that been going on? She had committed adultery completely accidentally. And "Accidental Adultery" sounded like as sickening

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a combination of two words as “Counterfeit Lover” and “False Jesus.” What could ever make that better?

So now that wife had moved out into the living room and was sleeping on the sofa, resolved to sleep on the sofa for the rest of her life. And when the Person that she thought was her Real Husband, but could never be sure about again, walked by and looked at her sadly, longingly, questioningly, she told Him she could never let Him touch her again, just in case it wasn't really Him, even though she missed Him more than anything else in all the world. She loved Him too much to ever risk doing that to Him again.

I laid that story before the Lord and defied Him to come up with a happy ending for it, as He had so often done before, because nothing could ever make a story like that better again.

The Voice answered, though I no longer had any confidence that anything was really the Voice.

And then the little girl woke up because her little sister was jumping on her and yelling, “Wake up! Wake up! Daddy’s making pancakes for breakfast!” And she opened her eyes and it was all a bad dream, and none of it had really happened. There was just a Daddy who loved her and really, really wanted to give her a hug.

But I wasn't ready yet.

Anna texted me a Bible verse, emphasizing the words that had grabbed her in all capital letters: “As for you, the anointing you received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, NOT COUNTERFEIT—just as it has taught you, remain in Him” (1 John 2:27 NIV).

But I just cried.

I was afraid of everything I associated with that time and of everything I thought the troublesome metaphor had been a metaphor for. I was afraid of love. I was afraid of joy. I was afraid of God loving me. I was afraid of the Holy Spirit. I was afraid of worship. I was afraid of enjoying God. I was afraid of comfort, especially comfort from God. I was even—especially—afraid of feeling safe.

All these things felt impure to me. Apparently, I had fallen into Deception because I had not feared it enough. Fear was my only Protector, since Jesus had not protected me—or so the castle's last desperate defenders whispered to me. Fear was my only friend.



Chapter 13



The old inn was built in the 1850's at the place where the stagecoach stopped. In modern times, it was still surrounded by wheatfields and mountains. Some Jesus-loving people had bought the property and repaired the winding old staircases, planted a large garden, and built a beautiful sunny library on the top floor. They painted each bedroom on the third floor a different color and named it for one of the fruits of the Spirit. There was the Joy Room, the Peace Room, the Love Room; my favorite was the Gentleness Room, where a painting of Jesus hugging a sheep hung on the lavender-colored walls above the iron bed frame. On the second floor, they created bigger bedrooms with names like Mercy and Grace, each decorated according to its theme. The old inn had become a lovely retreat center.

Our little church enjoyed a weekend together there every autumn, as did groups from faraway big cities, seeking Jesus together in fresher air. The inn's caretakers had changed hands three times since I had known the place, but God always raised up someone to keep it open for His kingdom.

Every semester I had ever taught, as the busyness increased and crowded out time for contemplation, I would say, "When this class is over, I am going to go away with Jesus for a whole day!" And then after a few more weeks, I would change it to, "Never mind, I am going away with Jesus for two whole days!" And usually by the time I reached the end of the semester—or even just the spring break—I had started saying, "Actually, I am going away with Jesus for three whole days!" Jesus and I would find a place to go away together for three whole days, and often it was to the inn.

Now, nine months into my spiritual trauma, I was teaching again, and it was spring break. I had made no comments about going away with Jesus anywhere this time, and my mother could see that I was unhappy. "What if I ask

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the new directors at the inn if you can stay there for a few days during your spring break like you used to?" she suggested.

"Yes. Please ask." *Maybe if I do that, He will do something to heal me.*

I lay on my bed and listened to my mother's half of a long, happy, chatty phone conversation, floating up through the floorboards from downstairs. I couldn't hear the actual words, and it felt like forever before she got off the phone and gave me the verdict. I was so afraid the answer would be "No. We can not do that. We have groups. There is no room at the inn."

But it wasn't. Jesus would sleep in a manger to be close to me, but He got me a room to be close to Him.

So I went.



THE PREVIOUS DIRECTORS had always left me to my own devices so I could fast and pray, but these new ones invited me over for dinner. I got out of the car and went straight to their apartment on the ground floor, leaving my suitcase in the hall. The gift of hospitality was dripping from their smiling faces and running down their walls, although I did not think of it then. I just enjoyed feeling safe and welcomed. They invited me to stay for dessert. They invited me to play cards after that. I guessed it would be OK. Because, honestly, I was afraid to be alone with the Lord. I was dreading the moment that they went to bed and left me alone with Him.

They happily shared their testimonies with me. God had told the wife that her husband was the one she would marry, and she had *told* him—and he'd still married her in the end! We talked easily about everything. I could feel they were safe. They already felt like friends.

Then I said goodnight, and they told me I would be staying on the second floor, in the room called Grace. I had never stayed in those bigger second-floor rooms before. During church retreats they went to married couples and to older folks whose knees could not handle another flight of stairs.

I picked up my suitcase and went upstairs in the semi-darkness to find the room called Grace. When I opened the door, I took in the scene in an instant.

Pale pink walls. Pale green trim. Lacy curtains whose pink flowers and green leaves tied the colors together. A double bed beautifully made under a bedspread with roses. Flowers in the vase. Towels set out.

It looked like just the sort of room a husband who was really, really in love with his wife would prepare for their honeymoon.

I screamed, slammed the door shut, and ran back to the safety and light of the inhabited apartment as fast as my feet could carry me. I pounded on the front door, and the wife opened it to find me sobbing and shaking with fear.

“What was wrong with the room?!”

Nothing was wrong with the room, I reassured her. But obviously now I needed to sit on her sofa and tell her what was wrong with *me*.



I LET JESUS HUG ME, for the first time in nine tortured months, in the room called Grace. After I had wept out the whole story on that sweet woman’s sofa, after she had heard it all, and like each Servant that the King had sent before her, washed it over with the grace of loving me just the same, after she had held me and prayed for me. After she had offered me a different bedroom and I had insisted that no, I didn’t need that, because I knew the love that had pursued me to this place was pure and true.

After our conversation, I only ever remembered one thing she said. Somehow, earlier that evening, over dinner and dessert and cards, the topic of “dying to ourselves” and “crucifying the flesh” had come up, and I had said I never understood what that meant. In what sense was death a good thing? In what sense would I ever want it? In what sense would Jesus want me to die?

Now she said, “But dear, I think you are right in the middle of it, going through it right now!”

And then I went back upstairs.

When I was a little girl, and my mother sent me to go up a dark stairwell alone or fetch something from a dark closet by myself, I would sing songs about Jesus out loud until I could find the light switch. Now I braced myself and opened the bedroom door again. I searched for a song in my memory and a simple old hymn about the resurrection floated to the surface. I grabbed it like a life preserver and started singing:

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“Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.

Because He lives, all fear is gone.

Because I know He holds the future.

And life is worth the living, just because He lives”.

The song got me across the soft pink carpet and into the bed without shaking.

The castle's last evil defense of Fear was driven back, and I dared to let the One who I knew was with me, touch me again.

And for the first time in nine months, in the Room called Grace, I fell asleep feeling Jesus' arms wrapped around me again.



THE REASON I KNEW IT had been exactly nine months was because my sister had announced she was pregnant the same week that Paul, Lydia, and Anna exposed my deception to me. And that week in the inn, I received the text message that the baby had been born.

I was resting on the bed, and Jesus and I were talking and talking and talking; because I was daring to hear again, and we both had so much to say. He had planned every aspect of that week at the inn for my healing, though I had planned nothing at all.

Like the John Piper sermon clip that my host was listening to on his computer in the inn's office, called “Believe in a God Bigger Than Your Sin”:

You should always see a banner flying over your life, and the banner has on it Genesis 50 verse 20, “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.” God had a meaning, and Satan had a meaning; and they were not the same meaning. God's meaning was good, and Satan's was not good. Herod, Pilate, and angry crowds meant it for evil; God meant it for the salvation of the world. What sins in you or against you are filling you with a sense of inadequacy which, if you really believed God were sovereign over sin, could not stop you from fulfilling His glorious purpose in your life? If these sins by you and against you are no worse than the murder of the infinitely valuable Son of God, then you should see, flying over your life, the banner, “They meant it for evil and God meant it for good.”

Or like the Bible verse I had found when I flipped open at random the New Testament I found lying on the deep windowsill of the sunny bathroom, 2 Timothy 4:17b-18 (NKJV): “I was delivered out of the mouth of the Lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!”

Or the unsolicited email from Paul that simply said, “Prayed for you today.”

Or the time I spent naming on paper two lists of everything I was afraid of. The first list contained things I was afraid of but knew were good things, like the Holy Spirit and trusting God, and the second contained the things I was afraid of that I knew were bad things, like being deceived or God finding me disgusting. I skewered the fears with my dull number two pencil until the first list filled and overflowed a notebook page, and the second list was stretched out over three more pages. To name my fears gave me power over them, got them out of me and into the light.

Or the walk I took through the wheat fields that surrounded the inn. As I walked, I was crying and looking for a place without mud so I could throw myself down on the earth. But the unsown fields in March consisted of last year’s dead plants and mud, and there was no such place anywhere. So I kept walking and walking and walking, and as I walked I wept louder and louder like a wailing woman in the Bible. Out in this wide open space where no one would hear me, it was as if my prayers, too, had reached the place of groaning that cannot be uttered in words, until at last I gave up on caring about the mud anymore and threw myself down on the soft brown earth and wept until I had no more tears. When I finally stood up again, I took mud with me but left a burden of grief behind me.

Or the evening service at their church that my host and hostess took me to. We watched the first video in a series on church history, covering the period between Jesus’ ascension and the time that the New Testament books were finally assembled together. The history was more chaotic than I had ever dreamed: the fighting, the false teachers, the persecution, the confusion, the churches who had only one letter to read and the churches who had no letters at all. Jesus had left His new, messy baby church full of new, messy baby disciples, on a planet full of enemies, in the hands of the Holy Spirit as if with a very, very trusted Babysitter, and gone back into Heaven. It was suddenly obvious to me that Jesus

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trusted the Holy Spirit very, very much. And the Holy Spirit had done it—He had preserved them and the Scriptures, just as He had rescued me.

Or the time I told my host and hostess that I had believed most of my life that the Holy Spirit found the inside of me a disgusting place to live and wished He didn't have to and only stayed because Jesus had asked Him to—which all felt especially true now—and they laughed so hard and merrily. There was healing in their laughter. And that night the Voice, that I was daring to listen to again, whispered, *I am so happy to live inside of you. I have always wanted to. I belong here.*

The fear-enemies were fleeing now, and my Lord and I had a reclaimed castle to explore, to spend the rest of my life exploring and sharing.

Of all the healing moments in the Room Called Grace, the most healing of all were the stories He told me now, as we snuggled again, as I listened to His voice and let Him comb through the Scriptures as gently as if He was combing His fingers through my hair. I listened for hours and hours, and later wrote them all down.

I was thinking that if I was Peter, I would have been very upset and distressed at the end of that day in which Jesus rebuked him and said, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (Matt 16:23 NIV) because Peter tried to deter Him from the cross. I thought if I was Peter, I would have come and found Jesus that night and hoped that He would comfort me. So I pictured Jesus and the twelve disciples sleeping on the grass around their campfire, and started to imagine what we would say to each other.

Peter stands shyly, awkwardly, over where Jesus is sleeping, and wonders what to say, and

whether to wake Jesus up, and what to do if He does wake up, and Jesus says,

“What is it, Peter? How are you?” and moves over and holds His blanket up for Peter to join

Him. Peter is thinking about that horribly painful moment that Jesus yelled, “Get behind Me,

Satan!” at Him and the incredible shock it was to him. Jesus looks at his face and sees what he

is thinking and feeling, and He says,

“Are you upset that I yelled at you?” And Peter, like a little child, is too close to tears to do anything but nod.

“Come here,” says Jesus, even though Peter is already here, and Jesus wraps both His arms around him and whispers in his ear, “I yelled at you because I love you. Do you know what I was thinking and feeling when you said that to Me, and I yelled at you?”

Peter shakes his head, afraid to imagine.

“I am the Second Adam, I AM Adam Again. And I suddenly found myself in the same situation as the first Adam found himself in when Eve handed him the fruit: Satan had gone after the person I love and had persuaded My beloved that God’s way was not the best, and he had gotten you to listen to him, and to believe him, and to come to Me and tell Me that I should do what Satan wanted Me to do instead of what my Father had told Me to—just like Eve came to Adam and told him he should do what the serpent had said instead of what God had said. Satan was trying to tempt Me to disobey God by speaking to Me through My beloved, My precious one, My Peter-stone, just like he spoke to Adam through Eve.

“And so, in that moment, I did what Adam should have done but failed to do: I yelled. Adam

should have lunged forward and dashed the fruit out of Eve’s hand and roared ‘NO!’ and then

yelled at Eve, ‘Do not ever listen to him!’ and then yelled at the snake, ‘Do not ever talk to her!’

and then should have said, ‘We will always do what God says, not what that snake says.’ And

then he should have chased that snake away; and then if Eve was surprised and frightened, as you were, for she was deceived, just as you were, he could have wrapped his arms around her and

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comforted her and explained to her what had just happened and what was going on and how much he loved her, just as I am doing now.”



Chapter 14



Many years before, when I had entered the fourth and fifth grade Sunday School class, the faithful Mr. Miller had been our longsuffering teacher. The lesson I remember most vividly was the story of God appearing to Solomon and letting him make one wish for anything he wanted. After reading the story, Mr. Miller asked each of us what we would have asked God for.

“Wisdom,” said the first child promptly, as that had been the right answer in the story, which pleased God so much that He added everything else on top of it.

“Wisdom,” said the second child, not to be outdone.

“Wisdom,” said the third, fourth, and fifth children as well.

Mr. Miller looked a little frustrated. “Really, guys?” he asked. “I have trouble believing that this many nine-year-olds would really ask for ‘wisdom.’” But the next child said it anyway.

I was last, so I had time to think about my answer. I looked with contempt at all those kids trying to give the right answer and not being honest. I was going to tell Mr. Miller—and God—what I *really* wanted. I announced, “I would ask Him to make all my dolls and stuffed animals come alive and talk to me!”

I can only imagine how hard Mrs. Miller laughed over lunch that day when her husband related the desires of the hearts in the fourth and fifth grade Sunday School Class: a half dozen orders for wisdom and one request for talking stuffed animals.

But Heaven leaned in to hear. Never mind that I was judging all the other kids. Never mind that I was already sure, at the age of nine, that God did not grant wishes anymore (although Jesus says just the opposite). God always leaned in to hear when I was finally being real with Him. He may have laughed harder than Mr. and Mrs. Miller combined. He definitely realized that if He gave me what I said I wanted, I would have run out of the room screaming in

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mortal terror. The stuffed animals I had asked Him to bring to life remained as limp in my hands as before, requiring my imagination to supply their personalities and dialogue.

But He never forgot.



THE FIRST HEART-IDOL that I can remember in my life was a brown teddy bear named Brownie. He came in a bag of hand-me-downs from somewhere. He had a seemingly magical face: one side of his stitched mouth turned up and the other turned down; and yet if viewed from straight ahead, he did not look crooked. This meant that if I turned him to face the left, he would be smiling; and if I turned him to face the right, he would be sad; and if I did not turn him, he looked just normal. This was useful for playing out stories and made him seem to be a bear of deep feelings. Besides, he was small but just the right size for hugging.

I had never attached myself to a security blanket or toy, but I had little friends who had. So one day when I was old enough that my friends were outgrowing those things, I decided I had missed out. I would choose one toy to sleep with every night and carry everywhere and be loyally attached to. So I chose Brownie.

I followed through on my plan: Brownie and I became inseparable. My parents became concerned when I got out of bed and came downstairs to get him at night, saying I could not sleep without him, and more concerned when I let go of my mother's hand in the middle of the busy street to get him when I had dropped him, and most concerned when I defended myself with the comment, "I can't live without him." My father said gently, "That is called idolatry. That is giving the bear God's place. You have your mother and me giving you everything you need and your sisters loving you, and you don't need this bear to live and be happy. And the truth is, the only Person it is OK to not be able to live without is God."

For several hours after this brief conversation with my father, a feeling I had never felt before began to grow in me. It felt like guilt, but even stronger. It also felt like nausea. It was unbearable. Eventually my parents found me lying on the sofa crying as hard as I could cry and saying, "Take the bear away! Put

him somewhere I will never see him again! I never want to see him again! Take him away!” My father took the bear and prayed with me to put God back in His proper place in my life. The bad feelings went away, and I went on to eat and sleep and play and grow every day without the bear and found nothing was lacking, just as my father had said. Happy years went by, and I forgot about Brownie.

And then one day I went up into the attic to get Christmas wrapping paper and there staring down at me from the top of a bookcase was Brownie. My father had put him away for me, just as I had begged him to.

I knew if I had found Brownie years before, I would have been really scared of feeling all those bad feelings again. But now I was surprised to discover all the bad feelings were gone. Both the feeling that I needed him to live and the feeling that having him was killing me were gone. I just thought, “Oh, that’s my old bear! I could play with him again now!” I knew that if I did, it would be ok. So I pulled a chair over to the bookcase, climbed up, and lifted him down.

I never wanted to go back to the way things with Brownie had been before, so I renamed him. I called him Chestnut. I would pretend he was a new bear, new relationship, fresh start. I took him downstairs and put him with his new brothers and sisters.

After that, I slept with Chestnut in rotation with all my other toys, one at a time. And when my mother said we could each take only ONE stuffed animal on vacation, I sat the whole stuffed family down and explained, “Your Mommy loves you all the same, but your Grandma says only one of you may come. So since last year Baby Marshmallow got to go on vacation, this year Pancakes will go, and Chestnut can go next year.” And we all lived happily ever after. Chestnut was now just the same to me as all my other soft friends, except that there was a little extra dearness about him because we had been through so much together and yet were OK now. Sometimes when I gazed into his turned-up-and-down smile, I knew we both remembered.



AND THEN ONE DAY, WHEN I was so big I slept without toys and brought only my books and my cell phone on vacations, God answered my childhood wish. The God who had heard me say, “If God would do anything

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for me, I would ask Him to make my toys come to life!” made Brownie-Chestnut come to life. He gave me a living friend as comforting as my bear with the magical smile, and He let me play the whole story out again with her.

Her name was Lydia.



THE SAME STORY HAD played out in our friendship - first the good part and then the bad part. I had finally been reunited with Lydia after our long separation. And now—even as I was battling through the spiritual strongholds of deception, shame, and fear in my relationship with God—now my relationship with Lydia was falling apart.

Just as with Brownie, there had been the stage in knowing Lydia where all was comfort and wonder and joy. But then, just as my parents had become concerned over my obsession with Brownie, people close to me and brave enough to speak were expressing concerns over my obsession with Lydia.

When Lydia and I had both finally felt like God was letting us see each other, I had abandoned all the other friends I was with to stay up talking with Paul and Lydia until 3 am. Even talking until 3 am only got us about halfway through all I had been saving up to tell them over the past year and a half of not telling them. This was what I had been waiting for. I found out second-hand that my other friends were hurt. I was angry, angry at God. I had done everything I could possibly do to hear His voice and obey, and I didn't get even one visit with Lydia without hurting other people? If I was hearing His voice, why hadn't He warned me? I had only been listening to Him about this reunion for 18 months—hadn't He had time to tell me how to do it without hurting other people's feelings?

I felt even more anger at God because He never gave me as much time with Lydia as I thought He had promised. Was that not what He had meant? All my expectations were not being met, and I found myself angry the way the prodigal son's older brother was angry: *I have been slaving away for You; I have done whatever You asked, and You never even gave me this chance to spend time with my friends.*

At long last, I had Lydia back in my life to solve all my problems, and I was supposed to get my happily ever after. I was angry with anyone I saw as trying

to take Lydia away from me. “I feel like you have your normal friends and then you have Paul and Lydia,” one brave friend confronted me with. “Why are they more special to you than all the rest of us?” Inside I thought, *Well, duh, of course, Paul and Lydia are more important to me than my mere friends—Paul and Lydia are the meaning of life!*

I was actually terrified of idolizing Lydia, but not because I thought it was an inherently bad idea. My fear came from my certainty that if I idolized her, God would take her away; because I had idolized Ben, and God had taken Ben away. He always did.

It turned out that fearing a sin did not give me victory over it. Fearing a sin just gave it more power. I couldn’t confess to anyone that I might be idolizing Lydia—not even to myself—because then God would take her from me. I couldn’t ask anyone to help me set wise boundaries or to keep me accountable. I couldn’t get help. I couldn’t shed light on the subject... and evil things grow in the darkness. I didn’t even know what it meant to idolize Lydia. I just knew that there was a line somewhere; and, if I crossed it, I believed God would punish me by taking her away again.

But God never took Lydia away from me, just as my earthly father had never pried Brownie from my fingers. He just let me have my own way until I saw what it was really like. Just as I had ended up sobbing on the sofa and begging my father to take Brownie from me and never let me see him again, after six months of idolizing Lydia, I ended up begging God to take her from me forever.

Lydia had never applied for the job of being the Meaning of Life and the Solution to All My Problems and the Only Friend I Needed. And while she had never submitted her resume, she felt especially underqualified for the position now that she was in crisis, burned out, slogging through reverse culture shock, and trying to rebuild her life. My expectations were added to the pile of things crushing her. I was hurting her, and she couldn’t even tell me why.

In the end that hurt both of us so much that I ran for my life, telling her that I could not handle communicating anymore. This time I was not taking a break from writing to her to seek God, all the while waiting for her and longing for her. This time I was facing the rest of my life without her, truly believing our friendship was over, that she was gone.

Lydia gave you hope. Now plant it firmly in Me.

I had not fully obeyed that, but now I understood it. “The rains came down and the floods came up,” as the Sunday School song about Jesus’ parable had warned, and all the hope I had kept placed in Lydia was gone—the hope of living with her, working with her, following her, the hope of her bringing me meaning and purpose and healing and joy, the hope that she would meet my needs, the hope that she would be the one to make me like she was, and the hope that she would enable me to fulfill my destiny. “And the house on the sand went ‘CRASH!’” That part of the song had been the most fun to sing in Sunday School, but it was the least fun in real life.

Just as I had cried and repented about Brownie long ago, I cried and prayed and invited God back into His proper place in my heart as The Only Person I Cannot Live Without. I discovered He had not been waiting to punish me at all. He had only been waiting to scoop me up and forgive me.

I had been surprised as a child to find that I was OK without Brownie. Now I was even more surprised to discover that I was OK without Lydia. I didn’t go back to the dreariness I had been experiencing before I met her. I didn’t lose the things that God had used her to show me were possible, nor the things He had used her to show me He was like. I didn’t lose His voice, or His glory, or His stories, or His nearness, or His waterfalls of love, or His miraculous provisions, or His Daddy heart. Every hope that was in Jesus survived; “the house on the rock stood firm!” I lost nothing but Lydia when I lost Lydia, and nothing except the loss of Lydia could have shown me that.

And I didn’t just lose –I gained. I discovered all the other people around me, waiting to show their love for me, waiting for me to be able to see them. Lydia had loomed so large in my vision that I hadn’t even realized they were there. They, like Jesus, were waiting to forgive me, too.

At the next church retreat at the inn, as we all sat on a circle of lawn chairs on the grass, I dared to read aloud one of the beautiful stories in my journal. Our little circle contained broken-hearted people and people who had never heard such stories before. The stories were not given to me for just myself and Lydia, I realized: *my spiritual gifts are for all of these people.*

I grieved the loss of my friend. I grieved the loss of an entire set of dreams and expectations for my life. I then tried to move forward in following Jesus and not Lydia. I applied to join the mission with the castle, the mission God had used to bless me so many times, even though there was no longer any hope

of serving alongside Paul and Lydia. The mission staff wanted to send me for a year to check out working in an entirely different country. I agreed.

Just as Brownie had waited on the top of the bookcase in the attic, where my father had placed him, Lydia waited where God had placed her. She waited over fourteen months, waited until I had finally grown enough, and repented enough, and processed enough, and healed enough to be able to look at her and say, “Oh, you are not God, nor are you scary! You are just my old teddy bear, and I could play with you again now.”

The week before I left for my year-long trip to the other side of the planet, we were reconciled. The day before I left, we took communion together, along with everybody else at the mission. I put Lydia back, like the bear lifted down from the bookcase. I put her back with all the other brothers and sisters in my life. Now she was just one of many friends that I would leave behind on the receding landscape as the plane took off. But there would always be a little extra dearness about her, because we had been through so much together and yet were OK now. Just like the bear with the turned-up-and-down smile—I knew we both remembered.



Part IV: The Gift of a Bicycle





Chapter 15



I didn't know how much power there could be in speaking things out loud. But in Mike's Sandwich Shop, before I left for the uttermost parts of the earth, I said something very significant out loud for the first time.

I said it at a little table across from Zach, my friend who had prayed for me before I went bravely to visit the pastor, and Alana, whom he had just married. Their new marriage wasn't the only change in our lives: our pastor had retired and moved away—and Zach had become the new pastor. I knew I wanted to be more real with him from the start. We'd had a special Ask The New Pastor Anything meeting in church, but I didn't want to ask my questions in front of everyone. So Zach and Alana came to Mike's with me instead.

The steak for our cheesesteaks sizzled on the grill. I leaned over the red-and-white checked tablecloth and said, "I want you to know who I really am, and what I really believe. I don't speak in tongues—I never have—but I do have friends who do and I believe it's real. I believe the gifts of tongues and the New Testament gift of prophecy still exist."

I didn't know I believed that! I thought in surprise, when I heard the words pop out of my mouth. For so long, I had kept it all inside and told myself I didn't know what I believed. But now, in a situation of risk, of potential cost, not knowing if Zach agreed, if he approved, if he would reject me, or how he would respond, I had said it. *Wow!* I thought to myself. *I just said that to him—I must really believe it!*

Lydia's testimony had moved me another big step in that direction. Lydia didn't speak in tongues when I met her, but after she came home burned-out and broken she confided to me that in the depths of her weariness, God had sent a friend who had laid hands on her and prayed for her, and she had received this gift. "I've never done it out loud yet," she said shyly. "For me, it's like I can hear this River in my mind and heart now when I pray, and I don't know

the meaning of the sounds the River is making, but I can pray along with them in my mind and know I am praying what the Holy Spirit is praying. And when I am too tired to pray now, or when I can't think what to pray for people, or when the needs around me are too painful to think about and put into words, I can just rest and pray with the River. It's a beautiful gift."

And then she added almost exactly the same words that Miss Judy the dance teacher had said so long ago: "But please don't tell anybody else, because they'll think I'm one of *Them*, and I am not that at all. . . I'm still so much one of us!"

But it was John Piper who finally gave me permission from the Bible to believe Lydia and Miss Judy. We all had trusted John Piper in my growing-up—his books were probably our pastor's second favorite of all the authors in his beautiful green library, after Charles Spurgeon's. I had started devouring Piper's moving books about desiring God when I was a young teenager, and I was still a teenager when I discovered that all of Piper's sermons were on his website organized by Scripture text. When my own Bible reading brought up questions I couldn't answer, I would look to see if he'd preached on it. And somehow, in more recent years, I stumbled onto his sermon on 1 Corinthians 13 called "When Will Prophecy Cease?"

John Piper laid the issue out so clearly and carefully: Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 (ESV) that tongues and prophecy will pass away "when the perfect comes." If "the perfect" means the completion of the New Testament, then they ceased 1900 years ago. If "the perfect" means the return of Jesus and seeing Him face to face, then they will not cease until He comes. In the context of the passage, "the perfect" is when we will "see face to face" and "know fully, even as I have been fully known." That is the way we will know Jesus when He returns, not the way we know Him through the completed canon of Scripture. Therefore, Piper concluded, the passage is teaching that tongues and prophecy remain until He returns.

I couldn't believe I had missed it. I remembered my old conclusion, that we all believed whatever we wanted because there was no Bible verse that said either "These gifts will cease!" or "These gifts will continue!" But here there was a verse about it after all! The door was propped open until Jesus returned. The experiences of people I met—of Miss Judy and Lydia and the people at the Pente-

costal Campground—could be fake or they could be the Real Thing. The Real Thing was still with us.

But being intellectually convinced wasn't the same as taking a risk. I had never risked saying I believed this to anyone out loud. Until now. I waited to see if Zach would reject me.

He didn't.

Few things could have surprised me more than what he said. "Elizabeth, not only do I believe that the New Testament gift of prophecy hasn't ceased, I believe you have it. My wife and I have talked about this together—there have been so many times that you shared something God is teaching you and we started to cry because you said exactly what we were going through and needed to hear, even though you had no idea."

I still had no idea what conversations he was talking about. I managed to finish my cheese steak, even though I was reeling. In one day I had decided I believed something existed and then been told that I might have, without knowing it, been using it all along.



A FEW WEEKS LATER, I got on the airplane.

I left a world of white faces for a world of Asian ones. I left my church with its pretty sign out front for an "illegal" church hidden in an unlabeled basement. I left a world of one language for a context where two, three, four, and even five languages might be spoken in a room of 15 people.

I could only speak two languages myself, English and the trade language, which I'd studied in college—and that was enough to be drafted as a translator. After a long Sunday morning in the basement, "listening" to a sermon in a new language I didn't understand, and an even longer afternoon in the kitchen, translating back and forth for locals and foreign guests to be able to communicate over lunch, my brain felt like a piece of the deep-fried bread. Every time I wanted to open my mouth to speak to anyone in the room, I had to first stop and think of which language they understood. Once I figured that out, I had to switch my brain into the proper language, and then I could start talking. The most difficult people were those who spoke *both* languages. Then I couldn't figure out which one to use, and I just froze.

Too exhausted to do any more talking, I pulled away and started washing the dishes. I wanted to pray. I tried to pray. I realized that God was one of those people who understood both of the languages I could speak. My tired brain couldn't figure out which language to start praying in, so instead I just burst in to tears. Then I started laughing at myself, and thought, "For the first time in my life, I wish I could pray in tongues!"

A week later, our Scottish coworker, Auntie Moira (as the locals affectionately called her) arrived on the train from her city by the distant river. She took me back with her to visit for a week. On the two-day train ride, I told her about that exhausting Sunday and how I'd said, "For the first time in my life, I wish I could pray in tongues!" I didn't know what she believed, but everyone in the mission had to sign an agreement to the effect of "We do believe the gift of tongues can come from God, so we won't condemn anyone who practices it, and we also believe it's not the only sign of having the Holy Spirit, so we won't condemn anyone who doesn't practice it," a position I appreciated greatly. Knowing she must have signed that statement at some point in her past, I figured it was safe to joke about. Auntie Moira only said, "That wouldn't have solved your problem, it would just give you a third option to choose from!"

When we finally arrived in the distant riverside city, the local pastor, who worked—and evangelized—as a taxi driver during the week, picked us up at the station. As soon as we were safely loaded into his car, he told us we needed to pray for a man in their little congregation who had a much-needed job interview going on right now. He turned up worship music until it filled the vehicle, and we all began to pray aloud at the same time, as was the Asian way. We prayed all the way home. They prayed in a language I didn't know. I was getting very, very used to hearing languages I didn't know.

That night, I was sitting in Auntie Moira's tiny, two-room apartment, drinking tea with her housemate out of traditional tea cups without handles, when I heard the strangest loud buzzing sound. "What is that sound?" I asked my companion in alarm.

"It's Auntie Moira praying," the housemate said, greatly embarrassed that I had not even been able to recognize it as a human voice.

All that week, the first sound I heard when I woke up and rolled up my floor mat in the morning and the last sound I heard when I unrolled the mat again and fell asleep at night was the sound of Auntie Moira blaring her wor-

ship music at top volume and praying even louder in her unique prayer language. In between these morning and evening sessions, she accomplished more than I had ever imagined humanly possible. She owned her own business and was also leader over all the teams in the country while doing an online master's degree and helping lead the little church in many capacities. Since I was there for the week, she threw together an English camp for the local children, too. But despite all this, she was ceaselessly available for the endless stream of guests that came to drink tea and ask "Auntie Moira, will you pray for me? Will you pray with me? Will you tell me what I should do?"

And she'd been here for 20 years.

Auntie Moira's little apartment had mats instead of beds, tables, or chairs. But the back room did contain one sort-of chair—a bean bag chair she sat in to pray—and also a piece of furniture that was the equivalent of a treasure chest to me: a shelf of books in English. I stood in front of it and slowly savored reading their titles and examining their covers, each one a chance to rest in a world of words I knew. Finally, I chose an autobiography by Jackie Pullinger. I'd read about her in Nicky Gumbel's daily devotional: she had felt called to be a missionary but God hadn't told her where, so instead of waiting, she got on a boat that made as many stops around the world as possible and asked God to tell her where to get off. She felt led to get off in Hong Kong and found herself in the Walled City, a lawless place belonging to no government, where she spent the rest of her days powerfully ministering God's deliverance to drug addicts. I thought that would be a duly exciting story for my precious chance at reading in English!

After a few days with Auntie Moira, I could see how she had lived for 20 years without chairs, but not how she had lived for 20 years without a washing machine. She cheerfully showed me how to wash my clothes by hand in the set of red buckets in the bathtub. It took a lot of wringing. Before I was done, my hands were so tired I decided to take a break and read the next chapter of my book in between rinses.

It turned out to be the chapter in which Jackie received the gift of tongues. Her ministry had been initially unsuccessful, so when an older Chinese couple offered to pray for her to receive "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" she was up for anything, even though she didn't think it would "work" for her. She wrote,

I shut my mouth firmly. If God was going to give me this gift—then He was going to do it, not me. ‘Now you begin speaking, now you begin speaking,’ I was acutely embarrassed and began to get cross with them. I felt hotter and hotter and more and more uncomfortable; here I was not speaking in tongues and they were going to be so disappointed that nothing had happened... Eventually I could not stand it any longer so I opened my mouth to say, ‘Help me God’ and it happened. As soon as I made the conscious effort to open my mouth I found that I could speak freely in a language I had never learned. It was a beautiful articulate tongue, soft and coherent in that there was a clear speech pattern with modulated rise and fall. I was never in any doubt that I had received the sign that I had asked for (*Chasing The Dragon*, by Jackie Pullinger, page 51).

She went on to testify that God’s gift transformed her ministry. She prayed and prayed in her new language, not knowing what she prayed for, but when she went out on the street and people began to receive Christ, she knew God was answering the prayers the Holy Spirit had been praying through her. Moreover, each person she led to Jesus received the gift of tongues and was then delivered from heroin addiction without the pains of withdrawal through praying in tongues whenever those feelings began.

I sat back on my heels and did some serious thinking. I was still carrying around several objections to seeking this gift for myself, and this testimony was starting to answer them. First of all, I didn’t want to fake it. I didn’t want to make it up. Just like Jackie, I didn’t want to make sounds that could be either me or God and just trust they were from God, as the man at the Pentecostal campground had advised. I wanted to know that I knew that I knew that I wasn’t making it up. When I read Jackie’s experience I thought, *I wouldn’t mind if it was like that!*

And secondly, I just didn’t know what it was *for*. It seemed pointless to talk to God in a language He understood and I didn’t. I had so much to say to Him in English that I already didn’t have enough time! But Jackie had found it very, very useful. The Holy Spirit had prayed through her what He wanted to do, and people had been saved. That was what I had come here for. And if this was how God strengthened Moira to do all that she did, and survive, even thrive, in this

spiritually dark place for twenty years, well, I wanted access to the way He empowered her.

I felt like God was asking me, *Do you want it?*

I answered Him with the answer I had given at the campground long ago, and that I still gave Him whenever I thought of it ever since: “I want whatever You want, Lord.”

He asked again, *But do you want it?*

I said, “Yes.”

And then I was completely surprised at myself. I had had no idea that I wanted it. I hadn’t known I believed the gift of tongues existed until I heard myself telling Zach so in the sandwich shop, and I didn’t realize I wanted it until I heard myself telling God so on Moira’s apartment floor.

The Voice answered, *Well then, you should ask Auntie Moira to lay hands on you and pray for you. This is your chance, while you’re here with her in her city. She’s been praying for you about this and she’s waiting for you to ask her.*

Well! It was easy enough to test whether *that* thought came from God! I could just ask Auntie Moira if it was true that she’d been praying about this and waiting for me to ask her...

No way! I was terrified to let her lay hands on me and try praying for that. What if nothing happened? I thought that to ask God and then not receive it would somehow be as embarrassing as the end of the world.

But now my legs were somehow not under my control. My legs were walking away without my consent, walking from the front room to the back room to see what Auntie Moira was doing. She was sitting in her bean bag chair, the chair that was for praying. She looked up and saw me. She smiled at me sweetly and said, “Yes? Can I help you with anything?”

I got my legs back under my control then, and I fled. I ran into the bathroom with the red buckets in the tub, and I locked the door. I said, “God, that’s enough, I have to finish the laundry!”

And then I was so disappointed that I hadn’t asked her, I cried the whole time I finished wringing out the clothes.



Chapter 16



Maybe I'm just very emotional after reading the exciting story, I thought to myself, as I lifted the laundry out of the bathtub and hung it up to dry on the hot water pipes in the bathroom. *I will wait 24 hours, and if I still want the gift of tongues tomorrow, then I will ask Auntie Moira to pray for me.*

I could hardly wait for tomorrow!

But tomorrow brought no chance to talk to Auntie Moira alone. After teaching English camp in the morning, we spent the rest of the day rolling out homemade noodles, boiling them with fish from the river and eating them with our fingers as we sat with our guests in a circle on the mats on the floor. When everyone finally left it was 9pm. I marched into Auntie Moira's little back room and announced, "I need to talk to you and I might chicken out, but I really need to tell you, so don't stop asking me questions until I tell you everything!"

Auntie Moira did not show any reaction to this astonishing introduction. She invited me to sit with her on the bean bag chair. It could hold two people, but only if we counted to three and sat down at exactly the same time. We did.

Safely squeezed onto the chair, I told her about the chapter I had read and how I'd heard God's invitation, "You should ask Auntie Moira to pray for you—this is your chance." I told her about choosing to finish the laundry instead of asking—and then crying over my decision.

"You poor thing!" she said.

I left out the fact that God had told me she was praying and waiting. I didn't want to tell her that until she told me. I asked it as a question instead:

"Were you praying about this for me? Have you been waiting for me to ask you?"

She said simply, "Yes."

Wow. God had led me to this. He must be going to do something.

Moira got out her Bible and read a few verses to me. I guessed this must be standard procedure. I guessed she must have done this before.

“It says, ‘And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance,’” she read from Acts 2:4 (ESV). “It doesn’t say the Spirit spoke for them. The Spirit ‘gave them utterance’ but they had to do the speaking themselves.”

“I think that if God did give that to me, there’s a good chance I would feel too self-conscious to actually do it in front of you,” I confessed. I expected Moira to say, “That’s wrong! You shouldn’t care what other people think of you.” But she didn’t. She just said,

“OK, I’ll turn my music up and pray loudly, and then I won’t be able to hear you.” She turned on the worship music videos on her laptop, just as she had every morning and evening before. I slid off the bean bag chair and onto the floor, and she placed her hands on me.

I stopped her for a moment. “I don’t believe that if He gives me this gift now, then this moment is when I received the Holy Spirit,” I said. “Because I know I have the Holy Spirit. I know He’s here with me now. I know we have a relationship.”

Auntie Moira nodded. “It’s just one more present,” she said. That satisfied me. I was happy to receive one more present from Him.

“Start praising God in English or another language you know,” she instructed. “And then try to stop speaking a language you know but don’t stop talking.”

“Auntie Moira!” I wailed. “That’s weird!”

“Is it?” she asked, unperturbed. “I guess maybe it is weird.” She began to pray in tongues. I watched the words of praise roll by on the video. I started to tell God I loved Him. Praise began to pour from my heart.

It was wonderful.

And it was all in English.

After several songs had played, Auntie Moira stopped praying to ask me, “How’s it going down there?”

“Nothing,” I told her. “I can praise God just great in a language I know, but as soon as I stop speaking a language I know, I stop talking entirely.”

We tried again. I listened to the sounds Auntie Moira was making. Of course, I could just copy her. I could try to *learn* her tongue by imitating it, the way children learn natural languages. But I didn’t want to do that. I would have

been able to copy Auntie Moira's sounds even if I didn't believe in Jesus, even if I didn't have the Holy Spirit at all. There had to be *something* to show it was Him and not me.

Auntie Moira stopped to check on me again. This time she took a break from praying to ask me questions. Did I have any concerns? Had I ever spoken anything over myself like 'I never want that' or 'That could never be for me'?

I tried telling her all my fears and concerns. "I'm not sure if I'll like it. I don't understand what it's for. I don't even have enough time here to tell God everything I need to tell Him in English..."

"But when God asked you yesterday, you told Him you wanted it," she replied simply.

That was true. I had.

She asked me if anything had happened to make me afraid of the Holy Spirit.

"I was deceived once," I told her. "I tried to hear God and I ended up hearing stuff that wasn't God."

"What kind of stuff?"

"Demonic stuff."

"How? I mean, did you just ask for the Holy Spirit and then start hearing demonic stuff? I can't believe *that* happened," she added. I knew she was thinking of Jesus' promise: Ask the Father for the Holy Spirit like a child asking for a fish, and He won't give you a snake.

"No," I reassured her. "I was hearing God and then I liked what I was hearing from God more than what I read in the Bible as I understood it, so I stopped reading the Bible and I stopped talking to other people. And then I started hearing the demonic stuff."

"Oh," she said. "But now you know not to stop reading the Bible and not to stop talking to other Christians, right? So you're OK now."

Auntie Moira made everything seem so simple!

"I guess so," I said. I felt suddenly close to her. She knew now. She knew that I had been deceived. Nobody on this entire continent of Asia knew that about me, until now. No conversation had gotten to this level yet. Even if I didn't gain the gift of tongues tonight, it was wonderful to gain a friend.

We tried praying again. I was afraid she'd pressure me, pressure me to make up something. I felt nothing, nothing but love for God. No ability to say one

single syllable I had never said before. My mind was blank of any new ideas of sounds to say, and my mouth wasn't doing anything on its own. I was afraid she wouldn't believe me. I was afraid she thought I should be doing more somehow. But I knew I couldn't.

"I know that now is God's time for you, Elizabeth," Auntie Moira said. "I can *see* it around your mouth." But she didn't pressure me. And whatever she could see, I didn't feel, or know how to access.

Eventually, as the night grew late, she asked me, "Would you like to keep praying, or would you like to stop?"

"How long do I have before you need to go to bed?" I asked. I knew she liked to go to bed early. I knew she didn't like staying up late. I knew she'd have to get up early tomorrow morning, as she always did, to go running and to pray loudly.

"You have until 9am tomorrow morning, when I need to be at the office."

Wow. She would have stayed up all night for me. I felt loved. And on a continent where nobody knew me, feeling loved meant everything.

"I want to pray a prayer of closure, and then go to bed," I said. So Auntie Moira prayed something in English. I didn't hear it. All I could hear as I unrolled my floor mat and lay down on it was the cry of my disappointed heart:

What just happened, God? Why would You so clearly lead me to ask for something like that and then not give it to me? What are You doing?



Chapter 17



The next morning, I felt like my disappointed heart was bleeding, bleeding all over everything. All over the tiny classroom in Auntie Moira's language business. All over the whiteboard and the English vocabulary words about Ireland. All over the children playing Irish-themed Bingo and watching a video about leprechauns.

The kids loved Bingo once they'd figured out how to play, and they wanted to keep playing it over and over, so I didn't need to do much except stand there and watch them. And in these in-between moments with space to think, I ached. *God, I trust You. I don't understand, but I trust You. I trust You. I trust You.*

The kids loved the video about leprechauns too. They wanted to watch it again. Another moment to myself. More aching. *I trust You. I trust You. I trust You.*

I had nothing else to say.



IN THE OTHER CITY BY the mountains, where I was assigned to live and work and study and teach this year, homemade noodles were boiled with beef, or on a festive day, with horse meat. In Auntie Moira's city by the river, they were boiled with fish. The taxi-driver-pastor caught two impressive fish in the river on Saturday and his wife served them up on Sunday at the church service in their living room.

We were seated on the floor mats by age, with the older people at the more honorable end of the low table. The pastor served the fish to his guests in order of age too. Auntie Moira got hers first, as she was almost fifty. I hadn't realized how many people were older than I was; before he got to me, the first fish was

gone. I waited, trusting my turn would come, as he cut into the second fish and piled some on my plate.

The next day, Auntie Moira told me a young man was coming over to bring her a gift of fish. He belonged to the other church she'd helped plant in town. "He'll probably time it to show up right around lunchtime and join us for lunch," she added. The fish-bearing young man showed up as predicted, and sat with us to eat chicken and rice.

"Auntie Moira, have you prayed yet today?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. He looked disappointed.

"Oh," he said. "Then I guess you won't want to pray again?"

Auntie Moira burst out laughing. "Of course I will pray again! What do you want?"

"I want to pray together," he said.

We sat on the front room carpet. Auntie Moira brought out the laptop and turned on the worship music videos. She and the young man began to pray aloud, simultaneously, in tongues, and I prayed aloud simultaneously in English. I enjoyed this simultaneous way of praying very much, even if I didn't have what they had. As I sat there staring at the carpet, I felt fear reach for me. Would this gift I had dared to ask for really be a good thing?

"Lord, would you please give me a picture for this that isn't scary?" I prayed.

"Yes," said the Voice. "*Fish.*"

But of course. Two memories came at once to my mind. The first memory was of words I'd heard many times: "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? ... If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:11,13 ESV)

The second memory was of yesterday afternoon, sitting on the living room floor waiting to be served my piece of fish, waiting in complete assurance that my turn *would* come.

Was He saying my turn would come?



WE FINISHED ENGLISH camp. We drank tea. We swam in the river. We didn't talk about it again.

On the last night, when we had climbed out of the river and bought ice cream cones on the street and my suitcase was packed for my departure in the morning, Auntie Moira asked, “Would you like to pray again?”

“Well, I definitely want to pray with you,” I said. Praying with her was becoming my favorite thing in the world to do. When she sat in her bean bag chair blasting worship music and praying in tongues loudly while I sat on the floor mat beside her writing in my journal what I heard from God in the quiet of my heart, I seemed to hear so much *more*.

We did it again. I began to praise God in English. Praise poured from my heart. I started to see things about Him that I’d never seen before. I felt so close to Him. It was wonderful.

It was still in English.

“Well, you’re enjoying Him. That’s what matters most,” Auntie Moira said, when I reported this back to her.

She stretched back on the beanbag thoughtfully. “You know, some people receive the gift of tongues and then they think they have ‘arrived.’ And that isn’t true. It’s not the most important thing. But I don’t think I would have been able to survive in this place for 20 years without it.”

I went to bed, praying in my heart, “Lord, if you want me to last in this place for 20 years, please give me that gift too. And if You don’t want to give me that, please give me something else that will do the same thing for me!”

The next morning Auntie Moira put me on the train to go back to the city by the mountains, where I was to enroll in the university to study the language of the local people group to add to the trade language I could already use. I was taking “the slow train” back—three days and three nights.

I wanted to show God that I was serious about this, so I spent the hours lying in my upper berth reading the entire book of Acts and the relevant chapters of 1 Corinthians. The Apostle Paul’s argument seemed to be: 1) Tongues are good, 2) Prophecy is better than tongues, and 3) Love is better than prophecy. I got to 1 Corinthians 13:1 (ESV), which said “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” I set the Bible down and said, “Lord, You’ve already given me two tongues of men, English and the trade language, and I am asking You now for another tongue of men, the local language, and I also am asking you for a ‘tongue of angels,’ so I really, really, really need love or I am going to be the loudest ‘clanging cymbal’

around! Please give me this tongue of men. Please give me a tongue of angels.
And please give me love.”

I had “asked for fish.” With that prayer, I left it with Him. I let the rocking of the train lull me to sleep as it carried me along the tracks into whatever lay ahead.



Chapter 18



The “slow train” carried me back to my new host city and into the six busiest months I had ever lived. I learned to ride the bus to the university every day and pronounce new letters in a new alphabet. I taught English classes three evenings a week and went with my students to restaurants and the mall and the zoo. I cleaned the basement room for church on Sunday and taught children in a language I couldn’t speak (“Here kids, have a coloring sheet, I’m glad you know what to do with it!”) and led worship in a language I couldn’t sing (“Everybody sing while I play the guitar and hum!”). I searched seven stores before I found sprinkles to make Christmas cookies for our student outreach party, and I directed the first Christmas pageant for the new baby church’s first Christmas.

Sometimes, I would pause before the Lord and try to speak a syllable of a language from heaven, try to see if I had any ability now that I didn’t have before. Nothing. Not one sound. I never was able to speak a single syllable.

After the Christmas parties came the winter break from the university—two weeks of free time that I could spend with Auntie Moira. I took an airplane this time, so as not to waste six days of my break on that train!

I prepared a list of all the things I hoped to do in the little city by the river: the stories from the past six months that I wanted to tell Moira, the many questions I wanted to ask her, the people I wanted her to introduce me to. I was afraid she wouldn’t have time for all of it. I asked God to give me everything on *His* list of things He wanted to do, and if it was His will, to copy everything on my list onto His! I knew His “list” would happen.

I felt like the Voice asked me, *Would you like tongues for Christmas?*

I answered, “Yes, but only if it’s a surprise! Christmas presents are supposed to be a surprise! I’m not going to ask for it or think about it or talk about it or try to do it. Surprise me.”



THREE DAYS BEFORE THE end of my visit with Auntie Moira, I checked off the last item on my list. We had drunk tea with the friends Auntie Moira had disciplined when she had first arrived, back when they were all close to my age. We had dressed up as clowns and gone house to house giving the children candy for New Year's. We'd gone "prayer driving" through the city since it was too cold to go prayer walking. And I'd been able to read more English books and tell her everything that was on my heart. God had given us enough time to do everything—and I still had three days left! I was so relieved and happy, and I said to Him, "I wonder what else is on *Your* list?"

These last three days were a special time for Auntie Moira's little house church. Every January, I found out, they started their new year by spending three days together in corporate prayer and fasting. I had never fasted with other people before, and I loved it. It was so much easier than fasting all alone!

We met for prayer each day in Auntie Moira's front room, the room where I slept. I woke up each morning, rolled up my sleeping mat and laid out the sitting mats, turning my sleeping place into a prayer room where a chorus of voices rose in intercession for the church and the city and the nation. It was glorious. I didn't want to miss a minute of it, but I had to. On the last day, I had to go out and meet with a student of mine who was in town.

When I got back to the little prayer room, Auntie Moira and her teammate and the little huddle of Asian believers were watching a video of a sermon by Heidi Baker, missionary to Mozambique. I settled down on the mat beside them, but I had missed crucial elements of the story that Heidi was telling, and now it made little sense.

"And then, God gave me the horse!" she was saying. The audience on the video—it looked like thousands of people—gasped and cried for joy and praised the Lord. There was definitely some back story I had missed about this horse!

Heidi finished her stories and said, "Everyone, stand to your feet!" The thousands of people in the audience on the video all stood up. The small group of us in Auntie Moira's front room looked at each other questioningly, asking with our eyes, "Should we really do it, since we're just watching on a video?" Then we laughed, shrugged, and jumped to our feet to stand, too.

Heidi began praying loudly and passionately for everyone standing to receive “the baptism of the fire of His holy love.” I didn’t know what they meant. Did it mean *the* baptism of the Spirit, the controversial one that some people believed happened at salvation and others believed was a second experience? The first time I had ever heard of “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” was as a teenager taking the pre-baptism class my pastor taught so that I could be water baptized in the pool. He had stated emphatically that “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” was what happened when we were saved and the Holy Spirit made us part of the body of Christ, as in Romans 6:3, and *not* something that happened later. I had no idea why that was important, but the pastor spoke with such strong feeling that I never again heard the words “baptism of the Holy Spirit” without remembering his warning.

But Heidi Baker was praying for “the baptism of the fire of His holy love,” and I again had no idea what she was talking about. Hopefully this “baptism” was something else, something it was OK to ask for now. After all, I needed love. That’s what I’d told God I needed when I was reading 1 Corinthians 13 on the train. I had seen more of that need over the past six months of interacting with people who needed Jesus but who might persecute His messengers; I had seen the battle between love and fear in my heart and the need for more love to win. I started asking God for whatever kind of more love Heidi might be talking about.

“I’m going to pray for you to receive the baptism of the fire of His holy love,” Heidi told all the standing people in the video, “and when you feel it, kneel down.”

I had no idea what I was supposed to feel. I saw people on the video starting to kneel down. They were feeling something, whatever it was. I saw Auntie Moira kneel down in the room where I stood. She must have felt something. I saw her pastor, the taxi-driving fisherman, kneel down. He must have felt something, too.

I felt nothing but the longing to feel something. Nothing but my own longing and desire for God. After a moment I said, “God, You know I feel nothing but the desire for You. I am going to kneel down out of sheer desire. I want You. I want more of You. I want as much of You as I can have. *I want whatever You give in this life.*”

I knelt down.

I wondered what I had asked for.

The gift of tongues was the furthest thing from my mind. After a moment, though, I realized that something new and strange was happening in my body: my lips were moving—without me making them move. No sound was coming out, but they were moving.

It wasn't scary. I felt sure I could make the movement in my lips stop if I wanted to, but I didn't want to. And as long as I didn't exert any effort one way or the other, they kept moving. I wondered if I voiced it, if I added some air to whatever shape my lips were making, if it would sound like something. I started to whisper very quietly. It worked. The shapes my lips were making were shapes that formed sounds, like words.

It was the strangest feeling I had ever felt. *The words weren't going through my brain.* They were coming straight out my mouth. I had absolutely no idea what I was going to say until I heard what I said. If I whispered so quietly that I couldn't hear myself, I never knew what I said at all. It was like listening to another person speaking, but I was controlling the fact that I was letting it come out of my mouth.

I didn't want anybody to hear me. The video of Heidi Baker finished, and Auntie Moira put worship music back on. I crawled over to the laptop, lay down on the floor beside it to be sure its music would drown out my whispers, and then kept whispering. And listening. I listened to myself as hard as I could to hear what my new language sounded like. All I could think was *Please don't be repetitive, please don't be repetitive, please don't let it be repetitive.* My long-ago teacher Mr. Carter had still persuaded me that anything that sounded too repetitive to a linguist be a real human language couldn't be a supernatural gift from God. Every time I made the same sound twice, I was filled with fear and hoped I wouldn't repeat it again!

But to my great relief, what I heard myself saying wasn't repetitive. It sounded like a real language to me. It had lots and lots of different words in it. It was pretty. I actually liked it. I liked it a lot, even better than Auntie Moira's language. Mine was even less repetitive than hers. In fact, I liked the way mine sounded better than anybody else's I'd ever heard, except, of course, the old man at the campground with his elvish-like heavenly tongue that was too beautiful to bear. I was so, so relieved that I liked what my language sounded like, because

I had absolutely no control over what it sounded like. I wasn't getting to plan or choose a single sound I made!

After several minutes of this, the thought occurred to me, *I wonder if I could make it stop*. I tried. I could. *But it took more effort to stop than to keep going!* Then I was happy, oh so happy. This was definitely something real. For six months I had tried to speak in tongues and been unable to utter one syllable. Now these new syllables were flowing out of my mouth so freely it took more effort to stop them than to speak them! I was glad now that I had the memory of those six months to compare this to. If I ever doubted that this was real, I could remember how much had suddenly, in this moment, changed.

The others kept worshipping, and I kept whispering. I whispered until my throat hurt too much to keep it up. I had two options: I could either stop entirely, or I could dare to start speaking aloud. I didn't want to stop. So I raised my voice from a whisper to regular speaking as quietly as I possibly could!

I already knew that I would soon be describing this experience to lots of people who had no idea what it felt like. Almost nobody I knew and loved knew what this felt like! I had better pay good attention and make helpful notes for them. I experimented to see what I could control and what I couldn't.

I could control whether I started or stopped, and I could control the volume at which I spoke. I could not control the content of what I said, nor the speed at which it came out, nor the tone and emotion in my voice. I started repenting of judging people whose prayer languages sounded repetitive—I hadn't realized they didn't get to control what they said! If the Holy Spirit wanted to say the same syllable a hundred times through them, they just had to say it. Maybe it meant something that He thought was worth saying a lot of times!

I was so happy. I thought, *Daddy cared. Daddy listened. I didn't even tell Him the details I hoped for: that I wanted the gift to come without me trying and that I wanted it to not be repetitive, but I sure thought about those things, and He overheard. It's like He got me a Christmas present and He listened to me talking with my friends to find out what color I wanted and got one just like what He heard me say I wanted. He got me my own. Moira has one and I have one, but it's like... like her present is purple and mine is pink. He gave me the one He knew I'd like better. And He gave it to me for Christmas—and it was a surprise! What a good Daddy He is!*



Chapter 19



Eventually, I dared to stop whispering furtively and share with Auntie Moira and her little church what had just happened to me. They rejoiced with me, and when they went to play the next sermon, Auntie Moira discovered she hadn't downloaded the sermon they'd meant to, but rather, one about the purpose of the gift of tongues. "It's for you!" they laughed. It was about how "praying with your mind" builds up your mind and "praying with your spirit" builds up your spirit, based on 1 Corinthians 14. The preacher read from verse four the words, "the one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself," and urged his listeners to ask God for this gift and then use it a lot to build themselves up!

Once I finally stopped speaking in my new language, I was terrified that I wouldn't be able to start again. After all, I couldn't plan the words or even choose the first syllable, so how would I begin? What if the mysterious Source of flowing syllables wasn't there anymore? I opened my mouth and willed to speak what that new Source was giving me. The flow of sounds picked right up again. Every time I tried, there was that scary instant of wondering if it would start again, and it always did. On the plane ride home, I was so anxious to check that the gift was "still there" that every few minutes I cupped my hand over my mouth so the strangers all around me wouldn't hear and then attempted to start whispering in tongues again.

It was always still there.

When I got back to my city by the mountains, I began to hesitantly tell my other teammates, who were all from South Korea, what had happened to me. To my surprise, the first one I told said, "Oh that's great. I was a university student when God gave me that gift," and the second one said, "Oh, wonderful, I was in high school when God gave it to me." I was astonished, thinking, *You never told me you had this gift. I was so afraid to tell you! We've been working together for six months and I never would have guessed. You aren't one of "Them,"*

you aren't something else called "Charismatic," you're just a Christian. It was appalling to think anyone at home would write off my Bible-believing South Korean Presbyterian teammates as something other than we were just because they had received this gift that it had never even occurred to them to tell me about. Apparently the South Korean Christians hadn't polarized along quite the same lines as we had.

I wanted to reassure my supervisors, "I promise I won't tell anybody. I promise I won't cause trouble. I promise I won't use this to start division in the church." But before I could say any of this, they asked me, "Next Sunday in the church service, would you please share your testimony of how God gave you the gift of tongues when you visited Auntie Moira? We want all the local believers to know they can ask God for that too!"

They were happy for me, not afraid.

"It's a good gift because it helps you to pray longer," said the South Korean teammate who had received tongues as a university student. "Praying for two hours in English or Korean would be hard because I would have to think of so many things to say to God, but if I pray in tongues I can easily pray for two hours."

"I don't think I've ever prayed for two hours!" laughed Eliza, another British missionary who told me how she had received the gift of tongues in Africa. "What I love about it is if I don't know what to pray for someone, especially in difficult situations, I can pray in tongues and know I'm asking for what the Holy Spirit wants to pray."

Even the repetition I had so feared could be a good gift. I learned that from Joelle, who would be one of the first of my friends to ask for the gift of tongues for herself after hearing my story. Joelle was an overcomer: while her mind was sharp, and she had even earned a master's degree, her body was limited by cerebral palsy, which also made it physically difficult to speak. It had taken years of therapy before she had learned to talk, and it still took her more effort than people realized to make her mouth form all the sounds that human speech required. But the "prayer language" God gave her was simple and repetitive, syllables her mouth formed easily. At least she could talk to *Him* without effort. And that made her feel so loved. I heard her murmuring those syllables by day and night, whenever she was faced with anything she needed her heavenly Ab-

ba's help with. Once she looked up at me and whispered with a grateful smile, "How did we ever live without this?"

Everyone that I dared to tell about my "Christmas present" in those first few weeks had a different explanation of what the gift of tongues was for. I collected all of them. It had given Auntie Moira strength to last for 20 years overseas. It had given Lydia rest when she was too tired and wounded to pray her own thoughts. It enabled Jackie Pullinger to pray for God only knew what and then go out on the streets and collect the answers to her prayers. It enabled her disciples to escape from heroin addiction without torment. It enabled my South Korean teammate to keep praying for hours. It enabled the British missionary to pray God's prayers when she didn't know what to ask for. It gave Joelle a way to reach for her Father in prayer that was easy for her twitching muscles. And it built up one's own spirit, the preacher in the sermon Moira had downloaded said.

It was also just... fun. Did I really have the power now to choose to start doing something supernatural any minute of any day, and it would never ever be taken from me? Could life really be that exciting? Would I ever be bored again? If I was stuck waiting for a bus or standing in a long line at the supermarket, I could pray in tongues!

After my English students left, I sat in the empty classroom, playing around on the guitar and trying to praise the Lord. And then, I started to *sing* in tongues. I was breathless in awe and wonder. Moira had never told me about this possibility—I didn't even know if she could do it. My Christmas present came with special features! After that, my new language sometimes came out spoken and other times sung—I never got to choose about that either. Sometimes I sang to new tunes I'd never heard before. Other times I sang words in the new language set to familiar melodies. I never knew which tune was coming next. Sometimes what I was saying rhymed, like poetry, even when I wasn't singing. Sometimes it sounded like I was reciting some epic ballad. With an amazing rhyme scheme. For 10 minutes.

This Christmas present came with a lot of special features.

My own favorite discovery, which nobody else ever told me about, was that I could hear the Lord's emotions on a subject coming through my own voice. Since I wasn't able to control the tone and emotion in my voice when I prayed in tongues, I listened to hear what emotion I was using. It was my only clue as

to what I might be praying about, since I couldn't understand a word I was saying.

When I tried to pray in tongues for my friend who had insisted on marrying a non-believer, the words came with weeping deeper than I had ever been capable of alone. If I refused to cry, the tongue stopped. That was the only time it ever stopped.

When I prayed about news of a favorite mentor who had fallen into adultery, my voice made sounds like I was dying, sounds I had never heard in real life or realized I was capable of. I'd only ever heard those sounds in movies where dying people were trying to say something before they die, like Boromir with a chest full of arrows or Jesus trying to speak from the cross.

When I told Julie about the new gift, she wanted me to pray for her while she listened to what it sounded like. I'd never prayed in my new language with a human audience before, but I took a deep breath and prayed for her, my voice full of love-longing. When I stopped, she breathed, "That was beautiful! I couldn't understand a word you said, but I could hear Jesus' longing for me in your voice!"

That made me curious. I stopped praying for Julie and willed to pray about myself, to see what my voice would sound like. The unknown words started coming out in the tone of voice that a mother would use to tell her baby, "Oh what a cute baby you are! Yes you are! Oh yes you are! Aren't you just the cutest baby in the whole wide world!"



Part V: Journey to the House that Had Butter





Chapter 20



Hearing God speak to me had become so normal and so constant now that it couldn't be hidden anymore. I couldn't tell the stories of why I taught at community college, or when I came to Asia, or how I received the gift of tongues, or what I did yesterday without saying, "So then God said this and so then I said that and so then He said..."

This was incredibly frustrating to my latest Asian roommate, whose name meant "Flower." Flower had just believed in Jesus, was reading the Bible for the first time in her life, and asked me around 50 questions about God every day. Nothing had ever made me happier. But whenever I accidentally said the words, "God said to me," in a conversation with Flower, she would interrupt me.

I had always feared someone would break into my story and say, "Heretic! Blasphemer! What do you mean God talks to you?" But Flower was the first person in my life to ever actually interrupt me, and her protests were different.

"That's not fair!" she wailed. "How do you hear God like that? Why can't I hear Him like that? I want to hear Him, too! Why can't you teach me?"

It was like eating peanuts in front of a toddler. It was easier to hide them from her than to try to explain why I wasn't sharing. I tried to weed the "God said" out of my stories.

I still viewed hearing God as my dirty little secret. I had never understood from the Bible that this was supposed to happen; I just heard Him because I couldn't help hearing. But when I told other people, it felt like I—and the Voice of God—were on probation. Other people didn't seem to hear God this way, and I felt like they were watching me to see if what I experienced was worth the pain and confusion it cost me.

I thought, *I can't risk messing Flower up*. I couldn't risk messing anybody else up. I would never teach another person to try this thing that had nearly destroyed me.

Besides, even if I had wanted to teach Flower to hear God like I did, I couldn't. Hearing God was like parallel parking: I could do it, but I had no idea how to explain it. And nobody had ever asked me before.



I REMAINED UNABLE TO verbalize what hearing God felt like until I was back from Asia, back at the mission headquarters, and back in Julie's purple room. Julie had moved from five states away to join the same mission. She was based out of the mission's headquarters right now, and so she had moved into a room on the top floor of the old mansion and painted it purple. The children who prayed for her ministry called her "the princess who lives in the castle."

Now I was visiting my princess in her tower and hiding out by myself in her purple sanctuary while she helped decorate the rest of the castle for Christmas. When Julie had moved in, she brought her library of books. Most of them she kept on the big bookcases in the hallway for all to enjoy, but a collection of about 20 books, those that were too controversial for public display, she kept on a little low shelf by her bed. I lay on her soft white rug and looked at them. They had words like "prophecy" and "fire" in their titles. I wasn't sure if I dared to open one of them or not.

Then a title caught my eye: *Four Keys to Hearing God's Voice*. I was dubious but intrigued. *How could anyone boil that down to "four keys"?* I wondered. *Could this book possibly be legitimate or true?* I reached my hand in and pulled the little volume out. I opened it. The book was light, but the realization that came to my mind as I held the book felt heavy:

I have never read a "charismatic" book before.

I started skimming. The author, Mark Virkler, had learned these four keys when he devoted a year of his life to seeking God about how to hear God. That sounded like what I had done too, actually, when I had devoted six months to learn from God Himself instead of from Lydia.

The first key, I read, was to quiet yourself down. *Hmmm. Well, God definitely taught me that one!* I remembered how I was learning stillness at the cabin, when the hummingbird had dared to hover so close. I remembered the season when I kept apologizing to the imaginary human judges in my head, and He showed me the picture of myself as the screaming newborn and all my fearful

thoughts and prayers as just “WAAAAHHHH!” to Him. I remembered the picture of Jesus roaring “SHHHH!” in my ear and trying to stick a bottle in my mouth so I would finally get quiet enough to hear Him. Yes, God had been trying to teach me to be quiet.

The second key was to “set the eyes of your heart on Jesus”—which meant to dare to picture Him in your imagination. Virkler suggested that King David had been picturing the Lord at his right hand when he wrote, “I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken” (Psalm 16:8). *Oh wow.* The sweetest discovery in all my life was still this one, the discovery I called “the Place”: instead of envying the ancient children sitting on Jesus’ lap in the Sunday School paintings and achingly waiting to be close to Him after I died and went to heaven, I could picture sitting on His lap any minute of any day and believe it was true.

The third key was to tune in to spontaneous thoughts, because “the voice of God sounds like spontaneous thoughts lighting upon your mind.” Did it? Yes, looking back, I had to admit that it did. It had been a spontaneous thought, “*Give her a lollipop,*” so long ago, when He first broke into my fearful childhood thoughts with His Fatherly direction. It had been a spontaneous thought, “*I want you to destroy those poems you copied for Ben as a sacrifice to Me*” that had broken into my hopeless obsession and launched me on the painful journey towards freedom.

And the fourth key was simply to write it down, to write down your spontaneous thoughts as you are quiet and fixing the eyes of your heart on Jesus. Oh, the Lord had been so eager to teach me that! When I turned from Lydia to draw near to Him, getting me to start journaling was the very first thing He wanted to do. I remembered how He had taken me running through the rain to buy me that first blank pink book. I had been filling notebooks with Him ever since.

I leaned back against Julie’s bed. It felt like the purple room was spinning from the revelation: I was not the only human being on planet earth who had experienced God this way. Mark Virkler and I had both set aside a season of our lives to learn from God how to hear God, and when we did, God had taught both of us the same thing.

The only difference was that he, unlike me, was able to put it into words.



Chapter 21



Julie had been telling me for years of her dream of going to the ministry school Barbara had told her about—a “*supernatural* ministry school.” Julie said that meant learning to do miracles. I thought it was very weird. How could doing miracles be *taught*? If God wanted to do something miraculous He would do it, and if He didn’t, He wouldn’t, right?

While I was in Asia, Julie finally went to a three-week summer course at the “supernatural ministry school”. When I returned, the two women from the mission who picked me up from the airport were talking about where Julie had gone.

“It’s one of those places that’s all like, ‘you can raise the dead!’” said one.

“Oh, that stuff makes me SO uncomfortable,” said the other.

I listened in silence. I had gotten off the plane broken. Meeting Moira had been glorious. Receiving the gift of tongues had been glorious. Living with Flower had been glorious. So many things had been wonderful. But not everything. In between those glorious things, I had lived for six months with a local woman, and slowly everything in my life and personality had been sucked up into trying to please her and prevent her unpredictable explosions of rage. Just like the False Voice that had deceived me long ago, the spirit of control at work in her life feared the light. She tried screaming, threatening, quoting Bible verses and accusing me of gossip to try to convince me it would be a sin if I told anyone else how she was treating me.

I became afraid to obey the Voice. Obeying the Voice hadn’t always protected me from her painful attacks. What if He asked me to do something that made her scream at me?

No one can serve two masters. The thought came to me on the bus, after six months of growing secrecy and growing verbal abuse. I cried out to Jesus that I didn’t want to lose Him—if I could only have one master, I wanted Him to

be Lord. At that, the Voice had pierced through the confusion, threats and lies that she had wrapped around me to keep me silent:

If I am Lord, go back to your supervisor and tell her everything. Today.

I did. I expected to be told a version of what I was telling myself inside, “It’s all your fault, you keep making cultural blunders, if you want to be a good missionary you have to try harder to do everything her way.” Instead, I was told, “That is not your fault and it is not OK. We’re going to get you out of there right away.” And they did. Within hours, my horrified teammates, who owned the apartment, had told my oppressive roommate that she had to move out. She had persuaded me that I couldn’t do anything right, that everything about me was wrong, and that all the problems in our relationship were my fault. I was surprised to discover that the day she moved out, all the problems she’d blamed me for moved out with her.

But I didn’t have time to process my emotions. I kept pushing to teach and study and clean and help out, seven days a week, until my body collapsed in a strange new state of burnout and I could barely get out of bed. I thought that as soon as I got home to America and got some good sleep, I would feel better. I was wrong. I was a kind of tired that I had never experienced before, a kind of tired that no amount of sleep took away.

The Voice had gotten me out of the nightmare. It took longer to get the nightmare out of me.



IT FELT LIKE FOREVER between the time that I got back to America and the time that Julie the princess returned to her purple tower room. She had gone straight from her strange miracle-school to a missions trip to Haiti. She was gone those long aching days when it felt like I needed her most.

Eventually, however, Julie was back, lying on her purple bed, showing me pictures on her laptop. And as strangely broken and tired as I was, I could lean against her purple pillow and enjoy her stories. At the supernatural ministry school, she told me, she had learned to pray for sick people to be healed and then ask them on a scale of 1 to 10 how they felt, and then pray again. I thought that was weird. Between church prayer chains and family devotions, I had probably prayed for thousands of sick people to be healed in my lifetime, but I’d

never expected or seen an answer right away. And I didn't think Jesus had used scales of 1 to 10 when He was healing people; this didn't seem quite as elegant as the way He did it.

But I had to admit it seemed to *work*. I had witnessed Julie doing what she'd learned, sitting in the car outside the bakery where we picked up bread to be donated to the mission. At the end of the process, the woman she prayed for said that her pain was a zero now. I had also set up a prayer tent at the town block party with a young man who'd had similar training. He used the same strange method, and again, people said their pain had gone from a high number to a zero. Now I felt hurt. God was apparently doing miracles for them that He'd never done for me or anyone else just because they used this number scale thing! Why would that matter so much to Him?

Julie began clicking through her pictures of Haiti. She showed me picture after picture of people she had met on the street and prayed for, and God had healed them. But more than that, after being healed, they had wanted to receive Jesus. That got my attention. That was what my heart had been longing for all my life: for God to use me to save people.

I still didn't want to have anything to do with Julie's school, not because I thought this way of praying they taught was necessarily wrong, but because I thought going up to strangers in public and asking if you could pray for their healing would be so uncomfortable and embarrassing! I decided I wanted God to heal all the sick people in the world and save all the lost people in the world and cast out all the demons who were bothering people in the world, and that I did not want Him to use me to do it.

"Hey, you could go to the summer intensive course next summer!" Julie said.

I smiled and said, "That's nice dear," and thought in my heart, *Not unless my Heavenly Father makes me!*

Famous last words.



I CAME HOME FROM THE mission and went back to bed. I inhaled books in English. Dozens and dozens of them. And I slept. I had lots of what Lydia called "snuggly-time with Jesus."

One day, as we were snuggling, He brought up miracles.

You know, 'doing miracles' is like playing the piano, and I am like a Daddy who plays the piano very well. And I have said that I want all My children to play the piano at least as well as Daddy does, if not better.

I knew which verse He was talking about: "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12, NIV). And this verse always upset me, because despite His "very truly I tell you," it didn't seem to me to be true. I didn't see *anyone* I knew doing the works Jesus did and greater, let alone *everyone* who believed in Him!

He went on, *And you are like My little girl who is afraid to even go near the piano, and if I even talk about the piano, you start to cry. And I am kneeling down and looking into your eyes and asking you about it now, because I really wish you would tell Me why.*

I jumped into the story with Him and answered, "It's because some of the bigger kids in our family told me that the piano only works when You play it. It doesn't make sound when anybody else plays it. And they said if I press a key, no sound will come out, and so I will be humiliated, and so it's better not to try. And the piano has just been sitting there in our house completely silently, and I've never heard a sound come out of it in my whole entire life, so I believe them!"

Oh.... He said so gently. I see. Thank you so much for telling Me. But sweetheart, the reason you've never heard the piano make a sound is because nobody has walked up to it and tried to push on the keys. If you walked up to it and pressed a key, well, it wouldn't sound as good as when I play it the first time. It wouldn't be Beethoven the first time. But something would happen. And you know that the piano works, right? Because you've heard Julie banging out 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' over and over ever since she came home from Piano Camp!

I burst out laughing at that. All my concerns made sense inside His story, even the fact that Julie's prayers for healing were less elegant than Jesus' had been, and yet they "worked." I told Julie this story, and we referred to the school she'd gone to as "Piano Camp" ever after.

But He hadn't commanded me to do anything yet in response to that story, so I just filed it away as beautiful and went on with my life.



DURING MY YEAR IN ASIA, God had made it very clear that He was calling me to go back there long-term. He used every form of guidance I had ever heard of. He sent me sermons and Scriptures and conviction and people and circumstances and His “still small voice”—and His slightly louder voice, too. I even had dreams at night—and other people had dreams too!

He wanted me to go back for many years—yet I had burned out in just one year. It reminded me of going back to teaching all those years ago: *I just proved I can't do this, and yet this is what You want to do in me?*

Gradually, He helped me take steps to get better. I set up counseling sessions over the phone with Joelle again, every week, telling her about what I had survived with the controlling roommate. Then I talked to the counselor at the mission too. And based on Joelle's advice, I wrote down in the presence of the Lord everything that I forgave this woman for. I filled 17 journal pages brainstorming everything she had said and done to hurt and control me. I spoke aloud that I chose to forgive all of it in Jesus' name.

At the Inn, I had skewered my fears on my pencil and defeated them. Writing them down had helped break their power. I found that writing out forgiveness had the same power. Every hurtful word and action I wrote on my forgiveness list was captured between the pages of my notebook like a pressed moth, no longer flying around in my head and replaying over and over in my thoughts.

I kept writing. I wrote a 21-page letter to Auntie Moira, telling her everything I should have told her at the time when it was happening to me but hadn't. My thinking finally cleared enough to journal about what God had to say about it. He said that the woman had a spirit of control and that everything she had said to me had been based on what would control me, not what was true, so I didn't need to try to sort through her words about me for truth anymore. I needed to stop believing them and reject thinking about them.

After all of this, the bad memories were clearing out of my mind. My heart felt better. But my body was still as weak as before.



AFTER SIX MONTHS OF this healing process, in faith that I would fully recover, the admissions staff at the mission let me come to the headquarters

for the three months of orientation to become a long-term worker. Now I was shown to my own princessy room at the top of the castle. I unwrapped the pictures I'd brought to hang on the periwinkle walls. I started to take down the pictures that were already hanging there.

Then I saw it.

It was a framed painting of a little girl, about three years old by the look of her, banging away on a piano and singing at the top of her lungs. Just like in the story the Lord had given me.

I left that one on the wall. It felt like God was trying to tell me something.

When I went to bed that night, He brought it up clearly, using the metaphor from His parable for me: *I want to teach you to play the piano.*

I responded like a proper three-year-old and said, "No! I won't do it! And You can't make me! What are You going to do about it?"



Chapter 22



It was 3 am. I hadn't slept. I couldn't remember the last time I had fought with God like this. I didn't want to fight with God—but I also didn't want to go to “Piano Camp.” It was scaring me that I couldn't bring myself to give in.

It must be daytime where Auntie Moira is. I groped in the darkness for my phone. I composed a text message to tell her that God said He wanted to teach me to do miracles, and I was fighting Him, and I couldn't give in, and she should pray.

She responded right away. “You do not want to do miracles?”

I typed back, “I want Somebody Else to do it!”

I meant that I wanted *anyone* in the world besides me to do it, but Moira thought I meant Jesus. She answered, “He needs your hands and your feet and your voice and your willingness.”

Hands, feet, voice, willingness. Those were the things you needed to walk around and lay hands on people and pray for them, as Jesus did. They were also the things you needed to play the piano and sing.

No! I was still throwing an internal tantrum like a three-year-old. Eventually, my Heavenly Father responded like the Parent of such a three-year-old, scooped me up into my favorite place on His lap and spanked me there. That was the picture I had as He convicted me of layer after layer of the roots of the rebellion in my heart, like fearing obedience more than disobedience, or caring about what other people would think more than what He had said, or just plain being utterly disrespectful!

Deep down inside, I was relieved. When I had fought with Him about Ben or about teaching, He had let me disobey and get hurt. It hurt so much less to be “spanked” in a vision than to be allowed to go my own way!

“But what will my parents think?” I demanded. He said, “They love you and they love Me, so they will be fine with it, but it is not OK to ask Me that

before you start obeying. When I tell you to follow Me somewhere, you need to start walking in the direction I said, and then as we walk, I will happily answer any and every question you might have, but it is not OK to stand still and say, 'I won't obey You unless I like Your answers to all my questions!'"

Then He showed me another picture in my mind. I saw a busy intersection. I was a little child and Jesus was my Daddy, and we were standing on the curb holding hands, waiting to cross the street. The light for pedestrians turned green and He started to lead me across. Then I turned around and saw my parents and everyone else I knew and loved. They were walking down the same street that Jesus and I were walking down, and they were going in the same direction that Jesus and I were, but they were still behind us and about a block away. I saw that by the time they reached the intersection, the current green light would have turned red again. They would have to wait for the next green light. We would be on different sides of the street for a few minutes. And I didn't want to cross without them. So I stopped in the middle of the street and tried to pull Jesus back — or if He wouldn't turn back, maybe even drop His hand and go back all by myself. "No, no!" I cried. "I want to wait until everybody else is ready! I don't want to cross without them!"

When I saw this parable-picture, I understood His reaction as a loving father. I understood why He would scoop me up in horror, get me out of the street, and say, "NO! You do NOT try to let go of My hand or try to disobey Me and stop following Me in the middle of the street! You could get yourself killed doing that! When the other people are ready to cross the street, they will cross it, but *you follow Me.*"

The sunlight was streaming in through the lace curtains of my new room.

"Fine!" I said. "I'll go to 'Piano Camp' if You pay for it!"

I've already paid an infinite cost, the blood of My Son, for you to be able to do this with Him. I'll happily pay any lesser price than that!



DEFEATED, AS ALWAYS, in my wrestling match with my heavenly Father, I crawled out of bed and sat at the wooden desk they'd put in the new bedroom for me. I powered on my computer, connected to the castle's wi-fi, and searched

for the website of Julie's school. I found the "Contact Us" page and fired off an email asking about registering for the summer school.

Then I looked at "About Us" and found a statement of faith to read. It seemed true, yet the vocabulary was a bit different than the statements I was used to. I copied and pasted the statement of faith into an email to Joelle, writing, "I feel like God wants me to go to this school, the one Julie went to. Please look this statement of faith over and tell me if you think it sounds OK."

Scrolling down further, I read that the school's founders had been used of God at

"a hungry church in Toronto, Canada in 1994. What happened next has been called the Toronto Revival. God showed up in a powerful way. Many thousands from many different church backgrounds came to be touched by God and sent back out to minister with the flame of revival. The number of those that have come to Christ due to this movement has reached into the millions."

Whoa, I heard of that once. I didn't hear about lots of people getting saved, I just heard that it was the revival where people "laughed in the Spirit." I remembered where I'd heard of it. My father's close friend, the pastor of the Pentecostal church in our town, had said to my Dad,

"John, you're lucky in a way. You have so much less work to do than I do. I have to look into every new thing that comes up and try to discern if it is from God, because my people will go to it. Like this new laughter thing that just broke out in Toronto, I have to research that. You don't even have to know about this stuff because your people would never even consider it."

Well, now he was wrong. Now I was considering it, too. I had no idea what to believe about Toronto—except that making me laugh sounded a lot more like the Holy Spirit I knew than killing me did—but I figured I'd better research it for myself. I started with Wikipedia. It wasn't a source my university professors had let us cite, but at least it would be neutral or two-sided. The Wikipedia article gave lists of people who had gone to the Toronto meetings and who had either endorsed or rejected the "revival." But I hadn't heard of any of the people on the lists! Well, no, that wasn't quite true—I had heard of two of them.

One familiar name was Nicky Gumbel, the pastor of the Holy Trinity Brompton church in London that had created the Alpha Course to introduce seekers to the basics of Christianity. I'd seen that course used on the mission field. It was Nicky Gumbel who had created that online "Bible in One Year" reading plan and devotional that Anna read every day. I remembered how I had been at her house in crisis, spiritually malnourished from not reading the Bible anymore, and she had urged me to read it with her. To this day, I'd been reading it every morning ever since. Those daily Bible readings and commentary had been my "breakfast in the hospital," my lifeline to sanity.

The other name was Heidi Baker.

Both Heidi Baker and Nicky Gumbel endorsed the "revival" in Toronto as a real move of God and testified that they went there and were greatly blessed by God in the launching of their ministries. Hmm, these were two people that God had used for so much good in my own life. Not to mention that I knew they both had directly and indirectly led thousands of people to faith in Jesus. I reasoned, "Well, if 'by their fruit you will recognize them,' like Jesus said, then the fruit of the only people I know who were influenced by this is very good" (Matthew 7:20 NIV).

Days later, an email came back from a person at the school, a person named Katie, answering my questions. I wondered what kind of life this girl named Katie must have, with a job answering emails at Julie's crazy school. It felt weird to have even exchanged emails with someone who must be so strange.

Another email came back, from Joelle. She said she'd read the statement of faith I emailed her, and then read it again with her husband, who was the Bible college's librarian. They had discussed it together, and the end result of that was that they both thought it was OK.

So I took a deep breath and submitted my application.



I WAS STILL BURNED-out. For my three months of orientation in the castle, I went to my missions classes every morning and then ate lunch as quickly as I could so I could lie down for the rest of my lunch break. I *had* to keep having "snuggly-time with Jesus" now—lying down during every break was the only way I could make it through the day. And as I lay in my bed, I could listen

to Him and talk to Him and enjoy the two things that busyness and the fear of my angry roommate had stolen from me: time to listen to Jesus and time to rest and be still.

Then I got up again and I sliced tomatoes in the kitchen and went on ministry field trips to the city and had my group interviews with the candidate selection committee. At the interview, I came into the bright library and sat down in a red chair across from a whole row of smiling missionaries in red chairs. When someone asked what I would be doing next after orientation, I mentioned the three-week ministry school.

Later that afternoon I received a private email from one of the missionaries on the committee. I opened it and read that he was concerned about the school and its affiliations. He sent me a critical article and recommended I talk to ten different members of our mission before I decided to go.

I sat back at the desk, shaken. I'd heard God so clearly. Hadn't I fought with Him all night and gotten a spanking? Was this not the path of obedience? I prayed for wisdom and opened my Bible; it fell to the page that contained Proverbs 11:14: "In a multitude of counselors there is safety." *Well, I might as well interview ten missionaries before I go.*

I formed a strategy. Our interdenominational mission included believers of many kinds. I would start with the most charismatic members I could find, thinking, *If I talk to a cessationist, they by very definition have to believe these claims of miracles are a hoax. And I know now that I am no cessationist anymore! But if the people at this school are considered false teachers by charismatic Christians, then I will be concerned.* So I contacted the first person on my list.

He agreed to sit with me and talk at dinner. After we carried our heaping plates of salad from the salad bar to our table and said a prayer, I shared my situation. Somehow I also ended up sharing about how I had wrestled with God all night before He had won.

"Wait, if God told you to go, what are you asking me about it for?" the man asked, looking almost alarmed—as if before God he was a little boy who didn't want to get in trouble with *his* Daddy for helping me disobey!

"Well, I didn't want to be an unteachable person who thinks they've heard from God and then won't listen to anybody else's advice," I said. How many times had I heard warnings against becoming like that!

"OK," he said. "But you still have to go!"

**BUTTER FOR THE HOUSE OF BREAD: ONE EVANGELICAL
DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY TO REDISCOVER HER FATHER'S
VOICE**

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Wow. I still wasn't used to anybody else considering the Voice to be authoritative in my life.



Chapter 23



I met with more of my missionary coworkers, in the dining hall and in their offices and in their homes. None of them were very familiar with the school, but on the subject of Toronto, their opinions ranged from “It was all God” to “It started out from God but became human” to “It started out from God but became demonic” to “It was all demonic.” Phew! I couldn’t believe I had found an issue on which members of our one organization would have *that* broad a range of opinions!

Julie was excited, of course. She ran to her room and pulled three books off the shelves. “Here,” she said. “These are the books that will be required reading for homework before you go.” I carried them off to my room and lay on my stomach across my bed. I lifted the top book off her pile, prepared to read the second “charismatic book” in my life. I read the title: *There is More*, by Randy Clark.

There is More.

The Voice interrupted my thoughts:

I want that to be the motto of your life.

I remembered the hunger I had felt when I knelt on Moira’s carpet crying out, “I want You! I want more of You! I want as much of You as I can have! I want whatever You give in this life!”

It was a sweet, sweet memory, that hunger. It hadn’t been the physical hunger from the house church’s three-day fast. It was something else, that screaming desperation for God Himself. I wasn’t fasting now, but I felt that hunger returning as I looked at the cover of this book. If there was more, I wanted it.



JULIE EAGERLY ANNOUNCED that she had found a free place for me to stay during “Piano Camp.” I wasn’t at all worried about God’s provision since I would have been *relieved* if I didn’t have enough money to go! But He was providing anyway.

In the end I had talked to seven different missionaries. Most had concluded, “We can’t tell you if what this school is doing is from God or not, but if you feel like God wants you to go, you can always check it out and come home early if it seems wrong.” I also spoke with two pastors, including the Pentecostal pastor who was my father’s friend and Zach. Zach didn’t seem entirely convinced yet that this was a good idea.

After hearing Zach’s hesitancy, I felt shaken up. Maybe I shouldn’t go. Maybe this was a bad “piano camp.” I started to pray, “Lord, I changed my mind, I do want to learn to ‘play the piano.’ So if this is a ‘bad piano camp,’ would You please please give me a better one instead?” And I even started to think, *How will I break it to Julie if I decide not to go?*

I didn’t get very far in planning my explanation to Julie before I was overwhelmed with two sensations: firstly, that the Lord wanted to talk to me and secondly, that I was in big trouble. I grabbed my notebook and crept off to a spot where I could listen to Him. He had a lot to say. Yet another whole story flooded my mind; I put pen to paper and the story flowed out onto the page.

Once upon a time there was a nice yard with fences around it. It was a big yard, and it had a sprinkler and a garden hose and a tree house and a tire swing and a sandbox and a friendly dog. There was no reason why you should need to go outside of the yard to play. And I told you not to go outside of the fences, because on one side of the yard beyond the fence there was a desert, where you might get lost and die of heatstroke and thirst, and on the other side there was an ocean that could sweep you away and drown you. And there were lots and lots and lots of places for you to choose to play between the fences. Moira was running laps around the yard, and Lydia was playing house with all the dolls and making pine needle soup for them, and Paul was stargazing.

But some children were tempted to climb over the fence on the desert side. It was fine for them to like to play on that end of the yard, but not to go over the fence. And you, on the other hand, liked to play on the end of the yard towards the ocean, where you could smell the sea breezes. And that is fine. But sometimes you are tempted to climb over the fence on the ocean side. And sometimes you remem-

ber My warnings not to climb over the fence on the desert side, and you are so, so afraid of doing that (even though you never go anywhere near that side of the yard) that you move so, so far in the other direction that you climb right over the fence on the ocean side!

Now the meaning of the parable is this. The yard where I want you to play symbolizes giving weight BOTH to what you hear Me saying yourself and also to the rebukes and concerns of other people. To go over the fence on the desert side is to give so much weight to what you hear from Me yourself that you give the rebukes and concerns of other people a weight of absolute zero. And to go over the fence on the ocean side is to care so much about the rebukes and concerns of other people that you give what you hear from Me a weight of absolute zero. Neither of those is OK.

Some people have the personality to say, 'I don't care what anybody thinks of me; if I don't hear it from God myself, it doesn't matter,' no matter how many people are concerned about their choices. If they do that, they are going over the fence on the desert side and they will get hurt. But you, on the other hand, My dear, care a great deal what other people think, so much so that you are tempted to say, "If even one other person is concerned, it doesn't matter what I think I heard from God; I had better throw all of that away," which is what you are doing right now. And if you disregard the fact that you heard Me very, very clearly tell you to go to Piano Camp, you are climbing over the wall on the ocean side and you need to get back in the yard right now. There are strengths to having your personality, and there are strengths to having the other sort of personality, just as I am very pleased with children playing on either end of the yard, but you both must stay inside the fence!

I remembered my conversation with the man at the salad bar and saw that it fit into this story nicely. That man had seen me running towards "the ocean side of the yard" and asked me, "What are you doing?" I had said, "I need to be sure I don't go over the fence into the desert!" and he had called after me, "OK, but don't go over the other fence into the ocean!" The Voice went on,

Now I am not going to comfort you like you want Me to to and reassure you that you are allowed to go to Piano Camp, I am going to remind you very sternly that I commanded you to go to Piano Camp! What did I tell you to do?

"To register for Piano Camp and go to it," I said, writing my response down under His question, the way I captured our "conversations."

Right. Did I say that every person there will be right about everything they say?

“No.”

Did I tell you that you could trust everything you learn there and don't need to be discerning?

“No.”

Did I say that everything you hear or experience there will be from Me?

“No.”

Did I say that everything at Piano Camp is balanced, fair, healthy, right and true?

“No.”

Then what did I say?

“You told me to go.”

That's right. I want you to obey My voice AND My word. I want you to obey My specific voice to you by going to Piano Camp and I want you to obey My word by being discerning and testing everything you hear and see and are taught at Piano Camp. That is how I want you to do both. I want you to use what you learned from the people you interviewed to help you be more discerning as you obey My word and test things at Piano camp. That is how I want you to do both. Right now, I am blessing you. I am blessing you by packing your suitcase. I am using all the people you talked with to pack their insights and opinions and testimony and counsel in your suitcase for you to take with you to Piano Camp to help you be discerning. But you still have to go.

I saw a picture of Him taking objects like glass jars and rolling them up in my socks so they wouldn't break and putting them in the bottom of a suitcase for me. There was still room for plenty more.

I told Him I was sorry. I stopped planning how to tell Julie I was backing out!



“WHY DON'T YOU ASK THE elders of the church to anoint you with oil and pray for you to be healed?” my mother asked, during my one month at home after the mission's orientation ended and before the infamous “Piano

Camp” began. God had carried me through the orientation, but she saw I was still daily as fatigued as before.

Her suggestion was based on James 5:14-16.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

It wasn't something we did frequently, but it was in the Bible, and in theory you could always ask for it if you wanted to. My mother had asked the elders to come and anoint her when she had painful sciatica—and she'd been sure to confess every struggle she could think of too—and while she wasn't healed in the moment they prayed, God had healed her over the following several months.

So I asked Zach and the three other elders to come and pray for me. Of the four of them, three had never done this before. It was obvious that they didn't know exactly what to do or how to do it and that they felt awkward about it, but they were willing to do something for me that they'd never seen done before just because the Bible said to. *That's real faith*, I thought.

We sat in the empty church sanctuary and I poured out the story to them. About the roommate. The verbal abuse. The secrecy. The recovery.

“I know there is a connection between forgiveness and healing,” I told them. “So I have asked God over and over, ‘Are you SURE I've forgiven her? I believe I have, but I'm still not better!’ I received all that emotional healing through counseling and forgiveness, but my physical body isn't catching up. So I've started to think there must be a physical reason I'm still fatigued. But the doctor couldn't find anything wrong with me.”

I saw their faces, moved with compassion, even horror, over what had happened to me. Then Zach opened a little jar and pressed a finger dipped in oil onto my forehead. I closed my eyes. I heard each of their voices rising in turn, praying mercy over all the pain I had described. *Maybe there is still an emotional*

or spiritual reason for my condition after all, I thought, as I listened to them. But I didn't know what it could be.

A few weeks later, I loaded three weeks' worth of clothing into my old car and drove to the house Julie had found for me near the unknown world of "Piano Camp." I still didn't know if I would like it. I thought I might hate it. It might be three weeks of torture. But I knew I was obeying God, and I knew there was a blessing in obedience.

So I took His hand and we crossed the street to the other side.



Chapter 24



I stood in a long line of people waiting to get our name tags and small group assignments. There were all kinds of people there: men and women, black and white, retirees and teenagers, local and international. They all looked normal enough, but I was thinking *What kind of person comes to a place like this of their own free will, without feeling like God is commanding them to? I don't think I can trust any of these people!*

The supernatural ministry school looked culturally nothing like the Pentecostal campground. Most of the people were from America, not Africa. There were far more young people. Both genders were wearing trendy skinny jeans, while at the campground Julie had forewarned me that women should wear long skirts. They sang songs that had been written in the past year or two, not old-timey songs. They had electric guitars and drums, not a piano. Nobody put any pressure on anyone to speak in tongues.

But if they were culturally unlike the campground, they were still even less like anything “at home.” On the first day, a fashionably dressed man took the stage to teach on evangelism. He gave the good advice, “When you’re sharing the gospel with a non-Christian on the street, don’t use church jargon.” He then gave a list of examples of “church jargon”—and even though I had been attending church since nine months before I was born, I wasn’t familiar with a single term on his list! I had never heard “anointing” used as a noun instead of a verb or “Holy Spirit” referred to without the *the* in “*the* Holy Spirit” or the adjective “apostolic” applied to this, that and the other thing. Apparently our church cultures had been separated so long, we no longer spoke the same dialect.

Acts 17:11 recounts that those in Berea “were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” Now I was like a Berean on steroids—at least in the “examining” part. Whenever anybody opened their

mouth I was asking myself “Is that biblical? Is that biblical? They just said ‘Hello’ to me— is that biblical?” It didn’t occur to me that I might actually be able to take some time and spend months or years sorting through what was biblical! I was on high-alert mode, just as I had been at the Pentecostal campground, as if I thought a demon would immediately crawl down my throat if I missed somebody’s error. It was exhausting. By the lunch break I had to go out to my car and lie down. As I reclined the driver’s seat and told God how upset I was, I heard the Voice.

“That’s great that you’re trying to be so discerning. You keep doing that. But now you need to turn around and be equally discerning of everything else you were taught before this, outside of this place.”

My life would never be the same.



ON THE FIRST DAY, THE staff had stood up to introduce themselves. One of them was Katie, the person who had answered my first email. It turned out she was actually a leader at the school and the teacher of the classes on emotional healing. To describe herself to the class now, she said simply,

“Hi, I’m Katie, and I just love Jesus so much!”

Jesus! I thought. *Yes, finally! Something I’m familiar with in this place!* I wished I could talk to Katie.

On the second day, during the worship time, I saw Katie kneeling on the floor in worship. I felt so lost and lonely I wished I could crawl over to her and put my head in her lap, but I knew that would be weird! I heard the Voice again:

It’s My turn to talk to her right now, but you can have a turn soon.

After worship ended, Katie walked past my desk, so I smiled at her—and she came over to talk to me!

“Have you come to any of our events before?” she asked.

Ready to be vulnerable, I wailed, “It’s worse than that! I’ve never even been in a Charismatic church in America before!”

Immediately all of the other students sitting close to me turned towards me with faces that said, “Oh no, you poor thing!”—confirming my suspicion that in their world, I had just jumped into the deep end of the pool.

“Oh wow,” Katie said. “Yesterday must have been really hard for you then.”

“Yes. It was horrible.”

“I’m really proud of you for coming back.”

“Thanks.”

I thought she’d want to keep talking about that, but instead she asked me more about my life. So I told her I was a missionary about to go back to Central Asia long-term but I had burned out and needed God to heal me before I could go back. She asked the exact timing of my burn out and I told her I’d collapsed a little over a year ago but my body still wasn’t recovered.

“This conversation is such a confirmation,” she said. “I was getting words of knowledge during worship and I was asking God for a confirmation whether or not I was to share them, and I think one of them is for you.”

“Oh, OK. What is it?” I didn’t know what a ‘word of knowledge’ was, but it sounded like a prophecy, so I thought she would tell me something from God for me, like the speaker at the campground had long ago.

“No, I’m going to give the words of knowledge from the front when I go up to speak, but when you hear the one that is for you, stand up. And I think it’s for you and also for some other people, so they’ll stand up, too.”

Then she left me and walked up to the stage. She took the microphone and said, “I felt like the Lord gave me some words of knowledge during worship, and I just had a conversation that was a really big confirmation that He wants me to share them. So if any of these describe you, stand up and I’ll pray for you.” She began to read aloud what she had written down on her mint-green-covered cell phone during worship: “The first one is that I felt like there are burned-out missionaries here... and that you burned out on the field... and that was over a year ago now... but when you compare yourself to then and now you still aren’t better... and that’s discouraging to you. If that describes you, please stand up.”

I jumped out of my seat. No wonder meeting me had been her confirmation! What she’d written down exactly described my life! I felt like the disciple Nathaniel when he had heard Jesus say, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, *I saw you*” (John 1:48 ESV) and all his prejudice against a teacher from Nazareth melted away. The God who knew me and had been walking with me all these years was here. The fear inside me started to subside. It was OK for me to be here. I could receive from Him here.

Five other people of the 120 in the class stood up, too. Katie prayed for all six of us. Then she began her teaching.

Julie had somehow failed to mention that they taught on more subjects at this school than just praying for miraculous physical healings. Yesterday, we'd learned about evangelism. Today, Katie taught on emotional healing.

"Repeat after me," she said, practicing on us what she would have us practice on others. "Jesus, is there anyone I need to forgive?" *Oh, this again.* I had already asked Him this question so many times! I repeated the question to Him again now, in unison with the group. "Jesus, is there anyone I need to forgive?" I heard only deafening silence in response.

Katie moved on to her next step. "Repeat after me: 'Jesus, is there anything I need to forgive myself for?'"

In chorus with 119 other voices, I repeated the question: "Jesus, is there anything I need to forgive myself for?"

The deafening silence suddenly changed to the opposite of deafening silence! I was overwhelmed with the realization: *I have never forgiven myself.* I had never forgiven myself for letting this happen. For not telling anyone and not getting help sooner. For believing the lies that woman told me. For being deceived and believing the lie that it was all my fault . . . I felt like I needed to go through the exact same process in forgiving myself as I had in forgiving the other woman, to journal out about 17 pages of what I forgave myself for and forgive it all in Jesus' name.

I also knew why I hadn't forgiven myself: I'd read a book in my youth that said forgiving ourselves is unbiblical because we aren't the judge, God is. But in this moment the Lord was reminding me that I wasn't the judge when I forgave other people either; He was, and He asked me to forgive them. I saw God as the judge, who had pardoned both me and my roommate, and I saw myself as the jailer who was supposed to unlock the jail cells. I had let the other woman go free, and now I had to do the same thing for myself.

And then I heard Him say, *That is the last thing that has to happen before I can heal you.*



GOD WAS THERE IN OUR little church, hearing the prayers of my elders when they anointed me with oil. He was there in the supernatural ministry

school, too, giving Katie a word of knowledge for me as she knelt in worship there.

I didn't know of anybody else at the school who came from a church in my denomination, nor did I know of anybody else in my church or denomination who had ever gone to a school like this. So it seemed the only Person who had ever been in both places was God—and now me too. I had never felt like such a pioneer before!

But He was with me, in both places. And I felt sure that He had taken me to Katie's inner healing class in answer to my elders' loving prayers—He had answered their own prayers by taking me to a school they didn't even know if I should go to! He hadn't healed me instantly in the moment that either my elders or Katie prayed for me, but now He had revealed to me what was still blocking my healing: needing to forgive myself.

It was three weeks after Katie's class, after Piano Camp had ended, that I finally had time to sit on the floor with my pen and my current journal and write out what I was forgiving myself for. Again, I filled notebook page after notebook page. Again, I felt the power in naming the wrongs. I felt the power in releasing them in Jesus' name. I finally laid my pencil down. I had named everything I could possibly think of.

I spoke aloud into the empty room, "I forgive myself for all of that in Jesus' name."

I felt His Presence coming over me, pouring over me as forcefully as if a mighty waterfall had just opened in the ceiling. It felt so heavy that I had to lie down. I heard,

I am healing you now.

And my strength was restored from that moment forward.



Chapter 25



Another teacher at “Piano Camp” was Mark Virkler—the man who had written *Four Keys to Hearing God’s Voice*. Apparently, that book had been on Julie’s shelf because she’d gotten it here. Now God had brought me to hear him live and in person!

I watched and listened in awe as he taught the four keys to the 120 people in the room and got everybody started journaling and hearing from God. Everybody learned to quiet themselves down, fix the eyes of their hearts on Jesus, tune in to spontaneous thoughts, and write them down. He gave us five minutes to try it, and then he invited volunteers to come up to the microphone and read their very first journal entry to the group. Each entry was exquisitely beautiful. Each one was unique. Each one was incredibly loving. But they all sounded to me like the same Person was speaking, the same Person who spoke to me.

What my classmates shared also reminded me of the entries in the *Jesus Calling* book. It sounded like each student had just started writing their own *Jesus Calling* book during the five minutes Mark Virkler had given us to try journaling. Now I thought, *Maybe the only thing wrong with the Sarah Young books was that she didn’t teach every reader that they could all be doing what she did: listening for themselves and also hearing the One she was hearing.*

Mark Virkler had just done for 120 people what I had been unable—and afraid—to do for Flower. He had taught them all my “dirty little secret.” And it wasn’t dirty; it was clean. It wasn’t little; it was life-changing. And it wasn’t a secret anymore.



I HAD SOMETIMES ENVIED Christians with dramatic testimonies of how Jesus found them, like the ones saved in adulthood from lives of crime; they

had clear before-and-after stories. I thought I had the most pathetic “testimony” I had ever heard: “My parents started reading me Bible story books before I could talk, and I raised my hand and ‘prayed to ask Jesus into my heart’ every time I was invited to at Sunday School and camp.” But those same Christians I envied would always tell those of us who trusted Jesus from childhood how blessed we were, how much *they* envied us, and how much pain they would have been spared if they’d only known sooner!

Now, sitting in this auditorium, I understood what they had felt. *If I had only known what Mark Virkler is teaching now—how much pain I would have escaped! How different would my life have been if I had known there are churches out there teaching Sunday School classes about the experiences I have been too afraid to ever tell anyone in my church about? Like hearing God’s voice in my heart?* This guy had given us a whole workbook full of lessons on how to hear God and how to discern when it was and wasn’t God you had heard!

I stared down at one of the first pages in the workbook, the page called “Biblical Safeguards for Hearing God’s Voice.” The safeguards included “You accept the Bible as the inerrant word of God... You demonstrate your love and respect for God by your commitment to knowing His word... You have an attitude of submission to what God has shown you in the Bible... You have two or three spiritual advisors to whom you go for input on a regular basis.”

I realized, *If I had only had just this one page, just this page in my hands, none of that horrible stuff would have happened to me.*

Now 120 people were all pairing up around the room. Each pair would read their new journal entries to each other and ask each other the question Virkler had taught us to ask our “two to three trusted spiritual advisors” when we shared our journaling with them: “Does your heart bear witness that this is from God?”

Of everything I learned that day and wished I had learned many years before, what meant the most to me was that question: “Does your heart bear witness that this is from God?” When I heard it, I felt this teacher placing a tool in my hands that I would keep for the rest of my life. I could almost feel the heaviness of the weapon being carefully placed in my hands, feel my fist closing over its handle, never to let go again.

He said we didn’t need to ask, “What do you think of it?” or “Do you like it?” because if God was speaking, other people’s *opinions* of what He said didn’t

matter! What mattered was that we had another's input in discerning that we were hearing Him.

Virkler was making it *feel safe* to get help testing the Voice. And that had never felt safe to me before. Every time I had sent a journal entry to Lydia I had both hoped she would tell me if she thought it wasn't God and been terrified that she would. I was much too embarrassed to *ask*. I had thought it would be the end of the world if I heard wrong and someone else saw it. I thought they would despise me and I would be humiliated. When I did run things by people, I thought they had the authority to take God's voice away from me if they disapproved. I wasn't asking them, "Do you think this particular journal entry is from the Holy Spirit?"—I was asking another human being, "Do I have your permission to keep my relationship with God?"

And now Virkler had put a question in my hands that wasn't scary to ask, wasn't shameful to ask, and didn't give the other person unlimited authority over what I believed. The question was based on his definition of 'submission': "*Biblical submission is an openness to the Spirit-led counsel and correction of several others, while keeping a sense of personal responsibility for our own discernment of God's voice within us.*"

Wow. That sounded like the picture God had given me of staying between the fences in the backyard. That was the kind of submission that had gotten me here.

And Mark Virkler hadn't just taught this question to me, but to a whole community, and we all were using it together. I was surrounded with people I could ask that Helpful Question to who would understand, because we were learning this together. I wasn't the only one anymore.



I SAT ON THE EDGE OF my seat, pencil in hand, ready for the next question we would try asking Jesus and journaling about. Now we were talking about the second of the four keys, the one about "vision." Mark Virkler said that "vision" meant "flowing pictures alighting upon the mind," just as what we called "hearing" was really "flowing words alighting upon the mind." I had "seen" a lot of "flowing pictures": the pictures of Jesus bouncing the baby in the log cabin or

holding me on His lap as we talked, or the recent ones of crossing the street or playing in the yard or packing a suitcase. So Virkler would call those “vision.”

This second key about “fixing the eyes of your heart on Jesus” or “looking for vision as you pray” was always the one that concerned people the most, he said. Virkler believed that all of Protestantism had thrown the baby out with the bathwater in this area. The reformers had seen the abuse of images as idols and overreacted, he said; they had started to believe the lie that *all* use of images is a “graven image” and idolatry. He believed our tradition had made an “ungodly inner vow” to reject all use of images in the Christian life—and so we had been blinded for 500 years to all that Scripture says about vision, dreams, imagination, and imagery!

Was that why no one had ever told me about this?

So the next question Mark Virkler wanted us to ask the Lord ourselves was, “Lord, how important is it to You that I use the eyes of my heart?” That seemed a slightly strange-sounding question, I thought, but I wrote it down at the top of a sheet of notebook paper. I dropped down a line and began to write out beneath the question the answer that was already coming to my mind:

“You already know how important it is. I showed you long, long ago, when I gave you the vision of you in the hospital bed and I came and rocked you. I want you to share that image/story with the world. It’s not just a picture of you. It’s a picture of the entire Protestant church. The whole church is where you are, like you are, lying in the hospital bed because she tried to do this for Me. The church tried to sacrifice her heart for me, to please Me, to do what she mistakenly thought I wanted her to do.

The reason you were in great pain in the hospital bed is because you had climbed up on an altar, lain on your back, and stabbed yourself with a knife and tried to cut your heart out and sacrifice it to Me. You interpreted My word in a way I never intended you to, as if you had thought I wanted you to physically cut out your heart. And I say to you what I said to the Israelites who thought physically sacrificing their babies would please Me—“It never entered My mind.” I’ve asked you to be a living sacrifice, not a dead one.

When you cut out your imagination, you cut out your ability to really give Me your heart in the way I wanted you to. And I know you did that for Me. You did it because you loved Me and wanted to please Me while believing a lie about what I want you to do. Many others are doing that too: misinterpreting My word, cutting

their hearts out, thinking it will please Me—and the church is in a hospital bed because of it. And I want you to share your story with them so they'll know I can pick them up and rock them too, comfort My bride. A lot of the pictures I've given you over the past years of your life that you thought were just for yourself were actually prophecy for the rest of the world too."

Wow. Maybe, like the Christians saved from crime and addiction, I had a story now, a "dramatic testimony." Maybe someday, somehow, it would benefit somebody else that I had needed to learn all this the hard way.

I raised my hand and carried my journal entry up to the microphone.



Part VI: Bringing Home The Buttered Bread





Chapter 26



Six months after the end of Piano Camp, I stood like a princess in the tower of the castle. An after-Christmas snow covered the mission headquarters' stone towers, the parking lot, the trees.

Physically, I was still restored and feeling well, ever since I had forgiven myself after Katie's class. Spiritually, I was still processing all the wonderful things that had happened to me, and what I was to do with them.

I had come back to the mission through the snow to discuss my future and my return to Asia with my leaders, but I stayed the night in the castle afterwards because the mission was having a two-day "Hearing God Retreat" with a workshop by a local pastor. I had never before gotten to do such a thing with "my" people, with people I already knew and loved, instead of with brand new friends in the new culture of Piano Camp.

I went down the winding castle staircase and crunched through the snow to the building where we would meet. Twenty or so of my missionary friends had gathered in the same bright library room where I had had my missionary interviews almost a year ago. It felt like a lifetime ago.

The teacher gave each of us a white binder. I flipped through my binder as more people slipped in and sat beside me in the familiar red chairs. This pastor had based his material off of Mark Virkler's four keys, but had put them into his own words and lessons. "When you become a born-again Christian you also receive the person of God, the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Holy Spirit is the One who gives you the ability to hear the voice of the Lord and to see in the Spirit," I read. The lessons said that God has given us each a mind to process words and an imagination to create mental pictures, and that the Holy Spirit in us enables us to both "hear God's voice" in our mind and to "see in the Spirit" in our imagination—that is, through flowing thoughts and flowing pictures.

This pastor also taught us the daily Bible study method he had developed to integrate his two-way journaling with his regular Bible study. It added two-way journaling to the inductive Bible studies I was familiar with—the same method that Hannah and Alana and I had studied the book of Matthew with the freshman girls, looking for observations and interpretations and applications. The pastor used the acronym READS. I wrote down in my notebook what the five letters stood for:

Read the passage.

Examine the passage using your study tools and making observations and interpretations.

Apply the passage.

Dialogue with God by asking “Lord what do You want to say to me about this passage?” and journaling.

See vision by asking, “Lord, what picture would You like to show me about this?” and writing that down too.

I loved it. I supposed I had almost done this in that Bible study of Matthew with the girls without even realizing it—I had studied the guts out of the Scripture passage and then gone home and wrote down everything the Lord was saying to me about it. This pastor was combining the best of both worlds, like spreading the Holy Spirit “butter” over thick slices of Bible “bread.”

After we went through all the lessons as a group, it was time to practice. We all flipped to the empty pages at the back of our binders to try journaling. The pastor had us write the question “Lord, what words of encouragement do you have for me?” and gave us 15 minutes of silence to write whatever came to our minds. I put my pencil down onto the paper, and wrote what was bubbling up into my mind. The words flowed as easily as they always had before.

But one thing was different: all around me, my brothers and sisters were scratching on other papers with other pencils, listening to the same Father. And they weren’t people in “another world,” they were people in *my* world. Would God do this for them too? Could they receive it from Him if He did?

At the end of 15 minutes, we shared our results. Everybody had gotten something, even if it was only one piercing sentence—the only person who had a blank paper was a lady who had been too afraid she was making it all up to write down any of her thoughts. Volunteers began to read what they had written, and I heard the same Voice in their journaling. The same Voice I heard

speak to me. The same Voice I'd recognized in the journal entries of my classmates at Piano Camp. But now, in one hour, this pastor had gotten twenty people I knew from my past to hear that Voice with me. Was it really this easy?

And he didn't seem to have ruined their lives, either. He had taught them what I had been afraid to teach Flower. Was it really OK to teach this to others?

But after all I had experienced, maybe it was equally legitimate to ask the opposite question: was it OK *not* to teach it to others? After the sessions finished, I trudged back through the snow to the castle-shaped main building. I climbed up to my tower in the castle with a thought I couldn't shake: *I think God wants me to start teaching other people that they can hear His voice too.*

I climbed into bed that night and lay there in the darkness, remembering. The Voice of God had intruded on my life after I had declared, "I will never give up being in love with Ben unless God himself speaks to me and tells me to." I hadn't known if God *wanted* to talk to people like this or if He'd made an exception because of my stubbornness. Even when Lydia shared the pictures she'd received from God in the counseling room, I had thought God only spoke like that in the most critical moments of our lives. In crisis. To heal trauma. To guide major decisions.

Was hearing God supposed to be *normal*?

And even if it was, was there really, truly, no cap on it? No limit? No ration? No daily quota? Was God really *that* available, so that if I listened for six hours, He'd talk for six hours, and if I asked 100 questions, He'd speak 100 answers?

Well, actually, if I listened for six hours, I would probably hear something like, "Now stop sitting there and go do what I told you to do," but I would still *hear* it. And He would stay available and communicating the whole time I obeyed. Was He really this available, this close? Did He really want to be?

And if He *was* this available and close and wanted to be, how could I possibly keep that to myself and claim to love?

I turned to the Lord and whispered to Him through the darkness. "All right, if You want me to teach this to other people, I need to know it's in the Bible. I know it happens to me, but I can't teach other people unless I know it's really Biblical. I've heard a few Bible verses here and there used to defend it, but I've also heard alternate explanations for every one of them. I need You to show me the Biblical basis for it."

I wasn't journaling, because I was too tired to get out of bed and turn the light on and write, but I whispered to Him the question I would have put at the top of my paper if I was:

"Lord, does Your word really teach that You want to 'speak' to every Christian today?"

Yes dear, it does, it really does.

For the next few hours, I lay in my bed and listened to Him, listened as if I was journaling, listened as He began in Genesis and traced it through Revelation. I was tired. I had never thought of any of this before. But now I was seeing all of it, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus with their hearts burning, suddenly seeing the story their whole Bible had been telling them all along when *Jesus* Himself explained it to them.

I listened to Him until I fell asleep.



IN THE MORNING, I JUMPED out of bed and stumbled to my computer. I opened a new document and typed my question at the top. I opened my Bible. The Lord had alluded to a *lot* of Bible passages last night. I would have to try to find all the references! Underneath my question, I typed up everything I remembered hearing Him say, and then searched through my Bible, adding reference after reference in parentheses. When I finally sat back and read what I had written, it rolled me over like a steam roller.

All right, He had convinced me. I had to let Jesus bring me out of my tower. I had to share this with the world.

Elizabeth's two-way journaling, January 8, 2018

"Lord, does Your word really teach that You want to 'speak' to every Christian today?"

Yes dear, it does. It really, really does. Not just in one or two specific places, although those are there, but in the entire overall thrust of My word, the entire story, from Genesis to Revelation. I think it is fair and safe to say that the Bible is the story of God restoring His relationship with humanity. In Genesis 1 and 2, Adam and Eve were

created in My image, and we talked together. We walked together and we talked together. I spoke to them and they heard Me. I blessed them and they heard Me (Genesis 1: 28). I commissioned them, told them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and they heard My voice. We had ceaseless, unbroken communion *and communication*, day and night, until the day they heard My voice saying, “Adam, where are you?” (Genesis 3:9). Until the fall. At that point, the intimacy with God that I had created My human image bearers for was lost and broken. They were driven out of the garden. From that point on, the Bible is the story of how I set out and acted to redeem them and restore that lost relationship, so God could dwell with man again on the earth (Revelation 21:3). Intimacy and relationship requires communication, two-way communication. Ceaseless, endless, continuous, two-way communication between God and each human image-bearer has always been My goal and the desire of My heart. Spirit to spirit communication with you, My Spirit (for I am Spirit) with yours, has always been the goal I set out to restore.

The Bible is the story of how I did that, of how I have and will restore My creation and My relationship with humanity through, ultimately, the work of My Son. The question is *not* the sufficiency or inerrancy or infallibility or inspiration or worth of My word—My word is all of those things—but rather the *fulfillment* of My word. The question is rather, “Where are we now in the story?” All Christians agree that in Heaven, in the age to come, you will all have two way, personal conversation with Jesus that will not be only through the words of Scripture. You all expect to see Jesus, hug Jesus, kneel before Jesus, walk with Jesus, talk with Jesus, stroll hand in hand with Jesus, ask Jesus questions and receive answers, tell Jesus what is on your heart and receive a verbal response and see the expression on His face, and etc. etc. etc.—don’t you? And rightly so! I am absolutely looking forward to doing all of those things with you. So the question is rather, *How much of that can we have now, in this age, by the indwelling Holy Spirit?* In the next age you will not dishonor My written word by

having personal conversations with Me, and neither does it dishonor My written word for you to have personal conversations with Me, the God of the Bible, in this age when My Spirit dwells inside of each of you. On the contrary, it *fulfills* My written word when you do that. Your personal conversations with Me are the God of the Bible achieving His Biblical goal of restoring fellowship with you!

After Adam and Eve fell and sinned, I did not commune with them and walk and talk with them as I had done before. I did not live on the earth with humans and dwell with them until I came down and dwelled in the “temple built with human hands” (Acts 17:24), first the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38) and then the temple (2 Chronicles 7:1-3; 1 Kings 8:10-11). This was a great improvement to what was before, as My presence dwelled in the Holy of Holies. I lived in this building, in this room. But it was a far cry from what My heart ultimately longed for, obviously! After that temple was destroyed, My presence did not dwell with humans on the earth that much, to that extent, until Jesus came. Then He shamelessly proclaimed that *He* was the temple, that His body was the temple (John 2:18-22). This stage was an enormous, unspeakable improvement over the previous sort of temple! He could walk and talk with humans again. They could touch Him and converse with Him, see up close what God was like (John 14:9). As His disciples later wrote that they had seen Him with their eyes, looked upon Him and touched Him with their hands (1 John 1:1), He became flesh and tabernacled among you and you “saw His glory” (John 1:14). His love, mercy, and truth, His treatment of children and of women, His healing power and saving power and cleansing power and forgiving power—all of these could be clearly seen when God dwelt among men in the “temple” of Jesus’ human body. It was a vast improvement on the former temple.

Now, however, you are in the third stage, the third sort of temple, where *you* are the temple and the Holy Spirit dwells in each of you individually and in the church corporately (1 Peter 2:4-5). This is because Jesus has died, risen, ascended to My right hand and poured

out the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). Jesus specifically told you that this stage would also be an improvement on the previous one, that having the Holy Spirit would be *better* than having Jesus present in the flesh (John 16:7). I know you often do not believe Me that this is better, and a big reason for that is that you do not believe you can have intimate, personal, two-way communication with Me by the Holy Spirit the way you could if Jesus was still present on the earth in bodily form. But that's a lie. You *can* have that personal, two-way communication with Me right now, you *can* and you *may*, too. I would be a cruel Father if I took that away from you and told you it was better this way! It wouldn't be better. I know how your heart aches to communicate with Me. Having the Holy Spirit filling each believer on the earth is an *enormous* improvement to having Jesus in bodily form. The Holy Spirit enables Me to have that intimate, ceaseless, personal, two-way, spirit to Spirit communication with each of My children that My heart longs for. *A primary reason that Jesus died was so that I could send the Holy Spirit.* So that I could "pour Him out on all flesh" (Acts 2:17) and reveal Myself to young and old, male and female, everyone alike. The Holy Spirit is not a poor consolation prize while Jesus has to be away in Heaven; the Holy Spirit is the best thing to happen yet!

He is the *parakletos* who pulls alongside of you, He is the Comforter (John 14:16). He reminds you of things Jesus said (14:25). He reveals new things to you (16:12-15). He convicts you, and the world, of sin (16:8). He can answer your questions. He can guide you, fellowship with you, commune with you. Primarily, He reveals Jesus to you. That is His role.

Through the Spirit, you can "see" Jesus through the eyes of faith, the eyes of your heart. You can "set the Lord always before" you as David did (Psalm 16:8). You can fix your eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of your faith (Hebrews 12:2). Not your physical eyes, obviously, for you don't see Jesus with those, but your heart eyes, your eyes of faith —if you can bear to hear it, your *imagination*—under the

control and direction of My Spirit. You are commanded to set your mind and set your heart on things above, where Christ is, seated at My right hand (Colossians 3:1-2). As you do this, you gaze at what is invisible, just as Moses used his faith/imagination to gaze at “Him who is invisible” and see Me as more real than the visible, angry human king (Hebrews 11:27), and you can do the same.

My word says that your heart has eyes, and Paul prayed for the Christians’ heart-eyes to be enlightened by a “Spirit” that I, the Father of Jesus give, a Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Ephesians 1:18). This is what the Holy Spirit does. By the Holy Spirit, you can “see” Jesus, even though He is invisible to you and with your physical eyes you “have not seen Him yet love Him” (1 Peter 1:8). By the Holy Spirit you can “hug” Jesus in this life, you can “see” Jesus in this life, you can “hear” Jesus in this life.

The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus to you in a greater, sweeter intimacy than you could have had if you had lived in 30 AD and met Him on the earth. This is the promise of the Bible to every believer. By the Spirit you can talk with Jesus by both day and night. Think of it. If you had lived back then, you couldn’t have done that. You are a gentile, and full access to Jesus was not opened to the gentiles until after the Spirit came. That’s another reason the age of the Spirit is better. Even if full access to Jesus was open to the gentiles, you are a woman, and while Jesus honored women, you could not have slept beside Him all night as He camped out with His disciples; it wouldn’t have been appropriate. Even if it was, you couldn’t have talked to Him all night; He had human limitations and He needed to sleep. Even if you could have talked with Him all night, you would have had to share Him with crowds and crowds of other people who wanted to talk to Him too. You would have had *much* less access to Jesus without the Holy Spirit!

But by the Holy Spirit, all barriers of gender and race are dissolved. By the Holy Spirit, Jesus is with you ceaselessly to the end of the age.

By the Holy Spirit, you can have ceaseless communication with Jesus all day and night, whenever you wake and even in your dreams (Acts 2:17; 16:9; 27:23-24). I have always wanted more than a “daily devotions” or “quiet time” with you. My word never commands that. I want you to let My word *dwell* in you *richly* (Colossians 3:16), pray *without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17), give thanks *in everything* (v. 18), praise Me all the day long (Ephesians 5:19) — I yearn for ceaseless communion and communication with you by My Spirit as My Spirit reveals Jesus to you, primarily through My word, but as you know My word, you can have communion and conversation with *that Jesus* all the day long. My word promises that you are blessed if you meditate on it day and night (Psalm 1:2). This meditation is not just memorizing words and thinking about them by yourself, but discussing them with the Holy Spirit. Picturing, imagining, discussing, letting Him use that word to reveal Jesus to you, to fellowship with you, to meet your need. You do not just have a book, you have the God revealed in the Book (John 5:39).

In 2 Corinthians 3, the “ministry of the Spirit” is contrasted with “the ministry of the law.” Under that old, but glorious, “ministry,” only one man, Moses, saw My glory. Only one man saw Me, and even he saw only My back, not My face. There was no way to show him my face without killing him with My holiness (Exodus 33:17-23). Just seeing My back made his face glow and shine, but he veiled his face because the shining faded (Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Corinthians 3:13). This is contrasted with how, now, the Spirit of the Lord reveals Jesus to you. Jesus made a way for the glory of God to be visible to all humans without killing them - “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6 ESV). This was the second sort of temple, Jesus come in the flesh. Jesus’ face revealed the glory of the Father, Whom He alone knew (Matthew 11:27). Now, you “behold” the glory of God in the face of Jesus through the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 4:6). This is what transforms you “from glory to glory” (3:18). Someday you will be fully like Jesus when you see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). In the meantime, you see

Him by the Spirit and things get better and better! This “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” is “*in your hearts*” (4:6). In your hearts you see, and you are transformed - I am ceaselessly revealing Myself to each of you, more and more. Compared to what is coming, the ways you “see” Me in this life are like “seeing through a glass darkly” or “in a mirror dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12). *But it’s still seeing.* Prophecy and tongues are two ways that you see through this dim glass (vv 8-12).

The things that Jesus’ first disciples did physically, you do by the Holy Spirit. You follow Him, hear His voice (John 10:16), draw near to Him, and sit at His feet and listen to His teaching (Luke 10:39) through the Holy Spirit. And what does this feel like? It does not feel like thinking about a book, it feels like talking to a Person. That is what you are doing, as My Spirit reveals Jesus to you through the word, as He illuminates the Father in the Son through the Scriptures to you. It can feel like seeing, like hearing, and like hugging Jesus as you get to know Him through the Spirit illuminating Him in the word to you and as by the Spirit you walk with Him throughout the day. By the Spirit you walk with Jesus and you talk with Him. What was lost in the garden is restored, not as fully and perfectly as it someday will be, but so much more than you have even now ever dreamed. You can have so much in this life. That is the question - how much of this relationship with God that was lost can be and is restored now by the indwelling Holy Spirit?

In the next stage of the story, the “temple” of God on the earth will change again. You will never lose the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will never lose you, but things will get better still. So much better, just as the “temple” in every stage has been so much better than the last. First the Son was sent to the earth, and then the Spirit was poured out on the earth, but in the end of the story, even the Father will come and live upon the earth! Then ALL three members of the Trinity will dwell with their human image bearers on the new and renewed earth. In that day it will be announced that “the dwelling

place of God is with man” (Revelation 21:3 ESV) and in the city that comes down from heaven to earth, “*I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb*” (21:22 ESV). God Himself will be the temple! Even the Father will be the temple! The ideal of “God with man” will be fully fulfilled. That is what will be so glorious that all your knowledge of God now is like a dim mirror compared to that kind of “face to face.”

In the meantime, however, what you have of God through the Holy Spirit is still far more than you realize. I made it very clear in my word that what you have is better than what Moses had. And Moses was known as “My friend.” Or rather, “The Lord would *speak* to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exodus 33:11 NIV). Our two-way communication, and My speaking to him, was what made Moses My friend. Jesus called you His friends, all of you, everyone who believes in Him and obeys Him. And again, the sign of His friendship was *revelation*: “All that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15 ESV). Now, after Jesus returned to My right hand in heaven, you who believe in Him and obey Him are His friends as He reveals Himself to you by the Holy Spirit. And what you have by the Spirit is better, far better, than what Moses had by the law. Your two-way, intimate, ceaseless, communication and communion with the Holy Spirit is more intimate, more helpful, more comforting, more glorious, more near and close and personal (by far!) than what Moses had when he spoke to Me “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11 ESV).

My word never, ever, ever says or implies that any of you who have the Holy Spirit inside of you should ever be jealous or envious of Bible characters who lived in another time, though it clearly states that they would be jealous of you. Jesus when He was physically present told His disciples “For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it” (Matthew 13:17 ESV), and then

He said that having the Holy Spirit on earth instead of His physical presence would be better still! It also says,

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (1 Peter 1:10-12 NIV).

No Bible character thus far has had as much of God, or more of God, than you. Whether they saw manna from heaven (Exodus 16:35) or a pillar of fire by day and cloud by night (13:21) or talked with Me as a man to his friend (33:11), you have more. The Holy Spirit in you is better (John 16:7). You have the best part of the story, the part the Holy Spirit told the prophets about, the part even angels long to look into. If you envy Bible characters, you're missing what is yours. The Holy Spirit in you is the best thing yet, by far. And again, it wouldn't be fair of Me to say that if you couldn't ask Him personal questions and receive personal answers. But you can. Moses could, Abraham could, prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel could, and what you have is better than all of that. *You have what Jesus had.*

The Holy Spirit who descended upon Jesus from the Father in the form of a dove at His baptism (Matthew 3:16) is the same Holy Spirit that Jesus has now poured out on you (Matthew 3:11; John 16:7; Acts 1:4-5, 8). You have the same way of being intimate with God that Jesus had while He was on the earth. While Jesus was human in flesh on the earth, He heard from and spoke to and communed with and communicated with His Father through the Holy Spirit. He received power from His Father through the Holy Spirit. He modeled

what your life should look like on the earth, as a human, in flesh, filled with the Holy Spirit. He had no difficulty hearing from God! He always did what He saw His Father doing (John 5:19), and He saw what His Father was doing by the Spirit. His hearing and His seeing came from the Spirit.

If Jesus was not pitiable on the earth, neither are you. If Jesus was not alone or lonely from His Father on the earth, neither are you. What Jesus had is what you have. That is why this age is better. There is no limit on how much I can talk to you and reveal myself to you, each of you, personally, in every moment of every day of your life. I am always speaking, if you will listen. I am happy to answer your questions. That is what Jesus had, and that is what you have. My thoughts towards you are more in number than the sand (Psalm 139:18), and I'm happy to share some of them with you.

When you get to heaven, our relationship will be personal. I won't just quote Bible verses to you—you would be very surprised if I did—though you do hope I will say “Well done good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21). I will answer *your* questions, I will judge *your* deeds (2 Corinthians 5:10) and *your* careless words (Matthew 12:36), I will give each of you a name that no one knows but him and Me (Revelation 2:17). That will be very personal. You can have the same thing on the earth, now, as the Holy Spirit “pulls alongside” of you throughout the day.

This is not just something I do to guide you in the biggest decisions of your life or to heal you of the biggest traumas of your life. My word never sets a limit on how much I can speak to you. I want it to be ceaseless. All the time. I want you more than you want Me. That is what Jesus had in His ceaseless dependence on Me. That is what you have as you “abide in Him” in ceaseless dependence the way a branch ceaselessly depends on a vine (John 15:1-4). Hearing from Me is part of abiding. Obeying, trusting, hearing, they all are part of abiding, of what that means. Jesus' word abides in you (15:7)—that

too is part of what the Holy Spirit does as He explains the word of Jesus to you, as He reveals Jesus to you.

What you have is more than what the prophets had. What you have is what the Son had, for you are called sons of God and the Spirit you have been given is the Spirit of adoption as sons (Romans 8:15). If the prophets had visions and dreams, you can have more (Joel 2:28-29). If the prophets conversed with Me, you can converse with Me more. If the prophets could hear from Me, you can hear from Me more. *The intimacy of sonship is greater than merely being a prophet, not less.*

As you meditate on My word “day and night” (Psalm 1:2), you commune and converse with the Holy Spirit who inspired it, and you are blessed. You are close to Me. I can answer any question. If you draw near to Me, I will draw near to you (James 4:8). You can “draw near” by just saying “Hello.” It’s not rocket science. I am SO ready to talk to you. *Jesus was crucified for that.*



Epilogue: Another Story



Once upon a time there was a mother and a father who would never divorce. They were perfectly united. They were One. Their love was the most perfect love in the world.

They were completely faithful to one another. They had no children with anyone besides each other. No one could have that man for their father without having that woman for their mother, and no one could have that woman for their mother without having that man for their father. No one would ever belong to either of them without belonging to both of them.

And because the Daddy and the Mommy were perfectly united, the only quarrels in the family happened between the children. The desire of the Daddy's heart was that the children would learn to love each other and get along the way their parents did—"that they may be one as we are one," he would say. The Mommy heard this, and she did her very best to teach the children to love each other with all the influence she had on them, whenever they would listen to her, for oh, she did love the Daddy so!

The Mommy and the Daddy were not jealous of each other. Ever. If a child cried for Mommy because he wanted to be nursed, the Daddy was not jealous. He would scoop that child up and carry him to his mother and place him in her arms. If a child was crying for her Daddy, Mommy was not jealous. She would pick that child up and carry her to her father. The only jealousy that ever arose within the family was between the children; the parents had none.

The Daddy did not feel jealous when he saw the mother holding and playing with and nursing her children. She had wanted to stay with them. She was a mother who had wanted to stay with her children and nurse them herself—she didn't want anyone else to feed them with a bottle while she was somewhere else. No matter how many grander places she had been and could be, there was nowhere in the universe that she would rather be than down on the floor with

her children in their mess, right where they were now, at the developmental stage they were in today. And the Daddy also had wanted that for her and for them; he had wanted the Mommy to stay with the children forever and never leave them alone like orphans are alone, not even for one single minute!

But the Daddy knew that the Mommy would not be able to stay with the children like that unless he provided for it. So he went out from the comfortable place where he could have stayed and into a difficult world, and he did some unspeakably difficult things out of his love for his family, did things for his children that they could never have done for themselves, asking nothing in return. And after all his sacrifice, which was greater than his children could ever truly understand, he had been very successful, so that now he could afford to give his children anything they asked him for. But the thing he was most excited to give them was the gift of their mother being with them, being with them forever.

So when the Daddy saw the mother nursing their children, he wasn't jealous. He was gazing at the scene with unspeakable joy and thinking, "This is worth dying for." How could he be jealous of what he would die for?

However, as is common among children, the children did not appreciate their parents as much as the parents deserved. They were still learning to appreciate their parents, and sometimes they learned to appreciate one parent more quickly than the other. So it was that some of the children did not appreciate their mother yet as much as they did their father, and some of the children did not appreciate their father yet as much as they did their mother.

The first group of children thought their mother had just given birth to them so they could have a relationship with their father, and that she didn't really do much of anything else anymore after that, as if they had outgrown her. They didn't think of her or thank her or try to have a relationship with her very much; they just wanted to play with Daddy.

And so these children sat with their noses glued to the front window waiting for Daddy to come home, and they missed out on the fact that while he was at work, Mommy was distributing gifts that were from him. And when they skinned their knees, they would just cry by the window and know that Daddy would kiss it and make it all better when he got back, not realizing that Mommy would be happy to kiss it and make it better right now. And when they missed Daddy, they didn't realize that if they had run to Mommy and told her

they missed Daddy, she would have called him on the telephone and put them on to hear his voice again while they waited for him.

But even when the children missed Daddy and ignored her, Mommy was not jealous. How could she be? She was the one who had taught the children about their father, the one who had given birth to the children and first brought them to their father. She loved the Daddy far too much to ever be jealous of him. She was so happy every time she heard his name on their lips. She knew how much he had suffered to be able to have this family, and how much he deserved it. She just kept changing the children's diapers and preparing their meals and loving them, even when they didn't realize that the help they received came from her.

But the Daddy noticed, and he was grieved, and he talked to the children about their mother. He would say things to them like, "Your Mommy loves you so much. Do you know what a wonderful Mommy you have? She takes such good care of you. She is always there for you. She is the most comforting person in the world."

And when he left for work in the morning and they clung to his knees and cried, he would say, "It's actually better for you that I go to work, so that Mommy can be with you and stay with you. I'm not leaving you like orphans! I'm leaving you with your own mother. And I'm also coming right back again, OK?"

And so every child who listened to their father eventually came to appreciate their mother, because Daddy taught them to.

On the other hand, some of the other children had not learned to appreciate their father as much as their mother. They knew he had left his credit card with them so they could buy whatever they needed with his authority, and some of them seemed to only mention his name when they wanted to ask for something, and the rest of the time they just talked about Mommy. They talked to their friends more about the fun and exciting things Mommy did with them and the wonderful gifts she gave them than about how incredible their Daddy was and how much he had sacrificed for them. They even formed clubs based on who got the same kind of birthday present and excluded their siblings who had gotten a different present from Mommy.

But the Daddy wasn't jealous of the children enjoying their mother. Daddy and Mommy were far too united for that. He wasn't jealous about the gifts—he

had paid for the gifts so that Mommy could give them to the children, and so that Mommy could teach the children how to use their presents to help Daddy and to go with him to do the things he did. That was the plan. So he kept paying for everything, even when people forgot to say “Thank you.”

But the Mommy talked to the children about their Daddy. In fact, that was her favorite thing to talk to them about. She would say, “Do you know how much I respect your father? Do you know how much he has done for you? Do you know how incredible he is? What I want most for you is to grow up to be just like him. Everything I do for you is so that you will grow up to be like your father.” And she would tell them stories about Daddy and tell them to obey Daddy, and if anybody disobeyed something Daddy had said, they would hear about it from her!

Yet it hurt Mommy’s heart whenever her own children were afraid of her. They didn’t need to be afraid of her. She was their mother. She had given birth to them. She was One with the father they trusted. She would never hurt them. She could only ever be good to her children. Even if their brothers and sisters sometimes got so excited when Mommy got down on the floor and played with them that they made lots of noise and frightened the little ones, it could never change how good *mother* was.

She snuggled with the children who came close to her, and she loved her children who didn’t come close just as much—or maybe, with an aching heart, she loved the ones who pulled back from her just a little bit more.

And she waited for them to understand.



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