



I CAN NO LONGER HEAR
THE MUSIC

BY ERICKA CLAY

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Quiet

The other night when you were clinging to my dreams
You felt alive, but still, I knew you were dead.
The whole of you was the way I remember it:
Slicked-back hair and black mustache,
Coffee-soaked skin and a way of not saying
Anything that would make me think
Maybe you would never say anything at all.
But she says differently, you know
How you would bark and scream at her
And her own mother who wouldn't say
Anything either because what can you say
When all the words bleed out and there's nothing
Left to back them up?
And I think about that. How infuriating.
How impossible. To be a kid, set against
a restless 1970's night, screaming obscenities
In your front yard because saying it inside
Would mean imminent death.
The bark lost its bite, supposedly,
But you'd still offer it, loud to my little
Girl ears, offset against your quiet,
Like being one way, only to become another.
And there I am in her very small body,
In the front yard of my mind, not screaming
Profanities at your face but telling
you how deeply loved you are
And that maybe your quiet
Was where you should have lived most.

The Woman I Used to Be

My body is becoming as old as I thought it once would be. But the reality is jarring. Apparently, I have arthritis in my spine, and my eye has developed something called “white space”—a benign condition that my optometrist calls “a whole lot of nothing.” That made me giggle, and how, too, the rest of me is following suit—becoming “a whole lot of nothing” as the years wear on and so do the very cells inside of me. It’s yet another reason I’m fascinated by the God who loves me so, knowing He’s not going anywhere but closer to me as I get farther away from the woman I used to be.

Dominion

Do you remember
What no one remembers
About the springs driven
Through newly-born ground
And the way birds flew in a vast
Capacity against the color blue
Even though there was no word for it?
Two humans aground in their aching,
Devoid of stopping, just that one
Second, to look at all
That had been created—
A secret garden where flesh
Felt the silkiness of dirt,
And the moist membranes
Of their olfactory nerves
Could still smell that newness,
A privilege they weren't even aware
Was something worth noticing.
And after hearts were broken
And bodies clothed,
A whole line of years and time
And entitlement where dominion
Encroached on dictatorship
Spurned forth from the ground—
A sickly-seeded evil
We call progress,
Choking out the bloom
And flush of a newborn
World.
And what was lost

Wasn't just those birds,
That blue, that dirt,
That newness,
But the way those two
Looked at each other
And loved so fearlessly
Because they didn't even know
To fear themselves.

Forever an Israelite

Yesterday, I was scrolling through YouTube and found a *60 Minutes* clip about people who are in "real" relationships with their AI companions.

I, of course, didn't click on it because I didn't feel in the mood to tear my clothes and cover myself in ashes (feels more like a weekend thing, you know?).

Everywhere I look, there are people searching for God's love, His eternal peace, and they don't even know it. So instead, they look to their manmade devices, their manmade ideals, their manmade religions, and end up losing the point completely.

And I am one of those people, too.

Forever an Israelite, I suppose, wandering the hot desert as He patiently waits and looks on with love, just like a parent whose deep concern for their child leads to letting them stumble back into their arms.

So here I am, stumbling, world-weary and knowing that I'm no better than a woman all alone, staring into a screen.

The only thing I have that she doesn't? The hope of Someone who loves me more than I or anyone ever could.

Evaporate

Liquid in all its forms
Is still liquid,
Like the night my eyes
Melted into too many tears
Only to be taken up
Breath-like,
Spirit-like,
And re-entered into a world
Where they were inhaled
By the one who made them.

Dried Tinder Set Alight

Yesterday, my daughter and I were at a rehab facility visiting a friend. As we were leaving, I noticed a cluster of women in wheelchairs. Their bodies were battered and beaten, hunkered inside of themselves so it was hard to distinguish even a little bit of flame within them.

But God sent me a quick flash of what these women were as girls—wide-eyed and open to the world around them, like my daughter walking next to me. Blue-eyed and blonde and ready to take on the same world that beat these women down.

I know now, after forty years of trying to subdue my flesh, my own shell, that it's not the outside that lives fiercely against a world willing to break it. It's the inside, our dried tinder set alight with God's breath, His Spirit, that keeps us resilient even when our bodies, our minds, refuse the same course.

“People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7

Two Bereavements

If one thing hurts,
It's not the only thing.
In fact, it doubles on itself,
Splits free like mitosis,
And becomes an additional entity
like crying for the one you lost,
Only to realize you've lost yourself too.

Running Through My Matrix

I'm letting space infiltrate my brain and lungs again.

I get deeply focused on the same thing, wearing it round and round until it's threadbare, and I take to mending it.

A friend of mine and I were discussing how raising kids with ASD and ADHD has given us an opportunity to look deeper within.

And I know I'm on the spectrum.

It used to bother me, my differences. But I also see how God uses them. I think I might disarm people. I imagine it might be like looking at a child and thinking, "They can't harm me."

And I suppose that's what I want deepest in my soul. Not to harm you. And not to harm me either, although I'm not always great at that second part.

I've been given way more than I'm even worthy of, God knows.

And even in my shortcomings, the bewildered genetics running through my matrix, He gives me the opportunity to remove the mask and look others in the eyes, even though eyes have always been my Achilles' heel.

But He breathes gently behind me, guiding my chin, working my hands, and showing me all that can be accomplished, in spite of me.

I Can No Longer Hear the Music

It's You, me, and nothing
But no noise and the silence
That comes from watching
Everything I can't control.
I call it meditation,
My husband calls it anxiety—
My daily offer, my daily sacrifice
At Your feet. The fool I was,
Once young and in love with You,
And now I'm old and in love
With You, feeling out the nooks
And crannies of lifelong devotion
And skin rippled with my heart's
Regret. But I don't regret jumping
Into the only relationship
That has withstood my (un)doing
Because of everything You did,
and do, and will always do,
Even when I sit and wonder
Why I can no longer hear the music.

Further and Further Away

Is there anything harder than removing your heart, watching it grow legs, and then leaving it at the side of the road?

No, probably not.

As a mother, this is my constant feeling, but also, inside that heart are my insecurities, my wrong turns, my doubts, and the revelation that the way I think is different, not the same. That I'm alone in the world with my thoughts, even when I'm not lonely.

And for all of these things, to the third and fourth generation, amassed and alighted within a single small body, one not my own, loosed into a world I'll never even conquer.

But He tells me sometimes that all this worry is for nothing; to cast my cares on His shoulder, for His yoke is easy and his burden is light.

My yoke is set to choke me, and my burden is set to let me drown.

So, I exchange the one for the other, watching His grace fill my cracks and lead her feet as she keeps walking further and further away.

Whirling Dervish

What happens is what you'd expect
to happen, watching the quietly loud
form arms and legs until it's running
around you, whirling dervish-like—
its tune set to the thoughts
you've always had a hard time taking
captive.

And all you want is to know its heart
because you wrongly assume
all new hearts are good, more pure,
but honestly, they're only blank-slated
and underlying with a sin that's been
passed down since God made time.

And eventually, it does happen—
the new heart speaks, and it's a beautiful
sound until it isn't, pressing into circular
cycles that make you lose your mind.

Are I enough?

Are I doing this right?

Am I ruining the heart?

Don't answer that.

For a long time, you forget the God who made time,
And all your answers are weak and brittle,
And swept into piles you try to sort
And categorize.

But then it speaks again, this time louder,
stronger, and it no longer has anything
To do with what you've done or didn't do.
And it becomes its own entity,
Frankenstein's monster.

What have you done?

But then the God who made time sees your own heart
No more purer or less ruined, and He reminds you
Of how you're in the now, cognizant of your every sin,
The one passed down and the coagulation of all
You've created, and how He takes it all from you,
Then, now, and for always and how He'll
Do the same for the heart He's let you hold.

Hand on the Hatchet

Once upon a time, my dreams were big. I wanted to be published and well-known and for everyone to love me.

Now my dreams are bigger.

I want to serve my husband and my daughter even when that evil niggling serpents itself around my shoulder.

"What happened, Ericka? Where did you go wrong?"

But everything is so right.

My daughter has done a 180. She's focused on being a nurse and will be volunteering at the hospital where she wants to work one day.

My husband has a new job, and we continue to walk together through the valleys and over the hills with God's goodness leading us both.

And I'm becoming far less a stranger to what it really means to dream big. It's the fattening up of all you've ever wanted, then hand on the hatchet, releasing it back to the One who's dreamt the dream we all are living.

It's watching the old dream die so the new one can take flight.

Vernon's Dad

Vernon's dad walks the streets, guitar slung
across the front of his stomach with the air
of someone who regards it as a part of himself.
And that's what Vernon's grandfather says, the man
who smells of beer and loss like it's a nightly
celebration to forget to remember.
And Vernon's dad does, too, but it's not much of a choice
I hear because Vernon's grandfather talks about the genius
Inside of his son's head, the way he used to make
Music like you and I make spit.
But there's something about genius
That can take a dark turn, can offer you
A bit more than you can chew, so it's no wonder
Vernon took to burning it away with a needle.
When I watch Vernon's dad walk by my house,
I thank God for music and guitars and pray
He's passed the genius down to Vernon
Who will one day have to choose which way
to celebrate.

The Sitting Still, The Staying Armored

I am breaking ground on things I thought I'd never see come to fruition.

I've prayed for so long to have a healthy mind and to truly know what living in Christ's freedom feels like.

And I'm there now.

Here's what I've learned: it has nothing to do with me. There's no amount of "goodness" I can accomplish.

There's only the sitting still, the staying armored, and knowing the voice of my Lord.

Growing up, Mother Teresa was a formidable character for me. How could I ever live up to her greatness and be the perfection God requires?

But here's another thing: the only perfection He requires is through the perfect sacrifice of His beautiful Son, who took our place, and now?

Now we see freedom.

As for Teresa? She said once that she doubted God's existence, and it made me like her all the more.

Because then I finally knew. I had no one to live up to but the person God has always known me to be.

Perspective

I am weak with all I thought
this was going to be,
yet strong in the hope
of who You are.

Fixing and Finishing the Work

When I think about Jesus, I think about women. All the ones He loved and honored. From the woman at the well, to the woman threatened by a stone-throwing mob for her sins, to His own mother who lived a lifetime with the promise of His greatness, His inevitable end.

So why then did Jesus only choose twelve men as His apostles?

Good question, because as we know, Christ never does anything by chance.

When we look at God's complete body of work, we must go to the beginning—our beginning in particular because the beginnings of everything God has or will ever make are beyond the finite boundaries of our minds.

There, in the garden, Eve ate the apple, and Adam, her Adam, watched on with feeble spine and listless hands.

Eve, and those of us she's spawned, have no issue with stepping up and taking over. Our issue? Stepping back and being led.

And granted, we need strong, smart, gentle, and loving men to lead, because without men like that, what's the point of anything?

We need men who look to Jesus as their ultimate guide.

So, this isn't about gender restrictions or a trumped-up game of "who can do it better?".

This is about fixing and finishing the work our Lord initiated—a work we, as fleshly beings, attempted to destroy.

And here in His goodness, He lets us work with Him to rebuild, renew, and rebirth something beautiful.

So, who are we to demand a "better" role in this process, the very process we sought to destroy in the first place?

Bigger

The older I get,
the bigger You are.

The Dance of Our Feet

Conviction¹ is a beautiful thing.

It's the Holy Spirit burrowing deep within our chests, knocking His knuckles

against bony rib, and reminding us that we are not invincible.

But like all things, conviction can become a jail cell if we seek to weaponize it.

There's a forever kind of freedom when we live following God's laws, but what about turning what's not written law into a strand of imperatives we require of our brothers and sisters?

Who, might I ask, is playing God now?

I've known people to claim that drinking alcohol is a sin.

I've known people to claim that only true followers use the name "Yeshua" instead of "Jesus."

And I've loved these people with a grace gifted to me by God.

Because even though our convictions are different, there's a sweet trace of grace trailing through our desires to keep our brothers and sisters from stumbling and to help them live well.

So, may we not require each other to live up to our own standards, but to allow God the ultimate authority in directing the dance of our feet.

1. <https://preview.convertkit-mail2.com/click/dphec0hzhm/>

aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuYmlibGVnYXRld2F5LmNvbS9wYXNzYWdlLz9zZWFFY2g9Um9tYW5zJTIwMTQmdmVyc2lvbj1OSVY=

Thank You

When you say thank you,
who do you say thank you
to if you don't know
the One to thank?

Something other than ourselves.

We're updating our home.

There was a period of time yesterday when all the old windows were out, and there was nowhere for me to sit or stand without awkwardly gawking at some poor individual trying to put the new ones up.

And the knocking is incessant. They're ripping down our old builder-grade vinyl siding and replacing it with new wood-look composite cladding.

These are beautiful, wonderful blessings that are very difficult for my brain to process.

I went to bed at six when everything was quiet and stayed blanketed in a prayerful stupor until I woke up this morning.

This is the kind of thing that used to bother me, but now I know it's just the way God has wound me so that I can tick without hesitation.

And what a brilliant metaphor when you think about it—how uncomfortable we all are as He tears away our old and tacks up the new, the painful feel of nails into flesh, crucified with our Lord.

And the brilliant way it feels to be something other than ourselves.

All My Evil

Look how neat
It's categorized
And put away, slammed
Metal drawer,
So all you see is a sweet
Jezebel smile
And the unconscious
Air of losing
The combination
To all my evil.

A Beautiful Possibility

As I live, ministry is woven more naturally through my life.

I used to be a perfectionist—a “pat on the head” type of kid who jumped higher than expected when given the command.

I liked that I could do things well. I liked that my reading level was much higher than my classmates and that anything below an A+ seemed unworthy of my time.

You know, all the things God isn’t grading us on.

So “church” was going to be one of those things I knocked out of the park too. And for a while, I did.

But there was a great chasm in my heart between the doing and the changing. Because, as often as God uses us to tend to others, He uses the act of serving others to tend to us.

And it wasn’t until I got this, until I gave over the exhausting act of being the “best” that God could minister to me at my worst.

So, ministry is no longer capitalized, but sits still with its lower-cased “m,” a beautiful possibility when looking into the eyes of someone God is waiting for you to meet.

In My Book

I scrolled for you in my Book,
and found you there
and everywhere elsewhere,
to the point that I read
the birds and trees
To know You more.

Finally Washed Clean

My old life was me sitting in the tub, waiting to die.

That seems dramatic. And maybe to a lot of people who don't have an old life, it is.

But I think there are a few of us who have been forgiven much, maybe much more than the average person.

I used to sit in warm water because water has always given me a sense of healing.

And when I think of my baptism, how that thrusted me forward into life with Christ, I think also how I was still suffering after the thrust, still dealing with depression and wondering why I was so broken when everyone else got to be so healed.

And it took me a long while to realize what a satanic lie that is.

Because the healing is an everyday thing, and sometimes you can't even see it for the darkness that surrounds this world.

And that's why **renewing our minds**¹ is so important. It's the remembering of what's been true from before we were even born.

He has conquered all. He will come again. We are finally washed clean.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012%3A2&version=NIV>

The Palm of Your Hand

Here, my love for You is bigger
I think
Then a trek to Africa
Or naked in a monsoon
Or bound to leave this world
With the money still under my
Mattress.
Here, my love for You is bigger
Than my eyes
That see no light
My hands that don't work well
Or the feet they took from me,
You know,
The ones that You created.
Here, my love for You is bigger
Than dirt and all the dreams
I dared to dream, five years old,
playing MASH for the mansion
And the sports car
Only to wake up to a world
That's infinitely large enough
To fit in the palm
Of Your hand.

All They Crave to Let Go

I've gotten to the point in life where I realize a lot of what I see in the world is a trauma response.

I'm not using that word lightly. I know "trauma" is all the rage right now.

But there are deep wounds cultivated from the beginning of time here on earth that surpass one generation and lead to the next.

And the way we wear those wounds is often quite revealing.

Sometimes this goes one of two ways:

1. The person engages and connects with a world that claims there is no sin, merely identity, and they wear their wounds as a point of pride.
2. Or the person can't stop knowing, feeling the truth no matter how hard they try to "fit in" and accept their wounds as who they are.

I often see God speaking to the second type of person because there's room to roam there. They've left the door to their heart ajar.

Yesterday, in our Bible study group, we were talking about the folly of protesting outside an abortion clinic.

Lives aren't saved when people are yelling.

But lives are saved when we sit with the walking wounded and say, "me too," walking through their doors and listening to the slow beat of all of they've endured, all they crave to let go.

Waiting for Change

I can feel it canyon-deep,
An aching desire to do what's
different,
What's better,
And don't we all
Want to be that "better"
version of ourselves?
But what if it's waiting for us
In the next world and this one
Is only meant for the prototype
Of what a heart looks like
When it's bare on the altar,
Waiting for change.

Where Our Help Comes From

I don't think I've ever seen a greater deception than "self-help."

Or maybe I have.

But I think this particular deception tends to affect the women I love most in my life.

From a variety of different diets, to all the ways you can work out your body until it disowns you, to the myriad of possibilities when it comes to burning off your own skin or needling in your eyebrows with ink all in the name of being better, there's a lot of "help" for ourselves out there.

But what's even more dangerous than that are the lies the world feeds us when it comes to the way we think.

There are so many different philosophies for women, everything from hustle culture to the "stay at home and live off the land and home-school your twenty-seven children or you're just not woman enough" mentality.

Anyone see a problem with this?

Raises hand.

When we're focused on what we should be, we aren't focused on who we are in Christ. And not to say having a side hustle is a bad thing (shout out to the **Proverbs 31 woman**¹) or that civilization would end if we all started homeschooling (in fact, your kids should thank Yahweh that I decided to homeschool mine considering she used to wallop them with plastic buckets for funsies).

What I am saying is there's a real folly in trying to live up to something God's never asked us to in the first place.

And I'm saying this as someone who has repeatedly made that very same mistake.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs%2031&version=NIV>

My prayer? That we (me included) can keep laying it all down at His feet as we trust the Holy Spirit and God's Word alone to be where our help comes from.

A Dog Circling

I keep missing the monuments
You erected to keep my feet
On course, my heart
In check, but there I go
Again, dog circling its vomit
Pretending the old and regurgitated
Is the new and profound.

Seeing Things Differently

If real life was the movie *Divergent*, I'd be from the Candor faction with a splash of Erudite.

My daughter? Total Dauntless.

Raising someone who is literally the exact opposite of you teaches you a variety of things, but let's hit on two main ones:

1. You're not the greatest type of person known to man.
2. Grace and patience don't well up naturally within you.

But that's where God comes in.

I've had to ask for so much grace and patience, it's a wonder I'm not on some sort of list by now (like the one I'm on at Walmart for spending a bit too much time in the toy section. It's not my fault. If you're gonna bring back Polly Pockets, then Ericka's gonna be playing with them).

It used to hurt loving someone so different than me, which says a lot more about me than the other person.

I was convinced that I was right, the world was wrong, and that if you'd only see things my way, then just maybe we could right this world together.

Hilarious.

Now, I see differences as yet another way God nudges me to let myself go. There He is, gently prying back these fingers until all of me is seeking all of Him, and this time, I'm the one seeing things differently.

It Won't End Pretty

I did a no-no.

I searched the internet.

It was to understand more about the **Proverbs 31 woman**¹, but I ended up on a pretty “popular” blog of a woman who seems to be promoting 1950’s nuclear family values over what Scripture actually teaches us.

And she does it with such venom in her heart.

I’m not going to call her out here because I’ve never been one to do that sort of thing (plus, the girls who unwittingly ignited the Salem Witch Trials thought it was a good idea and look where that got them).

But I do want to clear up misinformation, and hopefully, move us away from the divisive heart that lambasts our fellow sisters on the interwebs for merely being people in need of a loving Shepherd.

So, a few things:

- This particular blogger touts **1950’s outward perfection** as the Biblical model for all families.
 - **Reality:** many people living during that generation were told to swallow their feelings, leading to continued generational sin and heartache that we’re still discovering in our families today. **God does not require outward “perfection”** but an inwardly changed heart.
 - **Additional reality:** God creates all sorts of people and walks with us through all sorts of snares and circumstances Satan uses to trip us up, including familial fractures. It’s not our job to make everything kosher for the sake of looking “good.” **It’s our job to adhere to the Word of God, loving Him above all else and loving others around us, bringing peace to our families no matter what they may look like to others.**

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs%2031&version=NIV>

- This particular blogger believes **women should never work** (even single women) and that women must always stay in the home.
 - **Reality:** God has granted husband and wife (as well as single women!) autonomy and the **ability to make choices that best fit their family** according to His Word and His Holy Spirit. Cultural and societal norms change, but God's Word is forever, and **the point of the Gospel isn't to live out certain roles in a certain way but to be bondservants to Christ.**
 - **Additional reality:** Yes, women are to submit to their husbands (humbly and respectfully supporting yet actively admonishing when necessary – **Proverbs 27:17², Colossians 3:16³, 1 Thessalonians 5:14⁴, Romans 15:14⁵**) but husbands are called to gently love and lead their wives in the way of Jesus. **The relationship between these two people cannot be dictated by man, and it's truly a beautiful, symbiotic relationship**, not some sort of archaic model of interrelational misery.
 - **Additional reality: the purpose of this life for believers is to be sanctified through Christ, and He uses whatever training ground possible to do that within us.** It may be at home, it may be in the workplace, heck, it may be on the top of the Eiffel Tower. The point is, it's His call, not ours, where He wants us, and it certainly isn't the call of others who have nothing better to do than tear down their fellow humans on the internet.

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs%2027%3A17&version=NIV>

3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%203%3A16&version=NIV>

4. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%205%3A14&version=NIV>

5. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2015%3A14&version=NIV>

Gosh, that feels better. I read **James**⁶ yesterday and nearly copied and pasted the entire book into a comment on her blog but 1) she closed comments...naturally and 2) I'm not about that life.

So instead, **I'm praying for this woman, and I ask that you do too.** There's a lot going on there beneath the surface, as is the case for us, too, when we make pretenses in the name of Jesus. And I'm just telling you now, it won't end pretty for any of us if we don't repent and let God heal our hearts.

6. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%201-5&version=NIV>

I'm Sorry

I'm sorry I couldn't be
the "all" you thought I was
But at least He's
the "all" you'll
Ever need.

A Gift I've Never Deserved

For a long time, everyone else's life was the right one.

And there were a few who had really nailed it.

This became a constant reminder to me:

Ericka, you're just not good enough.

Ericka, you'll never win.

I am, how would you say, frighteningly competitive?

It's something God has and continues to work on me.

But on this side of the coin, I look back and wonder at my thought process.

God didn't give me any other life than this one.

I have abundance, and I'm not talking materialism here.

I have the honor of forever being in the court of the one True, High King.

So maybe it's not about winning or striving or doing better.

Maybe it's just about receiving a gift I've never deserved.

Risen

Deeply seeded within the ground
And there you go, tendrils breaking
Forth,
Dominating the dirt of the earth
Of my heart,
And bursting forth,
Stalk straight, branches
High,
A reminder that old hurts
Are no contest
Against the threat
Of
New life.

Count It All Joy

Yesterday, I realized how much I love to control things.

And maybe not just yesterday, but really every day of my life.

I had to cancel something pretty important for my daughter because of her eye infection, and the act of not showing up at the time dictated by my Google calendar felt like nails in flesh.

I talked to her about this, said offhandedly, “I hate when there are hiccups in life.”

And she said, “But isn’t that what life’s all about?”

She can often be much smarter than me.

And as I was walking angrily yesterday morning, and then stretching angrily after that, and then hand washing dishes angrily because our dishwasher caught fire Sunday morning before church (true story), God nudged me a little, reminding me about these hiccups, these small tests and trials accurately wedged within the pockets of my days.

Count it all joy, He says.

And I will.

Knotted

I untangle
And run
Only to find
Me knotted
In Your love.

Just a Blip

About a year ago, I decided to be fully myself.

And as alarming as this has probably been to several people in my respective circles, I'm not ashamed of it.

I'm finally free.

It used to be I was hyper aware of everything about me. The way I looked, the way I talked, the fact that my eyes were looking at someone else's eyes and then I'd start to wonder if I stared at them too long if I'd accidentally switch bodies with them and have to live out life like that recurring nightmare I had as a child watching too many episodes of *Quantum Leap*.

You know, girl stuff.

But now, I'm fully living out the fact that Christ died for me, this moment is just a blip, and even when I say weird things, people seem to actually like it to some extent, even if only because they're just relieved they weren't the ones that said it.

You're welcome, world.

So, I guess I'm just encouraging those of us who'd rather wear the masks than step into the beautiful souls God created us to be.

Just let them go. Put them down. Stop playing the "perfect" game and take a good look around you.

We're all a mess. We all need grace. And we all need to actually look each other in the eye from time to time.

But not too long (for obvious reasons).

Genie

I can make You a wish granter,
But what do You become
When the wishes aren't granted?

When Life Gets Lifelike

I've become a bit prolific lately.

I tend to do that when life gets very...lifelike.

And it has recently.

I'm working through a few things, one of which is emotional regulation.

Another of which is giving everything over to Jesus, no matter what my emotions try to tell me.

I sometimes don't know if I'm a good mother. I facilitate, I love deeply, I want the best and narrow way to Jesus for my daughter.

But I'm struggling with a lot of hurt and not being able to comprehend the particular tests and trials God is curating for my benefit.

And still. He is good. He loves me. He loves my daughter. And nothing can separate us¹ from His almighty Hand.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%208%3A38-39&version=NIV>

People Pleaser

God, forgive me
For putting air,
And dirt, and dust
And what returns
Back to what You've
Created, over Your
Creative hands.

Even So

Yesterday, I took a test to assess how I ranged on a scale for autism traits. I scored a 38 out of 50.

Things on that test that I feel in my soul:

- *Sticking to routines to feel regulated and more comfortable.*
- *Having to have everything organized to function.*
- *Preferring to be alone versus being in social situations*
- *Extreme difficulty adapting when there's a change in plans.*
- *Challenging to engage in small talk (I cope with this by asking people a million questions so I don't have to talk about myself.)*
- *Highly focused on my own thoughts or ideas (my first home is my head).*

There were several others. The ones I didn't connect with involve social interactions and the inability to grasp humor.

Which, I think is probably indicative of being higher functioning, more in the Aspergers category even though that's no longer a thing apparently, but I kinda wish it were.

Anyways, why am I even taking the time to write this? Because the words "even so" are written on my heart.

I can't tell you how many times in my past I was knocking on death's door. And I realize it was because I felt so different than other people (specifically other women) that I told myself that I wasn't meant to be in this world.

I must have been a mistake.

But *even so...*

- *Even though I listened to the lies, God kept sharing His truth with me.*
- *Even though I felt alone, I wasn't as He sat with me in my misery.*

- *Even though my brain had (and still has) trouble grappling with a myriad of things, He shares His grace through all my cracks and always leads me back to Him.*

So, whatever you might be struggling with, discovering about yourself, discovering about others or the world in general, He won't fail You.

He's the only One who can bring us peace.

Need

I give away little pieces
Of myself when she walks
Out the door and into a world
That hates everything about her.
But how good You were once upon
a time to a girl who left only
For the world to prove how much
She needs You.

As Deep Cries Out to Deep

There's struggle in the air.

I feel it on my friends and on myself.

I've lately come to hearing the words "count the cost," and when I deep dove, I'm not sure that I really did.

It's all for you, Lord.

And it still is, always will be.

But my bones are calcifying with the extra weight of somebody else's sin.

And then of course, the recourse—when my own sin comes out to play.

Like Paul says, I don't know why I do what I don't want to do.

And I don't know why others do the same.

But I do know, like a friend reminded me yesterday, that God is greater than the depths of my fear, the hole in my heart.

And as deep cries out to deep, I'll listen.

I Love You, I'm Sorry

What is it I'm trying to say to You,
to them?

What are the words that come
from knowing the Word You
Spoke into existence
before I was ever known to be?

What can I say except I love You,
I'm sorry, and I can't even fathom
Or understand the depths of what You
Are, let alone the shallow of all
I am.

Just a Sitting Duck

There are two passages I noted from John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*¹ that struck me.

1. **“What is this enemy that the Scripture calls “the world”?** Is it drinking and dancing and smoking? Is It going to the movies or playing cards? That is a shallow and ridiculous approach to holiness. It numbs us to the fact that good and evil are much more serious. **The Scriptures never prohibit drinking alcohol, only drunkenness; dancing was a vital part of King David’s life; while there are some very godly movies out there, there are also some very ungodly churches.** No, “the world” is not a place or a set of behaviors—it is **any system built by our collective sin, all our false selves coming together to reward and destroy each other.** Take all those posers out here, put them together in an office or a club or a church, and what you get is what the Scriptures mean by “the world.”

This first passage indicates that the world isn’t a list of “no’s” (things we should stay away from), but according to Scripture, it’s more of a deceptive mindset taken on by human beings and seems to culminate in the public arena...think churches, office buildings, clubs, etc.

Meaning? Unless we allow God to remove our masks and step into the whole person He originally created us to be, we’ll be just like these imposters with their dirty hearts—the same type that turned on Jesus and crucified Him.

And what’s more? We all have that imposter lurking deep in our hearts somewhere. As Jesus said, **no one is good but God**² (obviously making the point that He and the Father are one).

1. <https://amzn.to/45zCoed>

So, confession and repentance and constantly renewing our minds lead us away from worldly thinking, giving us the opportunity to truly commune with our Lord.

1. “If you read the saints from every age before the **Modern Era—that pride-filled age of reason, science, and technology we all were thoroughly educated in** –you’ll find that they take the devil very seriously indeed. As Paul said, “we are not unaware of his schemes” (2 Cor. 2:11). But we, the enlightened, have a much more common-sense approach to things. **We look for a psychological or physical or even political explanation for every trouble we meet...There is a whole lot more going on behind the scenes of our lives than most of us have been led to believe.”**

The second passage touches on the Modern Era and how our thinking as a society swiftly switched from being aware of the devil’s schemes to believing heaven and hell are foolish things and that there’s a more reasonable psychological or physical or political explanation for the evil of this world.

We are much more enlightened than our ancestors, are we not?

And yet?

We have higher depression and suicidal rates than ever, terrorism attacks, families turning on each other, etc.

So, who really are the enlightened ones?

Maybe the fact that we don’t acknowledge Satan even exists makes it even easier for us to be vulnerable to his attacks.

If you don’t know your enemy, then you, my friend, are just a sitting duck.

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2010%3A17-18&version=NIV>

Like Scripture says, we have to remain ready in the **armor of God**³ at all times to protect ourselves from Satan.

For those of us who refuse? We become nothing more than bags of meat for the prowling lion.

3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%206%3A10-18&version=NIV>

How Good

How good
a quiet little life
is with the ones
you love
and the God
who loves
them most.

The Sum of Our Thoughts

Lately, I've been thinking things that I'm not actually thinking.

Like maybe my daughter upsets me about something and the thoughts, "she'll never change," and "she'll always be this way" pop into my head.

And then God asks me:

"Who are you really thinking about here?"

And I have to come to the truth: myself.

Knowing the cycle of circular thoughts, being aware of how the flesh desires to suck you in and then spit you out is helpful in renewing your mind.

It's one of those obvious things, but unless it's a pattern of lived experience, it flutters away pretty quickly.

And how often do we forget the autonomy God has given us to control ourselves, including everything that worms its way into our heads?

I just feel like someone out there needed to hear this (other than me lol), because we are always more than the sum of our thoughts.

Reigns

God reigns
Over
the old world,
but do you
not think He
Reigns over
The new one
too?

Graceless Expectations

I often wonder why people hold requirements so heavy in their hearts.

And I think it's because it gives them an ounce of control.

A plus B should equal C, after all.

But the point of the Old Covenant is that God's people couldn't live up to either A or B, so C was a poor amalgamation of His children's inability to perfectly serve a perfect God.

And that was the point.

That is why we need Jesus.

So, it's frustrating when met with those who desire to keep the Pharisaical law in a way that lacks grace and fraught with the fearful desire to keep everyone in line.

Like playing God, if God weren't God.

We have freedom from human rules like **Paul says¹** and **Peter learned²**.

So, let's walk away from graceless expectations and walk into a pure and submissive heart to greet our Lord.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%202%3A16-23&version=NIV>

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%202%3A11-13&version=NLT>

Even Though You Love Her

I want it again—

The taste of You and me

and magic and the trees

And to be myself

Without being

the typical me,

Even though

You

love her.

We Never Suffer Alone

Why do bad things happen to good people?

If God truly is good, why is there so much suffering in the world?

These are typical thoughts of those who aren't in deep relationship with Yahweh, and I don't blame them.

I used to think the same things too.

So, let's dive a little deeper for a moment.

First off, **nobody's good**¹. Man was good in the garden. And then man turned on God to chase after his own desires.

And look where that's gotten us. You just have to skim the news for a hot five seconds to find out.

Secondly, suffering is a consequence of sin—man's incapability to obey God, and instead, choosing to fall into the trap of, once again, chasing his own desires.

Oh look. We're back we started.

So, okay, Ericka. Man can't be trusted and has mucked everything up. But why doesn't God wave His magic wand and fix it for us?

Because He loves us.

Yes, you read that correctly.

Do you have kids? Do they disobey? Do you then buy them a big ol' heaping scoop of ice cream after they've spat in your face and pulled out your hair?

Um, no.

You let them reap the consequences of their choices while still gently loving and supporting them.

Just like God.

Like I tell my daughter, "If I didn't love you, I wouldn't care what you do."

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2010%3A17-19&version=NIV>

And like us parents, God does care. And so, He uses our circumstances to lead us away from our own folly to (hopefully) put our trust in His design, not ours.

Also, how loving could God be if He didn't let us make our own choices, forcing us to love Him and each other against our will (which He lovingly gave us in the first place)?

When you know God's heart, that His mercies are new every day and the deep love He has for those He calls His children, then you realize very quickly that He isn't a part of the evil in which we're currently living.

He is, however, just and allows certain things to play out that were started back at the very beginning when we, as human beings, decided our own desires were much more important than giving ourselves back to He who made us.

And that is, my friends, why we suffer. And yet?

We never suffer alone.

Gently Blowing

Last year,

Was the year of sitting
In and stirring the pot
Of turmoil bubbling
Under my surface.

I sprinkled in a little
Of you breaking my heart
And her refusing my hand
And chopping each long
Day I suffered until
It confettied within my palm.

And there I'd go, releasing
Each pinpoint of pain,
Watching it strike the hot
Depths of all my fear
Until my fear was all I knew—
My little gift, my fleshly sacrifice,
Waiting for Him to throw me out,
And start all over. But He took

Each and every part
Of this broken heart of mine,
Keeping its beating heat intact,
And only gently blowing
Where my hurt grieved me
Most.

No Fence Sitters Here

There's a strange misunderstanding out there that Jesus is just a good guy.
And honestly that can't be true.

Why?

Because He claimed to be God.

So...

Either He's a lunatic who thought He was something He's not (the God of the universe), which I wouldn't categorize as "just a good guy."

Or He's a liar, which means He's definitely not "just a good guy."

Or He is who He says He is.

Ding-ding-ding.

We've been reading Hebrews at church and what an eye opener.

It's easy for all of us (believers included) to lull into the stagnant belief that Jesus is "just a good guy."

But Jesus, according to Hebrews, was "*appointed heir of all things, and through whom also [God] made the universe.*" (**Hebrews 1:1-2¹**)

Jesus, not the Big Bang, made the universe.

Wrap your minds, friends.

So, let's stop dancing around the obvious and either believe with a whole heart or turn away completely.

Because like Jesus says in Revelation, "*I will spit you out of my mouth, because you are only warm and not hot or cold.*" (**Revelation 3:16-18²**)

No fence sitters here.

So, Jesus? Definitely not "just a good guy."

Instead? Creator of the universe.

And all glory be to Him forever and ever.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%201%3A1-2&version=NIV>

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation%203%3A16&version=WE>

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1

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