

"THEN JESUS SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES, "WHOEVER WANTS TO BE
MY DISCIPLE MUST DENY THEMSELVES AND TAKE UP THEIR CROSS
AND FOLLOW ME."
-MATTHEW 16:24-26-

The Crosses
WE BEAR



A JOURNAL BY ERICKA CLAY

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THE CROSSES WE BEAR

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Love Endures All

"Love endures all."

It's an easy verse to miss or just skip over, especially if you've read it one too many times.

But can you ever really read it enough?

A writer friend, Don, shared his wife's painting¹, and the thought he shares, that *"God is often more on my side than I am,"* hits home.

I am my favorite worst enemy.

I second-guess everything. I question my heart at all hours. I contemplate deleting my blog more often than not because who am I to share anything related to our holy God?

But then he sends me a friend's blog post, and I see a picture of the peace God has for me even when I do my best to try to deny it.

Or the words of another friend² of my favorite verses about Jesus's yoke being "easy," and how this word really means "custom-fitted" or "bespoke."

She shares: *"Isn't it just like the Lord to make a custom yoke for us, especially as we face life's uncertainties, the battles of our age waging against light and darkness?"*

The world is on fire, and yet? He's made a place of comfort and peace for those who love Him.

And lastly, He had me read a book by my friend³, Mary Grace. This is the second work of fiction of hers that I've read that has aligned with the exact season I'm facing.

The protagonists are coming to terms with having to step away from their church to start healing the wounds they've neglected for so long.

Mary Grace does a beautiful job of revealing these hurts and sheds light on how easy it is to neglect ourselves in the name of "ministry,"

1. <https://donwhiteblog.com/2025/10/01/like-a-parent/>

2. <https://priscillakgaratti.com/index.php/blog/item/437-bespoke>

3. <https://amzn.to/4o4LrK9>

when our first ministry should be the very people God has given us to love and share Jesus with, within the four walls of our homes.

Love endures all. He endures me. And this means I can endure everything that comes my way, loving His people in the process.

His Ways Are Higher

Sitting and reflecting, I see the law, and then I see the heart behind the law.

For example, the Israelites were instructed to tithe in the Old Testament, but after Jesus's death and resurrection, tithing is no longer instructed.

Instead, what's instructed is what should have been the heart behind tithing in the first place – to give to God by caring for and loving His people, and this often means using the money He gives us to do just that.

It's easy sometimes to slip back into the mindset of the law. It's more tangible. It's surface-level and doesn't force us to dig any deeper.

And that's one of the main problems with it.

God is a God of depth. He has no floor or ceiling. He continues without end, infinite and bursting through our conscious minds.

It can feel like a relief when we try to control Him, putting Him into our own equation. If we do A and B, then He'll always give us C. It's like thinking that if we tithe and check all the boxes, then nothing bad will ever happen.

We'll always be "safe."

I wonder what the early Christians who were sawn in two would think about that. Or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who remained loyal to God regardless of whether He would have rescued them from Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace or not.

As these followers understood, there is no "safe" with our Lord, and praise Him for that. He will love us thoroughly, those who seek to please Him, and continue to test us to sanctify us and make us holy.

And more often than not, this involves the unexpected, the hard to understand.

As it says in Isaiah, His ways are higher than ours, and in that I'll thoroughly rest, seeking His heart as He purifies mine.

The Both/And of Everything

My faith is no longer either/or, even though I tend to be a pretty binary human being.

But this season has taught me a great deal, and there are a number of both/ands that God has revealed:

- **Just because you're no longer a member somewhere doesn't mean every person within God's Church isn't a brother or sister in Christ.**
- **You can disagree about something and still love someone thoroughly.**
- **Grace is God's beautiful gift of seeing the beauty in people, in situations that might turn out differently than you expected.**
- **The Holy Spirit is alive and real and sometimes makes Himself known in moments of uncertainty.**
- **Sometimes, others have a stirring in their spirits, too, but God may be asking you to go first – an often scary proposition.**
- **In the end, the only guarantee is what Christ has done for us, the ultimate sacrifice, and because of His bloodshed, how much easier it is to love and forgive.**

I was sitting in prayer thinking on these things, and reflecting on the idea of home church¹, and it's funny how God answered that prayer pretty quickly with a "not right now," confirmed through my husband too.

Instead, we're going to dip our toe into Saturday evening worship with a body that's close by and allow Sunday to be a day of walking in God's peace.

From there? God knows, and we'll be listening.

1. <https://erickaclaray.com/blog/selah/maybe-he-s-calling-us-home>

Before I Wake

*"For God does speak—now one way, now another—
though no one perceives it.
In a dream, in a vision of the night,
when deep sleep falls on people
as they slumber in their beds,
he may speak in their ears
and terrify them with warnings,
to turn them from wrongdoing
and keep them from pride,
to preserve them from the pit,
their lives from perishing by the sword."*

Job 33:14-18

A friend shared this verse with me and my breath caught in my throat.

This. This is what happened to me.

Ten years ago, I suffered through demonic attacks¹ at night for months. Even though it was horrifying, later on, after I gave my life to Christ one of those evenings (the demonic attacks abruptly stopping right after), I realized who was really in control.

God.

He was giving me the opportunity to look behind the veil of what's really happening on this earth. The evil you feel isn't something to be ignored—it's the reality behind what we can easily see.

And, if I'm honest, it's the evil that was pooling deeply within my heart.

I'm purified now by what Jesus did on the cross, but daily life is still life on earth, existing within the evil.

And so what a gift it is to turn to the Living Water to wash ourselves clean.

1. <https://heartoffleshlit.com/2020/10/09/joy-comes-in-the-morning-my-testimony/>

If you've experienced strange dreams and/or sleep paralysis, don't ignore them. It could be God reaching out to you.

Even Atheists Believe

I've always been a bit of a skeptical person, so the concept of childlike faith has often been lost on me.

But I see it now – the value of looking at my Father through the eyes of a child, that ability to completely trust and know that all will be well, even if I don't completely understand His ways.

When I was younger, I felt that way about my own father, and honestly, I feel that way now. But I know that's a gift, the ability to trust the man who raised you (if he even stayed to do the honor).

But if not, maybe it's harder to grasp the idea of leaning into God completely and fully when there hasn't been a man, a father figure, you can trust in your life.

So why start now?

Honestly, we all believe in something. Even atheists believe (and I've often felt my former collective can believe better than anyone. I mean, it takes a hardcore faith to believe something came out of nothing, especially since that very notion defies the laws of physics).

So what if instead of believing in the media, politicians, the latest fashion, that girl on TikTok, ourselves, we instead believed in something that won't lie to us and let us down?

What if we believed in a good Father, the creator of the universe – an entity that is pure fire and light and the only One capable of making a good thing out of the mess we've created here on earth?

I figure something like that is worth believing in.

You Are What You Think

My great-grandmother was diagnosed with schizophrenia, manic depressive disorder, and OCD. She mystified me when I was younger, those long boxes of Virginia Slims she'd buy when my mother and I would take her to the grocery store and the opened-mouth bass that hung on her wall that I believe either my great-grandfather or uncle had caught. And all those cups of milk she used to drink in her Campbell's soup mug – the elixir that I was sure was the reason she lived into her eighties on her own and was kept safe and sound during the night when some young gang bangers stole her air conditioner.

And all these years, I've worried I'd end up just like her.

Mentally, life's a struggle for anyone, let alone those of us predisposed to questionable genetics in that regard.

And I certainly am. I've struggled myself on the deepest levels, both as a nonbeliever and a follower of Jesus. But it's struggling when loving the Lord that's broken my heart most.

What was so wrong with me that I couldn't be one of the ones He healed?

A couple of things have happened that have changed the trajectory of my thinking, and therefore, where I am mentally:

- *First of all, I had to realize God has given me (and all who believe in His Son) the authority and power over the demonic, meaning any thoughts that are not of Him can be tamed. My issue? I feared Satan instead of realizing that through Christ, I had absolutely nothing to fear. His "power" is obsolete after what Jesus did on the cross for us, and therefore, he holds no power over my mind.*
- *I had to ask myself if I actually wanted to be healed. Like Jesus asks the blind man, it was the same question I had to hold up*

against my own spiritual blindness. Sometimes, there's something comfortable about hiding in your own darkness. The devil you know, you know? But man, can I tell you how much greater my life has been since walking in the light.

- *My identity is not in a mental health diagnosis. This can give me a baseline of where I am physically and chemically, but it does not determine **who** I am. I am a servant of God's and am beyond the detritus of this fallen world, something we have to be careful to remind ourselves of in a world that loves to label us.*
- *I used to convince myself that maybe I was putting too much stock into the idea of a spiritual battle. And I think we all end up typically in one of two camps: either we only see the world through a spiritual lens and put less focus on God's Kingdom here on earth or we don't believe in it whatsoever, which leads to the enemy concocting all kinds of schemes at our peril. I believe in the healthy middle, which is how I see Scripture laying it out for us. Take a look at *Luke 10:19-20*¹. Jesus acknowledges the power He gives us over the demonic, but He also points out how we're not to rejoice over this spiritual power we have through Him, but the fact that our names are written in heaven. It's important not to go down a spiritual back-patting rabbit hole, lest we forget the point of the Gospel and lead others off course.*

I am officially healed. I know that now. I do take medication, but as my very wise PCP has said before, medicine doesn't work if you don't believe it will. And I believe it will because God led me to it after years of prayer. But most importantly, He led me to His truth: that this may seem like a scary world – a battle nobody can win. But our Jesus has already won the war and with His help, we can slay any and all dragons that seek to destroy.

*If you're mentally struggling or would like some helpful reading material that Scripturally addresses this topic, I highly recommend *Battlefield of**

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2010%3A19-20&version=NIV>

*the Mind*² by Joyce Meyer and *The Bondage Breaker*³ by Neil T. Anderson. And even though I've yet to read it, I know Kyle Idleman's *Take Every Thought Captive*⁴ is exceptional. We've read his other works and studies, plus he's our old pastor. We've listened to the sermon⁵ this book is based on, and it's very well done.

2. <https://amzn.to/3KNpAs1>

3. <https://amzn.to/48nrfyv>

4. <https://amzn.to/4oc2Pwk>

5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgL AuRCu0ws>

The Crosses We Bear

I used to be angry that we struggled with mental health in my family.

It's a hard reality for a lot of people to understand (especially for those who don't happen to "believe" in it), not to mention those who wrestle with the concept that even though big pharma isn't necessarily a great thing (by any means), there are still some of us who benefit from the minds God created to make medicine that has helped to heal some of His people.

Sometimes, two things can be true at once. (And I get how hard this can be to grasp. I'm a very binary person myself, and God has had to do many things in my life to broaden my very narrow perspective).

Now? I actually see what a blessing it is to be sober-minded. I see that even though my brain doesn't act or react necessarily how I want it to, it doesn't matter. My Shepherd still watches over me.

And most importantly? It's a great reminder that there's nothing I can do to "win" His love, because if He can love me in this state, then he can love me in any state.

His love is beyond any striving for it on my part. It's a gift that's given because I am His and He is mine.

So, if you struggle, too, don't find the shame in it, friend, because that's a lie. Sometimes, the crosses we bear hurt more than we even knew possible, but how much more peace we will know in Jesus because of them.

Anxiety

It's being young,
controlling the air traffic
with your mind
and the moves
of your mother
before GPS
was even
a thing.
It's feeling
death as you
walk your dog
because how
dare you even
have a dog
in a world
that's bent
on killing
it?
It's moving
all the cards
into a precarious
castle,
waiting for them
to fall until
they do
one day in
September
when you're only
sixteen,
and the same

planes you
control
with your mind
have defied
you, flying
into buildings
instead
of the deep
blue freedom
you've granted
them.
It's knowing
the outcome
even when it
never truly
is the outcome—
a dark shadow
of reality
that could be
true, but even
if it is,
I've always
missed
the point.
That You
are sovereign,
I am not.
And You knew
those planes
my mother
that dog
and my

wayward
mind
even
before
they
were
a
twinkle
In Your
heart.

Beware of Spiritual Busyness

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles."

This is the first part of verse 1 of Hebrews 12 in the NIV. The Message puts it this way:

"Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins."

I love that. "Spiritual fat." I think sometimes we cling to certain spiritual practices or ideologies as if those things will save us, when Jesus already has.

And right now, I'm personally in a season of throwing off everything that hinders, and what I've realized is that Paul separates what hinders from what's sinful. So, when you think about it, sometimes even the "good" things we seek and do can end up being harmful.

We found that in our own family. I think we succumbed to spiritual "busyness," a trap a lot of us fall into.

We have hearts that desire to help others, and sometimes, this in and of itself can become an addiction. Eventually, we find we're solving the world's problems when our own family is robbed of our time and attention.

A good friend of mine phrased it as "taking care of the church in your home first." And man, is she right. The believers within our four walls were given to us by God to steward and love well. And this is why Paul says in 1 Timothy 3, "If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?"

He can't.

I've felt this on an epidemic level, watching good families start to crumble under the weight of "spiritual fat." And my prayer is that we all take honest stock of where we're spending our time and attention, giving our best to the very people God initially blessed us with, because if we can't take care of those well, who can we take care of?

The Importance of Quiet

I think about how lonely Paul was and how loneliness was almost a catalyst for him to love God even more.

We itch when we're alone or claim we crave it, when really, it's an allergy that's hard to shake.

Alone means having to hear our thoughts.

And this week was a little lonely for me. I had a good chat during weekly coffee with two of my closest friends, but two of my other engagements were rescheduled, and I found myself craving the noise, the laughter, the closeness with friends.

But God used this week to remind me that quiet time with Him is important, too. It allows me to process all that's happening and take stock of what's pivotal this season:

- **Spending worship time together as a family.**
- **Embracing peaceful Sundays with our daughter and her boyfriend.**
- **Keeping in touch with our people.**
- **Making plans to visit with family.**
- **Praying and planning a ministry with my husband and praying over those we'll eventually get to meet (and hopefully help) through God's grace.**
- **Taking moments to give Him gratitude for all He's given me, all I don't deserve.**

I know things will get louder and start to edge on busy again, and I know He's preparing my heart and head for it. So for now, I'll rest here, my head against His chest, embraced in His peace.

The Gift of Repentance

We all have a little discomfort in our brains. It's that feeling of "something isn't right" – that late-night friend, cognitive dissonance¹, whispering in our ear.

I see this a lot, even as a Christ follower, our willingness to justify what shouldn't be justified because the deep-down thought of either having to change our views or do something about our sin is just a little too much to bear.

It's an easy trap, one we tend to fall into together sometimes, and that's when entire church cultures get started. And before you know it, the train has left the station, and there's no way to slow the thing down.

But here's what is so beautiful: God constantly offers us the gift of repentance².

In Malachi, God says, "Return to me, and I will return to you," and He says it throughout Scripture³.

If we fall into the trap of "once saved, always saved," using that as an excuse to live as we wish, then we're no better than the Romans Paul had to admonish⁴.

1. https://thedecisionlab.com/biases/cognitive-dissonance?adw=true&utm_campaign=21+Bias-es+-+Cognitive+Dissonance&utm_medium=ppc&utm_source=adwords&utm_term=cognitive%20dissonance%20is&hsa_mt=b&hsa_net=ad-words&hsa_ad=500704987098&hsa_src=g&hsa_cam=12416038273&hsa_kw=cognitive%20dissonance%20is&hsa_grp=119028028715&hsa_tgt=kw-300378741323&hsa_ver=3&hsa_acc=8441935193&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=12416038273&gbraid=0AAAAADQTTnurZ72r5wEaNZ2gT29ZTVhLj&gclid=Cj0KC-Qjwrc7GBhCfARIsAHGeW5VhLNA5a9yB_U79G2WtCrTQ6cWQ86Ak-MSWUxIte-qWB39Y9d44C2d4aApRdEALw_wcB

2. <https://www.gotquestions.org/repentance.html>

3. <https://www.openbible.info/topics/repentance>

4. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%206%3A15-23&version=MSG>

As we grow deeper in faith, deeper in love, deeper in real Christian community (and less into the trappings of surface-level "church" culture), then we know we have a choice to make: stop living off excuses and change the course of our behavior to be obedient to our Lord.

Loving the Prodigal Child

I keep thinking of the parable of the prodigal son. Not the son himself, nor his self-righteous brother, but the father in that story.

He stays patient, waiting within the realm of his kingdom. He doesn't track down his wayward son. He doesn't follow him to beg and plead with him to come home. He doesn't accept his son's sinful actions or justify them. He lets him veer off into his own folly, calmly waiting to thoroughly love him when he finally comes home.

That story is obviously representative of our restless hearts and God's unflinching love. But it also represents the model we take as parents when our children balk against the truth, and we are left to suffer from the weight of their actions.

It can be overwhelming. I'm overwhelmed more often than not. But the pressure valve, the release, is turning back to Him who knows our broken hearts. He doesn't just have one child or even a few who have proven to be willfully disobedient.

We all fall into that category, and the mercy and grace He pours upon us is unmatched.

A reminder that even though we can't control the poor decision-making of our children, we can control the weight of our response and the intensity of our love.

We All Get a Little Dirty

When Jesus washes His disciples' feet, they're reluctant to offer them to Him. But He tells them directly that unless they give Him their feet to wash, then they "have no part with Him."

This washing is representative of our spiritual dirtiness and how only Jesus can truly cleanse us in the ultimate gift of salvation.

But I was thinking about how the feet of the believer can still get dirty. This is a dirty world, and since we're to be in it (although not of it), we're often left with dark soles and dark attitudes.

Jesus points out that we're to wash each other's feet, and this is obviously not a one-time act like salvation. So what is it?

It's the act of respecting our brothers' and sisters' vulnerabilities, carefully placing them in our hands and gently washing them clean in the name of Jesus.

I think we often assume acts of service are mainly caring for the poor, the down and out – physically providing for those who can't provide for themselves, and yes, this is true.

But in our Western society, Satan's upped the ante on his game play, heading directly to the root of our minds, the root of our families, and making it feel like we can't even share what's really going on behind closed doors with the very people we're to walk this life with.

And I get this strong feeling in my heart that since his tactics are always evolving, so should ours. We need to be willing to go beyond surface talk and offer our "feet" to those who *should* be able to properly care for them.

But that can only happen if we're truly offering up our sins to God regularly ourselves.

A good friend and I started a mental health from a Biblical perspective group at church, and since that launched, she's been able to sit with so many people, just being a soft place for them to land.

This is being Jesus.

I think sometimes, we want to do "big things" for God, and in our small human minds, "big things" are often things that bring us our fair share of the glory.

This kind of thinking is so wrong, and I know that because I've thought it myself.

But like the disciples who were fighting over who was the greatest before Jesus got on the ground and humbled them, we too, need to stop forcing acts of ministry and instead, humble ourselves before each other, serving from a clean mind, a clean heart, and a willingness to follow our Lord even when it means helping to clean up somebody else's dirt.

Maybe He's Calling Us Home

We're praying about home church right now. It's this little flicker of light in our hearts that God's put there as we digest our current season¹, and in some ways I'm fighting it.

Who am I to even think this is a possibility? Shouldn't I leave that to the "experts"?

But if we're called to not only be students of the message, but teachers, too, and not only that – love our neighbors intensely – then maybe this is a road God is asking us to walk.

My husband has a passion for teaching others how to steward their finances well based on Biblical principles, and I have a passion for sitting with people in their pain and sharing what healing mentally looks like according to God's Word.

And we both share an intensity to be obedient to Jesus, even when doing so is, well, very difficult.

It would be a blessing to break bread and share the cup, celebrating what Christ did on the cross, so that we can tend to His sheep with His Spirit within us. And what a gift to gently point people to God's Word in the midst of their struggles.

But still, something so radically new is daunting, and so I'll continue to bathe it in prayer.

1. <https://erickaclar.com/blog/selah/what-church-really-means>

Giving Recklessly

It's human nature, our fleshly will, to crave love and acceptance – often in ways that end up alienating ourselves even further.

The antidote?

To deny our own desires and open up our eyes to those who crave the same. Because when we can fill their need for the same things we internalize, our own cup will be filled as well.

And I think we deeply know that – how community and connection can satiate us, whereas other idols we run to (social media, drugs, video games, alcohol, sex, etc.) may bring a temporary relief but never create the lasting sense of satisfaction.

So what does giving recklessly to others actually look like?

I think (as with everything good and holy we see in Scripture) that it looks like Jesus. Jesus's ministry was beautifully intentional. His heart ached for the spiritually lost, and he shared truth with anyone who would listen.

He was patient, kind, open-hearted, but He was also discerning and knew when to draw a line in the sand.

But most importantly, He relied on His heavenly Father, who guided His actions, a gift given to us through the Holy Spirit.

I think this message is pretty apropos, considering Thanksgiving is right around the corner. But honestly, Thanksgiving should be the theme of our lives. And it can be when we turn our hearts towards those in whom we can inspire gratitude.

What Church Really Means

We're in a strange season. And my heart is doing its best to process it.

For seven years, we've belonged to the same church – the one the Holy Spirit led us to.

And it's the same church the Holy Spirit is asking us to walk away from.

I started to notice His nudging two years ago, gentle pokes in my gut forcing me to look up and around.

I had gone from cheerfully serving and loving to becoming the twenty percent of that 80/20 rule, where only a small portion of the body within a church's membership is serving and tithing.

But, to be fair, I have the kind of Type A personality that can keep my head down and moving forward. So what was it really God was saying to me?

I think it's something He's concerned about in many Western churches. We become a more corporate structure seeking to "keep up with the Joneses" – the bigger, better, more prosperous churches that seem to have people busting out the windows.

But when I read Scripture, I see two things:

- **The crowds who liked the message until they didn't.**
- **The true believers who followed our Lord into death.**

And that latter group? There aren't as many included, especially not enough to bring the house down during a worship service.

I know God moves everywhere (I was baptized in a mega church; it certainly happens). But I also know our own personal seasons change as God sanctifies and our minds are renewed. We start seeing things differently, which is jarring, especially when we crave comfort, the same, normality, the everyday.

But again, when I read Scripture, I don't see a comfy seat, an air-conditioned room, an opportunity to complain about the music.

I see hearts laid bare before God and others, a commitment to honesty and transparency, a walk that is hard but taken in community.

There certainly isn't a right way to do "church," and I think that's because we *are* the church, brothers and sisters together, no matter the building in which we meet.

But there is a right way to obey the Lord's calling. And if we listen, we'll find the next step in the path that leads to eternity with Him.

The Hope of Your Truth

Couldn't I swear by my deep justice,
This sense that I'm wronged
And everyone I love?
But like the man forgiven
who doesn't forgive,
holding on to what is owed
instead of letting go
of all that's not,
I become less like
You, more like my
adversary,
clinging to excuses
rather than the hope
of Your truth.

Running Away

Writing *Return to Me*¹ has allowed me to do one of my favorite things ever: to quietly observe human nature and find the divide between the human heart and God's unending love.

And the more I live, the more that divide takes on its full character: fear.

It's fear that destroys us individually and collectively.

I know this because fear used to be my spirit animal. It followed me around, whimpering and nipping at my heels. I fed it, bathed it, petted it until it grew big and strong, and the only way to cope with the fact that it had become much bigger than me was to drink until everything around me became a manageable dull ache.

I no longer live in fear. Sure, it was a choice, but it was also a process through God sanctifying my heart. I started to realize and accept the power I have fully in Christ (**Ephesians 1:15-2³3**).

Another thing? I learned the importance of what's important and my place in God's hierarchy, which starts with the family he's bestowed upon me. Life with other people is hard, especially those we love most. And I found myself looking outward: *Who can I serve? Who needs me most?* All the time forgetting (as a good friend has put it) "the church in my own home."

If I can't make priority and steward well the very people God has given me to do just that, then nothing I do elsewhere can truly glorify Him. Why? Because it's not about Him at that point. It's about me trying to escape my own reality.

1. <https://erickaclar.com/coming-soon>

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%201%3A15-22%29&version=ESV>

3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%201%3A15-22%29&version=ESV>

I see this everywhere. And it sucks. I kind of wish I could unsee it and go back to nurturing my own fear. It's easier that way, being a part of the crowd.

But also, I never want to go back because I find true freedom in Jesus, and the fact that all I have to do is rely on His Holy Spirit to speak truth is a true gift. I no longer have to rely on myself, and therefore, remain victim to my own shortcomings—my own fear.

If there's one thing I would like to tell EVERYONE who claims Christ, look at your own home life first. Do you have a spouse? Do you love them, trust them? Put their opinions, wants, feelings before ANY other adult in your life? Do you allow your husband to have a voice or do you believe you can do everything better than him? Do you protect your wife and put her before everything else?

Do you have children? Are you nurturing them, comforting them, teaching them about Jesus? Are you having hard conversations and bathing them in mercy and forgiveness? Are you holding them accountable for their actions but doing so lovingly?

Or are you running away from them, from God, from the Spirit that works through you?

It's not always an easy question to answer.

A Soul Ready to Listen

I've been pulling off a major "no-no" lately.

I've been reading the Bible without any sort of guide (well, other than the Holy Spirit).

Typically, I'm an "imbibe all the information" kind of gal, but over several months, I've been listening less to what the talking heads have to say and much more to what our Lord speaks through His Word.

My issue, really, is three-fold:

- *Man will never really understand all the mysteries of God (just ask **Job**¹). And I think this is why Christ makes it so clear for us: love God, love others. Otherwise, we could end up falling into the trap of my second point below. ↓*
- *I think it's pretty prideful to label ourselves and pretend we know the "right way" to interpret Scripture. Yes, I think there is God's way of understanding His Word, but this comes through the Holy Spirit and prayer, not man's incessant need to label and categorize and be on the "right" team.*
- *When **Philip offers to interpret Scripture for the Ethiopian**², He breaks down Isaiah through the lens of the Gospel—that Jesus suffered and died for our sins and paid the price for our iniquity. He didn't give him a ten-point breakdown on the intricacies of believing one way over the other. He just offered a fellow brother in Christ the truth in love.*

So no, I'm not a Calvinist or an Arminian or a dispensationalist or any other theological "My Name Is" sticker that certain circles like to pass out.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job%2038&version=NIV>

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%208%3A26-40&version=ESV>

I am a child of God.

Too often in my life have I added an "and also" to that particular identity, pridefully clinging to my own intellectual gifting. And guess what? It's gotten me pretty much right where I am now.

We all just need Jesus, you guys. Really. And yes, there are absolute truths when it comes to following Him. But I promise, He will NEVER steer you wrong if you're willing to read His Word with a contrite heart and a soul ready to listen.

True Freedom

There are so many things I feel led to talk about.

One thing at a time, Ericka.

Okay, so let's talk about something weird (by American standards).

The spiritual realm.

So, here's (a paraphrase) of what I've been reading in *The Bondage Breaker*¹ that has a whole smattering of truth piled up on it like a plate at Thanksgiving:

The spiritual realm is all around us, but just like, say, germs and our immune system, as followers of Jesus, we shouldn't waste our time becoming obsessed with it.

My great-grandmother used to wash her arms up to her elbows. Not (mentally) healthy, right?

Instead, we know what to do. Paul outlines in Ephesians how we're to be vigilant, active in putting on **the full armor of God**².

This means **we stay in the Word, keep praying, remain faithful, and as God fights our battles, we partner with Him in keeping sober-minded** (and yes, you can have a glass of wine every now and then unless you're personally convicted not to do so...don't even get me started on how "sober" in this context is not aptly understood in some circles...but I digress).

When we know who we are in Jesus and that Christ already defeated death (and the Adversary, for that matter), we then know everything Satan tries to tell us or make us believe is **A BIG OL' FAT LIE!**

And we'll never have true freedom if we are frightened by Satan's schemes. That is a trick of the devil.

Instead? Breathe.

1. <https://amzn.to/3Ly9B1z>

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

Know that He is the Lord your God who goes before you. He won't let you perish in the hands of something that will one day no longer exist.

And keep your mind protected. Maybe don't watch so many horror films, you know? Maybe read a good wholesome book (I recommend anything by Charles Dickens) or make a goal of seeing a good friend every other week.

And pray. Prayer is talking to Jesus. That's it. It's telling Him how beautiful and wonderful He is. It's acknowledging the awesomeness of God. It's bringing the fear in your heart that begins to bubble at the feet of our Savior. And it's receiving His peace in a world that knows nothing of it.

Keep going, friends. And man, I shouldn't have mentioned Thanksgiving because all I can think of now is turkey and stuffing and gelled cranberry sauce someone geniusly put inside of a metal can.

Sixteen days and counting!

Little Specks of Dust

Yesterday, I spent all day working on a transcription file.

I requested an extension because the audio was so poor (I basically had to build the thing from scratch), only to wake up to the fact that I was denied the extension and the file was no longer in my queue.

All that time. All that (mediocre) money.

And here's what He's teaching me: it's not even about the transcription.

It's all about my heart.

I felt like doing my usual thing, and even dipped a toe in it: wallow, wail a bit, wonder why everything is so easy for everyone else except for me (she says as she pours her French press coffee and gets to spend the day in her pajamas).

Sigh...Ericka, Ericka, Ericka.

I tout transparency, but it's hard when you turn the magnifying glass on yourself. I grew up entitled, spoiled, everything handed to me on a silver platter.

And really, the best of intentions were involved (they always are), but I'm learning intestinal fortitude and the will to survive, carry on, push forward at the ripe ol' age of forty (whereas my husband learned it at the age of three while smoking his pack of Camels and hustling marks with "spontaneous" games of pool).

It's funny when you think the thing God gives you is for a specific reason.

Like, right now, we're in a pretty remarkable season of being able to work for ourselves from home. It came with several years of sacrifice to pay off EVERYTHING (cars, house, that loan I took out to purchase a professional tattooing kit...get excited for Christmas this year, Grandma!).

And I was under the impression that this whole transcription shebang was meant to keep some income rolling in and maybe one day allow

me to upgrade my kitchen (my dishwasher caught on fire a few months ago, my oven will only auto clean, and I'm only allowed to use one side of my sink because otherwise, I'll flood the house).

And don't even get me started on the ice maker.

But instead, He's showing me that it's not about the money, the new kitchen, all the places I thought I was going. It's about sitting with Him as He uses my situation and circumstances to cleanse those little specks of dust from my heart.

So, I'm not giving up. I've switched gears this morning and am studying for part two of my transcription certification test. And I know that even when more hills and mountains come my way, He'll certainly put them to good use.

He Keeps Growing Me

I feel like I should start a regular "things I'm learning" segment.

So here goes nothing for this week:

- *People's reactions will often be disappointing. When you're looking for a soft place to land, especially in another self-proclaimed Jesus follower, you might find that the ground is hard and rocky. This has made me angry in my walk, but God showed me how He uses these situations for me to give these people the grace He always gives me. And also, maybe it's a bit on me for expecting someone to react the way I believe they should react. Instead, I should seek my comfort in Christ alone and then turn to those who have a hard time with transparency and empathy because they're ultimately in search of that very same comfort too.*
- *What I'm doing, I'm doing for the Lord alone. And this might mean saying "no" to all the "good" things every Christian "should" do. The only "should" I need to listen to is the one that comes from the lips of my Savior.*
- *Sometimes, ministry is tending to the people in your inner circle, sacrificing your time and energy to help them see Jesus in the everyday. It doesn't necessarily come with a fancy title and all the "trimmings." Sometimes, ministry is a beautifully quiet affair only between you, Jesus, and His people.*
- *Actually, I'm starting to think the above-mentioned point is what ministry actually is, and we (especially us results-driven Americans) get it all wrong. Surprise, surprise.*
- *It's the softer, slower moments in life when God seems to be gearing us up for the next phase, something we can't see but know will be sweet and satisfying because it comes from Him.*
- *Stepping into my day, offering it to God, and allowing Him to*

write my daily storyline is far more pleasurable for me and glorifying to Him than me trying to work out my day the way I see fit.

I'm thankful He keeps growing me, and that we have the opportunity to be old dogs learning new tricks, despite what the world tells us.

He is always moving us forward in this beautiful Kingdom of His with no help from ourselves.

And may we, at the very least, stop throwing on the brakes and making more work for the One who just wants us to become what He's always desired us to be.

Being Bold for Him

I've been working on **my novel**¹ this weekend.

I know, I know².

BUT...we're in Dallas for our daughter's dance conference, and I've had nothing but time to sit and write a few words on my iPad.

The exciting part? I've added a new character, Daisy, who is Hellie's mother and the vehicle through which I'll be able to share the reality of mental health struggles in families as well as the nuances of the mother/daughter dynamic. And I think I've managed to pull off "**the funny**"³ in the process. Whew!

So far, the words have been pouring through my fingertips (all 721 of them...words, not fingers), and I'm pumped to see where God leads us with this one.

Also, I've changed the photos on **my blog posts**⁴. I was all about sharing some family fun with you guys, but after leaving social media, I've been way more engaged in "the present moment" and didn't want that to change, having to worrying about if I have the "right" photo. Plus, having to email myself photos from my phone is a total hassle and an affront to my laziness.

Kidding.

Also, I've reposted some blog posts I had originally taken down. Sometimes, I worry about sharing my heart too much, not wanting to offend anyone as I walk out this Christian life. But if what I'm sharing is truthful, from God's Word, and could possibly help someone, how can I not share?

I just have to remember that following Christ often means being bold for Him.

1. <https://erickaclar.com/blog/updates/no-longer-flopping>

2. <https://erickaclar.com/blog/updates/first-comes-first>

3. <https://erickaclar.com/blog/updates/where-all-of-this-is-leading>

4. <https://erickaclar.com/blog/updates>

So thank you, as always, for your patience, and coming along as God continues to reveal Himself on this journey called life.

Exhausted and Frustrated

I've played the victim of overwhelm often in my life.

Instead of looking at life fluidly, I had made it rigid, manipulating it to fit inside my tiny, manmade box.

But all of us, even those who don't believe in God, have to realize at some point how futile this practice is against the forces of everyday life.

It only serves to exhaust and frustrate.

I've seen this on other people, too. People I love who act like rats in cages, slamming against the bars, hoping one will break. And the whole time, they don't even acknowledge the little door in the back that God has so mercifully opened for them.

I live life open-handed now. I don't typically get frustrated when things don't go "my way" because I realize there is no such thing as "my way." This world was here before I was even born, and subject to forces I'll never conquer on my own.

But I do have a King who has already overcome them, and when life offers yet another bump in the road, I hold His hand even tighter as He carries me into salvation.

The Flesh

There's something so bold
and abrupt about the flesh,
naked and cold outside
of the garden
and craving so
many things I
can feed it.

But there it goes
hungry again,
dormant like an
angry dream
that gathers no life,
haunting
and howling
no matter
the amount
of Netflix
and coffee
and booze
and porn
and paychecks
and little bits
of our insecure
selves we try
to feed it
Only to get
bitten.

It makes sense
then, I suppose,
God guarding

His garden,
Not only as
consequence
but as collateral—
insurance
that everything
He made
would be
protected,
including us
from ourselves.

No Longer Flopping

I had considered sharing my book progress for the New Year, but realized how apropos it is to share it after climbing over some major hurdles in my transcription certification journey.

You see, I'm one of those "if I can't do it perfectly, I won't do it at all," people, and God's really been busting down those walls in me. The last few months have been an exercise in resilience, in doing things way less than perfectly and realizing I'm still here. God still loves me. And I'm humbled that He wants to know me in the midst of my not-so-pretty walk this season.

I've been praying about my next writing project. And God answered that prayer. He gave me the premise, and I'm not looking back! (This never happens! Usually, I flop around until I find a plot, much like a fish that's unfortunately found itself stranded on the shoreline.)

Now, things might change as I discover where this story is going, but ultimately, I know it will involve sharing the Gospel and the hurt that's hidden in the human heart. And I'm so excited to get started once I've finished my second test.

So without further ado, here's the premise of my soon-to-be-titled next novel:

Thirty-six-year-old Hellie Garmin is a struggling writer whose only friend in the world is her younger brother, Brent Garmin (25). She lives a strange and secluded life, observing rather than living, and therefore, has no real "plot" to draw from when writing "The Next Great American Novel." One day, when following a stray cat that she creates an entire storyline around, she ends up at a small church. She thinks it's kismet, that the gods are shining down on her, and she stumbles in, thinking it would make for a great story. But what she gets is a crash course in human nature and the power of God working in the most unlikely of circumstances.

I'll, of course, be fleshing out dear Hellie and Brent (I have some seeds planted in my heart about their back stories), but I can definitely "see" where God may be taking me in all of this.

Thanks for your prayers and encouraging words. And just a quick shoutout to my writer friend, **Priscilla**¹, who is such a blessing when it comes to keeping me focused on the writing gift God has given me. There's been a ton of times when I think, "I just need to give this whole thing up," and then God uses her to keep me going. I often (and I think we all do) get scrambled up in what Christianity is "supposed" to be, and then comes along someone who is simply loving God and loving others, using her own gift of words to bring light.

That...that is what I want to do too. And I pray that for all of us.

1. <https://priscillakgaratti.com/>

Like a Diamond

I'm writing **poetry**¹ again.

It's a bit addictive, that.

Maybe not so much addictive as necessary for my brain.

I know I'm pausing on my novel because I don't have time to sit and focus on it, but poetry's different. It's breathing, and I suppose these blog posts are too.

It's just me and God and the page, and I feel this deep need to take every sin, every consequence, every dark thing and turn it like a diamond in His strong light.

I think a lot about how, when He comes to reign permanently, there will be no need for a sun. **He will be our sun**² and how only those whose names are written in the Book of Life will be able to feel His glorious warmth.

And so these poems? My writing? My words? They're not just for me to process and look back to my Jesus. They're to be shared with anyone out there who has never felt the touch of that kind of warmth and who has been let down by humanity (much like the rest of us).

Don't fear and don't put your hope in the sheep. Put your hope in the Shepherd. He loves you, searches for you, and overcame the death and decay we can feel in our bones to bring you into eternity with Him.

1. <https://erickaclarke.com/blog/poems>

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation%2021%3A22-23&version=NIV>

First Comes First

Things I'm learning:

- *Nothing has to be perfect...including me.*
- *You can fail and then try again. Even though Homer Simpson taught me "trying is the first step to failure," I've since subscribed to **Paul's mode of thinking**¹.*
- *Learning to compartmentalize can be a gift. Sure, it can get a little toxic if you keep your head down ALL THE TIME, but asking God to guide me in prioritizing my day has helped me to keep from being overwhelmed and prompts me to intentionally follow through a chunk at a time.*
- *Confession and repentance are good, good gifts from the Father.*
- *Not everything has to be "right this moment."*

These are all probably things you learned in kindergarten, but I was way too busy trying not to get kicked out. I don't know if you've ever seen the *Barbie* movie, but I always ended up looking like Weird Barbie after a cutthroat round of arts and crafts (the idea of giving a five-year-old a glue stick is just unsavory, but nobody asked my opinion...).

This is essentially a big lead up to the fact that I'm going to put my novel writing to bed for a bit (I had hardly even woken it up!). God's showing me what I need to focus on first, and that's my transcription career. I have been given the green light to blog as I process, and I'm glad you'll be with me. Keep me in your prayers! And my book, too, if you don't mind. I know I'll be getting to it eventually, and I also know that's okay.

First comes first, and what peace letting Him decide the details.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%205%3A3-5&version=NIV>

Where All of This is Leading

I was chatting with a writer friend the other day and mentioned how I'm open to shopping my next novel to an agent, but that I'm deeply praying about it.

And thank you, Lord, for the gift of deep prayer.

Because through it, He's answered me, and I know that traditional publishing just isn't the right road for me anymore.

For all of you who have followed my (quite impulsive) writing journey, you, too, have probably wondered where all of this is leading (and by the way, we got to hang with family friends this weekend, and my friend mentioned how she's pretty sure I have ADHD because of all my online shenanigans, and she might be right lol!).

I, too, ask that question, considering for a long while now, I seem to have been immersed in the art of shooting myself in my own foot, but God is always pulling me through, and making something beautiful out of my mess (and on that note, please read my friend, Don's, post, *My Shephard*¹. He perfectly outlines what God does for me [and you!] daily in simple, peaceful, and truthful prose).

And as I stand back and watch Him work, I'm seeing **my site**² become a reflection of the person He's growing me into. A peaceful (very much not impulsive) place where others can read about Him and about one woman's life that He changed for (the so much) better.

Case in point: instead of jumping straight into this **new novel**³, I'm waiting to hear the word "Go!" This weekend, we'll be away for a dance convention that my daughter's dance team is attending, and I know God's working behind the scenes to make this the perfect place for me to start the business of novel writing again.

1. <http://donwhiteblog.com/2025/10/23/my-shepherd/>

2. <https://erickaclar.com/>

3. <https://erickaclar.com/coming-soon>

In the meantime, I'm sticking to visiting friends, cleaning house, transcribing a bit, studying for part two of that dangnabbit certification test, packing, and listening to the humoristic and satirical works of Charles Dickens and P.G. Wodehouse (I feel like this new novel will be bringing the funny - pray I can pull it off!).

Oh and before I pop off, meet Remy and Emille (in the photo if you missed them lol)! They're our two rats who have brought us a lot of laughs and comfort since **Roxie**⁴ and **Rocco**⁵ passed.

Just when I thought we couldn't get any weirder...

4. <https://veronicamcdonald.com/artwork/#jp-carousel-17282>

5. <https://veronicamcdonald.com/artwork/#jp-carousel-17849>

The Last Mountain

Well, it finally happened.

I took the test.

And I passed! Thank you, Jesus!!

I needed an 80 and made a 94, which is quite astonishing considering I'm an old lady who drank more than her fair share of red bull and vodka in college (don't do drugs, kids!).

Seriously, God's been amazing. I've had a number of hills and mountains to climb lately. I had to take a mini-test then a much larger test (that took me three tries to pass...that one was brutal!) and then a probationary period for the online legal transcription company I'm currently working with and then this test that goes toward my certification (I just have the practical exam left to officially get my legal transcription certification).

Every time (seriously you can ask Matt who is just now taking the cotton out of his ears), I've moaned and complained and have felt completely vulnerable because who wants to feel like they're totally ill-equipped to do what God's calling them to do?

And for far too long, I wore the label of "the smart girl" (I mean I was LITERALLY called "teacher's pet" before...oh and also "the librarian," but that was from the employees I managed at my former workplace. Maybe I should stop wearing so many sweaters...). And God's been teaching me that I don't have to be anyone or anything but His.

If He's calling me to this, then He'll be equipping me for sure.

I have that final test left, and I have to get a 98% to pass. It's the practical exam where I have to produce a legal transcript in real time while being proctored. PRAY FOR ME. This will be the last mountain (at least for this particular slice of my life), and I would really like to claw my way over this one. I haven't scheduled it yet (I will once I get enough practice in), but I'll give you a heads up when it's game time.

THANK YOU to everyone who's been praying for me! I am a huge believer in prayer to our Father (surprise, surprise), and it never fails to blow my mind how God works through the encouragement of all those around me.

Time to celebrate by numbly staring into the void for a bit!

Hard to Be Grateful

Psalm 9¹ is interesting. David is praising God for vanquishing his enemies, and yet?

He's still in the thick of it.

People are still at his heels trying to kill him. And what does David do?

He remembers the good things God has already done. He praises Him for it. And he looks forward to the time God will do it yet again.

I've heard the same message about gratitude twice this week, once at our church and another time while reading the Bible app:

Thanking God in the midst of pain isn't an attempt to alleviate or downplay the hard stuff in your life. Instead, it recenters our focus on the only One who can walk with us through it and who always makes beauty from ashes.

So, a grateful heart isn't a naive one, nor is it one that ignores reality.

It's one that looks at the pain and evil of this world square in the eye and praises the God who has already destroyed it all.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%209&version=NIV>

A Little Worker Bee

This weekend, we had the opportunity to see a stage production of *David* with friends, which tells the story of King David's life. Beforehand, we got to spend some time together as a family eating (and maniacally giggling, much to the chagrin of the lady in the booth behind us).

It was a fun time, one of those memories I'll cling to as my daughter rudely grows up and continues to have a life of her own (I don't remember signing off on that, but whatever).

But the coolest thing? God talked to me during the play.

You see, a day or two before that, a good writer friend and sister in Christ wrote me an email (we kinda sorta pen pal around, like, as my daughter would say, "in the olden days"). She mentioned it's not our duty to advance the Kingdom of God on earth. Instead, we're to make disciples as God brings down the Kingdom to earth, taking that burden off our shoulders (as if we even have the jurisdiction or ability to do so in the first place!).

And the cool thing is that the character of the Prophet Nathan in the play said the same thing to David! That the reason his life was starting to unravel was because he was trying to further God's Kingdom instead of resting in His peace.

But that's not all, folks! That evening before bed, we were listening to *Exploring My Strange Bible*¹ by Dr. Tim Mackie, and he mentioned that with the advent of the social Gospel movement (1870-1920), there was a shift in how people spoke about the Kingdom. Instead of followers entering into it or it being bestowed upon us, Christians started saying things like "building the Kingdom of God," as if God should be so lucky that we would help Him out in this endeavor.

Snort.

1. <https://bibleproject.com/podcasts/shows/exploring-my-strange-bible/>

No wonder I was so overly exhausted in the last season of my faith journey! I was ascribing to a belief that I had to be a little worker bee to usher in something God's got fully under control.

Fortunately, I see this now, and never before have I had so much peace, just abiding in Jesus and listening for the Spirit's cues on what good works He personally has for me, instead of trying to "prove" my commitment to Him and the Church by doing everything under the sun.

I share this because I know, at one time or another, we (especially us Americans) tend to shift into "hustle" mode, thinking our destinies fully depend on our hard work. But the "American Dream" is a total lie, something that once achieved is a dark disappointment, leading to the realization that all this time we've been striving to do something "good," we've wasted our lives pursuing something that doesn't even matter.

Instead? We can rest in Him and be thankful we get to participate in His Kingdom because of what He's done for us, and never the other way around.

Strewn Upon My Heart

I realize I'm always writing even when I'm not writing.

I think God has a way of building up people, places, stories, and events in my heart where they're stored until I sit down and start fleshing them out.

And seeing that I've been pretty busy lately and don't plan on actually starting **this novel**¹ till roughly the New Year (unless things settle down a bit before then), I'm thankful He's keeping me mindful of all the things going on around me.

Additionally, He keeps softening my heart. I've shared in the past with you (my readers) that I often succumb to a critical spirit, and it's been at the forefront of my mind the past couple of months. And in true Jesus fashion, He's been steadily eradicating those roots from my heart.

He's given me a grateful spirit, especially in light of the "hard" of leaving our church because He's blessed us with true friendships, several people we still see regularly who really live out the command to love God and love others. And in that, I find that I'm wanting to do the same in every aspect of my life, a prompting from the Holy Spirit that goes against my very human nature.

And when you think about it, it further fans those writing flames—the ability to empathize with another human, willingly standing in their shoes and seeing the world from their perspective. A notable skill when developing the spirit of characters who long to be loved.

So I keep praying because I know He's already written this story and is patiently waiting, in His perfect timing, as the words are strewn upon my heart and my hands ready themselves to write.

1. <https://erickaclar.com/coming-soon>

No Longer the Perfection We Once Were

Yesterday was hard.

A lot piled up (my test is tomorrow, I'm transcribing for an online legal transcription company, plus all the usual fun things like laundry, cleaning, etc.).

The anxiety was high, and so was the overwhelm.

And, too, I've been in the process of lowering my meds, and I think I lowered them too much too fast, especially in light of all that's going on right now.

I felt horrible about that. I thought to myself, "Is this the person I really am?" Is medication covering up the fact that I'm an emotional roller coaster of a human being?

And no, it's not covering it up. It actually works to balance my brain chemistry and see things as I truly see them within my heart. I liken it to someone who's diabetic. I wouldn't go up to them and be all like, "You know you just need to eat better, take some vitamins, and really focus up here. It's all in your head."

In either scenario, it's not all in our heads. It's in our very DNA that has rapidly morphed due to a fallen world.

We're no longer the perfection we once were.

But we are perfect in Jesus. And that's what I had to keep my mind on yesterday, no matter the way my mind and body were essentially trying to suffocate my heart.

I'm back on my correct dosage and feel so much better. And after reading about Abraham and Isaac and Jacob these past few days, I see people who are pretty warped in their decision-making and dealt with their own tragic genetics. I mean, it's one thing for Abraham to lie about his wife being his sister...but then his son does it too with his own wife? Talk about generational curses!

But the point of these stories isn't only that we're no longer perfect as human beings. The point is that God always is, and His love and care for

us go beyond our weak minds and bodies straight to our very hearts that He strengthens through His Word.

What I always come back to is my own conviction that the Holy Spirit puts within me. So I'll never balk at the concept of treating what's broken here on earth, to the best of my ability, while God treats what ultimately matters – my very soul that will one day peacefully reside with Him forever.

Ready to Receive

In our house, we always ask a very important question:

"Are you ready to receive?"

This makes sense when you start to realize we can hear each other, but oftentimes, we're not really listening.

And I suppose this is the same when it comes to Scripture.

I've been guilty of reading it and allowing it to penetrate my heart in several areas, but not always every single one.

And I know God gives grace in this. Sanctification is a lifelong process.

But the thing about sanctification is that we have to be aware of it, and in being aware, we give ourselves over to God, who kneads out all the icky things inside our hearts.

But sometimes, it's easier to hold on to the ick instead of acknowledging it even exists in the first place.

Things like:

- *Our need to control...others, our situation, our environment, so we don't have to acknowledge our weakness and the fear in our hearts.*
- *Our need to manipulate...and change the narrative so we can ignore our reality and the discomfort in facing facts.*
- *Our need to find comfort in others...turning them into security blankets instead of abiding in Jesus, who is the Great Comforter.*

Vulnerability is hard. It requires being transparent with ourselves, others, and our God.

But if we desire to be set free (and not just read about it), then we need to open our palms, give over our sin, and hold on to God's truth as He saves us from ourselves.

But You

Maybe a 1990's mess of something
my daughter will one day say,
"like in the olden days,"
when I have one of those, but for
now, rocking to the sounds
of Alanis and Sarah and Sheryl,
willing to give it all away
to rock my hips this way
and that so all
the anger and bitterness
can finally fountain out.
And maybe that's what I
desired all too long,
just a place to reconcile
my evil, beating heart,
never realizing it wasn't
Alanis, Sarah, or Sheryl
who could save me,
but You.

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