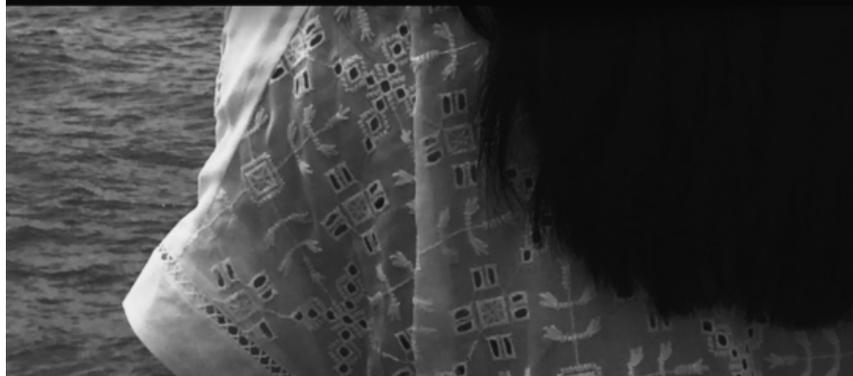


From the author of *Unkept* and *A Violent Hope*

A DIARY OF SORTS

Between You and Me

ERICKA CLAY



Between You and Me

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This is a creative work. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

BETWEEN YOU AND ME

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From the Author

The following are bits of my brain I once posted on Instagram. Or maybe more accurately, they're bits of my heart.

Following Jesus isn't a perfect script printed in black and white. It's a total loss of self and sometimes loss of words only to be given them back when you need them. It's an overly processed account of what plays on in the human understanding, knowing God is still keeping time with your steps. It's the confession, the hard repentance, the acceptance of truth much holier than all the bits of your brain and heart combined.

It's everything.

1. Between You and Me

May the Lord
Keep watch
between you
And me
when we
Are away
From
Each other
But even so,
When we
Are held close
And all I
Can smell
Is the human
frankness
Of My
Own
Misunderstanding.

2. And Sometimes I Hear God Laughing

A friend mentioned how hard it must be having a kid during the world's current state of affairs.

I laughed. I don't worry about the world corrupting Ava. I worry about Ava corrupting the world.

She is a force, my friends.

There is a term. Neurodivergent.

I thought at first it was another fancy way of further sowing divisiveness through the human race, and maybe it is. But I found an article that made my heart smile.

A list of people (myself included) are neurotypical. We hit all the marks when it comes to the way our brains function. People like typical. They like easy.

They take issue with different. Sometimes, I do too.

And sometimes I hear God laughing.

ADHD (along with autism and a few other conditions) are considered neurodivergent. The way people think with these conditions is nothing short of amazing. Day to day truths try to conceal this notion. Holding somebody's hand and helping them walk to the finish line when all they want to do is bolt in the other direction isn't easy. But I know it's my purpose here on earth.

I've never met another person so creative. I've never met someone so passionately willing to take up her cause no matter how trivial it seems. I've never met someone willing to say the things that burden our hearts and heads but the rest of us are too cowardly to voice.

The world. That's what I worry about.

Jesus made every neuron to fire the way it does. He made her heart and hands and an unrivaled beauty that is sometimes marred by sin. But he gave her that passion in her belly to wake up and face the day with her soul facing north.

She'll never know the depths of an unwanted depression, the dark pool where I sometimes sink my feet.

She will know light and God's spirit in her breast.

So no matter the circumstances around us, the world...the world is what I worry about.

3. Lay It All Down

Motherhood. If ever there was a reason for Wine Wednesday. But I think that's the problem. That old question: from where does my help come from? When we look around, it most certainly doesn't come from God.

Instead, we take note from the self-help gurus or the new age shamans or the bottle of Jack we keep in the closet. We eat chocolate quietly by ourselves and drink coffee until our eyes go red.

We listen to all the "shoulds" from people who don't understand how our hearts are breaking and flaking a tiny dust storm in our chests and take another trip to Target to nurse our wounds with a little retail therapy.

And that's when we see her: the perfect mother. The one that plagues our nightmares, haunts our dreams. She's the inner core of the person we wish we were. And no amount of downer or upper will ever make her the tangible person we see in the mirror.

But Christ laid it down so that we could be defined by Him. And when we're defined by who He says we are, all the "shoulds" begin to deteriorate and the "are" comes out to play.

You ARE the mother you were meant to be for your children.

You ARE a beautiful child of God.

You ARE meant to be a part of the kingdom.

The only question is are you ready to lay it all down, too?

4. A Penniless Endeavor

We tiptoe
Into our dance,
Smile like smiling
Is a penniless
Endeavor,
But how bankrupt
Are the bones
That never knew
The cost
Of true
Submission.

5. In the Never Was

I get so mad sometimes because I don't know if you know this, but it wasn't supposed to be this way.

There are different versions of the same dream. They vary to the point of morphing into different dreams entirely. Ones where I know the outcome each and every time: I. WIN.

But here's the thing about other people: you can't control them. And ultimately, they're woven into the fiber of each of these dreams. They know their parts but won't play.

Because they don't have to. They're the stars of their own stories.

My daughter. She lives a whole life I can't control. And as someone who's naturally battled anxiety since she was sixteen, this is a real bummer. She was supposed to be a brainiac with a penchant for writing and a horrible superiority complex quite like...well...her mother.

But no. She's a wild heart. She has empathy for others where her mother doesn't. She lives in a beautiful world made in her own mind and has a gentle mastery over animals. She is willing to work out her blind spots, those dark stains in her being that sometimes cause others to approach her at arm's length.

She's not quietly judgmental. Again, like her mother.

She is loudly compassionate and is willing to still love an aging woman who is treading water in the never was.

She is the mirror God granted me to peer into the face of my own soul.

She's the dream I would have never thought to dream.

6. The Cost of Losing Everything

I don't want my daughter to be happy. I want her to live with integrity. And sometimes, those are two very different things.

The other day, I mentioned the difference between living religiously and following Jesus. My friend mentioned she hadn't considered the difference before, and I understand that mode of thinking. For a long time, I never realized there was a difference either. It's because so many people have sullied what it means to be a Jesus follower. They take rules and tradition and manmade doctrine and ways you must look and dress and live in order to be a REAL Christian, all the while destroying the very essence of the Gospel.

If your heart isn't focused on building relationships with those that don't look or think like you and giving them a soft place to land, then you need to take a moment and have a heart-to-heart with God. You can know every ounce of Scripture and still be a Pharisee.

You can memorize all the Bible verses you want. If you don't live them, then what's the point?

And trust me, I'm writing this more to myself than you.

I don't want my daughter to be an "in name only" Christian. I want her to be the kind that willingly gives her life for another. I want her to be the kind of person that doesn't get squeezed out in our current state of affairs but lives boldly and courageously with a heart for God.

Make no mistake. The world is different now. And if your only goal is for your kids to be happy in this mess we call Earth, then you're doing them a huge disservice.

Teach them instead the cost of losing everything and how that's worth so much more than a feeling they can't even hold in their hands.

7. Heaven Knows

An interesting something happened last night.

I became a crazy person.

Okay, well not really. There was a group of teenagers at a booth near us who kept joking loudly and looking our way. I honestly don't even think what they were saying had anything to do with us, but once my daughter locked eyes with them, it was all over. She wasn't having the absurdity.

And here's something: I'm the quintessential introverted only child. I don't make a fuss when a fuss isn't necessary. Which in my book is 99.9% of the time. But I also come from a long line of Latina women who don't mess around.

Let's just say my genetics seem to be continually at odds.

And then, I'm of course a Christ follower. I want to honor God and his children, even the ones who are hell bent on tomfoolery.

So you can see how the storm started to brew.

I've done this before. Once at my doubles tennis game where two guys were catcalling me and my partner during our match. And once at Best Buy when the Geek Squad took my laptop hostage for weeks. I most definitely wasn't a Christ follower back then and became, well, blackout rageous in both instances.

I highly don't recommend that.

I felt my blood boiling just like those times. I was up on my feet before I knew what I was doing. I was talking and saying words, but this time, there was a difference.

I cried out to the Holy Spirit in my heart.

I didn't curse them out. I didn't scream my head off. I just mentioned how I was young and fun once (no seriously...like literally once), but if they could play it cool and not be so loud, I'd appreciate it.

Remember that whole WWJD phase? Besides being a glaring representation of how people "follow" Jesus whenever it's in vogue, it's also

something I roll around in my mind every second of the day. Because I don't want to be what He's not.

I'm not sure how well I did. But I am grateful for the lifeline. Because heaven knows I can't save myself.

8. This Jagged Piece of Glass

He's wading through
And stacking up
The puzzle pieces
I cut with this jagged
Piece of glass, and
When I sneak peaks
Behind my shoulder,
There it is.
Our life.

9. No Good Without God

I think about evil, its hypocritical glint.

A life is always a life unless I don't want it to be.

What I do with my body is my own business unless I make it somebody else's.

There are no truths in this world except my own.

We paint a morally relative picture, and yet we still want to define what is bad and what is good.

But here's the thing about that: there is no bad, no good without God.

Because if there is no ultimate judgment, there is no ultimate truth. We really are free to create our own realities, and if my reality makes you mad, sad, or scared, well, that's a bit too bad now isn't it?

It stings, the guilt that eats a heart. It hurts those wrongs we try so hard to close our eyes to.

Because no matter how tight we shut them, still, somebody else is always watching.

10. Pray That We Can See

It's funny how I used to hate Bible verses. But I suppose that's not too far-fetched for a former atheist.

Biblical memes, words of inspiration, everything that should fill a heart and help you find peace made me a little bit nauseous.

I was smarter than trite proverbs and feel-good sayings.

I lived in the "real" world and navigated it quite well on my own, thank you very much.

Let's just skip the part about how I was \$70,000 in debt and alienated everyone around me for the sake of my "art."

Deception is a powerful thing. It's a hard rock to drill through when you want to share the saving grace of Christ.

The hardest people to reach aren't who you think. It's not the down and out people, the ones on the street corner with nothing in their hands and an overflow of pain in their hearts.

It's the religious American middle class (and above) who keep fat and happy on the promise of a Jesus who doesn't really exist.

They know God, they say. So what can the truth of Scripture actually offer them?

And then there was someone like me. Someone who didn't want anything to do with any of them. I was happy digging my hole, thinking it would lead me to a much more pleasant place, unknowingly making my way to the fiery pit.

The only thing I know to do? Pray. Pray to Jesus that He can lift the blinders and reveal the broken. That hands will feel the glass-like shards and loose soil of a life thrown at the ground.

That we will all be honest with ourselves, constantly searching our hearts for sin and confessing and repenting to a God who's so graciously lined our lungs with breath.

Pray that we can see.

11. A DNA Mosaic

I'm finding bits

Of me on the floor,
A DNA mosaic
That speaks of the work
Of making and breaking
A man.

Or wo-man.

And how Your hands
Must have glided, a silk
Symphony like Verdi's
Each cell a heady note,
Fulfilling its destiny
and set to time's demise
The moment you wound
My heart.

12. Nobody Comes Out of This Alive

Yoga.

The deception is strong with this one. I should know since I was incredibly devoted to it. In fact, intense practice led to demonic attacks which led this atheist to Christ.

And I get it. We consider a “watered-down” version of the practice to be substantial in the States so what’s the harm? It’s just a little stretching after all.

But knowing the origin of something and its intended purpose is always important. The root of anything is the truth behind it, which is why I’m also incredibly wary of things like the Enneagram (look up how it was created. Goosebumps).

Yoga originated as a deep spiritual practice. And as Christ followers, we know what spiritual practice entails for us. It’s deep devotion to Yahweh, and if you love someone, you don’t want to send them mixed signals.

So why do so with God?

Keep your heart and mind pure. Stay the course. This whole life is a race to Jesus. Nobody comes out of this alive except the ones who are truly living for Him.

And it’s time to ask yourself: “Am I?”

13. For All the Lonely Hearts

The believer's walk can be a lonely one. Even within our own churches we might feel like an oddity.

And I suppose maybe that's because we're doing it right.

It's taken me a long time to realize "normal" is a misconception.

When I was younger, I craved normal. I'm pale and small and have read so many books, I'm afraid my brain is ink-stained.

I'm not necessarily your best gal pal.

But Christ still called for me. And I sometimes have to take a hard look at myself to figure out why on earth He'd ever do such a thing.

Maybe it's because I'm not the least bit normal. But when I read the Bible, "normal" isn't the vibe I get either. I mean David danced around in his underwear. In public.

He didn't really set the bar that high.

And yet, I can relate to something like that. I can relate to being exposed and giving it all to God even when I know I'll look like a fool. I talk (scratch that...I mean write) too much about my private struggles when the rest of the world holds their cards close to their chests.

But that's okay. Because I'm not here for the world.

When I take a hard look at it, I know why God has called me.

He wants me to write for all the lonely hearts who want to seek Him too.

But can't.

Because society has caged them within the confines of this nebulous thought called "normal."

Well, friends. Here's the key.

14. Like So Much Dust

Fat thighs. Big nose. Fine hair.

Ugly.

When you're twelve and the world is whirling around you, playing its hardwired games, you realize the cost of losing.

Of being mirror-deficient and punishing yourself with hot sun and the slightest bit to eat.

You live in a house of perfection, and you? You are the least perfect thing within it.

And so relying on your own ingenuity, you move Heaven and hell to change things, never taking a moment to count up the cost.

I don't feel that way anymore. I don't rely on my own eyes nor do I see the mirror as friend or foe.

It just is.

In *Ourselves* by Charlotte Mason, she mentions how we are neither to think highly of ourselves or poorly. In fact, the best thing is not to think of ourselves at all.

I believe this is what living in Christ truly is.

There's a respect for your being, your physical make up. There's thankfulness for movement and breath but only in the capacity of accomplishing God's true purpose for us.

But the ultimate accomplishment is a rested soul. An undeniable knowing that the outside will die and be like so much dust. That your name and legacy and all the things you did in one tiny lifetime will go unnoticed and unheard of in years to come. But who you are in Jesus will never fade away.

Now that? That is what's beautiful.

15. The Always Will Be

I ripped the seams
To every dream
I've ever had
And watched,
long-winded,
And overly flummoxed
As You stitched the never
Was into the always
Will
Be.

16. A Hurt Little Heart

I'm a hurt little heart. I bleed and break and am ripped a little at the edges.

I let my sin replay sometimes, and other times, I take it up in two hands and hold it close against my chest. My hips rock back and forth, and I never think to give it up. It is me, and I am it.

But that's never the truth in the slightest.

What am I without the wound inside me? What am I without the noise inside my head?

I'm free.

Christ gave us that gift. He hurt and bled and broke and ripped at the edges, so I could give up the bundle at my breast. The wound is healed. The noise, gone.

Because perspective is our reality. So what is it we're really seeing?

17. The Boiling Heat Inside of You

I don't know why we level sin to the degree of what's acceptable and what's not.

Evil is not acceptable in any form.

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

People dwell on the notion of homosexuality. And yes, homosexuality defiles God's original design for His creation. But they willingly turn a blind eye to the rest of the verse. They forget the part about the revilers, the mockers.

Those who tear others down for what they do or what they claim.

They can somehow fully ignore that log jutting out their own cornea.

The root of everything we do that displeases God comes down to one word: lust.

Eve lusted with the intense desire to do things her own way, and Adam stood by, enfeebled by the act of watching someone have the courage enough to stand up for what boiled in his own heart.

Despite our desperate want for evolution, we aren't much better all these years later.

Just take a peek outside your window.

The point of Jesus is this: complete peace. When your heart is fully aligned with His heart, your own desires fall away. You want what He wants, an intense love for people that outworks any bitterness and rage you hold for all the ones who did you wrong.

You understand how to take the “self” out of every endeavor and make it about the “Him.” The boiling heat inside of you stands calm, and it's finally silent enough to think.

This isn't about who I choose to love. This isn't about what I choose to do with my body. This isn't about how I label myself to the rest of the world.

This is about nakedness, complete vulnerability to a God who has been searching my heart since the moment He spoke it into being.

18. Soon to Surely Fade

There's a little
Piece of us
Off camera, concealed
and covered in God's
right hand
Where late night love
and heartbreak
And kitchen fires
and all the things
I meant to be are tangled
in their knots.
But in His other one,
He holds the day
we said "forever"
until that moment
when even forever
has to end,
and all the truth
and honesty
in this
One little moment
Is left to breath,
Your pulse against mine,
Our daughter's beating heart,
And ours soon to surely fade.

19. Feasting on My Own Heart

If I am not with Him, I am against Him.

I think I'm having a hard time, however, determining who is really with Him.

Myself included.

I've always been a bit more cynical than your average bear. Even my husband didn't see me cry until roughly five years ago, give or take. I've always prided myself on my mental acumen, a stony facade built stone by stone until my cuticles wore raw.

I'll smile at you all day long until the cows come home.

But I don't necessarily mean it.

This is my sin. One of many. This is what I put beneath microscope to study and learn. This is the point where I sharpen my scalpel to put it out of its (and my) misery.

I pray for an authentic kind of kindness all the time. It rather flabbergasts me how many people mention how nice I am. All those acting classes my parents paid for have really paid off, apparently. But I've been digging and sorting through the real and unreal. It's not the cynicism that God has an issue with. A little side eye never hurts keeping His kingdom pure. Shrewd as serpents and whatnot.

I know what the real concern is: the way I take pleasure in feasting on my own heart.

The joy in tasting its bitterness.

May God release me of my own delusions. May I take down a stone or two to peer into the inside.

May I clutch that scalpel and remove the source of my bitter cynicism and hand it over to the One who created it.

20. My Belly to the Ground

King Nebuchadnezzar went mad with pride.

I can relate.

Sometimes, I tell my testimony and people are wowed. I know it's weird, and I can understand getting lost in its weirdness, but I don't tell it for the wow factor.

I tell it because I'm still standing.

Because Jesus has made it so.

Pride was always something I nursed, its full and able body close to my chest. It craved my brain and heart and every fleshy bit of me.

I was a ghost of who God made me to be, a sad rendering.

And so He showed my sin in a way that would make me pay attention.

I didn't grow hair like eagles' feathers or nails like claws. I grew an obedience that slipped my legs right from under me and pinned my belly to the ground.

There is no God but Yahweh, and the only way to eternity is through Christ, His son.

I know that now. And it's only in this knowledge that I've felt the flesh of me grow, the beat of my heart

21. The Stitching of Their Bones

There's a possibility I'm doing this all wrong.

I like results, definite proof in my hand. I want to tell people about Jesus and then see Jesus in their faces.

But if you live long enough, you know that's not how this works.

Life is a long game. Relationships are the hardened stones in the arch of your foot. You keep walking, you keep making a mess of things. You keep holding on to the blessings you don't deserve.

Me: "Why do we keep doing this to ourselves?"

Matt: "It's not about us. It's for Him."

Oh. Right.

I can't allow a person's unwillingness to feel Christ in the stitching of their bones, the rushing of their blood, to impede the progress of God's glory.

And I can't allow myself to do the same.

It's not about me, it never was. It's about a love and light that pulses through everything He's created and how we can be a part of that miraculous unfolding of life or block our souls to it.

It's about choice, about forging onward in His ever present holiness.

Or remaining stagnant in the bitter decay that chokes all sense of good.

Either way, it's never about us.

And thanks be to God for that.

22. In Blue Silence

I was planted in blue silence,
A mid-eighties reverie,
And danced, deep
And quiet, belly breathing
In my bed. The goldfish
That would never die
Kept me company.
And in the car that was new
But is old now, I brushed my hair
To the threat of death, and lived
Through nosebleeds and talk
Of separations and white-boned
Skeletons that were bought
To cheer me up.
My father danced in the trees
And off the sides of buildings
And my mother taught me
Words I didn't know.
And in the inner eye inside of me,
There was a screen playing
Of the future me.
A plant unrooted
And replanted in
Your deep, dark
Soil.

23. A Steady Stream of Relief

Evangelism. You're doing it wrong.

Probably.

The point of bringing the Gospel to people is that it's birthed out of a deep sense of love. It's not a quota to be met. It's not a pin to put into your lapel. It's not a pat on your own back for forcing a Bible on a slightly befuddled stranger you just met on the street.

It's a strong desire to not wish anyone to suffer for the sins kept deep inside their hearts.

It's a real sense of sacrifice to be a believer. Putting yourself on the line to talk about Jesus to a culture that hates Jesus is less than appetizing. As Jesus Himself said: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." (John 15:18-19)

But when you know the truth, the cure to a death that is impending for *everybody*, you swallow your fear. You stand strong and you witness with a heart full of love.

This is a journey for me. In the beginning, I was one big ball of panic. It was up to me to save my family and friends and to make sure they knew the *real* Biblical truth of Scripture.

But I can't save anyone. Only Jesus can. And that fact is more than a steady stream of relief.

What can I do? Pray for those I know and the people God puts in my path that they will be open to the Gospel. Get to know people on a real authentic level, willingly loving them even if they spit in my face. Like Christ indicated to His disciples, if someone doesn't heed what you're saying, just dust yourself off and move on to the next person. Their ultimate salvation isn't your responsibility but making sure they hear the truth is.

And maybe most importantly? Live the example and gently remind fellow believers that the point of the Gospel is to offer the opportunity for everlasting life with Jesus.

We all can get off task and try to make our purpose about us. But it's not.

It's about the redeeming love of Christ.

Period.

24. Or Face the Lion

If you don't read Scripture, you're in for a world of hurt.

And if you depend on someone else solely for the relationship you have with Jesus, that hurt will only magnify.

I was reading about Jeroboam today, specifically the man of God who warns him that Josiah will sacrifice the priests of the high places who have desecrated the altar. This prophet does everything as God has told him until...

...he meets a wiser, older prophet. I think it's easy to imagine what the younger prophet was thinking: *Here is someone who knows God much better than I do. I should probably listen to what he says.*

And so he does. And so he gets eaten by a lion.

The end.

I think this story is incredibly important. If we're not in the Scriptures, if we're not in tune with God's voice, how can we ever really be on the redeeming path? One of the most shocking things when I became a Christian was learning how few Christians actually read the Bible and just trust whatever their priest or pastor is teaching them.

This, my friends, is foolhardy.

Jesus was the fulfillment of the Scriptures. He fully knew their life giving breath and had God's word inscribed on His heart. He even used these verses to defeat Satan's temptations.

Why do we think we can do any better without consulting what God has written directly to us?

Man means well. Sometimes. But Christ and the inerrant Word of God are the foundation that should light your path.

Seek Him or face the lion.

It seems like an easy choice to me.

25. Up and Down to Find You

We go round
And up
And down
To find You,
And all
The way
Along,
There You
Were,
The steps
Beneath
Our feet.

26. We Are the Clay

Write God's Word on your head and heart.

And also your bathroom mirror.

I do this thing where I gut myself like an unfortunate fish.

I stack up all the worldly "wrongs" I've committed like having the audacity to age as a woman. Like letting go of "pretty" one cell at a time to focus on my soul.

It's walking through a crowded room and everyone turning to stare because you've decided to no longer play the game.

And nobody likes a poor sport.

I love this verse from 1 Samuel 6:7: "Don't judge by a man's face or height...I don't make decisions the way you do! Men judge by outward appearance but I look at a man's thoughts and intentions."

Oh there it is. Breathing room.

Even Jesus wasn't attractive according to Isaiah 53:2: "In our eyes there was no attractiveness at all, nothing to make us want him."

So why waste the years fighting a death that will surely take us whole?

God is the potter. We are the clay. We might think it unfair when we look around and find ourselves lacking. But I recently read an article that put it most eloquently: If God dealt in fairness, we'd never be born. He'd already be aware of the sins we'd commit and keep us from ever committing them.

Instead, he deals in love. Love for our thinning hair and scarred up faces and brittle bones and waning memories and varicose veins and missing teeth and lost limbs and abundant weight and skinny flesh.

Love for the least dear things about us because, to Him, it's all dear. It's all the work of His hands.

27. Calling in the Wilderness

John the Baptist.

What a wonderful way to live. And a wonderful way to go.

Few might say that. Practically nobody, really.

Because I doubt there'd be many willing to exchange their heads for the sake of righteousness.

It's John's doubt that resonates with me. Here's the very one Isaiah prophesies hundreds of years before his birth, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

The one who prepared our hearts and minds for Jesus.

He did so with the taste of locusts and honey on his tongue and God's voice in his ears.

And yet? John still doubted.

While imprisoned, he sent his disciples to confirm that Jesus was the Messiah.

But John's heart already knew that.

It was his head that gave him so much trouble.

Isn't that like us though? To stand outside on a dark cold night and see the burning gases above, the roll of clouds encroaching on our space, and that moon. The bright face of something we can't even touch.

But then deep inside the covers on our beds we think, "Maybe it was just a dream."

Our hearts beat though. They remind us of the Spirit's voice within us and our own voices calling in the wilderness all this time.

Make way the path of the Lord.

And then that old familiar flavor of locusts and honey.

It's worth losing your head over.

28. A Gentle Heart, a Gentle Tongue

Seek first to understand.

Well, ain't that a doozy.

Sometimes, I want to seek first to judge. I get rubbed the wrong way, and I ride that wave of resentment for a moment, that “who do you think you are?” train that goes barreling deep in my gut.

It's a lot harder to stay small and quiet. To ask the questions that birth the answers.

James is one of my favorite books. If I wrote a book of the Bible, I have a feeling it would look a lot like James. A straightforward understanding of our sinful tendencies and the antidote to all our troubles:

“The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

Taming the tongue. As James also says, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

Be careful with what you say, how you react. For God will use the same measure you use to judge others against you. And that's not to say judging, in and of itself, is wrong. No, it's just that the log must be plucked from your own eye before you can remove the speck from your brother's.

And when you remove that speck, do it with a gentle heart, a gentle tongue.

29. Boiled and Eaten

If there be windows
In heaven, could
Such a thing
Be?
Like a lifetime
Boiled and eaten,
The other mother
Hiding her son,
And all the past
Working through
Your deepest
Parts, only
For the feast
To be revealed
In the empty camp
Of your enemies.

30. Relationship Not Religion

I wrote a comment on one YouTube video about how my demonic experience led me to Christ, and I received a question from a commenter asking how did I know that the demons weren't tricking me into following Jesus and becoming trapped in a religion?

Here's the gist of my reply:

I'm not trapped in religion, I'm in relationship. I never wanted anything to do with God, and now I have a lifetime with him. What the demons showed me was what a lifetime without him would be like. I highly don't recommend going that route. I lived that life for a long time, and I shudder to think what would have happened to me if I continued to live that way.

Jesus points out in Mark that a house divided cannot stand when the scribes claim that he's able to exorcise demons through the power of demons. This is illogical, obviously, as is the argument of demons leading people to Christ. The demons tremble when His name is even mentioned (James 2:19). Why would they want me to be his follower?

Now, my understanding is built on the understanding of Scripture, which I hold as truth. If you don't see Scripture as truth, I won't be able to convince you of my perspective (which isn't my job, by the way. My only job, according to Jesus, is to share my story and love and respect you as if you were me. It's between you and God if you follow him or not). But I do want to point out something: within each of us is a measure of right and wrong. Where does that come from? If we're merely evolved animals, why do we think some things are good and others aren't? Why aren't we truly free to do whatever we want whenever we want?

I know now it's because we're made in the image of God. We want life to be beautiful and peaceful, but we can't have that as long as our hearts serve another master. anyway, like I said, I'm not here to convince you, I'm only here to tell of the wonderful change Christ (not re-

ligion) has made in my life. I've been able to meet other strong believers who would lay down their lives for me, and I'd do the same. I never met anyone like that when I was an atheist. Ultimately, we all have the God-given choice of who or what we're going to follow. And I know who that is for me.

31. Tastes a Bit Rotten

Good works. The two most deadly words in the English language.

When we put our faith in our own two hands, we deny that the God of the universe paid the fine for us. Christ's death, the penalty for our sin, becomes a side dish to the entree of our lives.

And everything, at that point, tastes a bit rotten.

The idea of "being a good person" is a fallacy. Look around. The god of this world is Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4) and the idea of good works is a carrot that will never be grasped. Sure, we can do good things, but examine the human heart and you have a revolt against the very nature of God's goodness. Even the thoughts in our heads reek of our self-indulgence.

The cure?

Confess. Repent. Accept Christ as your savior and follow His command to be baptized in His name (Acts 2:38). Receive the amazing gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is what it means to be a born again believer and this is the only way to live with Christ on the new earth. Death doesn't have to be forever.

Because one day there will be that precipice when life is no longer about the good you do with your hands, or your pretty face in the mirror, or all the countries you've traveled to, or all the people you've made jealous, or all the money in your bank account.

One day, you will die. And God will judge you. And you will have the opportunity to claim Christ as your savior. Your debt will be paid, and you will walk in God's light.

Or not.

It's time to choose wisely.

32. Not for Human Consumption

There's white chalk
Skyward,
These big streaks
Against the twilight
That remind me of nails
Dragging down the paint
Of the canvas.
It's like how everything
Was given to us,
Perfect and packaged,
Until we ripped into
And through it,
Revealing
The underneath,
The "not for human
Consumption"
But we play away
anyway.
And feel the burning
Sin in these guilty
Human hands.

33. The Touch of My Scars

I just want honesty. Open hearts and open minds. A total soul revealed so you can taste the struggle, touch the scars.

It's kind of a difficult thing to communicate after "Hey, how are you?"

And that's where I have to let grace come in.

When it comes to the fruits of the spirit, I can check off a few. Self-control and faithfulness are my jams. I can be patient. But with people? Sometimes not.

Love. That's the hardest one for me. But maybe not. Maybe it's because we've convoluted what Biblical love is where I'm supposed to nod and smile and let my eye twitch as I watch you walk toward the flame. I just can't do that. But ultimately, the grace I have for others is something I need to work on. Because looking at my life, God's been far too gracious with me.

Our pastor pointed out that if you want more fruit in your life, you don't work on each one individually. Because no amount of work will get you to Jesus. Instead, we have to abide in Him, seeking and holding onto Him like a lost child. Because He is the one who will fill our lives with joy and peace and patience and ultimately, love. If we stand apart, we'll become the branch clipped from the vine.

I can't love others on my own. I can't pray for my enemies on my own. I am weak, and if it were up to me, all their cars would be lined up in my driveway for a good old fashioned keying. But He is strong. He knows the taste of my struggle, the touch of my scars. And he knows I deeply want to love these things in others. So? I hand Him my keys.

34. Crisp on Our Tongues

Seventy times seven is an almost inconceivable number. And maybe that's the point.

We all get a little lost in our anger. It's righteous and delicious, a deep bite into the apple. It sits crisp on our tongues. It is an all consuming flavor.

It makes the wrong thing right, and sometimes, we can even skew it in the name of Jesus.

But really, what are we doing?

I know a lost heart who's taking their pain out beyond the inches of their skin. They're selectively dicing away at everyone around them.

It's devastating to watch and devastating to endure.

And yet? Forgiveness. Who am I to weigh another's pain? Who am I to snuff out grace for the sake of my own righteous pride?

Who am I to withhold the very gift Christ gives me each moment of this little life?

35. A New and Familiar Beat

I like the way control feels. I like to shape my world, cup it in my hands.

I like the perfect angle, fitted pieces in a complete puzzle. I like all the things inside this damaged heart of mine.

And so I take to cutting them out with a smooth and sharpened scalpel. The idea of perfection and withheld love and breath that mangles my sensibilities.

I weigh and catalogue and categorize each one. I mark its place on the altar. I ask God for forgiveness. A simple retraction of all that I've held onto as truth.

It hurts more than an infected tooth and more than an arthritic spasm.

It's soul-level deep, and now all the parts of me are empty and cavernous.

So I pray that He will hold my heart and fill it to overflowing.
That He'll reset it with a new and familiar beat.

36. Those Precious Stones

I keep

These rocks
In my pocket,
A delicious way
To sink.
Your hand, lined
And opened, and I touch it
Only to push it away
From me.
And the deeper I go,
The ocean, she's eager
To cover me.
But there again,
Your hand,
Open and waiting
For my indiscretions,
The periods on all my sentences.
Those precious stones.

37. The Most Beautiful Road We Can Take

Why do people suffer?

No.

Why does God *let* people suffer.

This.

We are hard-knotted in our own pain. And why shouldn't we be? We're made manifest in the breaking of our own hearts and the burning in our own brains. We're eaten up and devoured and tortured through the past and hold onto it like it's the only path to our present.

We are Lot's wife, head over shoulder, overcome by the brininess of our own taste.

So why does God allow this?

"More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance..." (Romans 5:3)

Endurance. It's a foreign concept to a "we want it now" society. And I should know. I was mayor of that town for quite awhile.

When you hurt, you have two options: overcome or don't. And the overcoming is the most beautiful road we can take.

When we overcome, we leave that pain on God's altar. But more importantly, we have a story to tell.

There are so many hurting people out there. What if we could just share with one person that the rape, the assault, the abuse wasn't the end of their story? That God can redeem the sinful pain of this world and give your heart hope?

What if we stopped looking at our scars as losses, and instead, looked at them as the proof of a body and soul restored?

What if we endured?

38. A Bitter Relief

I woke up at 2 AM crying.

I miss Roxie.

She died Christmas morning of last year. Months leading up to this, she was enduring bouts of what seemed like seizures. Her body would freeze for a bit and then she'd come to in a dazed-like state.

I remember one night going outside to find her frozen body on the grass. She was yelping, squealing through her shut snout, and I lay my head on the ground next to her.

"It's okay," I said because that's something you say when it's not.

I felt her breath and her stiffened limbs and studied the way sin had traveled all these years to this very moment when I got the opportunity to watch it destroy something I loved.

Something God made.

Her body relaxed, and I held her close. I held on to what nearing the end feels like.

The morning she died was a bitter relief. You don't want what you love to die. But you don't want it to suffer either.

Sometimes, I'm the worst person in the world. I think of everyone I don't like and wonder why they're still here taking up oxygen and my dog isn't.

Like I said, the worst.

I think God has reminded me too many times what a gift this has been. To love something so raw and watch it work itself back into His sovereignty.

I can't control anything at all. And that is perfectly okay.

I try to find the verses and passages that say Roxie will be in heaven with me or the new earth once my Christ comes back again.

I'm not having much luck.

And I suppose that's another point, too. Worship the Creator, not the creation.

Give your whole heart to those taking up all that oxygen.
And be thankful you ever got to know such beauty in the first
place.

39. A Puddle in the Sun

Here's to our

“Could be,”

A notion that

Lays to waste

Like it's been

Beaten by my

Own mind.

Sewn up and stitched

I give it over to You,

And watch time

Turn eternal.

I watch the question

In everything die off

Like a puddle

In the sun.

40. This Little Me

What's the best way to put this?

I love people, and I'm a little afraid of them too.

I often wonder where this fear comes from. If it's more of my own insecurities that knit together into human form and wear me like a coat.

If a stranger's possible disappointment in me keeps me at arm's length until I'm buttoned up chin high.

For other people, it seems so simple. They can sliver themselves and offer it piece by piece without ever growing weary. Their voices don't go too high and they never just pause mid-sentence, the last syllable diving head first to the floor.

I'm a watcher by nature. I see how other people interact, and I've become a darn good mimic.

I can cleave off a part of me with the best of them.

But then there's this voice. "Imposter," it says. "Are you truly smiling because your heart is happy or because you're working your facial muscles sore?" "Are you nodding because you agree or because there's no other possible way to move your head?"

Holy Spirit. People talk about God and Jesus, and I do too. But the imperceptible part of me, that slow soft speaking that waters down that nasty voice in my head. That? That is the Spirit overriding my heart.

It grows fingers. It takes me apart, starting at the chin and unbuttons me all the way down until I am nothing but this little bit.

This little me.

Talking to you.

41. My Wayward Eyebrow

I am easily annoyed.

Like last week. There was this lady attempting to cut me off with her cart even though I was practically speed-walking down the main aisle, but apparently this wasn't good enough for her. So I, of course, positioned my body at such an angle where she had to slow down and enjoy life for a while. I may have even raised an eyebrow.

Fast forward to me in the parking lot with a giant platter of sushi in my hands attempting to unlock my car which wouldn't unlock because I had stupidly left my car on. I was man-handling this platter while trying to break into my own car to an audience of at least five other slightly concerned shoppers because...why not?

Also, the alarm went off. Loudly.

The Lord detests a haughty look, my friends. Darn my wayward eyebrow.

What I like to forget more often than not is that I'm walking through a sea of the spiritually dead. I can't expect kindness and patience from a world who doesn't know Jesus.

But most importantly? I don't need to be expecting anything for my own comfort in the first place.

If I'm not willing to die to self then you might as well put a giant cart in my hands and an unchecked need to run down the masses.

You would think by the sense of self-righteousness I sometimes have that I've always been a good little doobie.

Ha.

The fact that God so graciously saved me, an incredibly ginormous wretch I assure you, should be a reminder that I need to give this same grace to others.

The world is growing colder my friends, but those who have hearts for Christ shouldn't. We need to repent and confess our transgressions, and walk again with our Lord.

And always remember to turn off our cars.

42. To Obey and Abide

Personal conviction.

I came across a YouTube channel where a woman was convinced makeup and jewelry were evil, and as real women of God, we should stop wearing them.

I applaud her personal conviction. And personally, I've grown out my hair and wear far less make up than I used to. I'm more conservative in my dress nowadays. In fact, the other day, we were looking at pre-Jesus photos of me, and Ava raised an eyebrow at my affinity for low-cut tops.

What can I say? This life's a journey.

What I didn't like about that YouTube video, however, was this call to a kind of makeshift sisterhood where we all act, think, and look alike.

I'm too much of a renegade for something like that. And honestly, Paul isn't too keen on the idea either (Romans 14:1-23).

We are all different parts of one body. We play different roles and are gifted with different abilities and find joy in different aspects of this life. And God is using it all, burning convictions in our bellies that are to be kept "between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves," as Paul states a little later in verse twenty-two.

Between yourself and God. A quiet, personal decision to obey and abide.

I'm not saying you can't be a good influence and help a brother or sister who seems a bit misguided. But ultimately, their master is Jesus, not you.

We are born alone and die alone. And we will one day be alone, face-to-face with our Maker. So let us be wise in the way we worship the Lord and in the ways we assess the choices of His children.

43. Flecks of Sin

I keep my places
High
Like they're tucked
Out of sight
And yet You still
See
Me crouching
At an altar that
Doesn't know your
Face.
Then brick and ash
And flecks of sin
Sent ember bright
Into the
Sun.

44. That Peripheral Glimpse of Heaven

You can go to church your whole life and still go to hell.

There. I said it.

It perplexes me. This notion of the evangelical industrial machine replacing what it truly means to have a heart for Jesus. We say the right things. We have a big smile on our faces. We abstain from alcohol because heaven forbid anyone catch us with a glass of wine.

We check off the list, but we miss the only thing that matters: constant abiding in Christ.

A lot of people are deconstructing their faith, and I know that scares a lot of Christians. It doesn't scare me. What scares me is knowing so many people have been raised in a squeaky clean environment devoid of real truth and honesty, and then one day they have to look around and go, "Oh wait a second." Your whole life and existence is turned upside down when you realize that church has become an idol.

Christ is real. Heaven is real. Hell is real. What Christ did on the cross is the only real thing in this world that matters. And I don't care if you think I'm a lunatic for saying it. I only care about what God would think if I didn't.

Do I think being in fellowship with other believers is important? Most definitely. But this is a natural process of deep commitment and friendship in the act of worshipping God, not an automatic social club that puts progression above Biblical truth.

Walking with God is not a prescribed set of accepted acts. It's having a heart for Jesus, and in turn, His children. It's running to Him in the fear and heartache and confusion of everyday life. It's knowing He's that peripheral glimpse of heaven on even the darkest of days.

It's so much more than sitting in a pew

45. Love Them Anyway

Judas ate at the last supper.

Think about that.

Here was a man who Jesus knew was going to betray him, and he shared a meal with him anyway.

Oh, my heart.

I can barely look at my own face sometimes for the evil within it. How can I even look at the person who rubs me the wrong way?

And chances are, they're not even going to have me crucified.

In our Bible study class, we're learning about the Restoration Movement, the idea of restoring the church back to its original Biblical foundation. One of the founders of this movement, Alexander Campbell, was Presbyterian and wasn't too keen on the idea of bringing a special coin that signified he was one of the elect to share at the Lord's supper on Sundays.

Chances are, Judas definitely wouldn't have been welcomed.

There's a point here. Maybe it's that all are welcomed, even the ones who break our hearts. Maybe we're not in control of who God calls and maybe that's okay. More than okay really.

All we can do is this: read God's Word, love him with every fiber of our being, and in turn, love others well, too. Forgive even when forgiveness saws every single cell in half. Pray when those cells feel like they'll never be restored. Share who Jesus is in the quiet and chaotic moments of your life.

And when they turn on you, love them anyway.

46. The Hardest Sound

I carry your heart

(I carry it in my heart)

Is something once written

Maybe on a bitten-edge of napkin

Or the water-marked belly

Of a yellowed piece of paper

Or maybe the dry-lined hands

Of a man who didn't know where

That heart resided once death

Misplaced it.

I think maybe the hardest sound

Is no sound when the ones we love

Are stored in memory,

Lessons learned that line our spine,

The way their hair,

Blew and tickled their cheeks in the wind,

Oh how that glimpse plays

Hard against our retinas.

But knowing how my heart,

Pumping and alive

Could have breathed the breath

Of life, the truth in love

Told to the one who supposedly

Meant the most.

The absence of that.

Maybe that's the worst sound of all.

47. The Humblest and Gentlest of Masters

Born this way.

No, born again.

I thought that for a long time, however. This is who I am and bless your heart if you ever think you'll change me.

Welp, ate those words real quick.

It's easy to roll your eyes at the concept. I think a lot of people have done a disservice to what being born again truly means. It doesn't mean you've enjoyed being on a few ministry teams and bring the green bean casserole to potluck.

It means you die to yourself every day and make Jesus Christ the leader of your life, the lover of your soul.

Nothing against baked casseroles or anything.

If you don't believe me, maybe you'll believe Jesus:

"Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' 'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!' Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'" (John 3:3-8)

This is a process God works within you. It's right there in the Scriptures. And yet, it's something that some Christian churches don't understand and don't even teach. And I can't tell you how many times I've talked to people who attend these churches who are scared of death.

There's no fear of death when you know who holds you in His hands.

If you feel God is meeting you in this space right now, holding out His hand, submit to Him. Tell Him from your very heart how grieved you are of your sin. Tell Him you'll turn away from it with His help. Tell Him He has the reins to every part of your life, to every part of you.

Because we're all slaves to something in the long run. And Christ? He's the humblest and gentlest of masters.

48. The Sugary Sweet Version

I was listening to Mike Winger of the BibleThinker podcast talk about pop Christianity. It's the sugary sweet version of truly following Jesus, where you make Jesus into your own image.

It doesn't take too long of a search on Instagram to find this kind of account. I once stumbled upon one that mentioned loving Jesus...and cursing.

Okey dokes.

Essentially, the Bible becomes a book of granted wishes, not holy Scripture worth exegetical study.

It's the type of Christianity that kept me an atheist for so long.

If God's Word isn't truth, then what is? Even William Lane Craig, a renowned Christian theologian and philosopher doesn't believe there ever was a worldwide flood or that Adam and Eve were real people.

So if Jesus and Paul both cite these stories as historical fact, either they're liars or a few of us are.

Guess who I'm putting my money on.

Christianity isn't a club. If it were, I'm not sure why anyone would willingly join. Following Christ is hard. It's tears and stress and vulnerability and fear and sorrow. And it's the joy that comes in spite of these things.

It's the Holy Spirit leading us through the dank hardships of this world. It's knowing you're washed in the blood of the Lamb and that your evil heart has been made pure.

It's giving up every bit of yourself for no earthly return but living solely for the hope of being with Christ forever.

It's laying it all down, even for those who spit in your face.

Nothing cavity-inducing about it.

49. Shrewd as Serpents

I finished *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill* podcast.

Dude. What a twisted web we weave.

American evangelical Christianity makes me sick to my stomach. I'm not talking about Christ's Church. I'm talking about the phony machine that pretends to play her.

It has brought so many people to their knees. Depression, suicide. Leaving the faith completely.

It's a satanic deception that needs to be stopped.

It's curious though, the way we let figureheads manipulate us.

Yes, I said "let."

We're to be shrewd as serpents as Christ followers (Matthew 10:16). We're to let no man adulterate God's word, let alone use it against us.

I remember learning in seventh grade social studies (of all places) this concept of giving people authority. Our teacher pointed out that the only reason the queen of England is the queen of England is because we've decided to believe that.

Woah.

Maybe it's time we take the Gospel back, the true word of God. Maybe it's time we deconstruct our faith on a daily basis, stripping it bare until what we believe is what the Word says and not the other way around.

Maybe it's time we untangle that web.

50. Punish and File

I've burdened you
With bits of me
I've crossed lifetimes
To punish and file,
And when I look down
Expecting dust,
There lay the bricks
That break my heart.

51. Wars and Rumors of Wars

If you've been anywhere near the internet, apparently this planet is going to explode any moment now.

There are so many Christian "prophets" on YouTube, clanging their invisible cymbals and wailing how the end is coming.

Well, of course it is. The end started the moment Christ returned to the heavens.

But I get it. There's this great need to sensationalize everything that's going on in the world because it is a big deal. There's death, disease, and cancel culture (which I could argue is perhaps our deadliest weapon at the moment) and violence in the streets.

Violence in our hearts.

But friends, we've just gotten started.

In Matthew 24:6-13, Jesus talks about how there will be wars and rumors of wars. That such things will happen but the end is still to come. Famines, earthquakes?

These are only the beginning of the birth pains.

A friend sent me a YouTube video of a preacher "prophesying" that the Chinese and Russian governments were going to storm the streets and take over our government.

That was due to happen in December of last year. Insert eye roll emoji here.

Look, the reason this kind of behavior royally irks me is two-fold:

1. Nobody seems to know what Biblical prophecy actually is anymore.

2. It's a distraction that breeds fear and deters us from spreading the Gospel, which is our only REAL job.

Prophecy isn't future predictions. Prophecy is discerning communication with the Father that (hopefully) brings heart change in the PRESENT.

The now is where our hearts reside. The now is where we can find change.

But we have to look beyond the wars and rumors of wars and turn our eyes to the God of the universe, the cosmos. He is far greater than watered-down predictions and fear-mongering behavior.

He is the steady path beneath timid feet. So let's let go of false prophecy and find the truth of this life in Scripture instead.

52. A Cacophony of Things

I've learned this concept from John Delony of "both and." As a former "either or" person, I find it a little mind blowing.

Sometimes life is a cacophony of things, not a black and white detailed fact sheet that calms my insecurities.

We want easy and precise and categorized. We don't want the mess of what life is.

Right now, I'm finding a lot of heat coming from the Christian community at the idea of vaccines. Here's where I stand: we are human beings given to reason and a God who guides us. He will lead us in the decisions that are best for us and our families and the people around us. And as a fellow sister in Christ, I will honor those decisions and trust this process because God wants me to be an instrument of unity in truth, not another divisive barrier that breaks the human spirit.

And yet? There's this maddening concept floating about that getting vaccinated is somehow anti-Christian.

And yes, I have read Revelation.

Here's what we have to understand: as Christ followers we're to be subversive. Like Daniel, we are in the world but not of it, following the rules and laws of our government until the point of following those rules keeps us from sharing the Gospel.

I am in no way championing one decision over another. That is your decision to make with God. But I am asking for grace for those who have made a different decision. Paul tells us in Romans 14 that if our brother's conscience is different than ours in what to eat, drink, wear...even the days we deem special, that we should not look down on what God has accepted.

We all either stand or fall before the Lord, and He has made us to stand (paraphrase Romans 14:4).

He's also made us to be merciful towards those we don't agree with.

I know I can't expect that type of gracious heart from our secular world. But I don't think it's a stretch to expect that from the family of God.

53. When the Pills Begin to Wear

How often we

Forge forward with muddy

Feet and broken jaws

And bury the evidence

Under a pile of lies.

“Oh these? The faucet broke.”

“Oh that? Wisdom teeth.”

And we refashion the bad

For the slightly less worse

Until truth is something

Our grandparents knew once

And talk about when the pills

Begin to wear.

54. Things Start to Crumble

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

I am sometimes the least wise person I know.

I have a go get ‘em tenacity in me that intends on changing the earth’s axis with brute force.

I don’t like relying on others. I like relying on me.

I’m a self-help guru’s muse, the epitome of what an American should be. The American Dream? Nah, man.

The American Reality.

But then things start to crumble a bit, don’t they? We rely on our Masters degrees and good breeding and marrying well and nice homes and perfect children and good jobs, and we think, “We did it. It is done.”

And maybe it is. But unfortunately, in the entirely wrong direction.

Christ paid our debt on the cross so we would unchain ourselves from everything in this world (that brand new fancy car for instance) and chain ourselves to Him. These things aren’t inherently evil. And being a self-starter isn’t necessarily wrong.

But wisdom? Without it, we’re just slaves to the world’s devices.

And how quickly a dream becomes a nightmare.

55. Let the Dead Bury Their Own

“Let the dead bury their dead.”

Oh, Jesus. Anyone who thinks you’re as sweet as a newborn pup must not know you very well.

You’re honest and exacting and have a heart that can’t be hidden.

You are the embodiment of agapao, self-sacrifice. Your love isn’t a friendship built on getting a kick out of who we are.

Your love is built on a deathly self-sacrifice for who we never will be on our own.

You paid the ultimate price so I can be who God originally created me to be. And my heart aches for all the times I haven’t been grateful for that.

It’s been a rough week of sharing the gospel and it falling on deaf ears. It’s been a rough week of seeing what pretending to believe looks like when your heart hasn’t actually submitted.

But I can’t do the work. Only You can.

So Jesus, the ultimate lion, the beginning and the end. The foundation on which this world is built and the living hope in every follower’s heart. You will come back to judge the living and the dead.

So let the dead bury their own.

56. More Like Us

Live like Jesus.

What does that look like?

I think it can look any way we'd like when we cherry pick a Bible verse and believe a strand of words can embody our God.

But Christ is more than that. Living and breathing through every word of Scripture. He is the culmination of a world that was spoken into existence and will one day be righted by fire. He is the alpha and omega, the blessing birthed in the beginning that blooms through to the end.

He simply is.

Simple. That's the word I think. Somebody so complex and yet can move mountains in quiet moments. He was purposeful, not wasteful. He wasn't about entertaining Himself and sacrificed for the good of others. Yet in all this, He still had joy and humor and a spirit that yearned for justice. He had already seen His death, maybe even lived it in a heart quickening way as the end inched itself near. And through all that human fear that always tries to conquer, He still did it anyway.

I think this is why I've done a one-eighty. Time is ticking, and I'm asked to be a good steward of it. I've been given blessings, and maybe I could start working on that bucket list, tick off the things that would make my heart sing. But what about what God wants from me?

Simple. A life shaped by God's glory, not my own. A gratitude for all the things He's given me and a gratitude for all the things He hasn't. Because sometimes, it's the everything we think we want that makes us less like Him and more like us.

57. Fiend for the Squeaky Clean

Sometimes I look back

And “back” is the better
Thing.

There’s a hand in it that scrubs
Away all traces of living: sweat
And defecation and turmoil
And anxious thoughts and suicidal
Dreams.

I’m a fiend for the squeaky clean
Version that never existed so I make
My brain retrace the truth of all
The hard and all the hurt
So I can see the other hand
That held mine even when I
Tried to hold it close.
Yours.

58. The Hands That Made My Heart

The Jewish teachers are amazed at Jesus.

Here is a man who has no formal education and yet speaks of God as if he knows Him.

Bingo.

We've lived so many lifetimes telling ourselves such vile untruths, like we're not smart enough to read the Bible. Like man's unfounded doctrine is greater than God's word.

But Jesus never doubted the relationship He had with the Father. He never studied Scriptures as if He were trying to pass a test.

That's because He carried them in the heart God gave Him.

I'm not knocking study. I'm a card-carrying nerd after all, and I have the glasses to prove it. But I think there's something very different between "have to" and "want to."

I study because I want to know all I can about the God of the universe.

I want to know the hands that made my heart too.

59. Every Ounce of Me

I have a hard time defining myself. Hence the reason I've changed my Instagram name seventy-five times.

Nothing feels right. Nothing is really who I am.

We come on here with a plan, and it's always God who establishes our purpose. He is the finger switching on our souls. So why do we think we created the light?

I am just me. Flesh and bone and spirit. None of this will look good. It's all messy.

But He's the one who redeems, catching every ounce of me as every piece falls away.

60. He Has Blinded Their Eyes

God can harden your heart.

I think about the mess of this world. The desire to live in a whirlwind of “I want” and “I need.” The focus on self-betterment and raking people over the coals who don’t agree with you (whatever happened to the concept of friendly debate?).

The lie that self is the only thing you need.

And at first, I wondered how a heart could live like that. And then I realized the horror of it all: it can’t.

And it won’t.

There are some people living and breathing right now that have made amends and moved on. They walk a path that’s veered so far off course, and God keeps a hand on their shoulder. But His spirit has left them. And they’re more than okay with that fact.

But I’m not okay with that fact. An eternity with no God is terrifying to me. And what’s madly ironic is that’s the very life I used to live.

But it’s a truth that others will shoulder for eternity:

“He has blinded their eyes

And deadened their hearts

So they can neither see with their eyes,

Nor understand with their hearts,

Nor turn - and I would heal them.” (Isaiah 12:40).

So my question: Are your eyes open? Is your heart beating? Because in that case, it’s not too late.

61. Raw-Faced and Empty-Handed

Oh there I am,
Thirty-six years later
But You're not a slave
To time.
In it, I wonder
If Your fingers
Stirred up all
Those instances
Where I was left raw-faced
And empty handed.
I know of many
Who would blame
Your stone heart
For something like that.
But I blame my mind's eye
For seeing it all wrong.
Because thirty-six years later,
Here You are.
And here I am.
Face firm and hands full
Of all the things waiting for me
On this other side of time.

62. To Whom Shall We Go?

Lord, to whom shall we go?”

It’s something Peter says after Jesus tells his disciples they’re to eat his body and drink his blood to sustain everlasting life.

He’s speaking metaphorically, of course, but still. You can imagine the concern.

But not Peter. He doesn’t walk away because where would he go?

Nowhere.

I relate to how Peter feels. I think of the “easier” path. How its hidden cliffs and edges no longer look appealing. You can give your heart, mind, and body away in so many different fashions. But in the end, what do you have?

Nothing.

I’m betting my life on Jesus. I’m giving up everything for the life I know I’ll have with Him. It sounds risky doesn’t it? To consume the God of the universe in such a way that earthly bread and wine could never satisfy?

But none of us get out of this alive in the end. We have to place our souls somewhere.

And I know wholeheartedly to whom I shall go.

63. An Imperfect Little Space

I'm not everyone's cup of tea.

And this bothers the absolute dog snot out of me.

As a "former" people pleasing perfectionist, it really grinds my gears. I mean I'm small and unassuming and read at a college level in first grade.

What's not to like?

Fine. Be that way.

I get it. I'm not a girl's girl. I think it's just for the first time in my life I'm living honestly. I used to look the part. Make up, hair, nails, rocking those Seven jeans. My engagement ring was the size of some people's skulls.

I played the part, and it broke me.

And now? I've gotten face-to-face with Jesus. I can feel his breath. "Who are you, Ericka Clay? Are you who they say you are? Or are you who I say you are?"

Oh, Lord. You know my answer.

So now it's grown out roots and untrimmed cuticles. It's gray sweat-shirts with a tiny mustard stain on the right sleeve. It's knowing all those years of depression and anxiety and suicidal thoughts are all gravy baby. Because it took a whole lot of split lips and barked knuckles to get here.

And "here" is an imperfect little space where nobody's pleased, and dang if I ain't smiling anyway.

Hi, I'm Ericka. It's nice to meet you.

64. Seeks to Sting

Here we go

And make another world

To suit our need

For blessed autonomy

But nobody knows

How to handle death

When it seeks to sting

Twice.

65. Strip Down My Soul

I have a rebellious side.

I know I come off as introspective and quiet but that's because I'm busy figuring out how to burn down the establishment and take down the man.

You know, girl stuff.

When Christ invited me into his upside down kingdom, I was all gung-ho about it. I even day dreamed about scenarios where a masked gunman would appear before me and ask if I was a Christian.

I'd have no qualms about standing up.

But fast forward a few years when the hard sting of life starts to welt and sometimes you'd just rather not listen.

Case in point: writing these posts.

I had given up social media. Online life seemed too time consuming, and frankly, ridiculous. We're all caught in an emotional roller coaster that seems to salve itself with pasta bake recipes and photos of the grandkids. Of political rants and personal ones and somehow the dopamine hit that social media gives us becomes a replacement for the comfort Christ offers us.

And I, in my own way, was incredibly guilty of this.

I decided I needed to break ties.

So why on earth was he calling me back online?

In my heart I know he wanted me to be honest about my failures and the bumpy road my Christian walk has been. He's asked me to shed light on Biblical issues, not from my own understanding but the understanding he puts in my heart.

He wants me to confess and strip my soul down and stand vulnerable in a place that would be much easier to just chat about those new boots I just bought (they're fantastic by the way).

But that's not what he's asking me to do.

I pulled a Jonah for a while. This whole thing was my Nineveh. But he told me point blank that he'd grow this thing, and as long as I stayed faithful, humble, he'd bring the ones who needed the message.

I have over 900 followers on Instagram now. For someone who randomly likes to deactivate her online accounts and shove her head under a pillow, this isn't half bad.

Sometimes, I still want to hide. I want to delete all this and pray my real life friends forget about everything I've ever written.

I want to (pretend to) be normal again.

But normal isn't what God needs from me.

He needs me to obey.

66. Our Embittered Hearts

My favorite psalm is Psalm 73 which should tell you how petty I am.

Here we have a man, Asaph, who seems to understand the bitter web woven inside my soul.

He knows what it is to look over at the well-coiffed and well-off members of society who wouldn't know God if he smacked them in the face but still seem to thrive anyway.

To quote Stephanie from Full House, "How rude!"

I've lived with this sin for so long I've forgotten the moment I peeled my skin back to plant it. I think it goes hand-in-hand with my natural capacity for competition.

I will do my best, and you will weep when I win.

But then I never did win. I gave up that kind of life, the one where you're killing yourself but still smiling in all those online photos. The one where you're knee-ing and elbowing your way to a top that just doesn't exist.

The one where your only goal is to one up that person who still haunts your reality.

I suppose I just got tired of arguing with ghosts.

The latter part of Psalm 73 is my favorite. It's Asaph's realization of what is in store for people like that, what could have been in store for him if he kept swallowing the bitter drink of jealousy.

It's inevitable, death. And this time is short, man. I think it better to hold onto every moment and count it thoroughly, rationing it out for the good of Christ's kingdom than for the ghosts that feed off our embittered hearts.

67. In Which to Sink

You keep throwing
Out all those babies
With the bath water
Until the tub is a mild
Torrent of leftover
Soap, the ghost
Of clean skin.
We were only made
To win if we really
Understand the nuance
of Truth In Love,
Not a dissected mess
Of one or the other.
And I watch you now,
Your hand turning
The faucet's cold
Handle, playing
With the way the water
Feels until there's enough
In which to sink.

68. Who Has the Right to Rule?

Technically, this isn't the real day of Christ's birth.

And no, Santa has nothing to do with the birth of our Savior.

And the wisemen weren't there to witness Jesus coming into the world and there may have been three or forty of them.

And really, none of that matters.

What matters is that point in Genesis when God says to the serpent "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers." Ultimately, we all fall into one of these two categories: followers of Christ or followers of Satan.

And we have the option of receiving Jesus's free gift of grace and salvation, the very reason He came into this world.

So despite the details, the historical and commercial tapestry of things that make sense and others that don't, the only real question is this:

Who has the right to rule your life?

69. Searching for Something

We make it so much harder than it has to be.

God's Spirit is what set this universe into motion, and it's the gift that's offered today. You can accept it, and one day we'll be resurrected again to live on the new earth and grow and cultivate and write poetry and music and love others like we were made to do in Eden.

This is what Scripture actually says.

But over the years, there have been so many people who don't understand the Word. They don't understand Hebrew and Greek and Jewish literary devices so they use the Bible as a weapon and create some sort of myth where angels are women with wings and harps are somehow majorly involved.

Um, no.

My greatest prayer is that a better understanding of what God is truly saying in the Word is had by all. It's imperative to know what we are actually believing, *who* we are truly following.

I know a lot of people who wouldn't buy a pair of shoes online without doing a month's worth of research first. Why are we treating following Jesus anything less than that?

Read your Bible. Study your Bible. Go follow The Bible Project and then send me a fruit basket in the mail.

Your heart and mind and soul are searching for something. We all are.

So make it the right something.

70. The Us We Give

The us we give
Are shorn slivers
Of the us we keep.
If only our eyes
Absorbed the cross
So the real inside
Wanted out, and
Would walk the path
To somebody else's
Shorn slivers,
Building and reworking
The person they'd never
Let you see.

71. What Sets Us in Motion

Ruakh. God's spirit.

It's His breath that animates everything. It's the reason you can walk around without being wound up or connected to a chord.

It's quite an amazing thought really.

God's breath is the reason we are moving. Even breaking down the building blocks of who we are doesn't tell us what sets us in motion.

It doesn't tell us why this breath leaves us when we die.

I'm thankful for the reason my heart pumps and my lungs fill with breath. For the Spirit that will birth me from the earth to which I will return.

72. Choose Wisely

Heaven. Hell.

Pick a lane.

I just finished Tim Mackie's four part series on Heaven and Hell in Scripture on his My Strange Bible podcast.

I want to start telling people on the bus how amazing it is. And also start riding the bus.

Here's a recap that will undoubtedly rip apart heaven and hell in the traditional sense. So buckle up:

God created Eden. Eden was a place where heaven and earth collided. God walked with man and woman in the garden. This was the original design, that we could plant and cultivate and write poetry and do gnarly tricks on a skateboard, all while walking with our Creator.

But then man and woman defied God, and we were left to walk this world alone. EXCEPT that God mercifully created a plan to redeem our folly, our desire to walk away from Him and rely on our own efforts to create a world based on our own defined truth.

Sound familiar? Welcome to 2021.

This plan included God Himself walking the earth in human form, willingly suffering and dying for our immense sin, conquering death and becoming the first fruits of our awaited future (if we so choose that particular future).

Heaven is a choice we make right now, and God in His graciousness, allows us to actually make that choice. We are not forced. We can choose to walk with Jesus or not.

Walking with Jesus means we live a full and abundant life now in His name, sharing who He is and what He's done with others with a heart that's chosen love for our neighbors. When we die, we rest in Christ for a period until we are resurrected back onto this earth to live peacefully under Christ's rule, living and breathing and writing and

cooking and plowing and sewing and doing all the things we were created to do without evil breathing down our necks.

No harps or halo required.

Or we can walk this life without recognizing Him as king and live in the darkness of our own sin, listening to the wet sound of teeth tearing through our very spirit. In that case, we die but not in Christ. And we're judged according to our sins and thrown in the lake of fire where evil will be eternally destroyed.

Seems like an easy choice to me.

Heaven or hell are now friends.

Choose wisely.

73. That Warm Body

Redemption

Is that warm
Body in the
Ground
That grows
Our flowers.

74. A Lonely Heart Seeking

My fingers are cold. There's a chill that almost sizzles inside of me.

There's the old me watching the new one, and it lurks deep in its dark closet. I try to pull up the blinds, shepherding the sun at its sneering face.

But sometimes, they're stuck, and I sit heavy in my sin. I pet the head of something that wants nothing more than to bite me.

So here's what I'm going to do:

I'm going to pray for the wisdom that seems to have left this world, its place a vacant hole for lust and greed and the need for self-satisfaction.

I'm going to read the Book that was written for you and me, not reworking it with my own ideologies as a white American female of the 21st century but a lonely heart seeking the hand of her Maker.

I'm going to submit myself completely to Jesus, and instead of using this commitment as a source of pride and a way to shame those still petting the heads of their sins, it will solely be a catalyst of love for the lost and redeeming grace.

I'm going to open the closet door and watch my sin yelp its way out of my heart.

75. Like Jonah

My daughter wants nothing more than for her friends to know Jesus.

I'm not sure if I've been cut from this same cloth.

I think sometimes being older and knowing the world like a VCR you've dissected and categorized into parts makes you a little cynical.

The world wants hell? Let them have it.

But Jesus said to enter the kingdom of heaven like little children. And what child doesn't have an inclination to share goodness with their friends?

I have to release myself of the judgment I think all people deserve because in doing so, I forget the judgment intended for me that God has extinguished in His infinite mercy.

Like Jonah, it's easy to hold onto the grace that God asks for us to bestow on those we deem undeserving. And like Jonah, it's all too easy to drown and meet the death God has not granted us.

76. Return to Sender

All the poets I ever loved
Got swept away in the waters
Or stuck in ovens or smoked
Their lungs into fits of convulsions,
So here I was, gathering my oceans
And kitchen appliances and cases
Of Virginia Slims.
I thought being good meant
Being bad and working at killing
All the gifts You gave me.
A “return to sender” stamp
Not knowing the Sender
And choking on salty water
And oven grease and the stale
Taste of somebody else’s smoke.
But then You taught me
The truth of this gift
Not meant to squander
But to be given freely,
Not for my attempt at living
Somebody’s death-trapped glory
But for Your sovereign glory alone.

77. The Edge of Death's Doorway

I'm kind of a weirdo. Which is why I think I'm made to be a believer.

I like to think I'm the kind of person Jesus found solely to save me from myself. I've always been the type of person who never needed anyone else. I've also been the type of person, more specifically the type of woman, that doesn't fit into your typical female mold.

I have to think the women sitting at the foot of the cross were similar. They were students of God willing to inch their toes absurdly close to the edge of death's doorway.

They weren't concerned with which shampoo gave them the most volume.

Am I the only one noticing the noise of this age? The blatantly stupid pressure put on women to be something other than themselves even though we've supposedly made such strides in the name of female empowerment?

But that's the thing. Power isn't ours to have. It belongs to God. And I think when we lay it down and nudge it back over to the God of the universe, we grow and transform in ways we barely understand.

It's weird to discern the wool pulled over our collective eyes. It's weird to inch up that material to lay eyes on Jesus. It's weird to walk towards the cross while others are running away, no doubt off to find that best shade of red at Nordstrom's.

It's weird to be weird and finally be okay with it. And to know God braided that "against the grain" strand into our DNA and whispered, "Follow me."

And so I will.

78. If You Aren't the Worst Sinner You Know

Practical application, meaning what is read can rest in your head, but it isn't meant to stay there.

I'm talking about Scripture, of course.

How can we take the very guide of our lives and work these hundreds of pages into daily doings?

How can God's breath be more than the force that animates us, becoming the work of our own two hands?

Jesus made it simple. Love God before anyone and anything else and love your neighbor as yourself.

Oh, no problem then.

Except for when you go to Wal-Mart and that lady in the rumpled sweatshirt cuts you off with her cart and then looks at you like it's your fault.

Or maybe when your pay is cut yet again and your boss doesn't look remotely bothered by it.

These are God moments. He's giving us an opportunity to apply what we know to be true. To love through our circumstances and to always come back to the fact that His mercy was laid upon us so why can't we free our hearts enough to share that mercy with others?

As our former pastor, Kyle Idleman, put it once: "If you aren't the worst sinner you know, you don't know yourself very well."

Unfortunately, I've had eons to get to know me, and I'm knee-deep at the foot of the cross.

So when that cart comes barreling towards me and that sweatshirt is more rumpled than a sock lost at the bottom of a laundry basket, I'll pause and remember:

I am forgiven, and therefore, I must forgive.

79. This Little Slice

The rough part
is when it's beautifully
written, when poetry
is used as a weapon.
And my God
Is modeled
In my mind,
An apple poisonous
To the taste.
He is about me,
Not Him,
And my hand
Reaches out,
Mouths waiting
For their own
Bite of heaven
Only to receive
The one thing
That makes us
All alike, this little
Slice called death.

80. Talking Mounds of Clay

The sons of Elohim.

The first two verses of chapter six of Genesis are a real doozy. They mention how the sons of God found human women to be beautiful and took them for themselves. This resulted in them having children, the Nephilim, the heroes of old, the men of renown.

Part human, part demon. And yet again, Yahweh had to shorten man's years and remove His spirit from his nostrils so he wouldn't live in a perpetually sinful state.

This is the origin story of Babylon. On one hand, I'm sure the Babylonians were thrilled. Here they had powerful godlike beings in their midst. Think Thor, but for real. But of course, the Bible doesn't portray it that way. The Bible smells the evil in it.

Stories, that's what some people say. But I don't know, man. The flood narrative is found in other literature. There are fire-breathing dragons in the Bible, and I read once about a tribe that lives roughly where Ninevah once stood that still talks about the man who was vomited out of the mouth of a fish.

I think it's time we stop trying to etch in stone what we have no right to. History is often redrafted through our own perspective. And the twenty-first century leaves very little to the imagination.

I mean, we're walking, talking mounds of clay that try to hold onto some sort of power in our wink of an existence but death beats all of us no matter what we do.

Pssst....we're not that powerful. But guess what?

Jesus is.

I think it's time to call a spade a spade.

There's no way out of any of this but through Him, the God of the universe who knows every single hair on our heads and the darkest secrets of our souls.

There's no use running when the breath in our lungs is His breath.
Snap of the fingers and it's taken away.

So maybe we slow down for just a second. And think how maybe
the unimaginable is real.

81. Nobody to Blame but Ourselves

I listen to Melissa Dougherty because we have similar testimonies. While she seemed to have been farther along than me in her New Age practices before following Jesus, I still made a dent with my obsession with all things yoga, psychic, and the paranormal.

And I was all about getting my daily horoscope.

I see it now, why these things were so precious. They're ways to hold the world in your hands. They have nothing to do with trust and everything to do with immediate results, whether it's the other worldly current zapping through your body after a solid yoga sesh or direct answers from someone who claims to know your dead grandmother.

We all want the knowledge of God. Let's not forget that.

But I'm a different person now as is Melissa. On her last podcast, she talks about a Christian woman who practices the believer's version of these kinds of New Age practices.

And if you're confused by what this means, I imagine you're as perplexed as this poor lady must be.

As Melissa points out, there is no "good" version of these practices.

In fact, God tells us directly to stay away from them in Leviticus, Revelation, Isaiah, 2 Chronicles...the list goes on.

So why don't we? Because listening isn't fun and doing whatever we want is. As much as we like to throw the word "evolution" around, we're still battling the same sin that plagued Adam and Eve.

This lady could also fall into the camp of Progressive Christianity. As if Scripture suddenly morphs and everything we thought about the blatantly clear directives found in the New Testament to the church were just "suggestions."

But I guess nothing's sacred when you want a book deal and a chat with Oprah.

As John says, we are to test the spirits. As Matthew says, we're to be aware of false prophets.

If we're the ones willingly opening our mouths for another dose without checking the label, well then shame on us.

We have nobody to blame but ourselves.

82. The Fat of Past Memory

“What are we
Running away
From here?” I ask
Me all the time.
Because I know
Closed-fist
And brave-hearted
Are the only roads
I can travel.
But there’s a little part
Of me that stays fed
On the fat of past
Memory.
So, there I go,
Weighed
and weighted down
Suffering from all
I refuse to give You.

83. A Love That Spilt Blood

Stop. We all just need to stop.

Here we are turning Christianity into an idolized cluster, a feelings-based reaction to poor choices made in the name of Jesus over the years.

We progress because we've regressed for so long.

Instead? We need to dig into Scripture and not the interpretations of anyone else. We need to see the complete story of God desiring to live among a sinful people again, how He dwelt in the temple to be among us even though we shamefully denied Him that glorious opportunity. How He came down as a temple in the flesh and was crucified for our heinous thoughts and actions and paid our debt so that we could be with Him for eternity.

How we are now temples of the Holy Spirit, and He is the cornerstone, the very foundation of what's being built here on earth: the Church, the body of believers.

So we need to stop the circus acts, the big name book deals, the name it and claim it theologies, the spiritual degeneration that either hates you or loves you depending on what day it is.

All we need is the truth of Christ and a love that spilt blood for the renewal of the world.

84. A Very Dark Void

Some people are so good at playing religion.

It makes you wonder the type of evil one needs to plant to use Scripture as a weapon.

Satan has used the art of the denomination to shackle people for so long that we confuse little “c” church for the real deal.

No amount of potlucks and pie raffles will make it so.

Big “C” Church are the people who are slaves to Christ. Their blood belongs to Jesus. They’re sharp and cunning as serpents and peaceful as doves. They don’t play into fake niceties but gently show you truth because the very dust you’re made of means everything to them.

You are a child of God in their eyes. And no amount of abuse you heap on them will make them stray from that thought.

You can imagine how difficult being a true follower really is.

Daily repentance, a stacking up of sins. Prayers for constant renewal, a strict reliance on Jesus.

He truly is the breath in our lungs, the force holding up our wings.

And I have nothing against pies or potlucks. But I have everything against hypocrisy.

If you’re not meant to be here, don’t be. *Or*, the better option: humble that heart of yours in the presence of our Lord because one day it will cease to beat, and you’ll either hear the sound of His beautiful voice.

Or the sound of a very dark void.

85. A Red Light Blinking

How wrong I was
And you were
About the sound
Of the whole
World ticking.
A clock we thought
Was heading
For a door to our own
Making.
But now I sit and stare,
The bomb threat louder
Than a red light blinking,
Head now bowed and heart
In prayer because there's no
More room for thinking.

86. Behind Bone and Flesh

I'm having a hard week.

Jesus is working His way through all my cards, and it's so obvious I've been bluffing.

When I write, I write to me more than anyone else. I write to the black human hole eating through my heart. I write to the past I won't turn back to and the memory that raises bumps in my skin.

And to the future me I know He's making.

I have a whole room in my mind where I criticize and judge and live out an existential crisis that forgets Christ's mercy and grace to me.

And maybe that's the warped circular pattern in need of reframing. If I can just realize His mercy and love for me, maybe I can extend the same to others.

I research things like "is love an action?" because if that's the only thing it is, a decision to do, then I can handle that. It becomes another thing I can check off my list.

But if love is something more, a thing driven out of the beating of my own heart, I dare say I'm in trouble.

I pray every day for an authentic sort of love for others.

For the strangers nursing their own darkness behind bone and flesh.

87. When Your Gaze Is Out the Window

False prophets. They've been keeping me up at night.

Maybe this is the problem with having only one child. Your brain is a little more free to roam into the land of absurdity.

Because other people are making out their weekly meal plans, and I'm having a hard time swallowing the concept of Calvinism.

I'll put it this way: I don't have all the answers. But here's another thing: I'm perfectly okay with that.

I think it's almost strange the idea of doctrine. This butchering and dissecting of the Word and fitting it into air-tight containers. I don't like the rules and regulations that follow or the badges worn that separate us from another sibling in Christ.

It just...hurts.

My religion, according to Jesus, is to care for the orphans and widows. I don't have to write that down on paper. I just have to know it in my heart.

And according to Paul, repentance is metanoia, the Greek word for a change of mind. The old is old and my mind turns to the new, to God's light. To all the beautiful things in this world that announce His glory.

I may be tempted by sin but renouncing it is so much easier when your gaze is out the window.

If you want to know if you're saved, then maybe ask yourself this: Is there a hunger in my heart for Jesus? Do I have any inclination to care for His children? Am I climbing a ladder to nowhere alone? Or am I in the midst of His people, sometimes hurting and sad and full of grief and looked down upon but fully and wholly where I need to be?

I'm starting to think we don't have to make this so hard.

88. A Clean Heart

I think I just want a clean heart
And humbled hands and thoughts
That are pure but rooted in reality.
I don't need every little thing
That I thought would set me apart
Because sometimes, when you cut
The ties, you don't drift.
You sink.

89. The Only Thing That Matters

It's like this:

You claim a progressive Christianity where love without truth reigns and acceptance of sin is the drug you drink until everybody's dying of their own darkness.

OR

Following Jesus is a horrid game of Jumanji where all the rules and regulations barely make sense and you give a sneering side eye to those who aren't fit for God's love because only you fit the bill even though love is something you've never managed to understand in the first place.

How about INSTEAD:

We let God go free from the boxes we've kept Him in and understand what His Word is actually saying. That we never look at sin like it's our identity (i.e. I was born angry, so I am a murderer; I was born with same sex attraction, so I am gay; I was born lustful, so I am an adulterer) but instead look at it for what it is: the evil our minds are called to turn away from to keep our eyes solely on Jesus. And with our eyes focused and our minds set, we go out and teach others about our God who bled and died for the evil seed planted and growing in our bellies, who cuts down our iniquities and asks us to reign with Him here where heaven meets earth. We clothe and feed and bring the bread of life and withstand all judgment because the world just doesn't get it and never will.

But God knows we do, and that's the only thing that matters.

Confession, repentance, true faith in Jesus, baptism in the name of the Trinity. Go forth and spread the great news!

The end.

90. Letting Go and Letting God

A new friend was worrying over having an only child.

“I’m an only child, and I’m halfway normal,” I said and then proceeded to kick-ball-change my way to another part of the room as my social anxiety kicked in.

I suppose It wasn’t a very comforting answer.

But I’ve had this fight with myself, and I know all the headaches that come with it. The looks people give you. The wondering if you just can’t have anymore or if you’re that self-centered to only have one.

Mine was definitely the self-centered thing if you were wondering.

Kidding.

I made this choice before Jesus. Ava was later diagnosed with ADHD and had always been extremely defiant. I knew deep down somewhere that in order to show her Jesus, she was going to have to be my full time job. And funny, because this was even before I knew Him.

But Christ has a way of playing a part in our lives way before we ever realize it.

I see things differently now, of course. I know we all ponder over the idea of “go forth and multiply,” but I’ve come to understand that directive as part of the Old Covenant and often ponder more directly on Paul’s sentiments. This idea of being single and the ability to share the Gospel in more direct relation to one’s community because of it.

I’m not single, but I definitely have a little more time on my hands. And I know because of this, there’s a great responsibility there to use it.

Ultimately, God is the great redeemer. Even if you choose one thing or the other because of a strangely bitter heart, He has the opportunity to change it if you let Him. And you’ll come to realize that circumstances are just that, circumstances.

Your child(ren) will grow and flourish if you love them like Christ loves you. And they’ll grow into the people they were always meant to be despite our frown lines and bouts of worry.

Despite their having siblings or not.

I think the question shouldn't be, "Will my child be okay?" Rather it should most likely be, "Will I be okay letting go and letting God?"

91. This Little Pocket of Weird

I live inside this little
Pocket of weird and forage
My fare so I don't
Go without, but then my head
Pops through the window,
That sobering sun, and I realize
The world is hooked on "normal,"
A straight needle to the vein.
How nobody likes the taste
Of locusts and honey anymore.

92. A Pretty Red Apple

I keep coming back to the Bible.

I read books and listen to podcasts and watch YouTube, trying to dig deeper into God's Word.

And I realize it's brought me nothing but heartache.

I see the holes in everything. Myself especially. And I'm disheartened by how we're often placated with intense emotional experiences and self-empowerment models that don't have anything to do with the Gospel.

And a lot of this is directed at women specifically.

I was raised a feminist. I know Steinem and Friedan like the back of my hand. And as poisonous as some Christian women think their modes of thinking are, they have no idea how they're being fed the same poison, just from a different spoon.

I've even recently read about Bethel's "Christian tarot cards."

Has the world gone mad?

Imagine it: a bright-eyed former atheist strolling into a Christian bookstore, excited to get started on this journey of loving and serving our Lord and then she's met face-to-face with the same occult drivel she used to dabble in.

It's. Insane.

My greatest task in all the world is to make sure my daughter knows her self-worth in Christ. That she doesn't take being catered to in such a demeaning way by the evangelical industrial machine sitting down.

That she relies on Scripture and the Holy Spirit to guide her, not some smarmy marketing team trying to make a buck in the name of Jesus.

I have no problem with reading books. I breathe books. But I have a problem with an entire organization thinking I don't pray for discernment every single day of my life.

I do. We have to. Because Satan is as shiny as a pretty red apple.

And I refuse to take a bite.

93. Who Do You Say He Is?

Sin. That's what we get so wrong.

I'm trying to pin down what bothers me about how the Gospel is often reframed in modern-day Christian churches, and I realize one of two things often happens:

1. Sin is the dirty word nobody talks about.

OR

2. Everyone is beaten over the head with the idea of sin so thoroughly that nobody's halfway conscience enough to truly embody what Christ did on the cross.

Why can't we get this right?

I'm reading a really great commentary on Romans in the Enduring Word Commentary app. The way Paul acknowledges and aptly outlines the depravity of the human heart and then leads up to the beautiful crescendo is breathtaking: Jesus taking our place on the cross and suffering and dying for our sin so we can live in eternity with our precious Father. And how that can only be our reality if we have faith in who He says He is.

Who do you say He is?

I think sometimes we want the sin. We want to see someone practicing homosexuality or having an abortion or committing a murder so we can have something tangible to point at and say, "Look there. There's the evil." But how much strength it must take to not turn that finger at our own hearts.

The evil is in all of us. And even though I don't plug my ears to the high-pitched scream of our ever falling world, I also know that a person can't be rid of it and sanctified without submitting at the foot of the cross.

So that's our job, not closing our eyes to sin but not idolizing the threat of it either. We are to bring the TRUE Gospel to everyone we meet, from our family and friends who have fallen into the trap of reli-

gion and are undeniably confused by what Scripture says to the stranger on the street who thinks there's absolutely no room for God in his heart.

And whether or not somebody chooses Christ because of us isn't the point.

The point is He died so we could live beyond the bounds of the sins that sear our hearts.

And who wouldn't want to talk about that?

94. Never Yours in the First Place

I woke up singing

The screams in my chest

Because the world

Is going to end,

Don't you know that?

All the happy is built

Into the side of the sad,

So we can never let

Our guards down.

But then I was thinking

Of all the hopeful moments

And the ones that I looked

At with eyes that knew

They'd never see such things

Again, and I thanked God

for making them even when

I ended up losing them,

Because can you really ever lose

What was never yours

In the first place?

95. No Longer a Dirty Word

In the cathedral, we practiced our vows with other couples gearing up to be married. And when the time came for me to utter those lines of “honor and obey,” I said the word “banana” over and over again.

And Matt laughed.

We were children of feminism. I’d do my thing, he’d do his, and neither of us would call each other out because neither of us had the right.

What an interesting road we’ve traveled.

“Submission” is no longer a dirty word to me. It’s an act of humbling my heart and considering the fact that I’m not always in the right. That maybe somebody else has a better idea that deserves to be heard.

However, I know I’m fortunate. I married a man who’s truly knelt to Christ and loves me and leads me with a good conscience and unburdened heart.

I’m well aware that’s not always the case.

All I know is where our eyes are. We no longer look at each other, our pupils pleading with the other’s, begging for that person to save us from ourselves. There’s no longer the gigantic task of shouldering the other, spine bent, dragging one foot behind in a grown up version of a piggy back ride.

There’s no longer that undesirable sensation of sinking because we’ve already been saved.

We work together. We love our child together. We thoroughly respect each other. But at the end of the day, there’s always one captain of the ship, and I can relinquish that responsibility knowing it belongs to someone who puts my best interest before his own.

It’s a practice that breaks my human will and brings me that much closer to God because I understand now the necessary act of tamping out earthly desire in favor of spiritual obedience that lasts a lifetime.

“Honor and obey,” two words that don’t taste that bad anymore.

96. A God in Their Own Image

The other day I ran across a blog post of an incredibly intelligent and capable believer who had convinced herself that here on earth, the idea of submission to our husbands is a fallacy because Jesus was instilling a kingdom where men and women were on even playing ground.

Jesus does see women and men as both vital to the kingdom. But that doesn't mean we don't have different roles that He didn't uphold and fulfill through Scripture, a Scripture that is reliant on the concept of order and our places within it. Here's a little of what I said (which I actually borrowed from a comment I posted on my friend Crystal's Instagram account. She's doing a great job of explaining what true, Scriptural headship looks like):

“If submission and headship don't apply anymore, neither does anything else in the Bible. God is a God of order, not chaos. Our roles within that order don't change because the year does. The worldly sins of today are the same they've always been, we just like to think as a society we're more evolved. Just looking outside at the world's chaos says otherwise. I think people who can't submit on their own volition within their own family can't truly submit to Christ. They've unfortunately created a god in their own image that promotes their self autonomy other than God's sovereignty in this world.

I know what it's like to buck against the idea of submission. I used to be a feminist atheist and the idea of submission made my skin crawl. Now that I've given everything to Jesus, I realize not submitting is one of the main reasons we used to have problems in our marriage. We're definitely not perfect people but by us both submitting to Christ and me allowing him to lead our family, I can honestly say I truly enjoy what we have and am very grateful. I will say, I am fortunate to have a husband who always asks my opinion and thoroughly respects me (which I know isn't always the case), but if a husband doesn't treat his wife like Christ treats the Church then he shouldn't be leading in the first place.”

As Genesis 3:16 points out, women will desire to master their husbands, a concept that is still prevalent today. We've lived a lifetime of this sort of marital tension between women who want to rule and men who won't step up. Instead, why don't we both bend our knees to Jesus, and in doing so, lovingly fulfill the roles God designed for us in the first place?

Whenever we attempt to secularize our faith in order for the world to pat us in the back, we should be wary. For we are not the world's but God's. And just because man has twisted this concept of submission to manipulate and control doesn't mean we can't take it back and live it as God originally intended.

97. Through Every Cell

When you read about Joan,
The one of Arc, riding horses
Like a man and living for something
Other than expectation, how it sent
Your heart alight to know that faith
Could course through every cell
And Christ could be held in every thought.
But years later you speak and nobody
Listens, a little Isaiah, a little Jeremiah,
Receiving your pats on the head
As God burns His beautiful wrath
Behind the hand that mocks you.

98. Like a Layered Onion

My husband doesn't panic.

If he was on a plane nose-diving towards earth, he'd think to himself, "Well, this most likely won't end well," and then extend his seat back to get a little more comfortable.

With all that's going on in the world, God has been using him to keep me focused.

My heart can get fearful. I'm not always the bravest of people. Looking at my history, I mostly tend to stand up to teenagers and Best Buy employees with bad attitudes.

Not necessarily anyone threatening my life and the ones that I love.

But watching my husband, who's nothing if not cool and calculated in his thinking, I've learned a thing or two about discerning the world's noise and turning back to the only one who can silence it: Jesus.

In these hard moments, when the world is peeled back like a layered onion, my heart is always with the ones who don't believe. How can your soul feel comforted if it doesn't know the One who made it?

I guess that's why I write with steely resolve, with a heart and mind focused on the One who's penned the end to this world's misery, and keep my feet walking in faith.

Because if we who believe refuse to be the light, who will?

99. Don't Lose for Winning

“...and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

1 Corinthians 12. I’m reading, and it hits me. How so many of us are truly followers of Christ. And how sorrowful it is we have these different church divisions keeping us apart.

I hate the idea of denominations. What’s interesting, however, is how in 1 Corinthians 11 verses 18-19 Paul points out that these divisions within the Corinthian church are good so that “those who are approved may become evident among you.”

God approves these factions to sort the wheat from the chaff.

Some of us are true believers. Some of us are just playing games

This feels like today’s Church to me. Funny how it feels like there’s nothing new under the sun.

Oh wait. There isn’t.

It’s time. It’s time we put down what divides us and unite in the Word of God. But maybe then again, I’m a dreamer. Maybe it’s better instead that this all plays out. That we each decide if we’re going to follow God’s Word or the word of man on the altar on a Sunday afternoon.

If we’re going to submit to the God of the universe or the rule-bound prison of religion.

If we trust God’s doctrine or human interpretation that makes our heads ache.

Because in the end, it’s only the saved and unsaved. And I pray we rid ourselves of the unneeded pomp and circumstance to spread the Gospel, to share hope. To hold somebody’s hand so they understand the truth of this world and don’t lose for winning.

100. Fat and Flesh

Everything's on fire
Except your search
For truth.
It lays waste
In another treadmill
Cycle, in your long,
Strong muscles, in
Everything made
Of dirt and dust
And preset
Perceptions.
It melts like fat and flesh
That's no longer there
And looks better
In a photo as
an absence.

101. Paint With All the Colors

A friend told me about Brooklyn Salisbury on Instagram.

Brooklyn is dying and writing about it.

The joy in her words are Spirit-filled. Nobody likes the idea of dying. Nobody likes getting a paper cut. But Brooklyn is giving this gift of life and death back to the Father. She is at His feet showing people the way to the cross through her suffering and the hope she has in Jesus.

And the other day I was complaining about how cold it is.

God puts people like this in our path to remind us of our task here on earth. We can't let the little distractions be distractions. We have the choice of curating a life that is canvas-blank so we can paint with all the colors.

We can take everything that's offered to us - the blood, sweat, and tears - and offer them to the One who made each of these things.

But more importantly, we can remember our God isn't as interested in sacrifices as He is the love in our hearts.

So a prayer for Brooklyn, and for all of us, that we keep sharing the deep sorrow, the beautiful light in all of us, as we guide each other to the foot of the cross.

102. The Dead in Their Eyes

The other day, I got my hair done. I was greeted with hardcore rap blaring in the salon, a story about my hairdresser's daughter growing weed out in Missouri, another story about her hacker of a boyfriend, and two ladies who worked there and looked like they had a case of permanent side-eye while cyberstalking the new girlfriend of one of their exes.

The place felt dark and after my appointment, I cried.

My heart hurt for these people. It's not a case of "well, at least I'm not like them." It's a case of knowing I very well used to be them.

Even worse in a lot of ways.

And it's the insurmountable task of sharing a Savior who wants them despite the bravado, the permanent side-eye.

When I got there, the first thing my hairdresser said was, "We don't give a *bleep* what anyone thinks. Hope you're not offended by that."

And I wasn't. If there's something refreshing about a nonbeliever, it's their ability to be honest with themselves.

What got me though was when I asked her if rap was her favorite genre of music. "No," she said, which meant she just liked blaring the curse words. She just liked doing what she pleased.

She just liked putting out the sound of that siren, and maybe she's just waiting for somebody to notice.

So I'll go again when my ends start to fray and my heart is healed. I'll pray beforehand as I walk past the crystals lined on the wall and the Buddha statue resting beneath them. I'll pray and assess the lines on their faces, the dead in their eyes.

And I'll pray God gives me a way to show them just how much they're loved.

103. Dust in a Flame

Apollonia was beaten,
Teeth strewn at her feet,
And when they threatened
To burn her to ash,
She jumped like
Dust in a flame.
Gone in a second
But still known
All these years
For dancing against
The tide you drown
In.

104. Fighting the Good Fight

Today is my birthday. I'm thirty-seven.

And man, am I tired.

I'm not sure we talk a lot about demonic attacks, at least not in this country. But I've been feeling the heat lately.

My husband says it's because I'm smart and talented and have my eyes on Christ.

His check is in the mail.

But I think it's because I'm weak and stupid and have no business being about my Father's business.

And I suppose that's a very big lie.

The more the Holy Spirit speaks, the harder this gets. Horrible thoughts and a darkness at the edges. I can feel it.

I can see it.

It's a reminder that yes, I am weak. And sometimes I do stupid things. And alone, I have no business being about anything concerning the God of the universe.

But I think what Satan likes to forget is that for those of us who choose to be chosen, we have an internal force that goes beyond anything we could ever control.

That God is far beyond our reach but His extends into the depths of our souls.

So here's to another year fighting the good fight, enduring the ache in these bones.

Because it's never easy, but oh so worth it.

105. Tangled in the Web

I'm at a point in my Christian walk where I'm finally looking up and noticing something: we are not all the same.

We are not merely believers.

We are believers who have categorized ourselves so ruthlessly that there's hardly any room for someone to stand next to us.

To read the breakdown of the theological adherence of one pastor versus another is like reading the label of an overly-processed cereal brand.

It's ridiculous.

Paul said it best:

“Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ.’

Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

This sentiment still rings true. We divide ourselves between schools of thought and different teachers to the point that the very thing that should remain un-muddied is: the Gospel.

And it's not just these divisions but also the ones that come when vaccinations are concerned that further hinder our way.

I'm not sure who started the “good Christians don't get vaccinated rumor,” but I highly recommend a visit to Romans 14 and 15. We are to follow the authorities God has put into power and are also to make choices upon the conviction of our own minds. And our choices won't necessarily look like our brother's or sister's.

“The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”

It's time we stop focusing inward and look outward. There's a whole sea of people who need to hear the Good News, yet we're too busy getting tangled in the web of manmade interpretations and self-righteous judgment.

All we need is God's Word and each other to face the dark days ahead.

But when will we begin to acknowledge that?

106. The Holding of Hands

Every other Thursday, I meet with two really close friends. We talk and pray together and discuss a current book we're reading by Charlotte Mason. We get out the things inside us that have built up over several days and the most important part of all: we listen.

Church is this.

Church is also the Bible study my husband and I teach with our friends, people we've known since we started attending there. It's sharing parenting woes and triumphs and work headaches and the heart-break that comes with the crux of living. And the holding of hands as we walk into another week, a sea of unbelievers built to break us down whether they know it or not.

Church is also our Sunday gathering, the breaking of bread and taking communion, the soft pause in the ceremony to remember what we're really here for: a broken body and spilt blood for the weight of our sin.

Church is real. It's the people not the pomp. It's the prayer, not the circumstance. It is an undying love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, not a tongue-wagging, side-eye endeavor that leaves a new member out on the fringes.

It's an arms wide open welcoming of the new, the scared, the "I don't have this figured out yet" because the thing is, we don't either.

But He does.

And that's always the point.

107. Nothing but Dust

When they're formed
And warm and breathing,
And the skin is new day
Soft, there's no harm
In it. No worry that ventures
Forth from their hearts
Because the monsters
Only seem to be external.
But then they grow, bright
Sponges that they are,
Soaking all the sin
Around them, their
Skin goes dry, and you
Remember how everything
Is nothing
But dust.

108. It Was Never Meant to Be This Way

When I was young and sat in a hard, wooden pew, my head played a game of “how did this become that?” How did the early church morph into a list of rules, a show of pomp and circumstance? A “better show up or lose out” type endeavor?

And I know now in my heart, it was never meant to be this way.

One of our old pastors may have said it best: “Humans have an uncanny way of screwing things up.”

Well, don’t we ever.

When did we stop trusting God? When did we stop believing that the Holy Spirit would guide us through our Scripture reading and guide our walk on this (hopefully) long journey towards Jesus? When did we start putting our faith in the pope or John Calvin or the man on the Quaker Oats box to define what being a follower of Christ means?

When I was young and sitting in that pew, I found it all to be so stifling. I still do.

Church is not a game. It is not an intricate dance of “do this but don’t do that.” Our freedom is in Christ, in what He did for ALL of us on the cross, and the moment we trade that in for a list of seventy-two rules and regulations we MUST adhere to in order to be in good standing with God, we miss the point completely.

We dissect what’s holy and place it in filthy boxes.

Jesus had an issue with people who once did something like that.

Oh yeah, the Pharisees.

I pray you understand this post. How Satan takes bits and pieces of “good” and quietly sews them together with an evil underlining. He wants you to feel burdened by the Word. He wants you to feel like you have to dress a certain way or wear your hair long or show up on Sunday or otherwise you’ll write your own ticket to hell.

He wants you to be insecure and burdened by the goodness that is God.

But we can't be burdened by an act of love so intense it brought death to life and made it no more.

It's time to understand the truth of Scripture. To rely on Jesus to guide you through the Old Testament where His story begins to the New Testament where it's barely getting started.

Because He will come again to judge the living and the dead, and He will call His sheep. Not the people who dance all the choreographed steps, but the ones who know His music by heart.

109. To Sew These Strands

I've already cried this morning.

And I've been writing.

Cry-writing. I'm no stranger to it.

I didn't think this through. It happened last time I wrote a novel. The attacks. Satan can be so fierce, but at least I can call it what it is.

At least I know what happens to him in the end.

I was watching an interview with John MacArthur and he was talking about how once we submit to Jesus and the closer we are in our walk with Him, the worse we sometimes feel because we truly understand the unbearable weight of sin. We know wholeheartedly His grace, his love for us, our own salvation through His death on the cross, but we also have seen behind the curtain.

We've seen the evil without its lipstick on.

And sometimes, instead of sounding the alarm, there's this overbearing weakening in our knees and the overwhelming need to cry.

Hence, this morning.

But I won't stop there.

I know now the remedy: prayer. I am a guilty sinner but He is a forgiving God. And I know my purpose is to write this book, a story crafted from the bits and pieces He's placed in my heart.

And if I succumb to the weight of this world's sin, I'm putting myself in the shoes of my God, and how dare I.

It has already been won. It has already been finished.

So now to sew these strands of words with my eyes and face bone dry.

110. Down This Road Before

I have great faith that God will use my writing to reach people who are like the person I used to be.

Unconvinced and uncertain of an establishment that claims great faith but dwells in hypocrisy.

I want them to know that faith in Christ goes beyond the misdeeds of those who pretend to be the chosen. The true Church, the real Church can be found in a building, but it's also walking through our communities with the eyes of faith.

Jesus is real. I firmly believe that. He will come again. And my prayer is to write words that aren't trite and cute but invariably construct the gritty reality we live in, one that Jesus has healed for the sake of our souls.

I will need help with this. I'll need beta readers for a few book projects. I'll need people to read and review my work. I'll need people to promote it.

I'm not very good at this part, asking for help. If I could do this myself, I would. But being part of the Church has taught me that nothing is all on my shoulders. That Jesus has us live in community with our brothers and sisters to keep each other encouraged and to help drive the Kingdom forward.

So a request: please pray that my work finds the people it needs to move things forward. Please pray I stay obedient, not doing things my way but His way. Pray I have the energy to homeschool, write, publish, be a good wife, mother, friend, and person of faith.

Please pray that God's will in this is done. Because I've gone down this road before on my own only to watch it fizzle out.

And I don't want to live like that again.

Resources

Below are the people, podcasts, and websites I mention in this book.

Dr. John Delony: <https://www.ramseysolutions.com/shows/the-dr-john-delony-show>

The Mars Hill Podcast: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/>

The Bible Project: <https://bibleproject.com/>

Kyle Idleman: <https://www.kyleidleman.com/>

Melissa Dougherty: <https://www.melissadougherty.co/>

Enduring Word Commentary: <https://enduringword.com/>

Mike Winger: <https://biblethinker.org/>

Brooklyn Salisbury: https://www.instagram.com/brooklyn_speaks¹

John MacArthur: <https://www.gty.org/about/john>

1. https://www.instagram.com/brooklyn_speaks/?hl=en

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