



Ericka Clay

LIGHT

AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

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LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

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The Gospel of Being a Housewife

Yesterday was beautiful.

The sky was super clear, so I braved the cold in my long black winter coat (er, duster lol) and my way too big sunglasses.

(The perks of being nearly forty and forgetting to care).

I spent the walk praying and meditating, just being thankful that my legs were moving, I was breathing in fresh air, and that God has never given up on me.

But there was something niggling in my heart that I'd like to write down here.

The other day, I read something about what it means to be a Biblical woman. I've seen this often: posts that boast of more traditional family roles—how being a woman of God means staying home with your kids and how this is far superior to working outside the home.

And I'd like to address this topic as a former atheist feminist who is continuously learning to submit every single inch of herself to our Lord and has lived several different lives before finally bending my knee to our supreme and sovereign God.

All I know is this: He was with me every moment.

- *He was with me when He asked me to go back to work because my husband and I had gotten ourselves into \$70,000 of debt.*
- *He was with me as I worked and received calls from my daughter's principal nearly every single day that she was acting up again.*
- *He was with me during the ADHD diagnosis and while praying whether medication was the right path for our daughter.*
- *He was with me when He put the seed in my heart to come home and homeschool our daughter (something that was **NEVER** on my radar).*
- *He was with me as I struggled to submit to Him as a wife and*

*mother working in the home and doing something I had vowed to never **EVER** do.*

Ultimately, I'm writing this because it would be very easy for a fellow sister to feel shame if I, too, touted the gospel of being a housewife. Life just isn't that black and white, and there are a million different ways God uses to sanctify us (something truly evidenced in Scripture).

And I wouldn't trade a moment of my heart change for anything.

It's easy to idolize a certain kind of life, and I certainly am not saying being at home isn't a blessing. It has truly become one for me because I get to write these words, homeschool my daughter, and laugh with my husband in the kitchen (who now works from home, too).

But ultimately? God is in the hard parts when you second-guess yourself and nothing looks Facebook-perfect. So, to those women who are working right now, who might have that desire in their hearts to come home and feel like maybe they aren't "Christian" enough because they're not living for the Lord from the comfort of their kitchens right now, just know none of that is the point.

The point is that Jesus loves you. He died and suffered for you and was raised on the third day to eternally wash away your sins. He sees you. And it doesn't matter what anyone believes is the "right" way to live your life. The only thing that matters is where the Holy Spirit is leading you right this very second.

And that, my friends, is the ultimate way to live.

Like a Twig on the Shoulders of a Mighty Stream

We watched *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*¹ for the five billionth time this Thanksgiving, and I'm always amazed at how a movie with that much swearing can get to the heart of the Gospel.

But alas, God is everywhere.

One of the protagonists, Del Griffith (played by John Candy), has a bigger story going on than what meets the eye (and I will not ruin it for those of you who are quitting work early just to go watch it. Also, shame on you. Also, good call), but what's even more intriguing about Del, is the way he always rolls with the punches.

In contrast, Steve Martin's character, Neal Page, has never found a punch he hasn't taken straight to the face. Instead of adopting a thankful heart like Del, he instead is very not thankful for the little everyday inconveniences of life.

And it's a wonder the movie doesn't involve a scene where Neal suffers a stress-induced heart attack.

This movie reminds me of two Scripture verses that came into play for me this past week.

The first one is from James and reminds me of Neal's character (or more accurately, the exact opposite of Neal's character):

"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."

James 1:19-20²

1. <https://amzn.to/49iirIH>

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%201%3A19-20&version=NIV>

"...because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." Huh. I know it's easy to read the Bible and not actually follow it, but what if we took verses like these to heart?

What if whenever we got angry, we realized this wasn't producing godly fruit but a demonic hold that hurts families, ruins friendships, and causes more trouble than we ever intended to be part of in the first place?

The next verse reminds me of Del:

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18³

Again, what if we acted on a verse like this? What if the next time you were deeply annoyed, heartbroken, sitting in a big ol' stinking pile of fear, you gave it all to God and thanked Him that you are alive, breathing, and given the beautiful opportunity of bringing Heaven to others right down here on earth?

Wouldn't life for you (and for everyone) be a little bit different?

There are a lot of favorite parts from *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* (otherwise, I wouldn't have watched it five million LITERAL times), but this next little scene says it all.

Neal's miffed after he's left in a parking lot with keys for a nonexistent rental car, and he must trek three miles back to the airport. Del, on the other hand, easily gets a rental car, and this is their exchange:

Neal: Well Del, you're a charmed man.

Del: Nope.

Neal: Oh, I know. You just go with the flow.

Del: Like a twig on the shoulders of a mighty stream.

"Like a twig on the shoulders of a mighty stream." May we all live such wisdom.

3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%205%3A16-18&version=NIV>

No Thanks, I'm Not Hungry

My TV keeps feeding me demons.

Like last night, there we were, minding our own business and watching *Tiny House Hunters*, wondering how a family of six can defy the laws of physics and squeeze into a two-hundred-square-foot box on wheels when the Discovery app decides to offer us a demonic commercial involving an old woman who is “possessed” by the “Holy Spirit,” a slew of none-the-wiser victims, and Brandy, the former R&B popstar who has obviously taken her life in a very different direction (fellow 90’s kids: remember her “feud” with Monica? Cue “That Boy is Mine.” ...also, whatever happened to Monica???).

But I digress.

It’s odd the ideas Hollywood has about Jesus. It’s odd the way they throw out His name constantly as a curse word. It’s odd that they have no real understanding of who He is, and instead of bending a knee, they mock Him without a care in the world.

Or is it?

*“Above all, you must understand that in the last days **scoffers**¹ will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.”*

2 Peter 3:3²

It’s easy to be blindsided by the visceral hate and disregard that people have not only for our faith but also for Christ the King Himself. But to be honest, we shouldn’t be. Scripture warns us of people like these (remember **the pigs we aren’t to throw our pearls to**³?).

Frankly, it never surprises me, considering I used to be one of them.

1. <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-scoffers.html>

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Peter%203%3A3&version=NIV>

3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%207%3A6&version=NIV>

Oink, oink.

When Jesus doesn't take the rightful place in your heart, you must put Him somewhere because He is Lord and Creator of the universe. And that, my friends, just can't be ignored.

So, when you're uncomfortable recognizing that you're merely an incredibly small mound of flesh that could be eviscerated in the blink of an eye and have absolutely no control over that fact, it's easy to place blame and mock what you fully and completely do not understand.

"The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit."

1 Corinthians 2:14⁴

Scoffers are **spiritually blind**⁵, choosing this course for themselves because they refuse to put their faith in Jesus.

So, what is the cure for spiritual blindness? Complete faith that Jesus is who He says He is—the Son of God.

"As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

4. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%202%3A14&version=NIV>

5. <https://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-blindness.html>

Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

“Lord, I want to see,” he replied.

Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.”

Luke 18:35-43⁶

Look, not everyone is going to get on board. Many will continue to hate us because **they hated Jesus first**⁷. And in the event that someone won't hear you out about God's unyielding love for them, then **brush the dust off your feet**⁸, friend, and move on.

Because eventually, **every knee will bow**⁹, whether willingly or not. And it's not our job to change Hollywood's mind or anyone else's, for that matter.

It's our job to remind people that God originally created a stunningly beautiful world for us to grow and flourish in Him, and through the sin of our own hands, we ruined and are still ruining that perfect world.

But when we give our hearts, our minds, our everything over to Jesus, we receive God's ultimate gift of love and forgiveness and will forever be called His.

And I'm not sure about you, but I think that trumps any weird old movie, even if it stars Moesha herself.

6. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2018%3A35-43&version=NIV>

7. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2015%3A18&version=NIV>

8. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2010%3A14-15&version=NIV>

9. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%202%3A10-11&version=NIV>

All right, time to figure out how seventeen children are going to squeeze themselves into a questionably constructed overhead loft.

This one's a doozy.

*If you want to learn more about my personal encounter with demons, click **here**¹⁰.*

10. <https://erickaclay.com/my-testimony/>

It's a Little Too Loud in Here

A lot of people look sad at Walmart.

This is most likely because they're at Walmart (no offense Walmart, but also, kind of some offense). But it might also be because there's a constant war going on in their hearts and minds.

I forget about that sometimes. Not that Satan isn't trying to finagle his way into my life or ministry, but because I've gotten into the practice of battening down the hatches pretty securely.

I'm not online. I don't watch the news. In fact, I watched *The Daily Show* for the first time in years the other day, and watching the clips from it was like watching one of my favorite movies, *Idiocracy*. I've been waiting for the time that movie would ultimately come to fruition. And it totally seems like it's now.

But why wouldn't it be? People are constantly being bombarded by news of everyone and their literal mother, especially if they're still loitering around on Facebook. And considering comparison is the thief of joy, and social media is a playground for that particular thief, I'm not surprised the sadness I see when purchasing a man-sized bag of Sour Patch Kids.

(Like I said, Satan messes with me too.)

But the online thing is like another universe to me now. When Matt mentions somebody we know is in Disney and looks like they're having fun, I panic thinking he's either having a stroke or maybe he's somehow stumbled upon a wormhole in a fourth dimensional wall.

And then I remember Facebook exists.

No, this is not a "everyone should give up the news and social media like I do because I'm the best person alive" post. (That will be Monday's).

This is more of a "it's okay to detach from the madness, even for a little bit" post. Because I sometimes think we feel unable to give ourselves permission to walk away from being in the know because of FOMO and what not.

Well instead, let's FASTDBUJ (Forget About Stuff That Doesn't Bring Us Joy). And I didn't even have to eat a pound of sour gummy candy to come up with that.

Because ultimately, the louder the noise, the harder it is to hear our God who is quietly calling out.

Eighty Percent Less Greens

Did I ever tell you about the time I was going to have a hypnobirth?

This was notably during my "becoming vegan" phase, where I decided everything not made in an old medicine woman's cast iron tub was harmful to everyone under the sun, and how dare you?

Eventually, I did become vegan, and my husband did, too, (by default), and I could dive into that, but maybe it would be better if you just showed up Wednesday evenings at St. Mark's in the basement where you can hear him share the post-traumatic woes of eating something called "bok choy."

That's not even one of the hardcore vegetables, but I digress.

Just as "default vegan" as my husband was, he was also a "default hypnobirther" because guess who was nominated to softly serenade me into a soft, twilight trance that would obviously (and most definitely) make me forget that I was ushering my daughter out into this world via the smallest door in the universe?

My husband.

Granted, he does have a soft, angelic-like voice that makes one lose control of their extremities if donning the exact right timbre, but I highly doubt there was anything he could have said, danced, mimed with his hands, that would have made me forget what was about to happen to the lower half of me.

Oh, and last minute, I chose the epidural.

Sometimes, I laugh. Okay, fine, I laugh a lot. I realize, out of everyone, my husband has had a front-row seat to knowing the person I was before Jesus and the one after, the one still growing and changing and being refined like silver in the fire (**Psalm 66:10¹**).

And man, has he seen a lot.

But he, above all people, is thankful for my **sanctification**². If not for the fact that we eat roughly eighty percent less greens in this house now,

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2066%3A10&version=NIV>

maybe for the fact that God has shifted my priorities back to where they properly belong.

Before, I had an achingly ambitious heart. I was competitive beyond belief and didn't know a person I couldn't turn into an arm's length enemy, even if only in my head.

Now? I die every day to my family, to the dreams that were once trying to kill me, and to the fact that suffering—in those bits and spurts that can really rough a heart up—is sometimes the best antidote to what we try to run and hide from most.

Ourselves.

Before I wrap this one up, I wanted to share something from where I've found most of my best life guidance.

Reddit.

Somebody named "Tesaractor" aptly defined the process of accepting Jesus and what sanctification through Him looks like:

"We accept Christ and the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is done through surrender and sanctification and faith. The more we surrender to Christ, the more area He has to work with. Some people never get filled because they don't have faith in the Holy Spirit or that God will move, and they never surrender."

It's God's work within us. But it's also our desire to know Him better by reading the Word, spending time with Him in prayer, and serving His people.

He moves, and in doing so, we should move too. Especially when vegetables are involved.

Do You Want to be Healed?

In college, I lost my mind.

I had actually lost my mind far before that, at the age of sixteen. I had a mental breakdown, sitting in my closet, trying to read the book *Cold Mountain*. It was assigned reading for the summer, and I LOVED summer reading, or really, any kind of reading. But each time I tried to open the cover of that book, I started to cry. Hard.

You see, the year before, I was enrolled in an all-girls academy that kicked my intellectual behind. I had always been one of the smartest, and suddenly, I was one of the “meh.” This doesn’t sound like it would be a big deal except for the fact that I had built my entire life on being “one of the smartest”—a way to detract from who I really was deep down. I didn’t understand that about myself at the time, but I do now.

I always wore a mask.

And when that mask was trying to be pulled from my overly anxious and exhausted fingers, I doubled down and sacrificed myself on the altar of good grades. So, by the time summer rolled around, I just couldn’t do it anymore. Anything, really.

I stopped eating. I ran all the time in the hot Houston sun. I watched *The Gilmore Girls* until it felt like my eyes had dissolved and were leaking out of my head. But I wore all of this well, making sure the “crazy” never left its little cage in the back of my head.

Well, until college, that is.

I had broken up with my boyfriend, followed my parents back to Texas, transferred colleges, and tried to be normal. I even managed to become a Tri-Delt pledge and had a group of co-ed friends who were a ton of fun and loved to surf. But eventually, that “crazy” broke out of its cage, and I started to hide from my friends, literally hiding in my dorm room as they beat on the door, trying to get me to come out. I could hear them talking, asking themselves where I could be. They cared for a while until they didn’t anymore. I dropped out of the Tri-Delts. I spent my days tan-

ning, working out, and eating little. And I finally told my parents, who helped get me on meds and an appointment with a therapist.

But every time the therapist called to set up my appointment, I threw my phone into the closet.

Closets. I'm starting to see a pattern here.

In **John 5:1-15**¹, Christ asks a paralytic if he wants to be healed. The question almost seems ridiculous since the man has been dragging himself to the healing pool every day only to be edged out by others who are faster than him. But it's not ridiculous, especially when the paralytic answers that no one will put him in the water and everyone else keeps cutting in front of him.

So...excuses.

I'm not trying to be harsh. The man obviously was afflicted, and truthfully, so was I. I believe my mental struggles (although very much chemical) have also been used against me by dark forces simply because my faith wasn't in Jesus. It was in me to "do" something about my condition. I was smart enough. I could figure this out.

But like Jesus also says, "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it" (**Matthew 16:25**)². I tried desperately to find my own healing, but it hasn't been since the ripe old age of thirty-nine that I've understood full submission in this area.

I can't heal myself. Nobody can, except Jesus.

Again, I'm not denying the blessing that medication (in some cases) is. I use it myself and know God led me to it in His infinite grace and perfect timing. But it's a blessing because of God's sovereignty, not my own desire to change my life.

Often, it comes down to this for me: **Saul**³ lost his mind, but so did **Nebuchadnezzar**⁴. And Satan would sometimes torment me, remind-

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%205-6&version=NIV>

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2016%3A25&version=NIV>

3. <https://www.gotquestions.org/life-Saul.html>

ing me how Saul lost the Spirit and attempted to kill God's beloved, David. But then the Holy Spirit would nudge me towards Nebuchadnezzar, how he also lost his mind because of his prideful heart, but how quickly he turned to the God of the universe to heal and humble him.

So, do you want to be healed? Of course, you do. I did, deep down. But the only way to true healing is to give every inch of ourselves back to the God who created us to fix our brokenness, and our weakness, and to work through our shortcomings to prove His glory on this quietly dying earth.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Charlotte

We once owned a goldfish that wouldn't die.

She was purchased at a fair in Tulsa by my loving parents who delivered her onto my lap in a plastic bag when picking up my daughter who had been staying with them one weekend.

"Oh...fun," I had said, wondering what I had done in my pre-Jesus life to deserve holding a leaking bag of water on my lap for over an hour. Unfortunately, I didn't have to think for too long.

Charlotte, as often happens, became *my* goldfish. Not that my daughter didn't love her, take random selfies with her, or feed her whenever the mood struck, but ultimately, Charlotte became my charge.

The thing about Charlotte is that she was prone to trying to die. Not so much in a masochistic kind of way, just more in an exaggerated soap opera-y kind of way. For example, she couldn't have just any type of water in her aquarium. She had to have either filtered water (from our fridge specifically) or mildly expensive bottled water. Case-in-point: whenever we'd drive back to Tulsa to stay with my parents, we'd bring Charlotte along (which meant more time with a wet lap, but seriously, if you knew the person I was before Jesus got to me, then you'd conclude this was certainly a fair test in patience), which meant having to change out the water in her travel aquarium when we got there.

This is where I learned she'd only inhabit "special" water because as soon as I tried to fill up her small tank with water from my mother's fridge, there she'd go all dying on us. She'd do this thing where her eyes would start to glaze over, and she'd take her time floating belly up to the absolute horror of one child, four adults, one great-grandmother, and an insane standard poodle who couldn't take the emotional turmoil of the humans around her (my parents have a penchant for insane standard

poodles who can't take the emotional turmoil of the humans around them. They also like gifting people with live animals).

Fortunately, my mother had mildly expensive bottled water and we got to waste roughly five hundred dollars and several pounds of plastic to save one dramatic goldfish.

The next time(s) she tried to die always involved my lunch hour. I'd get off of work, thankful to live so close to my job that I could go home and enjoy a nice pleasant lunch in my own kitchen, drying out the work sweat in my blouse, and wondering what sort of horrible things I used to do pre-Jesus that landed me in the testing ground of a debt collections call center that was more insane than my parents' standard poodle.

And then I'd remember.

So I'd stroll into the kitchen, super excited to eat something stupid like broccoli because I used to think healthiness was next to godliness (it's not...that's cheese), and there she'd be with one eye open, waiting for me to step onto to the linoleum where I once laid down a hot pot of boiling water that I had in my hands because I was trying to defend myself against a scam call (we still have the brown, round indent which I will miss whenever we replace the flooring). As soon as I'd make an entrance, she would start to go belly up, slow, real slow, closing both eyes and giving off an air of, "Well, I guess this is it." I'd then spend the remainder of my lunch hour praying over her, changing out her water, and remembering all those times I drunkenly prank-dialed unsuspecting strangers.

This still seemed fair.

But the most horrifying time Charlotte didn't die was one particular time when she was in her bowl that wasn't covered. I came home from work (really craving that fresh broccoli...I literally can hardly write this sentence), when I discovered her on the counter, slightly dried out and glued to the formica.

She was dead. Absolutely and completely.

Except for the fact that she wasn't because I cried to Jesus, asking Him to intercede like He did with Lazarus as I splashed her with fresh

emergency bottled water that I had begrudgingly bought in the case that she would indeed finally try to die on us for good.

Once wet and unstuck from the counter (which still gives me PTSD), I then put her in a fresh bowl of water, placed something on the top of her bowl so she wouldn't try this again (even though she was still pretty seemingly dead), and waited as her body slowly but surely twitched its way back to life.

I naturally assumed this was a once-in-a-lifetime kind of miracle (until I Googled it and apparently goldfish have a knack for dying and then coming back to life. What is wrong with these animals??). But regardless, Charlotte's short life span (she did eventually die...for good) taught me a lot.

God's not done until God's done. And even when it looks like your life is dried out, stuck to the counter, and the only way you'll ever be revived is by somebody else's hand and not your own, He comes and changes the water unexpectedly, unbeknownst to you. And then there you feel it, the shock of life in your arms, your legs, in your heart, and the very mind that tried to tell you all along that you're gone for good.

But you're not dead, friend. You, like Charlotte, are very much alive (well, except for right now because she's not anymore but you get my drift).

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

James 1:12¹

Keep going, and I will too.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%201%3A12&version=NIV>

Before the Spring flourishes.

Right now is the hard time.

It's the cold earth before the Spring flourishes.

I want to give up.

Our family is going through something that is one of those things that lie dormant for the longest time.

I was good with it sleeping. I was good with it shadowed, not because I crave the dark anymore but because of the “what ifs” Satan sang in my head.

What if everyone knew you weren't in control?

Well, here's the thing: I think we're all already aware of how not in control we are.

I was listening to my friend's podcast the other day. It was either **Shelly's**¹ or **Jessica's**² (and regardless of whose, both are fantastic, so go start listening, friends), and they shared how a pastor friend broke down what the Bible actually is. Here's my paraphrase:

- *Genesis shares the story of the beautiful place God created for us to walk with Him.*
- *And then basically the rest of the Bible (before Jesus comes to earth to save us) is all about the ways humans screwed up this glorious earth (my words, not the pastor's) and how God won't give up on us regardless.*
- *Through our polygamy, murder, subjugation of women and people groups, rape, deception, covetousness, torture...God still runs after us.*
- *And He was even willing to sacrifice His own son to show us how much we're loved. How much He's willing to forgive us and make everything right.*

1. <https://un-perfect.net/the-un-perfect-podcast/>

2. <https://www.jessicahurlbut.com/full-spectrum-parenting>

So why would I ever be afraid of bringing to light the battle He's already won?

It's easy to blame God. It's easy to say, "Why don't you just blink and fix this mess?"

But then I realize, this is *my* mess. And God has already fixed it. The test is to stay still and know He is God as He walks me across barren ground, through snow drifts, to get to the place He created for us to cherish in the first place.

Oh, there it is. I see it now.

Spring.

World on Fire

Once upon a time, I had a dream that the world was on fire.

It was the night of 9/11, after learning our neighbor's daughter was on the second plane to hit the towers.

Her name was Lynn, and she had worn a red dress to prom just like I had.

There was something about that fact that weighed a lot heavier than it probably should, but then again, maybe not.

It was the realest dream I've ever had, and honestly, I'm not sure it was a dream at all. Because I was terrified watching all of it burn, and yet there was something else there hovering around me.

Since that dream, I was clinically diagnosed with depression, I became an alcoholic, I was socially inept for years, and I thought I could control it all by controlling the food I put in my mouth and the exercise I did to widdle down my thighs.

So, kind of nuts.

But who among us isn't, really? We live in a world that's already been lit at the edges, and we fall into patterns of addiction (whether we want to claim them or not) to numb out and ignore the smell of smoke.

(Recently, I've been watching *Tiny House Hunters* like it's my job. There's just something about people paying to defy physics that really calms me down.)

But ultimately, God knows all this. He knows my crazy. He knows the world's crazy. He knows the crazy of the ones we love most who we can't fix or change, but He can. And maybe that takes a lifetime, a timeline that often chafes at our "I want it now!" mentality.

Maybe the point isn't the change itself. If we believe the change is already a reality (since God isn't restricted by our concept of time), then maybe the point is the sitting in it. The smell of smoke, the world burning around us, and the knowing He loves us and that He's the only one who can put out our flames.

“Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, ‘Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!’

So, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.”

Daniel 3:26-27¹

I Hope You Brought Your Gifts

Yesterday, my husband caught me raising my hands high in the bathroom, jumping up and down, and praising God that January is finally over, and February is finally here.

(And it wasn't the weirdest thing he's ever randomly seen me do. But that's neither here nor there.)

The point is that God has seen us through the miserable month of January (that still had its beautiful upsides, I might add).

And we're all still alive.

So, what's so great about February? Well, we're in the balance between winter and March, and I still know God's staying true to the promise that our family will flourish this year.

Also, it's my birthday month. I hope you brought your gifts.

Plural.

I turn forty in two weeks. And it's been my life's goal to give all my crap over to God for Him to sort out before I start living year forty and one day.

So far so good. I mean, there's been a lot of crap, you guys.

But He's sorting through it and finding the beauty in every single one of my massive issues.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Romans 8:28¹

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%208%3A28&version=NIV>

You Cut the Hair, You Get the Matches

I go into "burn it all down" mode at least once a month.

In fact, my husband recently cut off all my hair (by my request...I feel like that's a pertinent thing to add here), and now I go around saying, "You cut the hair, you get the matches!"

This by no means makes any sense at all for them "normal" families, but for us, it's kind of like saying, "Mom's in warrior mode. She ain't letting nothing get her down."

I promise you that we do actually know what grammar is.

When I think of God, I often think of the Lion of Judah. It's interesting how Satan is also referred to as a lion, but I certainly see it like a Scar versus Mufasa thing in my mind. Scar thought he had Mufasa beat, but he only unleashed something that was meant to thrive eternally throughout the Pride Lands in the first place:

Life.

Death is always at our heels, friends. It's in the eyes of the person you thought loved you. It's in the way nothing seems to go right, and your bank account always seems empty. It's the horrid thoughts in your own head as 2025 seems to be leering and looming over the only peace you thought you'd ever know.

But take heart. Jesus has overcome the world, the evil, all the bad in every nook and cranny God deemed good in the first place. And like Paul, may we find solace, knowing we can do anything He asks no matter our circumstances:

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

Philippians 4:12-13¹

Time to refill those matches!

And on an entirely separate note, please pray for my husband...

Somebody Get Me a Tissue

You know who knows the Bible really well?

Satan.

I was thinking about how he tests Jesus in the wilderness for forty days (**Matthew 4:1-11**¹) and the entire time this joker is spouting out Bible verses like it's some sort of quiz bowl.

It makes sense though. For a long time, I refused Jesus because I refused other Christians.

If your leader is supposed to be so amazing, why are you so...well...not?

And I realized a few things:

- People use the Bible for their own selfish gains. They twist the Word to reach an end goal that has nothing to do with our Savior. Think **wolves in sheep's clothing**². (I've been watching **Scamanda**³ right now and it's heart-wrenching how this lady used something so beautiful to manipulate so many people).
- Some people know the Word on an intellectual or ritualistic level. But it's never actually targeted their hearts. Think **the Pharisees**⁴ (or anyone practicing "Christian" who likes to wield the Bible like a baseball bat).
- Everyone is a product of their raising (oops, my Southern roots are showing again), and a lot of us don't take the time to question our motives. We don't ask God to search our hearts like David, and instead, hold on to the generational teachings of our parents and their parents (and so on and so forth)

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%204%3A1-11&version=NIV>

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%207%3A15&version=NIV>

3. <https://abc.com/show/1056ec91-9c44-4671-ae98-3c9feb3f35b3>

4. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2023%3A27-28&version=NIV>

instead of letting God decide what's beneficial for our growth and what isn't. A lot of people live by the idea that "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." (And if that's your mentality, following Jesus will be a lot harder than you think, friend).

Ultimately, this is why we need to read Scripture for ourselves. Any pastor, priest, minister, guy off the side of the road can spout whatever he (or she) wants at the pulpit. But at the end of the day, we are tasked with knowing Scripture for ourselves and discerning what's truth and what's a blatantly twisted lie (**Acts 17:10-12⁵**, **Deuteronomy 6:6-9⁶**).

And we can only do this by having a REAL relationship with Jesus, not just a Sunday morning fly by on the way to the golf course or mall (I just made myself throw up a little bit by mentioning both of those things. Quick, somebody get me a tissue!).

Jesus walks right here, right now besides each one of us. We can either read the book He's written for us and use it as the life-giving tool it is...

...or we can follow in Satan's footsteps and waste our time (and God's) by wielding it as the weapon it was never meant to be.

The choice is ours.

5. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2017%3A10-12&version=NIV>

6. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy%206%3A6-9&version=NIV>

Underneath All the Ick

Yesterday, I reflected on a post I published the other day.

This happens from time to time. Sometimes I go, "Ericka, were you being "too Ericka" again?"

And most often the answer is, "Yes, of course you were."

But it wasn't my thoughts on Scripture and the ways people twist it that were tripping me up (I fully stand behind everything I wrote).

It was this: I forgot to talk about having a gracious heart for those who get it all wrong.

A writer friend, **Priscilla**¹, shared her own story in the comments of that post, and it prompted me to reflect on those times when grace didn't come into play for me.

Right after becoming a Jesus follower, I started to study...a lot. And as it often goes with me, I'd start to lean towards whatever it was I was studying. Like my whole Calvinist rabbit hole. I felt uncomfortable with their doctrine but then spent a whole heck of a lot of time wondering if I was even forgiven and how exactly hot the bonfire of hell was.

Fortunately, God snapped me out of it, leading me back to His loving-kindness, but it taught me a good lesson.

Just because we tend to get it wrong, doesn't mean there isn't a righteous heart underneath all the "ick."

God created that heart, even the hearts of those who insist on sacrificing them on the altar of evil. So, the best we can do is stand firmly in truth but also love like Jesus.

We have to understand how easy it is to get things wrong, to listen to Satan's deceptive tongue, and to find ourselves off the path that leads straight to the Father.

So, yes, there will be people who use Scripture against us and even against the Lord (whether they're fully aware of that or not...see **Matthew 7:21-23**²).

1. <https://amzn.to/4483XdD>

But no matter what, all we can do is what Jesus has tasked us to do: to firmly know **the Good News**³, share it with those around us, and thoroughly love God and love others as ourselves.

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2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%20%3A21-23&version=NIV>
 3. <https://www.gotquestions.org/gospel-good-news.html>

Sometimes "No" is the Kindest Answer You Can Give

The thing I love most about my husband (and there are certainly quite a few things) is the way he brushes annoyances off his shoulders and moves on with his life.

He always says, "We're living for Jesus, not for them."

The "them" is typically anyone I feel the need to please.

So pretty much everyone on the planet.

I have been getting better about this, though. God's been showing me the difference between loving people and pleasing them.

"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ."

Galatians 1:10¹

I think we often believe being "nice" and "accommodating" is being a true follower of Jesus.

But being a true follower of Jesus is being obedient to Jesus, which might ruffle the feathers of those around us, even our fellow believers.

Case in point, I was once upon a time a "do everything at church that's asked of you" type of person. But again, thanks to my husband, who takes heeding God's call very seriously, I'm aware that sometimes, "no" is the kindest answer you can give.

Because a "no" to someone's question can often be a "yes" to God.

And guess who I want to say "yes" to more than anyone?

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%201%3A10&version=NIV>

Which Church is the Best Church?

Answer: the one with all the people in it.

I think part of the problem is that we've got it all backward.

We think the church is the building we show up to every Sunday.

But the word "church" in Scripture is *ecclesia*, which is a Greek word for "assembly" or "gathering," which ultimately means "people."

It seems confusing because there are so many different Christian denominations, but I think it's not confusing whatsoever.

For one, we're all different, and I think sometimes we gather with those who see things as we do. But we have to remember that right now, we only see through a glass, darkly (**1 Corinthians 13:12¹**) but one day, we'll truly have all the answers.

So in that case, how can we believe that only our particular denomination has it "right" when God Himself told Job he can't even begin to fathom His awesomeness (**Job 38²**) and in Isaiah, we're told, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (**Isaiah 55:8-9³**)?

Also, I think Satan likes to play on our differences. If following Christ is the true way of this life, then why wouldn't he want us to bicker over small details and think we're the only ones who have it figured out?

Remember, God wants unity and Satan? Disunity, hands down.

I've learned a ton from the different churches I've attended. I learned about beauty in suffering from Catholicism. I learned to have a more open mind from the Disciples of Christ. I've learned how to have a servant's heart from our current independent Christian church.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2013%3A12&version=NIV>

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

3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2055%3A8-9&version=NIV>

Maybe, then, church is just the people who acknowledge Christ as the Savior of the world and who meet regularly to encourage one another and to break bread, remembering what Jesus did for us on the cross.

And in that case? We've all got it right.

Holy Spirit, Come

I've been having this niggling feeling that something ain't right when it comes to Western Christianity.

Hence, all of the blog posts I recently published.

My husband recently taught the *Not a Fan* series on RightNow Media during our Sunday Bible study (a **book**¹ that I absolutely love), and it's hit me how often we play "fan" to Jesus but don't actually follow Him.

Why is that?

Well, I came across **an article**² that hit the issue right on the head.

In this country (and especially the American South), we tend to experience church as a weekly one-off event, characterized by intellectual learning and church programming rather than a truly vulnerable reliance on God for our every breath.

This is spiritually detrimental because living for Jesus is a moment-by-moment experience. It's being in constant communion with the Holy Spirit.

So, what does this mean?

"...and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2 Thessalonians 2:12-14³

1. <https://amzn.to/4i3TnrB>

2. <https://www.christianpost.com/books/tyler-staton-warns-christians-are-missing-out-holy-spirits-power.html>

The Spirit is part of the **trinity**⁴, and God gives us His Spirit as our perpetual helper. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us, which is evident in **the fruit it produces**⁵.

"Cool, cool, cool. But seriously, Ericka. What in the heck does any of this mean?"

This means that when we submit to Jesus on a soul level, forever agreeing to be His slave and His slave only (goodbye living by the world's standards), God gives us His *actual* Spirit...like inside our bodies, you guys. And this Spirit walks with us as we continue to die to our fleshly, worldly whims, and become more in tune with our loving Father.

So now for the "how."

We connect with God's Spirit by reading Scripture, spending quiet moments with God (like we would a close friend), and asking Him to convict us of the areas in our lives we have not quite given over to Him—things like our need to control people or situations, our addictions or harmful habits, our desire for things like money and power instead of a heart of contentment in whatever situation we find ourselves, etc.

This is the way of peace, the peace Jesus gives, not the "peace" the world gives.

And sometimes, I think we get it wrong because we try so hard to "get it right."

But there's no "getting" anything for us here. There is only receiving the love and forgiveness of a righteous Father who continues to refine us like **gold in the fire**⁶.

3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Thessalonians%202%3A12-14&version=NIV>

4. <https://www.gotquestions.org/Trinity-Bible.html>

5. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%205%3A22-23&version=NIV>

6. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Zechariah%2013%3A8-9&version=NIV>

Wrecked (Like Ralph)

There's a **lady**¹ I like watching on YouTube.

She doesn't wear makeup, wears a kerchief over her hair as a sign of respect for God, and is currently looking into flat earth theory.

And we are absolutely nothing alike. (As I'm sure you're already aware.)

But her heart is pure, and what she does is prompted by the Holy Spirit. She lives in the way God's asking her, and even though I don't believe all the same things she does (I'm more of a round-earth person myself and look like a 19th-century street urchin in any type of head dressing...), she is still a daughter of the King.

The old me would have watched her channel and desperately wondered why she was more holy than I was. Why her teenage kids don't talk back and how come every evening they break out the guitar to sing old-school hymns while my family and I just finished *Ralph Breaks the Internet* for the forty-ninth time.

What am I doing wrong?

Why am I wrong?

But how demonic to think the God who loves me, created me, and is in the process of sanctifying me is in the business of wrongness.

If I were to live like her, I'd be idolizing her, not worshipping Jesus. The Bible isn't a black-and-white rule book that shows me every little move I should make to be "right." It instead is a beautiful invitation to let God wreck (kind of like Ralph) my life and rebuild it with a strong foundation in Him (God...not Ralph).

So, as I continue to grow in my faith, I continue to grow in the "me" God created me to be, not the "me" others are called to become.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we

1. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_iz0mIhVFaMwD-KBfrLPWA

were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

“Now if the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.”

1 Corinthians 12:12-25²

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2012%3A12-25&version=NIV>

Popping the Christian Bubble

Once upon a time, I was the type of homeschool mom that felt like a fraud.

We owned electronics, hardly had any clue who Charlotte Mason was, and were somewhat familiar with things like bugs and plants existing although not actually having the slightest idea they had any other names than that of "bug" or "plant."

(Why make things complicated?)

But then we unwittingly got absorbed in homeschool culture, and like with anything in life, there was a lot of good to be had.

But there was also this Christian bubble that felt strongly formed around me, which threw me off a bit being a former atheist raising an ADHD daughter who hardly knows the difference between poison oak and a tulip.

(Totally her mother's fault.)

Seeing that my baby Christian self used to play the "why is everyone holier than me?" game, it came as quite a surprise learning that surrounding yourself only with those who are just like you doesn't always equate to holiness.

In fact, Jesus came to heal the sick (**Luke 5:31-32¹**), and if we don't spend time with those craving His healing power (whether they're aware that this is what's missing in their lives or not), we essentially become...well...kind of like a cult.

(And I don't know about you, but I'm not much of a fan of Kool-Aid...too many preservatives.)

Fellowship is important, don't get me wrong. If I didn't surround myself with fellow Jesus followers, life would feel pretty bleak. But the thing is, I surround myself with all types of Jesus followers, and in doing so, I'm not tempted to bar my doors and windows and go on a YouTube Music

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%205%3A31-32&version=NIV>

deleting rampage when my daughter reminds me that Cardi B. does, in fact, still exist.

(I just throw on a little Spice Girls and dry heave into a bag. Problem solved.)

Ultimately, we can all be children of God when we surrender and submit. And in order to seek out the hurting and love them thoroughly (reminding them in the process how much Jesus loves them too) then we have to have Scripture and our fellow brothers and sisters as our touchstones, pointing to our firm foundation in Jesus, and prepare ourselves to pop the Christian bubble that keeps us from the ones who need Him most.

Kind of like a butterfly breaking free from its stifling cocoon. I mean, that's like a bug, right?

Yes, Ericka. Yes, it is.

Blind Date

I recently mentioned to my husband how I play this game called "Blind Date" in my head sometimes while we're chatting.

Like the other evening when we were sitting on the couch and he showed me a picture of Tom Brady wearing all of his Super Bowl rings and wouldn't stop calling him, and I quote, "The GOAT."

In my head, it's like that Hyundai commercial where the lady starts up her car and quickly leaves her own blind date who isn't talking about Tom Brady but competitive air drumming.

In all seriousness, my husband could talk about paint drying, and I'd be pretty enamored because he's my bestie and has had to suffer through my own shenanigans like my recent bout of horridly maiming yarn and calling it "crochet."

So, we're even.

But this whole blind date game started to make me think about my prayer life. Am I going on and on about every thought in my head to God or am I having a real conversation with the God who loves me?

We're doing a series on prayer in our Bible Study class by Michael DeFazio called *How to Learn to Pray*¹.

It's interesting because, at first thought, it's easy to think, "Oh I know how to pray."

Most of us are at least familiar with **the Lord's Prayer**² (the "Our Father" for my Catholic friends) and there have been times that we've called out to God even when we haven't always followed or obeyed Him (like that one time I thought my plane was going down and told God I'd give my life to Him only to not do that at all once I realized we would land safely. I was kind of the worst...and He's still working on me).

1. <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLAbFi-fpiIJ1pSLYFXj7oS3k8qpS48l3f>

2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%206%3A9-13&version=NIV>

And yes, it is easy to have a conversation with someone you love, but again, I think our issues with prayer stem from how we see God.

First of all, prayer is a conversation for those who love Him, the righteous who seek Him (not those who are desperately in need of saving their own lives. I'm looking at you "There Are No Atheists on Airplanes" Ericka).

"The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous."

Proverbs 15:29³

When I had yet to submit my life to Jesus, God wasn't answering my prayers.

He was waiting for me to accept His invitation to believe in and follow Him first...which makes a ton of sense when you think about it.

Secondly, the Lord's Prayer can be prayed verbatim of course, but Jesus was modeling for us *how to pray*. And when we have a conversation with someone we love, we're not reading a script but sharing our hearts. We're talking to them about how we love them, how they inspire us, how we're grateful for all they've done for us. And then maybe we ask for support in what we're going through and help when we feel lost.

And lastly (not at all indicating that this is the last thing we could mention about prayer, but just for the sake of not making this post ten decades long), I think it's important to point out something my friend Shelly mentions in **an episode**⁴ of her podcast on prayer.

The disciples already knew how to pray and yet? They asked Jesus to teach them. He was obviously doing something they hadn't done before—a beautiful, free-flowing conversation with the very God who created them.

3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs%2015%3A29&version=NIV>

4. <https://un-perfect.net/how-to-pray-like-jesus-three-insights-from-jesus-prayer-in-the-garden/>

And so, my prayer is that we ask God to enter our prayer lives. That if we haven't submitted our lives to Him just yet, we make that our very first prayer, confessing our sins, turning away from them, and asking Jesus to be our one and only Savior.

And from there? Let Him continue to lead us on this journey called life. Because even my husband would agree, He's the only GOAT we need.

Goodbye, New York

I've always been a prideful person.

I've struggled with this sin, but God, in His goodness, is working it out of me through circumstances beyond my control.

And thank you, God, for that.

When I was younger, I had this self-deceptive thought that I could easily cut the people who were grieving me one way or another from my life and run off to New York where I'd become a rich and well-known author.

Yeah, because that's a thing.

Later in my life, I started to realize there was something wrong with that kind of thinking. And I realized it was because that mindset lacked something that the very being of God *is*.

Love.

"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

1 Corinthians 13¹

Even if you're not a believer, you've most likely heard the bolded part at weddings. But it's kind of a travesty that the entire chapter isn't read.

Because Paul isn't talking about a romantic love but a sacrificial love embodied by Christ on the cross.

It is a love that is beyond our ability to purely radiate, and we can only do so with the help of the Holy Spirit.

As someone who lingered a bit too long in the academic world, I often think I have things all figured out. I have a knowledge I could easily boast about, but according to God's Word, that boasting and high-brow knowledge, left alone to fester and boost my pride, will only lead straight to hell.

It's of absolutely no worth if I can't even love my brothers and sisters.

God has forgiven me much, and I'm on a journey of forgiving those who have wronged me, angered me, annoyed me...you get the picture.

Because I'm no perfect person either. And I think maybe that's the ultimate point.

I don't deserve God's love, but He gives it to me anyway.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2013&version=NIV>

So, who am I to not offer the same?

A Sick Generation.

This week, as I was suffering from what I thought was food poisoning (turns out it was only a nasty virus...so yay, I can eat sushi again!) and violently upchucking into my toilet, I had a memory of someone I dearly love.

My mother.

You wouldn't think love and upchucking would be halfway comparable, but it dawned on me as all the contents of my stomach (and what often felt like my very soul) were swirling down that porcelain bowl: my mother loves me very much.

How do I know this? Well, it doesn't hurt that for most of the time my head has been stuck nearly inches away from fetid water, my mother has been right there by my side, patting my back and creating a makeshift ponytail as I have willingly asked the heavens to take me, take me now.

(That honor has now been bestowed upon my husband, who rocks it like a champ, I might add. Your makeshift ponytail is killer, Matthew. No cap.).

My mother was my nurse growing up (not to mention my chauffeur, personal chef, wardrobe stylist...you get the picture), well-versed in giving tepid baths to an overheated toddler and rubbing her down with alcohol to keep the fever in check (which I recently Googled only to discover this actually makes the fever worse but who has the time to throw open an Encyclopedia Britannica when you're caring for an erupting two-year-old circa 1987?).

I know I'm blessed that way. Not everyone has a mother or a mother willing to do what God created a mother to do—to love, even when it involves smelly toilets and projectile vomiting. But I did (and still do), and it taught me the very nature of our Lord who loves us. He's not afraid of the gritty details of our lives when our bodies weaken, and no matter who we are, how much money we've made, how much "power" we think we have, we're all stricken by the great equalizer one way or another and

will suddenly come face-to-face with everything we're not while hovering over our own sickness.

He's the one yearning to comfort our sick generation—a whole lot of whom would rather swallow our own vomit than suffer an act of submission so complete, so vulnerable, it flies in the face of the pride we seem to thrive on.

But how fortunate for those of us who get to just let go, stare down the face of an unknown future knowing all along it will be all right because He's there. He'll never leave.

Because He loves us.

*“Lord, by such things people live;
and my spirit finds life in them too.*

***You restored me to health
and let me live.***

*Surely it was for my benefit
that I suffered such anguish.*

*In your love you kept me
from the pit of destruction;
you have put all my sins
behind your back.”*

Isaiah 38:16-17¹

Light in the Darkness

There's so much evil and dark destruction in this world, and the beautiful thing about having Scripture as my guidebook is that it reveals how Jesus knows this, too, and yet remains faithful through it all.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

John 1:5¹

And God continues to dispel the darkness through His children (those who believe in Him and pick up their cross to follow Christ). We each have a role to play in this world to keep the forces of evil at bay, and when we listen, God lets us know what those roles are.

For me, this is biblically counseling those I love and writing work that will help people bring their darkest thoughts and trauma to the feet of Jesus.

Right now, I'm taking that seriously through writing my book of poetry, *100 Portraits* (retitled *Snapped*²), and a new project I'm working on called *Mental Health from a Biblical Perspective*³. The latter is a free PDF resource that will break down a list of common mental health terms and ideas as viewed through the eyes of Scripture. It will (hopefully) be beneficial to those of us who are currently struggling mentally and need help discerning what God says about our struggles versus what the world says.

If you'd like to see what I've already published, be sure to check out *10 Things I Wish I Knew When I Started Following Jesus*⁴ and *Bible Study Resources for Beginners*⁵. Both will (hopefully) strengthen your

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%201%3A5&version=NIV>

2. <https://erickaclay.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/snapped.pdf>

3. <https://erickaclay.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/mental-health-from-a-biblical-perspective.pdf>

relationship with God through His Son. (All my other free books and resources can be found **here**⁶).

So, question: Where do you feel God leading you to shed light in a world that so desperately needs it?

4. <https://erickaclay.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/10-things-i-wish-i-knew-when-i-started-following-jesus-1.pdf>

5. <https://erickaclay.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/bible-study-resources-for-beginners-1-1.pdf>

6. <https://erickaclay.com/books/>

Don't Let the Yoga Pants Fool You

The other weekend, we were in another town celebrating my birthday. It was frigid outside, so we were walking through the local mall. As we were leaving the bright interior of Dillard's for the busy happenings of the food court, two ladies stopped us to tell us the Good News of Jesus.

Except they weren't really sharing the Good News of Jesus; they were sharing the great "mysteries" of the Bible and, "Did you know that Passover is the only way to living water and that there's not only a Father God but a Mother God as well?"

In fairness, these poor women thought they had encountered a run-of-the-mill heathen, seeing that I was wearing my yoga pants and my "short hair, don't care" attitude, fit for the lostest of the lost, but what they didn't know was that they were encountering someone who thoroughly loves Jesus, her fellow sisters in Christ, and has asked God to burn His Word into her very heart.

The look of panic these poor women had when Matt and I opened our mouths...

I think the nervous energy they carried bothered me the most. I mean, sure, I was bothered by what they were saying about Passover (Jesus came to fulfill the law, and the New Testament clearly outlines that **we share in communion**¹ as believers in remembrance of what He did on the cross) and their thoughts on "**God the Mother**"² (not in the Bible...like at all), but the thing that got me most was how much of a chore talking to us seemed to be for them.

Like if they didn't accost strangers in public, there'd be hell to pay back home.

It broke my heart, so I did something God prompted me to do. I asked about them. About their lives. I learned about one of the women's

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1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2011%3A%2023-26&version=NIV>
 2. <https://www.gotquestions.org/God-the-mother.html>

grandchildren and her kids. Her demeanor instantly relaxed. She wore a smile on her face, and her heart felt...lighter.

When I think of examples of sharing the Good News in the Bible, a few specific examples come to mind.

- Some of the greatest examples of evangelism in Scripture are when people are healed by Jesus (whether physically or mainly spiritually, like **the woman at the well**³), and then they share that news with others. **This is a beautiful reminder that recounting our personal testimonies defeats the enemy's schemes and can organically bring others to Christ** (Revelation 12:11⁴).
- Another great example is **Philip and the Ethiopian**⁵. God leads Philip to the Ethiopian, who is trying to understand the Book of Isaiah, and Philip offers to explain it to Him. **It is God who leads the charge in our sharing the Good News, and He is the one softening the hearts of those who are destined to respond to it, not us.**
- When **Paul brings the good news to the Athenians**⁶, he references their very own culture. I think this is important because it is easy to demonize the lost and force them to understand the Word God gave us, but how arrogant of us. **God made us relational, so we're amiss to not use this opportunity to sit with another person different than us, learn their ways, and then ask God how we can use this new relationship to show them how very much He desires to have them be His child.**

3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%204%3A%201-42&version=NIV>

4. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation%2012%3A11&version=NIV>

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

6. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2017%3A16-34&version=NIV>

Ultimately, I hope this post inspires you and confirms that evangelism isn't about forcing you to act in discomfort. It's a reliance on Jesus as you ask Him to bring the lost your way so that you can love them through the greatest act we can muster: telling them about the God who died for their very souls.

“He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”

Mark 16:15⁷

7. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2016%3A15&version=NIV>

Family First...Or Is It?

I love my family. I really do.

But there was a time in my life when I idolized them.

I was a young mother, a lifelong only child, and someone who was way more on the academic side of things than the touchy-feely side (although God has used several people at church to work this out of me. Now I go around hugging everyone like an idiot).

But back then, I had no clue what I was doing, and to quell my anxious belly, I focused on force-feeding my husband and daughter vegan foods and imagining my kid was an idiot savant who just needed to be pushed a little bit harder to read at three years old.

She wasn't. She's smart and beautiful and sweet, but she's a free spirit with an extra helping of ADHD. Totally not what I was wishing into existence.

The pictures of us from that time are kind of sad. My husband and daughter are themselves, but I'm smiling with a hint of lunacy in my eyes, wearing a mask of "everything's perfect!" when everything certainly wasn't.

How much easier would it have been if I had been honest with myself and others? How much easier if I had simply loved and honored my family instead of making them the center of my world? How much easier if I wouldn't have let my own deep darkness lie to me?

How much easier if I had given God my fears?

Jesus talks a lot about family. What He has to say is always surprising.

In **Matthew 10¹**, Jesus speaks of not coming to make life cozy for us but to turn son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

Not exactly the best Facebook status update.

God isn't against family, but when you make Christ your life, sometimes your family is going to balk and make life harder for you.

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2010&version=NIV>

And when it comes down to choosing between them or the God of the universe who created you, guess which road is the best one to follow?

Another time Jesus talks about family is in connection with **Mary, His mother². Some traditions elevate Mary to an almost deific position, but that is most certainly not what we find in Scripture.** In fact, when somebody calls out to Jesus, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you" (**Luke 11:27³**), he responds:

"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

Luke 11:28⁴

Here was an opportunity for Jesus to confirm to everyone Mary's deific standing, but He didn't because it's not true. The blessed ones are the ones who listen to God, and that is why Mary is "full of grace." She's filled with God's grace because she was obedient, an honor not specific to her but offered to **EVERYONE** who follows the will of God.

Lastly, when Jesus's family comes to find Him while He's teaching His disciples, someone tells Him that his mother and brothers are waiting to speak with Him. Jesus's response?

"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Matthew 12:48-50⁵

2. <https://www.gotquestions.org/virgin-Mary.html>

3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2011%3A27&version=NIV>

4. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2011%3A28&version=NIV>

5. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2012%3A48-50&version=NIV>

Again, Jesus emphasizes the family of God being His true family, a concept we should wrestle with and submit to also.

I realize now that my family was one of my idols. It was something I was overly reliant on and attempting to control because I didn't have God in my life. **It's been a real trip watching Him slowly release each one of my fingers until my palm is open wide, and the people I love most are free to roam according to His will, not my own.**

And instead of choking on the suffocating thought of being all alone and not knowing where this leaves me in the mix, I'm well aware now that I'm never alone. He's right here with me, showing me the beautiful future waiting for us both.

And I Got the Bruises to Prove It

When I was in second grade, I nailed Lent.

I had this unfathomable idea of giving up all television for forty days as a pretty big "eat my shorts" to my fellow classmates who were attempting to forgo chocolate all of thirty minutes.

Honestly, it wasn't an easy feat (as evidenced by the bruises I amassed blindly groping my way through the living room as my father sat on the couch watching the screen and silently assessing if that time I fell out of my car seat had done any permanent damage).

But I did it.

I did Lent.

No, scratch that.

I won Lent.

Now, as someone who currently talks to Jesus as often as I breathe, I realize that really wasn't the point of Lent...like at all.

There is no "winning" Lent. There is no checklist of things I have to do in order to win God's favor and prove that I'm "better" than everyone else who'd rather give up Stevia in their coffee than stop binge-watching the Kardashians.

Lent isn't a requirement in the Scriptures. However, it can be a beautiful opportunity to connect deeper with Jesus and our Father by refusing our flesh something it mistakenly believes it "needs."

And in the act of doing so, we realize how much more we need our Creator than that five millionth episode of *Hoarders* on YouTube.

(I like watching people clean things. Sue me.)

Jesus did the unthinkable for us, so maybe, just maybe we can do the slightly uncomfortable for Him.

*"Even now," declares the Lord,
"return to me with all your heart,
with fasting and weeping and mourning."*

Joel 2:12¹

1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joel%20%3A12&version=NIV>

I've Got That Joy, Joy, Joy...

Joy.

It wasn't something I was familiar with over the years.

Since the age of sixteen, I've been battling the darkness, and often in shabby armor. That's what happens when you don't let God fight for you.

This last year has been a painful rip through my soul. So many things happened in my head and heart, not to mention to our family.

But with the ripping came the mending, and He's healed us in a way that couldn't have possibly happened if we didn't stand face-to-face with all we could possibly lose.

And I think that's the point of suffering. To fully understand what God did for us through His Son on the cross, to understand the pain God's endured with every person He's created who refuses to come to Him, and yet, to know that one day, the ones who truly love Him with their whole hearts will be able to live eternally in His peace.

In His care and comfort.

I guess I just wanted to say if you're suffering, take heart. Because this could be the slightest peek into the "better" you wouldn't have known otherwise.

Light at the End of the Tunnel

It's been one of those weeks where I'm glad I don't have social media. I often wonder what my Facebook status would look like:

You know when you're teetering on the edge of total confusion, wondering what the point is of this never-ending rat's maze called life and find yourself mowing the same patch of grass in your front yard twenty-two times in a state of complete mental paralysis? Yeah, no, me neither...time to get my hair did!

I often wonder what David would think of the masks we wear online and often in person. **Psalm 55**¹ (which he wrote) has brought me great comfort this week, reminding me life is hard, no matter how "YOLO" people on the interwebs try to play it.

Things can be hard, but it doesn't mean they won't be good.

Things can be hard, but it doesn't mean God's not tending to the outcome behind the scenes.

Things can be had, but it doesn't mean we're not loved in the midst of it.

As followers, **we're not promised easy**². And the funny thing is? Nonbelievers aren't promised easy either. But as God's adopted children, we are promised His refuge during life's storms.

And I don't know about you, but I'd rather be beneath His protective wing than out in the rain.

The great thing about the Psalms is the "light at the end of the tunnel" they offer when you reach the very end of them (well, except for you, **Psalm 88**³...yeesh, but I get it).

The end of Psalm 55 ends this way:

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1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2055&version=NIV>
 2. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2016%3A33&version=NIV>
 3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2088&version=NIV>

*“Cast your cares on the Lord
and he will sustain you;
he will never let
the righteous be shaken.
But you, God, will bring down the wicked
into the pit of decay;
the bloodthirsty and deceitful
will not live out half their days.
But as for me, I trust in you.”*

Psalm 55:22-23⁴

My prayer is that, like David, we're honest with ourselves and others about the hard of this life. And that we don't lose hope in knowing our God will sustain us.

4. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2055%3A22-23&version=NIV>

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