

God is My Refuge

A fourteen day devotional to help you
find shelter in the storms of life.



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I have full confidence in the power of God's word to heal, to restore, to guide and to comfort those who are hurting

In a time of crisis God's word really is the anchor to hold you firm

Introduction

I have grown up in God's word; from my childhood simple Bible stories and truths have been planted in my heart. As a teenager I was hungry for God's word and with the zealous energy of the young, I studied God's word taking notes and storing up treasure. As I entered the world of work, became a wife and then a mother fitting in Bible study has become more of a challenge but I have benefitted from the time spent in God's word. As a Christian youth worker for the last six years it's been a privilege to teach young people stories from the Bible; to share with them from the treasure chest of God's wisdom to help them find that steadfast anchor in the turbulent time of adolescence.

I love the Bible and am so passionate about seeing others engage with it. *In a time of crisis God's word really is the anchor to hold you firm*, the drift wood you can cling to after the shipwreck, the ladder back to safety. His word is our comfort, our hope, our guide, our light in the darkness which is our suffering.

After ten years of a turbulent and abusive marriage, I made the difficult decision to leave. During my time in a refuge, several Bible passages came to mind which I felt might be useful to others in their time of crisis. So rather than using the metaphor of sowing seeds, I will use the metaphor of throwing out lifelines to those who are drowning and *I have full confidence in the power of God's word to heal, to restore, to guide and to comfort those who are hurting*.

Each day for fourteen days, I provide a Bible passage, some thoughts and personal experiences and end with a prayer and a reflective activity.

Luke 4:18

"The spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me,

Because he has anointed me

To preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

And recovery of sight for the blind,

To release the oppressed,

To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

These words were spoken by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. As he was visiting his hometown of Nazareth, he entered the synagogue, picked up the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and declared these words were fulfilled.

This passage is one of the tools I believe God used to call me into his freedom. When I spent time sharing stories with the women around me at the refuge, I saw some very broken hearts, some who had been downtrodden and held captive, blinded by the lies that have been spoken over them such that they did not see their own value and beauty.

Jesus was very clear on the purpose of his ministry. He came for the weak, the broken, the overlooked. Women were seen as second class citizens but Jesus often spent time with women and showed them their value, He even made time to talk to the prostitutes and adulterers who others shunned. When he was criticised by the religious do-gooders of

his day for hanging around with 'sinners' he made it clear that he had come for them. 'A doctor doesn't come for the healthy, but for the sick' Jesus declared.

There is nothing that disqualifies us when it comes to Jesus. Sadly, our encounters with the church, his body, may not reflect this.

I felt most uncomfortable when I headed to a new church with no wedding ring and three children in tow. Whatever welcome awaits you... Jesus welcomes us as we are... whatever marital state we are in.

What I love about this passage is that it clearly shows that Jesus' arrival and his ministry was all God orchestrated. To go back to the imagery Jesus used of a doctor being called to a sick patient, it is God who sent help. *God sees and God knows what we are going through and if we are willing to accept it, he will send the help we need.* He has already made the call and sent out the doctor.

There are so many stories in the Bible of God coming to someone's aid, God is a rescuer God. He loves to save, to heal, to restore, to turn around, to overcome. There is nothing in fact that he can not mend.

The Bible teaches us that it is God who created all of mankind, who formed us in our mother's wombs and so as our designer He fashioned each one of us. So, when we are broken by our circumstances, by the world around us, it is God who naturally can restore us.

As a child, I can remember my nan teaching me to knit. She started my sister and I off with a row of knitting each, I was rather hopeless I have to say! I would lose stitches and gain stitches and my half-finished knitting would have gaping holes in it! In our lives, we may find ourselves in situations where we have little control and we are in the hands of someone other than God. The way in which we are being shaped creates holes in our hearts, or perhaps what is being added is to

our detriment. We find ourselves misshapen and ugly. But God, like my nan, can patiently undo the wrong lines and give us the chance to start over.

I wonder if it might be helpful to take this verse and speak it over yourself adding your name in the blanks:

Jesus says:

The spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, Because he has anointed me To preach good news to _____ He has sent me to proclaim freedom to _____ And recovery of sight to _____ To release _____

When I claim that verse for myself, wow! Jesus came to bring me the good news - not to correct or condemn me, not to add to the insults and injuries but to speak hope into my life. *Jesus came to proclaim me free – free from the past, free from the fear, free from guilt and condemnation.* He came to restore my vision, to give me sight that I might see afresh the goodness he has created in me and in the world. He came to release me into the fullness of life, to reach my potential, to reach out with this same hope to others.

He who knit me together in my mother's womb has not finished his work in me and the same is true for you. In his expert hands the damage of the past can be undone and new lines added, shaping us into something both beautiful and purposeful.

The night I arrived in the refuge we pushed two single beds together and I held my little ones close until they fell asleep. I then retreated to the lounge and took out my prayer journal and I did something I've done for many years - I sat and I thought of ten things to be thankful for.

'Thank you lord....for a safe journey, for the children behaving so well on the way here, for the flat being available, for the welcome of the staff...'

Psalm 100:4 declares 'Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise'.

Even in the hardest situations, if I'm going to trust that God will send help, or deliver me, I find it best to start with a thankful heart acknowledging what God has already done for me. This builds up my faith as I approach him with my requests.

I think sometimes I forget how crazy my faith must seem to those who don't know God themselves. I actually believe that there is a

God who made the whole world, who knows me personally and who blesses me day by day. I know that as I appreciate what He has done with a thankful heart, I draw closer to Him.

Some days it is easy, the list pretty much writes itself. Other days this is not easy. Some days it is a struggle to think of something but still I make myself write this list - a spiritual habit like brushing my teeth designed to pull me out of the darkness of my day and into His light.

The suggestion that you could find anything to be thankful for right now might seem ridiculous

The suggestion that you could find anything to be thankful for right now might seem ridiculous. But the Bible tells us of individuals, who despite going through crisis after crisis, are able to praise God and to be content. Like Paul, one of the earliest missionaries, he was a man who knew suffering: he was shipwrecked three times, in and out of prison (for preaching about Jesus), beaten on many occasions, sleep deprived, hungry, even naked at times. And yet he writes in his letter to the Philippians:

'...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 4:12-13

Paul learned to endure whatever life threw at him because he had found a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Maybe this is something new to you. Go back to Psalm 100:4 'Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise'. Try thinking of ten things to be thankful for:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

What does your list tell you about God? Did you thank him for the sunshine, for a beautiful plant or creature? Did you thank God for the people in your life? Well, He made them too! Then adore Him as creator. Spell it out to Him - 'God you are good, you are an amazing creator, the world you have made is so intricate and amazing.'

Did you thank God for any practical things? Maybe a roof over your head, the food in your cupboard, the money in your bank account? Then adore Him as provider - 'God you are an amazing provider, thank you that you see my needs and meet them, thank you that you never run out; with you there is always plenty'.

Did you thank God for any specific answers to prayers? Then adore Him as the worker of miracles 'God you are an awesome and loving God who sees and hears and acts for our good, thank you for answering my prayer.'

If you practice this method of prayer you will build yourself up in faith. You will exchange your worries and concerns for God's hope and peace.

I have three children and they love playing with coins. One day my daughter had some coins and wanted to pay for something in a shop. I held out my hand for her to give the copper coins to me in exchange for a pound coin. She refused. She was incapable of recognising that what I had was of more value than the coins she was holding onto. When we approach God in prayer, so often we are clinging on to what is in our hands instead of allowing Him to exchange it. But if we practice thanksgiving and praise, in time, we will grow in our trust and we will know that *what God has for us is infinitely more valuable than anything in our own hands.*

Is there anything in your hands that you want to exchange with God? Any fears, guilt, shame, regret, pain? Offer it to Him now and ask instead for His love, His peace, His joy. It may be a process, this exchange, but the gateway, whenever you are ready, is thankfulness.

One evening I was flicking through my Bible looking for some inspiration, I turned to the book of Psalms which is a book of poetry. My Bible opened on Psalm 63:1-4

about who God is, both with my church and youth group and while leading RE lessons in schools. *The God of the Bible is an amazing, creative, powerful, passionate person.* He sees all, knows all, loves all: The Bible says, 'God is love' (1 John 4:8).

'O God, you are my God, earnestly I will seek you, my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in the dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than my life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.'

I grew up knowing of God from a young age and at the age of 5, I wanted to follow him for myself. Since then the way I have seen God has changed. There have been times I've struggled with God and His ways but praying to Him has been a constant throughout the storms of my life.

The reason that this passage struck me that night was that the writer of the passage was praising God in his difficult place, in the 'dry and weary land'. I had only shortly arrived at the refuge but it was a rather 'beige' and tired place. Dealing with the emotion of leaving, worrying about what people would think and caring for three small children had indeed left me weary. Here was a Bible passage

encouraging me to praise God in this bleak place.

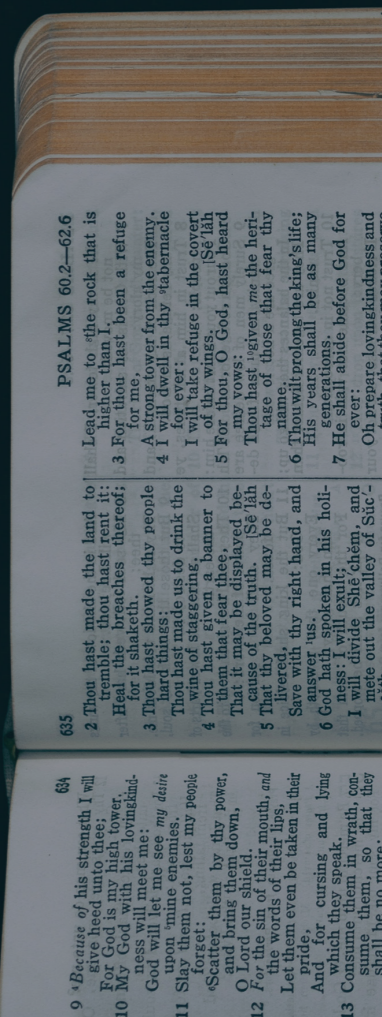
Praising God simply means to express your approval, to celebrate, applaud and honour.

Often Christians express this praise in song and I had grown up in the church band singing songs to the Lord. And here is where I stumbled; I met my husband at a youth service, we were in a youth band together, we wrote worship songs together, we sang and led others in singing praise together. Worship was 'his thing', 'our thing'. How could I now sing? How could I praise God in this new 'dry and weary land'?

So instead of singing, I read the verses aloud. I believed the words: I have 'seen God in the sanctuary'. I have experienced His power, His glory, His love in many ways in my life. Even in the hardest times of my marriage God was there, blessing me. Now in my exile He was

Praising God simply means to express your approval, to celebrate, applaud and honour

Now I don't know what comes into your mind when you hear the word 'God'. Is he an old man floating in the clouds? Someone who sends thunder and diseases? Or is he like Santa Claus who gives gifts to those who are good? I had spent quite some time thinking



there also. Providing us with a home, putting people in our path to help us, present in my time of need, giving me hope and peace.

But *I wondered if I would ever be able to sing again?*

The following week my cousin was able to gather some of my things from my old house and he brought me some CDs. Among the pile was an album called 'Dance again'. The lyrics of the song became my prayer and my hope:

"Your tears will dry, your heart will mend, your scars will heal and you will dance again."

Or in my case sing again. I will sing again one day. I will write new worship songs, I will 'praise Him as long as I live' as the Psalmist called me to. It might just take a bit of time!

I don't know whether you have met God before or if this is all new to you, but God created us to be in a relationship with Him.

He wants to be known. He reveals Himself through His creation, through his word, the Bible, and through His son, Jesus. If you want to know what God is like, then look at the person of Jesus. The land you are in right now may look 'dry and weary' but if you look to God, if you focus on Him, the Psalmist goes on to write: you 'will be fully satisfied'. You may be musical or not but you can praise Him all the same...God is not concerned with the quality of your singing, He looks at your heart.

If you have access to a Bible try reading Psalm 63 aloud (the Bible is available online just type Psalm 63 into your search engine). If you have access to the internet try listening to some worship music.

Have you ever had to stay up all night? There is a certain point when exhaustion hits and you really struggle to keep your eyes open. Sleep deprivation is used as a form of torture and this is something parents of a newborn can relate to!

There have been times in my life when I have felt completely exhausted by my situation. *I have felt out of my depth like I'm going to drown and I'm exhausted from trying to fight to keep my head above water.* When our circumstances are beyond our control we can feel overwhelmed.

At these times, I tend to feel like giving up 'take me to heaven now God!' When I am in these situations to say I pray is too trite...I do talk to God but I don't hold back! This is not kneeling silently with my hands clasped...I cry...I've screamed at times: 'Jesus, Jesus, do something, you make me stronger or you take me out of this, I can't take anymore!' You might be shocked to hear me shouting at God but in the bible in the book of Psalms we

see other heart felt painfully honest prayers from people who are drowning in their crisis.

In Psalm 42: 'My tears have been my food day and night' (vs 3) 'my bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me' (vs 10).

'Mortal agony' may be something you can relate to - times when it's almost painful to breathe because you feel so crushed by the pain of your situation.

Jesus felt this way too - the night he was arrested he knew what was coming, he knew how he would suffer and die and he said to his closest friends:

"My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Matthew 26:38

Have you ever reached this point? Maybe that's how you are feeling right now? Do you have people you can say 'stay here

and keep watch with me'? People to attend appointments, listen or just sit with you?

Some of the hardest things I've gone through, I've had to suffer alone. Crying into a towel in my bathroom, hiding the abuse, having to be 'ok' all the time made me feel very alone and *somehow on your own the problems you are facing are magnified.*

Jesus looked to his earthly friends for support but the real strength to carry on came from God.

"Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'"
Matthew 26:39

Jesus was on his knees, he was desperate and he longed to avoid what he knew was the inevitable suffering of the crucifixion; death

on a cross the most painful and inhumane form of execution. And worse, the separation from God as he took on the sin of the whole world.

"Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?'"
Matthew 26:40

Here in Jesus' darkest hour, his friends let him down. He tells them off, then goes to pray, he returns and once again they are asleep. So, he tells them off again and goes to pray some more. Again, Jesus returns and they are asleep! Seriously guys? What a let-down!

Even if you are fortunate to have great people around you, they will never be able to meet all your needs. They have their own opinions, needs and emotions to contend with and sometimes they are just very human; they get weary, they get distracted, they get fed up with us or our situation.

But *Jesus promises 'I will be with you', we never have to be alone.*

The Psalmist ends Psalm 42 with the words 'Why are you downcast, O my Soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him my saviour and my God.' (Vs 11)

Though he is suffering, in agony, crushed by despair the Psalmist talks to himself and reminds himself of the truth. He is not relying on himself, on his own strength or ability to get through, he's not relying on other men, no He reminds himself to put his hope in God, his saviour.

I don't know what has caused you to pick up this book, what situation you are facing in your life. But what I do know is that if you are feeling exhausted, crushed by the weight of the pain you are bearing, it is not good to try and carry on alone, in your own strength. Finding people, you can call on to 'stay with you and keep watch' can be a source of support. One of the best things you can do is give up. Give

up trying to cope alone and give up trying to control the outcome. Instead remind yourself of the truth right now, you need to put your hope in God, your saviour. He is willing and He is able.

Who could you call on for help? Is there anyone you need to get in touch with? Are there any support groups you could join?

What do you need to give up to God now? List your worries and concerns here and hand those things over to God:

I am not a patient person, which is most probably what got me into my current predicament...

I was married the day after I turned 20 to pretty much the first boy I went out with! I am not good at waiting; I am not good at seeing things through, I want instant results. I don't think I am alone in this... fast food, slim fast, instant credit etc all prove my point. As a society, we are impatient. But God's timing is not our timing. In a letter to early believers Peter told them not to be impatient waiting for Jesus to return, 'do not forget this one thing dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day' (2 Peter 3:8).

At first, in the refuge, I was on an adrenalin high. I was 'free' - suddenly new possibilities were open to me and there was hope for the future. But after a while doubt set in, I questioned myself as others criticised and judged my decision. At times I was numb, at other times I was fearful about the future, at other times I was angry and hurt by what I had experienced and was still going through.

On one occasion, an unexpected friend sent through a link to a song. It was a gospel song I hadn't heard before and it spoke to me so powerfully. The song was based on the account of Jesus healing Lazarus in John 11:1-44. In this story, Jesus is informed that his friend Lazarus is on his deathbed, Lazarus' sisters, who were friends of Jesus, called for him to come. They had faith that Jesus could heal their brother. But for some strange reason Jesus stayed where he was for two more days. In the delay, Lazarus died. So, when Jesus finally showed up, Lazarus was already dead and buried. Martha, one of Lazarus' sisters ran out to meet Jesus "if you had been here my brother would not have died" she cries. Then Jesus does the most extraordinary thing he tells them to move the grave stone. "But Lord" said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days." Jesus is not concerned about that and calls Lazarus out of the grave. The delay was part of a greater plan and a greater miracle was seen as a result.

It must have been so hard for Martha and Mary wondering why Jesus was taking so long, why didn't he come quicker? Why did they have to endure the pain of that grief for four days?

The lyrics of the song my friend sent me go like this:

"but you're four days late, and all hope is gone,

Lord we don't understand why you've waited so long.

But his way is God's way, not yours or mine

And isn't it great that when he's four days late, he's still on time."

I wept when I heard that.

God I was tired, tired after ten years, tired of waiting, tired of praying, tired of hoping. Certainly, my life hadn't gone the way I had planned. My dreams of a perfect family were shattered, however misguided they had been. And now I was free but the healing was taking its time and in the delay, were all the 'whys' and 'what ifs'. Why didn't God tell me not to marry him in the first place? What if I had left sooner?

There are many Bible verses people quote in times of tragedy, for example, Romans 8:28 "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." This verse is amazing and no doubt true, but when you are in the middle of your 'four days' it doesn't always feel true! Now Martha and Mary believed in Jesus and could comfort themselves with the hope of the afterlife, that one day they would see their brother again, but that wouldn't have reduced the pain, the agony of their grief.



I do believe that God is working things out for my good and if you are willing to open yourself up to Him and place your life in His capable hands He will do the same for you. It might not always seem like it, the results may be slow. But *when you look at a mighty oak tree that has stood for four hundred years, you can see the benefit of patience, that tree can endure sun, wind and rain.* The daisy may sprout quickly and draw the eye but it only lasts a moment. God is at work and He is investing for the long haul and eternity with Him. So, if it seems like He is a bit late showing up in

your life, after whatever storms you have had to face, know this, even if He is late in your eyes He is still on time and if you let Him He can begin His miracle of healing.

This may be a good time to draw a timeline of your life. Where has God been at work in your life so far? Talk to God about your hopes and dreams for the future.

Radiant is one of those words you don't hear often but people use it to describe you when you are pregnant. Now for me pregnancy was something to endure not enjoy: I was huge, I was uncomfortable, I had all the symptoms described in pregnancy books and I didn't feel 'radiant'. And radiant is not a word I would have used to describe myself during my days at the refuge and yet when we did a group exercise describing each other, the other women said of me that I was 'always happy'. That joy didn't come from me, *I felt like a mess, but I was leaning on God my deliverer and somehow through my mess people could still see something of His radiance.*

"I sought the Lord and he answered me, He delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; Their faces are never covered with shame." Psalm 34:4-5

As the doubts and fears set in, *I felt like a failure.* Maybe if I had just been stronger, better, tried harder, my marriage could have worked? Maybe it was my fault that he behaved that way, maybe I deserved it? I know I'm not the only one to feel this way. One of my friends in the refuge told me how her ex-partner had knocked her front teeth out 'I had it coming to be fair' she said, 'he did warn me'. It can be hard to speak out about domestic abuse because we can feel ashamed. Ashamed that we may have done something to deserve the treatment we received, or that we weren't strong enough to prevent it. The same can be true of poor mental health, unemployment, illness we can feel guilty like somehow we deserve to be going through this suffering.

When I met new people, and explained that I was new to the city, the inevitable question would come up, 'what made you move here then?' I would fudge an answer along the lines of looking for a fresh start after my marriage had broken down. Inevitably my voice would

trail off and I would look somewhat ashamed, clasping my hands, feeling where my wedding ring used to be.

This Bible verse resounded with me because here was the Bible saying that not only if we seek God He will answer but He will deliver us, He will take away the shame we feel so that we become radiant.

"This poor man called, and the Lord heard him, He saved him out of all of his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them." Psalm 34:6-7

then swinging off to the next crisis. No, the angel of the Lord 'encamps' around us - He sets up His tent and He isn't going anywhere. He is with us in this battle and the next and the next, until the war is finally won and we are free.

"Taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing." Psalm 34:8-9

I felt like a failure

Does that sound like a good deal to you? What did the poor man have to offer in exchange for this rescue? Nothing. *What do you need to come to God? Nothing.* And the best part is: it's not a one off hit and run rescue like spider man swinging in to save the day and

If you don't know God, I want to invite you to get to know Him, taste and see that the Lord is good. He is our refuge, we can hide in Him, we can find protection in Him. He is strong enough to deliver us from anything.

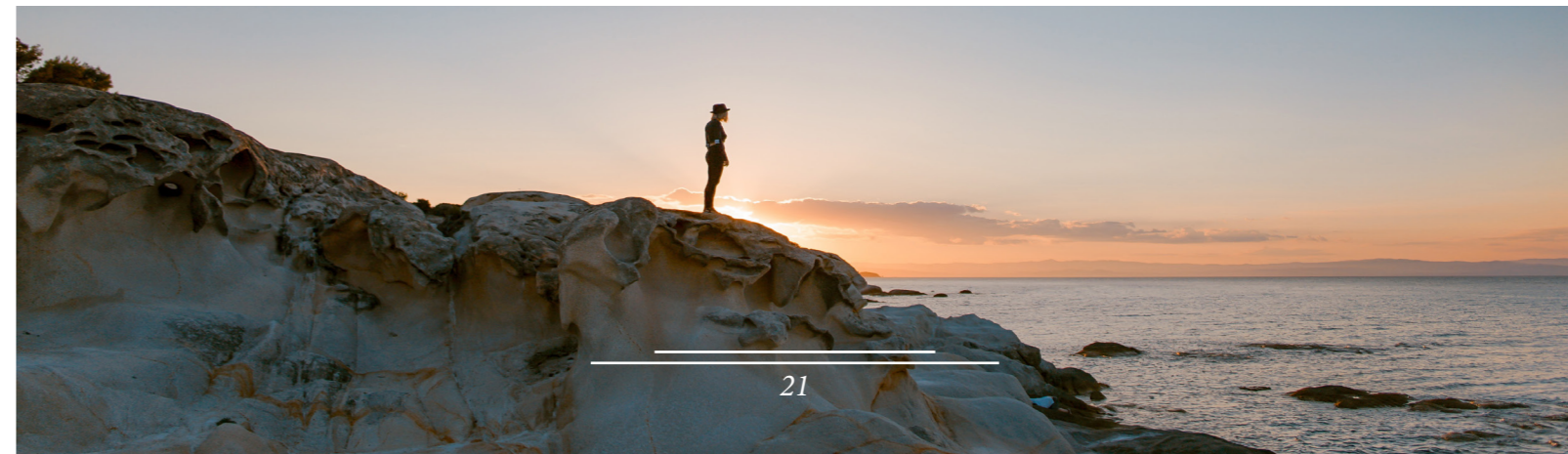
You may feel weak, you may feel a mess, but if you have made it this far, I think you are probably stronger than you know!

But if you do find your strength failing, know this, He does not grow weak or weary. God is ready and waiting, so call on Him now, tell Him your fears, tell Him the troubles you are facing and let Him fight your battles because 'those who fear Him lack no good thing.'

What struggles are you facing right now? Call on God now to come and camp out in the battlefield with you and know that He is in it with you.

Who is watching you in this situation? Are there children, friends, colleagues looking on?

Pray that somehow in your mess God would make you radiant that others would see His joy, His peace, His love in you.



My grandparents often took my sister, my brother and I away during the school holidays. I remember one holiday in Minehead, we were taken to church on the Sunday morning. It was a small congregation in an old building and there was no Sunday School. My sister, my baby brother and I sat quietly through the sermon. For years we would quote this enthusiastic preacher: 'Cast your bread upon the waters and it will return to you after many days.'

I never knew the context of this verse or the meaning but I would quote it often to the amusement of my grandparents. Fast forward to GCSE RE: we were studying the book of Mark and I came across this passage:

"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age" Mark 10:29-30

Jesus was reassuring us that *an investment in him is secure*. At times, it involves sacrifice—whether it's giving up our time to serve at church, choosing to get up early to read the Bible and pray, giving away our money, choosing to 'invest', whatever the cost to us personally.

Jesus warned those who would seek to follow him that they, 'must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.' (Matt 16:24). He promises us eternal benefits but does not promise us an easy life here on earth!

Following God's prompting and walking away from my abusive marriage cost me dearly. As I arrived in the refuge I had just a few contacts left, only a boot full of possessions and my three precious children. I had given up my home, my job, my reputation, my marital status, my friends and my comfort.

At times it felt so unjust, my mind would turn back to the church I had left behind full of so

many people who had previously loved and respected me. One Sunday I checked my phone and on my facebook feed I saw that my old church had appointed a new youth worker, my old job. I knew it would happen but it had only been six weeks and I was surprised at how quickly I had been replaced. I couldn't hold back the tears, but as I cried out to God I was reminded of the story of Jesus and Peter after Jesus' resurrection.

They are walking on the beach together and Jesus asks Peter to 'feed my sheep'. (When Jesus said this, he is asking Peter to care for his followers. Jesus was using the metaphor of the good shepherd to describe himself and he was handing over that role to Peter to lead the early church). Peter who had denied Jesus on the night he was arrested is restored. But then Peter's attention is drawn to John 'When Peter saw him, he asked, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus' reply is not sugar coated 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.'

I felt that through this Bible story God was saying to me that I had to leave my past behind, I had to leave my successor, my old pastor, my estranged husband, in his hands. 'What is it to me' if he has chosen to appoint someone to my old role? God is God and I am not in a position to tell him what to do! A new question formed in my mind, 'do I trust God to restore a ministry to me?'

And so I come back to one of the first Bible verses I ever learned, 'Cast your bread upon the water and it will return to you after many days' Ecclesiastes 11:1. I felt God was using it to speak to me. *He is in control and what I have given up protecting my children and myself, will be restored to me in time*. I will have more friends, I will have a new home, I will have a new ministry, I will have a good standing with God even if not in the eyes of the church I have left behind.

Crisis may hit people in different ways. It may be a relationship breakdown that causes a loss,



a bereavement, a tragedy, unemployment or ill health. But if we cast our cares upon the Lord and trust that he is in control, we can be confident that he has good plans for us and he will restore to us abundantly more than we lost.

If there is something you feel you have lost, make a list of those things here and talk to God about it:

When I arrived at the refuge my flat had only two lightbulbs. I went shopping with my parents and bought the correct bulbs, thanks mostly to my dad! When I got back to the flat I was determined to fit the bulbs, a bit of 'girl power', to reassure myself 'I can do this on my own'. Well, as my seven-year-old would say, my attempt was 'an epic fail'. I don't know why but however I turned the bulbs I could not get them to stay in and was reluctant to force any harder in case the glass shattered in my hand. I reluctantly knocked on the door of my neighbour who somehow was able to accomplish this feat which had been impossible for me only moments before.

Moments like these make me feel rubbish, worthless, weak. And there were plenty more of them to come: getting lost on my way to places; losing my flat keys; spilling things; breaking things; being outsmarted by my children; confronted by other residents and generally crying a lot! On one occasion I actually set the kitchen on fire, but that is a story for another day!

I, like many people I am sure, am my harshest critic. Sometimes I hate myself for being so useless, so weak, so quick to cry. But God doesn't see me that way and funnily enough lots of other people don't see me that way either.

While I felt weak for fleeing, some saw me as brave. While I felt inadequate to cope on my own, others praised me for doing a great job. While I felt useless and pathetic, others saw me as strong and someone who could help them.

Maybe you see yourself as weak because others have told you 'you are pathetic', 'you are useless', 'you'll never amount to anything.' These are lies. *God doesn't make mistakes, He made you with a plan and a purpose,* He gave you gifts and talents.

As a child, I was often told I was a 'silly girl' when I did something wrong and so I had

a perception that I was 'silly', that I lacked common sense. Since then there have been many occasions when I have clearly demonstrated that I do have common sense and yet that perception of myself has a tendency to hang over me. We need to challenge our perceptions of ourselves, things others have said and recognise when they aren't true.

Paul did some amazing things for God. He travelled great distances, preaching the gospel, persevering in the face of struggles. But Paul knew he wasn't perfect. In his letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul spoke of how he had a physical ailment a 'thorn in his flesh' which he had asked God to heal three times, but which God had not removed. Instead God told him 'My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness.'

God is perfect, His power, His love is enough. He is willing to work through us even though

we are imperfect individuals. In the Old Testament God chose Gideon, a weak and scared man to lead his army. God works through prostitutes, murderers, liars, cheaters. He doesn't wait for us to be perfect, that is a lifelong journey that will only end when we are raised to be with Jesus. God could have healed Paul but for some greater reason He chose to leave Paul with that impairment perhaps so Paul didn't become conceited and think he was doing all these amazing things in his own strength.

Personality traits often have both strengths and weaknesses, for example, we may see ourselves as OCD but that thoroughness can be a benefit in a job where details matter. I am an emotional person and so I do cry a lot, but I also care a lot about other people.

What would you say are your weaknesses? Maybe make a list of them now.

My weaknesses:

Be encouraged that God may have a purpose for those traits you see as your weaknesses and know that He is more than capable of making up any shortcomings you have. His 'grace is sufficient', in Him you will find everything you need, to face whatever life throws at you.



Make a new list of your strengths. What good things have you achieved? Don't play down your successes however small. When you are going through a time of crisis even having a shower, getting dressed, going to the shop, attending to some paperwork, paying off a debt, cooking a meal are challenges to overcome and should be counted as a success.

My strengths:

Sometimes it is hard to keep going when you are experiencing a crisis such as a relationship breakdown. Don't be too hard on yourself. One of the things the refuge staff encouraged us to do was to give ourselves a treat each week whether it was a bubble bath, a walk to the park, a coffee in town or something new to wear.

Is there something nice that you could do to encourage yourself tomorrow? Something to celebrate your success however small it may seem to you?

Since I was young, I have always been afraid of dogs. I am not aware of anything that made me this way but for years I was crippled with a fear of dogs. Even as an adult I would cross the road if someone was walking a dog on my side of the street! I have managed to overcome this fear...I'm not a fan of dogs but I am able to be around them now without freaking out and running away!

So, what is it that helped me overcome my fear: in short, it was love. I didn't want my son to grow up with the same fear I had. I pushed myself out of my comfort zone and would stoop to stroke a dog saying, 'nice doggie' and encourage my son to do the same. My love for him and wanting to set a good example was enough to make me face up to my fear of dogs.

Some fears have been harder to overcome! I am fearful of what people think of me, fearful of getting lost, fearful of failing, fearful of disappointing people, fearful of running out of things like money or food.

Overcoming these fears is going to be a process. It's not going to happen overnight. But the Bible says that, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). And according to the Bible 'God is Love' (1 John 4:8). So, we can interchange the word 'God' and 'Love' here

"There is no fear in God. But [our] perfect God drives out fear".

As we get to know God, get to have more of God in us, we gain a new understanding of love and as that develops we will grow more secure, more confident and that will drive out our fear.

There have been all sorts of people passing through the refuge in the short time I've been here. Some have fled for their lives; they have been driven here by fear. I suppose I was driven here by fear. The thought of standing in front of my husband and asking him to leave is even now an impossible thought to me.

I have been driven by fear for so many years. An early incident in my marriage where my husband punched the wall has never left me, it began the dynamic of fear in our marriage. Other behaviours he displayed may seem small or insignificant but because of the dynamic of fear; fear of the consequences for arousing his disapproval, I lived my life trapped and controlled.

Why didn't I leave sooner? Well again fear held me in its grip, there was the fear of the consequences of leaving, the fear of rejection by others, fear of failing God, my parents, my children. And so, I stuck it out as best I could.

Now I feel I am stepping into that perfect love and my heavenly father is helping me face down my fears one by one. He is still very much with me carrying me through this day by day. He is providing for me. He is giving me good standing with staff and others in the refuge. He is my defender so I don't need to be afraid.

*I have been
driven by fear
for so many
years*

Psalm 23 is a very famous poem by King David. David started his life as a shepherd, tending his father's flocks, protecting them from wolves and bears and his poem talks of God as a good shepherd caring for us.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Psalm 23:4

Just as David used his rod to fight off the wolves and protect his father's sheep, he believed that God was able to defend him.

God is willing and able to protect you.

This may seem ridiculous to you, reading that may even make you angry. Where was God while you were suffering abuse at the hands of your perpetrator? Where was God when you lost your job, your home, your health?

God was there, He was weeping with you, He was hurting with you.

For us to be able to truly love God and others he had to give us free will and because of that there is the possibility of evil. People can choose to do wrong, they can hurt, they can abuse, they can kill, steal, destroy. I have felt your frustrations. I've cried out to God 'don't you see? Don't you care? Why don't you do something?'

And He did. He did see. He did care. He did something: He gave me courage to speak out and ask for help, He gave me someone to listen, someone to act on my behalf, somewhere to run to.

If you are living with fear, I want to encourage you to name those fears now. To bring them before God and ask Him to fill you so full of His love, so full of Him that it would drive out the fear.

My fears

I pray that you would know His presence with you, that He walks with you through even the darkest valleys of your life. I pray that you would see His protection at work. I pray that you could live free, free from all fear.

I remember one day my little brother locked himself in the toilet at my grandparents' house. He was only little and we tried many different approaches to help him regain his freedom. The funny thing was when we finally saw his little face he wasn't distressed or worried, he was still smiling. He wasn't old enough to be afraid, it never entered his mind to think 'I'm stuck here, maybe forever', he didn't realise he was captive in the downstairs toilet!

For me *I didn't really realise I was captive, captive to fear, to shame, to guilt.* I hadn't realised how my mind and my confidence had been affected by psychological abuse. I was undermined, often very subtly, on a daily basis and made to question my motives, my judgment and my abilities. I came to believe that I was undesirable, useless, weak. I desperately sought approval from those around me and lived to please others. I so doubted myself I would ask my children to make decisions about where we should go, what we should eat, or watch on TV. I so devalued myself I couldn't spend £3 on a sandwich for myself in a café. Whenever I

used my gifts such as public speaking, I felt ashamed that I was too proud, that I was doing it to get attention rather than for the benefit of others.

As I left my old life behind it has been a process experiencing new freedoms. Freedom in what to wear, how to spend my money and my time, how to parent and so on. It took time to adjust to my new freedom and have confidence in the choices I was making.

Although I was growing in confidence and enjoying my freedom there were hard days. Days when I missed him, missed my home, my friends and moments of doubt when I would think, 'this is too hard, I can't do this, maybe I should go back?'

In the Bible there is a story of God, through Moses, leading his people out of slavery in Egypt and into the promised land. The choice between Egypt and the promised land should be a 'no brainer'. The Israelites would go from being slaves, serving the Egyptians making

bricks and living in harsh conditions to having a land of their own where they can live in peace and prosperity. The only trouble is that when they came up against problems such as a sea to cross, lack of food or water, when it got hard, they moaned and cried out 'Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (Exodus 14:12)

When it got hard they lost sight of the end goal - freedom.

At the refuge I have seen so many women give up and go back, returning to captivity. Whatever crisis you are experiencing, if you are doubting yourself today, if you are feeling like it's just too tough, please give it another day, another week, another chance. You have come so far to get to this point, please don't despair!

Thankfully the Israelites eventually make it to

the promised land. *And precious one, if you don't give up you will make it to the promised land too.*

'For I know the plans I have for you, declares, the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' Jeremiah 29:11

Driving my children back to our home town to visit friends was a strange experience for me. I didn't realise how much I had come to rely on the safety of that gated community. The visit went by without any chance sighting of my estranged husband. But that fear, the fear of seeing him was very real. Although I had left the physical captivity I was still mentally captive. My fear of him made me want to drive straight back and hide. He was still controlling me, I wasn't truly free.

The Israelites too had to change their mindset. It was during their journey to the promised land that God gave them the Ten

Commandments and many other rules and regulations. God was showing them how to live because they had never been free before, they had always existed under someone else's rule and so needed to work out for themselves as a nation, how they would govern, how they would survive.

For all of us there are times when we need to take some time and make space to consider what our values are, what our goals are for our lives. There will be baggage you need to get rid of from your past and in its place, you can construct new ideas about how you will live. This season is not permanent, we aren't meant to endure the winter forever. We need to keep our eyes focused on the end goal: freedom, peace and rest in the promised land.

God is a god of movement. He is always leading us on a journey. A journey out of captivity into His freedom. So, as the poster in the refuge

office says: 'Don't look back, you're not going that way.'

'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.' Galatians 5:1

How are you held captive in your life?

Do you feel free now or are there things in your mindset that demonstrate you are still captive? (this may be fear, guilt, shame, self-doubt). Talk to God about these things now.

What goals do you have for your future? Are there any values you want to build your life upon?

I have grown up believing in the God of the impossible. My God can turn water into wine, he can walk on water, heal the sick, raise the dead. *Nothing is impossible for my God.*

Jesus said that "if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20).

Now there are days when this seems ridiculous, when self-doubt and fear are almost overwhelming and getting through each minute is hard.

Preparing for court was one of those days. I had prayed, I had read encouraging Bible verses but I was still stepping into the unknown, a very hostile unknown. I felt sick. My estranged husband was now accusing me of abuse and demanding that if I didn't return to our home town then the children should reside with him.



My father walked me to the Family Court; an odd symmetry as he had walked me down the aisle ten years previously.

It wasn't pleasant but we got through it.

And whatever challenges you are facing: dealing with government agencies, court trials, troublesome toddlers or teenagers, endless doctor's appointments, job interviews you can get through it!

Nothing is
impossible
for my God

A friend sent me a Bible passage from the book of Zechariah. This is not a book of the Bible I know well, but there are two verses I want to draw your attention to.

The first is this:

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit says the Lord" Zechariah 4:6

You may not be as strong, as intelligent, as wealthy as those you come up against. *The odds may be stacked against you but this verse encourages us to not be overwhelmed by what you are facing.* If you are walking towards the freedom He is promising you and trying to live His way then He will get you there eventually. If you are honest, admitting your mistakes, weaknesses but trusting in His strength you can't go wrong. It's tempting to get drawn into a fight but instead let God fight for you and the odds become stacked in your favour.

The second verse is this:

"Who dares despise the day of small things" Zechariah 4:10

This passage is about the building of a temple for the Lord and at this point the foundations have been laid and God is saying it will be completed. You may feel like your new life is so far out of reach, that it is impossible to achieve the freedom and peace I am telling you God is promising. Don't ignore the small steps forward. Every day is an achievement. Every decision you make, every new experience, every new acquaintance an achievement. Bit by bit your new life will be built.

Let me encourage you to build your new life on God's word, the Bible. Jesus said "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and

beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock." Matthew 7: 24-25. *If you build your life on His words you will find that whatever life throws at you, you will be able to handle it!*

What challenges are you facing where the outcome is out of your control?

Tell God how it feels to be out of control. Ask Him to give you His Spirit, His peace so that you can trust in Him to bring you through.

What small things can you celebrate so far on your journey to freedom?

When my son was small, I can remember attacking some bramble bushes in the garden. I hacked away at those brambles all day until my arms were scratched and sore. I didn't want him to get hurt by them. However, I didn't have the right tools or the strength to uproot the brambles and so in time they regrew and their thorns again posed a danger.

Bitterness is as persistent as those brambles were.

It is so easy to slip into a mindset where you feel angry, hurt, bitter. It's easy to pity yourself and blame others for your situation. And that might well be true. But these feelings aren't healthy if you dwell on them, they will encircle you and keep you bound, constantly hurt and never free.

Jesus was born as a baby in that Bethlehem stable because he needed to experience the fullness of human life: hunger, pain, exhaustion. He didn't arrive on the planet

as a thirty something and begin his ministry. No, he grew up facing danger, hardships, uncertainty. And in his adult life he experienced betrayal, desertion, deception, rejection and humiliation.

He had every right to be angry, he had every right to pity himself, to blame others and demand justice. But instead he looked up to heaven and said 'Father forgive them they know not what they do'. (Luke 23:34)

Jesus uttered those words whilst he hung in excruciating pain upon a cross, naked and beaten, jeered by the crowds, abandoned by his friends.

I don't know what you have had to suffer. No doubt you are angry, hurt, bitter. *No doubt you have a right to feel sorry for yourself.* One of the things I had to do to keep myself safe was to recognise the abuse for what it was and not forget it, so that I wasn't caught again in an abusive relationship. But somehow,

we have to come to a place where we remember without the bitterness, without the pain and the only gateway to that is forgiveness.

Christianity is kind of outrageous when you get to the heart of it - it's about being loved 100%, forgiven 100% by God and then giving 100% of yourself in return.

Because He loves and forgives you He then calls on you to love and forgive others.

This doesn't mean going back to your perpetrator to be abused again. But it does mean cutting them free, letting them go debt free so that you can be truly free of them.

Jesus told a story of a servant who owed the king ten thousand bags of gold, the man was unable to pay his debt and when the king threatened to have him and his family sold as slaves to pay the debt the man begged for mercy. The king agreed to release the man

from his debt and he went off on his way. But later the servant saw someone who owed him 100 coins and he demanded the debt was repaid, when the man asked him for mercy the servant had him thrown in jail. Others looked on and saw what had happened and told the king and the king was so angry that the servant had not shown the same mercy he had that he had the man thrown in jail until every penny was repaid.

God is willing to overlook all of our mistakes, our sins, to forgive our debt, but in return He asks us to show the same mercy to those who have sinned against us even if they don't show remorse or ask for our forgiveness.

When we do this, as hard as it seems, it is like we cut a chord between them and us and we are truly free.

It won't be an instant process, it will take time, but if you set your heart to it and forgive those who have hurt you, eventually you will be free and you will have peace in your heart.

Make a list now of those who have hurt you. Then one by one say their names and ask God to help you to forgive them, speak out that you release them from their debt and thank God that he has released you from your debt. Once you let go of all these hurts your hands are then free to receive from God and he can trust you with new dreams, new visions, new relationships. (Be patient with this process you won't necessarily instantly be able to feel that you have forgiven, this may be an exercise you have to repeat over and over in the coming days, weeks, months.)

we have to come to a place where we remember without the bitterness, without the pain and the only gateway to that is forgiveness

One of my biggest fears in life is being rejected, that people won't like me or think badly of me. So being in new places is tricky for me - starting at a new school, new college, new workplace - all these things fill me with dread. I worry about having to eat my lunch alone, having no one to ask for help, to confide in. So, running away to a refuge in a new city presented many chances to face this fear! I just needed a little courage.

Courage isn't a word I hear often it's defined as 'the ability to do something that frightens one; bravery'.

I took the children out to play in the shared garden the first weekend we were in the refuge and for the first hour or so there were no other children there. Then two little boys appeared and a mother, who normally would be the sort of person I would be afraid to make eye contact with, in case I caused offence and ended up getting yelled at. But I found courage, courage to speak to her, to smile, to

listen. That woman became an ally, a friend, an inspiration when I felt like giving up. Over the weeks, we lived at the refuge together she listened to my story and shared her own and though our lives were so very different, she affirmed me in a way that so many of my so called 'friends' hadn't.

There are so many words in the English language that confuse me, like why do 'so', 'sew' and 'sow' all sound the same when they all have different meanings?! But suddenly looking up the definition of the word 'courage' makes sense of the word 'encourage'. When we encourage someone we "give support, confidence or hope to (someone)". What we are doing is giving them courage, the ability to face their fears, confidence to believe that they can overcome the challenges they face. That is why I have written this book, because I want to encourage you. *I want to support you, give you confidence, help you find hope so that you can see that with God you do have the ability to do what frightens you.* You can endure this storm and any others that come

in the future.

Remember Paul, one of the earliest Christian missionaries who endured so many hardships in his life but praised God anyway? Well he wrote, "For I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13. Through Jesus, Paul found the courage to pick himself up after every set back, to face angry mobs, to stand trial before dignitaries. And through Christ you too can find the courage, the ability to endure whatever comes your way.

For me, dealing with paperwork, phoning government agencies to claim my benefits, or gas companies, meeting new people on the school run, deciding how to spend my money - these things fill me with dread. But through Christ, through the strength He gives me I can face that challenge while afraid and do it anyway. When I received, a letter saying my child tax credits would stop, as a form hadn't been returned, I panicked, my chest tightened. How would I manage without that

money, there must be some mistake? My natural reflex was to ask one of the support workers at the refuge to phone on my behalf, to sort out this mess for me. But then I prayed. I ask God to help me stay calm and make the call myself. And do you know what? I did it, I made the call and I straightened things out.

Living courageously isn't always dramatic like a hero in a film saving a child from a burning building. *Living in courage is living out the details of each day, facing down the fears of each obstacle.*

"Courage does not always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, 'I will try again tomorrow.'" Mary Anne Radmacher

Some days you will give in to fear, you won't take up every opportunity open to you, you will let others fight your battles for you and that's ok. The Bible says, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never

come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Can you think of a time, however trivial it may seem, when you have shown courage? When you have been able to do something even though you were afraid?

Who encourages you? Is there someone in your life that gives you confidence that you can face the challenges ahead? If not, ask God to bring someone into your life who would be an encourager for you.

And while you wait, know that He is your greatest encourager. God never gives up on us. He is faithful and every day is a fresh start.



It had been a difficult day, at the end of a difficult week when there was a knock at my door. One of the ladies who lived in the flat diagonally opposite stood before me beaming, holding her little girl in her arms. 'She's just crawled and I just had to show you' she said. I brushed aside my tiredness and put all my concerns out of my mind for the next half hour. I was on my knees encouraging that precious baby girl to crawl to me. Finally, a wave of a sparkly, pink flip flop enticed the little one to come to me and she was showered in praise much to her delight. We had found a moment of joy in a difficult place.

In our lives, in our crises, we need to search for joy like precious gems.

Joy is defined as 'a feeling of great pleasure and happiness'.

Psalm 28:7 says 'The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps

me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.'

There are going to be ups and downs throughout life; there will be days of crushing pain, days where thankfulness is hard, days where hope seems lost. But if you look to God and trust in him to help you through there will also be moments of joy.

I could have ignored the knock on the door, I could have told her to come back later. I wasn't in the mood for company, but instead I saw the look on her face and I knew this was a time to celebrate, a time for joy.

In a letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul wrote 'rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn' (Romans 12:15). He was giving them advice on how to live in community and it is advice that holds true two thousand years later. When one of the ladies had had a difficult day, when the court case

hadn't gone to plan, or the outside agencies were on their case, it was time to listen, to empathise to mourn with them. When this lady came with a great big smile at a small milestone reached, it was time to rejoice. Paul encourages us to, 'Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.' (Romans 12:12) These three are essential ingredients in your journey through the storm you are in. In every moment, you need to search for joy, and you can do this because there is hope! At times, you will need to look pretty hard for the hope that things will improve. You will endure, you will overcome, when you find that possibility, however slim, cling on to it, then you will have joy. Patience is not easy. Trust that you can get through this: the divorce, the redundancy, the chemo, the depression and step into your new life. *In all of it, prayer can be a constant source of strength if you are willing to bring your worries and concerns to God and exchange them for his joy.*

The big story of the Bible is one of God reaching out to people to live in a relationship



with them. Time and time again people mess up and then God finds a way to restore them to himself. On day 10 I talked about Moses leading the people out of captivity in Egypt and into the land God had promised them. The trouble is, this story doesn't end happily ever after. The people get distracted by the gods of the other people living in that land and they turn away from the one true God. Worshipping idols, taking advantage of the poor and ignoring God's laws leads them to being overthrown and carried off to slavery



once again, this time in Babylon. But God is merciful and loving and he has a plan to restore them. Some years later Nehemiah is called by God to go and rebuild Jerusalem and restore the people into the land. The job wasn't easy as they were rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. The builders used one hand to build and another hand to hold a sword in case of attack! But they persevered and then the people gathered for a celebration and at that celebration a prophet named Ezra read aloud to them the law of the lord.

As the people heard the Law of the Lord read out loud to them what they saw was the mess they were in and they began to weep. But instead of feeling angry and upset with themselves Nehemiah tells them to look up, to look to God, because in him is the strength to turn things around, in him there is joy. Nehemiah tells them, 'For the Joy of the Lord is your strength.' (Nehemiah 8:10).

You could sit looking around at your current situation and feel angry and upset, frustrated by where you are and how you got here but that won't give you the strength to move on and change your situation. If you dwell on your problems, on your past most likely you will feel depressed and find you are sapped of all energy to do anything.

But if you look to God, believe in His love for you, believe He has a better plan for you and focus on that, well then you will find that joy Nehemiah is talking about, the joy of the Lord. That isn't a fleeting joy, a moment of happiness like you get when you eat a chocolate bar. But a joy that gives you the strength to go on. *You see God is outside of time, God knows the ending and he knows that love wins.*

It won't always be easy, like Nehemiah and his men you may be building whilst still under attack. But if you look to God, His joy, a joy that can't be shaken, will give you the strength

to carry on and you will find moments, like precious gems where you are happy, despite your circumstances.

Think over your day, your week, can you think of any moments where you have found joy?

Where are you on your journey? Have you begun to rebuild your life? Are you still under attack?

How can you keep the hope? How can you remind yourself of the end goal?

Talk to God about these things and exchange any worries or concerns you have today for his joy and trust in him that he has the strength you need to not only get through it but also to find joy.

The Final Chapter

My story isn't finished and neither is yours. Over the last few days we've journeyed through pain, bitterness, fear and hopefully found glimpses of hope, peace and joy.

Sometimes I'm ashamed to say that when I'm reading a book and I can't cope with the tension, I have taken a peek at the last chapter to find out the ending! Or if I'm watching a series and I can't cope with the uncertainty, I have googled a programme synopsis on line! Sometimes I just NEED to know how it's all going to turn out!

As I write now, I have left the refuge, the children and I are safely in our new home. There are still many battles ahead, no doubt, but I'm feeling positive.

Being a Christian means I know the end, even when I'm still caught up in the story.

You see the Bible ends with a major 'Spoiler alert'. In the book of Revelation, we get a beautiful picture of the new heaven and the new earth.

If we are willing to follow Jesus, our name is written in the book of life and when we die our life won't end there. We will be raised and go to live with Jesus in a world full of love. A place with no more sadness, No more tears!

You see in the end Love wins.

God is love and God will defeat all evil, we will no longer live with fear, pain, regret, shame.

So, whatever battles that come my way, I know I will overcome and in the end I will be greeted in heaven by the one who loves me completely.



Now you may be thinking, well it's alright for you. You have qualifications, you will easily be able to get a job, you've got the children, you've got family around you etc. You may think that I'm ok because I've got all those things that you haven't. But my strength, my hope doesn't come from any of those things. As horrible as it is to think of something happening to one of my parents, one of my children, losing my health etc I know I will be able to endure whatever comes my way and that is simply because my life is built on a solid rock - on Jesus. *So, whatever storms come to shake me I know I will stand firm.*

You may have heard the story of Samson and Delilah. Samson was a strong man; his mother had dedicated his life to serving the Lord and as a sign of this he never cut his hair. Samson believed his strength came from his long hair and when Delilah cut his hair he lost his strength. But at the end of his life when he is on his knees, humiliated by his enemies, in chains he calls out to God. "Lord God, please remember me. Strengthen me, God, just once more." And with that he has enough strength to pull down the pillar of the temple he is standing in. It wasn't your typical happy ending as he is killed along with all his

enemies. But the point is the strength wasn't from his hair, the strength was from God.

Your strength – the strength to live out each day, to rebuild your life, to help others - it doesn't need to come from you, or your abilities, or from your family, there is an unlimited supply of strength available to you in God.

So, this isn't a self-help book but I am confident of the ending because the strength to get through doesn't need to come from you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this far, I hope it has been helpful to you.

If you aren't already a member of a church I would really encourage you to find a local church. God designed church to be a family to support us through the ups and downs of life. You can search for a church near you on

this website:

<http://www.findachurch.co.uk/>

I would love to hear from you if you have found this book helpful or if you want prayer or would like me to signpost you to other resources.

Email: suziewade6v8@gmail.com

I have a youtube channel if you search Suzie Wade Standing Firm you should find videos on all sorts of topics such as anger, anxiety, identity, freedom, authority.

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