

# Beautiful Redemption

**By Katie Joy**

**This collection of devotions is a companion to the Lovely Deceit album by Changing Names.  
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When I was young, I used to daydream that I was a famous singer. I loved everything about music and pouring my heart out through my voice. I'd sit in my front yard, in my small town, and sing songs at the top of my lungs. I was so certain that some important music person would happen to be walking down my street and I would be discovered. Throughout the next decade or so, I would go on to be a part of many musical stage performances as well as join the worship team at my church, but I never did meet that ever-elusive *music person*. I finished high school, started college, and went to work full time in the office of a local construction company. I still loved to sing, but I felt aimless and without purpose, I honestly didn't know what my life was meant to look like. It was during a Christian concert at a fairly large venue when I poured out my heart to the Lord, sharing my fears and my insecurities, asking Him if He had a purpose for me. He told me that He wanted me to sing for Him.

Looking back on those big dreams in the heart of that little girl, I am so grateful that those prayers were not answered in the way they were prayed. The path that I have walked has been peppered with potholes, sprinkled with pebbles and stones, has left my feet sore and my legs tired. But it has also been filled with shady places where the trees rustle in the breeze and offer respite. There has been beautiful sunshine, fluffy clouds, and refreshing misty rains. I have experienced the exhaustion and heartbreak of disappointment and setbacks, but I have also experienced the peace that passes all understanding and the joy in knowing that I was created on purpose, for a purpose (just like you).

I'd be lying if I said that I wouldn't change a thing about my past, because I would. There are lessons that I took way too long to learn. There are times when I hurt or disappointed people that I dearly love. There are moments when I wish I had taken action or wish that I hadn't. But over it all is the blood of Jesus Christ. In Him I am redeemed. In Him I am set free. In Him I am healed and whole.

The songs on *Lovely Deceit* are written from real and raw places in our lives (*mine and my husbands*), but they only tell part of the story. For the rest, there is *Beautiful Redemption*. I have written the following pages to share my heart, my stories, and my Jesus with you. It is my deepest prayer that you will find hope and healing in what you read. It is my hearts cry that you will experience the love of Jesus and pursue a depth of relationship with Him, for that is where brokenness is made whole, wounds are healed, chains are broken, and captives are set free.

In the midst of the storm, He is the peace. In the midst of the desert, He is the Living Water. In the midst of the valley, He calls us higher. In the exhaustion of the climb, He gives us strength. In Him, you will find peace, comfort, healing, joy, and love.

I am grateful you are here. I am grateful that I have an opportunity to share my heart with you. Here are my stories.

## Last Week

Ten years ago last week, you were the one  
That I told all my secrets to, the best friend I'd ever had  
Ten years ago last week, I looked up to you  
And I hung on your every word, but those words they cut like glass

I will be so strong now (*help me be strong now*)  
I will move on now you'll see

Ten years ago last week, you tore apart my world  
And you didn't see the cracks you made, in the dreams of a little girl  
Ten years ago last week, you sowed seeds of doubt  
Now I find it hard to let them go, those voices still ring out

I will be so strong now (*help me move on now*)  
I will move on now you'll see (*help me see*)  
I will be so strong now (*help me move on now*)  
You'll see you're wrong about me

I still remember the day, I turned and walked away  
But time has quickly passed as I sit here looking backwards  
Remembering ten years ago last week

Memories, they haunt me still, but they don't contain me...  
Memories, they haunt me still (*but they've lost their sting*)  
But they won't contain all my will, for healing has come in time  
As I leave all the doubts behind  
Ten years ago last week

**Last Week**  
(unforgiveness)

Is there a time in your life when you have been hurt by another person? Of course there is, you are a human being. There are likely countless incidences in your life when you have been the victim of a careless word, a harmful lie, an egregious abuse, or any number of ways people can hurt people. So, here is the crucial question... did you forgive them? Did you choose to forgive the hurt and not allow the seed of unforgiveness to take root or did you choose to bury the hurt, lift your head high, and keep walking. Taking the second path might look appealing, it dresses up as *strength* and you might even feel *empowered* by being the lifter of your own head in a moment of pain. But, here's the thing... we aren't meant to be the lifter of our own heads. That role is already filled by our loving Father and when we choose our own strength, we are communicating that we don't need Him, don't want Him, and that we know better.

You might have heard the phrase *unforgiveness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die*? There is truth here and unforgiveness will only affect the one holding it, not the person who hasn't been forgiven. Holding on to unforgiveness will lead to bitterness, bitterness will lead to anger, and anger will lead to all sorts of evil things.

*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:25-32*

The truth about forgiveness is that no one deserves it. I don't. You don't. We can't earn it, but in all His grace and mercy, God has not only forgiven us both, He has redeemed us, cleansed us from all unrighteousness, and called us to Himself and for a higher purpose. If we are already forgiven by the One who has paid the price for the sins that He didn't commit, how then could we not extend that same grace and mercy to others?

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The*

*servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart." Matthew 18:21-35*

It's important to note that when Jesus tells Peter that he should forgive others "seventy-seven times" he was telling Peter that he should be limitless in his forgiveness of others, just as He is limitless in His forgiveness of us.

A good habit to develop is to take time to examine your heart to see if you may be harboring unforgiveness towards another person. Ask the Lord to show you if there is something you may be missing. Believe me when I say that holding on to unforgiveness towards anyone, for any reason, will do untold damage to you and the life that God has created you to live. It may not happen overnight, but over time, it absolutely will. David says it so clearly in Psalms when he asks for the Lord to search him, know him, and lead him.

*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24*

## Back of My Mind

When thoughts of you plague my mind  
There is no rest or peace to find  
I know that you don't feel the same  
Why would you even remember my name  
Remember my name

I can't forget about you now  
No matter what I try  
You're always there  
In the back of my mind

I've always held you in that place  
As I sit here and think about you  
Did you even feel the weight  
Of the fragile heart you held within your hands  
Did you even think it through

I'll try to forget about you now  
Cause you're not what I need inside  
My life, my heart, or the back of my mind  
Not there, on that pedestal  
Where you stole my light in the back of my mind

I know you cannot see how much you meant to me  
But now it's clear that I must move on

I will forget about you now  
To heal the scars inside  
I will forget about you now  
To heal the scars inside  
My life, my heart, and the back of my mind  
Now I'm here stronger than the pedestal  
That I hid behind in the back of my mind...



## Back of My Mind

(false idols)

Have you ever found yourself in a place where you look up to another person so much that their words hold more weight than others'? Maybe you had a favorite musician or artist and their music spoke to you in a way that no other music did, until they changed? When I was younger, there was a Christian artist that I loved to listen to. I found so much inspiration in her, her music, and her heart as she sang songs about the Lord. In my mind, I built her up to be this amazing woman of God who would never compromise. Flash forward to her first 'secular' album when her music took a distinct turn. I was listening to the pop radio station when they announced her upcoming concert. At the end of the commercial, they said that the show was being sponsored by Budweiser. I was crushed. Why would this amazing Christian, beyond reproach (in my mind), allow herself to be aligned with a beer company? It shook me to my core.

What about that youth pastor you had when you were young that you looked up to? He was the coolest adult that you knew and seemed like a giant kid, just having fun and teaching you how to walk in faith. Then one day he said those things that stuck in your head planting seeds of doubt about you, your future, or the Lord? There will be people throughout our lives that will let us down, disappoint us, hurt us, and reveal themselves to be flawed when we believed them flawless. The problem with putting someone on a pedestal is that by elevating them to that status, we raise them up to a place that no person is meant to hold.

*"Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the Lord your God." Leviticus 26:1*

*Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Colossians 3:5*

*"I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols." Isaiah 42:8*

*They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-who is forever praised. Amen. Romans 1:25*

There are many different ways to create false idols in our lives. All throughout Scripture, you will see countless places where God speaks against them and warns us about the damage they will do to our hearts, minds, and souls. Idols come in a wide variety of choices, they aren't just statues made of gold and silver. We can create an idol out of anything, because an idol is anything that supplants the Lord in our hearts or minds. When football season starts, do you skip church every week so that you won't miss the game? Do you look longingly at the possessions of others, wishing they were yours? Do you choose to go to a specific person for counsel before you go to the Lord? All of these are symptoms of creating a false idol in your heart that you elevate over the Lord, even if you're not physically kneeling before a statue.

All false idols are bad, but many will dress up as positive things in your life. Maybe you decided to begin a fitness journey and get healthy? You started working out and eating healthy. It takes a lot of discipline to make significant changes like that in your life, but once you started down that road, you felt the benefits of it. Well, I hate to break it to you, but *health* can become an idol as well. That kind of journey crosses over into idolatry when your mind is consumed and your thoughts continue to circle back. Once the mindset shifts and your thoughts become infected, this pursuit of being healthy has become an idol.

*Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God-or rather are known by God-how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?*  
*Galatians 4:8-9*

Paul is quite clear when he specifies that we are enslaved by our false idols. He is talking to the church in Galatia about their freedom in Christ and the importance of remaining free, rather than following false idols or choosing the bondage of the Law. Our God is a jealous God and He will not suffer taking second place to something else in our hearts or minds. I

*Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*  
*Exodus 34:14*

The thing with idols is, they are sneaky. You have to remain vigilant in your heart to keep Christ where He belongs and let nothing supplant Him. Search your heart, examine your mind, and look for any potential idols that may have taken hold. Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal any idols to you. He loves that kind of prayer as it puts Him on the throne of your heart and gives Him your permission to reveal anything in you that He would like to remove.

*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24*

Once an idol has been identified, you will need to repent of that idol and make the decisions necessary to avoid that idol taking root in the future. You may need to make lifestyle changes, relational changes, or activity changes, but you will absolutely need to begin taking your thoughts captive and spend time in the Word to renew your mind.

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2*

*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*  
*2 Corinthians 10:3-5*

## Someday

I kept wishing you would be a part of me, but somehow I knew it wasn't meant to be  
How could I fall into this broken dream, I feel betrayed

Someday, after all the color's been filled in  
I'll say all the words that pain had a hold on  
I pray that I will find the strength to say, someday

Gave you the lock and key that hid my heart  
I couldn't help but love you from the start  
Why did I rush into your open arms, I thought you'd stay

Someday, after all the color's been filled in  
I'll say all the words that pain had a hold on  
I pray that I will find a way

Somehow, I've been afraid I'll never mend  
All of this pain, when will it end

Someday, after all the color's been filled in  
I'll say all the words that pain had a hold on  
I pray that I will find a way  
Someday, He'll replace these tears with our laughter  
We'll say, all the dreams we've followed after  
He'll give us strength to find a way to say someday

## Someday (faith | hope)

They say hindsight is 20/20. I have to tell you, I was way older than I should have been when I finally understood what that phrase meant! If you are like me, let me explain it to you. It means that when you look back on an event, you can clearly see. You can clearly see the what, the why, and the how of a thing. You can clearly see what happened or should have happened. You can clearly see why it happened. You can clearly see how you responded or how you should have responded.

When I think of this, my mind goes to Sarah from the Bible. If you don't know her story, I will summarize it for you, but you can find it in its entirety in the book of Genesis, chapters 15-21. Sarah was the wife of Abraham and they had no children, but God promised Abraham that he would have a son of his own flesh and blood. This promise took some time to be fulfilled and during her season of waiting, Sarah thought that maybe the promise was meant to be fulfilled in other ways and she chose to have a baby through her servant. This decision carried consequences for thousands of years. When I think of Sarah, I wonder if she looked back on her life and understood why God gave her the promise of a baby so many years before He fulfilled that promise. I wonder if she looked back on her life and wished she had made different decisions in the waiting. Let me introduce myself. "Hi, I am Sarah."

In March of 2004 (2 years after James and I were married), the Lord told me that I was going to have a baby and in April, He confirmed it. Getting that confirmation sealed the promise. Time moved forward and no baby came. Roughly 10 years after the initial promise, God confirmed it again, but also told me that He had given me the promise so early because He wanted me to trust Him. In that moment of hindsight, I realized that His promise *did* cause me to trust Him. As I clung to my promise, I watched friends and family get pregnant and have babies. I never felt jealousy, I was always genuinely excited for them. I was resting in the promise. Well, the years kept adding up, the friends that had one baby moved on to having two or three. Those babies started school, got older, even learned to drive. The promise I was clinging to just sat there, holding my hand. James and I went through seasons of trying, unsuccessfully, but I honestly didn't believe that we were meant to pursue a baby outside with other means. I didn't want to make the same decision that Sarah did when she took matters into her own hands.

James and I celebrated our 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary at the beginning of 2022. Spoiler alert, there still isn't a baby Briga in my arms and as the years continue to move forward, the waiting can be more painful, but the trust remains the same. I definitely have more compassion for Sarah today than I did 15 years ago. In Genesis 18, she sits in her tent and listens as the angels confirm the promise of God, but also that she will be holding her baby boy within the year. When she hears this, she laughed. The younger me looked at her choices with judgement that she couldn't just believe the word of the Lord. The older me understands the heartbreak in that laughter.

*Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?" Genesis 18:10-12*

I believe that Sarah waited about 25 years for the fulfillment of her promise from the Lord and at around year 11, she took matters into her own hands, justifying that maybe God meant that she would have a son through her servant. We see later that she regrets that decision and, in hindsight, she wished she would have made different decisions and waited on the Lord.

The moment we begin to make justifications for our decisions, we need to step back and look at why we feel the need to justify. Generally, justifications come into play when we are out of alignment with where God wants us to be.

Proverbs talks about the heartache of waiting, but also that when that longing is fulfilled, it wells up in you as a tree of life. If you are waiting on a promise, let me encourage you, from one Sarah to another, don't lose hope. Pray for it, praise for it, lay it down if necessary, seek the Lord if there are things you should or should not be doing in the waiting, but don't make justifications or take things into your own hands. Hindsight offers a clear picture of what happened, but wouldn't it be sweeter to see that clear picture line up with what God had planned as well?

*Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. Proverbs 13:12*

## Scars

You don't see the tears when I lay down at night  
You don't see the scars that I hide deep down inside  
I want you to see me, but don't look my way  
I don't want you to leave, but I won't ask you to stay

Please don't believe me when I say  
That I am fine, I'm not ok

This mind numbing pain, I'm finding ways to cope  
Liquid anesthetic, it's drowning out my hope

Please don't let me make believe  
That I am fine, just help me see

What I, I long to say  
Deep down, beneath the fray

Wrap me in your arms, be patient with me  
I'll let you in, so you can see  
My scars

## Scars (hidden pain)

Picture this. You honestly can't remember the last time you cleaned your house, you have dirty dishes, dirty laundry, accumulated dust covering every surface, trash piled up in places it doesn't belong, and there's a weird smell you can't identify... and then you get a call that you're about to get company. It's *that* person, the one that you will always make time for, that person in your life that you look up to and work so hard to impress, and just don't want to disappoint. You've got 15 minutes, what do you do? Do you take the time needed to *really* clean or do you scramble to hide away the dirty dishes, shove the laundry under the bed, spray some air freshener, and just move the dust around? Ensuring that your house *appears* clean is the same thing as it *being* clean, no? No. No, it's not.

Why do I bring up this scenario? Because it's often what we do with our pain. We don't want people to know we are in pain so we *sweep it under the rug* and bury it deep down. It seems easier than being vulnerable. Here's the issue though, what happens when a cut goes untreated? Did you guess "It gets infected"? You did, didn't you? Well, that is correct. It gets infected. When you have pain that you bury, it becomes an infected wound. Hiding your struggles will not help you to heal, it keeps your pain in the dark and turns you into a member of the walking wounded.

*For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. Luke 8:17*

The walking wounded are people who, in their pain, cause pain. Hurt people, hurt people. Walking wounded develop callouses of bitterness on their souls. Bringing pain into the light is where the healing is found. Regardless of the cause of the pain but especially when it was pain that was inflicted on us by others. Pushing aside our struggles or pretending that they don't exist will only magnify and multiply them. But how does one bring their pain into the light? By seeking the Light, Jesus Christ.

*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12*

*This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:5-7*

Jesus tells us to go to Him with our burdens. To trust Him with the things that weigh us down, break our hearts, cause us pain and provoke a weariness that feels soul deep. To lay these things at the foot of the Cross and trade them for *His* yoke and *His* burdens. As we surrender, we will find healing and be made whole. We will also come into an intimate relationship with the One who paid the highest price for your pain, sin, and shame, so you didn't have to.

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30*

You are not alone in your pain. You are not alone in your sorrow. You are not the only one with scars. You have a Savior that hurts with you, cries with you, feels your heartbreak and bore His scars so that you can be free from them. You also have His Church. Sharing our pain, our shame and our heartbreak allows others to come alongside us to help us carry the weight of it all.

*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:18*

*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2*

Start by going to Jesus and tell Him. Tell Him about the hurt, tell Him about the pain, tell Him about the heartbreak. Don't assume that because He already knows, that you don't need to tell Him. Something beautiful happens when we pray, when we confess our sin and shame and heartbreak and pain. When we come into the presence of our Father, Jesus our Savior and the Holy Spirit, confessing these things begins the healing process and takes the power away from the enemy, allowing the Lord to be in His rightful place as Lord of your life. He is your Hiding Place, your Protector, your Savior, your Counselor, your Friend, your Father, your Deliverer, and your Healer.

*You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble  
and surround me with songs of deliverance. Psalm 32:7*



## Taking Over

A tidal wave of self-doubt, I cannot see the top  
Will I ever find my way out?  
Will the fears ever stop?

Taking over me  
All-consuming me  
Stealing over me  
Breathing into me

The waves are rushing over me, pushing me from all sides  
I'm being pulled down deep and going out with the tide

Taking over me  
All-consuming me  
Stealing over me  
Breathing into...

I don't have to do this on my own  
Don't have to drown inside these waves  
You are the One who gave me life  
You are the One who will save me  
Come take over...

You spoke Your words of peace to the storm inside my heart  
I'll never be the same, cause You change every part

When You take over me  
Consume all of me  
Steal over me  
Breathe into me

Come take over me  
Consume all of me  
Steal over me  
Breathe into...

Take over me  
All-consuming me  
Stealing over me  
Breathing into me

## Taking Over (discouragement)

I once wrote a song and the opening line says *A tidal wave of self doubt*. I think that's how discouragement feels. It's this overwhelming tsunami of negativity that can bear down on you, steal away your breath, and rip your feet out from underneath you. When you are in the midst of a season of discouragement, it's kind of like walking on a tight rope. One false move and you will plummet into the depths of hopelessness. Sometimes staying upright on that rope and somehow avoiding the fall is so tiring, you might just slip off from sheer exhaustion. Sometimes resolving to continue the fight is all we can do, hoping that there will be hope on the other side.

*He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:29-31*

During a tough emotional season in my life, I was so focused on remaining upright and keeping one foot in front of the other that I couldn't even see how discouraged I had become. Because I couldn't see it, my husband kindly pointed out how I had been behaving. It was a season of extreme discouragement and the waves felt too big to see over and they just kept coming. I needed to lean into Jesus Christ, laying myself and all my discouragement at the foot of the Cross. When you are in the midst of a season filled with tough situations and trials, you need to look at them from a place of victory, assuming the win. When you waiver and choose to remain in a place of discouragement, you have already lost. Your situations and trials do not dictate the mind of God.

A season, by definition, is *a time characterized by a particular circumstance or feature*. If your current season is characterized by hardship, difficulty, loss, struggle, or discouragement, then choose to look ahead to the next season, believing in faith that it will be a season of joy, growth, prosperity, and beauty. Trials and tribulations in our life are tools used by our Creator to shape and refine us. Sometimes they are consequences of our bad decisions, sometimes they are consequences of the bad decisions of others and sometimes they are the consequences of living in a fallen world. When in the midst of a season of discouragement, be patient and know that God will walk you through to the other side. Like waiting for a seed to grow and break through the ground, life will sprout out of the dark places.

*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28*

You might be in your own season of discouragement but hold on because you are not alone. You are loved beyond measure and chosen by the Author and Perfecter of your faith. You have a Father that wants nothing more than for you to bring Him your bits of discouragement so that He can lovingly take them away, replacing them with His peace, His hope, His love, and His

joy. As we bring Him the things that are broken in our lives and allow Him to take over, He will replace them with new things. Every time.

*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2*

## Cover Girl

I see you looking at me  
You're analyzing, and you're judging me  
Your eyes are filled with such disgrace  
There's disapproval all over your face

You think that just because  
I don't look like a cover girl  
I'll never touch the stars  
Or make a splash in the real world  
You'll see that you were wrong  
All about me all along  
'Cause you can't hold me here anymore

So keep your eyes to yourself  
Go tell your lies to someone else  
'Cause you are not really here  
You're just reflections in the mirror

You think that just because  
I don't look like a cover girl  
I'll never touch the stars  
Or make a splash in the real world  
You'll see that you were wrong  
All about me all along  
'Cause you can't hold me here

Reflections don't tell all  
Just two dimensions on the wall  
It's time to stop telling the lie  
That beauty's what's seen outside

I thought that just because  
I don't look like a cover girl  
I'd never touch the stars  
Or make a splash in the real world  
I see now that I was wrong  
All about me all along  
No more looking through those eyes  
I'm done hiding what's inside  
Here I am, beautiful

## Cover Girl (identity)

Raise your hand if you've ever struggled with insecurity, identity or feelings of worthlessness. Are you raising your hand? I am. In this fallen world we live in, we are constantly, continually, being force fed ideas of how we should behave, what we should look like, how we should think of ourselves, where we should shop, how we should live... it goes on and on. All these images, videos, blogs, magazines, reality tv shows, movies, etc. are designed by the enemy to be overwhelming, discouraging, unattainable, distracting and to incept feelings of insufficiency and they can be quite successful at achieving these goals. Which leads me to my next question, where is your identity rooted? Do these distractions find purchase in your heart and cause you to take your eyes off Christ and put them on yourself? You will continually struggle with identity issues until you fully find your identity in Christ. But before you can learn your identity in Christ, you need to know who Christ is in you.

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20*

*To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27*

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17*

*Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Ephesians 5:1-2*

*Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:2-3*

*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. Colossians 2:9-10*

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Spotless Lamb, the Light of the world, the Foundation of our faith, the Head of the Church, the Savior of the world, the Word made flesh, just to list a few of His names and attributes.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:1-5*

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14*

Jesus Christ was perfect and holy, yet He chose to take up the Cross and be crucified, paying the price as the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world so that we won't suffer the same cost or spend eternity apart from the Father. Our sin is detestable to God and by Jesus Christ taking our place as a living sacrifice, we are washed by His blood, white as snow.

*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! Hebrews 9:14*

*"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. Isaiah 1:18*

This is the price paid for you. Paid so that you can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, God our Father, and the Holy Spirit. This is who Jesus Christ is. He is the Lover of your Soul, the One who knew you, knit you together in your mother's womb, who chose you, and who continues to choose you. When you accept Jesus as your Savior, He comes to live in your heart. He goes before you, after you, and beside you, every moment, for the rest of your life on earth, and then for the rest of eternity.

If that is who Christ is in you, then who are you in Christ?

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:  
The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17*

*But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. Romans 8:10*

*Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. John 1:12-13*

*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. Ephesians 1:4-6*

*When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Colossians 3:4*

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? 1 Corinthians 3:16*

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:8-10*

*In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.  
Ephesians 3:12*

Friend, it is my fervent prayer that you will come into relationship with Jesus Christ and find your identity in Him and the fullness of who He is in you, and who you are in Him. When you come to the full knowledge of what it means to have your identity rooted in Christ, you will be equipped to face all the attacks of the enemy. When he tells you that you are worthless, not good enough, not smart enough, not attractive enough, that you deserve to be abused, that you don't deserve love, that you will never measure up, that you will never amount to anything, that you are a mistake, you will know they are lies. If the only perfect human to ever walk the earth found you worth His sacrifice, then every lie that the enemy tells you will ring hollow and you will know the truth.

If you have not yet invited Jesus Christ to be your Savior, let me walk you through it. First, you need to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Second, you need to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He died on the cross for your sins, and that He rose again. And last, you need to confess your sins and ask Jesus to forgive you and come into your heart and life.

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.  
1 John 1:8-9*

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Romans 6:23*

*If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:9-13*

Say this prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and I ask you to forgive me for my sins. I believe that You are the Son of God and You died on the cross for my sins then rose from the dead. I want to

turn from my sins. I invite you to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus name, Amen.

If you just prayed that prayer for the first time, know that you are saved and the angels in heaven are rejoicing! I recommend that you take your first steps as a new Christian with reading the book *Open Doors* by Caryn Ann Kilgore. You can find it on Amazon for paperback or digital. In that book you will learn all the necessary steps to live the life of an overcomer and learn to walk in freedom.



## Lovely Deceit

You were all I ever wanted, perfection was your name  
Your lies were so attractive, I fell blind into your game

Because of you, my heart is broken  
It was you who broke me down  
I believed the lies you'd spoken  
Lovely deceit, melodic sound

But now my eyes are open, now I see, I see your face  
Now you're not, not so perfect, I feel wrong and so out of place

Because of you, my heart is broken  
It was you who broke me down  
I believed the lies you'd spoken  
Lovely deceit, melodic sound

Healing comes from the time, time and distance  
Time away, away from your lies  
But it's not, it's not so easy, I have paid a heavy price

Because of you, my heart is broken  
It was you who broke me down  
I believed the lies you'd spoken  
Lovely deceit, melodic sound

## Lovely Deceit (perfection)

I usually have a lot of jumbled thoughts. They all fight with each other to see who will come out on top and be the lucky winner to find life as it is expressed in some form. The downside to having so many things going on inside your mind is that sometimes, no one wins. Sometimes there are just too many thoughts and the tangle they create leave nothing but silence and my mind a complete blank and I just stare off into space. The worst is when I am standing on a stage, speaking or in the middle of a show, and the silence of my mind betrays me and it's just so uncool. The second worst is when I feel inspired to write and as soon as I have a pen or a computer (or even my phone!) handy, there's just empty space where, only moments before, there had been inspiration.

I think I know where some of this comes from, it comes from the *old me*. The *me* that thought that I should not take any action unless there was a guarantee that the result would be perfect. The *me* that thought that the only way to be successful in life required that I be flawless in all things. The *me* that believed that I was only worthy of love if I was impeccable. The *me* that believed that the only way to inspire people was to be thought of as flawless. I used to say things like "perfection doesn't exist" and "it's ok to not be perfect, you are uniquely made and that's beautiful", but deep down, I was lying. I might have believed those things for someone else, but I didn't believe them for myself and I would never have admitted that to either of us.

I want to be clear here, I am speaking directly to the world's twisted up version of perfection, which is incredibly damaging. When you start to believe in the idea of it, it takes root inside your heart and mind like a weed. It grows deep, strong and fast and begins to uproot all these other beautiful things that have found a home inside you. It chokes out humility. It suffocates compassion. It dislodges honesty, and it causes authenticity to decay. Once this idea of perfection takes hold, it will taint how you view everything, including yourself. Especially yourself.

When this concept of perfection took root in me, it created a split and I wasn't even aware of it for many years. When the Lord showed me my brokenness and the roots of perfection, the best comparison that I can make is to liken it to a sort of multiple personality. There was the *me* that I would reveal on stage, the *me* that I would reveal to my friends and family, the *me* that I would reveal to my husband, and the *me* that I would reveal to myself. None of them were whole. The real me had been buried so deep and hadn't had air to breathe in years. When the truth of my brokenness was revealed, it was as if the Lord shined a light into the dark places that were overshadowed by perfection and revealed every tiny fracture that needed healing. All of the different versions of myself needed to be brought together into one whole being.

The word *perfect* is defined as: conforming absolutely to the description or definition of an ideal type. It sounds good, but who defines that *ideal type*? The world will hold up its versions of what constitutes *ideal* and you'll see those versions all over television, movie screens,

magazines, websites, blogs, social media, etc. We are bombarded with them daily. But, what does God say about perfection?

*Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

*Ephesians 5:1-2*

*If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:46-48*

*But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16*

We are called to set our hearts and minds on the things of the Lord, not on the things of the world, that is God's version of perfection. We are called to strive to be holy, as He is holy. We know that Jesus Christ is the perfect, spotless lamb and without blemish, He alone holds that name. However, we are called to strive to be like Christ. Striving for God's version of perfection is not the same and will not look the same as striving for the world's version of perfection.

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

*Colossians 3:1-2*

Now that we have identified God's version of perfection, I want to take a minute to talk about the world's version. The worldly version of perfection is a lie. It looks beautiful, but it is dark, decayed, and poisonous, sowing seeds of discouragement, despair, jealousy and pride. So beautiful on the outside, so ugly on the inside. Such a lovely deceit. Digging the roots of perfection out isn't easy, but it is possible. Sometimes it takes counseling, sometimes it takes accountability, and always it takes surrender, honesty, vulnerability, humility and a willingness to walk through the process, as many times and for as long as it takes. The truth is that you will never be perfect. I will never be perfect. That person you admire isn't perfect.

*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 1:10*

If I'm being honest with you, and myself, I still struggle. Not with the multiple versions of myself, when God does a healing, He does it fully. I struggle to keep the soil of my heart and soul weed free. The area of myself that still works to keep perfection from taking root is in my creativity. The lie says that I shouldn't write a word, sing a note, or draw a line, unless I know that it will be perfect. The truth says that perfect doesn't exist, God created me to create, and if I wait until I know something will be perfect, I will never accomplish anything and I will never allow the Holy Spirit to work through me.

*But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*  
*2 Corinthians 12:9-10*

This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. It's a beautiful thing when all the pressure is taken off and you can just relax into the fullness of who Christ is in you and who you are in Christ, flaws and all.

## Razor's Edge

I can't see the words behind your meaning  
Through the damaging noise of the persistent beating of my heart  
As waves of regret come tumbling down to drown out the sight  
Of memories of you, as they tear me apart  
I'm falling apart

We twist and turn, the razor's edge we walk on  
Memories, they're whispering just like a ghost  
Oh can't you see, I want it now like it was  
Back when we held each other so close now, I see

Your silence is swelled up with exaggeration  
And reality's riddled with imaginations of the way that we were  
Can't you see my emotions are suffocating, with increasing confusion  
I'm impatiently waiting as my clarity blurs, will my vision return?

We twist and turn, the razor's edge we walk on  
Memories, they're whispering just like a ghost  
Oh can't you see, I want it now like it was  
Back when we held each other so close now, I see

Heaven knows, heaven see  
I want you here with me, just like it's supposed to be

I'm all tied up in knots, I can't escape the bleeding  
Of reality's game, the shades of us we're feeding  
On the way that we were, will we return?

We twist and turn, the razor's edge we walk on  
Do you believe this memory will fade away?  
Can't you see I want you here like you were  
Back when we held each other so close, back then  
Well I believe we'll make our own memories  
He'll turn the page, the whispers cease just like a ghost

We twist and turn, the razor's edge we walk on heaven's song  
We'll make it through, just hold on  
We twist and turn, the razor's edge we walk on heaven's song  
We'll make it through, just hold on

## **Razor's Edge** (abiding in Christ)

For some reason, this chapter has been the hardest for me to find a starting place, which is unusual because it was one of the easiest and most collaborative of all the songs that James and I have written together. This song came from a season in our marriage where we were asking ourselves, *are we going to survive this?* Relationships are hard and sometimes love is a choice. I won't go into all the *why's* of our story here, because they aren't important at this time, but I *will* go into the results of those *why's* and how they caused us to ask that crucial question.

I can easily boil it all down to one thing. Not abiding in Christ. Not abiding as individuals and not being united together as a couple to abide in Christ, choosing Him and each other, every day. When we began to prefer ourselves and our fleshly desires over Christ, and then ultimately over each other, that selfishness resulted in a relational crisis. It doesn't always have to be some huge failing that breaks a marriage, sometimes it's just little choices that create a tiny sliver of division, added up over time and then one day you are miles apart and didn't notice until it's an emergency. By joining together in marriage, we became one before the Lord and that union was never designed to be broken. Ecclesiastes 4 talks about how two is better than one, but ends with adding a third. That third is God, affirming the importance of inviting the Father into your relationship.

*"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." Mark 10:7-9*

*Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.  
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:12*

I have been speaking about marriage specifically as that is where this story began, but I want to be clear about God's design for all relationships. God desires godly relationships, it's fairly simple. I don't just mean romantic relationships, I'm also talking about friendships. It is human nature to become like those with which we spend time, so be careful who you associate with.

*Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared. Proverbs 22:24-25*

This Proverb mentions anger specifically, but I believe you can switch that out for any behavior that is not godly. If your time is spent hanging out with a friend who uses profanity, over time you will become desensitized to hearing those words and the likelihood of them coming out of your mouth are high. If you spend time with someone who gossips about people, eventually you will join in. If you don't stand for the things of the Lord, you will fall for the things of the world, it isn't an *if*, but a *when*.

*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm- neither hot nor cold- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

*Revelations 3:15-16*

The problem with trying to stay in the middle is that there really isn't a middle. The Bible is quite clear how the Lord feels about us when we choose the things of this world over the things of God. You're either in or out, you can't straddle the line and play Christian when it's convenient. Like walking on a razor's edge, you will fall to the right or left, there is no other option. Our relationships are meant to be built on a solid foundation, on Christ the Solid Rock. I've seen it in every relationship in my life, not just my marriage. Every time a friend was found to be choosing the things of this world over the things of the Lord, there was a break. Sometimes I caused the break and sometimes the Lord did it for me, but always there came a point where my desire to remain in a place of abiding with Christ would be compromised if I remained in those relationships and I would have to choose.

*Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

*John 15:4-5*

Regardless of where you are in your life, relationships are important. We were not made to be alone, we were made for community and fellowship, made to lift each other up, made to cheer each other on, made to speak truth when it needs to be said, made to pray for each other and bear each other's burdens. Holding fast to my convictions and my desire for godly relationships caused many lonely years in my life, but I was never alone, I always had my Father. Looking back on those lonely years, I can honestly say that I have zero regrets. I allowed the Lord to direct my steps and my relationships, I would not trade those lonely years for years filled with relationships not based in the foundation of abiding in Christ.

Let me encourage you to examine your relationships. Are they godly? Are they filled with compromise? Do they spur you to a deeper abiding with Christ? If not, you will need to make some changes, but you will never be truly alone.

*The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." Deuteronomy 31:8*

## Set Me Free

You tell me I'm loved, I've heard that I'm free  
With all these chains I disagree  
I know I'm enslaved, held captive by fear  
When I find my strength that's when

He draws near, I try to fight but I'm weak  
Please draw near and set me free

I fall to my knees, I hit the floor  
Can't fight alone, not anymore  
I don't have to live with all these fears  
Choking out my soul  
Now I've found my strength it's when

You draw near, You are strong when I am weak  
You're right here, You set me free

I know you want to trade my fear with a peace that soothes my soul  
In You I'm loved, in You I'm free  
I'm learning who you want me to be, I'm listening  
Learning who you want me to be, You're saving me

You draw near, You rescue me  
Holy Savior, You've set me free  
Set me free



## **Set Me Free** (freedom in Christ)

Paul said it to the Romans. What I want to do, I don't do and what I don't want to do (*hate*), then that's what I do. Sometimes I feel that on a deep level. This concept can be seen throughout our lives. It's choosing to hit snooze on your alarm when you had determined that you were going to get up early. Telling yourself that you will start making healthier choices tomorrow instead of today. Putting off that thing that you know you need to do because it's more comfortable to prioritize other things that can be justified as more important. At the end of it all, the most important thing is Christ. What is He asking you to do? What is He calling you towards? Are you forsaking the great for the good?

Every day we make hundreds, if not thousands, of choices. That is a lot of opportunities to choose Christ over other things or the other way around. However, with all our freedom and free will to make all these thousands of choices, how often do we choose bondage? How often do we choose to stay stuck instead of moving forward? How often do we choose to remain stagnant rather than taking steps towards growth? There's a saying that *change comes when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing*. There is some truth in that statement, you have to desire the pain of growth more than you desire comfort. If you're stuck in the cycle of choosing stagnation, the first step to breaking it starts with asking God to renew your mind and bring you into alignment with Him.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God-this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2*

We are called to freedom in Christ. What does that look like for you? For me, it looks a lot like choosing freedom. Making a conscious choice to remember that my chains are broken, instead of acting like they are still held fast. Several years ago, while driving to my church's annual women's retreat, I was praying, simply telling the Lord that I didn't have an agenda, I just wanted Him. In that moment, He gave me a clear picture of where I was. This was the picture He gave me:

There was a cement cell-like room. The walls were made of concrete, they were moldy and gross. There was no door and only one window, it was a tiny rectangle set high up on one wall. The window was so dirty with hardly any light seeping through and you could not see sky when you looked up. The only piece of furniture in the cell was a rusted-out metal bed frame with a dingy, dirty mattress sitting on top, no sheets, no blankets and no pillows. I was sitting on that dirty mattress, wearing a tattered, dirty and stained nightdress. It was me, but a younger me. Then I noticed that there were aged and rusted shackles and chains coming out of the wall. The shackles were not attached to me, but they were laid open on the mattress, right next to where I was sitting. I had raw, open

wounds on my wrists and ankles where the shackles had previously been attached. Then, suddenly there was a door where I hadn't noticed one before and light coming in from the doorway. The light was so blinding that it was impossible to see what was on the other side. As my eyes adjusted, I saw Christ standing there, holding a new, beautiful dress and He was waiting for me to come to Him. But, I remained on that dirty mattress, acting like I was still chained up, despite the fact that I had been freed from those chains. I had been choosing *bondage* that Christ had already delivered me from. Over time, as the picture progressed, the Lord continued to show me my healing. Eventually I got off that mattress, I went to Him, was cleansed, renewed, and clothed in what He had for me.

I tell you this story as a testimony that it is possible to be free and still act like a slave.

*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*

We are called to freedom, but freedom from what? Fear, disappointment, discouragement, unforgiveness, insecurity, lack of identity, perfectionism, anger, selfishness, and every other fleshly thing you can think of. I have been healed and I have been delivered, but I also have to walk in those things daily. If I stop seeking a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, stop investing time with Him, and forget to daily put on the full armor of God, then I begin to be distracted, losing sight of my freedom, and begin choosing the slavery Paul so clearly speaks against.

*Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:13-17*

## Wall of Strength

I want to be there when you hurt  
I want to take the pain away  
When you're feeling all alone  
Please know that I will stay  
I want to help you when you're in need  
I want to be there when you cry

I will not walk away  
I will not say goodbye  
I'll be there through the good and through the bad  
I'll be your wall of strength just like I said I would

When your heart is full of you  
And you feel like you will burst  
I want to be there for the best  
I want to be there for the worst  
To me you mean so much  
Mere words can never say enough

I will not walk away  
I will not say goodbye  
I'll be there through the good and through the bad  
I'll be your wall of strength just like I said

I would be here for you, my dear  
To love you with my whole heart

I'll be the one who holds your hand  
I will not walk away  
I will not say goodbye  
I'll be there through the good and through the bad

I'm still here  
I did not say goodbye  
I've been there through the good and through the bad  
I've been your wall of strength just like I said I would

## Wall of Strength (strength in the Lord)

*I can do all this through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13*

I love this verse. It reminds me that when I feel overwhelmed or weak, I am strong enough in Him and He will see me through to the other side. However, as powerful as this verse is, isolating it doesn't tell the full story.

*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 4:12-13*

What Paul is reminding the church in Philippi is not just about relying on God for our strength, it's also about recognizing that we have nothing apart from Him, therefore in *all* circumstances, He is worthy to be praised. He's telling us to take our eyes off of ourselves and our circumstances and put them on Christ. He's telling us that on our own, we cannot be victorious. Victory can only come through surrender as we lay our burdens, our pain, our joys, our wants, our needs, our whole selves at the foot of the cross.

Paul lived a life filled with highs and lows. If you look at the first half of his life, he was in a high place physically, but a low place in his soul. He was an elite, part of the 1% of his time, so his physical needs were met in abundance, but he was arrogant, pious, and spent his days hunting down and persecuting people that he felt were a threat to his religion. He had every reason to feel good about himself when viewed through the lens of the world. The later part of his life was pretty low when viewing his circumstances. He was stoned, beaten, left for dead, homeless, imprisoned, falsely accused, persecuted, and shipwrecked. He went through some rough stuff. As low as his physical life was, his spiritual life was the opposite of where he had been. While on a journey to track down Christians, he was met by Jesus Christ and called to new life. He went from arrogance to complete humility and submission when confronted with the truth of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. From then on, Paul would spend the rest of his life as a missionary, telling the Gospel story, and laying down everything he was for the sake of Christ. His submission and surrender allowed the Lord to give him the strength needed to impact the world during the remainder of his life, and even today. Paul lived the full spectrum of highs and lows and found a place of peace and contentment through it all because he came to the full knowledge of relationship with Jesus Christ. That's where he found his strength, his peace, his joy and his contentment.

*But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

*2 Corinthians 12:9-10*

What does it look like to practically walk this out? It looks like bent knees as we kneel before the Lord in submissive prayer. It looks like loose hands as we are careful not to hold too tightly to the things of this world. It looks like a surrendered heart as we yield to the Holy Spirit in our lives. It looks like being grateful for the blessings in our lives, but also for the hardships. You might have heard the phrase *smooth seas never made a skillful sailor*? If the sailor never had to sail through a storm, he would never learn the skills necessary, or gain the strength needed, to get through to the other side. In His grace and mercy, the Lord allows the storms in our lives to teach us the skills we will need to get to the other side stronger, more faith filled, more like Christ and victorious. The beautiful thing is, He will also give us the strength to accomplish these goals and He will be right with us as we navigate the waves.

*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Deuteronomy 31:6*

*Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. Jeremiah 32:17*

When our strength is rooted and found in the Lord we will never grow tired, for our source is everlasting.

*Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:28-31*

When your strength is failing and your circumstances feel like they are crushing you under their weight remember where your strength is found. Remember where your hope should be placed. Remember that when the world is against you, your Defender is already victorious.

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33*