



Women, this is a journey toward freedom as we learn to experience Christ-centered empowerment—*not* by believing in ourselves . . . but by trusting in our faithful God. Becky devotes chapters to the most common messages promoted by our culture and gives dependable biblical truths grounded in the gospel.

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Chapter 1

~~YOU ARE ENOUGH~~ YOU'RE NOT ENOUGH, AND THAT'S THE GOOD NEWS

"I'll never be enough for you!" I yelled as I slammed our bedroom door.

In reality, I never felt like I was enough for anyone, let alone my husband. We were about a decade into our marriage and our relationship was accelerating toward the threshold of separation. As someone who struggled with pleasing people her whole life, feeling like I could not do enough to save our marriage or help my husband heal from trauma was gut-wrenching.

I wanted to fix things. I wanted to paint myself as a perfect wife. I wanted to forgive and move forward, but bitterness had planted its fatal root and I was ashamed for letting it happen. Blame bled into the deepest part of my heart, leaving me knee-deep in guilt. Day after day, *I could barely handle the pain*. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get out of this pit to bandage my own wounds.

Until recently, when I would fight with my husband, I'd roam around our bedroom and turn the pictures of us face down on the tables. Yes, I was usually angry. And yes, I'd leave them that way so he could see it. Not my finest hours, but my hurt feelings were often doing the leading. What I didn't realize was that every time I hid a photo from his sight and mine, I allowed myself to be swallowed by shame. I couldn't look at those pictures because I saw how my husband was caring for me, and how could anyone love me when I acted foolishly or said those awful words? How could my flaws be covered when my failure seemed too great?

People know me as an encourager. And yet, the same tongue that speaks life also whispers death, and it can be potent when someone is hurting, especially for the ones we love.

We all have ugly parts of our lives we don't want others to see or know.

Well, now you know one of mine . . . and I'm glad. A little squeamish, but glad. And here's why. Telling our full story (ugly bits and all) ushers in the gift of authenticity, but it also creates needed space where others can see God's redemption.

How Can My Lack Lead to Something Good?

“Has the LORD redeemed you? Then speak out!

Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.”

(Ps. 107:2)

In the moments when darkness hovers thickly, we need to remember two important things:

(1) Nobody is too far gone from the redemptive hand of God.

(2) We have an enemy who fights against all that is good.

The word *gospel* comes from the Anglo-Saxon term *god-spell*, meaning “good story.” It's a translation of the Latin word *evangelium* and the

Greek word *euangelion*, meaning “good news” or “good telling.”¹ At its core, the gospel is the ultimate story of God’s redemption, taking all that the enemy meant for evil and turning it around for good. But what does this mean for us when we feel weak or powerless?

It means everything.

We worship a God who chose us from before the foundation of the world, knowing who we were, what we would do, and where we would go. And yet, the love He has for His children outweighs the heaviest of costs, even the death of His Son on a cross. The gospel is good not because of what we have or haven’t done—rather, the gospel is good because the Maker of heaven and earth has done everything *for* us.

This *good story* points toward our desperate need for God and highlights His extravagant act of deliverance. It shows how we cannot depend on ourselves, we cannot save ourselves, we cannot dig our way out of the muck and the mire. We are in too deep. And so, our Father “reached down from heaven and rescued [us]; he drew [us] out of deep waters” (Ps. 18:16). When we are drowning or wish the raging waves would still, God becomes our rescue. He is both our salvation and our continual lifesaver.

Power is present as we share our honest stories, when we let others know we are *not* enough, and we never want to be—not when there is One who is more than enough for all. With every declaration of God’s ability to redeem our struggles, we offer up our lives as a glorious retelling of the good news.

We get to show others how absence in our life ushers in His abundance. How our failings give God the opportunity to fill. How our lessening on earth means we experience the kingdom’s gain.

Today when I say I’m not enough, I feel a sense of release. I’ve been liberated from the pressure to please or the drive to earn my own worth. *I can’t be enough for my husband* because that is Christ’s role alone to fill. *My husband can’t be enough for me* because only Christ can be my all.

Jesus is the single source of sufficiency and security that can satisfy the empty parts of every human soul. There are no exceptions, no matter what society may tell us.

Only the cross can wash away our sins, and only in our weaknesses can we be made new and whole—not by our efforts or hard-won grit, but by the gracious love of the Father who promises to make us complete in the fullness of Himself.

Can you say this sentence with me? And please, say it with audacity and boldness.

I am not enough, but the Great I AM is enough for me.

And repeat.

This is the key to walking empowered. And it's the truth Satan has tried to steal.

Why'd You Have to Be So Cruel? The Targeted Assault on Eve

We will be going back to the garden of Eden a few more times in this book, but have you ever wondered why Satan went after Eve first?

To be clear, we can't actually know. But it's a question I've thought about often. In Stasi Eldredge's book *Captivating*, she talks about a "special hatred" Satan has for women, which made him choose Eve before Adam.

The message of our wounds nearly always is, "This is because of you. This is what you deserve." It changes things to realize that, no, it is because you are *glorious* that these things happened. It is because you are powerful. It is because you are a major threat to the kingdom of darkness. Because you uniquely carry the glory of God to the world.

You are hated *because* of your beauty and power.²

Two things are happening here. It's possible Satan despised Eve because he was tremendously jealous of her God-given beauty, both physically and spiritually. He hated the way she represented the heart of God. Some believe Satan used to be the most glorious of all God's creation before he fell into pride and sin. But now . . . he's *not*. Humanity will always take the cake.

Moreover, Satan was terrified of her potential to destroy his plans. Earlier in the chapter, Eldredge says:

Eve is his greatest human threat, for she brings life. She is a life-saver and a life giver. Eve means "life" or "life producer." . . . Put those two things together—that Eve incarnates the Beauty of God and she gives life to the world. Satan's bitter heart cannot bear it. He assaults her with a special hatred.³

Women were too much of a threat for the prince of darkness. Clearly, Eve had to go. And what's the first thing Satan tried to do?

He made her forget who she already was.

After placing a seed of doubt regarding God's kind character, the crafty serpent went in for the literal kill, lying about the consequences of Eve's actions, but he also added something more malignant. He said, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, *and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Gen. 3:5 ESV).

Satan makes it plain as day. He tells Eve she is lacking—*she is not enough, so she must do something else to make herself more*. He wants Eve to believe God is withholding because then she would decide to reach for something extra in order to attain what she already had. Satan wants Eve to take matters into her own hands and independently make herself like God, not just His beautiful image bearer. This is the same lethal lie our current culture has adopted. It's the same hidden poison attacking the Father's hurting daughters today.

The enemy wanted Eve to feel like she was incomplete and imperfect *because* she was already complete and perfect in God. But after she took the first bite, she experienced a separation between her spirit and the fullness of her Creator, and the falsehood whispered in her ear became a fixed reality. It was a cruel and harsh self-fulfilling prophecy. She didn't believe she was enough, but she only stepped into lacking when she chose to separate herself from God. Eve chose an inferior form of empowerment.

Listen closely, sister. *The enemy's greatest strategy is to keep women from going back to their Maker and walking in the care and capacity of Christ.* Eve needs to remember God is enough, which means as she walks in His sufficiency, she will always be enough in Him.

But the forces of hell are scared we will find out. When Christian women know *whose* they are and *who* fills their entire being, they become a threat so powerful, the devil's knees begin to shake.

Enough with Enough

I've experienced pushback from Christians as I've communicated the fact that we aren't enough over the years. Many say there's biblical backing for claiming we are enough. So I ask for the verses they are talking about, because if I have missed something, I really do want to know. And guess what?

Not one person can find the phrase in the Bible.

Instead, they give verses declaring our worth in Jesus and how deeply we are loved. They talk about being fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God and how we are called "good" in the garden. They mention feeling seen and known by the Father when others dismiss them. Or they point toward the grace and gentleness of Christ, not His condemnation, as conduits for transformation. And to all of this I say YES! I agree with every one of these biblical truths. But where in

Scripture does it say the specific phrase *we are enough*?

It doesn't, because being *enough* implies something else completely.

Here are two definitions for the word *enough*: (1) "As much as is necessary; in the amount or to the degree needed."⁴ (2) "Occurring in such quantity, quality, or scope as to fully meet demands, needs, or expectations."⁵ Fully meeting the list of demands? Satisfying every need and expectation? Proclaiming my "enoughness" as the measure of what is necessary in order to tackle all situations, for all people? Do I really think I am enough, therefore changing anything or accepting help is unwarranted because I can fulfill the entirety of my needs? Am I really okay on my own?

In short, saying we are enough is equivalent to saying we don't need anything else, including a Savior.

This may not be our intention or what we really mean, but when we use this phrase we are falling into the same trap Satan set for Eve. We are letting God know we are enough on our own and we don't need any assistance from Him. We are trying to be adequate apart from Jesus, taking the bait to empower ourselves by being like God. The enemy wants us to think we are enough because then we are less likely to reach out for the Father's hand and will choose the fruit instead.

I find it interesting that we can communicate our feelings and scripturally sound beliefs like the ones mentioned above without saying we are enough. We can say "I am loved" or "I am valuable" or "I am accepted in Christ." We can say these simple and true statements, but we don't because talking ourselves into believing and saying we are enough implies more and unknowingly adds lies into the mix.

Declaring ourselves as enough only reiterates culture's narrative that everything is dependent on you and about you. Thankfully, because of God's grace and kindness, it's not! Circumstances and your identity are dependent on Christ because He will be more than enough for you and me, which makes us more than enough in Him. It's time we say *enough* to being enough.

Be the Real Eve

I want to end this chapter by looking at the one word this book will continue to come back to: *empowerment*.

According to *Merriam-Webster*, the definition of empowerment is as follows: “The act or action of empowering someone or something: the granting of the power, right, or authority to perform various acts or duties.”⁶

A granting of power.

A giving of rights.

An imparting of authority.

All of which are bestowed upon someone from on high.

Transferred from the top down.

Here on earth as it is in heaven.

The garden was God’s original plan played out on earth. Authority and power were the birthrights of His beloved children as they walked by His side in love. And yet, Adam and Eve chose to believe a cunning creature over their Creator God. They chose to believe in themselves over the faithfulness of the One who formed them by hand.

But we have a choice too. We can choose to veer away from Adam and Eve’s fallen footsteps and follow the path back to a restored identity in Christ. We can choose to believe God’s Word and trade the enemy’s lies for the Father’s irreversible promises.

Will we still encounter sin? Of course. Will we still see the ripple effects of the fall, including the vicious assault on women? Unfortunately, yes.

But clinging to falsehood will not help women grow or overcome. The “you are enough” ideology is not the answer to empowering women. It’s society’s attempt to counter the lies of Satan and make right what went wrong in Eden. When we continually try to be enough for

everyone, including ourselves, we will eventually realize we can't be our own Messiah. And that's okay because there's good news. *Only Jesus can do what we can't.*

Only Jesus can take our condemnation and cover us with His grace.

Only Jesus can take our lack and make it a holy gain.

Only Jesus can use our weakness as an outlet for His strength.

Only Jesus can free our hearts from the pressure of perfection.

Only Jesus can make us enough, because we are united in Him.

Without the restorative, healing work of Christ in our lives, we will end up trying to earn our worth through an unending cycle of defeat. We will wear our bones dry trying to prove our self-sufficiency through the power of our own hands. We can work. We can volunteer. We can be moms. We can be wives. We can run the schedule. We can create the perfect home. We can pursue the dream. We can be the good neighbor, churchgoer, daughter, sister, and friend. But when we mess up or can't get past the struggle or can't keep our head above the sand, we can expect another spiritual assault from the enemy.

Satan will tell you it's your fault and pack on loads of shame. *He will do everything he can to make you forget the position you've been given.* But don't let him fool you. Don't let him make you feel inferior when in Christ your identity stands.

The truth is, we are worthy of being cherished and accepted simply because we are His. We can receive the Father's compassion exactly where we are, and it's not because of what we do or who we try to be. Our value has already been determined by the good story of the gospel. Our position has been sealed and our inheritance guaranteed.

God made up His mind about us long ago, and the verdict is eternally in.

He wants to be with us. He wants to show His faithfulness. He wants to walk in paradise with those He calls His friends. We don't need to reach for anything else that extends beyond God.

And so, dear reader, may I leave you with one of the most empowering and encouraging passages in Scripture?

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources *he will empower you* with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with *all the fullness of life and power that comes from God*. (Eph. 3:16–19)

In Christ, we lack nothing. We are made whole and complete by the extravagance of His love. In Jesus, we are empowered, filled to the fullness of life and power that comes from the throne room of God. We aren't enough on our own, and that's okay. It's actually a relief. We can say we are more than enough through the One who covers us in His perfection and offers us His peace.

So, the next time the devil tries to slither his way into your mind, do the one thing he hates the most. Stand a little taller and claim who you *already* are.

Be you.

Be the real Eve.

Stories from Sisters Who Believed HE Could

JEN'S STORY:

In 2021, I was diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy, a disorder characterized by damage to the nerves that presents as pain, tingling, and numbness. After years of my seeking treatments, the Spirit challenged me to replace my incessant search for answers with a wholehearted search for the deeper things of God.

I began praying for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit and shared this with a friend. One morning after church, her husband approached me and said, "I know what you're praying for, and I want you to know I'm praying alongside you." He told me he had a life-altering encounter with the Spirit at a revival service years prior, unaware that I'd been invited to one that evening. I considered this confirmation that I was supposed to attend.

During the sermon, the Lord brought to my mind the story of Jacob wrestling with God. I, too, was desperate for more of Him. I needed God's blessing and strength to sustain me through chronic pain. Clothed with holy confidence, I approached the altar with those who were receiving the gift of salvation and asked for prayer.

I had a personal experience with God that night. The Spirit's presence was tangible, and I sought His direction regarding what to do next. I felt He wanted me to taper off the pain medication I'd become dependent on, so I took a step of faith, knowing I couldn't do it on my own. He would have to be enough for me. While this decision was solely between the Lord and me (and is not reflective of everyone's journey with health issues), God was faithful to provide.

He not only strengthened me to endure my pain without

medication, God also gave me the strength to begin serving others who were suffering. My entire ministry pivoted to serving those in pain, in order to reveal the nature of Christ. His abundant grace is sufficient to equip us for what He's called us to do, especially when we are at our weakest. Our greatest contributions to the kingdom are not achieved through our own power but His. (*Jen R. from Maryland*)

Chapter 2

~~YOU CAN DO HARD~~ ~~THINGS YOU CAN DO~~ **HARD THINGS THE EASIER WAY**

This past Mother's Day, my youngest son gave me the most adorable plant holder made out of rainbow popsicle sticks. He and his classmates worked hard on crafting their gifts, and as a bonus, they included a pretty planted flower in the holder. My boy beamed with joy as he handed it to me.

"Make sure you don't kill it, Mom. The teacher says you need to water it each day."

I smiled nervously, knowing what was about to happen. Unlike the rest of my immediate family, God did not bestow on me a green-thumb gene. My mother's gardens are glorious. She creates sanctuaries of serenity that give us a glimpse into the beauty of Eden. Meanwhile, I've killed almost every plant we've purchased.

I was determined to keep this flower alive, and also my child's hope in his plant-challenged mother. I watered it multiple times a day and placed it in open sunlight on the windowsill. But as the days carried on, the flower began to wilt. I'd *overwatered* it. My mind flashed back to the summer before when I spent five hours trimming our bushes with scissors. Later that day my mom once again proved her gardening intelligence and told me they had a hedger that could've accomplished the job in a few minutes. My aching body wanted to cry.

What comes naturally to some can be hard for others, and sometimes we can make things much harder than God wants them to be.

We Live in a Tired World

Not long ago, I conducted a survey with women in my life who follow Jesus. I asked a simple question: *What are some phrases you've heard that make you feel empowered?*

One of the top answers was *You Can Do Hard Things*. And on the surface level, we can. God has made His daughters strong in multiple ways. But what happens when we peek just below the surface of our own efforts? What happens when we look at the inner workings of our hearts as we face the hardships of life head-on?

The answer can be summed up in one sentence: *We find a world of weary women.*

We grow weary from pushing and pulling and prying to make things happen. We feel tired after using every ounce of energy we have to serve those we love. We're exhausted in the depths of our aching bones because we've taken on too much and now we're worn too thin.

It's a tricky business, doing hard things. Many women come to accept the normalcy of being weary because what we are striving to do is often simultaneously hard and good. Being weary becomes worth it. We were made to do good for the glory of God's kingdom, but should

it be at the expense of barely surviving or feeling like we can't breathe? Sometimes we can wear weariness like a badge of honor because weariness proves we are doing all we possibly can. But according to the God of rest, we may be doing hard things in a much harder way.

If our noble efforts are left unchecked by the Holy Spirit, endless acts of service can lead to shame-filled burnout. Holy passion without the power of God behind it is still performance. And performing for Christ cannot coexist with His peace if we are going at our preconceived fast pace.

We need to slow our stride down.

Reducing our desire to serve, achieve, or overcome may not be the answer. But increasing our willingness to listen is. When we lessen our pace, we slow our steps in order to match our Savior's. We allow our souls to remain still in order to hear from God and follow His direction because He knows an easier, Spirit-led way.

From one resolute woman to another, resting in God's ability will always bring the best results. While we definitely need physical rest, developing a heart that trusts in what God can accomplish is a must.

Life is rarely easy breezy. Winds rage. Storms surge. We are told trouble will be entwined into our earthly days. Jesus said to His disciples, "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We will have many chances to do hard things and we want to do them well. Our determination can become detrimental, however, when we depend on ourselves instead of God for deliverance from our difficulties. Sometimes there's just too much to handle.

When Life's Too Hard to Handle

If you hang around Christian circles long enough, you will hear the popular phrase: "God will never give you more than you can handle."

I used to believe this too, until I realized God must think I can handle *a lot* and it didn't seem fair. But again, we come to another idea that has been taken out of context and is nonexistent in Scripture.

Many people who hold this belief quote 1 Corinthians 10:13, where Paul writes to the Corinthian church, "The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure." The apostle is assuring them God will help them resist sin, not that He wouldn't give them more hard things than they could handle.

God was letting them and us know that when believers encounter sinful temptations, God will help us endure it by giving us a way out of the temptation through the power of the Holy Spirit. Even Jesus experienced a temptation to sin but He didn't yield to it. If Paul meant God will never give us more than we can handle, then he would be contradicting himself later when he wrote a second letter to the church at Corinth.

Paul says, "We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed *beyond our ability to endure*, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and *learned to rely only on God*, who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:8–9).

What faith Paul has! They were past the ability to endure and even thought they were going to die. Yet, these trials were catalysts to help them learn how to rely on God. Paul ends by expressing his confidence that God could raise them from the dead if it was His will.

The Lord allows hard situations to happen in our lives, many being more than we can handle, in order to emphasize His faithfulness to save. If we could handle it all, why would we need Jesus? It's in the moments when we are too weak that God's greatness shines through. God's Word

makes a countercultural correlation between weakness and strength—one Paul was very familiar with.

The apostle shared about asking God three times to take away a form of affliction that was challenging, even tormenting. But God continued to allow the difficulty to carry on and it wasn't without purpose. Paul said the Lord's response was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9 *ESV*). This switched Paul's attitude from resenting his weaknesses to boasting about them in order to let Christ's power rest within him. In God's economy being weak brings about strength, because Christ's power enables us to do every hard thing.

So, the next time you feel like you've been given more than you can handle, remember, no amount of girl power can compare to God's power. We can face the there's-no-way-I'm-going-to-make-it conditions with assurance. Jesus will be our rescue. When troubles are more than we can hold, let's hand them back to Him.

What God's Strength Is Meant For

A common verse we turn to when facing hard times is Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (*NKJV*). It's such an inspiring verse, but it's also been misused.

Paul is talking to fellow Christians in Philippi, thanking them for giving toward his needs. But Paul puts a little twist in his message and tells his brothers and sisters he has never truly been in need because he has learned to be content in every physical circumstance, with little or plenty. Immediately following this explanation, Paul pens this famous verse. But he makes sure to highlight how Christ has made it possible for him to face these hard, varying circumstances.

Many people believe this verse means God will help them do whatever they set their minds to. However, when read in context, this verse

is saying God will empower us to face whatever situation *He allows us to walk through*. There's a big difference.

We can have aspirations God is not behind. This can be a little shocking, right? Just because we want something doesn't mean God will bring it into being. Human ambition and aspiration need to be aligned with God's objective and Word.

Being a follower of Christ is not about achieving our goals or even getting what we desire. Instead, it involves relying on God when we are in want and being grateful when we have plenty. If our efforts have left us frayed and we can't push through anymore, that's when our God will give us the strength to sustain and succeed according to His plan.

The beautiful thing about letting God strengthen us is that we don't have to wait until we get to the end of our floundering rope to experience His help. Everything doesn't have to be going haywire to have God step in. We can come to the end of ourselves without being sucked dry, and it's done through the posture of release.

Muscle contractions are a good example. When we tighten our muscles, we can feel the tension. But unless you have the supernatural ability to hold your muscle in that same contraction for hours on end, your body will get tired and the muscle will loosen as you experience release. Our body comes to a state of rest when we release our cares to Jesus. If we choose to tighten our grip and never let go of the worries, fears, and feelings troubling us, we'll remain in a state of rigid overwhelm. Releasing everything into the trustworthy grip of God will help us move from a place of pressure to a posture of peace.

Discerning What God Wants Us to Do

If you are a fellow over-committer like me, let's breathe a long sigh of solidarity together. I get you, my friend. Whether it's because we have a fear of missing out or we want to serve or maybe we just love being with

community, often there's no shortage of projects or activities we can do. If we want to be a part of all the action but we're exhausted, stepping away is truly an act of faith.

Circumstances get more challenging when we are asked to help and we don't want to let others down or leave them in a bind. We want to be responsible and reliable people. And we really don't want to hurt others' feelings or make matters worse. But when did it become our duty to do all the *doing*? God didn't assign us this task. When we look at the Bible, God is the One who establishes outcomes and He decides what's best for His kids.

We want to avoid being helpers who do too much and then feel helpless.

Evaluating our weary hearts and bodies is a good way to be honest with ourselves and our Maker. If weariness begins to take over, we need to ask ourselves if the roles we are performing are God-assigned or self-appointed. And if we've appointed ourselves without God's anointed wisdom or guidance, we need to take the initiative and let some of it go. We need to learn the art of saying no.

Feeling guilty should not be part of creating boundaries, but it too often is. We may feel bad for not being able to be there for others the way we always have. But saying no is an opportunity to trust God with those we love. It's a tangible demonstration of our faith in God because we believe He can do the things we can't. He also excels at the things we think we can do on our own. At the end of the day, we aren't here on earth to do what people want us to do. We are here to accomplish what God wants us to do, and we don't need to feel bad about that.

Not everyone has the same budget for doing. Some people, like myself, have less margin for taking on tasks or responsibilities because their mental load is full from life's heavy situations. We are a special-needs family, which means our home is anything but pristine. Still, I can't tell you how many times I've compared my home to the neat, cute

homes of friends. I return from their houses and start “guilt cleaning” with plenty of huffs in tow. Thankfully, Jesus values perseverance over perfection.

We *all* face struggles. No one has a flawless family. Nobody has an eternally immaculate home. Social media delivers a message of perfection, but for the sake of all that is holy, we need to stop scrolling and worshipping a standard that doesn’t exist. It’s not healthy for our heads or hearts.

By taking this needed stance, we are also releasing ourselves, as well as others, from the pressure to perform. When we decide to stop striving to be the perfect version of ourselves, we say *yes* and *thank you* to the full gospel. People we encounter suddenly become those who are valuable and capable of receiving God’s most precious gift—salvation by grace and faith alone.

As God’s daughters we are given what we don’t deserve (grace) and we are spared from what we should receive (mercy). It’s definitely a win-win! But if we try to add our own efforts back into the picture or we expect others to do the same, we actually detract from the fulfillment of the good news.

Paul says, “My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. *I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless.* For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die” (Gal. 2:20–21).

A little later he adds, “After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it? I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! *It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ*” (Gal. 3:3–5).

We are perfect in Christ because we believed He could.

Before we do, we first need to believe He did. It's not about us or our power or our packed schedules. The world doesn't need more weary women. It needs wise women who rely on God's guidance and rest in His care. God's grace is not meaningless when we give Him control of our daily decisions and trust in the foundational facts of the cross.

We don't do more in order to be like Christ. We seek Christ and then He will show us what to do.

The Root of It All

I started this chapter with the woes of gardening and my anti-green thumb. The themes of planting, farming, and trees are scattered throughout the Bible, but there's more to these themes than being something everyone can culturally relate to.

Trees are used for their symbolism. So much meaning lies behind how they are grown. In the previous chapter, we looked at Ephesians 3:17–18: “Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.”

Roots are fundamental in determining a tree's strength. It's not about the height of the tree or its width. It's not about the lushness of its leaves or the vast amount of fruit it produces. What matters the most is how deep and secure its roots are. How deep do *we* go?

When looking at this verse more intently, we find Paul is talking about the range and depth of the roots we have in Jesus. Christ's love is our strength and the true outpouring of our empowerment. We can try to root our power in ourselves, but when the winds come by force, without solid roots in our Savior, our efforts will snap. They will break into pieces and we will be left scavenging through piles of our limited self-sufficiency.

Jesus is our ultimate Root. He is the root of Jesse referenced in

Isaiah 11:10, “In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious” (ESV). The idea of resting in Christ creates an opportunity for us to rely on His capacity, which results in glory, not for ourselves but for God.

Our Father is also the wisest Gardener. He knows how to tend the soil. He knows what needs to be pruned. He knows what needs to be done in order to make us more grounded in Him, even if it pushes us outside our comfort zone.

Did you know harsh winds are actually necessary for trees to grow resilient roots and make them tower tall? Dennis Merritt Jones reported about an important experiment done in a biodome in the desert years ago. Scientists grew trees, but they would only grow to a certain height before they fell to the ground. Experts couldn’t figure it out until they realized they had created the perfect environment for growth, with the exception of wind. There was no outside force pushing against the trees to foster the roots’ growth, which in turn would have helped support the trees as they grew taller and matured.¹

Resistance is needed to grow resilience.

The hardships that come against us in life are used by our God, who knows the better way, if we allow Him to have control. God’s good purpose will win out. No pain will ever be wasted. Instead, our strength and determination will be forged through the fires as we trust that Jesus will not let us be consumed by the flames.

“But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit” (Jer. 17:7–8 NIV). We are evergreen with God’s blessing because our confidence is in Christ and our roots are firmly planted in His love. Life is not immune from trials or difficulties, but rough conditions

can produce resilience and rooted trust in God.

May we flourish into the strong women God is empowering us to be, no matter the soil, no matter how hard the winds blow.

Would you look at that? Maybe I enjoy gardening after all.

Stories from Sisters Who Believed HE Could

TERESA'S STORY:

Parenting is challenging. Nurturing children genuinely and selflessly requires more sacrifice and intention than I had anticipated. It requires constant outpouring, attentiveness, problem-solving, and flexibility. As the daily demands of motherhood slowly chipped away at my seemingly patient demeanor, it was uncomfortable and I didn't adapt well to this loss of independence.

God had gifted me parenthood, charging me to navigate this challenging journey with Him. But my irritability often opposed His work. I ignored the deeper problem and persisted while we decided to become foster parents. I exhausted myself in pouring out from my already taxed and limited love, which ironically made me centered on self.

By God's grace, I was allowed to burn out. I crumbled emotionally, becoming anxious and short-tempered. In weariness, resentment grew toward anyone who needed me. No amount of self-care could ease the exhaustion or warm the fire in my heart.

I brought my years of struggles to the cross, the safest place I know. Confessing my selfishness, I submitted myself to the gospel again. I grieved, repented, and received unlimited forgiveness. Ultimately, foster parenting remained at the altar. We discontinued a foster adoption and grieved that loss for more

than a year. It was a vulnerable place, sacrificing a ministry and feeling disqualified because of my weakness. Yet Jesus continually tended to my wounds, washed away my old attitudes, and renewed my mind. He also filled my heart.

Now I truly parent from a Christ-centered perspective. I acknowledge my need of God's love and power for every good and hard work. Having resolved to serve from God's heart and strength, I thrive in the empowerment of Christ. Beautifully, He has recommissioned the ministry of foster parenting and I know He'll enable me to do the hard work ahead sourced from His limitless love and strength. (*Teresa L. from Texas*)

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