

A close-up photograph of a woman's profile from behind. She has long, dark hair with a subtle reddish-pink highlight. Her head is bowed, and she is looking down at a single lit candle. The candle flame is bright white and yellow, casting a warm glow on her face and neck. The background is dark and out of focus, with some blurred lights visible.

TRUTH FOUND IN  
*unexpected places*



# WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID YOU'LL NEVER BE *out of the woods*

Last year my church read through the Bible chronologically. As we traveled through the desert with the Israelites and watched them make the same mistakes, over and over and over, I wondered if maybe we're all programmed to repeat history. I wondered if getting stuck in a crazy cycle is inevitable, if it's possible to avoid the experience of looking at a hard situation and realizing that you've been there before, that it's not as new or surprising as you initially thought.

Those Old Testament stories and my wondering made me think of Taylor Swift.

Wait! Just stay with me here. None of it reminded me of her as a person; it reminded me of her song, "Out of the Woods." The catchiest and most-repeated lyrics ask, "Are we out of the woods yet?" and "Are we in the clear yet?" Over and over, she sings those words, making it clear that though she's desperate to be finished with this struggle, she isn't. She's not out of the woods. She's not in the clear. Trouble is coming up again in 3...2...1...

The video for this song is like a mini-movie, showing a determined but, again I'd say desperate, Taylor running from wolves, finding herself barefoot on top of a frozen mountain , falling into a deep lake, and crawling through mud in a rainstorm. As she escapes one dangerous situation, she's immediately thrown into the next one. No time to take a breath, no time to process or regroup, no time to get in the clear.

**When I first watched this video, it literally took my breath away.** I'd never seen that video, but I knew that story. I'd felt what she's feeling. I'd wondered those same words she sang.

Have I ever been chased by wolves? Or run barefoot on a mountaintop? Or looked that good in a blue dress? Nope. But have I ever crawled to the end of one race only to be tossed into the middle of another one? Have I ever faced trial after trial after trial until it feels like I'm crawling through mud, like I'm dragging myself through the miry clay? *Oh yeah.*



# WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID YOU'LL NEVER BE *out of the woods*

(continued)

Sometimes I'm there because I'm an Israelite at heart, returning to the same fear and pride and anger that got me in trouble in the first place. When that happens I'm almost always slow to recognize the pattern of my own sin, the responsibility I own for my stress. And even once I do, figuring out how to break the cycle can seem just as difficult and exhausting as sitting and suffering in the sin.

Sometimes I find myself [metaphorically] in a Taylor Swift video because this life is hard, because circumstances are out of my control and, seemingly, out to get me. And sometimes saying, "when it rains, it pours," doesn't even come close to describing the mind-numbing weariness that comes with one hard situation after another, with a season determined to illustrate Jesus' claim that we will certainly face tribulation in this life.

And sometimes, we face a situation that is unlike our previous experience but shares enough characteristics with something that's hurt us or something we've struggled with in the past that it brings it all up again. And we find ourselves thinking: Aren't we out of the woods yet? Aren't we in the clear yet? Aren't we over this thing?

So, what do we do when that happens? When this January feels suspiciously like last January, when our loved one breaks our trust — again, when we find ourselves having the same arguments or slipping into the same habits, when another job falls through or another pipe bursts or another friend stops calling, when this diagnosis sounds an awful lot like the last one? What do we do then?

**We push pause.** When you find yourself on a merry-go-round of misery, for whatever reason, it's time to take a moment. Stop and ask how you got there, and figure out what part of that is in your control (and what part is not).

**We lean on God.** Going in circles makes you dizzy, right? And if you do it long enough, it might make you sick and disoriented. I think that's prime time to lean on the Rock who never moves — and the Father who promises He is close to the brokenhearted.



# WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID YOU'LL NEVER BE *out of the woods*

(continued)

**We let God work in us.** Not only does the Lord promise to give us fresh mercies each morning, He will cleanse us and remove our sin completely when we ask. So when we find ourselves stuck in a cycle of our own making, we don't have to keep spiraling down into the mud. He's holding out his hand to help us up. We just have to take it. We remember what God has done before. If we've faced this same battle before, that means we made it through. That means God got us through. So we must remember the times God has walked with us and protected us and held us — and then trust that He'll do it again.

Friend, if you are facing something that feels achingly familiar right now, you are not alone. Whether it is a bad habit you can't kick or what seems like infinitely bad luck, this thing that has become your personal demon, your curse, your battlefield? It is not bigger than God. It might seem enormous, especially if it's gained traction and grown like a snowball rolling downhill. **But I promise you it is not bigger than our God, and it is not stronger than His love for you.**

Are you wondering if you'll ever be out of the woods? I don't know. Sometimes a thorn in our side really does last a lifetime. But what I know for sure is that whether we are in the woods or at the beach, in the mud and rain or running through a field of flowers, God is with us. God is with us, and He is going before us. He is with us, and He is making a path for us. I know that He is offering fresh mercies no matter where we find ourselves, no matter how many times we turn in a circle; and I know that just like He's saved us from the wolves before, He's going to do it again.

Wherever this season has you, I pray you remember the Truth that doesn't change whether or not your scenery or situation does: God is with you. **And He will be never leave you, woods or no woods.**



# fine. fine. I'm fine.

## I DIDN'T GET WANDAVISION - UNTIL I DID.

Have you watched *WandaVision*? (No worries if not. This is spoiler-free and gets to the Marvel-not-required point pretty quickly.)

I've been watching *WandaVision* every Friday since the show premiered. My first and strongest reaction for several weeks can be summed up as this: It's weird. A longer response usually followed: I don't really get it. Of course, I wasn't about to let my lack of understanding keep me from this strange but intriguing show everyone was talking about, so immediately after watching each episode, I turned to all the deep diving, Easter egg revealing, nerding out articles I could find.

I still didn't really get it. **Until I did.**

I'm not talking about how this show fits into the Marvel Cinematic Universe or the motivation of each of the random collection of characters. Clues for all that started showing up in the first episodes and came to a pretty major reveal in last week's penultimate episode. I haven't watched the finale yet but anticipate a whole lot of explanation along with a whole slew of unanswered questions because that's how Marvel rolls.

But what hit me like a case of hand sanitizer or a dozen jumbo rolls of toilet paper happened in episode 7.

In that episode, Wanda's world looks like a mashup of *Modern Family* and *The Office*. In the style of Claire Dunphy, our harried suburban mom spoke to the camera about her recent, devastating experiences:

- Look, we've all been there, right? (CHUCKLES) Letting our fear and anger get the best of us, intentionally expanding the borders of the false world we created.
- It's probably just a case of the Mondays. (CHUCKLES) Am I right?



# *fine. fine. I'm fine.*

## I DIDN'T GET WANDAVISION - UNTIL I DID.

(continued)

- I'm your mom. And as such, you were counting on me to have all the answers, right? (CHUCKLES) Well, I don't. I have... no answers. (CHUCKLES) Zip. Zero. Zilch. Nada. Niente. (CHUCKLES) I'm starting to believe that everything is... meaningless. You're welcome to draw your own conclusions, but that's just where I'm at. (CHUCKLES)
- (CHUCKLING) I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine.

I snagged those quotes from a website that published the script, which is why you see (CHUCKLES) throughout. But also . . . gosh, that's a lot of chuckling, isn't it? And without the wry, self-deprecating, transparently unfunny chuckles, we don't grasp the full meaning of Wanda's words. We don't see how desperately she's holding onto the facade that this is life as normal and everything is fine.

*Fine. Fine, fine, fine. FINE.*

The first time I watched this episode, I literally paused my TV to let that last line of hers sink in. And I realized, physically reacting as if someone had thrown that case of Germ-X or Cottonelle directly at my body, this felt familiar—and not just because I've watched my share of mockumentary-style sitcoms.

I'm not the first person to experience, acknowledge, or share about the "pandemic wall." So many of us are hitting it as we face the one-year anniversary of when our world changed forever. This isn't unique to me or to you. But that doesn't make it any less real than the glimpses Wanda gets in episode 7 of the very real ways her world—and her ability to handle it—are crumbling.

A few weeks ago I visited my doctor's office. As I sat on the table, awkwardly swinging my legs and wondering why I couldn't just sit on the chair, the nurse asked me all the usual questions. Then, fumbling a bit, she said, "We have a new system, so I have to ask you these questions now." She handed me a clipboard with a sheet of



# *fine. fine. I'm fine.*

## I DIDN'T GET WANDAVISION - UNTIL I DID.

(continued)

questions about my mental health and as I answered them in fits and starts, I began babbling about how I was fine.

Totally fine. I mean, not fine fine. I'm normal fine—or should I say “pandemic fine”? I get out of bed every morning and I only stare into space for, like, an hour each day? That's normal, right? Making sure my kids have three meals a day and meeting my work deadlines (albeit at the very last minute) and still believing God is good—these facts balance out the underlying, never-leaving sense of dread I feel and have felt for a year now, right?

Look, I told the nurse, I am fine. I'm as fine as anyone else. This is just how life is right now and I don't think it will last forever and I don't need help because I'm fine, I said.

*This conversation was as uncomfortable as it sounds.*

Finally, I signed the piece of paper and handed it over, sighing at my nervous chatter. I looked at the nurse and explained that I really was doing mostly okay on most days, and I'm glad she asked the questions. I confessed that recently, I'd started wondering if some things I've come to believe are “normal” or “new normal” or “normal for now” might be actual problems that I had just convinced myself to live with. She smiled kindly and said that, if I ever decided “fine” wasn't good enough and felt like I need help, they will help.

I was reassured but also a little shaken. Was I fine? I mean, I knew I wasn't fine fine. But I'd thought pandemic fine was enough for now. But was it? And what if I could actually do something—maybe just a small something—to move away from pandemic fine? Why did that idea leave me a little shaky, a little sweaty?

Because when we stop chuckling and start facing reality, it's hard. It hurts. And it leaves us vulnerable. But could it also lead to healing? Could we allow that vulnerability, that admission that we need help to propel us forward, even if by just a baby step?

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a dark green dress. She is sitting in a car, looking upwards and to the right with a contemplative expression. The background shows the interior of a vehicle with warm lighting.

# *fine. fine. I'm fine.*

I DIDN'T GET WANDAVISION -  
UNTIL I DID.

(continued)

I think so. And I think that, for me, it's time to stop "making do" with pandemic fine and ask God to help me find ways to get a little closer to fine fine. Maybe it is for you too?

God isn't Santa Claus. Asking for help doesn't guarantee an earthly answer to all our troubles. And I don't know what's pressing in on you while you chuckle and "fine" all over the place.

**But I do know that God is with us. He's never left us. And He's waiting for us to turn to Him, again (and again and again).**



# The Only Way WE CAN FACE OUR HUMANITY

I used to watch a TV show called *Blindspot* with my husband. I liked the show, but he quickly found it ridiculous – too preposterous to waste time watching. He's not wrong. The premise and nearly all the story lines are incredibly unrealistic.

But I keep watching. And this season has been particularly moving as the main character, Jane, battles an enemy closer than any other: herself.

Jane is a "good guy" who used to be a "bad guy," and in a recent episode, she finally began facing the horrible deeds she'd committed in her past. When her husband asked how she was holding up, she responded:

"I don't know if I can do this. I thought I could close the door on my past, quarantine it, but I can't. . . . I'm so tired. I'm tired of fighting, tired of trying, tired of remembering. I just want to forget."

Later, she confessed to a counselor about how she was overwhelmed by the things she's done: "There are so many of them, too many to atone for. I don't even know where to begin. And when I think about it, it just completely paralyzes me."

Fortunately, I've never committed murder or treason or any of the many truly horrible things this fictional character has done. I'm guessing you haven't either.

## **But I still know exactly how she feels.**

Recently, I've been reading a book with a women's small group at my church, and it's caused me to have a few "Jane" moments of my own. I actually selected the book for our group. It's one that a friend wrote, one that I wanted to read but knew I'd never finish without accountability. I thought it would be an interesting read as I learned more about my writer-friend's life and what God's taught her. I thought I'd probably learn something, but I also may have thought that the ladies in my group would learn more than I would. I *definitely* didn't think the book would wreck me.



# The Only Way

## WE CAN FACE OUR HUMANITY

(continued)

The book is about sharing Jesus with the people in your life, and as we've been reading chapter after chapter, I've been challenged in how I view – and treat – people. I've been motivated to live a little differently, to listen a little more intently to what the Lord has likely been trying to tell me for a while. But more than that, reading this book has brought to mind, and heart, several times I have seriously hurt people.

I've remembered so many instances where, despite knowing what God's word says about loving my neighbor, I did the exact opposite. I've remembered times when I wasn't just distant or negligent, but also times when I was intentionally hurtful. I've remembered a whole lot of things I had previously swept under the carpet of my memory, things I've never reckoned with or confessed.

So while I have very little in common with Jane on the surface, I know exactly how she feels.

I know how it feels to be so convinced I was in the right or that nobody got hurt and it was fine. I think, It's over. We all need to just get over it. I know how it feels to be so certain of those things that I completely forget about what I actually said or did.

And I know how it feels to be blindsided by a memory that I'd stuffed down so deep that part of me believes it never happened. I know how it feels to be gobsmacked by the realization that I was the one in the wrong, that what I said or did (or didn't say or didn't do) was a really big deal. I know how Jane feels when the pain she'd caused and the shame she now felt rush over her in waves until she can't breathe.

Do you know how that feels?

I don't know if I can do this.  
I just want to forget.  
There are too many sins to atone for.  
I don't know where to begin.



# The Only Way

## WE CAN FACE OUR HUMANITY

(continued)

It's true. We can't do this. We can't atone for all our sins. And, unfortunately, forgetting forever isn't really an option. But unlike Jane, we are not left hopeless in the face of our reckoning and realizations. We are not left alone to try to fight and work until we collapse under the weight of our humanity. No, we are not hopeless, and we are not alone.

We have Jesus.

We have the immeasurable grace of God that offers mercy and forgiveness despite our undeniable depravity. We have the ultimate sacrifice of Christ that means atonement is attainable after all. And we have the unbeatable strength of our Lord, who promises to never leave us, even when we do unspeakable things.

**We cannot bear the burden of our sins, and we cannot erase them from history or repair the damage they've done.** But it's okay. We were never meant to. God has given us a way to face our past, our sins, ourselves. He has given us a way to heal and to move forward. Jesus is the place we begin and the place our sins come to an end. He is the one who looks at everything we are and everything we've done — even and especially the parts we've tried to hide — and He says, "You are loved. You are forgiven. It is finished."

If you're breaking under the weight of your sin today,  
If you're afraid to face the reality of what has gone before,  
If you don't know how you can possibly handle this, how you can ever move on,

I pray God will open your eyes to the ultimate truth, to the gift of salvation, to the forgiveness and atonement that we all desperately need. I pray that He will hold you close and comfort you when you grieve, that He will give you strength and resilience and guidance as you move forward. I pray you will no longer feel exhausted or terrified or paralyzed, that you will accept the gift He's offering you and walk forward with eyes open and heart full.

**Because you are loved. You are forgiven. It is finished.**

# WHEN YOU WONDER IF YOU'RE *ordinary*

Last summer I decided my daughters needed to have their pop culture horizons expanded. With the help of some googling ("top family movies from the 80s and 90s"), I made a list of all the movies I loved from childhood. Movies my brother, parents, and I had watched on VHS, over and over because Netflix wasn't a thing; movies I could still quote to this day; movies I adored despite realizing, as an adult, that they weren't actually that good.

One of our favorites was *Night at the Museum*. Though it's been several months since we watched that movie, one scene from the first few minutes has stuck in my mind ever since. Ben Stiller's character is a divorced dad who has a hard time holding down a regular job. But he's a big dreamer and a hope holder, always certain something big, his big thing is just around the corner.

His son is young but he's heard this story enough times to be at least wary, if not jaded. When his dad admits he lost his job again and might have to move, but not to worry because his big moment is coming, his son asks tentatively: "What if you're wrong ... and you're just an ordinary guy who should get a job?"

Ouch.

I know well the sting of those words, of that doubt. Not because my child has uttered them - or because anyone has, actually. But that doesn't mean I haven't heard them loud and clear anyway.

Every time I fail.

Every time I'm passed over, ignored, rejected.

Every time I'm too afraid to try.

Every time I don't follow through.

Every time I can't get it together.

Every time, I wonder: "What if you're wrong ... and you're just ordinary?" I stop believing that I'm anything special, that I'm valuable or capable, that anyone would choose me or appreciate me or love me. I look at the hard reality in front of me, I face facts - and I ignore the promises I've received and the conviction I've been given. And I wonder if maybe I'm just ordinary.





# WHEN YOU WONDER IF YOU'RE *ordinary*

(continued)

Last week was one of those times. I'd had a rough day, but it wasn't all that unusual. It was exactly the kind of won't-cooperate, tripping-me-up, letting-me-down kind of Wednesday that just happens sometimes. In the span of just a few hours that afternoon, I returned a movie to Redbox an entire week late, yelled at my 10-year-old over spoons (as if that's a reason to get all riled up), burned the bacon, left the dirty dishes on the table in an effort to leave our house on time, got in the car (late) to head to church and realized my sweater was covered in cat hair and my daughter's hair looked as if it hadn't been brushed in a month.

As I collapsed into my chair later that night I sighed deep and long. I know. My day hadn't been that bad. Believe me, I've had worse. It was wearying and annoying, but nothing earth-shattering, for sure. It was...just ordinary.

Sitting there in the post-bedtime silence, one hand on the remote and the other holding my head, I heard it. As my eyelids drooped and my mind wandered, the words crept in.

I was tired. I was frustrated. In recent days I'd been so overwhelmed with the stuff of life that I hadn't had energy left over for writing or ministry, for pursuing the dreams God has placed in my heart, for following the call I've heard for decades. And decades! I'd been trying to figure out how to live some big life, to leave some incredible legacy, to build something important or find something exciting for years and years. But here I was, nodding off in a flipping rocking chair at 8 o'clock. HOW OLD AM I? I thought. If I don't have the energy to load the dishwasher or turn on Netflix, how will I ever muster the motivation to be amazing? To live amazing? To do amazing?

What if I was never meant to? What if...what if ordinary is all there is for me? What if ordinary is all I am?

**Or ... what if ordinary isn't, actually, all that bad?**



# WHEN YOU WONDER IF YOU'RE *ordinary*

(continued)

No, I don't mean we should settle for boring lives that don't leave an impact on anyone. I'm saying that perhaps "just ordinary" gets a bad rap - and maybe ordinary isn't the enemy to greatness we've made it out to be. Perhaps...we need the days of ordinary to prepare us for the days of greatness.

Maybe it's in the little things that we can develop tremendous faithfulness.

Maybe it's in the everyday that we can spot opportunities to love and share and give.

Maybe it's in the dry seasons that we can remember our thirst for Living Water.

Maybe it's only then that we learn compassion for those who so desperately long for the Truth we know.

Maybe at the end of an ordinary day full of ordinary stuff, we can take a deep breath and remember it was just one day. But what a day it was! It was a testing ground, a learning opportunity, a time of rest and refreshment, a day full of the smallest gifts and victories, a foundation for whatever comes tomorrow.

What if you're wrong? *What if your ordinary is actually extraordinary?*



## WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CALLING feels like too much

*Moana* is a movie about a girl who feels called to the ocean and to saving her island (and people) from danger. That's the short version, but you get the picture. Girl embarks on epic journey, girl faces challenges, girl saves the world. In between those steps, of course, quirky characters are introduced, hijinks are ensued, catchy songs are sung. I really enjoyed the movie and so did my girls, but one scene in particular has haunted me since we left the theater.

After facing a series of challenges – and then being hit with one more – Moana breaks. Standing on a small boat, alone, in the middle of the ocean, she yells at the ocean:

"Why did you bring me here?  
I'm not the right person.  
You have to choose someone else.  
Choose someone else. Please."

You better believe I broke down at that point. I'm not talking about a single tear rolling down my cheek, LIKE A GROWN-UP. No, ma'am. I'm talking about a hiccuping, heaving sob, LIKE A BABY.

**Because I have felt like that.** So many times. Recently, even.

Like Moana, I have felt my shoulders break under the weight of what I know to be a calling. Not just an expectation but a purpose. It can be too much at times, too hard, too demanding, too scary.

*Just too much.*

- When both kids are sick at once – and then they swap germs and ailments...
- When you get a series of hateful comments or emails, criticizing your work (and your heart)...
- When the ministry event you spent months planning is a flop and only a handful of people show up...
- When the words won't come or the laundry keeps coming or the deadlines fly by or the tears won't stop...

**Our callings can feel unbearable.**



# WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CALLING feels like too much

(continued)

Certainly, we will have times when we can't stop grinning and glowing, feeling God's pleasure as we run the very race He's given us. We will celebrate and cry buckets of happy tears and know the peace that comes with seeing Him work in our lives. But other times? That calling that we were so excited to answer, that purpose we were so thrilled to fulfill? It will be so heavy we think it might just crush us this time.

When it all piles up, when we can't see our way past deadlines and dentist appointments, sick kids and complaint cards, overdue bills and birthday parties, that's when we find ourselves at the end of ourselves. It's when we feel like Moana, screaming into the void, "Why did you bring me here? I'm not the right person. You have to choose someone else. Choose someone else. Please."

I've been there. Maybe you have, too? Maybe you know the sting of pouring out your heart and soul and blood and sweat, only to have your efforts ignored or mocked or overlooked.

Perhaps you've stayed strong and overcome challenges and faced down enemies and ignored critics, only to realize that this thing you're battling today might be the one thing you can't defeat. If that's where you find yourself today, you're not alone.

If God has called you to love your neighbor, to serve your family, to minister to your community (and He has), then He is with you every step of the way — even the tentative steps, the shuffling steps, the can't-take-another-step steps. Just like He gave Moses, a poor speaker, the words to say to Pharaoh, God will provide exactly what you need when you need it. Just like Moses found friends to hold up his arms when he no longer could do it on his own, God will send people to answer His calling alongside you.

**We are not alone, though our callings are as unique as we are.** And though our calling might never be easy or comfortable, it will always be worth it. God has called us and no matter how many oceans we face, He will be with us. He will be with us, and we can do this. He will be with you, and you can do this.

# *giving up*

## ISN'T IN THE BLOOD

My oldest is ten years old, officially a "tween," as she's informed me. I suppose this means a lot of things, but one of the most fun is that as her mom, I have a legitimate reason to listen to pop music.

Unironically.

Because that's what she likes, so that's what we listen to, along with showtunes and worship songs, country music and what has somehow become "oldies." I'm listening to the music with her and because of her, and that's a parenting perk I'm happy to receive.

One of my daughter's favorite artists for a while now is Shawn Mendes, and she — fine, I — was excited to hear a new song from him recently. As I caught some of the lyrics coming out of our car's speakers, I was relieved we were pulling into our garage. While I might be able to convince myself I'm a cool mom who listens to cool music, all street cred flies out the window when I begin openly weeping at lines written by 19-year-old pop stars.

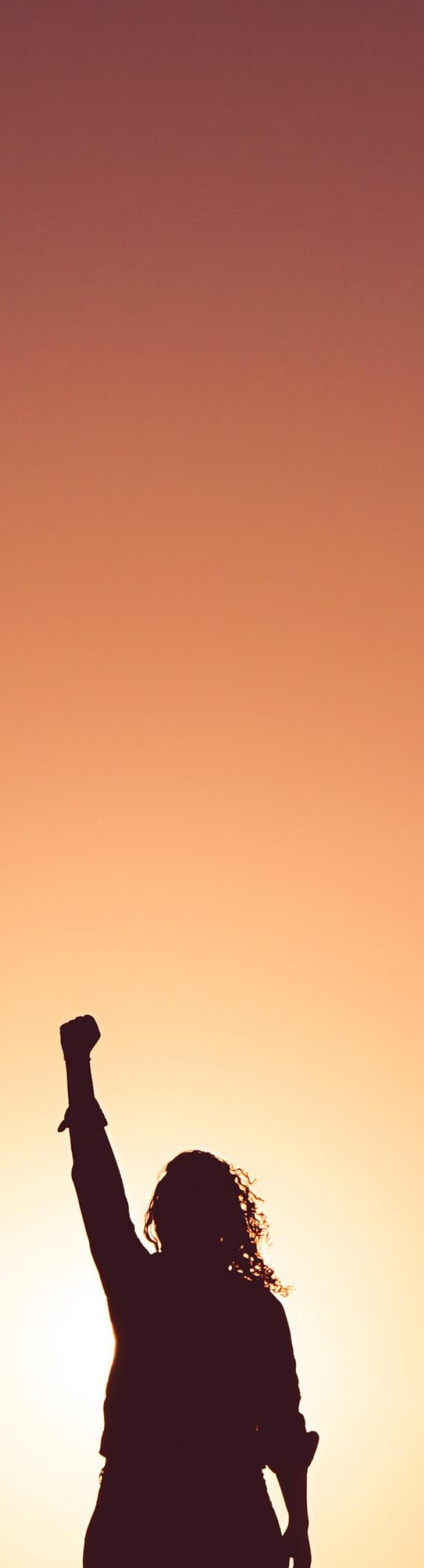
A few days later, I heard the entire song alone in the car, and sure enough, I teared up. Amidst cries for help and descriptions of anxiety or depression or some other unnamed but relateable struggle, the singer repeats these words:

*Sometimes I feel like giving up  
But I just can't  
It isn't in my blood*

The tears that lined my face weren't the result of sadness for the pop star on my radio. I cried because I feel that truth in my own life, in my own family. Every single one of us — on every side, on every branch — struggles with something or some things. And yet we don't give up. We fight. We keep going. Not always immediately or well or happily, but giving up isn't in my blood.

I thought about that as I nodded my head to the song, tapping my steering wheel for emphasis. *Yes! I'm strong! That's who I am!* I thought proudly.





# *giving up*

## ISN'T IN THE BLOOD

(continued)

And then I thought about my daughter, who broke her leg three months ago. I thought about how incredibly hard her experience has been, how painful it's been to encourage her and motivate her and watch her give up over and over again. I thought about how many times I've snapped in the past three months, yelling that she is not allowed to say the word can't anymore. And then I thought about how this song is the exact thing I've been trying to tell her — that she can't can't, that she can't give up, that she can't be anything other than strong and fierce and brave.

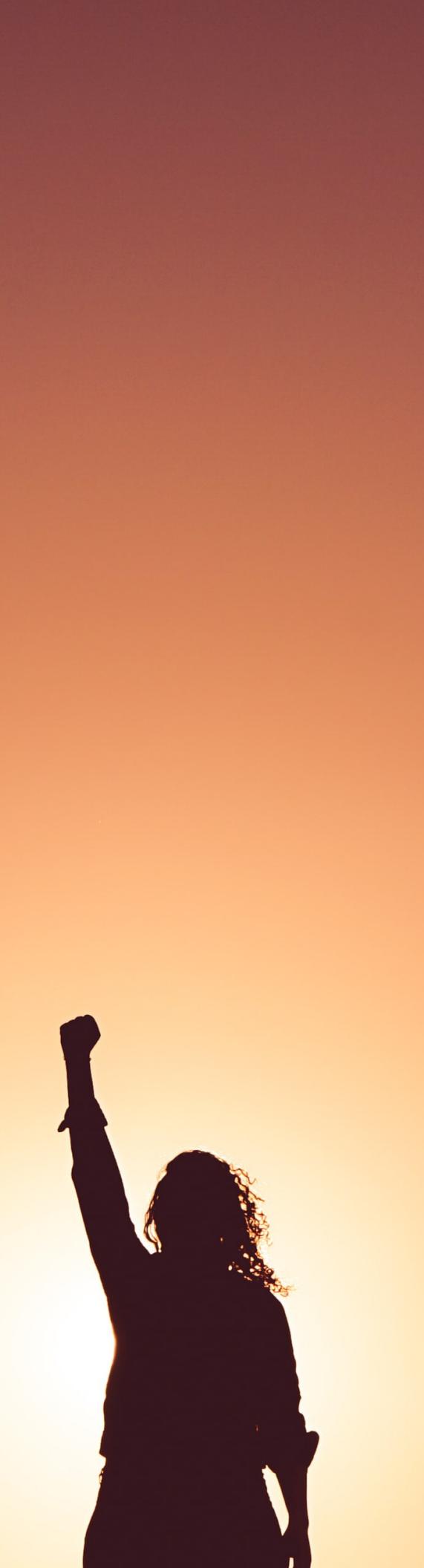
After all, it's not in my blood, and it's not in hers.

But then new tears sprang up for a completely different reason. I thought about how many times I have, in fact, given up and quit, how many times I have been anything other than strong or fierce or brave. And I remembered that even though I couldn't stand on my own or take another step or handle one more blow, it was okay.

The truth is giving up actually is in my blood. I'm just as weak and fallible and human as the next person. And just like pep talks and motivational posters and fight songs and inspiring books can't force my daughter to face challenges with strength and courage, nothing can change my own tendency to run away, to give up, to quit. I can't will either one of us into new personalities, new abilities, new DNA.

Long after I listened to that song, the chorus played in my head on a loop, weaving in and out of my thoughts. The more those lyrics wove through my brain, the more the word blood rang in my ears and my heart. And then the tune changed, and I remembered another song:

*Would you be free from the burden of sin?  
There's power in the blood, power in the blood;  
Would you o'er evil a victory win?  
There's wonderful power in the blood.  
There is power, power, wonder-working power  
In the blood of the Lamb.  
There is power, power, wonder-working power  
In the precious blood of the Lamb.*



# giving up

## ISN'T IN THE BLOOD

(continued)

In what might be the strangest mash-up of our day, I suddenly had an old Baptist hymn mixing with this new pop song until I had to Google the lyrics for both to separate them again. "There's Power in the Blood" has several verses, but the short version was summed up long ago in Philippians. We can do all things not because it's in our blood but because it's in His.

Giving up is in my blood just like it's in my daughter's and just like it's in everyone else's. We share that DNA as humans, and no nature or nurture can change it. But Jesus and His blood becomes ours and overwrites our genetic code, our predispositions, our weakness, and giving up is most certainly not in His blood.

I don't know what you're facing right now, but no matter what is in your path today or what's coming tomorrow, you can feel secure in the strength Jesus offers you. You can rest in the knowledge that giving up and giving in are not in His blood, and He's given us that power along with our salvation.

You can do this, whatever *this* is. You can stand up, you can fight back, you can hold on. Don't give up, friend. It isn't in His blood.

# Remembering who you are

AND HOW STRONG YOU ARE, TOO

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, seen from behind, walking along a sandy beach. She is wearing a flowing white strapless dress. The sun is low in the sky, casting a warm golden light over the scene and creating a reflection on the wet sand. In the background, there are hills or mountains under a clear sky.

This summer has been, among other things, the season in which both my daughters and I became completely obsessed with a movie. For me, it's Wonder Woman. For my three-year-old, it's Moana. (And for my nine-year-old, it's everything Harry Potter-related: books, movies, merchandise, theme parks. But I'm not about to delve into the possible messages and meanings behind that character or that story. At least not today.)

Earlier I wrote about how a tiny scene in Moana moves me to sobbing tears each time I watch it. Briefly, our hero buckles under the weight of her calling and begs for a reprieve. I've felt that way more than once, and I bet you have, too. But what I've realized after watching (and watching and watching and watching) the movie again is that a good part of Moana's strength to stand back up and fight her battle is remembering who she is.

Throughout her journey, Moana recites these words: "I am Moana of Motunui. You will board my boat, sail across the sea, and restore the heart to Te Fiti." Over and over she reminds herself (and Maui, when he bothers to listen) who she is. She is Moana!

That reminded me of those unforgettable words from The Princess Bride: "Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die." And, more relevantly, these words uttered with confidence and force in Wonder Woman: "I am Diana of Themyscira, Daughter of Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons." Just like Moana, Diana found strength in remembering who she was — and not just her name, but also where and who she came from. By standing on the foundation of her ancestors and her upbringing, she was able to access every ounce of strength available to her.

You and I? We can totally do the same thing.

We may not have years of training in swordplay and acrobatics, and we may not have a magical lasso or impenetrable cuffs to wear on our wrists. **But we have access to the most powerful Hero of all time, the One True God above all others — and He promises to give us all the strength we need.**

# Remembering who you are

AND HOW STRONG YOU ARE, TOO

(continued)

"Good, Good Father" by Chris Tomlin is not my favorite worship song, but one lyric always makes me smile and sing loud:

*"I'm loved by you. It's who I am. (It's WHO I AM!)"*

I am Mary, daughter of the King, loved by the Almighty God. And you are, too. You are a child of the King, and you are loved by God. And that? That is all we need to know in those moments we feel weak or uncertain, when we doubt or fear or worry.

When we wonder if we can possibly take one more thing, one more piece of bad news — we are loved by God, and He will give us strength.

When we are afraid of the meeting, the phone call, the test results, the email reply, the incoming storms both figurative and literal — we are loved by God, and He will give us strength.

When we are secretly, deep down terrified that we will never be enough, that it will never get any better than this, that they won't change (or we won't), that this is all there is — we are loved. By God! And He promises that He will give us the strength we need.

It's true that Moana and Wonder Woman are fictional characters who also have some magical abilities. But they also lean heavily on the same kind of reassurance we have in abundance for ourselves. They know who they are and THAT is what straightens their backs, lifts up their chins, and gives them the strength to step into the battle before them.

Do you know who you are? Do you know how STRONG you are? How amazing and capable and wonderful you are, simply because you are loved by God? It's true. **You are a beloved child of the King, and He will give you the strength you need.**

