

# Faith over Fear

**Connecting with God during a Pandemic**

**Nancy Riley, Editor**



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Faith Over Fear: Connecting with God during a Pandemic  
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ISBN 9798576532636

Printed in USA by The Crucible Project

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to over 5,000 Men and Women who began their soul work journey through the Crucible Project. We begin this dedication to our founder. The Crucible Project's founder, Greg Huston, moved with his holy discontent to bring experiences of radical honesty and grace to Christ-followers throughout the globe.

Greg Huston was soon joined by other founders including Judson Poling and Andy Hartman. Early leadership and development of Crucible Men's soul work included Chris Mosher, Bob Locascio, Carl Sutter and John Casey. Early leadership and development of Crucible Women's soul work included Christen Kolb, Lisa Modrzejewski, Kathryn Elmore, Linda Oury and Sharon Cooper.

This devotional book is dedicated to each soul who chose to courageously feel the heat, face the fire, and find their gold. Those who move away from complaining and blaming and into a place of responsibility. Those who live their lives with impeccable integrity, by making and keep their agreements with themselves and others. Those who chose to pursue taking what they experienced on Crucible transformational weekends into their relationships with their spouses and families, and into their workplaces, churches and communities.

We dedicate this book to each soul who has felt the impact of the unexpected pandemic in their lives.

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## Forward

In the following pages, you will find words of wisdom, from Men and Women whose lives have been positively and forever changed by The Crucible Project. Our hope is that you will take time alone with God as you read and reflect on each devotional... and that your soul might be refreshed in the middle of this pandemic.

We believe that God is the source of all love, grace, hope, freedom, blessing and healing. By reading and reflecting on the devotionals in this book, we pray that you will find deeper faith and relationship with God. In connecting with God around the devotional topics presented, we hope that your faith will overcome fear, and any other emotions, that might be a barrier to your soul living freely.

The Crucible Project is a 501c3 ministry is igniting Christlike change in men and women through radical experiences of honesty and grace. We are committed to creating a world of men and women who live with integrity, grace and courage, fulfilling their God-given purpose. You can learn more about what God is doing through the ministry at [TheCrucibleProject.org](http://TheCrucibleProject.org) or follow us on [Facebook.com/thecrucibleproject.org](https://Facebook.com/thecrucibleproject.org).

I am so thankful for each of the devotional authors whose authenticity was revealed as they shared thoughts for this book. I am especially thankful for Nancy Riley who professionally edited each of the author's devotional pieces and organized them into this offering for you.

May God bless you along your journey.

Roy Wooten, Executive Director

## How to Soar Like Eagles

*But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:31*

Frustrated. Stressed. Tired. Overwhelmed. Unfulfilled. Sadly, these are the words many of us—even committed, God-loving Christian people— would use to best describe our lives. But a frenetic, discontented, anxiety-laden lifestyle is polar opposite of God’s desire for us. The prophet Isaiah offers imagery of what the Christian life is supposed to look like. The dictionary definition of *soaring* is to *travel great distances at a higher level; to continually move onward and upward; to rise to majestic stature.*

When I think of someone who is soaring in their faith I think of a person whose life is marked by abiding peace and unending joy; who is completely dependent on God’s strength and not their own; who walks in confidence, assured that, no matter what comes their way, no matter what others say, they are deeply loved by God. Using that definition, I can honestly say that I know only about five or six people who are soaring. There are many believers — me included — who may get airborne for a time, but our trajectory is not always onward and upward. We’re up then we’re down. We’re riding on the wings of faith one moment then grounded by adversity and uncertainty the next. We are flapping our wings but going nowhere.

The question that begs an answer is this: If God intends for us to soar like eagles, why aren’t more of us soaring? There are actually a number of things that can keep us grounded in our faith:

- **Our past.** There is no question that — for good or bad — we are shaped by our past. How we grew up, how we interacted with family, who we hung around with, choices we made years ago can still have a profound effect on our lives. But we cannot soar with confidence, peace, and joy in the present if we are consumed by the pain, remorse, and regret of the past.
- **Shame.** The words guilt and shame are often used interchangeably in our culture but they are very different. While guilt whispers that what we’ve done is bad, shame shouts that we are bad. At the core of shame is the warped belief that we are defective, flawed, unworthy, unacceptable. The truth is, we will never truly get close to God, we will never experience the depth of His peace, we will never soar like eagles when we are shrouded in shame.
- **Fear.** Studies have shown that the three most common fears people have are the fear of flying, the fear of public speaking, and the fear of heights. But none of those phobias will send us into a spiritual tailspin like a fear of failure, a fear of rejection, or a fear of intimacy.

We have all been created with the ability to soar like eagles. If we're not soaring, we often find we are grounded by one of these. Or pride. Or unforgiveness. Or other people's opinions. Or unconfessed sin. The burdens the enemy places on us come in many different forms, each unique to our personal makeup. But the devil's ultimate goal is the same—to keep us grounded. The good news is we have a God who is more powerful than the enemy. A God who promises to share His strength with us so that we can overcome whatever it is that would weigh us down. Don't be burdened for one more day. Trust in the Lord. And prepare for takeoff. It's time to soar.

- What burden that keeps you grounded do you need to hand over to God?
- Where do you need to become dependent on God's strength?
- How can you make a first step towards soaring?

**by Dan Kuiper**



## Intentional Listening

*“So let’s do it—full of belief, confident that we’re presentable inside and out. Let’s keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word. Let’s see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshiping together as some do but spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approach.” Hebrews 10:24-25 MSG*

Working at home is not new to me and building relationships with people I don't get to meet face to face has been my normal for years. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic I have had to learn to more intentionally engage with compassion, grace and truth in all my interactions. I have been mindful to add my inner self to this learning. I schedule times to regularly listen. Listen to God. Listen to myself. Listen to the people I lead at work and collaborate with. Listen to friends and family. During these listening times I check in with them on how COVID is impacting them and share my experiences. A recent theme I have heard has been the desire to have more self-compassion and forgiveness. I fall short of my ideal regularly and so have many of the people I have listened to lately.

Being intentional to listen in the face of ambiguity and uncertainty requires a balance of planned meetings and a regular rhythm of reviewing and adapting while navigating all the changes around us. For me those planned meetings include just me and God as well as time with others. I try to set up my life to be intentional about learning, to be present with my feelings, reflect and grow. I want a "connected to others" life so I can live my life true to what I believe is my original design. And when I fall short, I practice self-compassion, forgiveness and consider potential ways to do it different next time.

These are some of the ways I have found effective for intentionally listening that I invite you to try:

When I want to listen to ...

- God, I read scripture, worship and pray
- myself, I journal
- others, I set up a zoom, phone or social distance meeting

**by Sharon Cooper**

## Sometimes Jesus Calms Us First

During these past few months, I have sometimes felt like I'm living in an apocalypse movie come to life. This modern-day plague has stormed into our lives turning our families, our jobs, our schools, our communities and our lives into chaos. It has been difficult to see where Jesus is in this COVID-19 storm and understanding why he has yet to calm it.

Consider this story when Jesus calms a storm.

*Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.*

*Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on the land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. (Mark 6: 45-51).*

Notice the ordering of the things Jesus did. First, Jesus calmed the disciples, telling them to take courage and not be afraid. After that, Jesus calmed the storm, and the wind died down. Sometimes Jesus calms us before he calms the storms in our lives.

Most of the time in my life, I think about things the other way around. I pray for God to calm the storm in my life first. I ask for him to fix my situation or help take a stressful event away. I don't often think about praying for God to help calm me in the midst of the storm.

Sometimes I think God works the other way around. He cares more about growing our character than changing our circumstances. As I look back through this season I am in, I can see God active in my life calming me through reordering my inner life, highlighting what truly triggers my fear and taking a hard look at what unhealthy habits I turn to in order to "calm" that fear.

I think this is an important point, because often we feel anxious about issues and problems that are not inside our control. Maybe we're feeling anxious about this global pandemic that has drastically and even traumatically touched each of our lives. Or perhaps frustrated about the actions of another person, or when we will die. In situations like these, in which we have limited control, it's more important to practice acceptance and calm ourselves. The storms in our life may or may not change. But we can always work on ourselves.

- Do you tend to pray more for God to calm the storms in your life or calm you?
- How can you see God actively calming you in the midst of a raging storm?
- Is there something God is asking you to look at that will transform your fear into courage?
- How is Jesus inviting you into a practice of acceptance?

**by Joshua Hook**

## In ALL Things

*And we know that in All things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28*

This Covid-19 pandemic has transformed my thinking about dreams. Not the lay-me-down-to-sleep dreams, not nightmares, nor daydreams. Rather, those soul-deep, life-transforming, God-inspired dreams where your passion and the needs of others collide and grow feet. Those dreams where momentum builds, goals are met, and a tribe runs alongside you toward the same goal. Then, rounding the final corner... BOOM! Everything and everyone halt.

Covid19 had slithered onto the track.

The world's health, including my husband's and mine, our family business, and my God-dream to lead women to Jesus' soul-deep healing surrounded by authentic community was unravelling.

For two weeks straight my husband and I fought Covid-19 symptoms. We gorged on comfort food, but when I lost my sense of smell and taste, the simple pleasures food afforded, no longer comforted. I mourned the loss of health, human connection with my family, my grandkids, my tribe, and the momentum of my dream. I was sad and angry.

When I read FB memes that touted positive messages about God's protection, I cried, "What about me, God? What about OUR dream?" As time passed, my hope diminished. My dream felt like a pile of dust in a desert sandstorm, blowing away bit by bit.

But. God.

I poured out raw emotions to God. He brought me to Romans 8:28, "...in all things, God works for the good of those who love him..." In ALL things, God said, I work for your good. In ALL THINGS...even pandemics...I work for the good of those who love me and are CALLED according to my purpose...ALL THINGS. ALL things.

And then he spoke about hope. Hope renews through rest, redemption, and resurrection.

1. Rest –
  - a. physically so health and strength return
  - b. emotionally because everything's out of control
  - c. spiritually and watch God work for our good

In other words, Rest with a posture of Surrender. When life is out of our control and our physical and emotional health is spent, surrender. Surrender our healing to God's hands.

Surrender our preconceived ideas of what our life and dreams look like and let God work all things for our good.

2. Redeem – Redeem means to fulfill a promise.

God always, ALWAYS keeps his promises. He will redeem the dreams he planted within us no matter how many times the Enemy attempts to destroy them.

While our world looks nothing like it did pre-Covid, it's given me hope witnessing the ingenuity, creativity, resourcefulness and reengineering world-wide to survive. I stand in awe of the scientists, business owners, engineers, teachers, moms and dads...you and me...and how GOOD has shined through.

And God will redeem all this time our dreams have lost with this same ingenuity, creativity, resourcefulness, and reengineering if we surrender what "normal" looks like for our dreams.

3. Resurrect –

When the Enemy thinks he's defeated us, God will resurrect our dreams to fulfill His promises. Our journey to fulfill those dreams may have taken a sudden turn, but God's dreams will come to fruition.

So, dear friends, have HOPE! Rest in a posture of surrender knowing that in ALL things God works for the good of those (including you) who love him and are called according to his purpose. He will redeem and fulfill His promises, His dreams in you and through you. Soon, God will breathe new life over you and resurrect that dream. It will be recognizable, but different.

- How is God calling you to rest?
- What do you need to surrender to God?
- What God-inspired dream, where your passion and the needs of others collide, do you need God to resurrect?

**by Dawn Aldrich**

## Leaning In

*“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” Isaiah 43:17-18*

Life is full of seasons. Nature reminds us of this multiple times a year. As we enter into fall and already see the first signs of winter upon us, I am reminded again that there is a season for everything. With this constant physical reminder from nature, you would think we would be better at recognizing when we are entering a new season in our own lives. Often though, we start feeling a shift in our world and we react by pushing back and resisting or maybe just avoiding and denying. Despite the changes around us we look for our normal modus operandi to carry us through.

When I enter a new season in my life, a mantra I use to challenge me is, lean in. I remind myself when I feel disruption to stop and lean in. Leaning in is actually quite simple in theory, it's the practice of shifting your posture towards something to slowly begin to embrace it. There are a few steps you can take to try this out:

1. **Awareness** – The first step is to become aware of the shift in your life. You may recognize that something in your environment has changed or you may feel a new emotion creeping in but in any case, it takes awareness first.
2. **Acceptance** – Admit your natural response and accept that you may want to avoid or push back against it. Acceptance creates empathy for yourself the same way you would likely do for a loved one.
3. **Act** – Ask yourself what it would look like to take a step into this new shift in your life. Then do it! It may be as simple as opening up to listen more or engaging in a conversation. The important part is to step out of your normal reaction and into something new.

When you break anything down into three steps it sounds simple but what we need to lean in to is usually the challenge. After all, if it weren't a challenge, we would just embrace the change without hesitation. Some common themes I have needed to lean in to have been change, pain, discomfort, forgiveness, fear, anger, sadness and loss.

The past few years of my life have been filled with season after season of pain, loss, illness and this past year of COVID-19 has been no different. Again, and again I have learned to lean into a season of change, of letting go and of re-birth. My awareness of the shift grows as my awareness of my fear and discomfort grow. Initially, I avoid the fear and deny that I can do anything about my situation. Eventually, I accept my reactions as natural responses and gave myself the space to have these reactions without judgment. I begin to act by taking steps to let

go of the burdens I've been holding and to engage my inner power instead of avoiding it. As I lean in, I realize much of my suffering is caused by my own actions. Changing my response leads to a shift in my perspective and attitude.

- What are you aware of that is shifting in your life that you may need to lean into?
- Is there something that you have been avoiding or pushing back?
- What would it look like to take a step into this new shift in your life?

**by Greg Hawkins**

## Is Anything Too Hard for God?

*“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?” Jeremiah 32:27*

*“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” 1 Corinthians 10:13*

*“And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” Matthew 21:22*

Covid seemed somewhat distant to me until that morning I woke up and realized something was not right with my husband. We immediately went to the doctor and both had a COVID test. While waiting for results we returned home with a loads of medicine. Six days later my husband was in the hospital; he tested positive for COVID plus had pneumonia! The hospital got him stable and he was sent home. Several days later, with an unrelenting fever, he returned for a more serious hospital stay. Medicines were not working; the doctors were struggling with treatment and my husband’s body was fighting to live. He called and said a final goodbye to family and several friends. Then the doctor called to notify me that I too was COVID positive while having zero symptoms. Life was hard for me in that moment but was it too hard for God?

It is hard to grasp that I am worthy of God’s attention, which I so badly needed, but there is proof everywhere that I am worthy and loved. I refused to contribute to the spread of this virus which was wreaking havoc on my husband. So as I trusted in God and allowed friends to support me, I grew emotionally.

I started acknowledging that it is okay to be NOT okay and leaned into the words of God. Telling Him my true feelings I grew spiritually and my faith in God grew more confident. (Thankfully God answered prayers and he recovered.)

- What hard thing is God handling for you today?
- How can you turn your hard thing over today with confidence?
- God see’s you as his favorite...List the qualities in you that make you his favorite.

**by Devra Wooten**



## Running on Empty

*“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*

For a time, we lived in a very small town in Mexico where there was not consistent water service. Our home had an underground holding tank called a tinaco that needed to be filled by a water truck when the city water was low. ...and it was always low. On more than one occasion, we did not monitor the water level and our tank became totally dry.

When there was water present, you could see a rippling reflection of yourself peeking through the small metal door. Without water, you could see down to the brown floor of the tinaco. Once when the tank was empty, our landlady looked in. She knew she was supposed to be seeing the light blue floor, so it was obvious to her that muddy sediment had settled in a thick layer on the bottom. We had seen it, had no idea how it was really supposed to look. She and a friend climbed inside to scrub the tank and help us rinse it out using her water supply. Finally, she showed us how to disconnect the pump from the water-line running into the house so we could empty this murky water onto the ground rather than send it through the house lines and finding it later in our shower! Gross, right?!

This year in our lives is so unpredictable. Many of our normal patterns of renewal have been altered or closed. We believe that God is doing something big with the collective emptiness and depletion of this season. In a sense, He’s been offering the chance to look into the emptied tinaco. He works even these things together for His good, by allowing us to see deep into the murky shadows of our souls when we are running on empty. We end up seeing things we cannot see when all is well.

Especially in these low times, I am thankful for the support of friends who know things that I have not learned yet. They have shown me how to maintain a cleaner system, a healthier soul. We see God through the get-your-hands-dirty relationships in our communities and He teaches us better ways of living. The health of our whole family is lifted when we find appropriate ways to clean the tank. Thank you, God, for Your continual restoration and the redemption of all things.

- Sit with God and remember back to the lows of the past few days...weeks...months. Thank God for the joy He feels in being with you right now and for the excitement He feels in your willingness to walk with Him into these memories.
- What stresses are you experiencing this season and what are the ways you are currently coping with them? Notice what is not working and what leaves you feeling tainted with longing, regret or shame.

- Considering Psalm 139, can you accept your anxious thoughts? Can you sit with God and be ok with Him seeing you fully? Think with God about what “the way everlasting” might look like for your situation. What is God leading you to do?
- This is how community works: we need others, and others need us. Who has God put in your lives to assist you in this crazy season? How is God using you to bless and support them?

**by Kim & Tim Rush**

## Live as God Sees You

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

How does God see you? The answers to that question will vary greatly. Some people will give a Biblical answer based on the Grace we receive. Some will answer from a place of shame and feel God is always ready to point out flaws. Some believe that as long as they are living “right” and following law, then God looks on them with favor. Moreover, there are all kinds of answers in between.

As I continue to work with various people in my coaching, I frequently notice how my clients define themselves according to the results in their lives. They say things like, “I’m not the person *I want to be yet*, but I am working on it.” “I see growth *as I develop into who I want to be.*” “*I haven’t arrived*, but it’s my goal.” What keeps each of these people (and so many more) from living as they desire? The focus is on their results. And, why not? We live in a results-oriented society.

Results are a good indicator of whether or not we are reaching goals for our lives. Setting goals are a good thing as well. Proverbs 19:21 says “Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” It is true that we should always be striving to be the best version of ourselves we can be. To do otherwise would leave us stuck. Our raising from childhood to adulthood points us towards waiting on reality to tell us who we really are. This is so engrained in us that our heart rises and falls with our results. It can become at times very disheartening. Taking this a step further, many times we see our undesirable reality and project this onto God. We feel God sees us based on our results.

Although we want different results in our lives, those results **do not define us**. Furthermore, those results are not how God sees us. So, how does God see me...you...us?

- ***As His creation*** – (Genesis 1:26, 31a) God made us in His image and he said this was “very good.” He never changed His mind on the fact that we are made in His image. This is **CERTAIN!**
- ***As Powerful*** – (Ephesians 3:20) His power is already in us. Go live as God’s **POWERFUL CREATION!**
- ***As Loved*** – (Romans 8:39) His love is always there and available. You, are, **LOVED**
- ***As HE, does not see us as Humankind does*** – No matter how we think we are viewed, God views us from a place of love, grace, mercy, and compassion.

In a sense, at times, we set our results up in the place of God. At times, I think I am hearing God’s voice of disappointment when my results are not acceptable. When we make our results

our definition of who we are **WE WILL NEVER MEASURE UP!** I sincerely want to work every day to be a better version of myself. However, my focus should not be on my results. My focus should always be on how God sees me. When I live as the person that God sees, and believe in His love, then the things that I cannot control will not control my heart and me.

- Find some time this week to reflect on God's truth about you.
- Find a trusted friend or guide to help you touch the truth about who God made you to be.
- Develop the mindset that no matter the results, I am God's Child!

**By Byron Myers**

## The Call to Dwell

*Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. Psalm 91:1*

How many times have you found yourself saying, “If I can just make it through this week, I will be ok,” or “I can’t think that far ahead right now?” These phrases find their way into our daily conversations. Consumed by the daily pressures of life, survival becomes the goal.

Survival is the continued drive to exist in difficult circumstances. We are designed to respond to perceived threats and protect ourselves from impending danger. This instinctual part of us spurs us to push forward in this busy and demanding modern world. We are accustomed to just surviving, which causes us to miss out on rest and peace.

This Spring the world came to an abrupt stop as COVID-19 came on the scene. Immediately my fight instinct went into overdrive. My focus was to find meat, toilet paper, paper towels and any type of sanitizing cleaner I could get my hands on. My sense of security was gone and I knew I had to do whatever I could to make sure my family was prepared for whatever lay ahead.

Survival was the goal in this unprecedented moment in our history. As my days were consumed with survival and preparation, God quietly whispered the word “dwell” to my soul. I remember saying to God, “Dwell, I don’t have time to dwell.” Then the Holy Spirit reminded me of the words found in Psalms 91:1.

As I recalled this verse, I imagined myself walking down a path on a hot summer afternoon. The sky was bright and blue. The path was clear of vegetation and I could feel the heat of the sun radiating on my skin. The heat was becoming uncomfortable. As I continued to walk, trees slowly began to line the perimeter of the pathway. The trees became denser and began to create shade. As the shade overtook the sun, I paused. I breathed in deeply and allowed the shade to shield me and protect me from the heat. I took refuge in the fortress of the trees and found peace and rest in the safety it offered.

God was showing me the promise of dwelling in His shadow. Dwelling can have two different meanings. Dwelling can be to remain for a time or to live as a resident. Immediately I felt like I had been punched in the stomach. I struggle with truly dwelling in the shelter of the almighty. I allow myself to visit this place of rest and security, but I do not dwell as a resident in this space. God began to remind me that I can find peace in the midst of chaos when I dwell in His presence. It does not change the circumstances that surround me, but it allows me to get out of the perpetual cycle of survival, find rest and live in the peace and freedom that only God can provide.

God invites each one of us to experience safety and protection in the shelter of His presence. He creates this safe space for each one of us to pause, breathe and find peace as we abide.

- What keeps you from the peace and freedom God has promised?
- How are you dwelling in this season of life?
- Is God calling you to stop visiting His presence and become a full-time resident?
- What one thing can you change today that will help you step closer to abiding fully in God's shelter?

**by Elizabeth Zimmer**

## What Is God Doing To Your Life Plan!?

*“For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1*

During this pandemic crisis I’ve hit some walls; a season to pluck up, break down, cast away and mourn.

My body disappoints me. It hurts in places that never seemed to exist. Despite occasionally working out, I gain weight, my cholesterol goes up, and my strength lessens. Work has become unprecedentedly challenging even before COVID hit and wasn’t exciting to me as much. I teach high school students, a fun and rewarding population to work with. I know I’m making an important impact in the world, I’m gaining mastery of my craft, and I’m making more money, but after 15 years something is lacking. And perhaps — the hardest of all walls — I’ve experienced deep betrayal in relationships at all levels — micro to macro — in my church, in my small group, in business, at work, my marriage, my family, and even in local and national culture. I even betray myself.

Richard Rohr calls this point in life the Crisis of Limitations. On our spiritual journeys, God offers us critical decision points to reconcile with Him and others. He offers peace, joy, and wisdom. He offers the gift of just being rather than the frustration and stress of striving. Rohr warns that people have to make critical spiritual decisions when they hit certain points in the journey. Upon hitting the Crisis of Limitations (usually at mid-life), a person can fail to see those limitations, continue acquiring and accomplishing, and become a shallow fool.

Up to this stage of life, at least in America, there is a pretty clear plan: graduate high school, graduate college, get a good job, get married, have children, buy a big house, get some nice stuff, set up to work as little as possible while making as much money as possible, take nice vacations, set your kids on the same plan, and set up to work as little as possible in retirement in Florida or Arizona. But if a person recognizes their limitations and wounds, there is still another decision. **He or she can take responsibility, see themselves as sacred teachers, and head on the Path of Wisdom, the path of the Holy Fool.** Or they can choose to blame others for their pain and turn into the Bitter Being.

As I reflect on my current crisis of limitations, I am at a loss. I’m not sure what to do, what to feel, or how to act sometimes. Unfortunately, and fortunately, here may be exactly where God wants us when we hit the crisis of limitations.

I look to my old paths — working out more, trying to make more money, learning more, even serving more at church or just generally getting busier and trying harder at whatever. But my old operating systems, even certain spiritual disciplines don’t work as well. Holding too tightly to my old paths and ideals bring me pain and frustration rather than clarity, joy, and peace. Rohr suggests instead that we begin letting go and embark on the path of wisdom, the path of

a holy fool reconciled to all things, God, and people as Christ was, at peace living in ambivalence and paradox. **There, we accept that we don't have control. We don't really have answers. We live in the mystery and trust God alone.**

Though I don't want to hold on to any single "path" to wisdom, I am finding that family and friendships are truly more important than anything. I'm finding that time in nature and in reflection can help me stay on this spiritual path. And as my friend, Greg Hawkins suggests, just staying open to meeting God and seeing stories in every interaction help me experience the spiritual path. After 11 thorough chapters proving the worthlessness of everything, the writer of Ecclesiastes summarizes the only appropriate response, "*fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind...*"(Ecclesiastes 12:13). So I wait. I stay present. I connect with my people. And believe it or not, God unravels a perfect plan, perfectly, infinitely cooler than any plan I could muster up.

Some questions for you to ponder:

- What season are you in on your spiritual journey?
- How has God unraveled your plans in this season?
- How do you respond to your crisis of limitations? How do you wait patiently, staying open to God?
- How would you redefine victory and success?

**by Marc Mantasoot**



## When the Sponge is Squeezed

*“For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks...The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.”  
Matthew 12:34-35*

I've learned so much through this season of being squeezed, many things I wish I could say I had already nailed down. I'm a woman with strong opinions about much that has been swirling around us. I believed I was someone who enjoyed lively exchange with others to flesh out beliefs, mindsets and biases. However, what I've found during this time has surprised me. As I've felt the pressure of the rapidly (sometimes daily) changing world around me, I've become *less* tolerant of others varying beliefs. Praying the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control over myself doesn't actually work like a magic wand to create these beautiful Christ-like characteristics in me. The opportunity to use these fruits when squeezed by circumstances, "rubbed wrong" by another, pressured on every side...these opportunities are actually when I learn truly what has taken root in my spirit. And right now, I have ample opportunity to see what's *actually* inside.

My grounding factor is found in 2 Chronicles 7:14, *“if my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”* My job is to humble *myself*, pray and fix *my* eyes (mind, heart) on my Savior's face. Ask Him to search me, find any wicked (prideful, arrogant, judgmental) way in me and heal *me*! The job of healing our land is already filled and its *way* above my paygrade. Regrettably, I have allowed social media, the news, and others opinions to sway my peace all too quickly.

I invite you to join me in this prayer: Jesus, during this time of ever-shifting sand beneath my feet, train me to remain planted on the Rock that is You. I'm unsure if there will ever be a world that "feels" normal to me again. But I do know that You *never* change. I pray for your grace to saturate me so much that when I'm squeezed, your fruit pours forth.

- As you've been "squeezed" through this time, what has come out?
- Is there something deep inside of you that God is highlighting though this time?
- In what ways could you pour out His fruit of the Spirit in these challenging times?

**by Joanna Bruni**

## The Power Within

*“You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.” Psalm 18:28*

In 2003, a friend of mine was in New York when the “great Northeast blackout” hit. 50 million people lost power in eight states. My friend and spouse were at the JFK airport when they heard an announcement come over the airport intercom: “Due to the blackout, all flights are canceled. We do not know when you can fly out.” So, they secured reservations for a room at a local hotel.

Life didn’t get better with a hotel room. Like everything else, the hotel was without power. No lights, food or functioning elevators. They trudged up the stairs with their luggage in tow to their dark room on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor. They unpacked their bags by candle light. My friend looked out the window toward another hotel across the street. All of the lights at the other hotel were on. The other hotel had full power. He was upset.

He huffed back down the stairs and ran to the hotel across the street. As he walked in, he could see that the restaurant was open and packed with people. The pool and gym were open, too. Escalators were running. Music was playing. Computers were operating at the front desk. He walked up to the front desk manager and asked: “How is it that you have all the lights, music and everything else on, while I am staying directly across the street and my hotel is powerless?” The manager responded: “Sir, this hotel was built with a gas generator inside of its foundation to ensure we’d always have power. No matter what is going on outside of this building we will always have access to the power that we need to fully function.”

In The Crucible Project, we learn about the things we hide, repress and deny. These are the things that can keep us powerless. During this year of COVID-19 I’ve felt like I’m living in a hotel without lights. There’s nothing. Not even hope. It seems the parts of me that I keep in hiding prefer a life without power. But I prefer to live my life from my power within...like the hotel that my friend saw across the street. No matter what is happening on the outside, the inside of my life — and potentially yours — is built on truth and grace.

Silence and solitude have been a key tool that I’ve used to help me flip that switch. It has taken me a year or so to work up to 20 minutes of silence and solitude, but you can start simple and slow ... try it for about five minutes and then slowly add more time. Here’s how it works for me:

- I seek to spend time alone — and without distractions — in my chair at home. I keep a notepad nearby.
- The first few minutes are getting my heart and mind settled, then releasing those things that I’d prefer to keep in hiding. If something comes up that I can’t shake, I write that thought down on my notepad.

- Next, I image what it is — or who it is — and I put it before me as if it was a painting.
- Then I look at it and offer it to God. I don't try to fix it. I just want my head and heart to see it. This opens me up to hearing from God and getting my power from Him.
- Finally, I ask two questions:
  - First, I ask God how He wants me to be with Him today
  - Then I make a request of how I'd like God to be with me.

In my life, I have found that incorporating this spiritual practice allows me to feel more centered in my power and authenticity. I live with a spirit of hope and expectation knowing that the power is still on, even when everything around me is in darkness or falling apart.

- What is your life built upon when everything around you becomes powerless?
- What are your spiritual “reserves” when everything around you collapses?
- What might you be hiding, repressing or denying that needs to be brought into the light?

**by Phil Jackson**

## Words of Distraction

*“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Ephesians 6:12*

Satan’s greatest attack on humanity began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. With just a few devious words, he placed doubt of God’s love and character in their hearts. That is evil’s goal in the world...doing everything in its power to keep humans from seeing the true glory and character of God, hence disrupting the life-giving relationship that God originally intended for us.

The more I grow to know Christ and the more God accomplishes his good through me, the more I feel evil working harder and harder to shut me down and distract or remove me from God’s presence and his purposes for my life. Evil is so crafty and cunning. One of the ways Satan attacks me most is through the little lies he whispers in my ear or places on my heart. I find myself believing them to be truth and giving them power to shape my reactions and responses. Evil attacks all the time, especially when I’m vulnerable like leading a group or participating in my own growth groups.

It’s oh so subtle too...

“You don’t have what it takes to lead that group?” “Well, that was a stupid thing to say.” So often I hear the harsh whispers, “You are not smart enough, caring enough, deserving enough...You are not enough.”

Enough??? Enough!!!

A wise friend once told that when we agree with these messages...when we play out our lives under their heaviness...when we spiral into despair or anger after hearing them...when we choose a harmful behavior to numb those words and feelings, we are in a sense agreeing with evil. We are giving Satan the power to lead our lives... our thoughts, our hearts, and our actions. When these messages attack our hearts and souls, take a good look at them and ask: Are they from God? Would a good God condemn or shame us or want us stuck in despair, anger, or self-contempt? In these moments, stand up, stand strong, and declare, “Hell no, Satan.” In this war against evil, take a stand with God at your side knowing that He has already won the war.

- Where in your life do you sense evil trying to distract or keep you from God?
- Where do you find yourself agreeing with evil?

- Knowing that God has already been victorious in the fight against evil, how might this impact your attitude and actions?
- What small step can you take to stand up to evil and say “Hell, no!”?

**by Colleen Hewitt**

## The Message of My Feelings

*“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.” Eph. 4:26-67*

In my decade of involvement with The Crucible Project, the single most important gain has been my new awareness of what I am feeling in any given moment. As a result, I feel more alive, more connected to my soul, and more connected to God and others.

Yet something was still missing. Awareness was good — I like being more alert to my fear, sadness, anger and happiness. But when I am afraid and know it, what do I do? When I feel sad, after awareness, is there a next step? When I felt anger, I was learning to own how I contributed to the situation that led me to anger. But is there more to do?

Early in my training as a chaplain, I was introduced to the concept of “feelings as messengers,” originally developed by a chaplain educator named Osofo Kwesi Atta. He suggests that each feeling has a message and a corresponding action. For example:

- The message of sad is “I have experienced a loss” and the action is “establish time and space to grieve and let go.”
- The message of fear is “I am experiencing real or perceived danger” and the next step is “to get support, protection or reassurance.”
- The message of anger is “I have been violated or my desire has been blocked” and the corresponding action might be “set a boundary, right a wrong or make a request.”

Though God gives us the ability to feel a whole range of emotions, God’s desire, I think, is for us to move through sad, angry, scared and get back to joy, happiness and tenderness. Osofo’s concept of feelings as messengers has given me a way to move through my more troubling feelings and return to joy more quickly.

It’s especially important during these trying times of COVID-19 to acknowledge our strong emotions and find the appropriate action to move through them. Recently, when I ended up staying two hours beyond the end of my shift at the hospital, I felt angry — at myself. The message was that the boundary of my quitting time was being violated and the appropriate action was resetting a limit. The next day I used my angry energy to have a conversation with my manager to discuss the parameters around calling in the night chaplain to relieve me.

Osofo’s concept has given me direction. Now I go from awareness of what I am feeling, to asking the message of my feeling and pondering the appropriate action. The result is that I move more easily back to a place of joy and peace.

- How do you move through sadness, fear and anger and get back to joy?
- Experiment this week—notice what you are feeling, articulate the message of your feeling, determine the appropriate action, and act.

– **By John Casey**

## God is Unchanging

*“For God has said, ‘I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.’ So we can say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people [or a virus] do to me? ... Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Hebrews 13:4b-6, 8 (NLT)*

During the early weeks of the pandemic, I had overwhelming feelings of sadness, fear and helplessness. I let anxious thoughts rule – how am I going to keep my family safe? How will I keep everyone busy? How do I keep my kids on track with their development socially, emotionally, physically, mentally? How do I keep MYSELF moving in a positive direction and not give in to atrophy? These thoughts and many others cycled through my head as if they were constantly driving around an internal racetrack. I’d give each a moment of my attention, but not enough time to make any positive steps toward dealing with them. By April, I was exhausted from managing my own inner world and the outer world of my husband, our four young kids, jobs, church, and the many other wonderful people and projects I give my time to. I was trying to maintain all of the same things I were before the pandemic, only from home without offices, childcare, or guidebooks. Needless to say, that didn’t work for long, and I pretty quickly surrendered to the fact that I would need to make some changes.

I wish I could say that those changes were the answer and that I have been the model of health ever since! I wish I was here to say that I took the test, aced it, and I’m here to share with you all the secrets about how to care for your mental, emotional, physical and spiritual self and *thrive* even during unfathomable hardship.

But that’s not what happened. Instead, when I was faced with a global pandemic and consequently, the complete disruption of my entire life, my system said “Ohhhh, this is familiar! Remember that other time your life fell apart when you were a kid? This smells a bit like that. Let’s do what we did THEN! Commence child-like coping strategies.” I sought safety and control in tracking COVID19 case counts, percentages, and reading the news. I allowed myself to shut down my normal desire for connection and friendship and instead took the familiar “freeze, hunker down and wait it out” method that worked really well when I was kid.

I could feel myself losing ground and knew it was going to be a hard road to reclaim the parts of myself I’ve spent so much time and energy cultivating as an adult. Yet during the dark days as a child and during this pandemic as an adult I clung to the truth in Hebrews 13. This reminder of the unchanging nature of Jesus, God, and His gospel are what sustain me when I’m constantly aware of just how uncertain and shifting the world is. When all else seems complicated, these words are simple and solid ground.

As the pandemic has stretched on, I’ve regained my footing and have shifted to coping methods that are more productive – I’ve built in routines of connection with friends, plenty of play and rest with my husband and kids, counseling, and I am prepared to give myself compassion and care when anxious thoughts begin to race.



- When you are faced with anxiety and uncertainty, what do you do?
- What coping strategies did you rely on when you were young and in stress?
- How did those strategies help you? How are they still working for you?
- In what ways do they no longer work? What's the cost to doing life this way as an adult?
- What kind of person do you want to be when under stress?
- What's one step you can take toward that direction?

**by Lisa Modrzejewski**

## Loosening the Wrench of Sadness and Anger

*“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.” Ephesians 4:26*

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

For a time, I believed it was easier to pretend that I was always happy and excited. After all, it made me more likeable and acceptable to others. If ever I thought anger was not an issue in my life, my work in The Crucible Project has spoken volumes that both anger and sadness are online in my life.

I don't pretend.

What I have learned is that whether you experience anger or sadness, there is a path forward. However, both emotions lend themselves to a slightly different path forward. Michael Schreiner's says, “where anger is active, sadness is passive. Anger gets you fired up, ready to defend yourself or go on the attack. Sadness leaves you exposed, feeling the full pain of the hurt you have endured. Sadness leaves you feeling vulnerable, where when you are angry you feel invincible, donning your armor, shield, and sword to go do battle. Sadness accepts the situation for what it is, while anger rallies you to do something to change it.”

As COVID-19 wanes on, I continue to experience both sadness and anger, and feeling sad and angry could make me feel alone. It doesn't though, because I have tools to work through these emotions.

### **So, if sadness is the presenting emotion for you, what might you do?**

- Survey the sadness and give your sadness context
- Consider what the sadness reminds you of
- Wonder aloud if there are other decisions you could have made that would have resulted in you not feeling so sad
- Consider setting a timer for you to throw yourself a pity party, but when the timer goes off, resolve to leave your pity party
- Share your sorrow with a trusting friend

### **And if the presenting emotion is anger, what might you do?**

- Be open to the power of your anger and attentive to what this energy is suggesting you do

- Reflect on the possible positive and negative outcomes of doing that action
- Share your anger and its context with a trusted friend
- Act in such a way that your anger is constructive, not destructive

There are always healthy paths forward. Both emotions suggest different paths forward, but God, in all his power, is *with* you, *for* you, and *in* you. By using these tools, you, too, will embark on a healthy path, finding your way out of these emotions and towards a more brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous you.

**By Tony Bradburn**

## Resources To Continue Your Journey

Coaching

Groups

Workshops

Mens and Womens Weekends

Two Year Transformational Program



[TheCrucibleProject.org](http://TheCrucibleProject.org)

The Crucible Project is a 501c3 nonprofit ministry igniting Christ-like change through experiences of radical honesty and grace.

Online Resources (coming in 2021)



[MyJourneyTo.org](http://MyJourneyTo.org)

