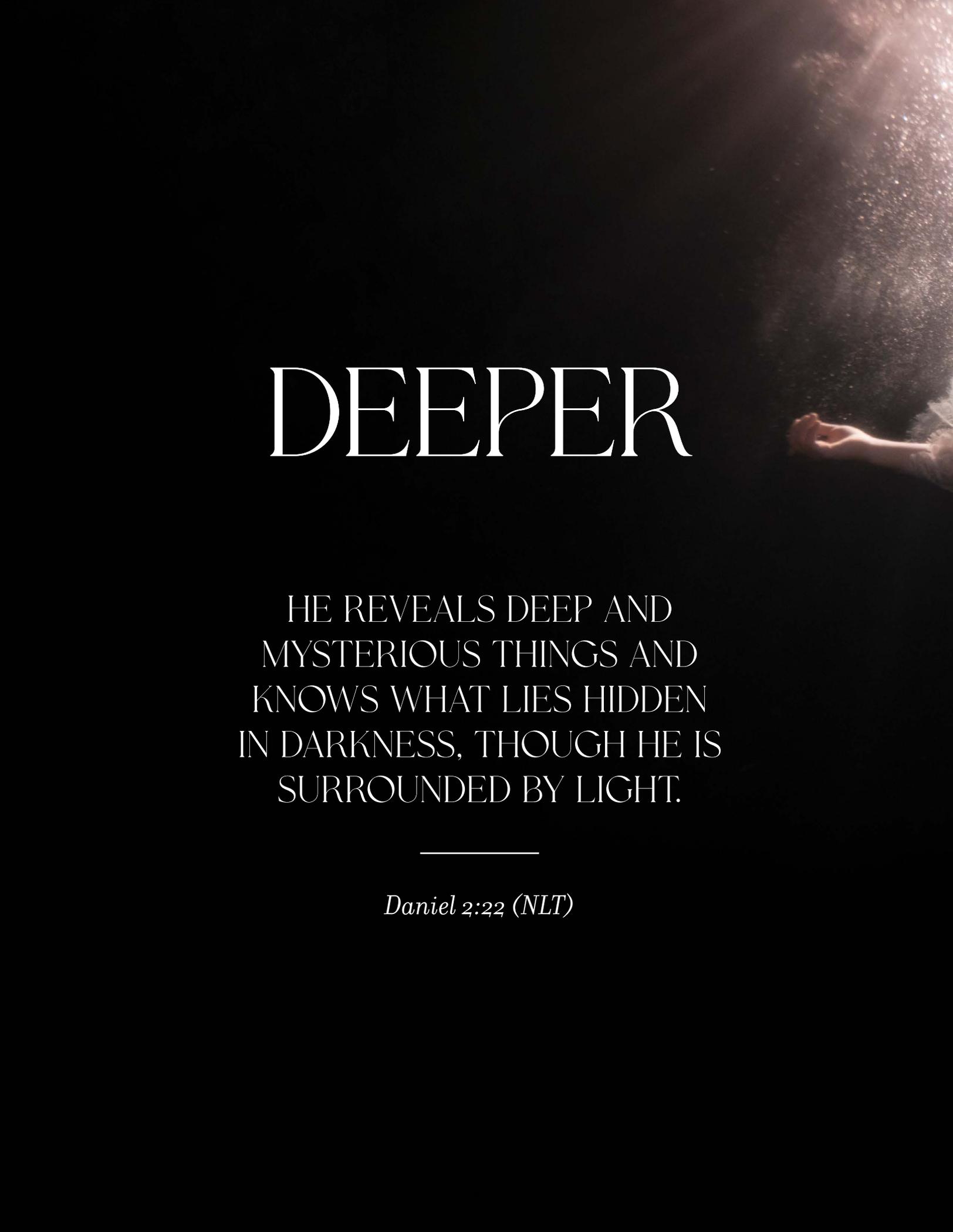


SISTERHOOD

2022





DEEPER

HE REVEALS DEEP AND
MYSTERIOUS THINGS AND
KNOWS WHAT LIES HIDDEN
IN DARKNESS, THOUGH HE IS
SURROUNDED BY LIGHT.

Daniel 2:22 (NLT)





Finally. Chosen is here. Even better, you're here. Now let's spend some quality time together!

We know that many of you came in carrying burdens. But it's time to set them down and give a collective sigh. It's time to raise your hands, feel the music deep in your chest, and sing your heart out in praise of an incredible God.

All around you are women from different places and different backgrounds, local and several states away, young, as well as those with lots of life experience. Are they smiling? Talking excitedly with friends? We hope so. But if they're looking a little uncertain or seem to be alone, maybe it's the perfect time to greet them and offer the first threads of a friendship.

No matter where you're from, it probably took a lot of effort to get here. We are so excited you carved out this chance to go deeper in your relationship with God, to worship and sing, but also to maybe find a quiet table or comfy couch to enjoy coffee with friends or walk outside for a little bit of a breeze and sunshine. We love to see you leaning in together, praying and listening to one another, and throwing your heads back with laughter. Sharing these moments is what Chosen is all about.

We know that going deeper with God and in your relationships can be intimidating, that shining light in some places of our lives can be really scary—especially if you have tried in the past to go there alone. But you're not alone. You've got all of us!

As life has ramped up again, we found ourselves getting pulled into whirlwinds of busyness that can keep us from going deeper into what matters most. But we've learned some things over the past few seasons—how to slow down, to breathe, to spend more time in prayer, and really, just to pay attention. Deeper doesn't just mean plumbing the depths to see what comes up, deeper also means richer—a life that can be richer in color, in understanding, in meaning. For us to get there though, we've had to slow down and look around, to practice being present.

So right now, let's not put expectations on ourselves. Let's give God room to reveal his presence and lead us where we need to go.

...THESE THINGS GOD HAS
REVEALED TO US THROUGH
THE SPIRIT. FOR THE SPIRIT
SEARCHES EVERYTHING,
EVEN THE DEPTHS OF GOD.
1 Corinthians 2:10 (ESV)

We're so happy you're here.

Josh and Lisa Surratt
Lead Pastor and Director of Seacoast Culture

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SPEAKERS



DONNA PISANI *Author, Pastor*

Donna, the author of *The Power of Not Yet – Living a Life of Endless Possibilities*, and her husband, Dennis were the founding pastors of Capital City Church in the D.C. metro area. They recently transitioned to a new role using their 40 years of ministry and experience to coach and encourage pastors and leaders. Donna's greatest passion is to see people empowered to live a life of endless possibilities, connect with their unique, God-given purpose, and live fully in their leadership gifts.



DR. ANITA PHILLIPS

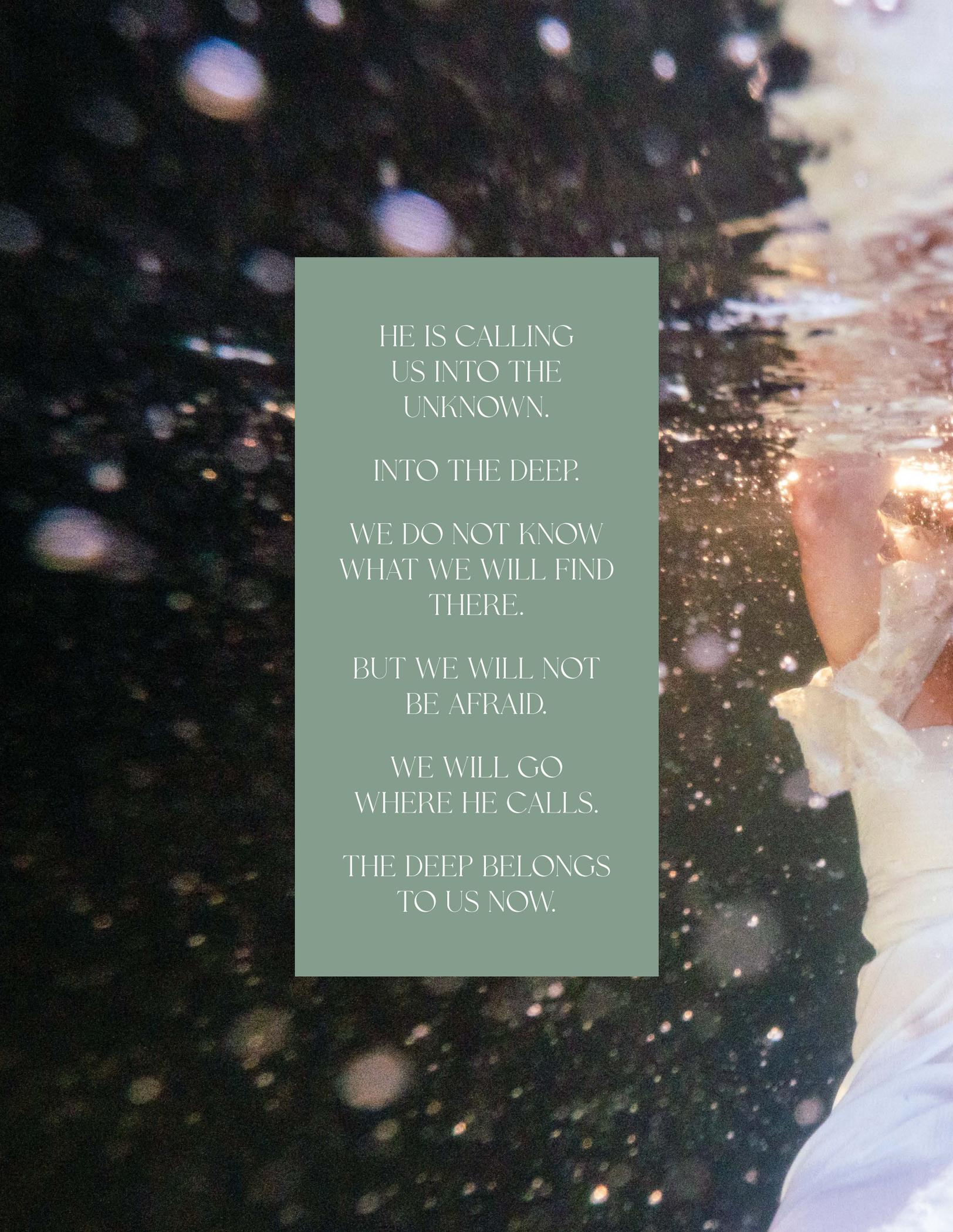
Therapist, Speaker

Nationally acclaimed trauma therapist, and *In The Light* podcast host, Dr. Anita Phillips is recognized for her groundbreaking work at the intersection of mental health, faith, and culture. This versatile and dynamic speaker is bringing mental health and illness to the forefront in communities of faith and strengthening racial unity in the body of Christ. Dr. Anita holds degrees from the University of Maryland, Regent University, and Johns Hopkins University. At home in Dallas, she enjoys the empty-nest life with her husband, Michael.



JEN WILKIN *Author, Bible Teacher*

Jen Wilkin is an author and Bible teacher from Dallas, Texas. She has organized and led studies for women in home, church, and parachurch contexts. An advocate for Bible literacy, her passion is to see others become articulate and committed followers of Christ, with a clear understanding of why they believe what they believe, grounded in the Word of God.



HE IS CALLING
US INTO THE
UNKNOWN.

INTO THE DEEP.

WE DO NOT KNOW
WHAT WE WILL FIND
THERE.

BUT WE WILL NOT
BE AFRAID.

WE WILL GO
WHERE HE CALLS.

THE DEEP BELONGS
TO US NOW.





NOT WITHOUT ITS DANGERS

By ANNE CAMP



LONG-TIME SCUBA DIVER, ANNE CAMP, REVEALS WHERE THE REAL DANGERS LURK.

In scuba diving, the most important rule is to never hold your breath. Even with the disorienting bubbles all around and every breath sounding like Darth Vader, you must stay calm and breathe deep. For some people, a sense of isolation and claustrophobia sends them rushing with anxiety to the surface. But from my first dive at age 16, I absolutely loved being able to breathe underwater. It became a way for me to see beyond my diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes at an early age. For a long time, I had struggled, wondering, “Why did God give this to me?” Diving opened a whole new world.

I started to see how good and bad, light and dark lived side by side. Like when diving on a reef wall, to my left I might see the shallows brimming with beautiful stag corals, brain corals, sea anemones, and sea fans that offered protection to baby fish. The water shimmers with schools of yellow and black porkfish, silvery barracudas, and zebra-like spadefish. Yet on the other side of the reef is an eerie sheer, deep blue drop-off to thousands of feet below.

Diving into the unknown is not without its dangers. People often think immediately of sharks. But most sharks ignore and avoid divers. During an open-water dive, I spotted a great hammerhead swimming over me. He wasn’t as enthralled as I was with him and swam off. Instead, what I found was that sometimes the greatest danger comes in forms you don’t expect.

Over the course of my first summer diving, I was sexually abused by my 38-year-old scuba instructor, who was a mentor to me. When I finally told my parents, they confronted him, but he denied everything. Over the next few years, I tried to continue diving, but traumatic memories, dreams, and flashbacks turned my shame into a crippling depression. Even the smell of scuba gear made me feel panicked. I attempted suicide more than once. Before the abuse, I had wanted to be a marine biologist, but I gave up those career aspirations partly because I kept reliving the abuse. I stopped diving, finished school, and went on to become a neonatal intensive care nurse.

In 2008, still feeling broken well into my thirties, I went to Seacoast Church for the first time and felt welcomed and accepted. I joined a small group, got involved in missions, and became a long-term volunteer RN at the North Charleston Dream Center. But to really move forward, I knew I had to “dive” into a dark and murky place to learn to forgive the man who had abused me—to let go of the anger, shame, and guilt, after years of blaming myself. I had to come up for air many times and remove all the “cloudiness” from my mask... the sin, the bitterness, the victim mentality, so I could see the truth—how God saw me. Once I did this, the ocean called me back.

Diving became a haven for me again, giving me time away from humanity to explore life with a new sense of freedom. Even when waves were rolling on the surface, or it was pouring rain, it remained peaceful underwater. And the deeper I went, the more peaceful it got. I would let the air out of my buoyancy jacket and sink into the depths, into a different kind of quiet: listening to the faint sounds of parrotfish munching on coral with their beaks, the crackling of snapping shrimp, and simply the movement of the water. I found myself often praying and thanking God for all the calmness and beauty and thinking of Psalm 46:10. “Be still and know that I am God.”

Sometimes in reaching the ocean floor, all I saw was white sand. But if I really looked hard, I could find stingrays, flounder, and maybe even an octopus camouflaged in the sand. I realized that just because I couldn't see God working in my life, didn't mean he wasn't.

Still, diving into deep waters can be scary. We don't know what we'll find. I've dived over shipwrecks like the British cargo ship, *Thistlegorm*, in the Red Sea, sunk in 1941 by German bombers. I've seen boots, jeeps, and other debris on the sea floor, and it was haunting. Swimming through the rooms of the shipwreck, I wondered: Who was on this ship? Were they scared? Were they praying? Were they right with God? It was the same sea, surrounded by red cliffs on both sides, that Moses parted in faith, believing that once he and the Israelites took those first steps into the water, they would cross unharmed. I wanted that kind of faith to step into the unknown.

I've found night dives to be a sort of physical way to stretch my faith. Although sometimes creepy, they are some of the most amazing ones I've done. When I turn off my flashlight, willing to face the darkness, suddenly I see thousands of tiny bioluminescent plankton sparkle and flash around me. God has placed beauty here that you can find nowhere else. But you can only see it if you're willing to go into the dark.

Scuba diving has helped me find ways to forgive and find beauty in this life, in my family, and in my faith. In Key Largo, Florida, there is a 9-foot tall, underwater statue called, *The Christ of the Abyss* that stands in crystal blue water. Placed there in 1965, it shows Christ with his hands raised high. It reminds me that Christ is present everywhere, even in the deepest depths. No matter where I go, he is with me.

chosen





BE STILL
AND KNOW
THAT I AM
GOD.

Psalm 46:10
(NIV)

UNPLANNED





MOTHER AND
DAUGHTER,
YAJAIRA GAINES
AND DESTINY
BARBER, REFLECT
ON THE CHOICES
AND CHALLENGES
THEY FACED
IN UNPLANNED
MOTHERHOOD.

By SARAH WOLF

At age 18, Yajaira packed her belongings for college and left the Bronx behind, excited to experience the freedom of life on her own in upstate New York. A good student, she'd earned a full scholarship.

Her mother, Hilda, had instilled in her that education was crucial. The only one of her 12 siblings to attend college, she'd become a professor in the Dominican Republic before moving to the States. When Yajaira left for school, she had the gift of her mother's savings with her.

But Yajaira took full advantage of college life with her new friends, and without telling her parents, made trips back to the Bronx to visit her

boyfriend, and vice versa. "I got to college and went a little crazy," Yajaira said.

When a friend became at risk for a sexually transmitted disease, Yajaira and three other girls offered moral support and got tested, too. Yajaira was the only one who got a call back from the medical clinic—she was pregnant.

"It was scary," Yajaira said. "I remember feeling darkness, and alone. I was completely hopeless, it was awful." She had just arrived at college, and already she was going to disappoint her parents. Ashamed, she told neither the school nor her parents. So, her brother stepped in as the messenger. As Yajaira feared, she and her mother stopped

speaking to each other. “She wanted an apology, and a plan with the dad’s family,’ Yajaira said. “Now, I can comprehend, maybe she felt like I didn’t see her sacrifice.”

Unsure what to do, Yajaira left school and moved back to the Bronx to live with her boyfriend and his parents. With her Dominican family always so tightly knit, she felt the emotional toll of her severed relationship with her mother, especially when her parents moved to Florida, the shame unbearable to them.

After no word from her mother during her pregnancy, Yajaira didn’t bother letting Hilda know the morning she went into labor. But news of the baby’s impending arrival traveled quickly among family. That afternoon, Hilda arrived in New York and was by Yajaira’s side for the birth of her granddaughter, Destiny.

“We never did talk about what happened. I just knew, after having a child, that you’ll cross the ocean to be there,” Yajaira said.

While her relationship with her mother improved, Yajaira’s relationship with her baby’s father deteriorated. “My parents knew I was miserable in the Bronx with my boyfriend going to the clubs and drinking several days a week, so they let him come

stay with them in Florida to find a job and get an apartment. To start fresh.”

When Yajaira was finally able to join him in Florida with Destiny, she wanted to get a job, too, contribute financially, but he was resistant. He wanted her to stay home. Soon, emotional abuse crept into their relationship. Yajaira knew she couldn’t raise her baby in that environment. “It was so toxic. I couldn’t do it.”

Getting a job at a hotel, Yajaira snuck out to work, while her aunt, who lived nearby, cared for Destiny. “I wanted better for my daughter, so I pushed past the fear of getting caught.” She made sure to return home while he was still at work to avoid any arguments.

Although she did manage to hide her job, the emotional abuse became unbearable. One morning, around 1:00 a.m., Yajaira tried to make an escape with Destiny. “I called family to come get us. But even though we weren’t legally married, some family members thought I owed him respect as the father of my child and told me to stay. But I had to get out of the fear, and all the things I was under.” Eventually, she found family who empowered her, and she was able to escape the abusive situation. “I knew it was going to take will on my end, and other people to come around to support me.”



One of Yajaira's biggest supporters was her mom. Hilda eagerly offered to help care for Destiny while Yajaira worked 12–14-hour days at the hotel.

Working at the hotel, Yajaira grew professionally and personally, and it was there, she met Keith. Over time, they began dating. But as a single mom coming out of a toxic relationship, she clung to her independent spirit “On dates, when he would reach to open my car door, I’d open it before he could touch it.”

But Keith was different. “He was a gentleman, and he was very intentional, always.”

Keith’s intentionality led her to church, where he introduced Yajaira to the idea of a relationship with Christ. “The pastor began talking about faith and love, and it was different than my religious upbringing,” Yajaira said. “Not being married, we were still accepted and loved, and what was being spoken from the pulpit matched the action.”

That acceptance made Yajaira want to know more about God. Eventually she was baptized, and after years of carrying shame and unforgiveness from her past, she realized, “I’m already worthy and loved, because he created me, and there is nothing he would not do for me. I didn’t have to earn it. I could stop proving myself and just be.”

Starting over with this new sense of freedom, Yajaira and Keith began a family together, adding a sister for Destiny. They married in 2009, with eight-year-old Destiny smiling brightly during the wedding—a smile that meant so much to Yajaira because it was a welcome

sign that Destiny had finally accepted Keith into their lives, so long being protective of her mom, and the life just the two of them had together.

“I don’t have any memories of Keith not being my dad,” Destiny said. And Keith took leading their family spiritually very seriously. “We served all the time,” Destiny said. “They just instilled it in me, and we were always around people who love God.”

Until middle school, Destiny lived under her parent’s faith, but she wanted to learn more about what it meant for her own life. After the family moved to Charleston, she attended Seacoast Church’s Summer Camp for students. When the speaker talked about anger toward his dad, Destiny realized she too, had been angry with her biological father. As the speaker prayed over the students sharing that pain, Destiny began to release her anger toward her absent father.

In the past, Yajaira had tried to help Destiny cope with seeing her friends showered with gifts from their dads by signing his name on cards to her. “I didn’t want to taint any perspective she had of him,” Yajaira said. But after years of sporadic communication, and little trying on her father’s part, Destiny made the decision to cut

ties with him, knowing it wasn’t healthy to continue trying to have a relationship.

Instead, Destiny began to rely on God, who would never let her down. Singing became her way of expressing her faith. One day at church, when she was 14, Destiny heard her name called. Wide-eyed,

“I LIVED
THROUGH WHAT
THE ENEMY
WANTED, BUT
I’M ALSO LIVING
FOR WHAT GOD
HAD FOR US. IT’S
A CONSTANT
REMINDER OF
HIS PROVISION.
HAD WE NOT
HELD ON TO
GOD, OUR STORY
WOULD BE A
VERY DIFFERENT
STORY.”

she realized her mother had signed her up for an audition without telling her, knowing how uncomfortable she was with attention. Destiny sang “Someone Like You,” by Adele and earned a spot on the Seacoast worship team.

By 11th grade, Destiny made the decision to fully pursue her love of music, rather than volleyball, a sport she excelled in and was on track to play in college. “I really prayed about this,” she told her parents, “I really feel like this will follow the Lord.” In 2020, Destiny released her own worship singles, “Start With Me,” and “Suddenly.”

In 2021, Destiny married Jay. Four months later into their marriage, she became pregnant. It wasn’t in their plans so soon. Shocked, and scared—much like her own mother—she felt uncomfortable telling her parents. “I’m only 20 and we were only four months into marriage. I’m a planner, so I was freaking out.”

When Destiny was too nauseous to sing at church one Sunday morning, she knew she wouldn’t be able to hide her pregnancy much longer. Making an excuse, Destiny planned to meet her parents at their house to share the news.

As they sat around the table, Destiny, with nervous laughter, showed them the ultrasound photos, while Jay did the talking. Tears of joy filled Yajaira’s eyes, and Keith said everything was going to be okay.

Despite the unplanned circumstances, Destiny saw the goodness in all of it. She has learned so much from her mother. “It benefits me knowing the hard things she had to go through, because I know I can do it. I know it [motherhood] will come with challenges, but I know I have the best person to talk to. I know how to love my child because of how she loved me.”

Now, Yajaira watches her daughter sing on stage with such confidence and in complete devotion to the God who got her to this place. “Seeing her now is such a testament to God’s faithfulness,” Yajaira said. “I lived through what the enemy wanted, but I’m also living for what God had for us. It’s a constant reminder of his provision. Had we not held on to God, our story would be a very different story.”

chosen



THEY SAW THE
WORKS OF
THE LORD, HIS
WONDERFUL
DEEDS IN THE
DEEP.

Psalm 107:24
(NIV)





CHOOSING TO HEAL

By MARNEY MCNALL

AFTER TRAGIC LOSS, ERICA CARLTON
FINDS A PATH TO HEALING DEEP GRIEF
BY HELPING OTHERS.

Erica followed the ambulance to the hospital early one February morning, her eyes focused on the vehicle's flashing lights and closed back. She imagined the paramedics inside, working on her husband. Cody had passed out, his skin cold. The doctors hadn't been able to get his pain under control after his surgery nearly a week ago. Everything was very wrong.

Erica had a bad feeling about this surgery from the beginning. Even the night before he'd gone in, she'd said, "I don't want you to do it. You could get an infection and die." But he'd tried all the alternatives and they hadn't worked.

The ambulance was shipped into a parking spot near the emergency room. Cody had gotten an infection after surgery and been in the hospital for several days with pneumonia. But with the pandemic ignoring

people's hopes for a better year and marching straight into 2021, the hospital had switched Cody to oral antibiotics and sent him home the previous evening.

By the time Erica entered the hospital, the doctors were running tests on Cody. It wasn't long before she received a strange call saying, "The doctor's ready for you."

A nurse led Erica to a small room where a doctor waited. Were they going to tell her Cody had been put on a ventilator or something? The doctor's expression was somber. "There's no easy way to say it. Mr. Carlton has died."

Erica stood unmoving. It wasn't possible. EMS had arrived with Cody at 8:45 a.m. It was only a little after 9:00. She began to shake, her body accepting the truth while her mind kept echoing the doctor's words.

Why didn't I go in and pray for him when I could've?

“What happened?” she asked, as if understanding the answer could somehow help it to not be true.

Cody had died from an abdominal cavity infection, peritonitis. He was 50 years old. When his heart stopped, Erica felt in many ways, like hers did, too. For the first few weeks after losing him, she moved through the house still in shock, noting the presence of friends and family, but not remembering much about the funeral or what people said to her. The days blurred together.

As February turned into March, and March into April, the house emptied, except for her son, Andrew. She knew it worried him to so often return from work to find her still on the couch. But nothing about life was the same.

The house was too quiet.

Cooking for one seemed a waste. She wasn't hungry anyway.

When she got out of bed, she tried not to look at the other side, the sheets smooth and untouched.

At the grocery store, she had to stop herself from reaching for Cody's favorite foods.

For months, she couldn't stand to work in the home office they'd shared upstairs.

She had to mark their 18th wedding anniversary without him, and celebrate the birthdays of their 5 children, blended into one family.

She learned to accept the help of friends and family, and that the hands fixing things around the house were no longer Cody's.

She went out at odd times to avoid running into people she knew. She couldn't take their sad eyes.

But still, there were strands of hope woven in.

The morning after Cody died, Erica was desperate to feel his presence. She went to Cody's "prayer closet." Between the walls lined with their clothes, Cody had jammed a small desk. On it was a lamp, books, and a corkboard tacked with photos and prayers on Post-it notes. Leafing through his prayer journal, she paused, seeing he'd written out Isaiah 41:10.

So do not fear, for I am with you;

do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you;

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

The verse nearly doubled her over even as it brought so much comfort that she wrote it on her own prayer board that hung outside their bedroom. Spotting the study book Cody had been doing with his small group, she decided to read the book of Hebrews, too.

She wasn't looking for answers, but asking for peace—for God to take away her fear for the future. She was scared, and yet she wasn't. One of the worst things had already happened. All she could do was turn to God. There was no managing on her own.

Reading the Bible for hours a day, Erica gained a whole new understanding. Never had she felt so close to God. "It softened the grief," she said. "I chose to be grateful and focus on the gloriousness of heaven. Cody's better off than I am, in heaven! That outweighs my sorrow here."

Erica also chose not to isolate. She found reasons to get out of her pajamas, to walk the dog, get back into her job in software sales, serve at church, and accept friends' invitations. "It made such a difference that people would just reach out. Nothing fancy. Just 'I'm thinking of you today. You're on my mind.' The key for me was knowing I wasn't alone."

Her first Sunday back at Seacoast Church, she sat where she and Cody always did. When the worship music started and she felt him beside her, she let the tears come, knowing she was in a safe place.

"I made a conscious choice to try to heal, to find the good," she said. "I asked God to use me, and show me some small bit of joy every day to help me make it through." She welcomed the stories people told her about how Cody had impacted their lives, stories from guys who'd gone on the men's hike and to movie nights, stories from his small groups, the trolley team, and from all the other places Cody had served at Seacoast.

“Anyone who knew Cody,” Erica said, “probably knows how much the hike meant to him. To honor him, I now go to see the men off to the hike, wearing one of Cody’s hike shirts and his hat. I just walk around, praying for them all.” When the West Ashley Campus hike team asked her to speak at an event, it was outside of her comfort zone, but God gave her the words. “I know,” she said, “Cody’s proud of me for it.”

In the fall of 2021, Erica did her first Sisterhood hike. “I left a lot of my grief on that mountain. I told God I couldn’t carry it anymore.” For a time, she’d hardly been able to see anything but the pain, but she was noticing again, the hurting of others. A friend whose husband was dying was shocked when Erica reached out, knowing the pain had to still be so fresh. But their growing friendship became a source of strength for Erica.

They both understood what it was like to be okay one day, and not the next. They understood the guilt that came with having an okay day—as if it meant you were forgetting the person you had lost. “But I knew,” Erica said, “Cody would not want me to feel guilty. He would want me to live. You wonder if what you’re feeling is normal. Hearing someone else going through the same thing validates those feelings. My friend and I had each other, but we found that resources for widows were missing. The loss of a spouse affects everything.”

Erica joined Warrior Widows Life, a private Facebook group to find resources, widow meet-ups, and to share thoughts and experiences. She attended a conference for widows and realized she needed more of this community.

“I’ve been praying about doing a widows ministry locally,” Erica said. “I still have grief of my own, but it’s cathartic to help others, to be with people who understand. I’m happy to talk to anyone going through this, and to let them know that eventually the waves just crash a little less. Cody always said I was strong. I never felt strong. But now I do.”

Erica now leads a local chapter of Never Alone Widows. For more information, visit seacoast.org/sisterhood.

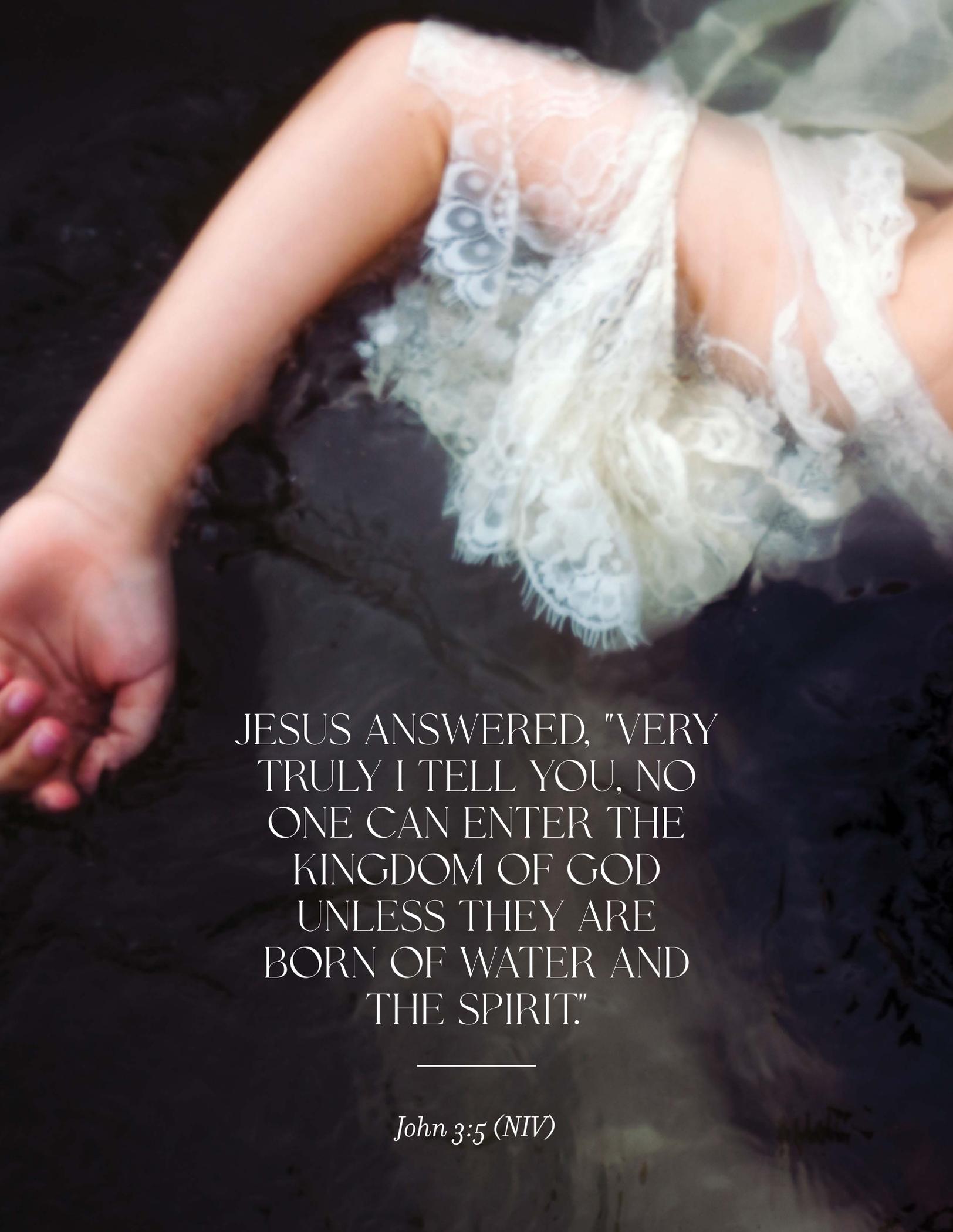


Chosen

SO DO NOT FEAR,
FOR I AM WITH
YOU; DO NOT BE
DISMAYED, FOR I AM
YOUR GOD. I WILL
STRENGTHEN YOU
AND HELP YOU; I
WILL UPHOLD YOU
WITH MY RIGHTEOUS
RIGHT HAND.

Isaiah 41:10
(NIV)





JESUS ANSWERED, "VERY
TRULY I TELL YOU, NO
ONE CAN ENTER THE
KINGDOM OF GOD
UNLESS THEY ARE
BORN OF WATER AND
THE SPIRIT."

John 3:5 (NIV)



THE TENSION BETWEEN

COUNSELOR, ABBI RUSSO,
SHARES HOW ANXIETY
CAN STEM FROM THE
TENSION BETWEEN
LOGIC AND
EMOTION.

By ABBI RUSSO, M.A., LPC-A

“I know the truth, that God is faithful. I know I shouldn’t worry about these things, but it’s still with me all the time. I’m so frustrated with myself, but I can’t seem to stop feeling this way.”

As a counselor, I hear this a lot from new clients. They feel a discrepancy between their logical mind (the part that says “I know what I believe and what I want to do”) and their unyielding emotions (the part that feels a certain way, regardless of how confident the logical mind is). That pull between these two uncooperative parts creates a kind of internal tension.

It reminds me of Romans 7:15 (NIV) that says, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” It’s like a rubber band pulling tighter and tighter, potentially moving a person from an uncomfortable level of stress to agonizing distress. People often feel completely stuck, and this tension can come out in the form of anxiety.



MASQUERADE

By JACQUAYLE DAILEY

MODERN-AGE FRIENDSHIP AND HOW
WE OFTEN SETTLE FOR FABRICATED
AUTHENTICITY.



At a masquerade ball, your mask is the most important piece—and the more elaborate the better. Maybe you decorate it with velvet, gold trim, or even bright-colored feathers. You make it stand out, while at the same time, you hide behind it. Masquerades may seem like a thing of the past, but the truth is, many of us are walking through life, hiding our faces, so that the world never discovers who we really are. We just do it in a different way now.

Modern-age friendship looks like you holding a lighted screen. You click "accept" for a friend request and think you're now a part of someone's life. You know them by where they have traveled, the friends you have in common, or maybe what they do for a living. But do we really know them? Do they really know us? We filter our own photos to make ourselves look better and try to fabricate authenticity.

In my past, my friendships looked like that. In college, my friendships were more like, "let's go to dinner" or "let's go out." I kept it surface level, always happy and smiling, never really opening up because I didn't want to let anyone see the "messy stuff." But then I met Dollie.

Dollie and I worked together at the University of Alabama's Aquatics Center. I was a front desk attendant and she was a graduate assistant, and my boss. We both worked long hours to pay those college tuition bills, but Dollie's main focus was on managing the pool lifeguards, so we didn't spend much time together.

Then Dollie invited me to a dinner party at her apartment. That evening, her effortless hospitality made me feel so comfortable. When we gathered around the table to eat, she prayed over the food and for everyone there. It was the first time I had experienced a heartfelt prayer like that. Dollie's relationship with God showed in her everyday life. I had grown up in church, but didn't really see people living out their faith. But Dollie did, even as a young college student.

After dinner that evening and once the others left, Dollie opened up to me about a relationship she was in and invited me to talk about my own. She asked what I wanted to do with my career and seemed genuinely curious about my dreams. She was a good listener and had an incredible ability to make me feel special and known.

We did something that was completely countercultural: she took off her mask and that helped me take off mine. Because of that, we've been best friends for nine years now.



Taking off your mask and being vulnerable is hard, but a true friend can help you through dark times. At that point in my life, I was dealing with multiple rejections from men, financial strain, and deep family wounds that kept resurfacing. I was just starting to heal from a past relationship and stepping away from a friend group that I didn't need to be in. I was also on the verge of failing out of school and wanted to change my major. To stay in and get the degree I wanted, I practically needed to redo my sophomore year and take fast-paced courses all summer.

Considering that my college advisor had no faith that I could get it done, I felt very discouraged. But when I told Dollie, she looked at me and said, "You are more than capable of getting the work done and turning this around. You need to work hard and when there is time to play, you can do that, but get the work done first." She pulled me out of the pit of self-doubt and was able to spur me on to finish. Later, I graduated with a degree in marketing, just as I wanted.

Dollie and I are unlikely friends because of our backgrounds, but our different perspectives have helped us learn from each other. At the same time we're growing closer together, I feel like we're continuing to grow as individuals. It's a blessing when a friendship builds you up to become more, not less, of yourself.

The most important thing any friend could do, Dollie did for me. She taught me the only solution to my problems was Jesus. She showed me what it meant to walk with him in faith. If it wasn't for her bringing me to a life-giving church and prompting me through the Spirit to join a small group, I doubt I would have grown deeper in the most essential relationship I will ever have: my relationship with Jesus.

In Hebrews 10:24-25, we're encouraged to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds and to not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another."

Even back in biblical times, it seems there were people like you and me who were in the habit of isolating themselves. But Jesus knew how important deep, authentic relationships would be for us. They can change your life. Just like they have done for me.

No more masquerading. No more hiding.

chosen







ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER

By MARNEY MCNALL

AFTER A TERRIBLE MISTAKE, BROOKE SMITH FINDS
FREEDOM THAT ONLY GOD COULD MAKE POSSIBLE.



Social gatherings made Brooke nervous. She disliked small talk and worried she'd say the wrong things. But there was no skipping her work Christmas party that afternoon. The company was celebrating virtually, like most everyone in December 2020, which made it worse. People staring at each other on their computer screens added a whole new level of awkwardness.

Brooke poured herself a drink, hoping it would relax her before she had to sign on to the party. Why couldn't she be more like Ned? Her husband loved social gatherings and inviting people over. He was a complete extrovert. Her drink went down easily, so she poured another. She wasn't going anywhere and didn't have to worry. Ned was picking up their eight-year-old son, Carson, from school.

Still, her anxiety rose like a wall dividing her from everyone—even her family. She was holding Ned back, not being social enough, not being a good enough wife or mother. If people got close to her, they'd see it, too. Trying to plan for worst-case scenarios and to control the situation had her struggling with chronic stomach issues and seizures that doctors were unable to diagnose. Sometimes she had trouble even swallowing. She'd tried anti-anxiety medication, but fearing side effects, she'd stopped taking them.

Many nights her heart raced so badly from worry that she moved to the couch to not wake up Ned. Extreme exercise, constant busyness, and strict diets were no longer holding the anxiety at bay. And there was the pandemic. Working fulltime as an occupational therapist at a nursing home, she isolated herself for her patients and for her family. But she could so easily cause harm without knowing it. The only time the anxiety eased was when she drank.

Taking a seat at her computer, Brooke emptied her second drink and refilled a third. How long before she had to log on for the Christmas party? At some point, a new text came in. Ned couldn't pick up Carson. She would have to do it.

CALL TO ME AND
I WILL ANSWER
YOU AND TELL
YOU GREAT AND
UNSEARCHABLE
THINGS YOU DO
NOT KNOW.

Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV)

When Brooke opened her eyes, she found herself in the hospital, two policemen in her room. She had been in a wreck and her car had rolled, but somehow she was uninjured. There was something odd about the way the policemen were looking at her as they spoke, like she was the lowest form of life.

Soon, she learned the reason. She had hit a man while driving under the influence—and he was thought to be in bad shape. The surgeon was trying to save his legs.

Brooke didn't remember even leaving her house, let alone driving. It seemed impossible, surreal. She'd hurt someone badly—a man whom she'd been told had been living out of his car at the time of the wreck. She was at fault. It was excruciating not to know how he was doing.

"I'm not going to try to escape," she told the policemen when she was given no water and forbidden to go to the bathroom. But then, it dawned on her. They intended to make sure she didn't try to hurt herself after learning what she'd done.

That night, Brooke was led out of the hospital in handcuffs and placed in the back of a police car. On the way to the detention center, where she'd be booked and placed in holding, Brooke looked down at her bound hands as they crossed a bridge. If they were in an accident and went off the bridge, she would most likely drown without the use of her arms. Would her family be better off if she didn't make it? Why hadn't she been the one to be hurt or die in that wreck? She could hardly get her mind to work beyond praying, *Help me, God, over and over.*

Charged with a felony DUI, Brooke spent a night in jail, and learned from her lawyer that she could face up to 15 years imprisonment if the man she hit was severely injured or died.

Her lawyer explained it could be months before they knew anything. "Go home and live your life," he said.

Home? It would be far worse there. She'd have to face what she'd done, and everyone would know. McClellanville was a small town.

Once released, Brooke stood outside the detention center, waiting for Ned to pick her up. She felt pieces of glass still in her hair, and she wore the same clothes from the accident, but had on random shoes, no idea where they'd come from. She'd never gotten more

than a speeding ticket. Yet, she had become the worst version of herself at 37. How would Ned react?

The moment she saw him, an overwhelming sense of God's grace filled her. She saw so much love in his eyes that she felt she didn't deserve. As Ned drove them home that day, she said into the quiet, "Tell me what to do."

He kept his eyes on the road. "I need you to be okay...for us. That's all I need you to do." He feared, Brooke realized, she would be crushed by what she had done, that she wouldn't be able to move forward.

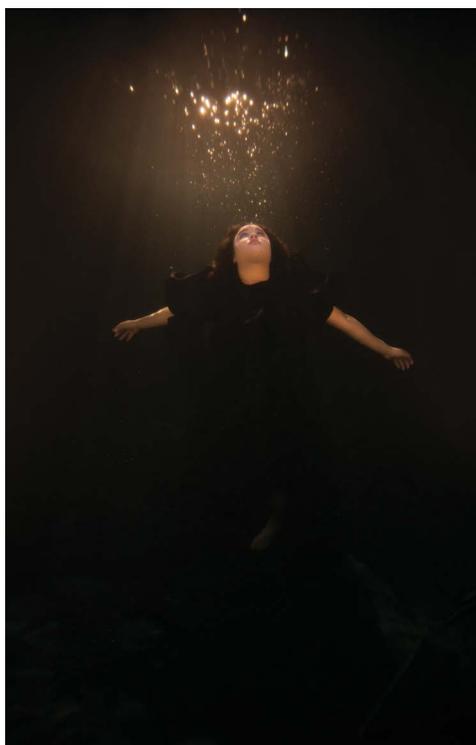
But she would do whatever it took to be the mom and wife her family needed.

Those first days at home, Brooke forced herself to get out of bed, to take a shower, to cook for Carson. She agreed to take medication prescribed for anxiety by a psychiatrist, finally admitting out loud that it was a serious problem. She went to church, although she felt ashamed and unworthy to enter. "I was guilty. I had a desperate need for forgiveness that I knew I didn't deserve," Brooke said. "I don't think I ever really understood grace before this."

Four days after the wreck, their neighbor, who was in her 70s, brought over dinner even though Brooke thought there was no need. "I could cook," Brooke said. "I wasn't hurt or ill. I felt like I didn't deserve to eat."

Yet Ruthie handed Ned a huge chicken pot pie casserole. "You can do what you want with it," she said.

Brooke and Ned, despite hardly eating since the wreck, sat down at the table because Ruthie had made the food and because they were desperate to make things normal for Carson. As they dished out



the casserole and prayed, they felt an immediate change. The heaviness hovering over them dissipated so markedly that she and Ned began to cry, sensing God telling them that no matter what happened, they would be okay. It was a huge casserole, and they ate it all, Ned commenting that the Holy Spirit must've been in that pot pie.

"I also realized," Brooke said, "that when someone brings you food, it's more than a meal. It's someone showing they care that you're struggling." Many others, including the small group Brooke had recently joined, also reached out, offering meals and encouragement.

As the weeks passed, Brooke kept busy, baking for other people and praying for what they were going through as she did it. "Through the little things," Brooke said, "I saw that God can accomplish big things."

She and Ned also made the decision to stop drinking alcohol. "I used to think if Ned knew the real me, he wouldn't love me the same. I was wrong. I used to focus on having the house super clean and everything needing to be perfect. But I realized Ned would rather listen to me sing, tell corny jokes, and just be honest and open. We spent more time together and started sharing our prayers and really talking. I would've never believed something so awful could lead to this, especially while the very real possibility of me going to prison still loomed over my head."

One day in church, Brooke heard a sermon about Paul and Silas finding purpose while in jail. Was it a sign that she was going to prison? Brooke closed her eyes. Maybe God meant for her to minister to people inside? *God, even if you choose to answer my prayers in a way that is not what I would choose, I want to surrender to your purpose for my life.*

"Scary as it was, it was so freeing," she said, "to finally give up the control that was never mine. God's strength helped me face the unknown."

That week, she learned that the man she had injured had made a full recovery, and the charges had been dropped to the lowest possible for DUI: suspended license and a fine.

"Every day I continued to thank God, and pray for him to show me his purpose for my life and give me the courage to do whatever he asked of me. Although I wasn't permitted to contact the man I'd hurt, I prayed that God would give him a home and a purpose despite me."

Nearly a year later, Brooke received a text from the man she'd injured. At once grateful and nervous about what he might say, she read his explanation of how, as an alcoholic, he'd been living in his car, estranged from his family. He had been about to celebrate a few weeks sobriety by grabbing a few beers. He'd known it was killing him, but hadn't been able to stop. The wreck, he told her, saved his life. He got sober, now had a home, and a renewed relationship with his kids.

To read this text was a gift beyond measure. "God used my huge, huge failure to bring about something good," Brooke said. "It was undeniably God."

Although they planned to meet on December 15, the day the accident had occurred a year earlier, the man changed his mind at the last minute. He wasn't ready to meet her. Brooke, however, soon learned that the man did show up that day at Seacoast's McClellanville Campus, the spot they'd chosen to meet in sight of where the wreck had occurred. It so happened that Pastor Heath Caldwell noticed a man outside, praying by the cross. Going out to chat with him, Heath soon put together from the man's story, who he was and how God was working in his life.

"God removed me from it, Brooke said. "I had no part. That was all God, healing the man I'd hurt. And healing me on such a deep level, and in so many ways, I'll never be the same.

chosen



SIGNS OF OVERUSING ALCOHOL

If you struggle with alcohol, you are not alone. To learn more, check out the following questionnaire and CDC guidelines.



Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking?



Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?



Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking?



Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover (eye-opener)?

Answering yes to 2 or more of the questions above can be an indication of a problem with alcohol. If you have concerns about your alcohol use habits, talk to your doctor or seek help through professional counseling.

Source:
hopkinsmedicine.org

Keyword:
[CAGE](#)

What categorizes excessive or heavy drinking?

The CDC defines heavy drinking as 8 or more drinks per week for women, and 15 or more drinks per week for men.

The CDC defines binge drinking as 4 or more drinks on a single occasion for women, and 5 or more drinks for men.

Standard drinks are defined as:

- 12-ounces of beer (5% alcohol by volume [ABV]).
- 8-ounces of malt liquor (7% ABV).
- 5-ounces of wine (12% ABV).
- 1.5-ounces of 80-proof (40% ABV) distilled spirits or liquor (e.g., gin, rum, vodka, whiskey).

Source:
cdc.gov

Keyword:
[Alcohol Use Basics](#)

DON'T GO THROUGH THIS ALONE.

Celebrate Recovery

This ministry is a community of people committed to equipping and encouraging those who want to overcome addiction and codependency. Using the proven and biblical Celebrate Recovery curriculum, groups meet to discuss the practical steps of recovery within confidential small group settings. No need to register in advance.

Join the group at any time. For more information, visit seacoast.org/recovery.

THROUGH THE NIGHT

A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT
THE DEEPER CHOSEN SHOOT 2022.
CHARLESTON, SC

By ERIN CARPENTER

“I don’t think she’s going to show up tonight.”
The text from our director flashed across my phone screen, interrupting my one hundred trains of thought. It was shoot day. We’d been preparing for months, carefully selecting locations, styling, picking actresses, making schedules. Our cinematographer from Los Angeles had landed last night. The set was built. We’d thought of everything.

But our main actress had stopped responding to our texts and calls. The shoot was starting soon. I panicked, calling her one more time. She sent it straight to voicemail.

We had to find a new actress in the next couple of hours, and this shoot was particularly tricky because we were shooting through the night and completely underwater.

Tonight, we would be plunging someone underwater in front of a camera, telling a story about surrender. What does it mean to sink deeper into uncomfortable places, where God dwells with us? In those deep places, we surrender control, we surrender what we know. In those deep places, we are weightless, held in his hands.



The theme *deeper* for Chosen resonated with me. Lately, my mind was overfilled by a constant striving to be better, overwhelmed by details and checking off tasks to make people happy. I was internally exhausted. But I had no time to fix it. I had too much to do—especially on shoot day, with no actress.

As first assistant director and co-producer, I knew I needed to find a replacement. We sent texts, made pleading posts. And miraculously, within an hour, we found someone.

When the sky was dark, we were ready. Our new actress got in the water, her long black dress lifting to the surface and swirling around her. The pool looked eerie. We'd put black fabric over the sides and bottom so that all traces of concrete would disappear. It looked like deep, deep water. It was only eight feet, but through our camera lens, it looked like it could be 40.

We did a few practice takes, our actress going under, blowing out bubbles. She'd told us she wasn't totally comfortable in the water, but we hoped Jenny, our underwater camera operator, who was a pro, could still work with her.

Our actress came up coughing. Again, she went under and came up coughing.

Time was slipping away. We had to get this done.

I need to do this. I knew it, or I felt it.

I told the team I could. "I've always loved water," I said.

They asked me to try, and so I jumped in with my clothes on.

I swam to the deep end, my arm resting on the ladder stretched across the length of the pool to act as a resting place. I faced Jenny. "Whenever you're

ready," she said. I watched her dive under with her camera.

Suddenly, it all felt much scarier. The pool bottom was so very dark. There were many eyes watching me. I took a breath and sank below the surface, my eyes closed. My nose filled with water. Starting to panic, I came up for air, coughing.

God, help me do this.

Once more, I sank below and felt my limbs go weightless. My nose filled with water again, but this time I stayed. I could do this.

When I came up for air, the team sent me to wardrobe and makeup.

My heart raced as I put on the black dress. I'd worked in video production for years, but I liked to be behind the camera, ask the questions, frame the shots. Tonight, I was being pushed out of my comfort zone.

I fell into the water, the long fabric of the dress tangling with my feet. I made myself relax, despite the weights around my waist that helped me sink. I felt like I'd left our set and plunged somewhere strange.

I'd helped with the creation of the story, but now I had to become our character, Bianca. I needed to show her releasing control. And it was fitting for my own life. I had to let go of all the details, shot lists, scripts, stressors that had been swirling around my head for months. Now, my job was to literally sink into this uncomfortable place. I needed to feel God's presence, to relax into his hands. The success of the shoot depended on it.

Don't think about 20 people watching the camera feed on the monitor at the surface. Don't think about what you look like. Feel peace. Trust that you are okay in the deep.

HE REACHED
DOWN FROM ON
HIGH AND TOOK
HOLD OF ME; HE
DREW ME OUT OF
DEEP WATERS.

2 Samuel 22:17
(NIV)





At 4:00 a.m., we finished our last shot. Hands reached to pull me out of the pool. Someone wrapped me in a warm robe straight out of the dryer. My eyes burned from the chlorine and were so cloudy that I could barely see. But I'd done it.

Two days later, we headed to Caper's Island on a small boat to get our last shots. When we reached the island, I walked on the sand, the air soft and the sun low on the horizon, leaving behind streaks of hazy pink.

Hours later, the boat began to take groups of the crew back to shore, and I waded into the ocean for our final shot. It was twilight, purple and dusky. Finally, our director yelled, "That's a wrap!"

As we gathered our gear and waited for the boat, lightning flashed in the distance. *Just summer heat lightning*, I thought. The sky turned orange, and the wind picked up. The boat was nowhere in sight. We stood silent at the edge of the island, watching for the tiny boat in the waves. We were the last 6 crew members left.

It grew dark. Someone handed me a flashlight, and I turned it on, waving it into the blackness. Still no boat. I felt sprinkles of rain on my shoulder.

Finally, we saw the light of the boat in the distance. When our captain, Kevin, arrived, we hurried to load our gear and pull away from shore, the rain now coming down hard.

"My phone is wet," Kevin yelled. "The navigation system isn't working!" It was pitch black. Wind blew against the sides of the boat, rocking it. Fear started to overtake my body. We were at the total mercy of this storm.

Slowly, we motored through the blackness. The sky and the water felt like one, dark and angry. As the wind whipped harder and the waves churned, our producer threw us lifejackets. I sat with our art director, Emily, in the back of the boat, and we began to pray out loud in the rain. I closed my eyes, and time seemed to stop. Cold and wet and terrified, I felt my eyes lock

with Jesus in the dark. I was somehow simultaneously scared and at peace. With my eyes closed I felt my surroundings fade away, and I just focused on my whispered prayers to him. As soon as I opened my eyes, fear came pouring back with the rain.

"Even the wind and the waves obey you," I prayed over and over. I thought of my priorities, and suddenly on a tiny boat in the ocean in a storm, nothing seemed to matter except for me and Jesus.

It was as if in that moment, I'd put my tiny humanness into perspective. God is so great, so vast, and I am so tiny, so in need of him. All the details, insecurities, meaningless goals, were nothing. I felt layers of meaningless stress peel back, leaving only the things that mattered. I thought of my family, our home, my life. *Thank you, Jesus.*

Every time a wave rocked us, I was sure the storm would only get worse.

Even the wind and the waves obey you.

For 45 minutes, we were in the dark of the storm. And then, lights. I saw houses on the shore, then the docks of the marina. Kevin had navigated us safely back. Relief washed over my entire body.

The rain stopped as soon as our boat reached the dock. We laughed off the tension in our bodies, stepping through warm puddles. People around us sat on a restaurant patio, drinking beers and watching a game as if nothing had happened.

"We've started to realize that every year, Emily said to me, "God shows us the theme for the conference in a very real way."

That boat ride was the deepest, most uncomfortable place I'd been in years. But I felt his presence in the most gripping way.

As I drove home barefoot, because my sandals were lost in the frenzy, I knew that I would never forget this night. Clutter would refill my life, insecurities would reenter my mind. But whenever I thought back to me and Jesus on that tiny boat, I would remember the feeling of going deeper with him.

—
chosen

DIG DEEP

By AMANDA NISWANDER

How do you surrender the wounds you never want to acknowledge or reveal? How do you move past trauma without ever verbalizing what happened to you? You simply cannot surrender if you are unwilling to recognize the pain. I know this all too well. In February 2019, a family member called to admit and apologize for the role they played in my childhood abuse. Everything in me wanted to deny and shove it back into the deep caverns of my mind and heart where it had resided for over 25 years, but it was time for that darkness to be revealed.

God knew I desperately craved freedom and was exhausted from attempting to reach it on my own. So, I had a choice to make: Keep wrestling with my shame and being a slave to my wounds, or dig into my painful memories with the hope that God would heal my heart.

Although terrified, I chose the latter. This decision saved my life, but it didn't come without growing pains. It helped to picture myself tending a garden overgrown with weeds. Some weeds budded flowers that almost passed as desired blossoms, others had hidden thorns, and some had deep roots that were really hard to pull up. At times, I worried

that only weeds would ever grow here. But I kept going, digging deeper to clear the way for new life—and finally, I'm seeing the garden blossom again with bright pink petunias and vibrant yellow zinnias, flowers and colors I love.

When we acknowledge the pain in our lives and allow ourselves to dig into where it originated, we create room for growth. Isaiah 51:3 NIV says "...He will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord." Dear friend, God promises to help pull all those weeds with you. You do not have to do this alone anymore.

- *I encourage you to tell your story because shame thrives in silence. Find a trusted friend, a mentor, or a licensed therapist.*
- *Acknowledge and grieve what has happened to you. Honor your emotions and know that no emotion is too big for God.*
- *Tell yourself that what happened does not define you.*
- *Talk to God. Ask him to give you the courage to keep digging. He already knows what you will find because he has gone before you and will light the path that leads to him.*



GOD COMES DOWN

By ELIZABETH REPPARD

WHEN YOU GO THROUGH DEEP WATERS, I
WILL BE WITH YOU. WHEN YOU GO THROUGH
RIVERS OF DIFFICULTY, YOU WILL NOT DROWN.
WHEN YOU WALK THROUGH THE FIRE OF
OPPRESSION, YOU WILL NOT BE BURNED UP;
THE FLAMES WILL NOT CONSUME YOU.

Isaiah 43:2 (NLT)

CHANGE HER STORY

EVERY WOMAN HAS A
STORY, AND THERE IS
POWER IN EACH ONE.

When a woman is empowered, the cycle of poverty is often broken—not just for her, but for her family, and for generations to come. This year, we’re partnering with Convoy Women, an international sisterhood advocating for women and girls, and with several of our local nonprofit partners who are making a difference in the lives of women.

Change Her Story: Discover how the trajectory of women’s lives have changed when they’ve received support, an education, or job training. See how they’ve held on to their dreams and goals and overcome intense challenges and obstacles.

- **Visit our Change Her Story display in the breezeway.**
- **Pack hygiene kits:** Help pack 5,000 hygiene kits for Convoy Women and for our local nonprofit partners and local warming shelter. By providing hygiene kits, you help families around the world with basic needs. These kits are more than soap and toothpaste. They let people know they aren’t alone. Kits will be distributed for disaster response and for relief in Ukraine, as well as in support of local homelessness, domestic violence, and women’s empowerment initiatives.
- **Shop with a Purpose:** Visit our Convoy Women’s booth in the breezeway to purchase “Change Her Story” items, such as hats, T-shirts, necklaces and tumblers.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

By ELIZABETH REPPARD

SOMEONE TO WALK WITH US.
SOMEONE TO FIGHT FOR US.
ISN'T THIS WHAT WE ALL NEED?

For over 20 years, Marie Elana Roland has worked alongside people going through economic hardship and homelessness, and it has helped her identify a major gap in the system—a void that needs to be filled. She observed that people often think the solution to homelessness is simply “shelter.” While it’s a vital component, what Marie Elana has found to be just as important is a new path and companionship: someone to walk alongside them, as they look to and move toward their future. She makes sure the people she works with know, “they are not alone anymore.”

Marie Elana founded The Navigation Center (TNC), to help connect the dots. She and her team connect those experiencing homelessness in Charleston with community organizations and services, specific

to their individual needs and situation. They act as a team of coaches and cheerleaders helping people navigate a new path forward. For instance, someone who has been trafficked may first need shelter and their basic needs covered, then services specific to trafficking survivors, as well as legal advice to help fight for justice and to prevent such horrors from happening to others.

Over the past year, TNC has seen over 1,400 people come through their doors looking for hope and connection. While TNC serves many veterans and those struggling with addictions, suicidal thoughts, or mental illness, the largest percentage of their clients are women and children.

Marie Elana recalls walking alongside a single



DEAR SISTERS,

I'll never forget July 6, 2014. After a busy weekend with guests in town, our family was out for a peaceful sunset boat cruise, enjoying some snacks and listening to Needtobreathe, when my daughter, Southerlyn, flipped over the front of the boat. She was 3 years old and couldn't swim.

Still in my dress from church, I immediately dove into the water and swam until I couldn't breathe. As I paused and looked up, about 50 yards behind the boat, I saw her precious little head come up completely out of the water. I felt an instant surge of relief and could not stop crying and thanking God as I pulled her to me.

An hour later, my husband, Jason, and I lay in bed with Southerlyn, holding her tight. I asked if she was afraid when she was under the water. She replied, "My eyes were closed, but I wasn't scared because Mommy was holding me the whole time." In that instant, the Lord reminded me, I had been praying Psalm 91:11 over our children daily, asking God to surround them with his angels concerning all their ways. I am confident the Lord sent an angel to rescue Southerlyn. It was a potential tragedy turned miracle because of the power of prayer.

I love my daughter with everything in me, but just like my limited ability to breath underwater, my human love has limits. I am so thankful and comforted by the truth that God's love does not. There are always deeper places we can go in his love. My prayer is that you would "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.*" *Ephesians 3:18-19 (NLT)*

We experience his love more fully when we drink deeply of the Living Water found in:

- *the truth of his Word*
- *the richness of worship*
- *the intimacy in prayer*
- *a life bound to other believers*

This is the year when we can become the women God wants us to be for the rest of our lives. Is there an area where God is calling you deeper so you can be fully immersed in his love? Our Sisterhood team would love to come alongside you! **Visit us in the Sisterhood Lounge or text SISTERHOOD to 320320 to get connected today.**

Blessings,
 Jenna Surratt
 Sisterhood Pastor

CONNECT WITH SISTERHOOD

SISTERHOOD SMALL GROUPS/EVENTS

Whether you're interested in a Bible study, book study, a wellness-based group, or a mentoring relationship, we've got you covered. Small groups meet in various locations throughout the week. Please visit seacoast.org/sisterhood for details on women's groups and events, or contact your campus Sisterhood leader.

SISTERHOOD SHEPHERDS

This ministry cares for the women of Sisterhood. In celebration or through grief, we want to be there for you. To serve, or if you have a need, contact beccawells@seacoastdreamteam.org.

TITUS 2 GROUP MENTORING

Generations journey together through intentional relationships, calling women to a higher vision, a more abundant life, and a deeper relationship with Christ. Contact beaswray@gmail.com for information about becoming a mentor or a mentee.

SISTERHOOD SERVES

We are passionate about making a difference in our community while finding and growing our relationships with God and each other. To get involved in serving, please contact beccawells@seacoastdreamteam.org.

SISTERHOOD EVENINGS

Mondays, 6:30–8:00pm
Starts September 19

ONLINE Wednesdays, 7:00pm ET

Starts September 21

*will not meet on First Wednesdays

SISTERHOOD MORNINGS

Thursdays, 9:30–11:30am
Starts September 22

JEN WILKIN, *Better: A Study of Hebrews*

Join Sisterhood for this midsize gathering, as we go deeper into Hebrews with Jen Wilkin's study, *Better*. In small groups, we'll explore how God "provided something better for us" in the person of Jesus Christ (Heb. 11:40). Through stories of Old Testament heroes and practices, the author of Hebrews demonstrates how the new covenant is superior to the old and how Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of every promise. Explore familiar verses in context of the entire Bible, learning how to place your hope and faith in Christ alone. Register now at seacoast.org/mtpwomen.

SISTERHOOD RETREAT

March 10–12, 2023

Come away with us to Young Life's Windy Gap Camp, just outside Asheville, NC, for a weekend of adventure, laughter, rest, and friendship. Cost is \$295. Register at seacoast.org/sisterhoodretreat.



Abby Suarez
Broker Associate, Realtor



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THE LIGHT SHINES IN
THE DARKNESS, AND
THE DARKNESS HAS
NOT OVERCOME IT.

John 1:5
(NIV)



HOW IS GOD ASKING YOU TO GO DEEPER?

I think God wants me to go deeper in my personal relationship with him. It's easy to see God as my all-knowing, all-powerful Heavenly Father, but it's harder to grasp that he wants me to spend time with him. Friendships are built over time and through personal interactions. It's easy for me to pray, but not always easy for me to listen. I want my first instinct after a hard day to be to turn to God.

AMY ALDERMAN
Johns Island Sisterhood



When my second child was born, I found out she had a birth defect. At first I said things like, "Well, her life will just be different than her brother's," but the Lord spoke to my spirit. He urged me to believe for more, to not come into agreement with what the world would say of my daughter, but to trust that nothing is impossible with him, though it may be impossible (incurable) in the world. Since then, I've been able to believe for more in so many aspects of my life and in the lives of others.

CARRIE MCGINNES
Summerville Sisterhood

I'm seeking God more. I'm really listening. I'm saying, "Okay, Lord, I'm choosing to trust you here," even—and especially—when things don't look like I thought they would in my life. He's teaching me that he wastes nothing and uses everything, even those moments when I'm struggling to trust.

LIZ PATRICK
Manning Sisterhood

Last summer, I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I wasn't angry—just confused and scared. I'm a grandmother of three beautiful grandchildren. I want a few more years with them. I've asked God many times, "What do I do next?" How do I share that God has brought me safely through? I have a hard time being open with people, a fear of not being good enough to share my story. But I guess that's what I'm doing right now.

JOAN GUTHRIE
West Ashley Sisterhood

Let's not keep it surface level. God wants to stretch us. I used to have a hard time connecting with others. I kept things to myself and "self-coped," not letting anyone in. I stayed in my little box, convinced it was better that way. But last year, I started a small group that has since grown into so much more. I've become intentional about reaching out to others, meeting new people, deepening friendships—even when it takes me out of my comfort zone.

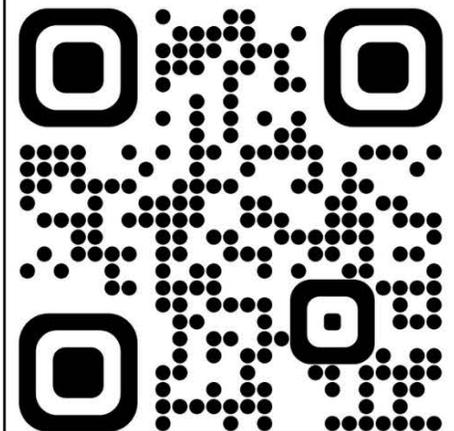
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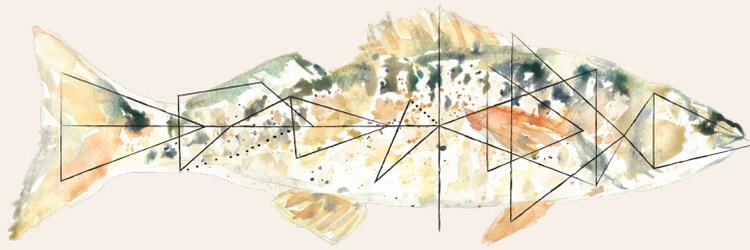
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MY “WHY”

Conference Director,
Jenny Mayer, shares
how Chosen has
impacted her life and
what it can do for yours.



How long have you been involved in Chosen? I've been involved with Chosen for ten years and have served as director for four.

What made you want to be the Conference Director? Chosen has really impacted me personally. When my son, Breck, was born as a tiny preemie and had to stay a few weeks in the NICU, I showed up at Chosen feeling overwhelmed. I was also struggling with medical issues following Breck's birth. During one of the sessions, the speaker called out in prayer for our healing. Instantly, I was healed. At that moment, I knew God was moving in the lives of women at Chosen, and I had to be a part of it!

What's your favorite part of Chosen? Thursday. I love when everyone streams in for registration. To watch the women react to the décor and be so charged up with expectations and excitement is hands down my favorite!

What's the biggest challenge? Actually, it's after Chosen. I go into a slump for weeks, and my brain gets foggy. The event takes so much out of me, but that's also what I love about it. It stretches me physically, creatively, and emotionally.

When do you tend to stress? I stress in the middle of the night while planning Chosen. To counter that, I make lists, play worship music in the morning, and drink LOTS of coffee.

What are some challenges you've faced in the last few years? LOL. I'm not sure we have enough room to write all the things! The most obvious was breast cancer. That was hard, like really hard. But God has been so faithful, restoring my body and mind daily to a much healthier new normal. I think that is good enough for now.

How do you handle stress on good and bad days? When I'm feeling strong, I deal with stress by getting creative. I love to garden and paint furniture. On a bad day, I binge-eat and watch Netflix, usually murder mysteries or food shows. I'm working on how I handle not-great days by reaching out when I feel low. I have friends who I can count on to tap me on the shoulder and ask how I'm really doing. It's easy to hide and isolate when I feel bad or sad, but I've learned to send a simple text, "Can you pray for me? It's a hard day." Just reaching out helps relieve the tension. Their prayers and encouragement get me through!

What do you do when you're feeling scattered? I make a list. I feel scattered a lot! Most people think I must be the most organized person to do what I do. NOPE, I am not. Lists and the calendar keep me grounded. If left to myself, I am quite the free spirit.

What helps you go deeper with God? Worship is my easiest way, but reading the Word is harder for me.

What might keep you from going deeper with God?

Sometimes, I'm afraid to go deeper because I know God is calling me out and up. Staying comfortable and complacent is easier. But it's not better.

How do you tune out things that aren't from God? I make God's voice louder. Sometimes, I have to yell out his truths in my mind. The enemy can be relentless, but it's always the same stuff. I've learned to recognize it quickly and loudly declare in my spirit, the truths that God says over me.

What is your favorite Bible verse? It's Isaiah 43:19.

"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." It helps calm me.

How do you relax? I like to relax with friends and eat charcuterie, lay out by the pool, or take a stroll on the beach.

Why is each Chosen conference special to you? Every conference is special because I see many of the same women attend—but each time with deeper friendships and new connections. I also love seeing the women, who are brave enough to come alone, leave the conference with a whole new set of friends.

What have you seen happen because of Chosen? I have so many stories! Once, I was at the beach the day after the conference and ran into a lady who told me what God had done through Chosen in her life. He had brought Holy Spirit promptings, redemption, and restoration of a family relationship. God does some cool stuff at Chosen. That will always be my why!

WHAT ABOUT YOU? How will you use your experiences here at Chosen to go deeper with God personally and in your relationships moving forward? This time next year, we hope you'll join us again to share your victories and celebrate with us! Register now for Chosen 2023!

Chosen

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