

Live in Reckless Faith

Love like you've never been hurt

Can you trust your Partner? That's what you want to know when you step out onto the dancefloor. Even if you love the song you hear, if you can't trust your Partner, it's nearly impossible to comfortably step into His arms. The most intimate of dances is one based on love and trust and faith that your heart is safe with the One who holds you.

We are told in Matthew 22 and Luke 10 to love the Lord our God with all our hearts. What if you see God as the one who's hurt you? Are you willing to love Him as if you've never been hurt? Do you secretly withhold your heart from Him due to past hurts you consider His fault? I believe even the most mature of us blame God when we lose someone we love or when an issue isn't resolved as we'd hoped. If we truly believe nothing is impossible for God, then when He doesn't act on our behalf and heal or prevent or intervene, how can we not blame Him? He could but didn't. That's a stab in the heart of anyone who's prayed for something and God says no.

I'm not talking about the wait scenarios. We all have them, and yes, waiting can hurt. I'm talking about God's all-out, decisive no.

Now that we wrap up the "reckless" series, I'll give you a final reminder of how we've used reckless in these topics: reckless: *marked by lack of proper caution; careless of consequences*. It's about loving with abandon and no matter the consequences to your own heart.

Read Acts 12:1-10 and meet me back here.

Peter was imprisoned by a king who was trying to get on the good side of the Jews. In verse 5 we are told, "... but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church."

Now go back and read verses 1-2. Don't you have to wonder, didn't they (the church) pray for James just as hard? James was imprisoned but killed. Then Peter was imprisoned and released after an angel showed up to miraculously set him free.

Was Peter's life worth more than James'? That had to be the question asked by one disciple for sure, James' brother John. The passage isn't clear if John was there in the house praying for Peter, but you know if he wasn't he heard about it after the fact.

I don't question John's heart. No doubt he was thankful for Peter's release, but was that nagging little voice saying, "Why not James, Lord?"

It's easy to set the Apostles on some pedestal and think they didn't feel what we feel or question the things we question. I find it hard to believe John heard of his brother's death and just shrugged and said, "Oh well, I'm sure it's all part of God's plan." There was a time of grief and heartbreak, a time he surely asked why his brother had to die. All of this is pure conjecture on my part, but a human heart is a human heart.

We often hear John referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved. John assigned himself that title in the book of John. John's Gospel was likely written in AD 90-100, many years after James' death. If he considered himself so loved by Jesus and expressed his own love and devotion to Christ through his life and service, then he had settled the issue of his brother's death somewhere along the way, and probably pretty early on. He had seen too much of Jesus' life and love not to. That's what we need, experience with Jesus like John had to allow us to settle those questions in our own hearts when God says no to what we desperately desire.

Many of us cherish the words of Jeremiah 29:11 that tell us God knows the plans He has for us, that they are plans to prosper us and not to harm us, to give us a future and a hope. What if the plan has crushed our heart and hopes and seems to say we have no future?

This is where trusting your Partner comes into play. You must have a deep-seated faith that God's plan, even when painful for you, is the better plan. There is only one word underpinning the ability to believe that—Love. I've said this before: Nothing filters into your life that doesn't first filter through God's love for you. He knows the pain His answer will cause, but He also knows the deep and penetrating work He can do in your life in response to that pain. Always and forever His goal is to make you completely His, so all things that happen to you will be an opportunity for Him to draw you deeper into Himself.

Our brother in the faith, John, after losing his brother to God's ultimate plan, twice said in 1 John that God is love (v. 8 and 16). In 1 John 1:5 he tells us that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. There is never ill-intention in God, only love. John still knew this to be true even after the loss of his own beloved brother.

When God's ultimate plan sometimes means no, we get hurt. If we can simply admit that, then we have taken the first step toward healing the hurt. In order to love as if we've never been hurt, we have to deal with and acknowledge our pain before God. Only then will we place ourselves into His hands and allow Him to align our heart with His.

Since John did have a history with Jesus and knew His heart, he was likely on a fast-track to a heart aligned with God's and willing to trust God's plan was for the good of the church, even when his heart was breaking.

How can you get to that place, to being on the fast-track to believe in God's goodness, even when His no doesn't feel so good? I said it before: We need experience with Jesus like John had. If you don't have a history of walking with Jesus, then this can be your first time to take new steps with Him. Whether you're new to walking intimately with God or if you've been doing this your whole life, these practical steps might help.

As I write this, it would be easy for me to lean on verses based on "just having faith" or make easier-said-than-done statements like, "You just have to believe that all things will turn out for the good." Faith and belief are absolutely accurate suggestions, but how do you actually do them? What do they look like in an applied sense in the life of a wounded believer?

When I've suffered the greatest losses and disappointments, I've found many different means of getting my heart realigned with God's heart when I've blamed Him or questioned why He didn't heal or change or fix. Sometimes I've been on the fast-track. Other times it's taken a long season of offering my pain to Jesus, asking Him to help me heal and trusting Him even in the midst of sheer agony.

Stay in the Word

I keep returning to God's Word. That's something that I almost never give up. I admit, during some of the darkest times reading Scripture feels hollow. There are times when I know in my heart that I'm phoning it in. Still I do it. In my worst valleys I may have skipped a day or three, but that never lasts too long. When my heart lies and my mind believes wrongly, there's something in me, I guess it's my spirit filled with His Spirit, that knows what it needs—Him. I need a fresh Word of Love. I need to hear direction whispered in verse form. I need to see the pain of others transformed into mighty acts of God.

For those of you who don't or won't live in the Word, girl, I just don't know what to tell you. You're missing out on the actual presence of God holding you close and pouring words of love into your brokenness. I know you've been told to read the Bible, that it's God's love letter to you, and that it's what transforms. And still you don't read. I'm a parent, so I know this: I can't make you. I can't bully you into it. I might not even be able to convince you, no matter how hard I try. But I can hope your circumstances get desperate enough that you're left with nowhere else to go. When your friends and family can't make you feel okay, when

your pain feels like a literal illness, I pray you will dive into God's Word, a healing pool where He reaches into the very core of who you are and soothes and restores that which is broken.

Pour out Your Heart

I know I mention journaling a lot, and maybe for a writer like me it's just more natural to write back to Him. Even if writing doesn't come naturally, if you can't write out what you feel, say what you feel. Keep it real. Say what you genuinely feel not what you think sounds church-ified. If you feel He's let you down, say so. I have. When I did that most recently, hearing my own words opened my eyes to a truth I hadn't seen up until then: He hadn't let me down, my wrong expectations had. It was the grappling out of my pain in writing that made it clear to me and changed the way I was able to look at the situation and realign my heart.

Your case may be different. Maybe, no matter how you look at it, you feel He's let you down or dropped the ball. I don't have the answer, but I know He can clear up any misunderstanding. Or at the very least, He will prove His love for you even when He didn't say yes to your most desperate plea.

I have read in the Oswald Chambers devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*, how we have lost the art of "practicing the presence of God." I like that, practicing the presence of God. Rather than pray to some far-off God, talk to Him as if He's right there sitting next to you. He is. He's so close that He's actually within. Just open a dialogue. Say what you really feel. Then sit in quietness for a while. Ask Him to speak into your spirit. Ask that He give you better understanding. Whatever you do, lean into Jesus; don't back away.

In some cases understanding may never come. If you know your situation is beyond human comprehension, then simply ask God to help you live with His answer and to help you trust Him even when you don't understand His methods.

Talk to Someone

Find a trusted friend—a mature-in-the-faith friend. Ask for prayer. Also, share as much with them as you feel comfortable and ask how they deal with disappointment and hurt over life-altering circumstances. Reach out. I'm the worst at that. I will go through a terrible time of grief and sorrow and only days or weeks into the problem will I reach out. My last and most memorable spiritual funk was ended the moment I expressed my doubts to a friend. Her words were simple, yet they made an impact. Don't suffer alone.

Offer Praise

Christian music is a lifeline for me when I'm at my lowest. Often, lyrics are taken directly out of Scripture. In that case you're listening to the Word set to a melody. At my weakest, music can breathe life into me. It often serves as a reminder of God's love when my circumstances are screaming otherwise. All other genres of music seem to take from me, where praise and worship gives; it pours into and fills my empty soul. Until today I've never even considered the concept of one type of music soul-filling and others soul-emptying. But I see it now. The world always and only wants to take from you. Jesus gives and restores and heals.

I have noticed something significant: The more praise and worship I listen to, the more my spirit is apt to hold onto faith and hope, and my mind is set on things above. The rarer times when I listen to '80s or country music, my vision becomes more clouded. I see close by, the world around me, but I don't seem to have as much spiritual vision. I may be making that up since I do make things up for a living, but that's how it feels.

I just know I'm the best version of me when I allow good to continually pour in. My spirit agrees with what I'm hearing, even when my heart is broken. With my mind set on

Jesus through the music I listen to, I seem to be counteracting the draw of the world around me.

I once was dealing with a severely broken heart, so broken in fact that it flatlined for a time. Nothing was okay. I genuinely felt dead inside. I was an emotional, mental, and spiritual mess. (I crack myself up with all my drama, but that's what emotions do; they make us soar high and then cause us to crash upon the rocks. I felt what I felt. You feel what you feel.) That season lasted for weeks until one day I heard Danny Gokey tell the backstory to the song *Tell Your Heart to Beat Again*. A surgeon had told the writer of the song that he was working on a patient and had done all he could do. Finally, he just looked at her on the table and said, "Lady, you're going to have to tell your heart to beat again."

That was me at the time. I just needed to tell my heart to beat again, to trust, to believe in the One I know is trustworthy and believable even when I was flatlined, living out what felt like my worst moments. I began to do that. I would listen to that song while walking in the morning. Something began to happen. A little blip here, a little blip there. Next thing I knew, an actual beat lead to a steady rhythm again. Music did that. Jesus did that through music. I lived the love song in that I believed His love for me was greater than what had injured me, the thing I believed He could have prevented but didn't.

Do this: Put your earbuds in and turn to Christian music. It can be contemporary Christian or gospel music or whatever sings to your soul. Drive to work, clean your house or garden or do laundry or whatever draining task you have ahead of you. Allow the lyrics to lead your heart to an open place with Him. Listen to accounts of His goodness and His love for you. Sing along to the songs that remind you of his faithfulness and devotion. Your soul longs for communion with God even when you blame Him or feel hurt by what feels like His betrayal.

Give Thanks

There have been moments over the years when my grief was so severe and my sorrow so deep, that I felt on the verge of death, like the example I shared above. I couldn't read. I couldn't praise. But I could give thanks. I have been so low that only recounting all the good in my life kept me on this side of heaven. Most of us have much to be thankful for, even in the midst of suffering a great loss. Yet the good is often eclipsed by the bad. I remember a Sunday school teacher once saying that when things are their very worst, just say all you're thankful for. Do that one thing even when you can't do any other thing.

I can consider the practice now and see the underlying benefit. For every person or thing in your life you are thankful for, even if you're not acknowledging it consciously, you are acknowledging God's goodness and provision. Psalm 136 is a long passage of perpetual gratitude. "Oh give thanks to the LORD for He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (Psalm 136:1).

When I have lost what feels like my all, the reality is that any one thing isn't my all. No matter its place of importance in my life, other people and things remain as a testimony that God gives, and yes, He sometimes takes away. We are blessed beyond measure by a God who is good and kind and loving and generous.

Cry and Mourn

Sometimes that's all you can do, just sit with the Lord and weep. I have. There was a time when I got news that I thought would be the end of my oldest son's future. It was a major-league legal issue, not some bad grade or teenage crisis. I just sat and wept. I went to sit alone in my room and cried and cried. I kept telling God, "Adam's life is over."

I had been praying for my son for over a decade, about his mind and heart and choices. From where I sat, it didn't seem as if God had ever heard me. I had begged over the years. I had bargained. Nothing I prayed seemed to have mattered. Finally, my worst fears were staring me in the face. Adam could be facing a fifteen year to life sentence in prison.

That night, as I sat crying, God spoke words into my broken mother's spirit: "Can these bones live?"

Pause.

I'm hitting pause on my story. I want to point out something vital to my living through that moment. I knew that verse because I had read it before. I had never intentionally memorized the verse; honestly, it wasn't even on my radar. Yet that night, my history with God's Word was what allowed Him access to speak into my heart. Read the Word. Live in the Word. Allow the Word to live in you.

Unpause.

When I heard those words asking if "these bones can live," I reached for my Bible and read more. What God was telling me that night was that it wasn't all over. Yes, it felt like it was. The three and a half years my son actually spent in prison seemed like the end. Ultimately, though, it wasn't. That little jail bird is now Dad to my sweet little grandbaby Ellie. He's a man who still gets it wrong often, but he's also a man who will tell you he sure won't do anything that might land him back in prison.

My prayers still aren't answered. Adam still lives a hard life due to his choices. Doors close to ex-cons that are open to other men. He will always struggle to get by. The things I have prayed for Adam aren't yet answered and may never be. But I still have hope. I still pray. I still trust God has a plan for Adam that's somehow even better than the future I've prayed for him.

I'll never stop hoping God will turn it all around. In the meantime, I still know He's good even when I don't see His hand intervening. I have seen evidence of how God has used the worst season in Adam's life to draw me closer to Him. In His sovereign plan, He did indeed use Adam's worst to grow me and shape me and make me more compassionate.

I used to run a food pantry where I would, in the physical sense, wrap my arms around people who had no home or security often because of life choices. I'm not sure my heart would have ever known the kind of compassion or love I felt for those people living on the fringe of our society without my own personal experience.

God says no at times, but that no to you may be His yes to someone else. The heart of compassion He gave me was very likely the answer to another mama's prayer for their child, that her son or daughter would go to bed with their belly full and feeling loved.

Maybe your no is God's yes to something you can't see now or maybe never will see. Will you choose to live in reckless faith?

Just moments before finishing this chapter, I was led to the Hebrews hall of faith for my own reassurance on a matter.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13)

Some of us will never see the yes that required God's no to our plea. All we can do is embrace what we have seen "afar off." A reckless heart loves in spite of our pain, knowing: God is good. God gives good. God loves you.

LIVE IN RECKLESS FAITH

TAKEAWAY

LOOK WITHIN:

Do you secretly withhold your heart from God due to past hurts you consider His fault?

Do you question God's plan for you based on your current circumstances? Be specific.

Do you spend time in the Word on a regular basis? If not, why is that?

List a time when a previously known verse came to mind at a most difficult time. Write the verse in the margin.

Recall a difficult season that proved to be what God used to grow you. Explain below.

KEY POINTS:

- It can wrongly appear that God is the one who hurt us.
- Only experience with Jesus brings Truth to the situation.
- Admitting we feel hurt by God is the first step toward healing.
- Our no may be God's yes to someone else.

PRACTICE THE DANCE:

How can you apply the Key Points of this chapter to your day-to-day life and to your day today?

LEARN THE LYRICS:

- Read Acts 12:1-3

In verse 1, why does it say Herod was going after Christians?

Some translations say he intended to persecute them, some say to mistreat them. Mine says to harass them. It serves as a reminder that here in the present, we still have an enemy whose intention is to harass us.

In what way are you currently being harassed by the enemy? Consider some common means the enemy uses to harass those we love: physical and mental illness, substance abuse, pornography, bullying, adulterous relationships, greed for more of the world.

In our text, James' life was taken while Peter's was spared. Do you see evidence around you of others seeming to live in peace while those you love are being harassed and tormented by the enemy?

In verse 2, what prompted Herod to seize Peter?

Herod wanted to please the Jews. Our current enemy harasses believers in order to pierce the heart of the One who loves us most and to try and hinder our faith in Jesus.

- Read Ezekiel 37:1-14

In verse 10, when the bones stood to their feet, what did they become?

The imagery of what mine calls an "exceedingly great army" brings me hope. I pray the Lord will raise those I love up as a great army for Him no matter the dry bones I've seen in my family.

I was once comforted by God's question: "Can these bones live?" He asks the same of you. His assurance is that He can breathe life back into what seems to be the most helpless "dead" situation. Use the space below to pray specifically for those you love who are being harassed.

NEXT STEPS:

Practical steps in getting your heart realigned with God:

- Stay in the Word or get in the Word.
- Pour out your heart. Through prayer, be honest about how you feel.
- Talk to someone. Find a trusted, godly friend who will help you see a different perspective.
- Offer praise. Saturate your mind and heart with praise and worship music.
- Give thanks. Recount the good God has done for you in the past to view Him better in the present.
- Cry and mourn. Sometimes you just need to release your pent-up emotions. Sit with God and cry if you need to.

SING YOUR OWN SONG:

Begin with the following and continue with your own heartfelt prayers.

Father God, in the deepest part of my heart, I feel wounded by Your no. I'm not asking You to defend Yourself. You are a holy God! But I am asking you to open my eyes to Your love so that my heart can heal and rest and trust Your plan for my life.
