The background of the cover is a collection of overlapping, watercolor-style shapes in various colors: green, purple, pink, red, yellow, and light purple. Each shape is decorated with different patterns: horizontal lines, dots, wavy lines, small leaves, and small triangles. The overall style is soft and artistic.

Honest conversations  
and songs about  
owning your  
story

a CUP of  
COURAGE  
FOR THE  
JOURNEY  
OF LIFE

Helena McNeill

“Helena's story is mind-blowingly painful yet exhilarating, her giftedness is extensive, exquisite and anointed and her heart is audibly passionate about empowering women for the journey of life. When Helena's words and songs collide, something almost tangible brushes over your soul and breathes life into your bones; something within you comes to life. You'll get what I mean when you dive in. This book and CD set is a must-have for every woman. Keep it accessible because it will become one of your greatest companions.

– Suzie Botross

*Learning and Development Consultant, Author, Speaker.*

“This little book and collection of songs is remarkable because of the heart of its author. Helena McNeill has weathered more storms in life than most of us, and she writes and sings out of her authentic struggle to find God in the midst of her questions and pain. I could listen to Helena sing all day long, and I'm still trying to decide which of these songs is my favorite! I invite you to sit down with a cup of tea in a comfy chair and allow the moments Helena has created to minister to your heart and soul.”

– Nancy Beach

*Leadership Coach with the Slingshot Group, Author, Speaker.*

“When I listen to Helena sing, she brings an extraordinary calm to my soul. It's as if the world stops spinning for a moment; my breathing deepens, my defenses slowly melt away and I find myself more open and transparent with God. Her book makes you feel like you're sitting down for a coffee with a close friend who “sees” you and reminds you that God knows the difficult journey you're on and is reaching out His loving hand to you. I strongly encourage you to put Helena's book and music at the top of your “must read/must listen” list. Your soul will thank you!”

– Corinne Ferguson

*Artist and Leadership Coach. Former Executive Producer The Global Leadership Summit.*

# Contents

Dedicated to  
**Karen Berndt**  
– aka, my fairy godmother –  
who showed up in my darkest hours  
with extravagant love, humour and diet coke,  
and somehow pulled me through.

© Helena McNeill, July 2017.

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# Introduction



*Hey you!*

Fellow traveller on this journey of life.

I see you.

Navigating your path.

Doing your best.

Clutching that beloved cup of courage in your hands, hoping to infuse liquid strength along with the caffeine.

Wondering if you are the only one secretly thinking, *Wow, how did I end up here? I'm not even sure I can do this...*

Well, girl, good news: you're not alone!

All of us are busy embarking on soul journeys in our everyday lives.

Some journeys are chosen and planned by us, while others are unexpected and uninvited.

Some are breathtakingly wonderful, while others mess with us. They mark us ... maybe even break us.

And in all our soul travels, we learn, we grow, we fail, we dream, we create, we accomplish, we

love, we lose, we rage, we connect, we break, we mess up, we become.

All these experiences are part of this exquisite privilege of being alive.

We don't always get to choose our pathways, but we do get to choose how we are going to travel the journey we find ourselves on.

The journey calls for us to be brave. But if you're anything like me, I don't always wake up in the morning and see brave in the mirror.

We all need a little encouragement now and then to go along with that skim vanilla latte (or whatever it is you fill your cup of courage with) as we navigate our steps.

So sit down, take a deep breath – even if there is a lump in your throat – and let these songs and stories fill your cup with a few drops of courage for the journey of life...

*Helena*

July 2017



It's not about the shoes.  
It's about what you do in them.

— Michael Jordan

## Chapter 1

Wear the Right  
Shoes 

**S**o let's start this conversation on a subject close to my own heart – shoes!

You can tell a lot about a woman by her shoes; where she's been, where she is heading and where she is hoping to go. If I lined up all the shoes in your closet today, they may tell me some of your story, your personality... and even reveal the scale of your shoe addiction. Are you a glamour heels kinda gal? Or do you live in your comfortable flats? Is it strappy sandals or easy slip-ons for you? Colours and bows or simple black for everything? Like I said, shoes can tell a lot about you.

Some women have a love/hate relationship with shoes as they hunt for that perfect pair that is cute AND comfortable AND on sale (that would be me). Others just go for cute and choose to endure pain because they fell in love with those pretty shoes (that would be me sometimes). Then there are women who just roll their eyes and groan, loathing the topic of shoes for a myriad of reasons (never me). Which one are you?

I think the whole shoe obsession started with Cinderella who set us up for high expectations with shoes, didn't she? I mean, her dream came true: the perfect shoe, the perfect fit, the perfect guy and the happily ever after, not to mention her own personal fairy godmother.

"Does this mean my shoes influence my destiny?" I hear you ask. Well of course not, that was a fairytale BUT where you choose to place your feet and walk can influence your destiny for sure, so let's talk more...

Basically you will need a variety of shoes to cater for all the different pathways you encounter on the journey. One pair of slip-ons simply won't take you the distance, trust me.

Some paths are literally a walk in the park, easy! You could almost dance your way along these, like Judy Garland in one of those old black and white movies. Tap shoes or a gorgeous pair of high heels come to mind for a path like this. Then some days you face paths with rough and uneven surfaces where you can trip and fall or find yourself irritated by a stone in your shoe. "No big deal," you say, "challenges are good," and you leave your cute red shiny heels in the closet and dig out that pair of sensible walking shoes more suited to a rougher path.

Now at this point of our conversation I wish I could tell you that after adding some fluffy comfy slippers and a pair of gumboots to your shoe list you will have covered your basic requirements for the journey of life. But alas! this is not the case...The truth is, life throws us so much more than rough or smooth paths. We can expect to encounter some very rocky and dangerous terrain that goes beyond our sensible walking shoes or anything we prepared for. Somewhere down the track you are going to find yourself staring at a big, humungous mountain that seems insurmountable.

What's a girl to do, let alone wear?

Let's see...

Option 1. Sit at the foot of the mountain and cry, possibly sob like a princess or a little girl, believing that you should and will be rescued from this terrible mountain.

Option 2. Get angry and protest how unfair it is that others have seemingly smoother paths with the occasional hump.

Option 3. Be afraid and avoid even looking at the mountain.

Option 4. Wish the mountain away by thinking positive thoughts until it magically disappears.

Option 5. Denial. "What mountain? I don't see any mountain."

Option 6. Attempt to pray the mountain away, utilizing every bible verse and prayer strategy you've ever heard of.

OR

Option 7. Hello! Put on your brave girl pants, kick off those pretty red shiny high heel shoes, grab a pair of sturdy hiking boots and learn how to climb mountains.

Don't feel bad if you have chosen more than one of these options before. I confess to trying all of them at once. Admittedly, sitting down to have a good cry can be therapeutic, but after you get that out of your system, I highly recommend becoming a kick-ass mountain climber which is the wiser, more productive response.

Mountains are part of the landscape of life. They are deeply challenging but also incredibly beneficial, because climbing them is where we develop strength. It's on the mountain where we face our fears and push beyond our perceived capacity. It's on the mountain where perseverance, resilience and character are formed in us.

Mountain climbers are also the ones who discover the rare wild flowers that only grow in the rocky crags. They experience the thrilling beauty of the mountain top, gaining a perspective that is insightful and spectacular. This view can only be earned by courageous climbers who pay the price with their sweat, stinging blisters and aching muscles.

So...do you want to breathe in that mountain top view? See those rare wild flowers for yourself? Then my advice is go shopping and buy yourself a very tough but stylish pair of hiking boots. You're going to need them.



SONG

## Climbing higher

The day begins and no one sees the end  
All is well for now  
When darkness falls, I hold the candle high  
The shadows go away  
I've seen this all before

I'm climbing higher, getting stronger  
Falling down but I get back up again  
I keep on walking, holding on to you

My feet are bleeding and my heart is racing  
The light is going and I can't see what's ahead  
I keep on singing in the hope that I'm free

My mind is strong from wrestling with the wind  
I hear you whisper to me  
My legs are strong from walking deep in snow  
The sun is shining on me  
I've seen this all before

I'm climbing higher, getting stronger  
Falling down but I get back up again  
I keep on walking, holding on to you

My feet are bleeding and my heart is racing  
The light is going and I can't see what's ahead  
I keep on singing in the hope that I'm free

When darkness falls, I hold the candle high  
I hear you whisper to me



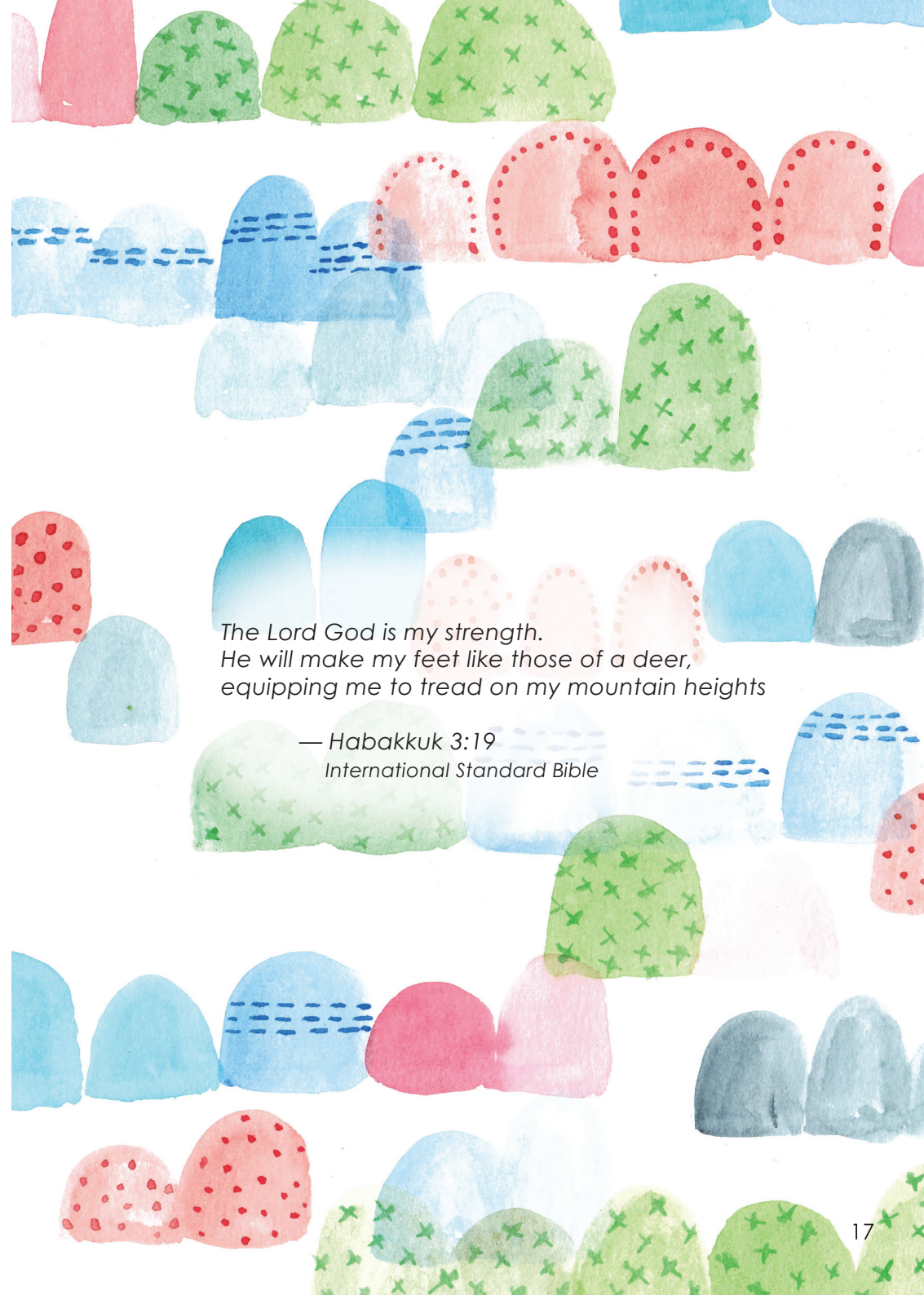


## Reflection

How is your shoe collection looking these days?

How do you feel about climbing your mountains?

What are some 'views' you have already earned from climbing mountains?



*The Lord God is my strength.  
He will make my feet like those of a deer,  
equipping me to tread on my mountain heights*

— Habakkuk 3:19  
International Standard Bible



## Chapter 2

When the map  
doesn't make sense

A hand-drawn sketch of a map, tilted slightly. It shows a grid of streets and several small, irregular shapes that could represent buildings or landmarks. The drawing is simple and illustrative.

*Life is amazing. And then it's awful.  
And then it's amazing again.  
And in-between the amazing and awful  
it's ordinary and mundane and routine.  
Breathe in the amazing, hold on through the awful,  
and relax and exhale during the ordinary.  
That's just living heartbreaking, soul-healing,  
amazing, awful, ordinary life.  
And it's breathtakingly beautiful.*

— L.R. Knots

**A**re you one of those women who have to hold the map upside down sometimes so that it makes sense? Me too. You must also know by now that some people do not look favourably on this practice. In fact it alarms them...but that's a whole other story.

The point is, sometimes the map of our journey doesn't make sense, even when we hold it upside down. Even after we have asked for advice from travel experts, or those clever but alarmed map-readers! Sorry if that's a shock to you, especially if you tend to be a control freak like me, and you're clutching the latest comprehensive state-of-the-art map App like your life depended on it. It's helpful to know this fact right up front, so you don't go travelling through life expecting to always a) feel in control or b) understand why everything happens. Carrying this expectation is not recommended because it will, as your mother used to say, "end in tears".

There may be times when your map of life reads more like a mystery novel with too many twists and turns and no plot rather than the fulfilling and rewarding life plan you were expecting. I have learned to make friends with the word 'mystery' because sometimes that's what life can be – a mysterious mingling of exquisite joy and heartbreaking sorrow.

Ecclesiastes chapter 3 says it so beautifully;

*There is a time and season for everything...  
A time to weep and a time to laugh  
A time to mourn and a time to dance*

The truth is, some roads are hard. We get wounded. We don't understand. Bad and sad things happen to good people. Rain falls on the just and the unjust. There are things in life that are never going to make sense to us this

side of heaven, from earthquakes to infertility to terrible crimes.

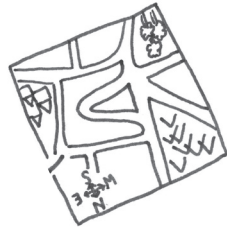
I think that's why God made sure the Psalms were there for us. He knew we'd need those voices expressing the universal human heart cry to help us in our own moments of distress and lament. We relate to their words and emotions as they struggle like us with utter contradictions and deep wrestling in their spirit; people just like you and me who also weren't always able to make sense of their maps or where God was when things fell apart. The Psalms affirm our humanity and invite us to express our journey with authenticity, transparency and raw honesty, avoiding the temptation to pretend all is well all the time.

Over the years I have faced many times when the road I was travelling made no sense. It felt like I was going around in circles and not getting anywhere. And then there are those valleys of sorrow...

I remember one of my darkest nights when grief overwhelmed me. In exasperation I finally turned around and faced God and poured out my fury and desperation at the suffering my child was going through. Wow, it tumbled out in a rage that surprised me. It was like a freight train, my raw painful truth dripping from my mouth and leaking from my eyes. When the sobs finally subsided there was an exhausted, empty stillness that was strangely comforting as I realised I had come clean with God and He was not shocked, surprised or angry. I had the sense he already knew it all and had been waiting for me to be honest with myself and with Him. I was not alone in my heartbroken moment. He didn't abandon me, even when projecting my deep, raw pain at him. My situation didn't change that night, but I did. The memory of this night is like my very own psalm.

I've come to realise that two journeys are constantly

corresponding in my life; one external and the other internal. One is about my circumstances and the other is about my heart. These days as I look at my well-worn life map, I'm allowing it to guide my character more than my footsteps. Maybe this has been its purpose all along...



SONG

## honest conversation

*Can I have an honest conversation?  
Can I say just how I feel?  
I'm waiting here for my revelation  
I can't deny I need what's real*

*Awkward words fall from my tongue  
Jumbled up and underdone  
I'll admit my brokenness  
Say the truth and nothing less*

*I'm so glad you hear my cry  
I'm so glad there are no goodbyes  
Even when my faith is low  
Your embrace and love still flows*

*The only thing that makes it alright  
Is to know you see what's wrong  
I still believe, no matter the season  
These days just come, no rhyme or reason*

*I'm so glad you hear my cry  
I'm so glad there are no goodbyes  
Even when my faith is low  
Your embrace and love still flows*



## Reflection

Do you need to have an honest conversation with God?

Or with yourself?

Have you been avoiding it? Why?

*Lord,  
you know all my desires and deepest longings.  
My tears are liquid words  
and you can read them all.*


— Psalm 38:9  
*The Passion Translation*



*It is not joy that makes us grateful;  
It is gratitude that makes us joyful.*

— David Steindl-Rast

## Chapter 3

Don't forget your  
glasses 

**T**he one item you should never leave home without is your gratitude glasses. Always remember to wear them, because looking at life through the lens of gratitude gives you such a different perspective. Believe me, these glasses can save you from falling into many a ditch of self pity, discontent and unnecessary temper tantrums – which, let's face it, stopped being cute at age 6, agreed? Better still, gratitude glasses look gorgeous, which is why they are the recommended basic accessory for a woman's natural beauty kit.

Viewing life through glasses of gratitude cultivates contentment, which I have discovered can lead to a sweet little feeling called joy – a deep sense that I am glad to be living this life. My life. With all its crazy and bittersweet moments.

This simple act of choosing to look for something good in the middle of our messy lives has a powerful effect. It helps us be present in the life we have now, not the life we wish we had. It opens our eyes to the beauty and blessings already in our day rather than blindly missing them. You see, if we are always wishing our lives were different and focusing on what is not there, we miss the beautiful life we actually do have right now.

Wearing gratitude glasses is like going on a treasure hunt, searching for a hidden gift or blessing in each day. It is amazing what you can find. If you look for joy, you will see it. And if you look for disappointment, you will see it. It's scarily true what they say – you become what you focus on.

Even though your gratitude glasses are totally gorgeous and beneficial to your life, you will be tempted to reach for those blurry glasses of comparison or an old trusty pair of worry glasses, particularly on your dark days. Avoid both of these at all costs. Looking at life through the

lens of comparison to others is destructive and will lead you down a bitter and resentful path. Those comparison glasses seem so comfortable and tempting to wear, but when you look at your reflection in the mirror, be prepared to see a judgemental woman staring back at you. Viewing life through the lens of anxiety will steal your peace and joy for the journey, and leave you hiding in a fearful ditch.

Now I know that some days are hard. Gosh, some years are hard! I too have moments where I can't even think about wearing any glasses because the tears won't stop falling. In my journey with my daughter Sunny, who has a severe disability, I have times where the challenges to care for her are completely overwhelming. Inner rage at the injustice of her loss and its price tag on my own life is wildly screaming at me to give up...and I do give up and lose it for a moment – just like you probably do too in the context of your own challenges. I feel it all and it hurts like hell, and I am powerless to change it. Then I breathe... and keep living... and soon enough Sunny smiles that smile... and there it is – my gift, my lifeline. How I love that little girl. These are the moments when gratitude saves me. Sometimes the only thing I have power over is how I choose to respond to what's happening in my life. And all I know is that I want my story and destination to be love, so I choose gratitude.

Remember, beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder – and that's you. What can you see? What are you looking for? Grab your faith-filled, hopeful gratitude glasses today and go on a treasure hunt!

SONG

# grateful

Bitterness go away  
Don't come around today  
I won't forget to take a breath  
And open my eyes

This journey gives and then it takes  
Life is a mystery  
So I will choose gratitude  
Hear my heart say

I am grateful  
So grateful for the gift of today  
I am grateful  
So grateful you love me always

Every winding road  
All the ways I've grown  
The scars that I bear

Storms that made me brave  
Pain that made me change  
I'm thankful they came

I will take it all  
The sorrow and the joy  
The gift of today

The privilege to love  
The sacred power to bless  
It's all in my hands

I am grateful, so grateful  
I am grateful for making me strong  
I am grateful that hope is my song

I am grateful your mercies are new  
I am grateful you are faithful and true

I am grateful  
The bitter and the sweet





## Reflection

Have you ever tried 365 days of gratitude?

Are you taking note of the gifts you see in your every day life?

Do you struggle to put down those glasses of comparison?

Do you find yourself drawn to those worry glasses?

*The faithful love of the Lord never ends!  
His mercies never cease.  
Great is his faithfulness;  
His mercies begin afresh each morning.*

— Lamentations 3:22-23  
New Living Bible



## Chapter 4

that Little Bird  
CALLED *hope* 

*Hope is the thing with feathers  
that perches in the soul –  
and sings tunes without words –  
and never stops at all.*

— Emily Dickinson

**S**ome things in life are overrated, like counting calories and organised tupperware cupboards, but hope is not one of them. We can't live without hope! It's like oxygen for our soul. We look for hope every day, just like the sunflowers lift their face reaching and stretching toward the bright sun. Without the sun they wilt, and without hope our hearts will wilt too. Hope lifts us up and strengthens us for the journey.

Hope is that little bird, perched on your shoulder, singing in your ear as you travel. She sings her song of hope, faith and strength, reminding us that it is good to be alive.

Some days you hear her song very clearly and it's so beautiful you want to sing along with her, hearing the melody deeply within you. Other days you are just quietly aware that she is there with you, and that is enough. And then there are those hard times when we fear she has flown away, never to return. That's how it feels when you experience a painful season of hardship, loss or disappointment. It's like a cold, dark winter right in your soul, and the darkness makes it hard to see or recognise hope, so life appears bleak and colourless. Cold chills of sadness and grief numb you to the point of freezing, and you wonder if you will ever feel warmth in your soul again.

Take heart if you find yourself there, because the seasons of your soul keep changing just like the seasons we observe in nature. Be kind to yourself. Keep warm. Stay nourished... And one of these days you will notice a warm breeze teasing you with the promise of spring, a fragrant scent in the air. And if you listen...yes, you can hear her very faintly...there she is...that little bird called Hope.

No matter what season you find yourself in, hope is always there, because the source of all hope never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is there, with you. Keep your heart fixed on Him.

## SONG

### hope of my life

*I will look to you  
Set my eyes on you  
Everyday  
Trusting you always*

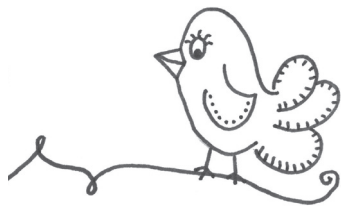
*I will bless the Lord  
Every season of my soul  
No matter what life brings  
To Jesus my soul sings*

*You are the hope of my life  
Always*

*I will wait on you  
Set my heart on you  
Everyday  
Loving you always*

*I will bless the Lord  
Every season of my soul  
No matter what life brings  
To Jesus my soul sings*

*You are the hope of my life  
Always*



### Reflection

What is that little bird called Hope singing in your ear today?

What is the song she most often sings to you?

What season are you in at this time?



*He's the hope that holds me,  
and the stronghold to shelter me,  
the only God for me,  
and my great confidence.*

— Psalm 91:2  
The Passion Bible



*New beginnings are often  
disguised as painful endings.*

— Lao Tzu

## Chapter 5

YOUR inner  
COMPASS



**A**ll journeys have beginnings and endings. But sometimes you find yourself in this interesting space that lies in-between the end of one journey and the beginning of a new one. It's like an uncomfortable yet necessary bridge of change, where you are waiting in between what was, and what will be. You can feel very lost on the bridge, and may desperately long to go back to where you felt comfortable and had a sense of identity and control.

If you find yourself facing a bridge, don't rush over it as fast as you can, even though your head is screaming at you to just move on. Take your time and tune in to your inner compass. Whether your bridge is long or just a short stroll, it offers the gift of insight that helps prepare you for whatever is next. If you have just come through a very difficult journey that has brought immense change with it, the bridge allows you time to process, adjust and grieve.

Of all the bridges I have crossed in the course of my life, one has been the longest and hardest and the most redefining. The day I left Chicago and boarded a plane back to Australia, leaving behind my dream job and my tribe of support, I had no idea that I was stepping onto a bridge that would change my life forever. My husband and I returned to Australia with our twin 3 year old daughters, leaving behind the wonderful church community and fulfilling life we had known as home in the U.S. for years. It was a decision we made for love, for the future of our daughter Sunny who has a severe disability. I went from singing on a platform and working with highly creative people, to wearing my knees out on the floor doing physical therapy with my daughter and being surrounded by the reality of cerebral palsy. Instead of singing worship songs with gifted musicians, I was singing rhymes with other dedicated mothers as we all tried to assist with our children's therapy program. My life changed dramatically, and I was completely lost in this tsunami of change.

Singing at my piano has always been my sacred place in life. It is my home, my language, my altar; my meeting place with God. But on this bridge, my piano was now a symbol of my pain, of what I had lost, and I felt completely empty when I tried to play it.

I desperately wanted to go back to what I knew, to the old me that was familiar; the singer who was full of deep faith who loved to move people's hearts through songs. But I had changed...pain and love and mystery had messed with me permanently, and I was heartbroken over it all – my daughter's disability, the uncertain future, and the loss of dreams and community. I realised I needed to grieve on this bridge, and embrace my new life instead of trying to control it and fix it.

It was a long and difficult bridge to travel, and for a while, I kept looking back over my shoulder, thinking I was meant to go back. But every time I turned my head, I would feel those winds of change blowing on my face and in my spirit like they were calling me. I began trusting my inner compass which was telling me to rest...and listen. I cautiously went back to my piano... and the 'still small voice' song quietly and tearfully slipped out, guiding me to dream new dreams, travel new journeys and look toward whatever lay at the end of the bridge.

I can't remember the moment I stepped off that bridge into my next journey. But I do know that I was still that same singer, full of deep faith who loves to move people's hearts through songs...except I was now walking with a braver yet broken heart, a deeper appreciation for the complex painful mess that is life, and a new rule for living my life which was all about love. And a slightly bigger coffee addiction...

# Still small voice

Still small voice  
Speak to me  
Wake up my heart  
Give me a start

Somewhere in the mess of life  
I've lost my song  
Lost that sacred place in my soul

I can go through the motions  
Have clever conversations  
But deeper seas are calling to me

I don't know what to say  
I don't know what to do  
So I look to you

Still small voice  
Speak to me  
Start humming the tune  
So I can believe

Maybe it's the sadness  
Maybe it's just life  
The winds of change can take your breath away

I don't know what to say  
I don't know what to do  
So I look to you

I am looking to the power that is greater  
To the spirit that binds us all together  
To the love that makes it all worthwhile  
That makes you wanna, love makes you wanna try  
Makes it all worthwhile




## Reflection

Can you recall some significant bridges you have travelled on?

How do you tune your hearing to God and hear that still small voice?

Can you recall a time your inner compass guided you when you felt lost?



Surrender to what is  
Let go of what was  
Have faith in what will be

— Sonia Ricotti





*Difficult roads often lead to beautiful destinations.*

## Chapter 6



**W**e don't always get to choose our pathways. It can seem like they sometimes choose us. Luckily some of these unexpected surprises can be a delightful detour, leading us to new horizons we would never have otherwise explored. For example, you break your leg, fall in love with your doctor who wants to be a missionary and now you both run an orphanage in Tanzania! But now and then life just happens and, like it or not, we find ourselves travelling on a journey we never signed up for that redefines our life forever – chronic medical conditions, accidents, divorce, infertility, bankruptcy, cancer, tragedies. Some of these paths only last a season, like a dark valley we travel through and then come out the other side, while others continue for the duration of our life. Some paths are relentlessly challenging and heartbreaking. Paths that involve suffering.

But sometimes it's those unexpected difficult journeys that can bring us the most insight and where we learn our richest life lessons. They can draw out of us things we never knew were there.

My unexpected pathway is a love story – raw and real, not the Disneyland-type love story. One that messes with you. That love story crashed into my life 12 years ago, in a blur of trauma, with the birth of my twin girls, Jazmine and Sunshine. They were born 3 months early, and Sunshine paid a high price to survive – she has severe cerebral palsy and is profoundly deaf. She has a degree of hearing today thanks to the miracle of a cochlear implant, but needs full time care 24/7. She also knows how to love like no other and has a smile that will rock your world.

As I started to experience this unexpected pathway stretch out before me, I felt crushed, completely smashed. This unfolding path was nothing like the beautiful dream path of motherhood I had been praying for and longing for. I expected healthy children. It had to be a mistake.

I needed to fix it all so I could get back on to my dream path with no disappointments. Riding in the back of an ambulance for the first time with my baby hooked up to beeping monitors and oxygen, I had the distinct feeling that I was in the wrong life. I was meant to be in another life, smiling with deep contentment as I rocked my baby to sleep in a rocking chair! But this was my life – full of hospitals, therapists, surgeries, meds and equipment, and a rocking chair where I sat in the dark of night and sobbed as I held my baby and tried desperately to rock her to sleep. It felt like life was over. But it wasn't. It was just going to be very different. And that's what it is – a completely different journey from the one I expected I would have. A new normal. Our little family lives and moves to a different rhythm than other typical families. It has limitations. It's always complicated. There is more work in our daily routine. Truth is it can be exhausting: physically, mentally and emotionally. And spiritually? I can't even begin to tell you the mysterious journey this love story takes your faith on.

But what am I learning from this pathway? A hard but stunning lesson in love. That love can come with a high price tag. That love can be sacrificial, fierce, and crazy, making you do desperate things like walk away from your dream job and move countries. That love is our highest calling. I never understood love until Sunny.

My day always ends the same. Every night I give Sunny a goodnight kiss while she is sleeping and pause to soak up the beauty...those adorable cheeks, her blonde curls...I don't know how to convey it, but it is holy ground. It rips open my heart in such a bittersweet way, and even though it can be so incredibly heartbreaking, I wouldn't want to live without that girl and her smile. There's something I glimpse in that moment. It's like God is saying "See! The greatest is love. It's all about love."

I remember in the early days, returning home one night from leading worship at my wonderful church. I kept thinking how easy it was to sing all those songs to God compared to being here at home, in the darkness at 2 am again, exhausted, with a suffering child. As I stood in silence at the top of the stairs and snuggled her close on my shoulder and kissed her chubby cheek and poured my love on her, I heard God whisper to me "Now you're worshipping me – now! Not up there on the platform where it's easy, but here in this brokenness where you choose love." Those whispers from God have redefined my faith and values.

I have been wrecked by my unexpected journey, but beautifully wrecked. Maybe I needed to become undone. If the "greatest is love"...then this may be the grandest journey my soul will ever experience. All I know is I am changed for the better.

Maybe our unexpected pathways are an invitation to grow in a way we never could on other paths, to learn what can only come through a pathway of suffering. Maybe this:

*I walked a mile with Pleasure  
She chatted all the way  
Leaving me none the wiser  
For all she had to say*

*I walked a mile with Sorrow  
Never a word said she  
But, oh, the things I learned from her  
When sorrow walked with me*

— Robert Browning Hamilton

SONG

## Sunny's Song

Hey little girl  
Don't you lose that smile  
It's gonna be okay  
You make me realise

That at the end of the day  
When I close my eyes and I pray  
There is love, crazy love  
Sweet strong love

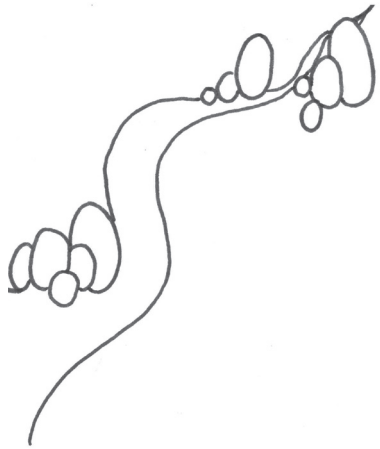
I won't pretend  
Yeah it makes me cry  
The questions remain  
They leave me asking why

But at the end of the day  
When my hope and faith start to fade  
There's still love, crazy love  
Sweet strong love

So every night  
I kiss your cheek  
I take in your beauty  
As I watch you sleep

And when I'm empty of it all  
I've spent all I am  
And I'm crying on the floor  
It's your smile that fills me again

And even if I'm tasting my tears  
I'm fighting the fears  
As I feel you breathe  
This is what it means to love



## Reflection

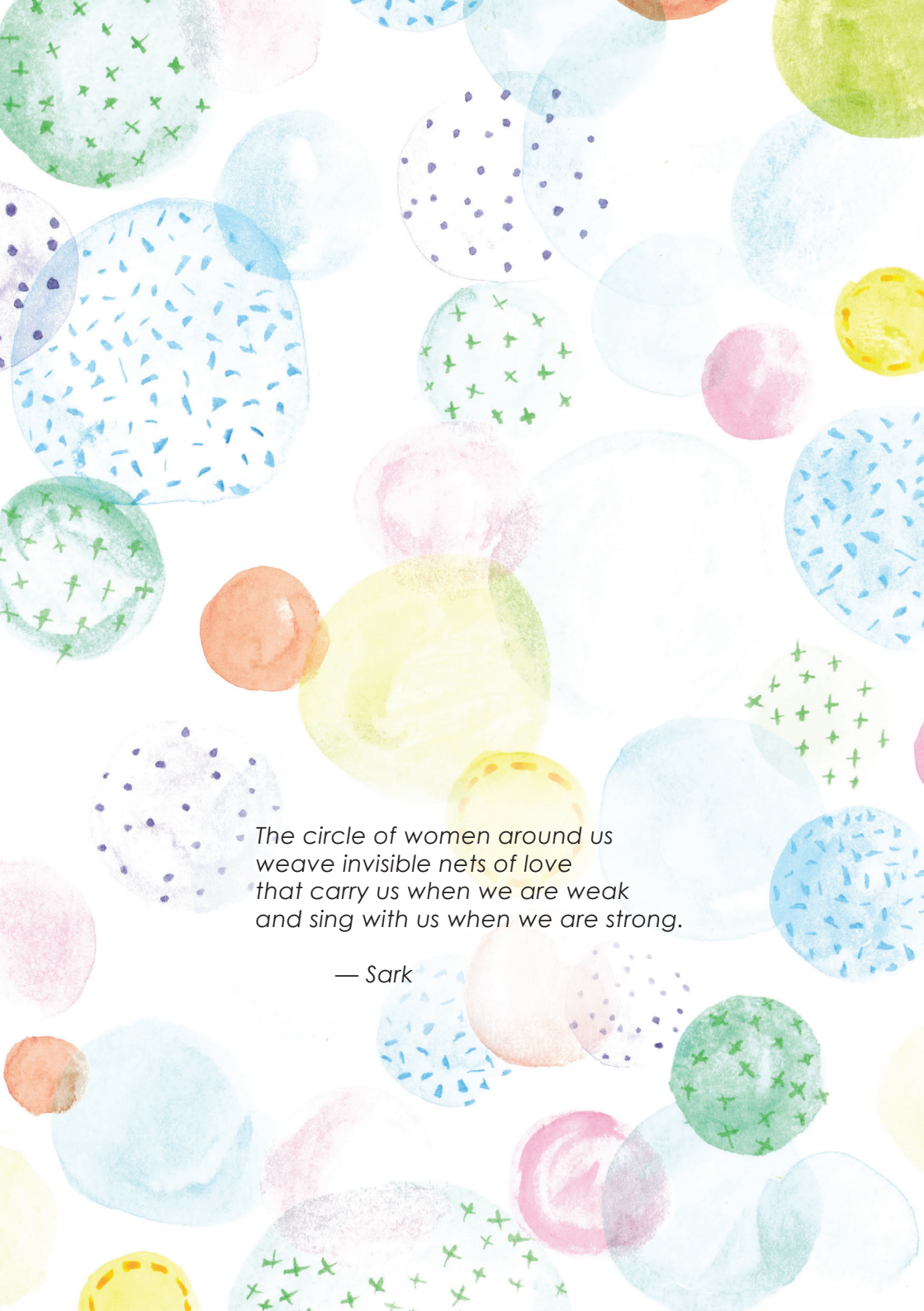
What are some of the unexpected pathways you have encountered in your life?

Did you find a treasure in the darkness?

How has your unexpected pathway changed you?

*Trust steadily in God.  
Hope unswervingly,  
Love extravagantly.  
And the best of the three is Love.*

— 1 Corinthians 13:13  
*The Message Bible*



## Chapter 7

NEVER TRAVEL  
alone *✿✿*

*The circle of women around us  
weave invisible nets of love  
that carry us when we are weak  
and sing with us when we are strong.*

— Sark

This journey of life is not meant to be travelled in isolation, so please don't even consider trying to do this alone. Superwoman is a fun pretend character for costume parties but in the real world we need each other. Finding good travelling companions is critical. Surrounding yourself with others who will share the journey leads to the discovery of one of God's greatest gifts: the powerful blessing of community.

These companions can share crazy dances with you and make you laugh, or hold your hand when you feel scared and provide a listening ear or a shoulder to cry on. They might push you out of the way of danger, or fight enemies on your behalf like a scene in an action movie because you didn't even see the danger coming. Sometimes they need to lovingly drag you kicking and screaming through a necessary tough path that you are resisting because of fear. And sometimes they are the ones who carry you through the most painful part of a journey; you may even be unconscious from trauma as they carry you through the darkest part of a valley. Like a medical team, they keep you alive when your soul is in intensive care and see you through to recovery.

There may be moments when you desperately need the insight and guidance of someone who has previously travelled down the exact path you are facing. To find such people is gold. They know from raw experience how that path looks and feels, where the dangers are, supplies you will need to survive the journey and other valuable advice. It's like finding someone who speaks your language, rescuing your heart from the debilitating sense of isolation.

I will never forget meeting Kelly. She was the first fellow mother of a child with a disability I had ever met. The reason I remember it so well is because it had such a profound effect on me. Waking up the next morning

after chatting with her for hours the evening before, I felt something distinctly different in my heart, something I hadn't felt for quite a while: HOPE! Sharing this new and challenging journey with another woman who spoke my language infused hope and encouragement into me in a way absolutely no one else could do. Because of Kelly I now have a tribe of fellow mothers parenting children with a disability who keep me sane as we share our unique journey on a road less travelled.

It is such a powerful experience to give and receive loving support as we travel together. What a difference we can make in each other's lives. Of course it's more comfortable to be the giver; that can feel great. Sometimes being the receiver can leave you feeling vulnerable and uncomfortable, but what an incredibly humbling and valuing experience to let God love us through the hands and feet of others... I think that's the way it's meant to be.

So don't travel alone. The journey is so much sweeter when shared.



SONG

# Love CARRIED me

What I am is because someone gave me  
Another chance to see all I can be  
And everyday I take the time to be so grateful

Fallen words have broken open my heart  
Cannon ball has fired and I can see it coming over  
But you push in front to save me

Love carried me  
Love carried me again

Now I see all that I have instead of  
What I don't or time lost out to sea  
All I needed was for you to stand by me

Walk the path of someone and you'll see that  
There's a need for us to reach beyond  
Our speculation and expectation of trouble free

Love carried me  
Love carried me again

Running along, nowhere to go  
You sang your song  
And lifted me above  
Surrounding me in love

You showed me the other side  
Now I can see  
It's not just black and white  
But colour in the sky

Love carried me  
Love carried me again





## Reflection

Are you trying to survive alone? Do you need to let others love you right now?

Is God asking you to be a giver and invest into someone else's journey today?

Who can you be a Kelly to?

Do you find it hard to be a receiver?

Do you have a journey that you know you would not have survived unless you were carried by others?

*Rejoice with those who rejoice  
Weep with those who weep.*

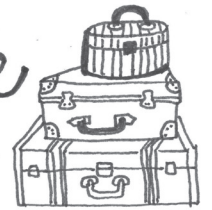
— Romans 12:15  
The Bible



*Holding on to anger is like drinking poison  
and expecting the other person to die.*

## Chapter 8

Let's talk *luggage*



**M**any women like to have a bag that matches their shoes, which means you can easily find yourself with quite a collection in your wardrobe.

When travelling, it's best to take the right amount of luggage suited to the particular journey you are embarking on. Are you one of those women who always pack too much luggage? Then you have to drag it around, silently berating yourself for over-packing yet AGAIN, relying on the kindness of others to assist you – which may or may not include an annoyed but wonderful long-suffering male accompanying you on the trip.

But what about luggage from the past? Often we don't even realise that we are carrying excess baggage in our lives; suitcases packed with our anger and hurt, handbags carrying our fears, purses crammed full of resentment and bitterness and tote bags carrying destructive habits.

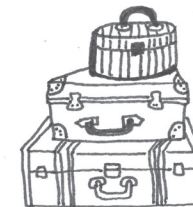
Holding on to luggage from the past can make your journey very difficult. Not only is it exhausting carrying the heavy burden of all those bags, it robs you of finding joy in the journey. Your hands are so busy clutching your baggage that you are not free to reach out and connect with other fellow travellers; they can't get close to you because of the luggage you carry. In fact some may even get knocked and bruised by the sharp edges of your luggage when they get close to you. Ultimately, baggage can be destructive to relationships, and you can end up feeling quite alone, unaware that the baggage you hold on to is contributing to your loneliness.

We need to learn to let go and travel lighter. Letting go of this kind of luggage can be tricky if you have been carrying it around for years, because your hands have become so accustomed to clutching it that you believe the baggage is actually a part of you. This is where the beauty of love, friendship and counsel steps in, as you

allow someone to carefully help you let go, one finger at a time, until you can finally release the unwanted baggage. This process can take time but the incredible freedom experienced once you have let go is completely worth the challenging process.

Keep your luggage to a minimum so you are free to enjoy the journey. Most days all a girl really needs to carry in her bag is love and a little lip gloss.

Oh and yes, of course, always match your bag with your shoes...



# Letting you go

I'm letting you go  
I'm saying goodbye  
I don't want to be  
Angry anymore

I'm letting you go  
I'm setting you free  
My soul has found  
Precious release

I'm letting you go  
So I can let me go too  
'Cause I want to fly  
Free like a bird

But this anger and pain  
Is keeping me in chains

So I'm letting you go  
I'm saying goodbye  
I've found a love  
That has dried my eyes

I'm letting you go  
I'm setting you free  
So I can finally  
Be free

I want my heartbeat to be mercy  
To be like the heartbeat of God  
Who opened a door of mercy for me  
So now I open mercy's door for you  
And let you go



## Reflection

What excess luggage are you travelling with today?

What do you need to let go of?

Are you carrying something daily that is robbing you of joy?

Is the luggage you carry keeping others at a distance, causing you to feel alone?

*...dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline... and regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.*

— Colossians 3:12-14  
The Message Bible



Mother:  
one who does the work of twenty.  
For free.

## Chapter 9

The danger  
zone



**E**arly motherhood is the crazy zone. Your body, mind, heart and hormones are beating to the sound of the motherhood drum, and that music is loud, fast and furious! Life is so fast paced when in that high nurturing gear, constantly focusing on the lives of your children that you are in danger of losing yourself.

It's shocking to glance in the hallway mirror whilst rushing out the door pushing a stroller, juggling bags, rushing to get somewhere on time and you don't recognise the woman looking back. Who are you? And what have you done with the me I know? The me I used to be?

It's not just the unkempt hair, unshaven legs and never actually finishing a cup of tea...it's the way motherhood changes us so much that can be scary.

Some days in the motherhood zone you can feel like Wonder Woman; you experience moments of freakish pure genius and pull off what you see as miracles. Oh please enjoy those magical days when it all comes together and you even feel like you are in control for a teeny weeny second, because that satisfied smile and sense of empowerment will carry you through whatever happens next.

But most of the time this pathway looks and feels very ordinary, and involves the mundane: packing lunches, loads of washing, wiping sticky little fingers, disguising veggies in spaghetti sauce, no sleep, finding sultanas in the sofa and car for years and singing along to songs that haunt you at night like "the wheels on the bus go round and round AND ROUND AND ROUND." You get the picture.

So here's my bottom-line motherhood zone wisdom;

If your kids feel loved today, you are nailing it.

So smile and attempt that cup of tea...

Hey, I'm not minimising the need for vegetables, but kids need you to look into their eyes and nourish their soul just as much as feed their bodies.

When things get really tough, follow the sage advice of those clever flight attendants you usually ignore: put on your own oxygen mask first, then attend to your child's.

Don't miss this zone just because it is crazy and challenging. Heck, women were made for crazy and challenging! Embrace the chaotic messy motherhood pathway; be present in every precious, sticky little moment, even though you may feel tempted to merely endure it. Why? Because Robert Brault was right:

*Enjoy the little things in life  
For one day you'll look back and realise  
They were the big things.*

And ultimately, keep your sense of humour, because this early motherhood crazy pathway really will just pass in the blink of an eye and soon you will be lamenting, "Where has my baby gone?"



SONG

# Slow down

Alarms are ringing and the morning is beginning  
My mind starts racing away  
Coffee is brewing and the lunches I am doing  
Not enough hours today

Kids are out the door and I am choosing to ignore  
The chaos that follows me  
My husband's on his way as he complains about his day  
As I juggle one two three

Caught in a haze in the core of a maze  
I need to breathe

Oh the day is calling  
Slow me down so I can  
See what's around  
And have the time to see your eyes  
Oh I need to slow down  
Leave my feet on the ground  
Let the breeze in  
Change the pace of the race I'm in

Now I am awaiting in a line that's not abating  
Time is ticking past me  
Doesn't everybody know, I have a life, I need to go  
School's done at half past three

Now I'm getting dinner done and everyone is having fun  
A laugh catches me by surprise  
Now it's time for bed and I am trying to rest my head  
We'll do it all again

Caught in a haze in the core of a maze  
I need to breathe

Oh the day is calling  
Slow me down so I can  
See what's around  
And have the time to see your eyes  
Oh I need to slow down  
Leave my feet on the ground  
Let the breeze in  
Change the pace of the race I'm in





## Reflection

How do you slow down?

What one thing can you do to be kind to yourself today?

What's your survival strategy besides caffeine?

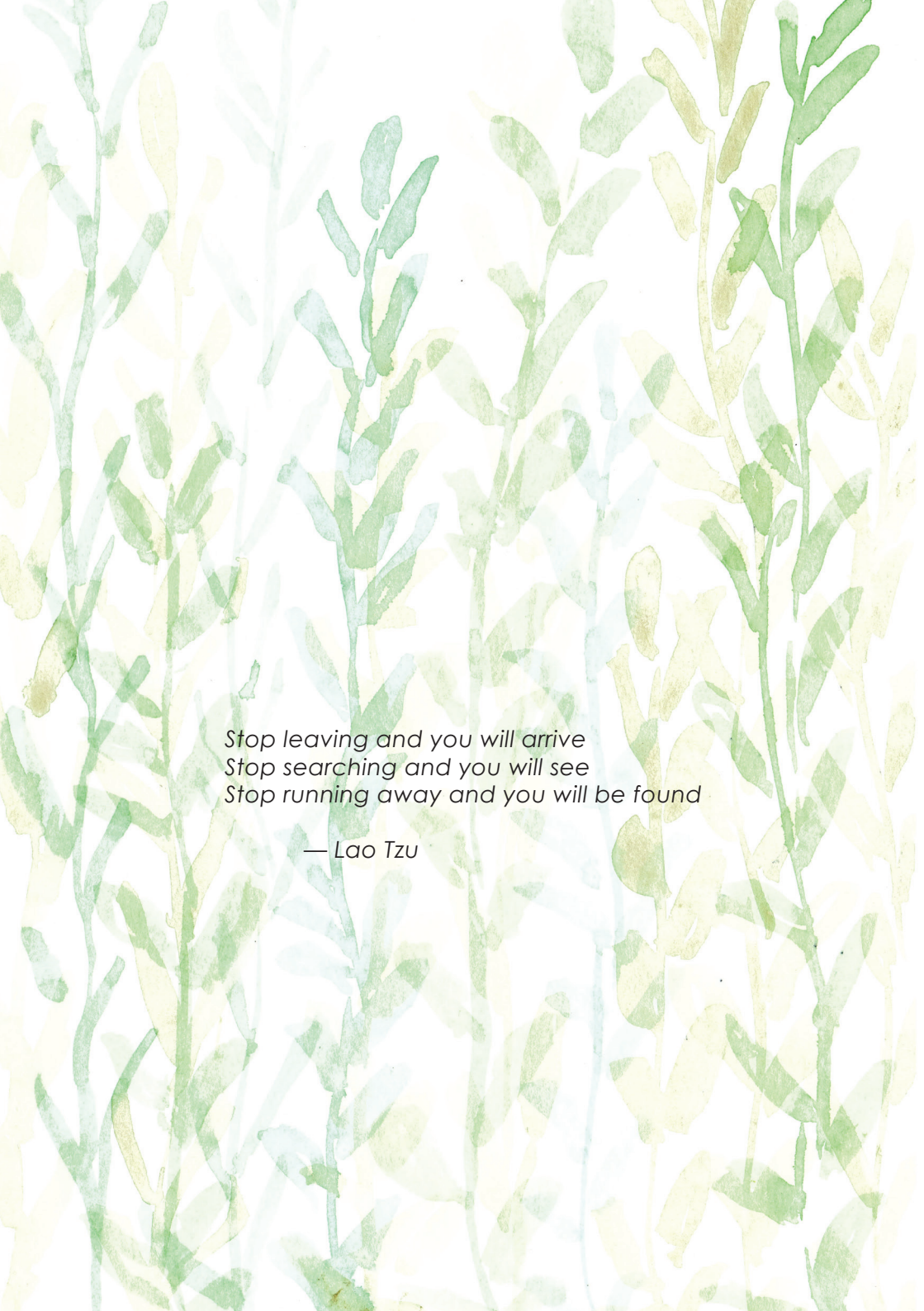
What does it mean for you to put on your oxygen mask?

*Don't worry, you're not the first mum who's ever thrown a towel over the peed-on sheets and gone back to bed.*

*Nothing is ever really lost until mum can't find it.*

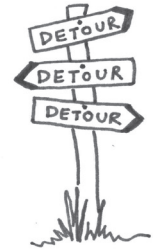
*Silence is golden...  
unless you have kids,  
then silence is just suspicious.*

*Those who say  
'sleep like a baby'  
haven't got one.*



## Chapter 10

# getting lost on detours



*Stop leaving and you will arrive  
Stop searching and you will see  
Stop running away and you will be found*

— Lao Tzu

**R**unning can be good. There are some women who like to run for enjoyment; you know, they go jogging, run marathons, hit the treadmills at the gym, play sport, etc. Unfortunately I have never been able to emulate these energetic women, although I have desperately wanted to. Even bought the cute outfit. I tried, really I did, but alas! hot and sweaty isn't my thing. Who'd have thought?

But I'm not talking about that kind of running.

The kind of running I have been very good at in my life is emotional running – hey, I could win awards if this kind of running was a competitive sport. It's an internal behaviour that, unfortunately unlike physical running, does not lead to a healthier life.

This is what a lot of us do, in a million different ways in our lives. We run away on the inside. When our pathway is full of a pain that we seem to have no control over, our instinct is to run and lose ourselves on a detour of some kind. It's a wonderful distraction.

Most of us started this internal running pattern in our childhood; we ran away with our pain to the nearest detour we could find that provided any relief. Almost like playing hide and seek with life itself. We found hiding places, coping strategies, survival mechanisms and behaviour patterns that made us feel better in the moment.

But here's the problem with constantly running away, taking detours in life: those hiding places can feel like our new best friend at first, offering comfort and relief, but they can end up being our worst enemy. What can seem like a safe refuge and haven becomes a prison, and we become trapped and imprisoned in self-protective behaviours and addictions those detours offer. They lead to nowhere!

You end up stuck and lost and not where your heart really wants to be.

Instead of running to our detours of self-protection and hiding places, we need to find the courage to embark on our journey of healing. This healing journey is a challenging but incredibly worthwhile path for our soul, and I recommend with all my heart that you allow the companion of your soul (see chapter 11) to accompany you.

From my own experience I can tell you that a healing journey cannot happen in isolation. It happens within the deep love, guidance and support of relationship with others – usually God and trusted people.

You don't have to run away on detours anymore; you are strong and brave enough to walk down any path that is calling you and leading you to a fuller life.

Take your talent for running to the gym instead...



SONG

# Running AWAY

When I was a little girl  
I would run away  
On the inside  
To a faraway place  
Tucked away in my heart  
Where the pain was gone  
And no one hurt me  
Where I was not afraid  
To let my heart go free

Oh how I wanted to stay  
And hide in my faraway place  
To keep the pain of life far from me

But life would call me back  
From my hiding place  
To be the girl  
That I found so hard to be

Where does a girl go  
When her heart beats with sadness  
But her face bears a smile  
To keep her safe

She can't find the words to speak the pain  
And no one's listening anyway  
When it hurts too much to stay  
She runs away

Well I'm not a little girl anymore  
Childhood was years ago  
But sometimes  
I still run away inside  
To that faraway place all alone  
When my heart is torn  
And pain visits me  
When loneliness and fear  
Whisper in my ear

And oh how I've wanted to stay  
And just hide in my faraway place  
And keep the pain of life far from me

But life is calling me back  
From my hiding place  
To be the girl  
That I still find hard to be

Where does a girl go  
When her heart beats with sadness  
But her face bears a smile  
To keep her safe

God help me find the words to speak the pain  
'Cause I know you're listening today  
Though it hurts so much to stay  
I don't wanna keep running away



## Reflection

Do you find yourself still getting lost on detours today?

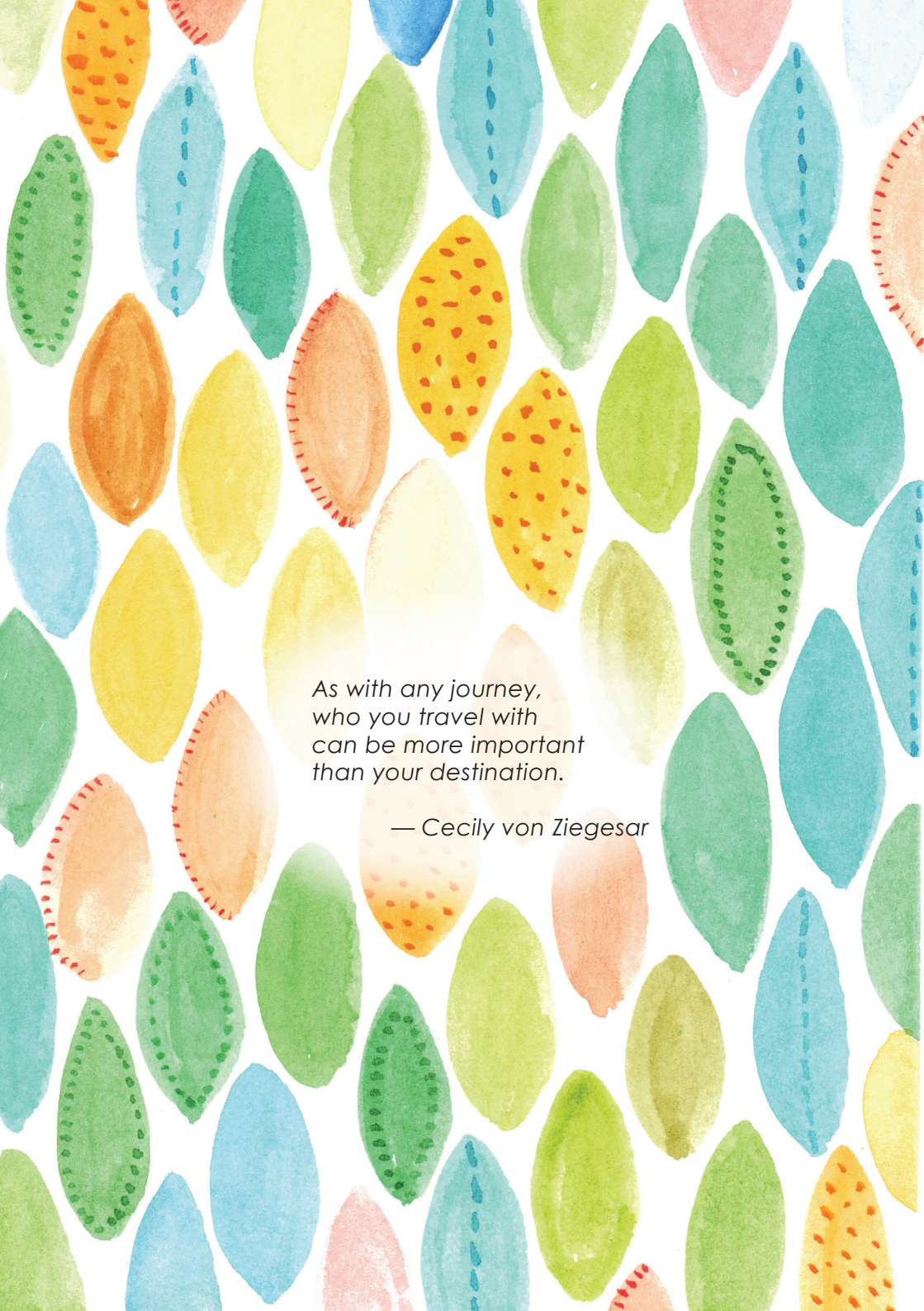
What were some of your childhood detours?

Do you still find yourself drawn to those hiding places?

Have you ever embarked on a healing journey?

*He alone is my safe place;  
His wrap-around presence always protects me.  
He is my champion defender.*

— Psalm 62:2  
The Passion Bible



*As with any journey,  
who you travel with  
can be more important  
than your destination.*

— Cecily von Ziegesar

## Chapter 11

THE TRAVEL companion  
for YOUR soul 

I wrote the song 'One Name' in a good season of my life when it was easy to sing with a strong faith and passion. For me, the song declares a simple but powerful truth as I walk my life journey. It has been, and still is, the theme song for the soundtrack of my life. But it's not the song itself that is precious to me; it's who the song is about. Many of us hold on to something or someone to help us make sense of our life journey in order to give meaning to it all. What do you hold on to?

I have been holding on to Jesus my whole life. He's been the travelling companion for my soul, sharing the journey alongside me, whether it's a difficult road or a sweet path beside still waters. I've realised he is not there to change my path so it's smoother or easier; he's there to change me so I can find meaning in the journey. Having Jesus travelling by my side doesn't make me feel safe – he makes me feel brave.

The song 'One Name' has travelled with me on many twists and turns throughout my life journey. I can recall significant times over the past years when that song was playing intensely in my heart, carrying me through my most desperate moments, giving much needed courage, comfort, hope and faith to my soul.

...Like the time I needed to walk the difficult path of facing the abuse I experienced as a child. I felt Jesus alongside me whispering courage as he led me out of the emotional and psychological prison I had been trapped in for years, surrounding me with people to guide me on that healing journey...

...and the first morning after I had been given the diagnosis of breast cancer. As I awoke, I remember that big ugly word 'cancer' shouting at me and I dissolved into tears. I had no comeback and I was overwhelmed with fear. I knew I had a battle on my hands and needed

far more than tears to fight with. The only thing I knew to do was call on that name that had always given meaning to my life up to that point. The next morning as I awoke, the same word 'cancer' came to scare me, and without hesitation my voice spoke out its comeback: 'Jesus'. It felt like cancer had met its match that day. That song became my warrior anthem throughout that cancer journey...

...and then when infertility wove itself into my journey, Jesus quietly sat with me through the sorrow of each disappointment. I would try to sing that song often, waving it like a banner of defiant faith, even though it was a banner saturated with my private tears...

...and when I miscarried our first pregnancy, I was too tender to sing or pray anything for a long while, but I clutched that song tightly and tucked it firmly in my pocket. I can't remember feeling anything but numbness, but I was aware that Jesus walked silently with me. The fact that I couldn't even acknowledge him there didn't seem to bother him at all...

...and then years later in another country as I spent distraught months in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit watching my premature twin babies fight for life, the song returned to travel that road with me. As we played our songs on a CD player in their humidity crib so they could hear our voices, I would hear that song and wonder who was that girl singing with such a strong faith? It was a full circle moment as that song gently reminded my weary heart of the name that was present with me in that hospital room, even though I couldn't sense him at the time...

...soon after I was faced with the diagnosis for one of my precious babies that frightened me even more: cerebral palsy and profound deafness. It was a life defining

moment. This would be it, I thought; where it all falls apart. Surely this is too much for me, for our marriage, for my soul. Would that name be able to sustain me on this overwhelming new path called disability? A path I was completely unprepared for?

It seems there is no path that Jesus cannot or will not travel with us, because, yes, he has never left my side in all the complexity of this journey. And in the oh so many times I fell apart...he held me together and still does today.

That's the name I am still calling on today, every morning as I wake to face whatever the day may hold. The song is usually playing at high volume in my heart. It's as necessary to my survival as my morning coffee! This name is still filling me, still saving me, and still by my side.

His name is Jesus.



## SONG

### one name

Every morning  
Every day  
There is one name  
I will proclaim

He is always near  
His mercy follows me

There is one name that I will call  
The name of Jesus  
No other name can fill my soul  
With such sweetness

There is one name that saves us all  
Jesus





## Reflection

Has there been a journey where you were powerfully aware of Jesus being present with you?

Have you ever prayed to Jesus, asking him to travel your life journey with you?

Do you have a theme song?

What songs are on the soundtrack of your life?

*I'll never let you down,  
never walk off and leave you.*

— Hebrews 13:5  
The Message Bible

## Chapter 12

# Rest Stops

*He offers a resting place for me  
in his luxurious love.  
His tracks take me to an oasis of peace,  
the quiet brook of peace.  
That's where he restores and revives my life...*

— Psalm 23:2-3  
The Passion Bible

**I**t is so important to take time to rest. I'm not talking about taking a big holiday, but rather carving out regular moments and spaces for rest as part of your itinerary. This unique pastime called rest is not just for your body, but for your mind and soul too.

Somewhere in between the travel and exploring, learning and growing, working and playing you need times where you simply stop; stop the rushing activity of hands and feet, stop thinking and strategising and problem solving in your mind.

Stop doing and just BE for a while. Breathe.

This can be difficult for those whose sense of worth has become tied up in 'doing' instead of 'being'. Some of us are driven to busy activity because we think we must earn our worth by doing and performing, and only then are we loved. We never feel valuable enough to just be. If this is one of your core beliefs then you are heading down a road that will make you feel incredibly exhausted and still not valued.

The truth is you can rest in being loved by God for who you are, not what you do. Once you lean into that truth and start to believe it, the art of resting becomes a life-giving experience where you find yourself being filled up with affirmation, strength and peace.

Resting allows you to reflect and replenish, to recharge and restore, helping you enjoy the journey rather than merely race toward the destination.

Finding your own unique rest stops that fill you up is a joyful treasure hunt your soul can embark on! We all find rest in different ways, so don't follow the crowd; set off on your own exploration.

God has given us a world brimming over with outrageous beauty; so many places and spaces calling us to be present and rest. There are quiet gifts waiting for us in the sunset, at the beach shore, in the foggy green ancient forest, in the scented garden, in the night sky as we gaze in wonder at the stars. There are simple places of rest to be found by your window, in your favourite reading chair or on a park bench.

The beach seems to be the place that calls me to rest when I am overwhelmed, tired or hurting. The minute my eyes glimpse the blue sea and calming sand, I begin to relax. There is something calming about the sound and rhythm of waves, lapping at my feet; they sing a reassuring song of God's faithful love to me, washing over my soul. I exhale and breathe in God's grace. Sometimes I need to stand before the crashing ocean waves where I feel small against their grandeur and allow the waves to reassure me there is a greater power than myself that I can trust in.

Even the exquisite seashells that decorate the shoreline are whispering mysteries about the Creator to me as I rest and soak in the wonder of nature.

My soul is quietly being restored, moment by moment, as I learn to rest in the love of God.



## Reflection

Do you find it hard to allow yourself to rest?

Are you addicted to doing instead of being?  
Have you found a special place that calls you to be restful and restores you deeply?

How do you rest in God's love and peace?

# QuietLY restoRing my SouL

*Sunrise to sunset the heavens declare  
Your constant presence to me  
All of creation draws me to your side  
Your breeze softly kissing my cheek*

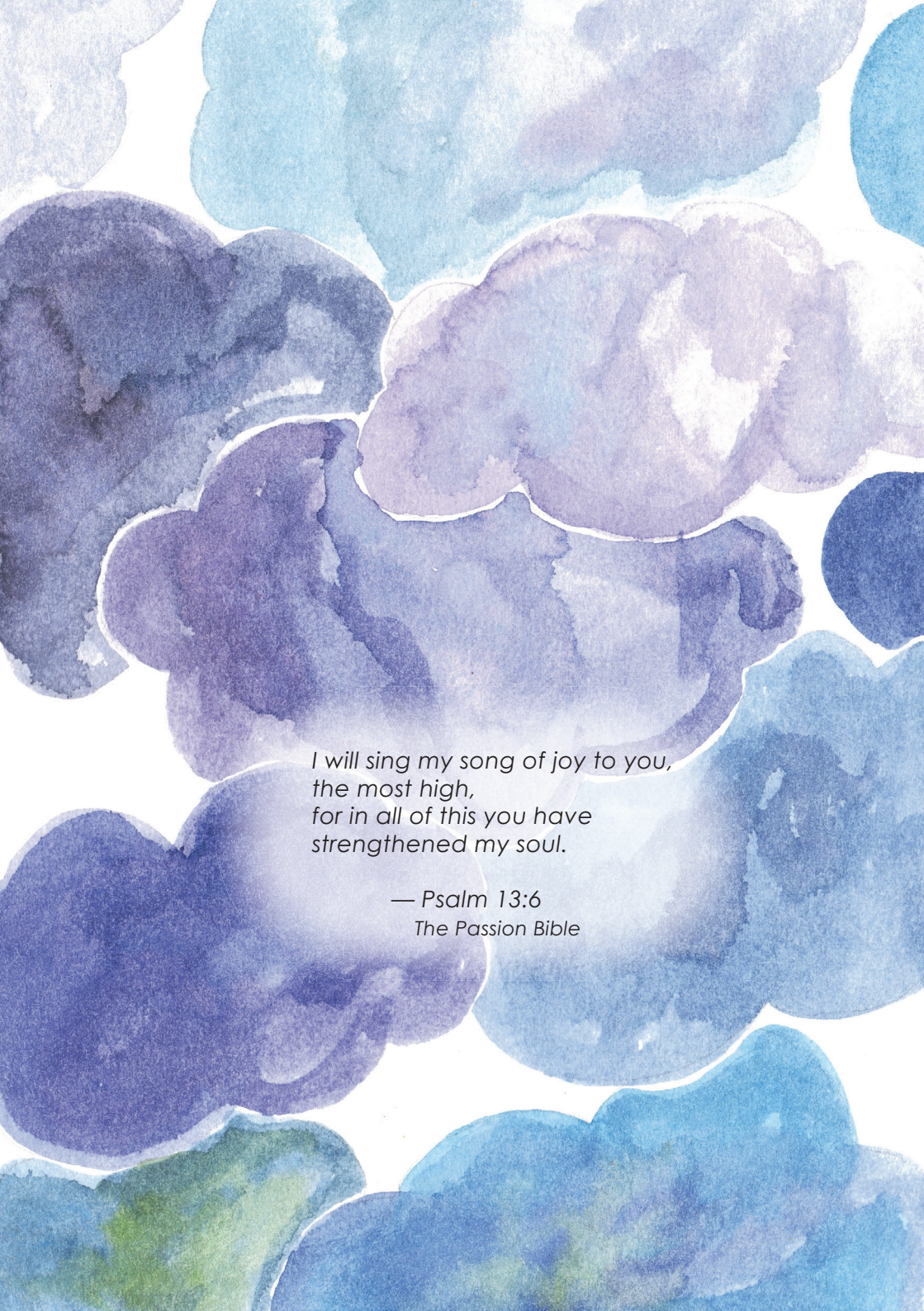
*Quietly restoring my soul  
Your gentle oceans are making me whole  
Breathing new life into me  
My spirit sets sail on your breeze*

*Mercy is breaking like waves on the shore  
Flooding these sands with your peace  
Waters so sweet I am thirsting for more  
Deep waters calling to deep*

*Quietly restoring my soul  
Your gentle oceans are making me whole  
Breathing new life into me  
My spirit sets sail on your breeze*

*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion?  
Come to me.  
Get away with me and you'll recover your life.  
I'll show you how to take a real rest.  
Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it.  
Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.  
I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.  
Keep company with me  
And you'll learn to live freely and lightly.*

— Jesus  
Matthew 11:28-30, The Message Bible

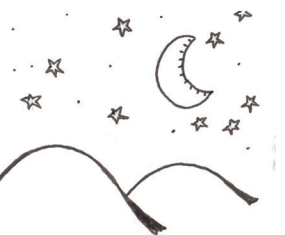


I will sing my song of joy to you,  
the most high,  
for in all of this you have  
strengthened my soul.

— Psalm 13:6  
The Passion Bible

## Chapter 13

THE POWER OF  
*looking up*

A hand-drawn illustration of a night sky. It features a crescent moon with a smiling face, surrounded by several small, five-pointed stars. The drawing is done in a simple, sketchy style with black ink.

It's easy to be so focused on your own footsteps and the path you are treading that you forget to look up and enjoy the view. Remembering to take in all that is around you gives you the gift of perspective. Seeing your own journey in the context of the bigger picture of life is when you realise that your journey is part of God's bigger story, giving profound meaning and purpose to your existence.

Looking up and realising there is a God who sees you and loves you deeply with a 'no matter what' kind of love can fill you with a 'no matter what' kind of hope. There is a source of courage, strength and love to draw upon that is greater than you – a higher power. You don't have to try to do this journey all in your own strength and you were never meant to do it alone. This realisation may be so overwhelmingly rich to your soul that you find yourself feeling deeply thankful, not just for these benefits from God, but for God himself and what he means to you. Looking up starts out as being thankful, but can grow into a very personal experience that changes you on the inside.

Look what Psalm 100:4 and 5 has to say about looking up:

*Enter with the password: "Thank you!"  
Make yourselves at home, talking praise.  
Thank him. Worship him.  
For God is sheer beauty,  
all-generous in love,  
loyal always and ever.*

How amazing, to think a simple expression of thanks has power in it; without even realising, you are opening a door to an awareness of God and his presence.

Psalm 103:1 and 2 reminds us not to forget to look up:

*O my soul, bless God.  
From head to toe, I'll bless his holy name!  
O my soul, bless God.  
Don't forget a single blessing!*

Looking up helps us remember God and the blessings we already have in our lives, which can easily disappear from sight when we are focused only on the challenges around us. It takes our eyes off ourselves and reminds us of the God who is on our side and who is more than enough for whatever we are facing. It can move us from a state of anxiety to peace, from fear to faith, changing the atmosphere in our journey.

Over the years I have found the most comforting and empowering moments as I look up from my messy, challenging life and open my heart wide to the God of the universe who is also my heavenly father. Probably like you, my mess and challenges continue, no magic wands here, but oh how my heart is inexplicably strengthened as I soak in God's unfailing love, acceptance and affirmation.

*Hallelujah* is a beautiful word. It's been uttered down through the ages as an expression of thanks and honour to God. It simply means *I praise God*.

Let that word fall from your lips now and then, as you look to the heavens and take it all in. Try singing it sometimes as you go through your day. Whisper it as you fall asleep at night: *Hallelujah*, thank you my God, I am grateful for it all.

Look up every day and know that you are loved and that your life journey matters to God. Inhale that love and exhale your *hallelujah*...

SONG

# *I am blessed*

*I am blessed  
I am moved  
You held me up  
In waters deep*

*I am loved  
I can rest  
In your strong arms  
Where peace is found*

*You have kept me close  
Walking each step with you*

*I love you  
And all that is within me  
Honours you*

*I'm thankful  
So thankful  
Because you love me*

*When I hear oceans roar  
And ground beneath my feet gives way  
It is you that I call  
In Jesus Christ your name I pray*

*You have kept me close  
Walking each step with you*

*I love you  
And all that is within me  
Honours you*

*I'm thankful  
So thankful  
Because you love me*

*Hallelujah*



## Reflection

How can you carve out some hallelujah moments in your life each day?

Find a way of looking up that works for you; it could be spontaneous or a discipline you build into your daily routine.

Notice how you feel before and after a time of looking up; how does it change you?

*For God is great and worth  
a thousand hallelujahs...*

— Psalm 96:4  
*The Message Bible*





## Songs:

- 1 – Climbing Higher
- 2 – Honest Conversation
- 3 – Grateful
- 4 – Hope of my Life
- 5 – Still Small Voice
- 6 – Sunny's Song
- 7 – Love Carried Me
- 8 – Letting You Go
- 9 – Slow Down
- 10 – Running Away
- 11 – One Name
- 12 – Quietly Restoring My Soul
- 13 – I am Blessed
- 14 – Bonus Track: Amazing God

## C.D Credits

All songs (C) & (P) Suitcase Music PTY LTD.

All songs written by Jay and Helena McNeill, except 'Quietly restoring my soul' lyrics co-written by Kathy Johnston.

All vocals – Helena & Jay McNeill, except 'Quietly restoring my soul' Backing vocals by Christine Butson.

Songs produced by Jay McNeill, Andy Sorenson, Phil Butson.

Guitars – Phil Butson, David Carr, Chris Siebold, Randy Pearce, David Holmes, James Ryan, Andrew Naylor, Mark Cullen.

Keyboards/Synths – Andy Sorenson, Chris Mosher, Jay and Helena McNeill.

Bass – Andrew Naylor, Chris Donohue.

Drums/Percussion – Jay McNeill.

Strings – Tracy Silverman (I am Blessed), Jen Anderson, Helen Mountford (Running Away).

## About the Author



**Helena McNeill** is a Melbourne based singer-songwriter and speaker who loves gratitude, brave love, Jesus, seashells and coffee.

Her songs and stories explore the journey of life and faith with raw honesty and humour, inspiring us to see the beauty in our lives even in the difficult days.

You can find Helena on Facebook & Instagram @helenamcneillartist and on her website [helenamcneill.com](http://helenamcneill.com)

## About the Illustrator



**Kim Miatke** is an artist whose hearts desire is that her art and the story that accompanies it will speak to your heart and may even be used in some tiny way to bring some healing and joy to your soul.

Each piece of art is a personal journal in paint and word that documents a journey. One full of both beautiful highs, gut wrenching lows and all the 'normal' bits in between.

Kim lives in Melbourne with her husband Michael and three children - Ella, Jed and Matilda. She loves colour and has an addiction to both coffee and chocolate. She adores her family, lives for holidays, delights in beauty and loves Jesus passionately.

To see more of Kim's work visit:  
[www.kimmiatkeart.com](http://www.kimmiatkeart.com)  
Instagram: @kimmiatkeart  
Facebook: Kim Miatke ART

