

# *Soul Shots*

**31 Days of Pocket Wisdom  
for Your Hurting Heart**



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WORDS OF JOY  
PRESS



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## *Dedication*

This book is for you if you're feeling drained, depleted or discouraged. And for all who need a supportive word or inspiring thought to help bring hope and encouragement back to their heart. These words will remind you that you are more courageous than you realise, you are not alone in your struggles, and you're stronger than you know.

## Introduction

Hello Friend, I wrote this book during a rollercoaster ride of a year for most of us. Few have emerged completely unscathed or untouched by the life threatening Covid-19 coronavirus of 2020 and its lingering effects. In a prolonged season of sickness, pain, panic and havoc, and with the threat of more to come, we crave peace, hope, encouragement and calm.

Our hopes have been squashed. Dreams have been lost. Jobs have gone down the pan. Education has suffered, and parents left tearing their lockdown locks hair out trying to homeschool their kids. Many of us are exhausted, stressed, depleted, and in desperate need of cheering up before we feel like giving up.

That's where this *Soul Shots* book comes in. It is a gentle, handy resource, a warm hug for the heart. A reminder to become more centred, grateful and hopeful when life gets hard and dark. I get it, and I'm reaching out to show you how I've been helped myself during my own soul-crushing and challenging seasons.

Here you will receive empathy and encouragement to let light and hope back in. Think of me as an understanding friend who wants to help steer you in the right direction again, as I share small soul shot thoughts you can read and consume each day for a month or snack on at your leisure, whenever you want.

They are intended to remind you where our best hope comes from. There are daily reflections to get you thinking and poetic nuggets of wisdom to drink in. As you walk with me here, I offer a friendly shoulder to lean on and a reminder of the power of grace to affect how we react to our circumstances.

There is hope of reaching and being in a better place. You can recharge your depleted batteries as you pause and reflect. In sharing my thoughts, experiences and helpful suggestions, I point beyond them all to our major source of help and strength, which comes from God himself.

This is for you because you've made it this far in a year that's been scary and hard. It's a gift for your heart. You are a survivor. You are stronger than you know. And I want you to have a little reminder at hand for those days when you might feel overwhelmed.

## *Day 1: Brave*

As a small child, I was taught to colour carefully within the lines and keep to borders and boundaries, which involved adhering to limitations set by parents or teachers, rather than self-imposed ones. I wasn't often brave enough to push past them.

Now, as I pause and ponder how my life has turned out, I want to change things, charge them up a bit, add touches of brightness to the grey, throw in a bit of teal, perhaps, or a dash of purple to cover over the sad places and bring the picture to life again.

I have health and strength limitations due to chronic illness. And challenging circumstances often squeeze me tight with their prescriptive lines. Your limitations may differ, of course, but their effects will be similar.

*What would it look like to live cheerfully and willingly within the defined circle we find ourselves in? Could we colour within its circumference? Alter the hues, perhaps? Add our own, personalised designs instead of accepting the ones given to us?*

Herein lies a challenge to us all. How to live courageously, fully and freely within the place in which we dwell—mentally, physically and spiritually. I believe we can live brave, unfettered, and unchained.

Because the more we trust and rest in God's provision and grace, the less we will stress about situations we cannot change, i.e life's confines, conflicts and constraints. It will take courage but that's okay. We already have more than we know.

What if we believed we were already brave? Could we colour with courage and confidence and paint with passion and purpose within the parameters of our lives? I'm willing to try. How about you? Let's do it. What do we have to lose?

**You may not feel brave  
at all but you're braver  
than you know  
because each step of faith  
and courage you take  
helps you move forward  
once more and to grow.**





## Day 2: Waves

Waves rise high, threatening to drown us. We're like sinking ships bobbing about in a storm-tossed sea, desperately seeking safety. Then we remember there is no pit, watery or otherwise, too deep for God's arm to fail to reach down and rescue us.

There is no storm that will do irreparable harm to our souls. We are held secure. *Hope is an anchor for our anxious hearts. Mercy remains our lifeline. Love holds us steady*, soothing our fretful spirits as we try to stay afloat in the storms of life.

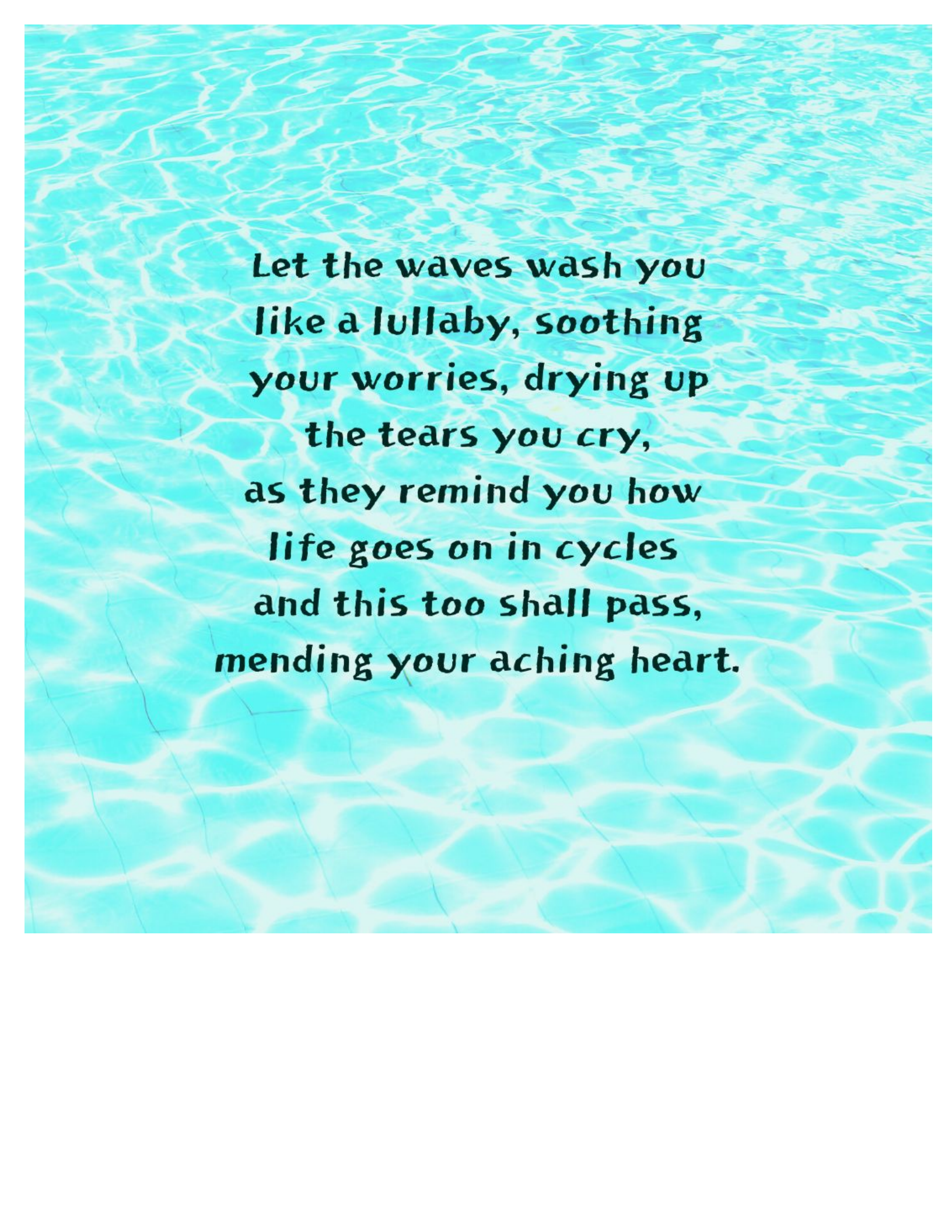
We may feel like we're lost at sea as storms rise with dreadful rapidity. It can seem as if we're permanently sunk with such things as: relationship upsets, financial crisis, heartache and heartbreak, health scares or losses of every kind.

I've discovered that each and every one has been survivable when I've rested more in God's provision for me, instead of resisting the waves rising over my head. He reminds us that this too shall pass and we can emerge safe out the other side.

If we gaze at the waves and problems then our courage melts away, but when we look to God for help it gets reinvigorated. We will be shaken, yes, but still intact because we've trusted him to help us out. God is Our Rescuer, Healer, Deliverer, Refuge, Shelter, and Strength.

No matter what we might go through, God is ready, willing, able and available to help us survive it all. Life may overwhelm us for a while, but with his support and strength we can begin to swim and rise above the waves that threaten our peace.

We begin to realise that the tide will eventually recede and the waves will gradually die down, as they morph into inconsequential lacy rivulets circling our feet. Calm will come and life will settle down again. There will be ebb and flow but God remains our steadying eternal Sea.



**Let the waves wash you  
like a lullaby, soothing  
your worries, drying up  
the tears you cry,  
as they remind you how  
life goes on in cycles  
and this too shall pass,  
mending your aching heart.**

## Day 3: Too much

When life overwhelms us, we can recover our sleeping joy which is often hidden in plain sight. We can begin to reclaim our zest for life. It will start with an honest examination of the heart.

Here's a top 10 list—in no particular order—of what steals my joy. You might recognise a few things here that bother you too...

- Negativity
- Comparison
- Envy
- Regret
- Impatience
- Anxiety
- Worry
- Discouragement
- Resentment
- Fear

*It's quite a list, isn't it?* And these are just the heart attitudes that make us miserable and leave us longing for difference. Thankfully, God does not leave us alone to stew in our mess and worry about how on earth we're going to cope with this and that, how we might change the way we feel, think or behave.

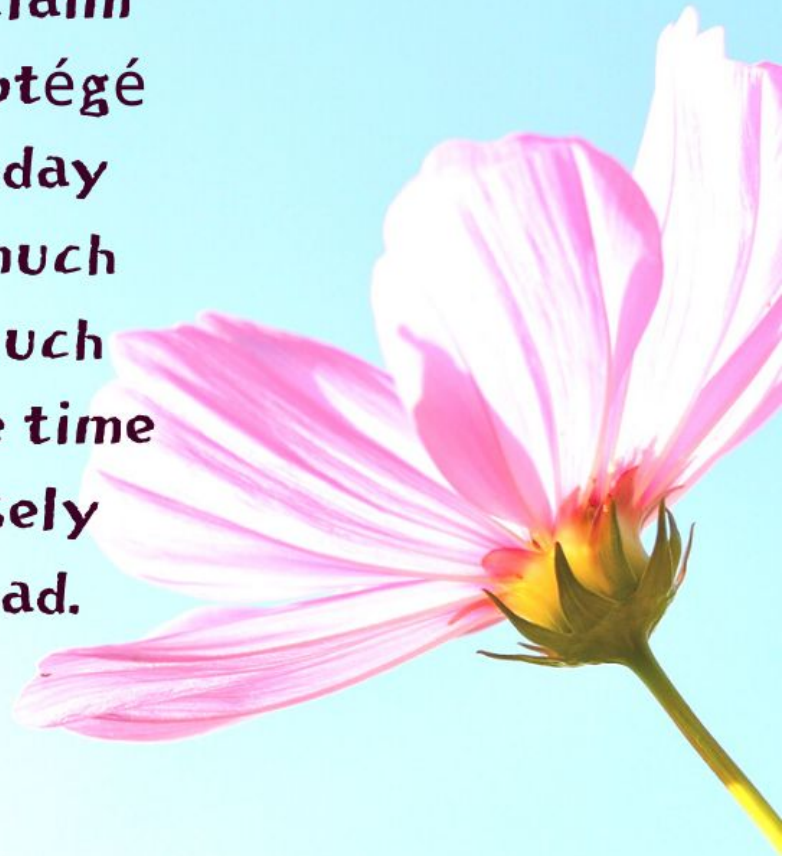
Every alteration in our thought life and behaviour starts with recognising our own personal joy stealers. This is Holy Spirit and Scripture-led transforming work in response to us asking for God's guidance and help.

Some challenges are caused by the type of personality we have. I'm a driven, perfectionist type 'A' personality who happens to live in a 'Z' (Zzzzz...) type body that is invariably flat-out with fatigue. Not a great match! The potential for frustration is endless.

We also need to address the effects of our upbringing, environment and past, all of which have a bearing on how we act and react now, the sensitivities peculiar to us. Entrenched attitudes and behaviour develop over time and we will need to be prepared for them to take a while to change.

One area might currently be shouting out for your attention and that's absolutely fine. It's rarely possible (or sensible) to tackle several issues at once, therefore focusing on one area at a time is always best. That way your hope and joy can be gradually regained.

***Anxiety may want to claim  
you as its child, its protégé  
but you will desist today  
because there is too much  
life to be lived, too much  
joy to be had, too little time  
left to spend it unwisely  
or stay fearful and sad.***





## Day 4: Gratitude

How do you view contentment? Many of us see it as achievement, success, and life going swimmingly. *What if we looked at it differently?* Maybe contentment is more to do with an attitude of the heart, a daily decision, and a position of praise and gratitude.

If I wait for my life to become easy, for pain to lessen, circumstances to change and tests and trials to cease, yet fail to notice small mercies, then I could lose all sense of contentment altogether.

Because the blessings are there if we deliberately search for them, waiting in the corners of our existence like a trail of Hansel and Gretel breadcrumbs. And when we do spot them?

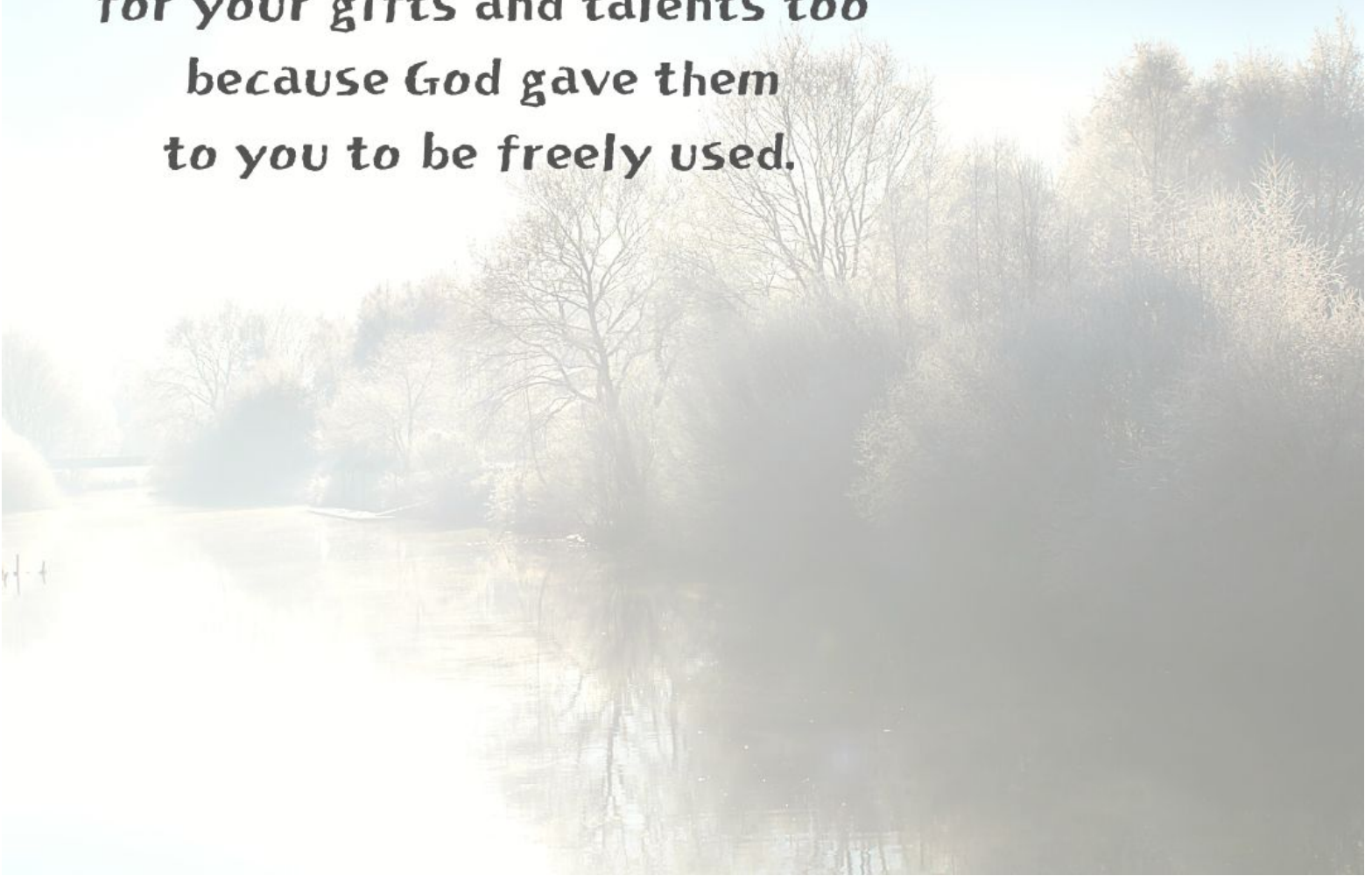
Then we realize how it really is the little things, those seemingly random and insignificant things which matter most of all. It's the small graces, breath of beauty, and family joys which we so often fail to appreciate that bring us the most satisfaction in life.

*We begin to battle our way to holy joy and contentment when we remind ourselves to sense God's hand at work in our lives.* In the unfurling of the hours there are whispers of goodness and grace just waiting to be discovered.

In living a cloistered, housebound life due to my physical health limitations, I've had to look beyond its confines to the One who sustains and strengthens me each day to face life with faith, hold onto hope, and find peace in being slowed down and stilled.

But it's also a life infused with God's blessings. He's given me an ability to look beyond the superficial, to sense his presence and be thankful for small mercies, and he will do the same for you, too.

**It's hard to stay down for long  
if you practice gratitude  
and make like a monk, maybe,  
being thankful for each meal,  
for the stages of each day,  
for your gifts and talents too  
because God gave them  
to you to be freely used.**



## *Day 5: Beauty*

It is said that the mirror seldom lies. *Or does it?* What if the reflection we see isn't really a true representation of you and me? Our appearance might say a lot but it isn't truly representative of who we are.

We are far more than the sum of our parts and a glancing gaze in glass. We are spirit, soul and body, yet it's the body which tends to claim major attention, the part others feel free to remark unfavourably on.

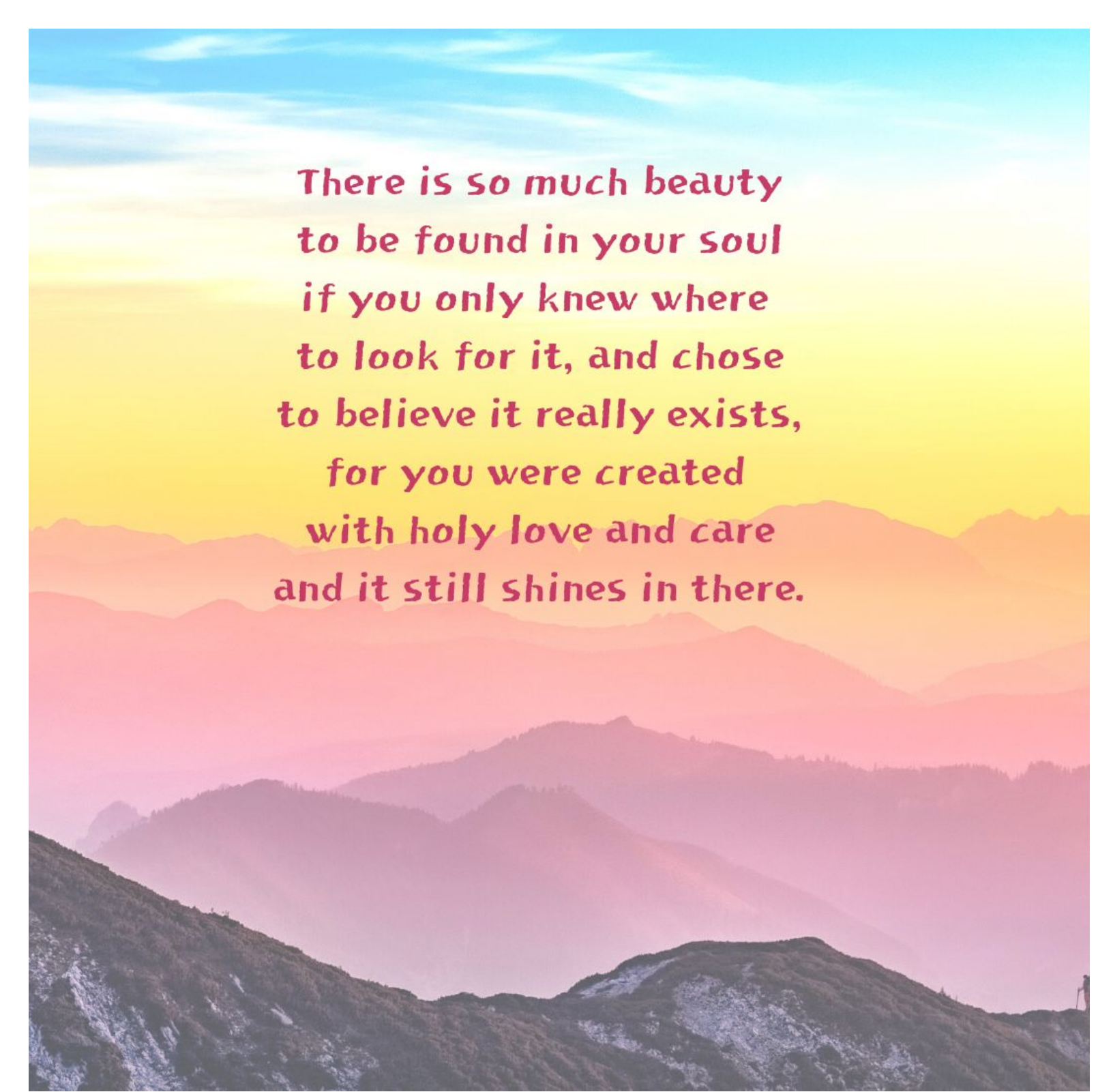
We feel so much through our bodies, sense our world and perceive our place in it. But we can fail to fully appreciate the beauty we have within our souls or how we are beautifully framed within the mirror of God's Word.

We can be clouded in our judgement and oblivious to how God sees us. *In his eyes, you are his precious, beloved child, and beautiful to behold.* He views you and me through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Our lives can be so circumscribed by painful circumstances that we forget who we really are in the midst of the muddle, mess and mayhem of existence. Our soul beauty can be marred by our undesirable thoughts and behaviour as well.

Until we sense God calling, making himself known in a million little ways, to encourage weary, burdened hearts to turn to him in acknowledgement of who we are and Whose we are.

God chooses to reside inside our hearts and reveal his beauty through a surrendered soul, a transformed, grace-filled will, and a redeemed and renewed mind. It's a beauty which lasts into eternity. Now that's something to smile about!



***There is so much beauty  
to be found in your soul  
if you only knew where  
to look for it, and chose  
to believe it really exists,  
for you were created  
with holy love and care  
and it still shines in there.***



## Day 6: Grace

Despite how hard things might seem, may you give yourself permission to hope again and let the light in on your cobwebbed dreams. Rest in truly believing God is with you. He is *for* you. And he loves you more than anyone else ever could.

God's gift of grace (his undeserved, unmerited favour) means we've been declared worthy by him. Jesus came to earth as a declaration of how very much God loves and cares for you and me. A joyful, freeing thought indeed.

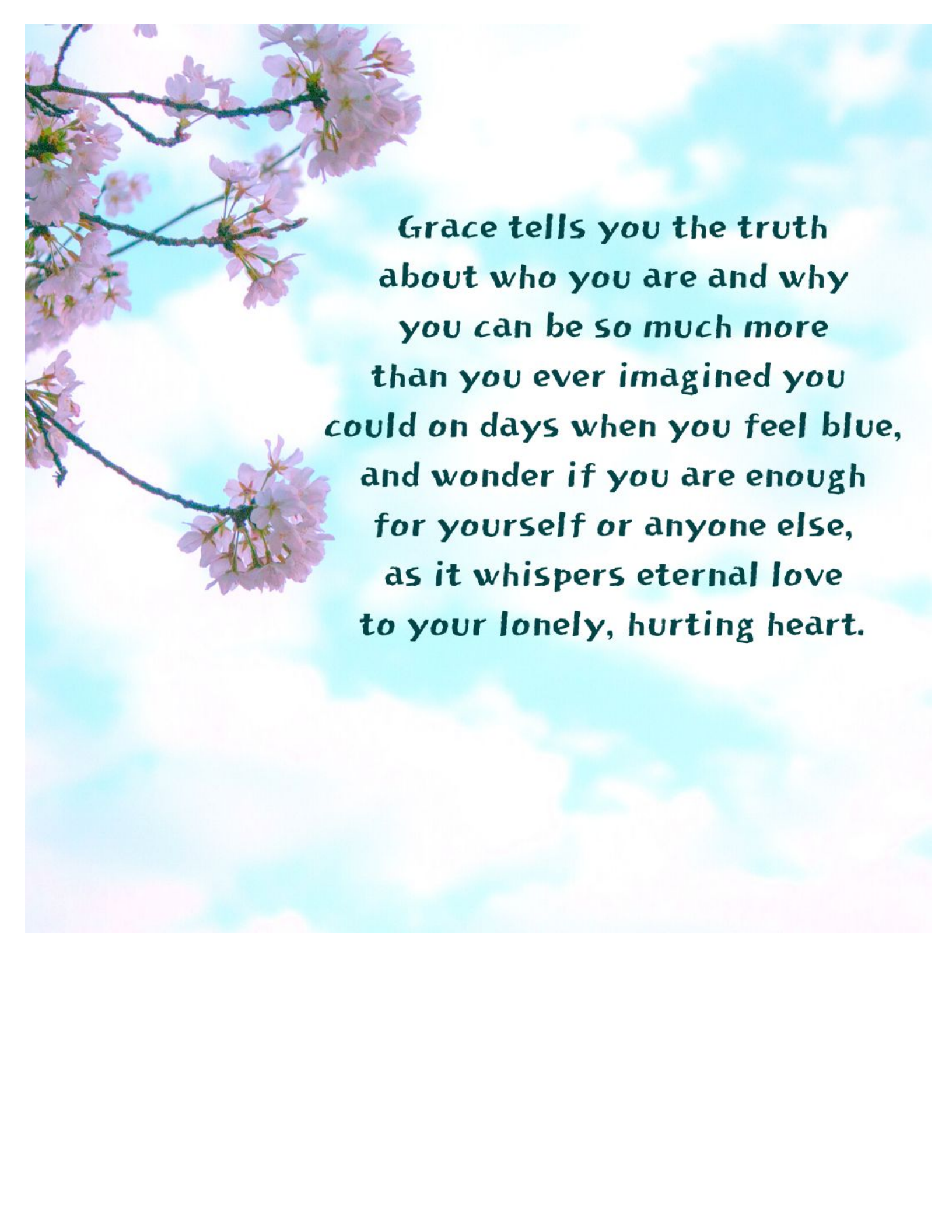
*We don't have to try to prove our worth. We don't need to compare ourselves with others. We needn't feel like we don't measure up. We are already declared worthy and supremely loved because of his grace.*

Never forget you are God's beloved child, the apple of his eye and a joy and delight to his heart. When God looks at you he doesn't see a failure or a disappointment. Oh no. He sees potential, promise and purpose. He sees someone he adores. *Just. As. They. Are.* And loves dearly on the way to all you are becoming as well.

It's during our times of deepest struggle, when we're weary, worn, depleted and dry, that God liberally pours his mercy and grace into our lives. Filling our emptiness with showers of his goodness and strength.

It's when we're too fatigued to pray and in too much pain to do more than scrape through our days that God soothes our hearts with his rest and calm. He holds us close and comforts our hurting souls.

God is continually pouring himself out on our behalf. Giving us grace we don't deserve. Offering us a fresh start. Reason to rejoice and hope again. And a special kind of peace we cannot access anywhere else. All you need do is ask.



**Grace tells you the truth  
about who you are and why  
you can be so much more  
than you ever imagined you  
could on days when you feel blue,  
and wonder if you are enough  
for yourself or anyone else,  
as it whispers eternal love  
to your lonely, hurting heart.**

## Day 7: Steps

Progress can seem painfully slow when we're longing to see change for the better, can't it? Whether you're in the midst of decluttering, decorating, losing weight, writing a book, learning a new language or trying to implement a new habit, there's always a messy middle to negotiate.

And that's when we're most tempted to throw in the sponge, admit defeat and leave it all for another day. Except we shouldn't. Because despite how hard it feels to press on and eventually get to the end, we are actually making progress, my friend.

Each tiny step we take brings us one step closer to our goal, whether it's a new accomplishment or a tidier home. *Every weary effort will be worth it when we achieve what we are aiming for.* This isn't the time to give up, unless you really need to, of course.

We'll be glad we did keep on track. Though right now I have to keep reminding myself of that fact. As someone who hates mess, disruption and chaos, it's really hard to move past the obstacles in front of me, physical and otherwise.

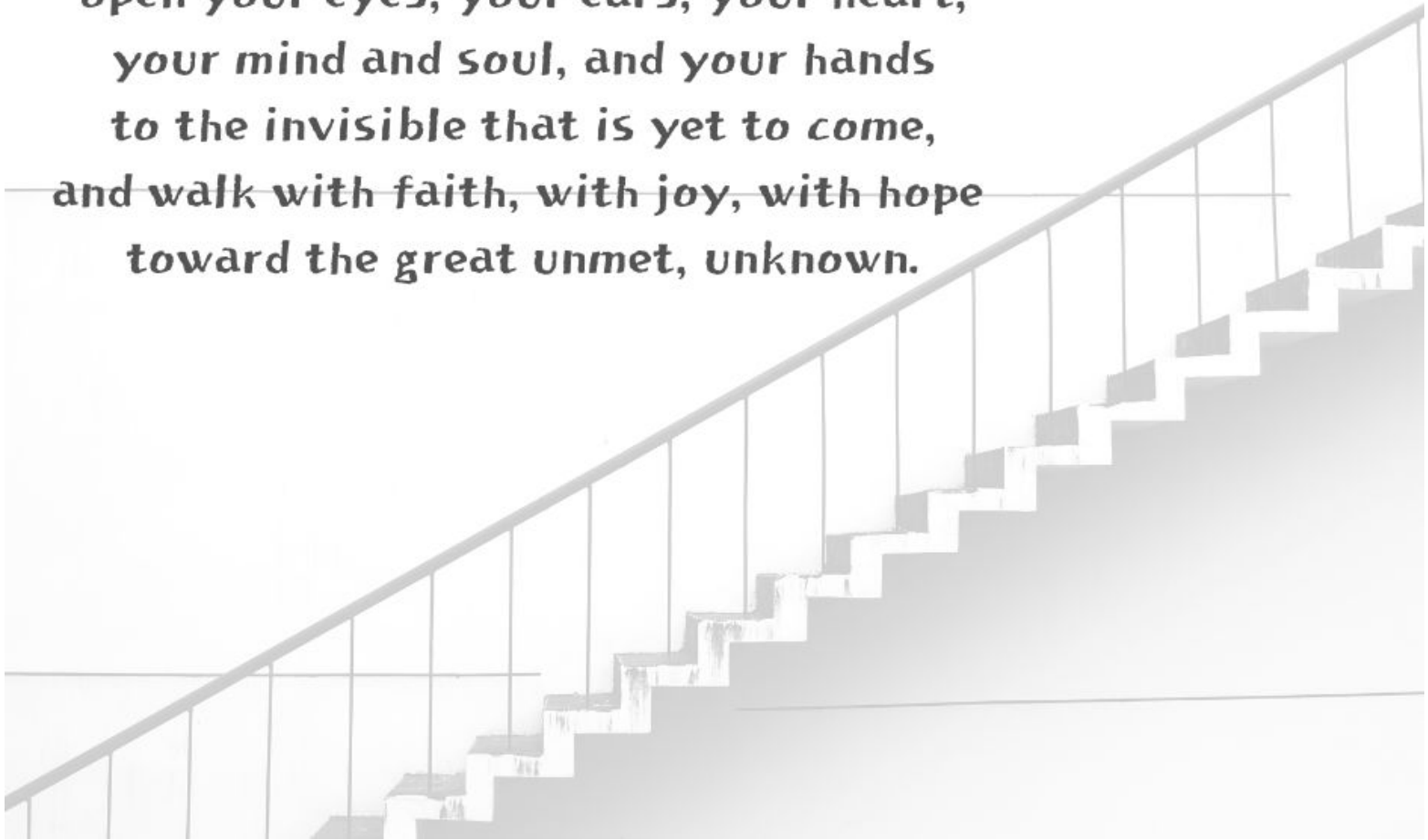
I want to give up or minutely examine each item, rather than methodically sort, sift, then move on to the next thing. Maybe you can relate? Impatience can halt our progress because we fail to fully appreciate the seemingly minuscule steps we've made along the way.

*But there's something strangely beautiful about a work in progress.* There's something rather wonderful in relinquishing things we can actually live without. There's a quiet satisfaction in taking small steps toward our goals.

The very act of pausing and deciding what to keep or discard is quite cathartic, whether it's unwanted clutter, soul garbage or wounds from the past. It makes us assess what is truly valuable to us, what we take pleasure in and love, and what fits who we are now. It's a positive step toward becoming freer in every way.

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***Life is a repeating series  
of tiny steps, and if you haven't  
taken the last one yet, you can  
remain receptive and alert,  
open your eyes, your ears, your heart,  
your mind and soul, and your hands  
to the invisible that is yet to come,  
and walk with faith, with joy, with hope  
toward the great unmet, unknown.***



## *Day 8: Blessed*

Words sing in my spirit, seeking their exit, ready to explode upon the page. Only now is not their time. They must lie dormant and wait a while. A few prospective poetry anthologies and a barely started memoir sit on the back-burner, simmering slowly.

I feel impatient, twiddling my thumbs at my ineptitude and inability to complete those things I long to bring forth. God whispers: 'Everything has its moment to arise and be seen. Not yet... soon...be patient a while longer, my child.'

All that is within me wants to cry out, 'Really?!', until I remember how seeds lie dormant before they burst into glorious life, and harvested ground seems dead and fallow until it is ploughed. Though watching while others gain their harvest can be painful while we long for our own to come.

Waiting for God to say 'Yes' to us can seem endless, can't it? I feel my years slipping away like sand in an hourglass, and wonder why it takes so long to see any visible fruit appearing. *Then I sense a holy reminder of how much fruit is invisible to us, but God sees it.*

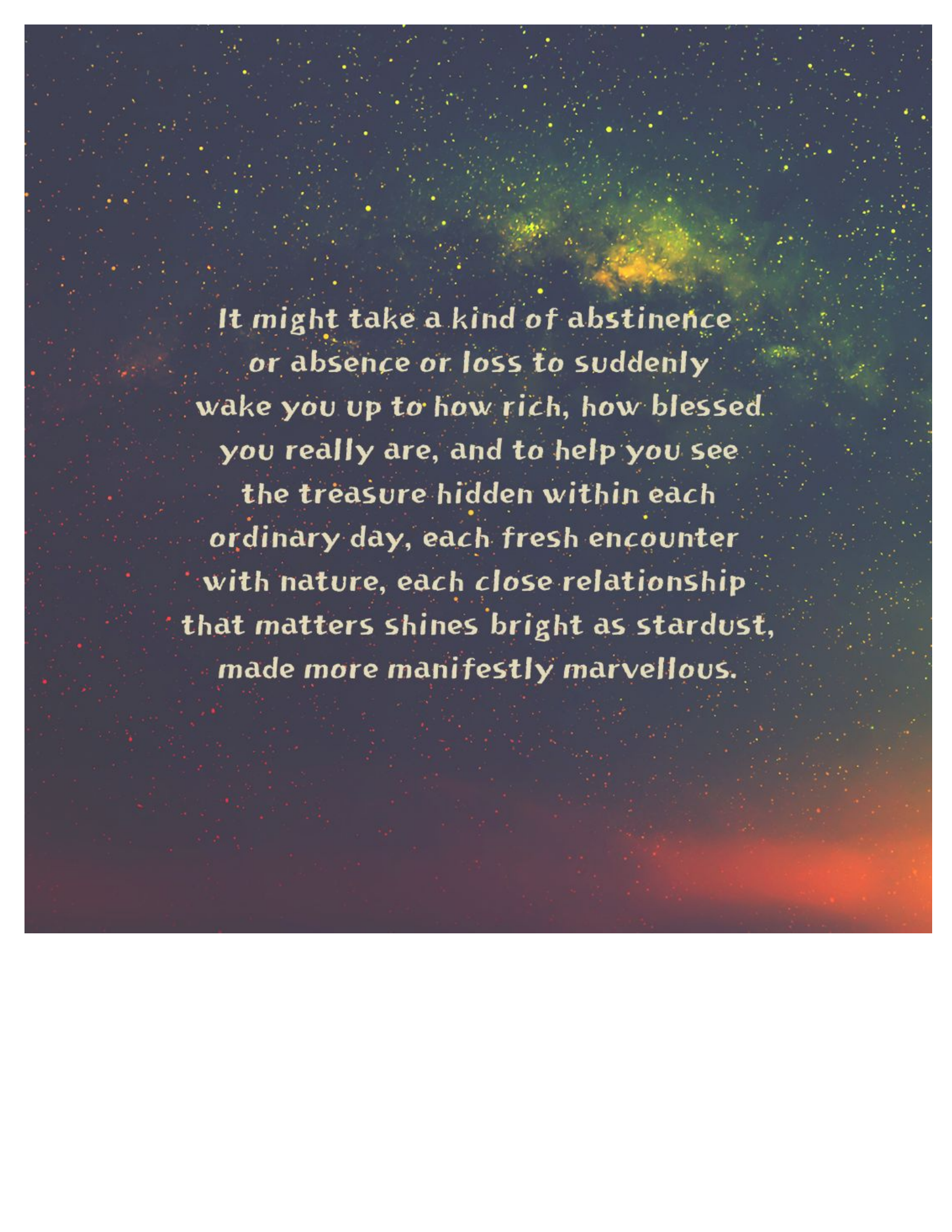
He also looks at our lives as a whole, noting where we're too fatigued or stressed to move forward yet, knowing how to shape the things we create until they are ready to be shared and become a blessing to us and others.

He knows how things that seem ready to us might still require his refining touch. And he's more interested in growing Holy Spirit fruit in our lives than making sure we see tangible evidence of the works of our hands.

*They will have their day. Even if all looks barren and bleak, cold as ice and deep as snow right now.* Because, as creation reminds us, new life and new birth return to earth after winter's chill and long periods of seeming inactivity in the soil.

Our work, our words, and our creativity will rise anew when God breathes his life into them and whispers, 'Now! Go ahead, my child.' And as we examine our lives, we will see how very blessed we already are, in small ways and large.



A starry night sky with a nebula in the background. The text is centered and reads:

*It might take a kind of abstinence  
or absence or loss to suddenly  
wake you up to how rich, how blessed  
you really are, and to help you see  
the treasure hidden within each  
ordinary day, each fresh encounter  
with nature, each close relationship  
that matters shines bright as stardust,  
made more manifestly marvellous.*

## Day 9: Resistance

It is said that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Experience shows us that increasing health challenges or emotional rollercoasters initially serve to flatten and make us weaker than before, though a degree of resilience can develop over time.

However, when we consider that what happens to us externally also affects us inwardly, targeting our mind and heart, the truth of those words begins to make some sense. Something happens to our souls when we get hit by adversity.

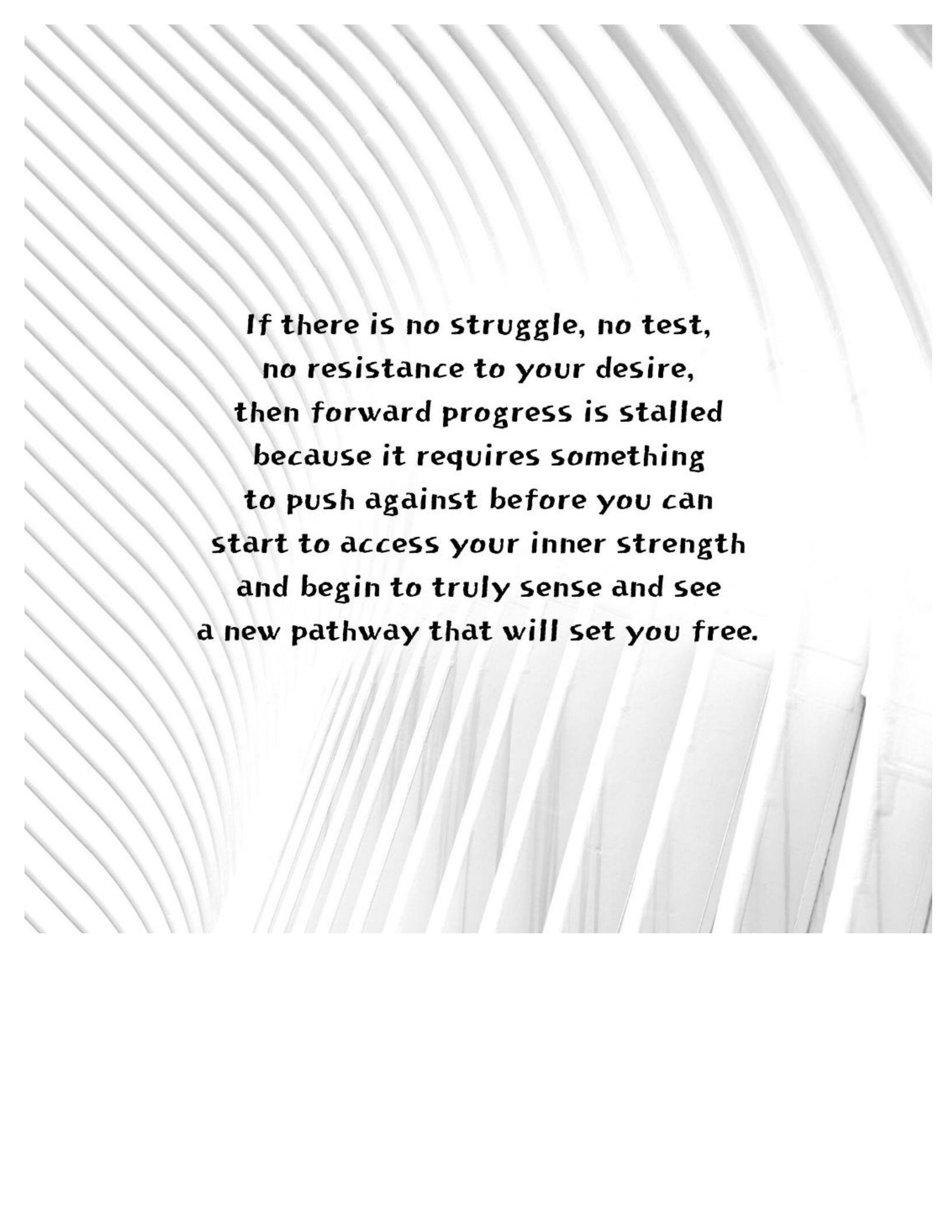
*There's a degree of holy shaping going on, a reconfiguring of attitudes and thoughts.* They're usually ones we were ignorant of, so accustomed have we become to falling into a flawed thinking pattern, one that seems normal to us now.

I'm not suggesting by any means that every bad event in our lives is orchestrated by God. He might allow bad things to happen to us but he is infinitely loving and good, desiring the greatest joy, rest and peace for his beloved children.

Yet those qualities are often wrought in us by unexpected means, teaching us to seek them in Jesus above all things. When he is the major means of soul support we have, then we know we are walking by faith and trust.

We would prefer not to experience adversity at all, of course, yet hindsight often shows just how much various tests and trials have shaped us for the better. *Because we only discover how strong our faith is when it gets tested.*

And we can give witness to God's sustaining power, provision and strength once we have experienced them. The resistance we feel as our souls struggle with hardship is truly painful. But, in due time, the hidden blessings and benefits will surface and far outweigh any ill effects we feel.



**If there is no struggle, no test,  
no resistance to your desire,  
then forward progress is stalled  
because it requires something  
to push against before you can  
start to access your inner strength  
and begin to truly sense and see  
a new pathway that will set you free.**



## Day 10: Renewal

There is still beauty to be found in the ashes of summer's ending, those dying back days when flowers lose their lustre. There is a tendency for us to fade with them in sympathy with summer's passing, as we ache inside at the dimming of the light.

We might grieve a season's closure, a period when life seemed bright and happy but is fast becoming a distant memory. Sadness can pervade all too swiftly when good times end and we get caught up in a different kind of busyness. When that happens, I find I mourn the months I feel I've missed.

Like those lazy, leisurely days we cannot get back again for a while. I miss the sun's warmth, long evenings and length of days. And I could easily become stuck in a groove of grumbling, unless I make a conscious effort to consider how renewal and beginning again is available to us 24/7, any day, any month, any year.


Because God is the God of the *Now*. He reveals himself through a series of *This Moment* moments which echo his presence with us. If we fail to pause and absorb the lessons last season (or even yesterday) has been teaching us, we also retain the weight of it, those burdens God is asking us to relinquish to him.

Moving on and moving forward is only possible if we have arms wide open to receive the new, hearts ready and receptive, and minds aligned with God's will. In moving on from one season to the next, it helps to remember how new life comes in a cyclical circle in creation and our lives mirror the morphing they represent.

Death is always a precursor to the new. Leaves shrivel into crispness, flowers lose their lustre as they fade and die, and plants need to be pliant while they switch between the renewal of new roots and shoots, reveal signs of life beginning or a necessary dying back season.

It's reassuring to our restless souls to believe in new life springing up at a time of God's choosing. As we sow seeds of faith for the future, we are sowing into a bountiful harvest to come, invisible as it may be for now. Let's remember that joy is a seed which needs to take root in good, fertile soil.

If we are still digging around in yesterday's detritus, meandering in its mess, we are not well placed to see and sense joy's presence in the here and now. That alone is reason enough to relinquish each day to God so we can begin to embrace all the new, joy-filled things that lay before us.



**During times of stillness, darkness,  
and dormancy, you grow your seed,  
while it receives all the nutrients  
it needs to suddenly burst into  
bloom in spring, when liveliness  
comes dressed as dreams come true,  
and you will start to flourish  
as your hopes become renewed.**

## Day 11: Hope rising

How did you rise today, my friend? Eager to embrace whatever the day ahead might hold for you, perhaps, or wishing you could crawl back to bed instead? You see, every morning issues an invitation for us to experience a fresh touch from God.

It's a call to awaken to his presence and hold out our hands for this day's manna from above. Even before your feet hit the floor, your mind might be preoccupied with problems or downcast because of fatigue. Such things make it harder to see the hope available to us for this day, in this hour.

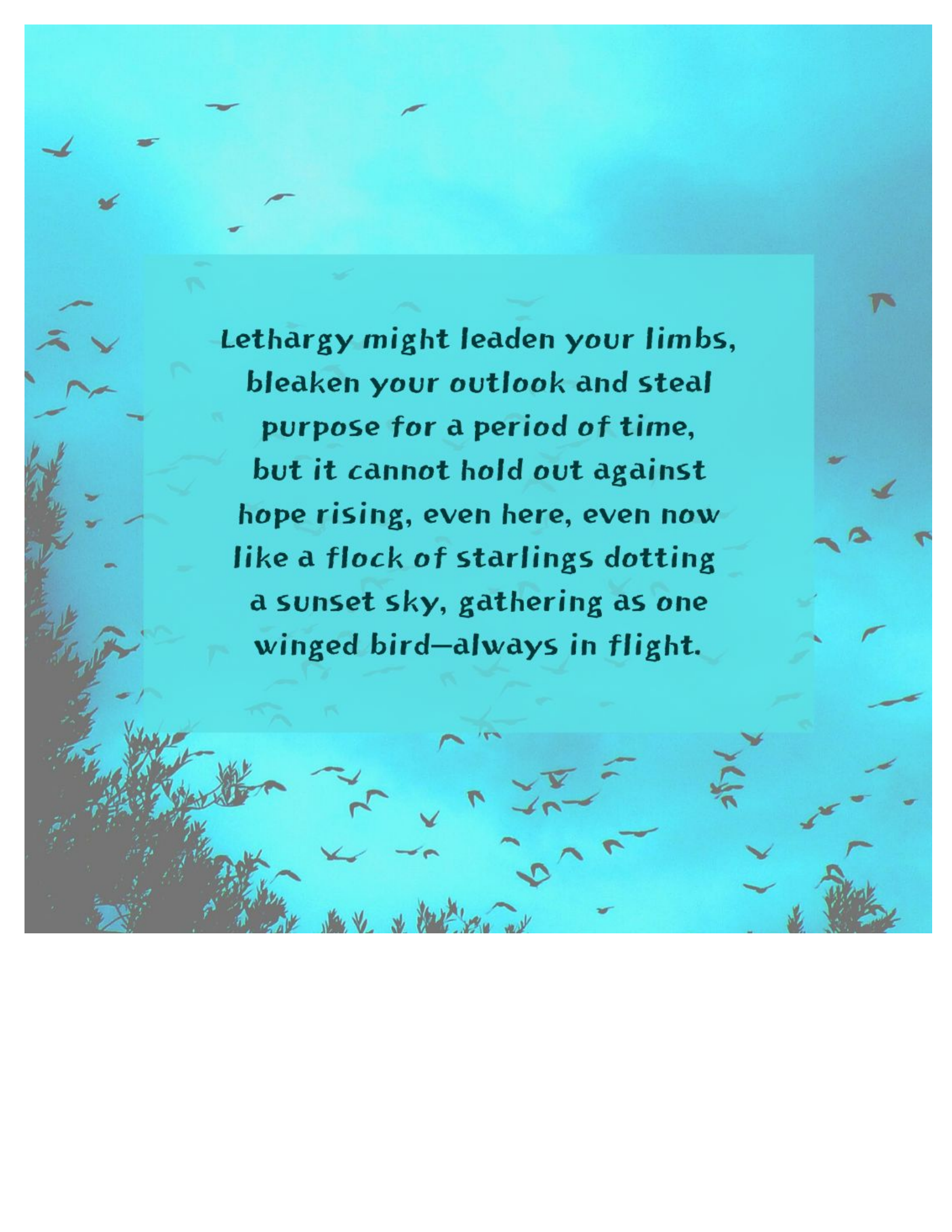
Will we allow our sorrows, griefs, bodily aches and pains, soul sluggishness and physical weariness to steal a march on a call to receptivity? If so, it might hinder us from making the most of all God longs to pour into our drained and depleted souls.

Or will we rise with hope and expectation in our hearts, while we seek to maintain an awareness of the myriad ways in which God may choose to speak to us? As he does to all whose hearts have learnt the art of recognising his presence in the familiar.

Your worries, task list or regular routines might keep you preoccupied when you first wake up but there comes a point in the day when energy and strength tend to flag. And when it does, you might begin to wonder just where your hope has gone. *It hasn't vanished—if you look for it in Jesus.*

He is the Hope we all need, the Giver of all good gifts. His hope never ends. And the best thing? We can access it wherever we need to, any time we want, day or night. It's freely available to us, always.

It rises in our hearts when we spend time in God's Word and rest in his presence. May we aim to begin our day with eyes peeled, mind receptive, and heart primed, prepared to see, sense and receive God's holy love and hope to help us stay calm, strong, buoyant and afloat.

A photograph of a large flock of starlings flying in a sunset sky. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and light blue. The birds are silhouetted against the bright sky. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of trees and bushes are visible. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered in the image, containing a quote in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**Lethargy might leaden your limbs,  
bleaken your outlook and steal  
purpose for a period of time,  
but it cannot hold out against  
hope rising, even here, even now  
like a flock of starlings dotting  
a sunset sky, gathering as one  
winged bird—always in flight.**

## *Day 12: Small beginnings*

Such a small creature, a tiny little thing had been my daughter-in-law's constant companion while she toiled at unyielding, winter-hard ground. Pausing from her labours, she would smile to see him perched close by, before attending to her garden again with renewed gusto.

As spring segued into summer, days lengthened, and several feathered friends came to the bird feeder, this faithful little robin was still present, hopping to and fro with an inner felicity born of knowing and being content with its place in the scheme of things.

He doesn't seek attention or strive for prominence. He's just happily going about his own sweet thing: gathering, gleaned, feeding, singing and celebrating life. *I wonder if we are so easily pleased with being small or experiencing small beginnings to things we want to do?*

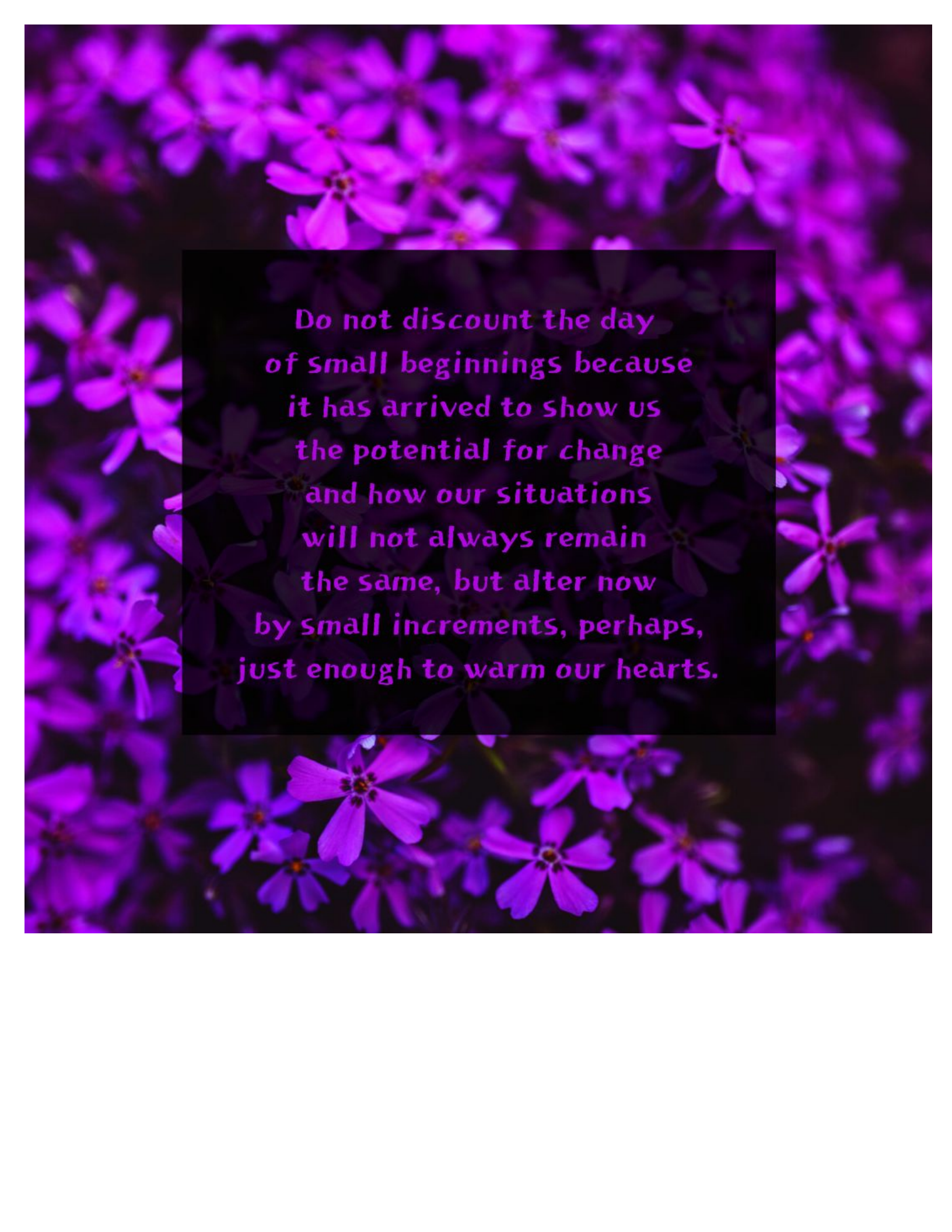
Can we celebrate seasons where God calls us to be still and small, labouring behind the scenes on our own (often challenging) plot—the fertile garden of the soul, where few know we are secretly tending God-sized dreams within our hearts?

Perhaps we long for significance, ache to be seen, to have worth and value in the eyes of others, for our voice to be heard. Or we could be prayerfully cultivating things only God sees and knows about, while he works within our stilled, surrendered heart.

As I watched the robin play in the warmth of the sun's rays, I saw his shadow extending beyond his petite frame. It loomed larger than he was. Likewise, as we seek to serve God and potter faithfully through our days, we are casting a holy shadow larger than ourselves.

Because God shines in and through us, through you and me, here and now, even if we might not be aware of it. He's also in the future, faithfully waiting with patience and love, with excitement in his heart, preparing for our small beginnings to become grand endings.



A field of small purple flowers, possibly baby's breath, filling the background. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, with some in sharp focus and others blurred. A dark, semi-transparent rectangular box is centered over the image, containing white text.

*Do not discount the day  
of small beginnings because  
it has arrived to show us  
the potential for change  
and how our situations  
will not always remain  
the same, but alter now  
by small increments, perhaps,  
just enough to warm our hearts.*

## *Day 13: Welcoming*

Each summer's end is always tinged with a kind of grief in me that these lighter days are finishing. As summer segues into autumn, I mourn how pain and incapacity have (once again) kept me rooted to bed or chair for months.

They've left me with precious little energy or ability to go out, engage in online activity or move forward as I want to with my writing life. If you also have M.E or other chronic illness, you will recognise such episodes, whether they occur in autumn, winter, spring or summer.

And so it comes. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) attacks once more. It inevitably takes me by surprise. Darkness steals in through the window and hope seems to fly out the door. But as I slow my breathing, pray inwardly and settle my soul again, I feel a little less fearful than before.

That's when I hear God whisper above the tumult in my head. He reassures me that the darkness is no match for him. If anything, it simply reveals his light more readily. It appears brighter and shines more incandescently than before.

*Nothing that causes a child of God to fear can ever destroy his ability to rescue, comfort and draw near.* We can learn to see each season, every day even, as a gift to be grateful for. And to reach for his hand in the darkness, knowing he will keep us safe.

I'm not sure if I can actually welcome fear, though it is a useful, parasympathetic mechanism to help protect us. Finding ways in which to accept and feel more in control of our feelings is good. As is acknowledging what these uncomfortable emotions might have to teach us about the state of our soul.

By the grace of God, we can start to see autumn's darkening days as a colourful new beginning, rather than the sad, dead end of summer we might dread. It provides us with an opportunity to move forward, upward and onward. Even as falling leaves slowly turn to mulch, our faith can still rise up.

**Let your soul steady itself  
as you contemplate the days  
ahead, and try to view them all  
as invitations to accept  
because in welcoming them,  
good or bad, you help yourself  
to live with less fear and stress,  
and you learn to have patience  
with these agents of change.**





## Day 14: Love comes calling

I watch, aghast, as scenes unfurl before my eyes. It's not a pretty sight. I don't want to watch or embrace this. I long to turn away because I barely recognise the woman I have become. *Who is this horrible harridan?*

Life isn't much fun when the cinema screen of your mind replays events of the last few days—at least not when it's showing a lengthy, high-definition spool of negativity directed toward yourself and a critical spirit vented toward the one you love.

Instead of staying hidden in my thoughts, the darkness in me had shifted to my talk. I was majoring in self-criticism most of all, not liking the person I saw in the mirror or the life God had given her.

Gratitude had given way to grumbling. I'd forgotten to give myself the same compassion, kindness, understanding and grace I try to extend toward others. *Have you been there? Do you ever catch yourself like this?*

Sometimes we don't want to acknowledge our dark side because it makes us curl away in despair. We can forget how much God has forgiven us and how lavish is his unconditional love. So we hide. Sometimes in activity and things.

We can only comprehend why Christ died for us when we accept the darkness within and our need of saving, healing and rescuing. The darkness within and without is intended to encourage us to seek for the Light of Christ and long for the solace, hope and joy which only God can give us.

And when we finally do crawl out of our shells of insecurity, shame or guilt, we discover the radiance of God's love totally surrounding us, covering us completely, accepting us unconditionally. It's blinding and binding because this is a love above all others, a love that will never let us go.

**Do not fear the slow removal  
of your shell when love comes  
calling, because your vulnerability  
is beautiful to your soul's lover,  
who sees your true self and does  
not shrink back but reaches out  
in acceptance, with gentleness  
because he has created us.**



## Day 15: Pause

Have you considered having a holy pause? Maybe taking extra time to linger in God's presence, listen with greater intent or sit quietly to receive a holy hug from him as he pours his love out on you, like he always wants to do?

A holy pause can be defined as taking time to rest and be refreshed in body, soul and spirit. It can include having fun and taking a welcome break from routine. *It sounds delightful, doesn't it?*

But the reality can be very different from our expectations. There can be inner resistance, an initial wrestling match of sorts before we learn to truly still our body and soul.

We may have trials to overcome, pressing problems to sort through, and decisions to be made, while seeking God's best for us. The enemy loves to drive us to distraction when we've chosen to press pause on busyness.

Don't be afraid, my friend. *Though it seems daunting to step away and let go of stuff, we need to remember just Who is holding on to us.* Although we may feel invisible without being so present to others, we are never overlooked or forgotten by God.

When life gets too overwhelming for me, I find that coming aside to rest, spending quality time to engage with God, close family and friends, savouring a slowed down life, and appreciating the beauty of creation is what recharges me best.

Because gratitude, love and relationship are at the heart of life and faith. Our souls need sacred spaces and holy pauses in which to become revitalised, healed and whole. May you treat your lovely self to both in the days and weeks ahead and emerge refreshed.

**When you are tempted to fast-forward  
your life, take a moment to pause  
and appreciate where you are now,  
because it is more precious  
than you might know, more sacred  
than you might allow, transformative,  
and chock-full of new knowledge  
to help you learn, listen and grow.**



## *Day 16: Outdoors*

There is such beauty in the everyday, if we have eyes to see it. And the longer I am incarcerated in the house by poor health, the more I yearn for sights beyond my four walls or the limited view outside my window. For instance, even though I dislike spiders, their webs fascinate me

Their gossamer threads are strung with tensile strength, shimmering and glistening like a pearl necklace in the rain. And the small hooks on the silken cords ensnare the unsuspecting, creating a web of deception, a hiding-place for the unwary, a chasm to flex and fix its victim securely within.

Such intricate designs delight the eye even as I scan for the dark horror lurking inside. Yes, I can wax lyrical even over a spider's web! And whenever I have an opportunity, I take a picture and create a memory album of what I notice.

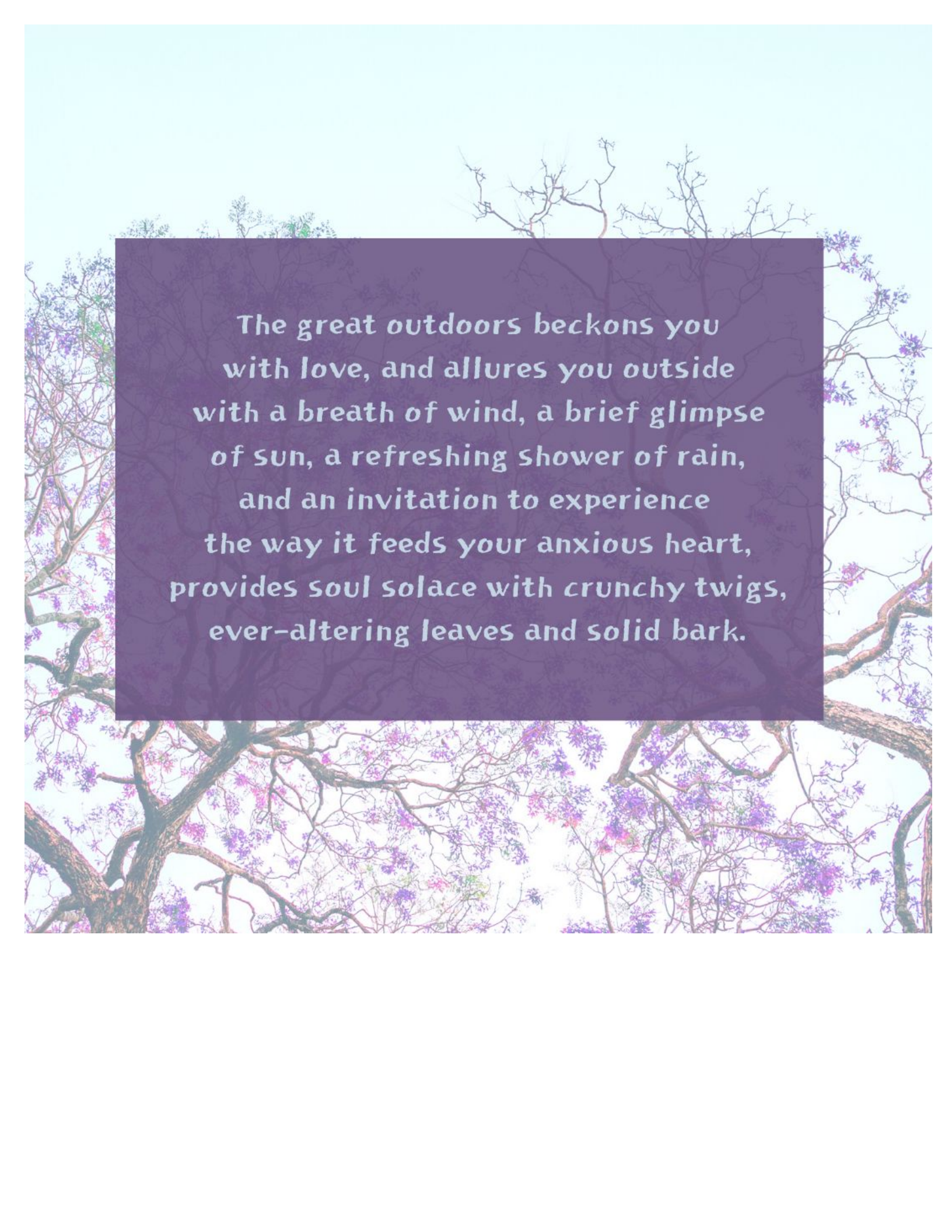
Going outside is a rare event for me. I breathe deeply, gulping in air like it's going out of fashion, set my gaze on earth or sky and view it all with new eyes. Then I might aim my camera and capture a shot of the object of interest I've discovered.

As an inept amateur, my shaky-handed shots are far from Pinterest-perfect but they stir a deep well of appreciation inside. Looking back, I see seasons shift, remember brief splashes of sun on my face, lush green landscape, bright blue sky, and moving drifts of clouds.

I revisit colour and life in plants and trees, noisy ducks waddling, and canoeists cresting the waves. Life going on in its own sweet way in a natural, undisturbed rhythm. All inviting a pause to appreciate the scenes unfolding before us.

The outdoors is a constantly changing panorama that shouts out loud, proclaiming its glory and a hymn of perpetual praise to our Creator God. May you take an opportunity today or later this week to appreciate its beauty and soul reviving power.





*The great outdoors beckons you  
with love, and allures you outside  
with a breath of wind, a brief glimpse  
of sun, a refreshing shower of rain,  
and an invitation to experience  
the way it feeds your anxious heart,  
provides soul solace with crunchy twigs,  
ever-altering leaves and solid bark.*

## Day 17: Reminder

I am a bit ashamed to confess that our garden is often a messy, tangled up space, where weeds frequently run rampant, and grass can be deep enough for pegs to fall off the line and hide within its tall, lush blades. It's an unintentional wild space which insects can flourish in.

But even this uncultivated space (which speaks out loud of our slowness, incapacity, and need for help) is a source of gratitude and deepening awareness. I've developed a greater need to see and sense the sacred in the secular even if the sights I hone in on are those most people would either tut over or ignore.

I want to awaken to wonder and a deeper awareness of God's goodness and grace all around me in the commonplace. He is particularly manifest to those with eyes eager to see and ears willing to hear, and can reveal himself in unexpected ways.

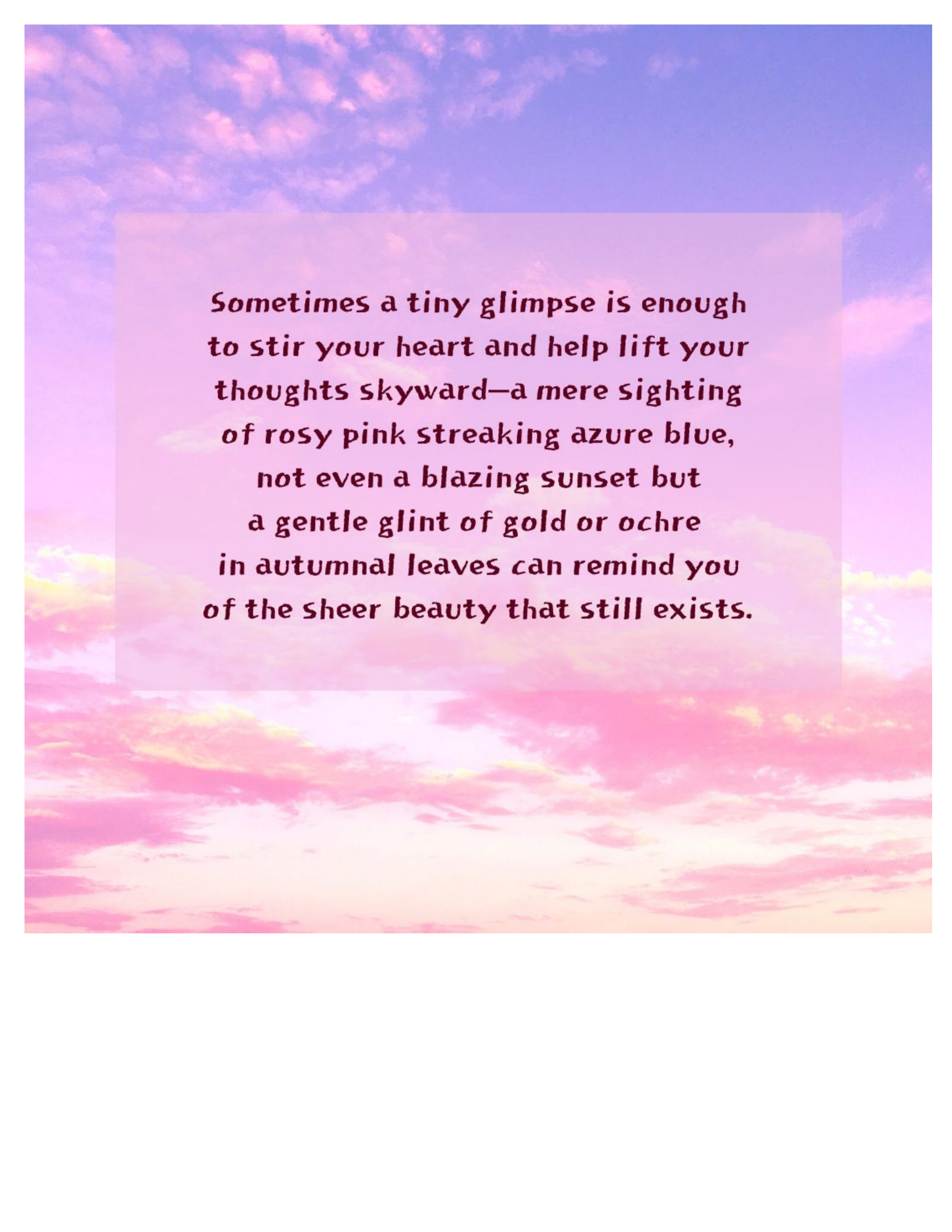
Recently, my eyes were captivated by a blaze of golden sunny rays from tilting heads as dandelions raised their yellow flags to the world. Unashamedly brazen in their boldness, with no apology for being 'less than' any other plant.

Deep down, I know weeds are largely flowers growing wildly, especially when a garden is bereft of the cultured sort and rarely cultivated as such. Weeds are also a sign of life, vigour and vitality. *They speak of thriving where we are planted and survival against the odds.*

Their tenacity and endurance are like faith markers in the soil of God's Word, while their perseverance shows grit and determination to stay rooted. Their colour is as vivid as any true flower, and the green reveal of them suggests the sap and spark of life itself.

Seeing them move and sway reminds me how the Holy Spirit speaks to my soul: sometimes soft and low like a soothing lullaby, or fierce and wild as a reminder of God's searing love for you and me. Seeing beauty in the everyday shapes my thoughts, words and poetry. Take a look and note how it affects you too.





*Sometimes a tiny glimpse is enough to stir your heart and help lift your thoughts skyward—a mere sighting of rosy pink streaking azure blue, not even a blazing sunset but a gentle glint of gold or ochre in autumnal leaves can remind you of the sheer beauty that still exists.*



## Day 18: Equilibrium

It doesn't take much to rock our world or spoil our day, does it? With 24 hour news reports, lives that are increasingly fractured and eminently distracted by pinging phones, i-pads and tablets, we can quickly swing from delight to despair, from joy to sadness, from feeling carefree to being consumed with fear.

And that doesn't include our own internal reactions and body chemistry, plus any propensity for self-preoccupation, worry and anxiety, which can play havoc with our feelings on the best of days.

So how do we find and maintain a state of measured calm, of equilibrium in all this? How do we avoid being at the mercy of our feelings and subject to change because of shifts in the world around or even in our souls? *Where is the equilibrium we all seek and desperately need?*

What works may vary from person to person, but the major stabilising thing in my life is my faith in Jesus Christ. Not that my faith doesn't falter at times, of course. The vital, stabilising part is what and who we place our faith in, not how great our faith might be in and of itself.

Trusting in Christ is how I achieve a measure of balance, composure and calm, despite what might be happening in my life. It's not a state of constant, switched off bliss, ignoring the things that disturb my soul, while I meditate or something. It starts with a conscious awareness of my need.

It's a willing surrender to God as a loving Father. *He cares deeply about what hurts us, and has the ability to keep us stable instead of falling apart.* He gives us his courage, peace, equilibrium and strength whenever we need them, and reminds us he is in control of everything.

Though I may come to God in a state of turmoil to begin with, once I have stilled and rested myself in his presence, prayed and handed over my worries and concerns, he fills me with his supernatural peace, calm and contentment again.

It's a gift. Pure grace, in fact. Such holy calm is freely available to us all. And we have unlimited access to it as often as we need. There are no limits to God's great willingness to meet with us and calm our fretful hearts, making soul equilibrium totally achievable for you, too, my friend.

**It is here, in a quiet corner of  
the room, where all you can hear  
is a steady tick, tick, tick  
puncturing the silence,  
that your soul can finally  
exhale, relax, breathe freely  
again, inhale equilibrium,  
find strength to begin again.**



## Day 19: Revolution

I wake feeling out of sorts, unsettled, restless and agitated. Weakness, insomnia and pain tend to affect my mental state because the weariness they bring in their wake soon begins to permeate everything else like a dense, heavy cloud. *Perhaps you've felt that way, too?*

On days when light and joy seem to be absent, and our souls feel downcast, we have to make a deliberate effort to stay encouraged and pursue joy for all we are worth. Because joy hides behind every dark cloud and we notice it most when we search it out.

*It's a matter of the will—of mind over matter, Spirit-led living over flesh-induced feelings.* We have to fight for hope and joy when we feel joyless, although the battle might feel endless. But it's definitely worth it!

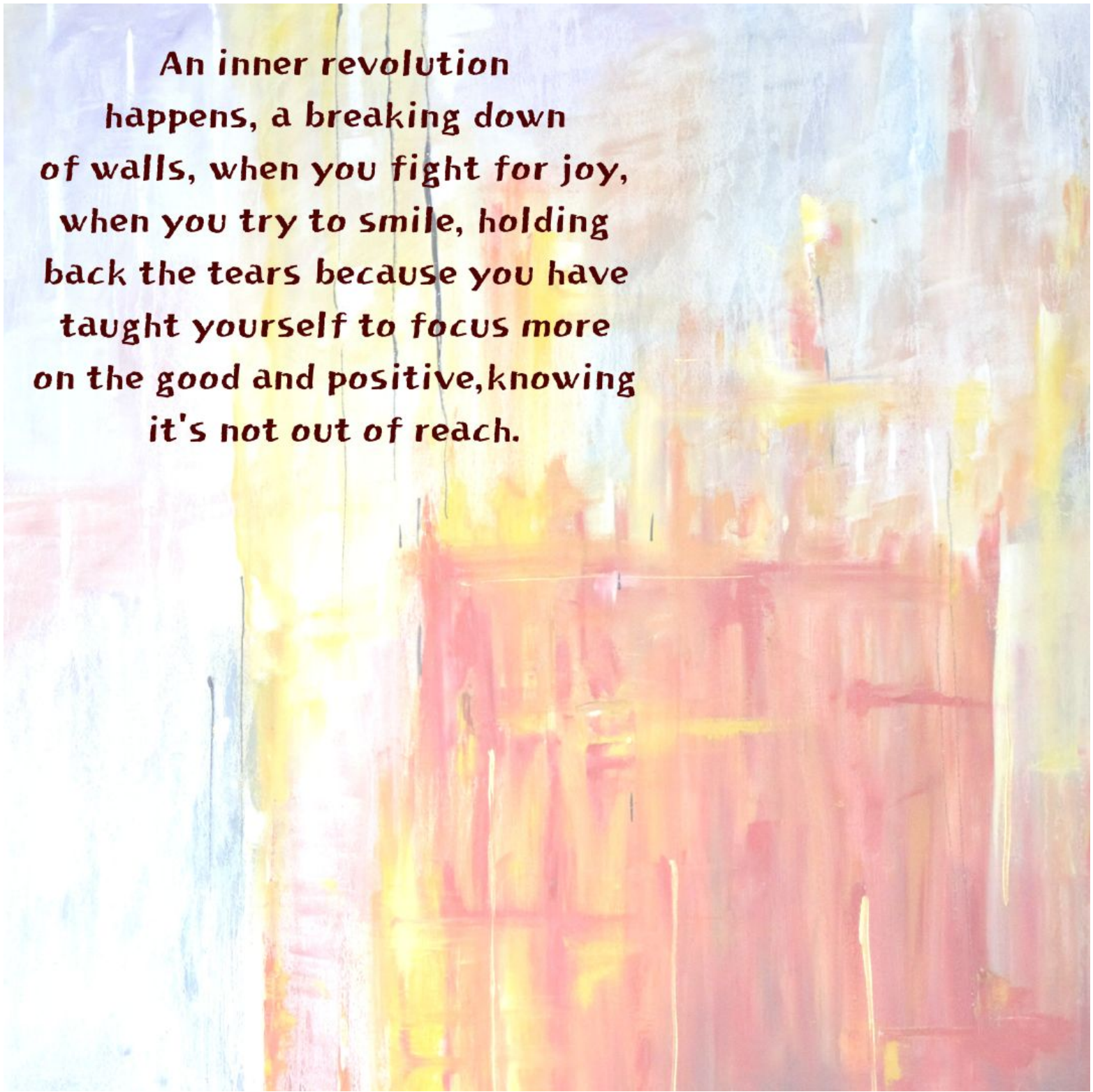
Unsurprisingly, rest and joy are closely aligned and dependent on one another, especially resting in God. Our days of extra busyness, weakness and weariness are speaking to us of a pressing need to pause and exercise better soul care.

They suggest a strong need for rest, silence and stillness instead of a crash and burn style of busyness which leads to prolonged illness. I still struggle to listen closely and obey these initial inner promptings some days.

But if I choose to ignore those messages, I soon find myself regretting it. *This fight for joy isn't just for those of us who have M.E and chronic illness, it's for everyone.* Because we all live in a fallen world which can drain every ounce of vitality out of us, if we let it.

Joy and peace are much harder to access when we feel exhausted or have too many worries and fears going on in our heads. Let's try to spark a revolution of joy because it lifts us up and might just become contagious. You never know.

**An inner revolution  
happens, a breaking down  
of walls, when you fight for joy,  
when you try to smile, holding  
back the tears because you have  
taught yourself to focus more  
on the good and positive, knowing  
it's not out of reach.**



## Day 20: Unique

Our near neighbours recently brought home their precious newborn son from hospital, and it made me reflect that every life begins with a journey. As tiny infants, we have to make our way into the world to commence on this adventure. It is taken as we traverse the birth canal or arrive via delivery by Cesarean Section, perhaps.

The wonder of our time in the womb is a continual marvel that we are privy to in some small measure with intrauterine images. Though nothing fully prepares us for the moment of arrival as we await the birth of our infants. Each one is unique, amazing and special.

The gestation time period of 40 weeks (more or less) is a miracle of Divine knowledge, planning and foresight. God knows the secret place where conception takes place and the child develops in hidden solitude.


God is with us even as we flex and grow away from public view or scrutiny. For those few weeks of our lives, from conception to delivery, we literally live, move and have our being in him, as well as in the watery home of our mother's womb.

I wonder what secrets we might have whispered to us by the Holy Spirit's life-giving breath? Sadly, I can only speculate. *But I am sure we are welcomed, affirmed and celebrated even before we draw breath in the world outside this maternal home.*

Because God values and celebrates the uniqueness of you and me. After all, he created us with precision and love. And I believe that one of his greatest desires is to witness us confidently living into our unique, God-given potential and promise.

Even if your family of origin hasn't valued you very much or your family of choice appears to take you for granted, God never stops appreciating, unconditionally loving, and compassionately supporting his unique, beloved child. You matter to him—and you always will.



A light pink rose is the central focus, partially submerged in a clear glass vase. The vase features a decorative rose gold band around its middle and intricate floral patterns etched into the glass. The background is a soft, neutral tone, creating a gentle and elegant atmosphere.

**Try not to compare yourself with others, whereby they seem like an exotic orchid but you are more of a humble rose surrounded by sharp thorns, because you are a precious, unique, beloved individual, and the world needs you to be real.**

## *Day 21: From the heart*

Things slowed as the music stalled. Voices were speaking. One voice taking up the mike. My ears pricked. The room hushed. A message was given. Spoken just to me, it seemed. All was still, save for a heart hammering fit to burst.

I drank in every word, desert-thirsty for Living Water that would satiate to the full, absorbing every drop. Words ringing bell-like in head and heart—*He. Loves. Me. God loves me?!* Never before had I known love to be pure, unsullied and unconditional.

I had sought answers, meaning, purpose and love everywhere: inappropriate love-givers, horoscopes, Ouija boards, levitation, writing smut, being lust for others. My 17 year old self was accustomed to being used, taken advantage of and hurt.


My search for acceptance and love caused me to cast the net wide, dive deep into murky, treacherous waters as I sought a kind of hidden treasure I couldn't name yet. But I came up empty every time, with a sad and silted heart.

As a child, I lay back on grass, looking to heaven, seeing angels in my eyes, always knowing there must be Something Else out there. A better way to live. Someone Who Really Cared. *This child-prodigal was finally running into the arms of her loving Father-God.*

Now reunited with the One who knew me even before I was born, with a holy spark of Life awakening a deadened spirit to the wonder of his Love. The thrill of knowing and being known running through me, with my emotions and heart set on fire.

Those were heady days when my heart was first captivated by the love of God. Little did I know how much other people and other things would vie for first place in my heart and thoughts from thereon. As they will for you, too. But our soul ardency can be revived again by grace, and our priorities rearranged.





*Your eyes have been opened now  
and you can see that life is not  
about tasks, not about success  
or making progress, but about  
acknowledging your weaknesses  
and resting in holy strength and grace,  
knowing your small part matters—it is  
necessary, vital to the whole—and  
counts a lot when lived from the heart.*

## Day 22: Befriend

I've been a Christian for decades. I write about and think I know a fair amount about love. Isn't it a given for all believers in Christ? After all, he is the epitome of love. Turns out I am wrong. I have barely scratched the surface when it comes to actually living it out. *Because love is more than a feeling—it's a faith thing.*

God has revealed it's a vital necessity for me, for all of us really, to learn to fully accept his love and begin to live freely in our identity as his beloved children, as we allow the knowledge we are totally loved to journey from our heads to our hearts.

I don't know about you, but my scared, scarred and wounded soul is wary because being loved and loving others doesn't always come easy for me. I've been afraid to let love in, automatically keeping barriers up and defences ready, often without noticing it.

Yes, even with family and friends to some extent, my heart hasn't been as open as it could be, keeping love at a distance. Because when you've been deeply hurt by childhood abuse, it makes trusting and loving others (or yourself) challenging at best.

I find it hard to befriend, never mind love myself. *Do you struggle in this area as well?* We can remain afraid we won't know how to change (or actually want to) because those self-protective walls, the barricades built up over time, will have to be broken down in order to allow love full access to our hearts.

It helps us move forward in this area if we can learn to accept God's love for us as a solid fact rooted in reality, love ourselves in a balanced way, and freely love others in return. *It's a tall order when you've been hurt, isn't it?* Because it's hard to revisit the past when you've been wounded by so-called love.

Panic can grip us for a while, until God reveals how this opening up is actually an ongoing part of the deep inner healing work he has in mind for us as the next, necessary stage of moving forward. And we can exhale when we remember God is Love personified. *Therefore learning how to love better is learning how to understand God better.*

Love is God's defining characteristic and should be ours, too, as his disciples. When we embrace our need of saving love, we embrace God. We embrace Love himself, so we needn't fear or hesitate to accept such amazing, unconditional love. Then we can gradually learn to befriend and love ourselves as well.



**No matter how many friends you might have, it can be hard to be content unless you learn to befriend yourself, acknowledge your hurt, pain, mistakes and ways you've messed up, and begin to love and accept yourself for who you really are: a beautiful person who deserves to be cherished and cared about.**





## Day 23: Voice

I began my life as a premature twin, remaining small in stature and influence, and have largely stayed that way since. I was a girl scared of her own shadow, who lived within the pages of books and deep inside her own imagination. *Perhaps you have a similar story?*

As a shy, introverted child with occasional extrovert tendencies—like singing to her next-door neighbours (yes, really) and leading school assemblies—I lived in a minority way, with my ambition reduced by adverse circumstances. It seems I wasn't destined for greatness or for my voice to be heard.

Although I remained a shrinking violet, on the inside I ached to fit in and belong, rather than being an edge-dwelling girl-cum-woman on the margins. Many years were spent feeling anguished over being small in every way, as society put me into boxes with labels like 'disabled' and 'insignificant.'

I broke out of them now and then, raised a pipsqueak protest. Then I began blogging, sharing my writing heart to heart—in a small way, of course. Allowing dormant creativity to finally be expressed as a writer and poet. *It seemed I had found my voice at last.*

I also woke up to the fact that God wants you and me to give voice to his life, light and redeeming power in us as we live out our ordinary lives. Gradually, I grew more confident, wrote about my painful past—formerly a veiled, secret thing—in the hope of encouraging others to know they are not alone with their struggles.

A doorway opened. A window of freedom. A gap of grace appeared. *A way to live small and be large in God's sight.* I take comfort in the relative obscurity and anonymity of my quiet corner of the blogosphere, where I voice my thoughts.

And I take heart in knowing someone out there might benefit from reading the words I share. Because in the outpouring of our words, the sharing of our unique voice, however we can, we have an opportunity to help and encourage other hurting souls and reassure them they are not alone.

*Being small is allowing God to be great in us as we give voice for his glory's sake. We reveal his beauty in our brokenness, his strength in our weakness, and his hope in our despair. We discover we are already enough, already amazing, unique, precious and special to God. And that's the most freeing thing of all.*

**Silence isn't always golden or good, not if it means you dare not speak up and fail to give voice to your thoughts because you're afraid and you think your words don't count, but oh, they do my friend, because someone else needs to hear them, someone who will really benefit from your message—once it's said.**



## Day 24: Strength

Confession time: I'm an avid reader, dreamer and deep thinker, and I'm mostly happy to be so. I can easily lose myself in words, reading and reflection. My parents grew impatient with this daydreaming girl with her head in the clouds and nose in a book. They gave no encouragement whatsoever to pursue this pathway.

It seems as if God designed me to be contemplative by nature, and created me with a questioning disposition and thirst for knowledge. There's nothing I love more than discussing life and faith issues and putting the world to rights over coffee with my beloved, as and when I'm awake and alert enough to do so.


But sometimes I forget to switch off and resist all the pondering and questioning. Sometimes I get tied up in knots on the inside and wonder how on earth I got there, and please won't someone untangle me? I forget how much mental energy it takes for me to think and hold conversations.

*A mind can go into overdrive and make us weak with exhaustion, weary with worry or depleted with discussion.* Because I'm a naturally driven type of person, the slowing down which having M.E requires of me can still cause huge frustration, now and then.

Inevitably, once a little bit of energy, ability and strength are available, the tendency is to take it by the horns and run with it, until it is no longer there and I'm too spaced out to notice or care. *But if I allow myself to have burnout, then I'm prone to becoming more unwell and less of the person God desires me to be.*

A better plan for all of us who feel weak, weary or depleted in any way is to look to God for the strength and energy we need. He might draw us aside to rest ourselves with him for a while, or he could refuel and replenish our empty tanks so we are able to carry on as before.

It's also possible that God cares more about building up our inner strength and resilience than he does about giving us fresh infusions of physical strength whenever we get low. That will equip us with greater patience with ourselves and our weaknesses, and greater endurance in general. A win-win in my book.



*One of the best things you can have  
is inner strength and resilience  
because they will guard you against  
harm by building up your faith and trust  
when hard stuff happens to you or those  
you love, and you can access these gifts  
by developing a close relationship  
with God, depending on his grace and love.*

## *Day 25: Between the dash*

When there is a gap, or several, in our lives, they can yawn empty as chasms. *Where is the next big thing coming from? Isn't it time for something new?* Well, maybe, maybe not. Sometimes the gap, the space, indicates loss, missing things, opportunities or relationships.

Even a tiny gap in our teeth can feel huge when our tongue explores the space, can't it? Never mind the cavernous emptiness when a loved one leaves or passes away. Hearts ache as the loss leaves a huge gap nothing else can fill.

I've been living what feels like a lifetime in the gap. It's in the waiting-room between the here and now and where I want to be. And it hurts. You might be there as well. *When dreams fade and reality kicks us in to touch, then maybe it's time to look at the in-between life differently.*

We can experience a gap: In-between sickness and healing. In the middle of pain, promise and purpose. Between desire and destiny. In-between confusion and understanding. Deep in the valley before we get to the mountaintop, and between this world and the next.

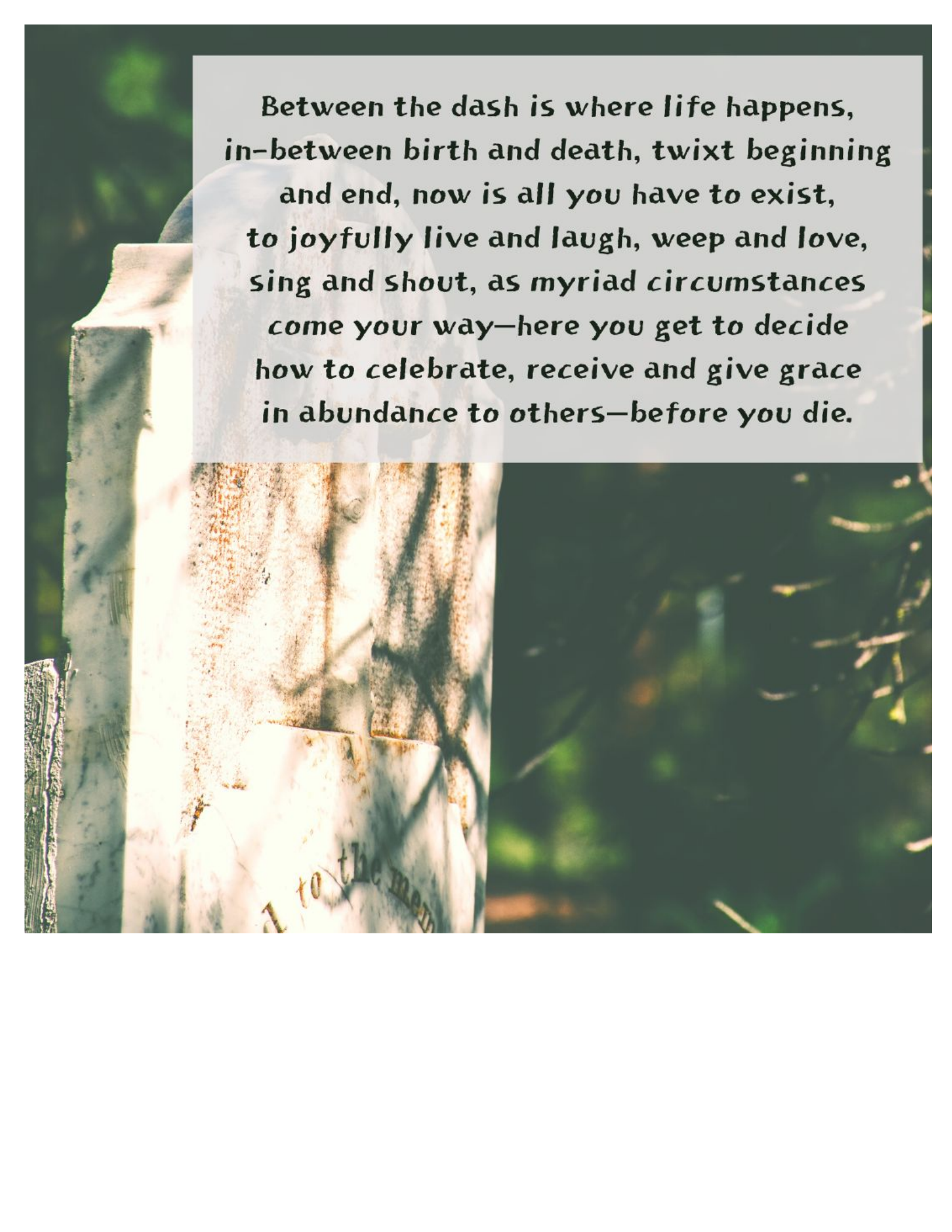
*What if we could see the gap between where we are now and where we want to be as a learning experience?* If we could stop and savour this moment, right here, right now, we might feel the pulse beat of our own hearts slow and steady to match God's own.

We can find grace and find God, for he's already here, with arms wide open, ears attentive, heart and senses finely tuned, and voice ready to whisper his wisdom to us. He is ready to receive us whenever we pause long enough to notice.

Yes, even when we build walls to close those gaps —walls of resentment, ignorance, pain, confusion and shame—God's love still seeps through the cracks, crevices and empty spaces. Even as we race to fill our lives with anything or anyone else but him.

All because we dread the dark chaos of our own lives or the deafening silence of our inner turmoil. God will fill all those in-between spaces and all our empty places if we let him, giving his hope and purpose to all our days on earth.





**Between the dash is where life happens,  
in-between birth and death, twixt beginning  
and end, now is all you have to exist,  
to joyfully live and laugh, weep and love,  
sing and shout, as myriad circumstances  
come your way—here you get to decide  
how to celebrate, receive and give grace  
in abundance to others—before you die.**

to the men

## Day 26: What if?

How often we yearn to break free from life's challenging circumstances, desperately hope for healing from sickness and disease, pray for problems to be fixed and long for an existence that is happy, calm and relaxed.

*But what if the very things we seek to get away from are actually the making of us? What if those situations we struggle with and demands we dread are helping to shape us into Christ-likeness?*

Would we view those things any differently? Could it make a difference to know we are continually being changed on the inside by God's grace? I think so. There's plenty of anecdotal evidence in my own life, and most likely in yours as well.

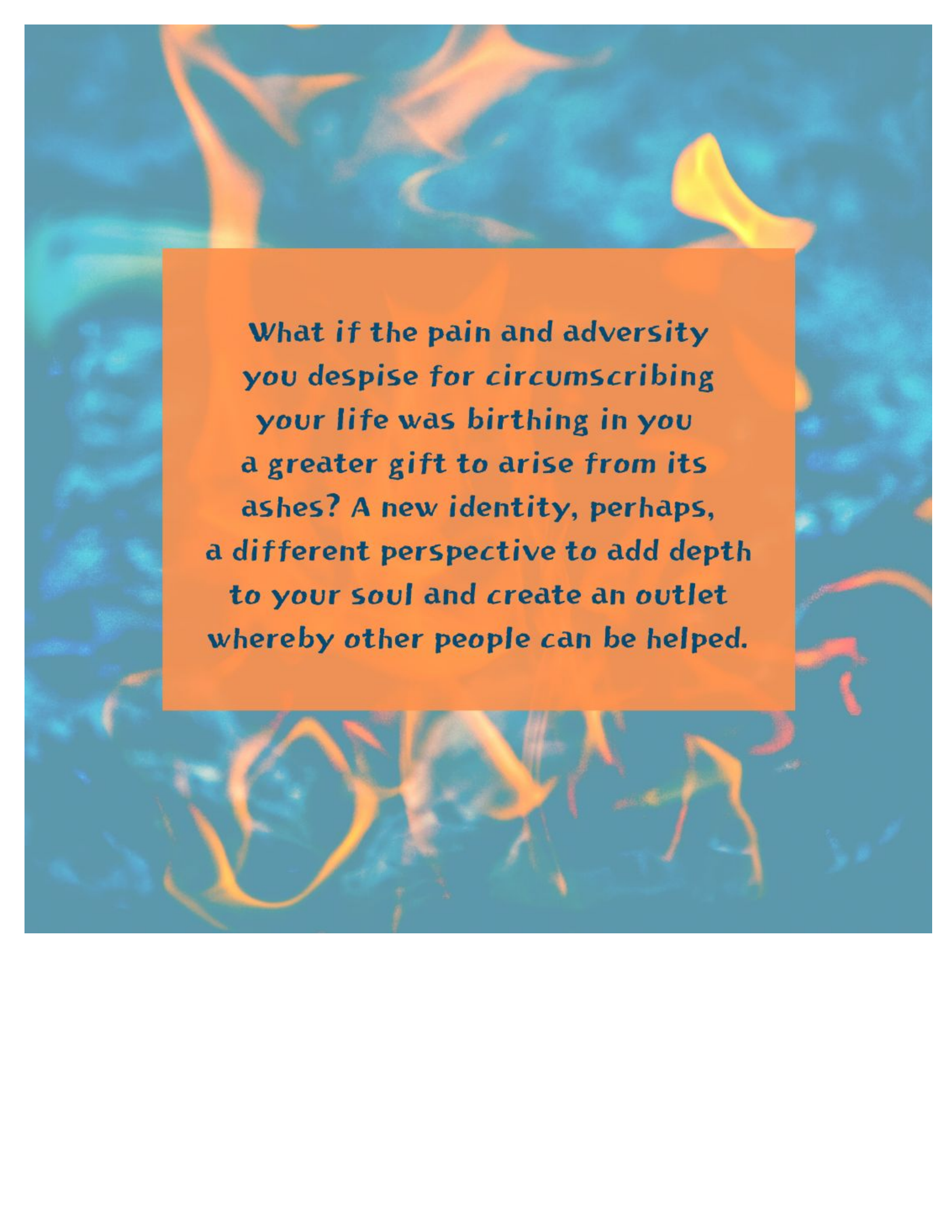
*For we actually grow most in times of adversity, flourish in yielding to God's hand at work in us, see how our souls are moved to seek his face, and realise that greater dependency produces greater reassurance and abiding fruit in us.*

Because our lives are never just about us. They are part of God's greater narrative in the world, whereby people, places and problems are far more interlinked than we can possibly know from our limited, earthly perspective.

You and I are conduits of God's grace, channels of his mercy, love and compassion. *All that we go through is teaching us how to relate better to God and to others.* We are in the school of the Holy Spirit, continually learning how to live well as Christ-followers.

Sometimes we don't like our homework very much, or repeating hard lessons until we finally get them. Then we start to see how God is using us to speak of his overcoming love during life's painful circumstances.

*Our lives become a living sermon. Our history is a testimony of faith and grace.* Our stressful situations and difficult circumstances are means of helping others, just as much as they are shaping us. Which gives us hope and encouragement even as we battle to overcome them.



**What if the pain and adversity you despise for *circumscribing* your life was birthing in you a greater gift to arise from its ashes? A new identity, perhaps, a different perspective to add depth to your soul and *create an outlet* whereby other people can be helped.**

## *Day 27: Drained and dry*

It's one of those inevitable burnout days that seemingly hits us out of the blue. Though I usually get them because my mind and body have been pushed beyond their limit and are strongly protesting a feeling of overwhelm.

Thankfully, God always gives us body and soul refreshment when we are weary and go to him for refuelling. He alone can touch us soul-deep and bring about the healing we desperately need.

God renews and refuels us as we sit in his presence. He restores us by his grace. And as I sat before him once, with tears of overwhelm and exhaustion running down my face, I asked the Lord for a word to refresh the weary.

I wanted a cheery thought to soothe a sinking soul and help lift it up toward the brightness of his light. I asked the Lord for strength to write and words to share because my heart desires so much to bless and encourage others.

God spoke tenderly to me, as he has done several times since, and reminded me that I was far too empty, drained and dry to do as I desired. This was a time to replenish myself, to sit, rest and abide, to wait and come beside, and receive from him instead of giving out. *Could it be that time for you too?*

A time to pause, not press forward. A season to relax and just stay in faith. A period to still your soul before the Lord and listen to his voice. He will hold you close and whisper of the way he willingly pours his manifest grace into your days.

All those who want to make a difference, to spread hope and encouragement to others, must come often to his table and receive their own manna bread. *We can't go on without this sustenance or we will grow weary in the offering.* Please pause and refuel, my friend, if this describes you. Your body and soul will thank you in the end.



**When you feel like you have nothing of worth to offer others because you are drained and dry and thirst yourself, why not sit under the wide umbrella of prayer and pause a while to let the clouds of blessing open up and rain down hard on the parched land your soul has now become, as you allow a holy drenching to provide you with a fresh touch of sacred hope.**





## *Day 28: Nurture your soul*

I pick and eat a few fresh, home-grown strawberries, collect a handful of dwarf green beans, dig nails into soil, bend arthritic knees, stoop low to the ground, and tug a few dead leaves off living greenery.

And despite the debilitating stiffness and pain pervading my body as it resists these exertions and tries to right itself again, it feels good to be alive, positioned close to earthiness, with its juice running down my chin.

Lounging in the garden, with my book propped open, birds chirping in the background and insects buzzing, my senses are alert to the loveliness surrounding me, and the scents assailing my nostrils with their sweet freshness.


I breathe deep and easy, relaxed in the sun's inviting warmth, not too hot to be uncomfortable, a soft breeze playing with my hair, no remembered worries or cares. Noises sound from afar as children raise voices and adults admonish and comfort in turn.

I'm resting, yet strangely more alive and alert inside than I've felt for a long while. It feels like holy ground as I touch base, touch reality, touch the healing hem of God's garment spread to ground, and revel in sights and sounds to soothe my frequently frazzled soul.

I lift my eyes, tilt my face and enjoy a gift of grace. Here is a kind of normality I crave with all the yearning of an addict desperate for their next fix. An afternoon when I am well enough to spend a few minutes outside and pretend that this is what I usually do, when the reality is very different.

I'm reflecting back on an experience here because most of my life is lived behind closed doors, housebound, often bedbound, confined and constrained for months at a time, and circumscribed with pain. But when I do get out into a garden, I sense my soul almost visibly exhaling.

Flowers and plants feed our souls because they're so alive and vital, vibrant and colourful. I love everything, from high trailing wisteria to ground level geraniums. And I encourage you to pay attention to the ways in which your own soul can be nurtured by nature's bounty, or something else you enjoy.



**Sometimes it's a satisfying meal  
which seems to feed you well, inside  
and out, or a small glimpse of a loved  
one close by—the way they laugh or smile,  
or watching a child at play who's totally  
absorbed in a game, oblivious to you  
and everything else, or catching sight  
of a starry sky, a garden full of floral  
delights—and you feel warm and light.**

## Day 29: Journey

In our journey of life and faith, we long for instant restoration and change, though God takes his time with us. His best and deepest work cannot be rushed. We are continual works in progress, slowly being sanctified day by day from one degree of glory to another.

While we're in the waiting room between here and now and the yet to come, we need a revelation on who we are in Christ and how that impacts everything else in our lives. *Our seasons of slow are where we learn to trust and seek more ardently after his heart.*

It has taken me many years to grasp the fundamentals of this alone. I'm a slow, slow learner. I've travelled a hard path of guilt and shame, worn a garment of dirt and ashes, lost myself in its grey silt fabric, and choked on the dust of it. Your journey might feel similarly arduous.

I've become unravelled as my life spooled out before me in broken threads. I often failed to appreciate how beauty arises out of ashes, joy gets birthed out of despair or hope emerges from helplessness. *But God is continually teaching me to see myself whole, healed and restored in him even in the messy middle of things, just as you are too.*

As wounded ones with broken wings, we feel tethered to earth, weighed down and set aside, especially when we experience sickness and pain. Until God gently lifts us up and sets us free to fly again. His free-flowing, constant currents of grace and mercy revive and refresh all who are wounded and weary.

We are enabled to fly free and become whole within the very air he breathes. And to discover holy ground is right where we are. *Because in the mundane things of earth, the darkened soil of the secular, God's presence continues to envelop us.* It never leaves us for a second.

Though shame and guilt seek to pull us back to grubbing in dirt and ashes if we let them, they have no lasting hold over us. For as long as we learn to accept God's forgiveness (and forgive ourselves as well) there is nothing stopping us from flying free and soaring high as he intends us to.

*Every journey we take eventually leads us back to the Father's waiting arms, back to his eternally loving embrace.* It's a place of full acceptance where we see how our seemingly stagnant waiting seasons have actually been the very making of us, grown our faith, and given us reason for hope in future days.



**You are on a soul journey  
with fluctuating scenery  
so do not get dismayed  
if the view stays the same  
for miles, because it's intended  
to teach you to stretch, relax  
and rest yourself before you're  
ready to go forward once more.**



## Day 30: Invitations

When I had an invitation to attend a small group, centering prayer Eucharist service after years of missing church and missing Communion completely, God not only equipped me to attend, he also affirmed I was precious to him just as I am. Yes, even in my usual state of deep weariness and weakness.

And although the locusts may have stolen years and health, my latter days could be more fruitful than the former—yes, even now, late as I might be to manage two blogs, write books, share my thoughts and poetry, and open my heart to offer hope and encouragement to others who are struggling.

As those who have walked a challenging, painful path before me can attest, these latter years could be our best yet, because we finally think, 'Why not?' instead of 'Why me?' Even if we have to press past our limitations which can seem like forbidding dead ends.

Why not... write a blog, write poetry, belong to on-line communities, join in, get involved, stand up for something you feel passionate about, be generous, be compassionate, encourage, make a difference in the lives of others? *Why not look for another opening if one door closes?*

My outing, which ended in tears, revealed how little it actually takes to make me feel truly blessed (and exhausted), and how thankful I am for the rare occasions when I can leave the house and enjoy meeting up with people. Most invitations get turned down because my health is too unreliable and precarious to participate.

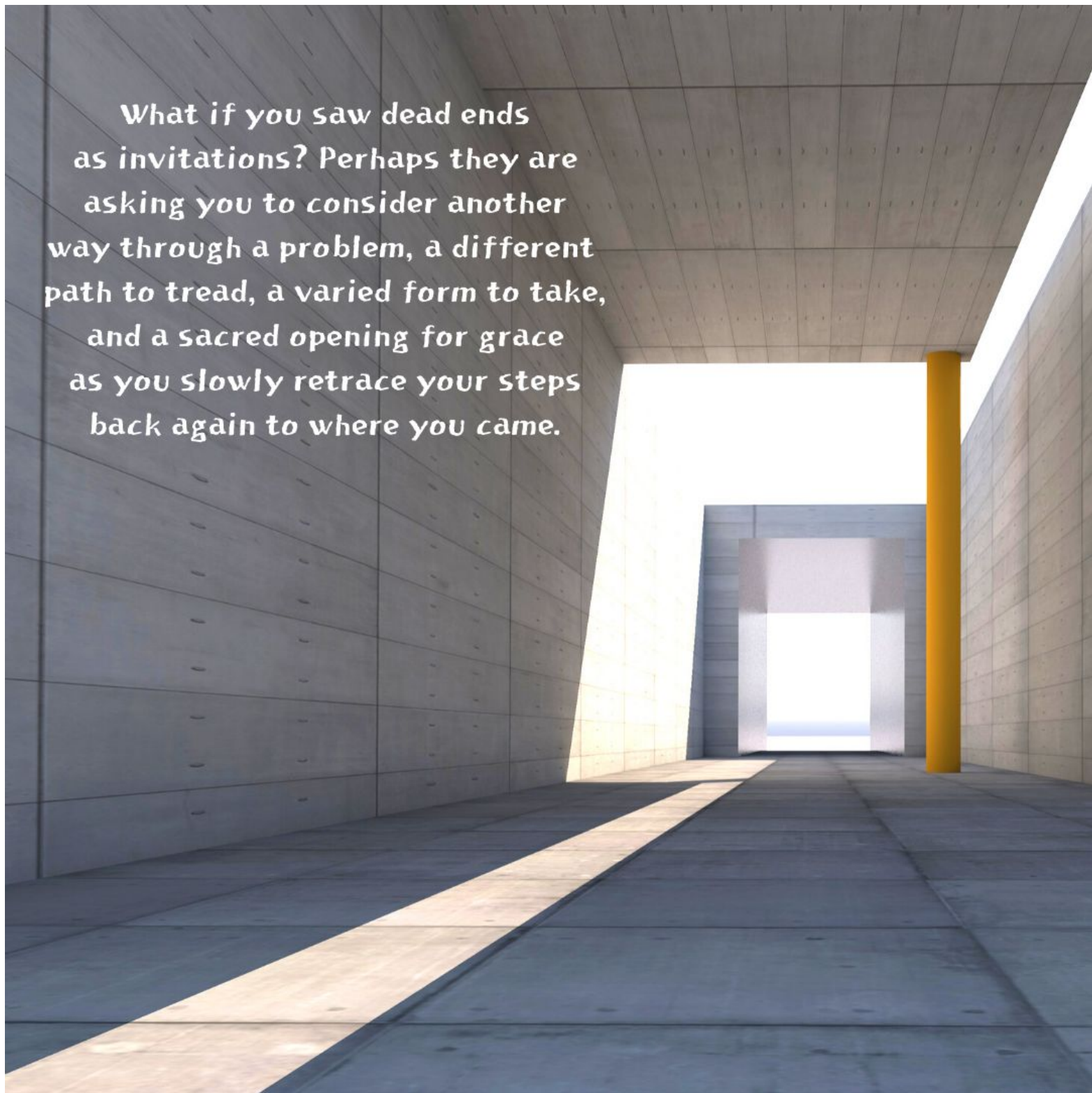
But simply seeing the landscape unfurl before me on the drive there was a thing of wonder. Beauty wears many faces, doesn't it? Holy ground is all around because God is everywhere in the normal, run-of-the-mill, prosaic and practical everyday existence we encounter.

Sometimes, all it takes is a special gift of grace for us to appreciate just how much he inhabits the mundane moments which we are all in danger of taking for granted. And how ardently he longs for us to see and accept the everyday invitations he offers us to notice his presence with us.

*My friend, I pray you will sense him in those times when you feel too weary to go on or too uncertain to know the way forward. May you hear God's reassuring voice affirming his great, unconditional love for you, and open your heart to the holy ache of ordinary as a sacred opportunity not to be missed, if possible.*



What if you saw dead ends  
as invitations? Perhaps they are  
asking you to consider another  
way through a problem, a different  
path to tread, a varied form to take,  
and a sacred opening for grace  
as you slowly retrace your steps  
back again to where you came.



## Day 31: Mountain

When we're between a rock and a hard place, there is hope of seeing change when the Rock we lean ourselves against is Christ himself. He provides safe shelter and protection when the storms of life hit us out of nowhere.

And his steadfast strength gives us resilience to press through the mountains of shame, pain, discouragement, disgrace, sickness and dis-ease of every kind that we might experience in life. *Remember that however large obstacles and mountains might seem, God is bigger still.*

Faith can move mountains. Not faith in our own small, wavering mustard seed-size faith, but faith in the One who can move mountains for us. Yes, even *this*. No matter how high, how wide, how deep, how immovable it might seem at first glance.

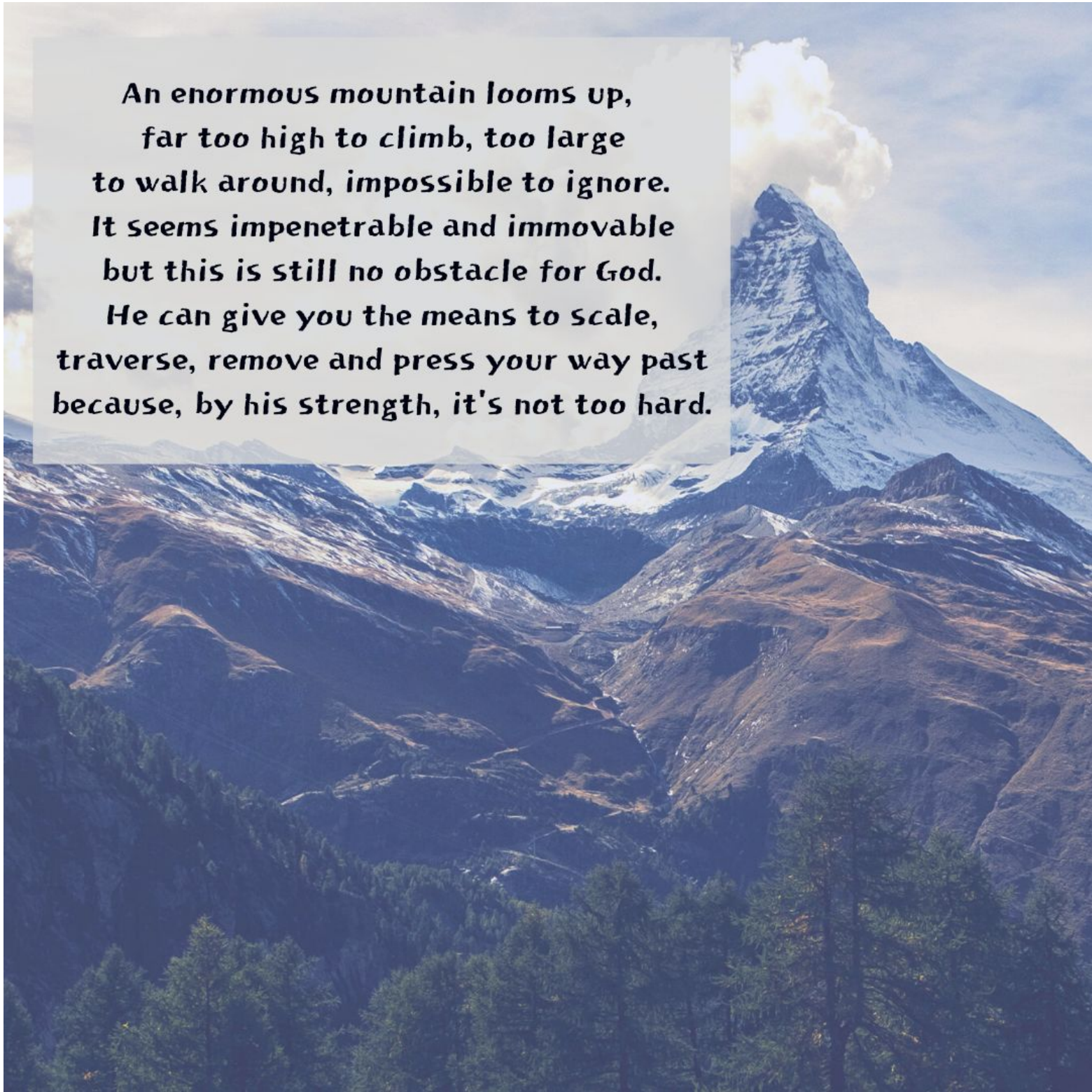
*The Mountain Mover stands ready on our behalf.* We have promises from the ever-faithful One. We have knowledge that pain does not last forever, joy comes in the morning, and help is only a cry, a breath, a prayer away.

God never loses heart or hope in you and I one day becoming all we can be in Christ. All he asks of us (and how huge an ask it can feel) is that we allow him to show us the painful places and fully cooperate with his work in our hearts, one small step at a time.

Even as we daily battle fear and struggle to see any progress happening yet. Because things are happening in the unseen realm that will become visible one day. *Those mountains might resist a bit but they are moving, inch by inch.*

One day we will see the difference. Instead of looming large, our mountain will be a shadow of its former self, a mere smudge in the distance when viewed through the eyes of faith. May that thought encourage your heart whenever you struggle with mountainous problems.

**An enormous mountain looms up,  
far too high to climb, too large  
to walk around, impossible to ignore.  
It seems impenetrable and immovable  
but this is still no obstacle for God.  
He can give you the means to scale,  
traverse, remove and press your way past  
because, by his strength, it's not too hard.**





## *Acknowledgements*

The book you hold in your hands isn't just a response to the horror of Covid-19. It has been birthed in the fires of affliction and adversity over many years. They have helped shape who I am, how I think, how I write, and how I live. Because everything we go through leaves a mark, a trace, a scar, perhaps.

Strange as it might sound, the coronavirus pandemic has given me a stronger impetus to want to make a difference through my words. It's been a horrible experience for us all, but it's also produced wonderful examples of people helping one another, particularly frontline medical staff.

This is my tiny, minnow-sized, humble contribution to that vast pool. It's written out of gratitude for the kind, caring and compassionate friends and neighbours who have been there for us during so many challenging months.

I'm also truly thankful for my lovely, faithful community of readers, friends and followers at [poetry joy.com](https://poetryjoy.com) and [joylenton.com](https://joylenton.com) who welcome my words, appreciate my poetry, and are encouraging supporters of my creative output on the blogs and books. You are gems shining brightly in my moments of doubting darkness. God bless you all!

Grateful hugs and a massive shout out to my hero and best supporter behind the scenes husband, Phil, who keeps me fed, centred, focused and calm when I feel too tired to carry on or have trouble believing I have it in me to bring another book to life. Without your constant love, care, faith and prayers, I wouldn't be the woman I am or the writer I have become. Thank you, sweetheart!

Last of all, but certainly not least, the most important person in my life is God, and I couldn't write a word without his inspiration, equipping and grace. He has allowed me to experience sadness, suffering and struggle so I would be able to come alongside others who need support—alongside you, dear reader—while I lean harder on him for everything. I owe him a huge debt of gratitude and praise.

## Author bio



Joy Lenton would be the first to admit that she's no super-serene self-help guru. Before she became a chronic illness warrior and writer she used to be a nurse, spending her days racing around a ward, but now she nurtures souls instead as a contemplative Christian writer and poet.

She's the author of [Embracing Hope: Soul Food to Help Chase Away the Blues](#) and [Seeking Solace: Discovering Grace in Life's Hard Places](#). She has contributed to [Mosaic of Grace: God's Beautiful Reshaping of Our Broken Lives](#) by James Prescott, [Taking off The Mask: Daring To Be the Person God created you To Be](#) by Claire Musters, and [Finding Purpose: Rediscovering Meaning in a Life with Chronic Illness](#) by Cindee Snider Re.

Joy's words have also been published in several poetry anthologies, including [Celebrations: 15 Years Of the People's Poetry](#), and she acted as a guest poet for Jenneth Graser's summer 2018 [Poetry As Therapy Online Retreat](#). Writing for her is both therapy and mission based.

Having experienced childhood sexual abuse and mental health problems in the past, Joy battles with anxiety and depressive tendencies. She lives with multiple chronic illness, M.E and disability. Her goal is to support and encourage all who are going through painful or challenging circumstances, and help them find the courage and faith to hope again.



You can find her sharing her heart thoughts about embracing hope in the hard on her [Words of Joy](#) blog. And sharing soulful, encouraging poetry on her [Poetry Joy](#) blog, where she seeks to sense the sacred in the everyday, looking for the bright threads of hope within every dark cloud. She's also a contributing writer for the community centred [Godspacelight](#) blog.