

Blog Post Readings (in)RL 2013

A collection of your favorite posts from the writers of (in)courage

(in)courage
home for the hearts of women



Blog Post Readings (in)RL 2013

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***Your Favorite Blog Posts from
(in)courage Read by the Authors***

Follow along while the authors
read these aloud on camera!

(in)courage
home for the hearts of women



Siloam Springs, Arkansas

www.dayspring.com

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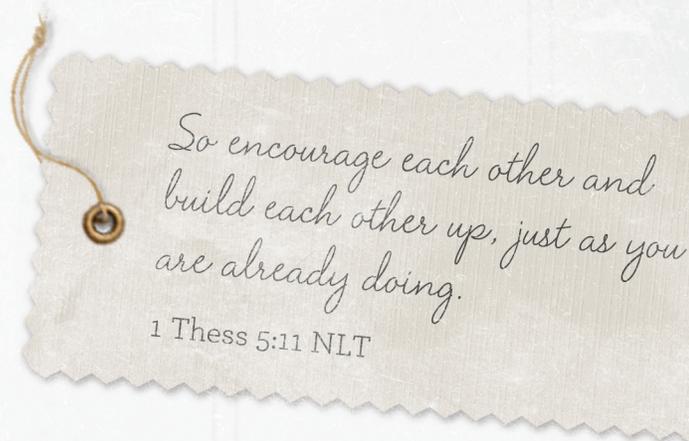
Think about (in)courage

as a bit like a beach house. You can put your sandy, dirty feet on the coffee table, laugh late into the night with girlfriends, and hear God's voice through our shared, broken, beautifully redeemed, everyday stories. It's the place where you're always welcome, just the way you are.

This E-Book features stories from the writers of the website (in)courage who read these posts aloud in the (in)RL 2013 video content. With openness, they share from their hearts personal experiences that challenge, inspire and move us out of our comfort zones. Their voices vary yet it's clear they share what matters most: a deep love for Jesus and all of His girls. You're one of them; you know that, right?



And we pray that as you read these words and follow along with the video, that you'll see yourself in the stories and recognize how **beloved** you are.





It Takes
Bravery



A Spark of Bravery

Since David is about to turn 10 years old {gasp!} I've been reflecting on how his life has changed and molded me and made me more brave.

I remember a sunny Saturday when David was a baby. Steve and I {although we had no money} decided to splurge and go to Baja Fresh for lunch. I gathered diapers and food for David's diaper bag while Steve strapped him into his car seat and off we went. When we arrived, Steve went up to order while I found a highchair for David and grabbed a table for us. While I was getting organized, I saw two boys, about 8 and 10 years old laughing and pointing to David. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but I could tell they had noticed his small hand with only two fingers and they were making fun of him.

My cheeks flushed bright red and my heart shattered into a thousand pieces. I wanted to climb under the table and hide. I wanted to grab David and run far far away where no one would ever be mean to him. I wanted to protect him from a life where the kids at school who would call him names and not include him in their recess activities. Instead, I sat there motionless while shame threatened to swallow me whole.

And then a spark of bravery ignited somewhere inside me. No. No. NO NO NO! I am not ashamed of my son. Yes, he only has two fingers on his left hand. Yes, he is different. But he is amazing and he is mine.

My first instinct was to go over and grab those kids by the collars of their tee shirts and scream at them. "How dare you laugh at my son!" I wanted to say. "You are awful, terrible kids!" But in my heart I knew. They didn't understand David. They had probably never seen a baby with seven fingers. They were scared—so they tried to be cool.

Slowly, I unstrapped David from his carseat and carried him over to where the boys were sitting with their parents. I could see the looks of terror on their faces. They thought they were about to be in big trouble. But instead, I calmly said, "Hi, I'm Lisa, and this is my son David. I saw you notice him and I wondered if I could answer any questions for you." They looked back at me with blank expressions. But the parents were incredibly kind. They asked how old David was, if he was healthy and thanked me for coming over to say hi.



I walked back to our table with my head held high and my chin quivering. It was one of the bravest and scariest things I had ever done. But I learned something about myself I hadn't known when we left the house just a few minutes earlier. I wasn't powerless. David was awesome—just the way he was, and I didn't have to sit by and let shame swallow me up. I could stand up, I could be brave. And I thought maybe, just maybe I could change the world, one little conversation at a time.

By Lisa Leonard // [Lisa Leonard](#)

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You're Right, Christian Women Aren't Immune to Cliques



The last time I really dressed up to impress a man was probably a decade ago when Peter and I were still in the do-you-notice-me-not-noticing-you-noticing-me phase. **The last time I dressed up to impress another woman was yesterday morning** when I painstakingly blow-dried my hair before escorting a group of preschoolers on a field trip to the farm.

To. The. Farm.

Micah's teacher is the opposite of me in every way. She is petite and effortlessly fashionable with truly great hair. So 7:30am found me determined to tame my own unruly mane. There may also have been eyeliner and a cute purse involved.

No one can make us quite as unsure about ourselves as another woman.

We can stand knee deep in witty conversation holding cupcakes in one hand and our cell phones with brilliant Twitter commentary in the other only to retreat to hotel rooms and whisper in quiet tears to our roommate how left out we felt.

We want to matter to the people we think matter.

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

Mark 10:35-37 (NIV)

We want them to want to room with us.

We want them to want to read what we wrote.

We want them to want to share bits of themselves with us that they don't share with anyone else.

We want them to invite us in.

Into the shared secrets and secret Facebook groups. Into the late night conversations and group blogging communities. Into the vacation, beach house getaways and photos of sunsets on the beach.

Into the conferences and ad campaigns, into the Skype calls and mom's groups, into the planning committees and vacation plans.

We want *in*.

Left on the wrong side of the door I can regress into a third grade version of myself in mere minutes.

Lisa-Jo the too tall. Lisa-Jo the awkward. Lisa-Jo the sticky-out-eared-teenager. Lisa-Jo the too loud. Lisa-Jo the too much mom-talk, too much South African, too much opinion.

There is a voice that whispers all the reasons we deserve to be out.

There is a voice that taunts.

There is a voice that remorselessly lists every time we've found ourselves on the outside and revels in each remembering.

There is a voice that will hypnotize if we let it. That will poison and paralyze our friendships by focusing on the moments when we felt excluded.

The quest of the Inner Ring will break your hearts unless you break it.
—C.S Lewis¹

Blink.

Blink and see it's a mirage.

The illusion that there's an inner circle we've been left out of; the lie that we've been left out on purpose.

We're built for friendship, yes. We have community in our bones. And when we're desperate and blinded by the taunting mirage of the inner circle we will drink the sand—angry, gritty, bitter and confused.

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

*Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with***

There is a voice that will hypnotize if we let it. That will poison and paralyze our friendships by focusing on the moments when we felt excluded.

you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:41-45 (NIV)

We can fight to find a way in or we can love on the women where we're at.

We can obsess over who didn't talk to us or we can focus on the woman we're talking to.

We can keep looking for a seat at a more popular table or we can pass the bread basket and an introduction to the women sitting right where we already are.

And if in your spare time you consort simply with the people you like, you will again find that you have come unawares to a real inside:

that you are indeed snug and safe at the center of something which, seen from without, would look exactly like an Inner Ring.

*But the difference is that its secrecy is accidental, and its exclusiveness a by-product, and no one was led thither by the lure of the esoteric: for **it is only four or five people who like one another meeting to do things that they like.***

This is friendship. Aristotle placed it among the virtues. It causes perhaps half of all the happiness in the world, and no Inner Ring can ever have it.

—C.S Lewis²

Everyone is on the outside of something. But that is only half the story.

We are all on the inside of something often without even realizing it.

Do you see?

Blink.

Do you see them? Your people.

Look around.

Wipe the mirage out of your eyes.

Now, who do you see?

By Lisa-Jo Baker // [Lisa-Jo Baker](#)

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If You Only *Saw* What I Can See

I have a confession.

And it's an embarrassing one.

But I'm going to tell you anyway.

I love that pop song by the teenage boy band, What Makes

You Beautiful. And when I say *I love it*, I don't just mean I think it's catchy and will hum along should it happen to come on the radio. Oh no.

I mean that I will search it out on the radio, crank it up and sing along as loudly as my far-from-teenaged lungs can manage. I mean that I have convinced my four-year-old it's our favorite song. I mean that I have been driven to defend it to my friends who point out (and rightfully so, I suppose) that I am about 20 years past that band's target audience, *and don't I feel just a little ridiculous?*

Yeah, I really love it.

Why? Why am I ~~obsessed with~~ such a fan of this silly song? Is it that the first notes of the song (and the video, *if you must know*) echo the song Summer Nights from Grease, one of my favorite musicals/chick flicks/movies ever? Is it that I admire the songwriter's audacity to consider rhyming "make-up" and "cover up" acceptable? Is it that I simply love the floppy hair and sweet harmonies of British boy bands?

Um, no. (Although, I'm not going to start lying now. I do love every single one of those things.)

I love this song because it says the words I long to hear. At first, I only recognized my desire to be seen as beautiful. I mean, really, what girl (30-something years old or not) doesn't want to hear someone say this? "*You're turning heads when you walk through the door. Don't need make-up to cover up. Being the way that you are is enough.*"³

Despite that ridiculous rhyme in the middle, those words *are* sweet. And sometimes a person just needs to hear that she's beautiful!

But this song speaks to a deeper desire than just that. If I take the lyrics of this song to heart (*I'm not saying I do, but maybe I do.*), I begin to think, even if just for the moment that it's airing on the radio, that I have something special to offer.



*You're insecure (don't know what for!)
If only you saw what I can see!
Everyone else in the room can see it, everyone else but you.⁴*

How many times have I wished, so desperately, that someone would notice me? That someone would recognize my potential? That someone would look me in the eye and say, “Hey! I see you. I see you, Mary. I see you and I understand you and I think you are fabulous. God has given you amazing gifts, and I can’t wait to see how you’re going to use them. You are His wonderful creation, and I see it.”

I don't think that desire ends with adolescence. I think that desire lives in many of our hearts our entire lives. And that's why I'm not actually all that embarrassed to belt out this song as I cruise into the grocery store parking lot or preschool pick-up line.

Throughout my life I've been blessed to have a few people who have said those words to me. (Granted, they neither rhymed nor danced while saying them, but I'll take what I can get.) Most recently, my friend Janet has sat across the table from me and shared the most kind, encouraging, I-believe-in-you words I've heard in years. That conversation—or, more accurately, those multiple conversations, because she has continued to feed my spirit with encouragement—changed my life. It really did. Those words healed so many hurts and eased frustrations and, I'm not kidding, changed my life.

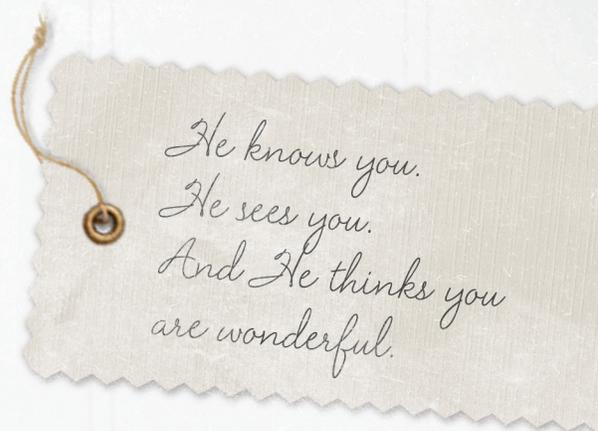
I'm beyond grateful for that friendship and those conversations. That's not to say my needy emotional tank will stay full and I'll stop loving What Makes You Beautiful and boy bands. *But it does mean that I've been thinking more lately about who I need to say those words to.*

For the past few weeks, my church has shared a series of messages about just this. We've heard about how God speaks to us—or sends others to speak to us—to tell us, “I see something awesome in you.” Of course we all have unique gifts, talents, personalities and experiences inside for someone to notice, but this series has been a great reminder that a few things remain true for every single one of us. So I want to tell you something.

*Hey. I see you. Yes, you, reading this post and wondering why on earth
someone would write hundreds of words about a boy band pop song.
I see you, and I think you are fabulous.
You are God's wonderful creation. He made you, and He loves you.
He loves you so much He sent His son to die for your sins.
Yeah. That much.
And He made you for such a time as this, for the place and time you are living right now.
He made you for this, and you are going to shine. I just know it.
I see you, and you are beautiful.*

If only you saw what I can see! Really, *if only you saw what God can see.* You may not know you're beautiful, but I promise you are. Just read these words, these words that are so much more true and real and important than any pop song lyrics:

*Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
you formed me in my mother's womb.
I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!
Body and soul, I am marvelously made!
I worship in adoration—what a creation!
You know me inside and out,
you know every bone in my body;
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,
how I was sculpted from nothing into something.
Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;
all the stages of my life were spread out before you,
The days of my life all prepared
before I'd even lived one day.
(Psalm 139:13-16, MSG)*



You were created by God. And just like when He created the first man and woman, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31 NIV) He knows you. He sees you. And He thinks you are wonderful.

Has anyone ever told you how beautiful (wonderful, talented, special, amazing) you are? Have you heard God, your very Creator, tell you those truths? Do you believe it?

By Mary Carver // [Giving Up On Perfect](#)

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Trailblazer

I saw a picture in my head one time as a friend told me a story of his trip through the jungle. He could see the path at his feet before him, but if he looked straight ahead, the brush was so thick that he couldn't see anything but the vines and leaves tangled at eye-level.

He was leading a team, and so it was up to him to use his machete [*don't you know he LOVED telling me this part of the story*] to chop at the overgrowth to make a way for his people to head down the path. He got scraped up a good bit, but, as he tells it, that was just a minor setback in the bigger story where he was the hero—yes, he called himself a hero—**the story that there was a way to walk and it was up to him to make sure those behind him had clear access to travel.**

I sat across the table in a coffee shop here in Nashville as a younger single girl told me of her aches and pains and the faith issues that, in her mind, were directly related to her singleness. [*I. Hear. Ya. Sister.*] She didn't cry, but I held a napkin in my grip because I thought for sure, at any moment, she would. She told me stories, many that I felt she was pulling from my own journal as a 20-something single Christian gal, and I told her what I never knew to tell myself.

I know.

It hurts.

But God has not forgotten you.

He is showing you His love for you, even now.

Believe Him. Believe His Word. Believe His heart.

She asked me why I started writing about singleness this year. What was it about my 31st year, she wondered, that made me finally want to talk about it.

“God.” I said, “He just made it clear that this was the right time.”

Without hesitation, she said, “**I'm so glad. We all need trailblazers.** Now that I see that you have done this, I genuinely think I can do it too.”



I almost laughed. Trailblazer? Sister, if this is trailblazing, I am the most cut up, ill equipped, whiny leader a team has ever encountered.

I frustratingly hack away at the brush that cuts me on this path of singleness, the thorns of lies that try to penetrate my skin, the leaves of worry and the vines of loneliness that weave so tight before my eyes that the only way I can even know there is a way forward is by the path at my feet. *[And even that isn't so comforting because I don't know where it leads.]*

“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path...” I sing in my head as the tears pour and I push forward on this trail.

I've never noticed the innocent young faces lined up behind me, watching the clearing process, and then walking through the openings that my toiling has created.

I never knew this was for them.

If that is the case, then every day I have wrestled with my singleness and the God who knows and loves me through it was so that others behind me would see and then know an easier path?

Then every day has been worth it.

You, my friend, married or single, you are blazing a trail with your life for the younger women behind you. They will have their own overgrowth to challenge them, and they will lead the way for others. But for today, would you be intentional about cutting back as much brush as you can?

Because you are making a way for them, saving them some pain that your bloodied arms prove is real, and honoring their footsteps by providing a clear path.

Never forget that as you are stepping forward with your life, you are a trailblazer.

Someone is watching.

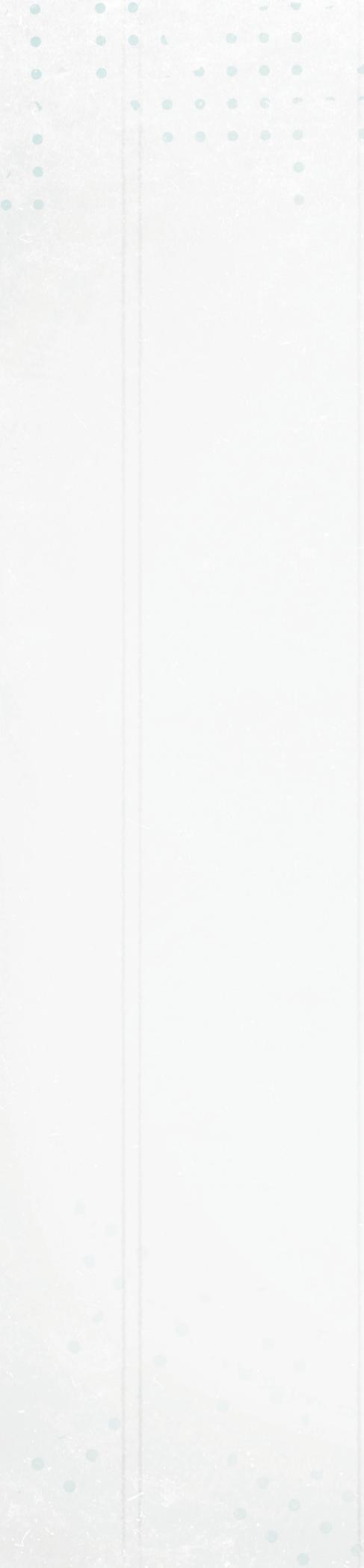
May they learn to blaze with integrity, honesty, faith, and heart.

Much like you do.

By Annie Downs // [AnnieBlogs](#)

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Trusting
the
Process





For When Your Future Keeps Changing

We live **a thousand lives in one lifetime**, from playing Barbies on the covered front porch in that small Indiana town, to riding bikes to the mall beside Duck Creek; from longing for love and true acceptance, to sending those tiny babies off to kindergarten with deep prayers, shaky knees, and a slight bit of thrill.

One season of my life I spent as a sign language interpreter at a high school. I interpreted what the teacher said into sign language, and if the Deaf student had a question or a presentation, I was their voice. After a few years, I became the interpreter coordinator at a local university and it was my job to hire, fire, and schedule interpreters for all Deaf students on campus. I put in at least 40 hours of interpreting, advising, and scheduling during those years. **That was my life.**

As it is with many jobs, simply having a degree in your field isn't enough. If you wanted to be considered a qualified interpreter (not to mention a respected one) it was important to earn at least a basic level of competency.

Being the good girl that I was, I couldn't settle for basic competency and so I set out to take the exam to become nationally certified. It was not a simple process. **I had to pay a lot of money, schedule a time way in advance, and then travel 6 hours to Atlanta.** Then, I had to take a written and a performance portion of the test. Then I had to wait several months to find out the results.

I finally earned my national certification. *All that work! Worth it!* **Now I was set.**

Interpreting was my job, I had worked hard to become one, and I was good at it. For years I earned the appropriate number of continuing education units that were required to keep my certification current.

Then I had two babies at one time.

I still worked hard as an interpreter, but not nearly as often. Agencies would call and I started to turn the jobs down so much that eventually, they stopped calling all together.

If we only lived one life in a lifetime, then you might say my life was over. But of course you know that isn't true.



At the same time I began saying no to interpreting, I began to say a small, timid yes to writing, a shadow-love leftover from my childhood life that I still held dear but didn't know it.

Then, I had another baby. And I led a small group of high school girls. And I served beside my husband in our church. And I started a blog. My kids grew and so did I.

Last month, my national certification—the one I spent years to earn and maintain, the one that legitimized me as a professional, the one that earned me respect and importance even if only in my own eyes—**expired because I didn't earn enough CEUs over the past four years to keep it up.**

And I didn't even care. I don't consider myself an interpreter anymore. Now, I'm a writer. When did that happen?

What about all that money? All those hours? *What about my degree?* Those questions have forced me to think of another question. *Why must we always insist that the destination is the most important measure of success?* We put so many worry hours into our future only to discover that it keeps changing.

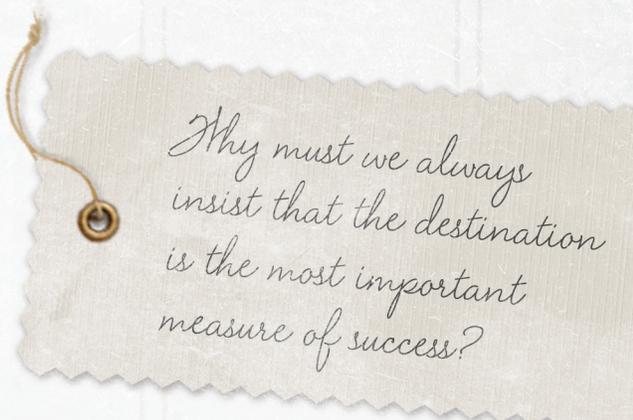
My years pursuing and practicing the job of sign language interpreting were not wasted. They brought with them necessary gifts for my life: **the gift of listening for the purpose of understanding, the gift of learning how to do the work, the gift of becoming comfortable in my own skin.**

That season prepared me for this one. But at the time, *I was sure that season was all there would ever be.* I was sure I would be a sign language interpreter for the rest of my life. I was sure I would hold onto that certification no matter the cost.

What you are doing now may not be what you'll be doing this time next year. Those things you care so deeply for now may seem small a month from now. Might I boldly suggest that the season you are in carries hints of what you'll be doing next? **This season is a kind companion, escorting you to the next one. And then the next. We would be wise to sit back a bit and enjoy today's adventure, whatever gifts and sufferings they may hold.**

Neither the accolades nor the critiques are worth anything. Don't force something as valuable and sacred as the definition of your life to fit onto the small, flat, earthly paper of a degree or a certificate. They will come and they will go and they are important. *But they do not get the final say.* "For in Him we live and move and have our being"—then, now, and forever.

(Acts 17:28 NIV)



Why must we always insist that the destination is the most important measure of success?

What gifts have your past seasons brought you so that you can live this one more fully present and alive?

By Emily P. Freeman // [Chatting at the Sky](#)

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How Friendship Heals Our Broken Hearts

For one entire year, when we found ourselves in our new church, I began each Sunday morning with a panic attack. Sitting on the bed with a towel wrapped around me from the shower, I tried to remember how to fill my lungs with air. Sometimes I'd walk across the room and turn on the box fan in the window, or flip the switch to the exhaust fan in the bathroom, all to drown out the sound of my heart pounding loud in my ears.

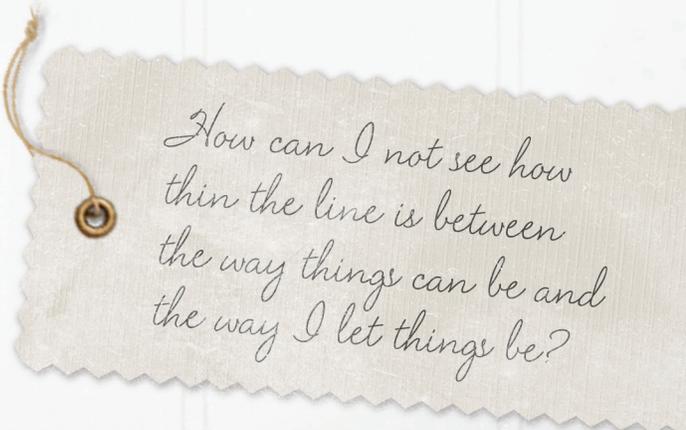
I'd been down this road before, and every time I'd had my heart stepped on by women who shared my faith in Jesus and who loved him big time and for real. Every time, it caught me off guard and sucked the air out, leaving me flat and empty. And sore.

I don't know why we break each other the way we do. I don't know why I allow a careless word to slip through my lips and hang there in the air, knowing the way it slinks between and settles in and crumbles into shards of glass. How can I not see how thin the line is between the way things can be and the way I let things be?

We carry the glory of God in earthen pots with dirt caked on and death trying to get comfortable in the darkness where the roots are tender, and He trusts us to let Him shine through all the broken places. He knows how prone we are to wander—to crush and be crushed. And He has this uncanny way of bringing glory out of ashes, grace transforming dis-grace, healing banishing dis-ease.

Eventually, I found a way through those panic attacks. I opened up my heart to women over coffee or tea or a good book. I kicked off my shoes and tucked my feet under me at the end of the sofa and leaned in to hear the stories other women shared. And eventually, my heart got stepped on because that's what happens. It's true.

But also? This heart, all tender and broken and split wide open, has been filled with breath and life and hope—hoisted on the shoulders of women who love well with bruised hearts of their own. The good



with the bad, and God right there in it, working it all for His good.

I have this tender, broken heart—split wide open, and filled with breath and life and hope.

Won't you share with us in the comments today about a friend who has helped redeem your view of friendship? We'd love to hear your stories!

By Deidra Riggs // [Jumping Tandem](#)

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Liabilities and Assets

So often we see our failings as liabilities. Or others failings as liabilities.

There's the girl who had an abortion. There's the girl who committed adultery. There's the girl who walked away from her husband. There's the girl who got so drunk on her own power and influence that she forgot who she was.

I think, however, if you ask any girl who has failed {and failed big} and has allowed God to return her to grace, you'll find that those failings are not liabilities but they are assets.

Maybe you are one of these girls.

Several years ago when I created some terrible situations in my own marriage, I came out the other end of it a changed person and we came out a changed couple. In the months that followed I wrestled with a lot of things, but the one piece that is, even now, hard to work through is

If I could change it and go back, would I?

Yes. And no.

My life was so different after, and my new life was so distinct in the aftermath of it all that I don't know what my life would have been had we not experienced those hard days. *Would I trade this newness for life without it?*

Yes. What I did was wrong.

So. very. wrong.

My addictions were horrible and my heart was a mess and I know God can do big things without our sinning to add to the mix. **So yes, if I could go change it all, I would.** I wouldn't have been the betrayer, the hurter, the wounder. I wouldn't have chosen the path of destroying. I would take every minute of it back.

But No. Without the wound, our relationship would never have experienced the kind of renewal that it did. **I would not have fallen in love with Jesus in the way that I did when I became the rescued.** And without my experiences I would never have the authority to speak to others in



the midst of the same pain. Without what I've walked through I could never give counsel to a woman over a cup of coffee on a Thursday morning.

It's an upside down idea. **And one that is eternally hard to swallow: that God uses the deep dark to create the very, very good.**

"In my deepest wound I saw your glory and it dazzled me," St. Augustine said.⁵

Because Your strength is made perfect in my weakness.

Your glory is made beautiful in my wound.

Your beauty is made evident in all of my failings.

My liabilities are made assets because of Your love.

Who better to counsel a woman through depression than one who has lived through the dark night of her own soul? Who better to help someone walking through marriage recovery than a person who has seen her own returned to health?

In this upside-down Kingdom, our liabilities are made into assets for Him. Our sins are turned into glories for Him. He redeems what has been lost and takes back what has been stolen.

He does this kind of crazy stuff every day.

So we must remember that there's not a one of us who is any bigger liability than any other of us. My betrayals can be used (have been used) for helping couples knit themselves back to one another. **And all of our failings can be turned into things that He can reach in and use us for what is good and true and perfect.**

Has God used your weaknesses and wounds for His glory? How has He redeemed your own failings?

By Sarah Markley // [Sarah Markley](#)

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 At His
Feet  

* Cold Coffee

Our coffee had been cold for 2 hours, and despite the fact that the waiter was ready for us to leave, we kept talking.

And talking.

And talking.

I missed the appointment I had scheduled for after the breakfast, and we went straight through lunch in the same chairs.

The entire time I was trying to figure out what I was supposed to say. *What in the world was I supposed to say?*

I didn't know her well enough to say anything definitive or gripping. In fact, I felt like I was just supposed to be a listener. Even as she went through the details, I found myself thinking the same thing she had been thinking only a few weeks ago.

This could never happen to me.

It had started as a business relationship, and ended with his clothes thrown on the front lawn. And what we were dealing with at that moment was the question of "what next?"

I didn't have the answer.

I teared up a few times, and I leaned across the table to let her know I was listening. Really listening. And I was. But I was also thinking.

If this happened to her, *why not me?*

My marriage has not been perfect. Far from it, honestly. I don't talk about our fights publicly, and I don't blog about things that I believe are private. For me, there is great good that can come of someone's hurt, but it doesn't always happen during the hurt. When Todd and I have had hard times (and we have had plenty), I didn't write about it, in fact, I stopped writing. It's not what everyone would choose in that situation, and there isn't a right or wrong. But it didn't feel like something that was enough in retrospect for me to speak to. I was in the middle of it. Are Todd and I separating? Absolutely not. Not ever. I love this man with everything I have to love. But good gracious, we are a mess sometimes.

And today, as I sat with a friend, I realized that it was more than a conversation. It was an



awakening. My marriage is not perfect. There are days where it's not even great. And others where it's downright atrocious.

As I looked into eyes of hurt this morning, while patrons hustled in and out of the diner, I was spellbound by the circumstances of this story, and how eerily it mirrored mine. It was a phone conversation that led to an argument. It was dinner gone cold while she waited for him. It was one mis-interpreted, mis-construed, misunderstood comment after another, and it had turned into this. And who am I to think that it would never happen to me?

Let me clarify before the rumor mills start churning. I would tell you with absolute sincerity that Todd would chop off a limb before he would have an affair. Truthfully, it is nothing that I think about. I've never, never, never worried about it.

That wasn't what I was hearing from her though, and it rocked me deeply.

What am I cultivating? My marriage, or my platform?

My children, or my blog?

My home, or my credentials?

My heart, or my God's?

I'm not really wrapped up in any of those things. I am a really inconsistent blogger, I am still not very fond of speaking, and the whole "being in the public eye" is more torture than ego. Truth. Absolute truth.

But sometimes my calendar says different.

It isn't about an affair specifically, and I'm certainly not putting blame on her for her husband's decisions (please don't even think that for a second, because it is completely untrue). I just want to feel like my priorities are right. I want to believe I'm putting the weight of my life where God most desires it. I don't want to neglect what's important because there was something else that demanded my attention.

I don't want to run after something and then realize I was missing the entire race.

So let's pull back the lens a little bit and realize that our time is short and our decisions have eternal weight. Where are the places in your life that you have chosen you over Him? It isn't too late.

It's never too late.

Make this day an offering, and consider this an extension of our welcome to use this place as an altar. Don't feel pressure to write any details or even leave a comment. But know that I am praying for you, you sweet friends who visit us here. We all walk long roads. We all wish we could start over sometimes. We all need to be told it isn't too late to make it beautiful.

As a reminder, this is a place where we love each other furiously, and with the grace that the Lord gives us. And on many, many occasions, we are honored to let our coffee go cold for the sake of loving you.

Prayers today, from me to you...

{In the event that infidelity has been part of your story, I would love to introduce you to my dear friend Trish and her husband Justin. They have a ministry called [Refine Us](#) that I pray is a blessing to you.}

By Angie Smith // [Angie Smith](#)

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Why It's Okay to Not Be Enough

When they took my Titus to another room to insert the feeding tube, I felt flush all over, green. My milk wasn't enough. The food wasn't enough, and so they called it "starvation mode" and "failure to thrive," his one year old body the size of a 4 month old. My tiny buddy came back with a puffy, sad face covered in tape.

After having 3 sons before him, I had decided to really do it right this time. I ate and gave only organic foods, and I wanted to nurse him for as long as I could. The truth is that my list of how to do it the right way has grown very long, and the longer that list gets, the worse I am at doing anything well. **All the homeschooling, gardening, nursing, and playing in the world wouldn't add up to enough for me.**

In the hospital, I had to hold Titus' feisty arms down so he didn't pull out the tube. We had an intense and demanding job in that little room, and suddenly we were the needy ones. We couldn't care for our other boys. We couldn't water the tomatoes or go make a pot of coffee. We didn't have any meals for ourselves or for our children at home.

And how could I ask for help, when I'm positive that I've failed at being a giver. One of the things I've been asking from God is that He would make me a servant. It's one of those prayers I say, "I want to be better. Make me better."

Then He answers this request in the funniest way. **He allows me a position where I'm able to do nothing.** Then He surrounds me with dearest friends and family, some of whom have the very least in time, physical stamina, sleep, emotional wherewithal, or material possessions. He shows me how they stop and sit with me and my children in their not-enoughness. It seems to me that those who have the very least were the greatest givers.

One friend laid next to me on the hospital bed for a while. I had no idea at the time how just having her sit right next to me helped my heart. I look back and remember our legs right there together, backs against the pillow. We were laughing. She has no idea. None of them know.

Sometimes I think about Paul's thorn, how he must have thought to himself, "if only it were gone, I would finally be enough." If only my milk were better. If only I read more. If only my



kitchen were bigger or we made more money. If only I were better with people or were more loving or wasn't so selfish ...

But God's response? **"My grace is sufficient for you."** When He says this, it's the same as saying, "Don't give me your excuses," while simultaneously saying, "You're not the one doing it anyway."

I suddenly feel so free to shirk the pretense that I could possibly have anything together, and I'm learning that boasting in this weakness—it's the gospel.

When we boast in our weakness, our hearts hurt for the struggles of others, and we are more willing to share even in our little. **A sufficient grace makes our weaknesses our power.** The accomplishments of others begin to seem right, and whatever I receive, I accept it with gratitude.

My temptation is to say that if I nurse him more or read the Bible more or pray harder, I'll be enough. Our temptation is always to say that our works are sufficient. But for me, let me tell you now, my marriage isn't sufficient and nor is my house. My kids, my friends, and my insurance plans aren't enough.

So when the mighty fall, when the rich go bankrupt, and the greatest dreams land broken, we can say to ourselves and to all the world what is true. His grace is sufficient. Power is perfected in weakness. Only after our deaths are we resurrected.

By Amber Haines // [The RunaMuck](#)

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We Must Do This
((together))





When You Need Your *Heart* In The Right Place

“Let’s be women who no longer compare and compete, but celebrate and complete our friendships...with the unique offering we bring.”
—Renee Swope⁶



On a sun drenched Saturday, us girls gather at Jen’s house, each bringing a glass or porcelain plate. On Jen’s driveway, we take turns dropping our plate. After each one shatters, we walk around and pick up a few of each other’s shards to add to a few of our own.

Because this is what good friends do, become safe places to break wide open and share the shards of the mess.

We take each other’s broken plate pieces and place them in heart-shaped molded plaster. When we are satisfied with our individual mosaics, we work grout in between the shards.

Because this is what the best kind of friends do, they hold onto each other’s broken parts and encourage Christ’s love to enter all the in between places.

Sometimes I’ve done this well and other times not so much.

If you expect me to be a perfect friend {sister, daughter}, you will be sorely disappointed. I mess up and can be selfish and want to talk too much and listen too little. I laugh obnoxiously loud. I might forget your birthday.

Only Jesus gives us never-disappointing, always-fulfilling friendship and support. And when He guides me to the story of Ruth and Naomi, I smile remembering one of my favorite pictures of genuine friendship.

Ruth had such devotion to Naomi, she vowed not even death itself would come between them. Ruth adopted Naomi’s faith, so she knew they would spend life in eternity together. But while they lived and breathed on earth, Ruth would do everything in her power to be the kind of friend who celebrated and completed Naomi. **In other words, Ruth would *not* do anything that would separate their hearts or drive a wedge in their friendship.**

Like the colorful pieces in a mosaic, loving friends in practical ways reflects vibrant beauty.

And while those outward expressions show love, my inward heart must be in the right place. Because like the grout between glass and porcelain shards, the right heart holds everything together. **To ensure a right heart within me, I must make wise day-to-day decisions on how to interact with my genuine friend, to not do anything that drives a wedge in our friendship.**

So, I keep this tucked away. I don't follow it perfectly, but it shows my heart's goal.

A Manifesto for You, Friend

I will be a safe place. I won't share your confidences.

I will talk about you behind your back, and I will use words that build you up and show you off.

I will defend your reputation rather than contribute to its demise.

I will show humility through encouragement, and do my best to let my actions reflect the way Jesus sees you.

I will allow a united spirit of completion rather than a divisive spirit of competition enter our friendship.

I will pray for you when you ask me to.

I will be accountable and trustworthy—my yes is a yes.

I will be for you and not against you, even when what I say may sting a bit.

I will be there to share in both hard and good, to divide the sorrow and double the joy.

I will give your kids extra grace when they are ornery in front of me. And when they are having a moment, the only thought I'll entertain is it must be your turn for the hard day. Yesterday was mine. And probably tomorrow, too.

I will forgive you when you make a mistake. While I can't control how you behave towards me, I can control how I behave towards you. And I'll do my level best to err on the side of grace and love. Because heaven knows I need to receive it as much as I need to give it.

In friendships, where do you struggle keeping your heart in the right place? What mosaic pieces of friendship would you add to the manifesto above?

By Kristen Strong // [Chasing Blue Skies](#)

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When You Need to Find Community {even when you're really hurting}



Emmeline Steiss told me that she'd stood in a room full of women, all strangers, and they were all the same.

That's when I looked right into her and I could hear it, what her whole life was saying: **no woman can ever heal in a state of loneliness.**

Emmeline had lived alone. She had loved her cats. She had once had sisters, long ago. She had driven a mint green Chevrolet to town until they took away her license.

And every Sunday, Mama stopped in at Emmeline's and brought her a banana loaf or a plate of cookies, and I sat beside my sister and we listened to her stories in a house that smelled of ache and time and felines.

Why did it take me half a life to feel this: **in the space of the differences that separate us, there can be all this unique, creative strength, and in the places where we overlap, all this unifying certain comfort.** *What is there to be afraid of?*

Emmeline had died alone by the time Mrs. Martin found Mama in the back of church foyer. Back by the coat hangers and children darting between legs, where Mrs. Martin had asked Mama if maybe I'd get together with a group of women weekly?

"No, Beryl, no I don't think so." Mama had just said it straight up. "**She's not good here.** Not good at all."

The details of what had happened doesn't matter. **There are times when leaving things unsaid to most, and mostly said to one, can be the way love covers over a multitude of sins.**

All that need be said is that community had about hemorrhaged my heart and I dry heaved to breathe around women. Emmeline could have told me: **The shields that protect you can easily become the bars that imprison you.**

I can still see her—how Emmeline would pet that cat on her lap, the petting like beckoning someone to come. Like this soothing of her wounds.

The truth of it is, **I wanted out.**

For years, I wanted out of community.

I didn't want gossip to catch my gizzards and bleed me dry.

I didn't want insensitivity to numb the last of the feeling places.

I didn't want love to hurt and **the truth is that love means to suffer and there's no getting around it.**

Someone said that to me once: **that loneliness is far better than rejection. True. And being dead is probably far easier than living.** I had nodded. I have lived it—the quiet death of it all. And found **loneliness to be more injurious than rejection because it can be self inflicted.** *There is always someone to love.*

I told myself that when Flora Mullander floundered and spewed all the wrong words over me and my skin, right there around the tender places, flamed all raw. And when another woman murmured these white lies that stained, and a friend failed, and a whole community of faith fumbled—**That love is a skill that can't be learned in seclusion.**

Love is a tree, each person a branch. And a pile of cut off branches doesn't make a tree. Love can only be comprehended in community. You *need* imperfect people in your life to perfect your *practice* of love.

There are no solitary saints; all sanctification is forged in community.

That is why I stayed. *The chance to love imperfect people is another chance to perfect His love in me.* **And all the believers are belongers.**

You *belong* in the imperfect pews, **you belong in the community that disappoints yet is anointed to keep on pointing to Him who cannot disappoint,** you *belong* to the club of all the failing passing on all His mercy, all the members of the marred sisterhood being impossibly redeemed by love, lit by transparency, perfected by grace.

I had stood one October, at the far end of our lane, and watched a V formation of geese fly straight over Emmeline's.

And I had almost heard it—how their hearts beat slower in community, how together they were doing it, flying further, with must less effort, soaring on the thrust of one another.

When one lone goose falls out of formation, falls hurt and struggling, two more fall out and follow her down. And stay with her until the flying again, until the flying as one arrow again through the sky.

Emmeline had told mama that. That her keeping company with her had kept something inside of her together. And I had felt those broken places in her when she'd said it.

Her petting this congregation of cats there at her feet, and the geese flying somewhere overhead in this perfect gathering of grace.

All calling each other upward and higher on this communal wing.

15 Reasons To Keep Reaching Out Even When You've Been Hurt

1. Christ is the Body and He is Love and both can only exist in *community*.
2. **God's people are given the ministry of reconciliation** (2 Cor. 5) and reconciliation begins first in our homes, down the street, in this pew, around the corner, in community—or we are *ministers of misrepresentation*.
3. It's only when you reach out to community that your gifts can be used for the kingdom.
4. Joining and participating in just one group or community this year cuts your odds of dying in *half* over the next year.⁷
5. Community is only and always what people are: beautiful and broken and *utterly redeemable*.
6. There are no I-lands in the Kingdom, only His-lands, and the **notion of lone rangers is purely bad fiction**.
7. The wonder of this: "**Don't you know that you yourselves are the temple of (the Holy Spirit)?** ... God's temple is sacred and you are that temple." (1 Cor. 3 NIV) We are all the "living stones" of the temple of the Holy Spirit. But if one stone withdraws from the other stones? The "you" in 1 Cor. 3 is *plural*. *Y'all together* are the temple of the Holy Spirit; we are a temple of the Holy Spirit *together—in community*. We need each other, all of us. **And believing is about belonging to a community**. It's when we are committed in community that we collectively live it before the world: God is among us.
8. 2000 years of Christianity is founded on the breathtaking living organism of community.
9. Community is healthy for us: "Those with strong social connections but poor health habits (eating, exercise, etc.) are just as healthy as those with good health habits but weak social connections."⁸
10. There are sisters in Christ who have *died* for gathering together with their sisters—how could I neglect so great a privilege?

11. **“Dor” in Hebrew, it means generation.** May we be the next generation to go next door, the generation who knows who lives next door, what they need next door, how they ache next door. **The Next Christians need to be the generation of Next Door Christians.**
12. The Christian life is the compassionate, crucified, cruciformed life. *Not the comfortable life.* Community is how God shapes His children into the image of Christ.
13. We love Him enough to meet Him where He is—“Where 2 or 3 are gathered **there He is...**”
14. **Love is a tree, each person a branch. And a pile of cut off branches doesn’t make a tree. Love can only be comprehended in community.**
15. **Every chance to love imperfect people is another chance to perfect His love in me.**
This is a way to soar.

By Ann Voskamp // [A Holy Experience](#)

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Notes

1. C.S. Lewis, “The Inner Ring,” Memorial Lecture at King’s College, (University of London, 1944).
2. C.S. Lewis, “The Inner Ring,” Memorial Lecture at King’s College, (University of London, 1944).
3. One Direction, “What Makes You Beautiful,” (Sweden: Kinglet Studios and Cosmos Studios, 2011).
4. One Direction, “What Makes You Beautiful,” (Sweden: Kinglet Studios and Cosmos Studios, 2011).
5. St. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, (New York: Image Books, 1960).
6. Renee Swope, *reneeswope.com*.
7. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
8. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

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**Come one, come all;
we can't wait to meet you.**



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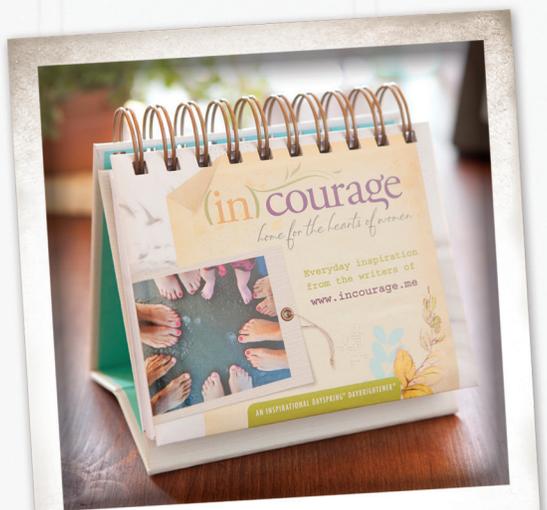
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