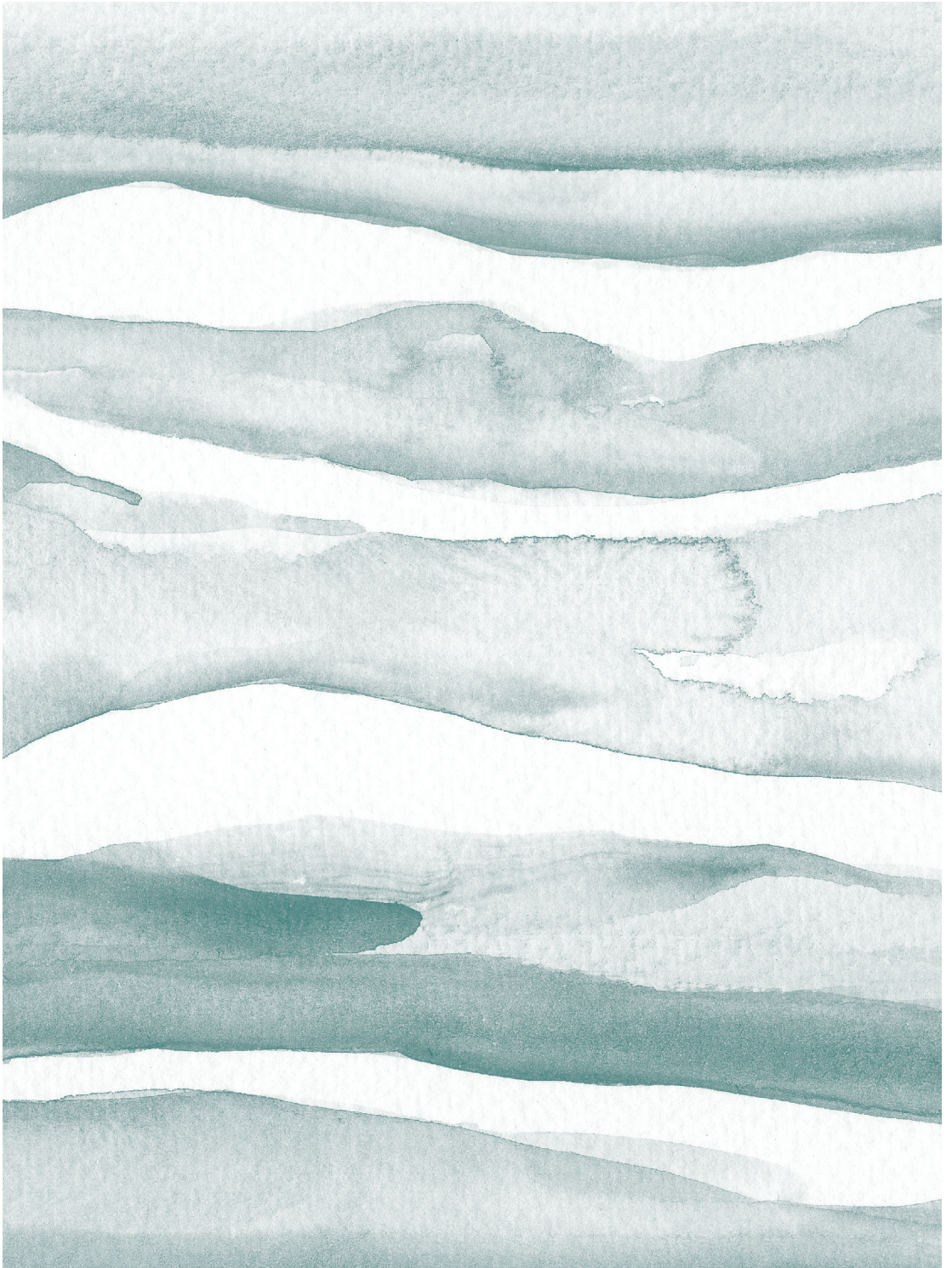


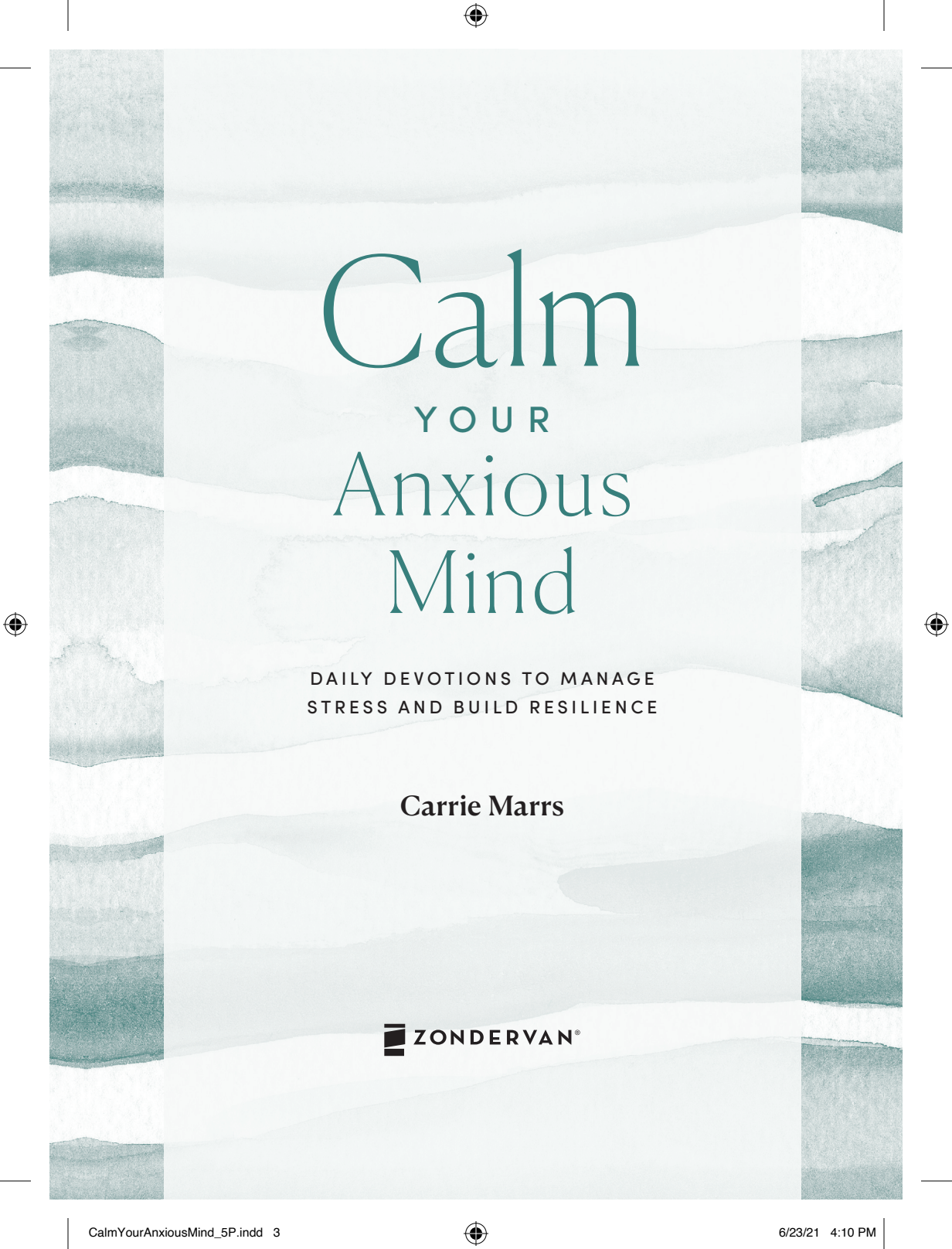


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DATE: \_\_\_\_\_





# Calm

YOUR

# Anxious

# Mind

DAILY DEVOTIONS TO MANAGE  
STRESS AND BUILD RESILIENCE

Carrie Marrs

 ZONDERVAN®

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*Calm Your Anxious Mind*

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Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

ISBN 978-0-310-45574-5 (Hardcover)

ISBN 978-0-310-46122-7 (Audio)

ISBN 978-0-310-45573-8 (eBook)

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*Printed in India*

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## Introduction

How's today been for you? Maybe it was smooth sailing until a life-curveball totally rattled you. Or you've been trying to tune out a string of concerns running like a newsfeed at the back of your mind. A swirl of tasks, questions, and worries might have you knotted up inside, or a growing pile of problems might be feeling heavier by the hour.


You could even be in a darker place. Maybe you're reeling from a series of life-punches. Maybe hope feels out of reach.

When was the last time you breathed deeply? Or felt a grounding sense of peace, a surge of confidence, or a joyful lightness? It's not just you. Everybody's got their stuff. Even if today's been a good day, the waters may get rough again. We all face challenging times and the mash-up of feelings that come with them.

We were made with complex emotions, big hearts that care, and powerful brains that want to figure things out. Put us in a broken world and things are bound to get complicated.

But guess what? God knows how we're built, He knows what we're in the middle of, and He can handle it all. He says to us, "Come here. *Closer*. Lay it all out. We'll look at it together. Yes, I see it all. Will you let Me carry that for you? Will you let Me provide what you need for this journey? Now, keep close as we go on together."

"Cast all your anxieties on Me," He says. "Be anxious for nothing and pray instead," He says. "I'll be your strength, be all the help you need, and make a way toward your bright future with Me."



And so this is a book about moving through our struggles with the Mighty One. The One who knows us best and loves us most, who has abundance and beauty and dreamy goodness in mind for us. The One who calls us into His power and fullness of life.

Listen, I've dealt with fear and anxiety for as long as I can remember. I still deal with it! For me, part of being alive and worshipping God means continually staring down my monsters and returning to truths I can hang on to. It means forming habits that keep me healthy, connected, and productive. I've learned I have to cultivate a mindset and lifestyle that help me be joyful, grateful, and alive with purpose. It requires brutal honesty and a teachable spirit. But much of it has to do with staying in tune with the Voice of Love.

So let's dive into this together.

We're going to talk about winning the battle of the mind and managing feelings and being still so we can receive peace. We'll look at the crazy force called hope and dependence on the One with all the resources. We'll explore some of His amazing gifts: healing relationships, wisdom for wellness, a spirit of power, and heaps of agency. We'll think about how we can live in the light every day and become sunshine for our part of the world.

Our God is an awesome and compassionate God. He didn't leave us to our sin; He's not leaving us to our anxiety either. He will create a way forward for us, just like He has before.

He's full of comfort and love and power. He's offering you peace and wisdom and freedom.

Come see.

JANUARY



## You Are Known and Held

**A**nxiety is like a fog that keeps you from seeing what's right in front of you. It fools you into thinking you're alone. It gets you constantly anticipating danger, expecting the worst.

In reality, though, you're never alone. The One who is with you understands you perfectly. He knows your whole story and holds your future. He'll hold all your hopes, fears, and feelings too, if you'll let Him. He'll help you sense more than just potential danger.

The fog *will* lift eventually. In the meantime, He'll be your safe place.

Keep breathing. He's got you. He's right here.

## Not a Solo Mission

*The LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.*

Joshua 1:9

I don't know about you, but when my anxiety spikes, I feel like I'm completely alone in a rocket ship getting propelled toward a scary, uninhabitable planet. I'm headed for an atmosphere that doesn't allow normal breathing.

I can see other humans, but they don't get my rocket ship problems. I feel like even if I called out to them, they couldn't understand or are just too busy with their normal life stuff.

I wind up feeling pretty trapped.

But then it's like I suddenly notice a surprise passenger on the rocket ship, and He knows how to ground me. He's well aware of how I ended up hurtling this direction and can bring me back to safety.

When anxiety rises up in you, you might feel alone. But that is not the reality, dear one. What *is* true is this: the Spirit of God is with you wherever you go.

He can ground you. He can bring powerful truths to mind, calm your breathing, send helpers. He'll point you to people who are indeed within reach and willing to meet you where you are. It's not as bad as you think, and it's going to get better. You're teamed up with the One who sets you on steady ground and makes your footing sure.

*God, help me sense Your presence—right now.*

## His Heart's Wrapped Up with Yours

*He will quiet you with His love.*

*Zephaniah 3:17 NKJV*

**H**ave you ever seen a mother with her newborn baby? The little creature might have started in a worked-up state, wriggling and whining, huffing and puffing. Then he's put into the arms of the one he belongs to.

And something shifts. Something powerful arrives. The baby starts to quiet down as all his senses begin to pick up on what the mother is communicating with her loving gaze and strong embrace.

*You haven't seen my face before, but I've been thinking of you non-stop. I've been pumping life into your veins. I've been dreaming up sweet moments for us. I've been getting so much ready for you that you're gonna love. My heart's been wrapped up with yours from the very beginning.*

And that baby transforms into the calmest, most content little bundle of cuteness you've ever seen.

Right now, wherever you are in the big story of your life, you might be kinda worked up. You've got a lot on your shoulders and on your mind. At times, you find your heart uneasy, even racing.

Have you forgotten that Someone has a loving gaze for you? He has all kinds of powerful messages for you. He's longing to give you so much—enormous love, perfect provision, intimate connection.

*God, help me know more of Your heart of love for me.*

## Deeper Still

*There is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still.*

Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*

There are days when your problems and concerns feel so large and so looming, you just can't escape them.

Questions about the future fill your mind. *What if things don't get better? What if the worst happens?* Their weight is enough to sink you.

There's yet another question to add to the others: *Am I too deep in this stuck place for anyone to reach in and pull me out?*

David talked about being in a pit of despair in Psalm 40. Everything seemed to be going wrong in his life, and he was freaking out about a bleak future. He was stuck in the mud and mire—stuck in fear and hopelessness.

Guess who got him out of there?

Listen, you're looking at legitimately hard things. Life can be grueling and heartbreaking. But it's not too much for your Rescuer. The pit you're in *is* deep—but not deeper than His love. No matter how you feel right now, believe me when I tell you: this is not too hard for Him.

Your problems will never outmatch His power. That goes for your current anxiety and every problem you'll face in the future. He will meet you where you are and lift you up. Just look up.

*Find me in this pit of anxious thoughts, God.  
Reach in and pull me into Your light.*

## Breathe

*If your heart is broken, you'll find GOD right there; if you're  
kicked in the gut, he'll help you catch your breath.*

Psalm 34:18 MSG

**C**an you take a deep breath for me?" the doctor asks, stethoscope poised. "And another?" Pause. "And another?"

I wonder if you've taken deep breaths like that since your last visit with the doctor. Some people think it's hokey, but it's actually scientifically legit. Slow abdominal breathing stimulates your vagus nerve, which prompts relaxation in your nervous system. It can actually bring down your stress and anxiety level.<sup>1</sup> So why not give it a shot?

Some people recommend inhaling for five seconds, then exhaling for five seconds.<sup>2</sup> Others say breathe in for four, hold for four; breathe out for four, hold for four.<sup>3</sup> Still others recommend inhaling for four seconds, holding for seven, and exhaling for eight.<sup>4</sup>

However many seconds you do, the most important thing is that you take deep, slow breaths using your diaphragm, the muscle in your lower ribs. You can choose to breathe only through your mouth, or only through your nose, or use a combination.<sup>5</sup>

Do this when your internal pressure is rising, for sure. But really, do it anytime. Stimulating your vagus nerve regularly will make you feel calmer and more relaxed.<sup>6</sup>

*Lord, help me slow down my breaths. Calm  
my body, my heart, and my mind.*

## Not Too Much

*“My love won’t walk away from you.”*

Isaiah 54:10 MSG

**H**ave you ever felt like you were too much for someone to handle? It’s that moment when your feelings are on display, your struggles in full view, and the other person is nervously eyeing the door. Before long he just might blurt out, “Whoa,” as he steps back and shows you his palms.

And now you feel like a freak show.

Get close and listen. You are a beautiful creation of God, unique and wondrous and lovely. He made you amazing. Now, struggling—that’s just part of the human package. You’re being honest and real about what you’re feeling, which takes courage. If any shame over struggling starts to sneak into your heart, kick it right out.

While other people may choose to bolt, Jesus never does.

He’s not eyeing the door. He’s not backing away saying, “Whoa, this is too much for Me.” He actually leans in. He shows you His nail-pierced palms. He reminds you of His bigger-than-you-can-fathom, relentless love.

He didn’t run away from your sin problem; He ran after it and conquered it. Your anxiety? Not even close to being “too much” for Him.

*God, thank You for sticking with me no matter what.*

## He *Really* Knows You

*You formed me in my mother's womb. . . . You know me inside and out. . . . Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth.*

Psalm 139:13, 16 MSG

**W**ho in your life knows you best? Probably your best friend who finishes your sentences. Or is it your sibling who can tell all your embarrassing stories? Maybe it's actually your mentor who knows your strengths and weaknesses.

Yep, these people have seen you up close—they are super familiar with you. But, compared to the way God knows you, they simply know things *about* you.

God dreamed you up. You are His awesome idea. He knows you inside and out. Every wound, fear, and mistake. Every triumph, hope, and highlight. He sees all the crazy, hard things you've endured, what has formed you, and how you've grown. He sees all your fabulous abilities, potential for greatness, and love in your heart. He totally gets your personality quirks and sense of humor.

With Him, you don't have to explain yourself or your circumstances or your issues. He gets it. Don't bother trying to put on some kind of performance. Just exhale. Be real. He knows everything there is to know about you, and He adores you.

*God, I'm amazed that You know me better than I know myself.*

## He Holds You Close

*Even if my father and mother abandon  
me, the LORD will hold me close.*

Psalm 27:10 NLT

Ow! Ow, ow, *owwwwww!*” After my seven-year-old daughter takes a big fall and the pain is intense, she lets out a visceral yell. I’ll hug her and she’ll cry. She’ll say, “It hurts.” I’ll say, “It hurts.” Sometimes we end up saying that over and over, and eventually we get quiet as we keep hugging. I just sit in that feeling with her.

Sometimes you and I need to do exactly that in God’s arms. Sometimes there isn’t a lot more to say than “It hurts.” He enters into that pain with us. He sees every tear and knows every ache.

While we sleep with tearstained faces, He stays by our side. In the morning, He remains as close as ever. We can say of the God of all comfort, “When I awake, I am still with you” (Psalm 139:18).

Let yourself be held like a child by your loving Father. Tell Him how it feels.

“It’s heavy.”

“It’s scary.”

“It’s confusing.”

“It’s exhausting.”

Be with Him through it all.

*Father, I’m letting myself fall into Your arms. Hold me tight.*

## Take a Look

*“What comes out of the mouth comes from the heart.”*

Matthew 15:18 HCSB

Sometimes you're in a dark or stuck place in life, but you can't put your finger on why. You can start to trace it by having more self-awareness. So often we're just trying to get through the day, and we're not exactly in tune with the nuances of what we're doing. But our behavior is information; whatever is going on *in* us eventually comes *out* of us. Once we acknowledge our behavior, we can begin to identify what feelings or needs are part of it.

So take an inventory. What have you been doing lately? What have your tendencies, reactions, and coping mechanisms been? Don't automatically scan over the “bad” behaviors. This is information-gathering time, not judging-and-shaming time. Did you snap at someone you love? Did you put off that important task yet again? Did you numb yourself with a Netflix binge? *Sure did.* Okay. Noted.

Now, what feelings might be behind these behaviors? If this kind of introspection makes you want to run, I get it. But just remember: you can't work through an issue you refuse to look at, and it's going to keep hanging around until you do. There's so much power in simply acknowledging where you are. Find your courage and take a good look. You'll be so glad you did later on.

*Open my eyes to see what I'm doing, God. Help  
me see my starting point for growth.*

## Vocab Refresher

*Good words are worth much, and cost little.*

George Herbert

Remember when you learned lists of vocabulary words in school? Suddenly, you no longer got cold or hungry or excited. You were frigid. Ravenous. Delirious!

Sometimes, when we're acknowledging our feelings, it helps to dig a little deeper than *sad* or *mad*. Sure, that's in there. But you've got a plethora of distinctions and complexities going on too. You're wonderfully made. You're no two-dimensional creature with black-and-white simplicity and cookie-cutter qualities. If you can describe more of what's going on, it can help you come to terms with where you are and how to move forward.

Look up a list of terms for feelings and see what fits. Here are a few: embarrassed, misunderstood, apprehensive, aggravated, disturbed, on edge, skeptical, remorseful, betrayed, isolated, distracted, frazzled, resigned, exasperated, overwhelmed. Do any of these describe how you feel today?

You may not be proud of some of the words that describe your current state, but don't beat yourself up, okay? Nobody's perfect, so don't bother pretending to be anything you're not. Just be honest.

*God, give me the courage to be honest with myself and with You.*

## All the Feelings

*You, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God,  
slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*

Psalm 86:15

As you become deliberately self-aware, there's something super important to remember: you need to acknowledge your feelings and experiences *with compassion*.

Make observations about your behavior and past without immediately shaming yourself. Why? Because God has so much compassion for you—an ocean's worth of compassion for you. Open your heart to that and receive it from Him. Practice it in your own thoughts.

Sometimes it helps to think of it like this: How would you respond to a child sharing his feelings? Or a friend opening her heart to you? Treat yourself with the same gentleness and kindness. Think of the words you would say to them. Then say them to yourself.

Do not be hard on yourself. You are not a robot; you are a living being with frailties and wounds and limitations—and so is everyone else you know! All your feelings, even the ones you're not a fan of, are part of being human. God completely understands them, and He accepts you.

*Thank You, God, for the ocean of compassion You have for me.*

## Curiosity

*It is a narrow mind which cannot look at a  
subject from various points of view.*

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

**D**o you like putting jigsaw puzzles together? Picture when you see a distinctive marking on a puzzle piece and think, *I bet I can figure out where this goes*. You try to fit it into one spot and it doesn't work, so what do you do? You look closer. If you approach the piece with curiosity and patience, you'll eventually find where it connects.

We need to have a spirit of curiosity as we're practicing more self-awareness. It's a little weird to think of being curious about yourself, but the truth is, we don't automatically understand ourselves really well. God designed us with some pretty complicated wiring. We're not fully cognizant of how past experiences have affected us or why we react to people the way we do, which is why therapists have jobs.

Instead of dismissing a feeling, acknowledge it—and then ask questions. *How is this related to past experiences and other times I've felt this way? How is this related to what I believe about myself, about God, about the world?* It's like looking at that puzzle piece. You examine, then wonder. *What's it like? What might it be connected to?*

As you do, God just might guide your thoughts to some important insights.

*Lord, help me be curious and patient enough to  
see what You want me to see in myself.*

## Deep-Down Realities

*Search me, God, and know my heart; . . .  
know my anxious thoughts.*

Psalm 139:23

**W**hen David invited God to know his heart in Psalm 139, it wasn't because God didn't already know it. David was saying, "Show me what's going on in here, God. Help me know myself more like You know me."

Like I've said before, we don't always know ourselves really well. Invite the Spirit of God to reveal some important realities to you: *Am I looking for approval in my relationships? Am I trying to find purpose only through my achievements? Am I seeking significance on social media? Am I trying to gain self-worth through my possessions or lifestyle? Am I avoiding wounds that need healing or questions that need addressing?*

Maybe He'll gently unveil some really big questions at the deepest part of you: *Am I doing enough? Am I failing too much? Am I seen and loved? Do I matter? Am I safe? Do I fit in? Can unconditional love and grace actually be real? Will I ever be able to forgive, adjust, recover, heal? Is there hope for me to grow in the ways I long to?*

Dear one, you *are* loved—more than you know. Find these secret places in yourself. Meet with God in them. Let Him speak to every anxious thought and big question.

*God, I know You can see what I can't. Show me what I need to see.*



JANUARY 13

## A Big Blinking Arrow

*“I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people  
and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.”*

Jeremiah 33:6

**M**y instinct is to resent anxiety. You too? For years it just seemed like a sign of general weakness, another way I wasn't measuring up. Even if my anxiety stayed private and only I knew about it, I was mad at myself for not being Wonder Woman. Maybe it was even a faulty part of my faith in God.

Later, though, I realized that anxiety can be like a big neon arrow, pointing to wounds that need healing or to fears and unmet needs that ought to be addressed. It's connected to deep parts of me, areas where God wants to bring His power and goodness and peace.

Most of us are walking around with unresolved pain and unidentified needs. There may be tender areas or major traumas from our younger years. There may be too much on our plate, a lie that's limiting us, or just an ongoing need to not feel so alone.

Don't resent or quickly dismiss your anxiety. Look at it long enough to learn what it's connected to. Invite God to meet those needy and broken areas with His help and healing.

*God, help me be patient with my anxiety. Bring Your  
strength and goodness to everything it's connected to.*



## Express Yourself

*I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the towering rock of safety, for you are my safe refuge.*

Psalm 61:2–3 NLT

When's the last time you wrote out how you were feeling? It turns out that experts can list oodles of benefits of journaling.<sup>7</sup> Among other things, it can really help you understand yourself, process what you're experiencing, and pray.

Don't know where to start? What's been on your mind? Whatever you write doesn't have to meet any standards. You're creating a safe place to express yourself. It may seem basic, but it might prevent you from feeling like you need to combust later.

Journaling isn't only a form of release; it often brings clarity too. Sometimes I start out in a wad, a big mess of worries and frustrations. Once I find some words and put them out there, in dialogue with God, His Spirit leads my thoughts. Scriptures come to mind. Hope and peace and wisdom show up. By the time I'm wrapping up, I often have new praises in my heart and direction for what's next.

At the very least, I'm calmer. I have assurance that I'm not alone, I'm known, and I'm on a path with God. I've opened up about where I am and what I'm experiencing. I've put a spotlight on my struggle, and He has met me in it.

He will meet with you too. He's ready anytime.

*Father, hold my feelings and wounds. Hold my fears and hopes.*

## Pour Out Your Soul

*I am a woman who is deeply troubled. . . . I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. . . . I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.*

1 Samuel 1:15–16

Sometimes you don't have time to journal—and the anxiety is cranking up. Wherever you are, get real with God. Maybe cry. For Hannah, it was at an altar, but for you it could be in a car or outdoors.

Hannah was desperate to become a mother. For years, her infertility had been breaking her heart. Eventually her anguish came flooding out of her at a public altar. She silently prayed out her grief and longing and crushed-up heart to God. She wasn't praying the way people typically did, by speaking out loud, so the priest actually thought she was drunk. But Hannah was earnestly confiding in God, asking Him to help her in her agony, and telling Him she still hoped for Him to act.

God absolutely answered Hannah's prayer. She became the mother of Samuel and continued to honor God with the rest of her life. And she left an example for generations of what to do when you are deeply troubled.

Pour out your soul to God. Get real and let it all out in the presence of the One who knows you and holds you.

*God, here are all my longings and hurts and tangled-up feelings. I pour them all out to You.*

## You're Not Meant to Carry All That

*Give your burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of you.*

Psalm 55:22 NLT

**H**ave you ever gone backpacking? Those giant packs are no joke—some people walk around with sixty pounds on their back! Can you imagine going through your daily routine with one of those strapped to you? You wouldn't feel free to do all you were meant to do with that beast constantly aggravating you and wearing you down.

Aren't we sort of like that when we drudge through our days feeling miserably burdened?

God says, "I see you've got a heavy-duty burden going there. Will you let Me take some weight off?" If we say yes, He'll choose a way to do that in His wisdom. Sometimes He takes burdens away. Sometimes He sends helpers. Other times He makes the hard things feel lighter and doable. His powerful presence changes our experience of them.

It's a bit like when I call my sister and say, "Here's what's weighing on me." I can't explain why, but simply talking it out and having her listen makes me feel lighter. Or like when I'm carrying ten grocery bags and my husband says, "I can take some of those," with an outstretched hand.

Listen, you need to remove something you've been carrying alone on your shoulders. I'm betting all that is not meant for one human. Surrender it into God's able hands.

*Help me feel lighter, God. Free me up to do what I'm meant to do.*



JANUARY 17

## In His Care

*The Spirit of God has made me; the breath  
of the Almighty gives me life.*

Job 33:4

**H**ave you been pausing to take deep breaths? Remember how you can stimulate that vagus nerve and prompt your nervous system to relax?

The next time you do that long, deep breathing, think on this: even though your heart is uneasy as you're carrying uncertainties, and parts of life just feel wrong, *you are breathing*. God is making you alive right now. On purpose.

Even if it feels like your world's spinning out of control and you can't imagine how things will ever get better, you're breathing. You're meant for this moment and what God has for you in it.

God wants you alive for something beautiful and purposeful. You'll have to trust Him, and sometimes that feels hard. No matter what you do, though, He'll remain insistent about bringing you into His goodness. That's one thing in your life you *can* be certain of.

So breathe deep and ponder this mystery, that the Almighty put His breath in your lungs. Offer yourself up to Him. Think, *My soul is still in His care. It always will be*. He's giving you the gift of life in this moment. He can keep giving you what you need for each moment to come.

*Almighty God, thank You for giving breath.*



## Holding Hands

*"I will take hold of your hand."*

Isaiah 42:6

**T**here's nothing like holding the hand of someone you love. You've probably done it countless times throughout your life. Each experience has had its own distinctive sensation or meaning. Maybe the hand you held was soft or clammy or scratchy-dry. The hand felt electric on a date. It felt like home with a family member. It felt connected in a circle of believers. Most times, it made you feel safe and loved and special.

Now, go with me here. Imagine what it would be like to hold God's hand.

No, really, take a minute and try to picture it.

How would you describe how His hand feels? *Big. Strong. Warm.*

How would it make you feel? *Secure. Loved. Special.*

How would it affect how you view where you are and what's next? *Not alone. Helped. Less afraid.*

Jesus walked this earth and used His hands to love and help people just like you. Only heaven knows how many hands He held and hearts He comforted.

Let His Spirit do that for you now. The next time an anxious thought springs up, imagine yourself reaching out to grab His big, strong hand. He will hold you fast.

*God, help me to keep grabbing hold of You.*

## Right by Your Side

*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where  
can I flee from your presence?*

Psalm 139:7

I have abandonment issues. Like anyone else, I've had friends profess forever bonds, then drop away, and boyfriends who just quit calling. But the deeper cuts were when my dad moved out when I was thirteen and when my mom died when I was seventeen. I learned really fast that God was the only One who stayed.

God's presence is truly relentless. He's with you in the hospital room, in the lawyer's office, and at the job interview. He's with you in the panic attack and the sleepless nights. He's there when you're stood up, lonely, or nervous.

Wherever you are, whenever it is, whatever is happening, you can count on this: the Spirit of God will not quit on you. If you think you're alone, you've put up blinders. You can't see what's right next to you.

God didn't make you so He could abandon you. He made you so you could be in a loving, intimate relationship with Him, and He's serious about it. So take off those blinders and look around. *He's right here.* He always has been. And He's not leaving. Ever.

*Spirit of God, You're closer to me than my own breath.  
Help me remember and sense that You're right here.*

## The God Who Sees

*“You are the God who sees me.”*

Genesis 16:13

**Y**ou know those moments when you feel overlooked or misunderstood? A woman named Hagar had a lot of those.

God had promised Sarah and Abraham that they’d have a baby, but after ten years, they were done waiting on God. They instead decided to try to grow their family through a maidservant named Hagar—a standard cultural practice back then.

So Abraham slept with Hagar, and she got pregnant. When she turned hostile toward Sarah, Sarah fired back the contempt, and the fighting culminated in Hagar running away.

Hagar was out in the desert by herself when an angel of God appeared. His message to her was, “Running away isn’t the answer. Go back. Continue in your role there. But know this: you’ll have a huge family. God heard you, Hagar. God answered you.” She was stunned and overjoyed. “You are the God who sees me!” she said.

Can you see the generosity in God’s heart here? He saw how this woman had been mistreated, along with her mistakes, and poured out loving gifts to her.

We’re all eager to feel seen. But people will only ever see parts of us. God is the One who really sees it all. God has His loving attention on you, dear one.

*God, You are the One who truly sees my heart and my story.*

## Who Forgot?

*“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have  
no compassion on the child she has borne?”*

Isaiah 49:15

When my anxiety is high, it can be hard to sense the presence of God. It can feel like He’s far away, like He’s forgotten me.

The Israelites felt this way when they were exiled in Babylon. All signs pointed to God turning His back on them—they were captives in a foreign land, missing the home they loved, just miserable. But Isaiah basically said to them, “Are you kidding? God is like a devoted mother who is forever connected to her kid. There’s no way God could forget you!” Isaiah went on to describe how God would do some legendary rescuing. He’d bring His people back home, make wrong things right, and give them all kinds of new joys.

So back up. God never forgets His people? But what about those moments I’m pretty sure He has? When my feelings take over?

Oh. *Right.* It’s actually me who’s forgetting Him.

My tasks and concerns and fears can essentially become my focus. Guess what? It’s hard to do all that while not forgetting some things—including the fact that God knows exactly how I am and what I need.

Remember, His heart is all wrapped up with yours. You’re His heart’s treasure and are never out of His thoughts.

*God, help me not forget Your never-ending love.*

## God's Tattoo

*"I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."*

Isaiah 49:16

**D**o you have a tattoo? What is it? If you got one today, what would it be? It'd be something that matters to you. Someone you love. A message that fills your heart. A memory that points to who you are. That tattoo would show your connection with this ultra-important person or idea.

The Israelites did something kind of like this. They marked their hands by puncturing them with an image that represented their temple or city. They wanted to express what their hearts were saying: *We're as devoted as we can be. We are all in.*

There's a good chance this was exactly what God was alluding to when He told His people, "I have engraved *you* on the palms of My hands."

How would you feel if someone put your name on his body for all the world to see? Just picture it for a minute. It'd be so crazy-bold and striking and certain. So permanent. What would that tattoo be saying to the world? *Yep, I love her. I'll forever want to be around her. I am hers and she is mine. I wouldn't want it any other way.*

God has that heart for you. It's undying affection times a million. He's as devoted as He can be. When it comes to loving you, He's all in.

*God, nobody loves like You. Thank You for a love that's so much bigger than me.*

## Confess and Be Light

*I confessed all my sins to you. . . . And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.*

Psalm 32:5 NLT

A little boy lay awake in his bed, unable to sleep. Why? He'd stolen money from his mom's wallet. Finally, he got up and told his mom, and then he could finally rest.

The weight of unconfessed sin causes anxiety no matter how old we are. But God is lightning-quick with forgiveness.

Sometimes we deceive ourselves and think we're fine. When we do that, we're not accepting what He says is good and right. We're pushing away His Spirit, hindering the beautiful work He can do in us. All of this opens us up to anxiety.

So we need to ask the Spirit to lead us into truth and get honest with ourselves. As the Spirit points out sin, we agree with Him. We say, *God, I love what You love and hate what You hate. I did that wrong thing. Forgive me. Help me turn away from what's wrong and grow in virtue.*

From that moment on, we make room for His Spirit to work His wonders in our lives.

God lifts up the one who is honest and contrite. He gives grace to the one who raises her hand, saying, "It was me. Forgive me." Humble yourself before Him today. See how He lightens your heart.

*Forgive me for the ways I've not embodied Your truth and beauty, God. I don't want anything to come between us.*

## Ask All the Questions

*Faith does not eliminate questions. But  
faith knows where to take them.*  
Elisabeth Elliot, *A Chance to Die*

The sharp turns and long detours in our lives can leave us feeling fatigued: the cancer that came back, the baby you lost, the job you can't find. You can end up gasping, crying, and questioning.

Those questions don't have to consume you. God is all ears. He deserves reverence, but that doesn't mean you have to be guarded with Him. He already knows you perfectly; it's not like you'll shock Him. Have you heard the questions people in the Bible asked God?

Abraham asked, "What good are all your blessings when I have no son?" (Genesis 15:2 TLB). Job asked, "Why then did you bring me out of the womb?" (Job 10:18). Paul repeatedly asked, "Will you remove this thorn in my flesh, this thing that torments me?" (see 2 Corinthians 12:7–8).

They didn't bottle up their confusion or run away from God in despair. Philip Yancey observed, "As often as not, spiritual giants of the Bible are shown *contending* with God. They prefer to go away limping, like Jacob, rather than to shut God out."<sup>8</sup>

You can go to God with every single question, even ones you can only bring yourself to whisper. He is here for it all.

*God, thank You for not turning away from my  
confusion. Thank You for staying and listening.*

## Allow Yourself to Grieve

*Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits  
up the o'er wrought heart and bids it break.*

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Sometimes our anxiety is wrapped up in loss and we haven't fully processed the grief of that loss. Let me give you a few examples.

A friend betrayed your trust and drifted away, so you've lost the meaningful bond you had with her. Establishing trust with new friends now will be tough.

Your position at work was eliminated, and you're totally disoriented. You've lost the career trajectory you worked hard for and the financial security you were counting on.

You've moved to a new place where you don't know anyone. You've lost a way of life that was familiar, and now it's time to create a new local support system from the ground up.

In each scenario, someone has something to grieve. If anything like this has happened to you, open the window of your heart so God's light can reach inside. There could be sad or hurt parts of you that you can tend to and invite God into.

We're constantly adapting to the changing parts of our lives. Sometimes that's good; other times it's a whole lot to process. Ask God to show you how He can help you heal.

*You know me best, God. Reveal what I need  
to process and grieve with me.*