

# *Out of the* **WILDERNESS**

31 Devotions to Walk with God  
Through Your Hardest Seasons



from the hosts of the *Girls Gone Bible* podcast

**ANGELA**  
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Your Hardest Seasons

ANGELA HALILI AND ARIELLE REITSMA



WaterBrook

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To our GGB family, thank you for providing a safe place to share our hearts and our faith. We wouldn't be able to do any of this without you.

And to our Jesus, the light that leads us out of the wilderness. Thank you for saving us. We will never stop telling people what you did for us.

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## Out of the Wilderness

wilderness season: a time of trials, testing, and  
spiritual warfare

When you find yourself in a wilderness season, it can feel like you're dying—like you've been abandoned as you cry out for help in your moment of need. But even Jesus spent time in the wilderness, and as Christians we will too.

We may think that by embracing God and our faith, the road will be easier or problem free, but this isn't what we're promised. John 16:33 says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." We will experience times of hardship, but while the world sees hardship as only that, we need to look at it as an opportunity for growth—an opportunity to put our trust in God and his plans, to surrender ourselves and our lives, knowing that he works all things for good! It's an opportunity to draw closer to him. So when you feel like giving up, when you feel lost or alone, remember that you are not abandoned—you are meant to be right where you are.

We (Ang and Ari) know what it's like to feel lost and broken, unworthy and unqualified, and to feel shame or judgment for our past. We

know how hard it is to truly seek God and to surrender the things of this world in order to live a life after Christ. We've personally experienced amazing highs but also some *real* lows, periods where we struggled to hear God's voice and questioned whether he was even listening. In fact, when we first met a few years ago, we were both searching for purpose. I (Ari) woke up on my birthday, feeling utterly alone and heartbroken after my three-and-a-half-year relationship ended, and tried to put on a brave face and make it through the modeling job we were both working that day. During a break, I couldn't help but sob into my hands, unable to compose myself.

That's when I (Ang) saw Ari crying and suddenly felt the Holy Spirit prompt me to approach her. A vulnerability instantly connected us, as we saw our own struggles reflected in the other. In the devotions that follow, you'll read about how our lives were transformed as we came to know Jesus by reading our Bibles together. Up to this point, we were both simply existing, lacking joy and purpose as we fought to gain control over our mental health, our careers, and our relationships, basing our identities on fleeting things that would disappear from our lives and leave us flailing and lost again. We desperately tried to control every area of our lives, thinking that we could determine the outcomes and force our lives to be what we wanted. We looked to the world to find peace but were constantly coming up empty.

But in Jesus, we've found the peace that surpasses all understanding, a peace that exists even in difficult circumstances. We've found a love that never fails, one that always surrounds us. Even when we feel separate or distant from God, we recognize his hand over our lives and hold on to our trust in him, knowing that this trial is only for a season and he will work all things out for our good.

Coming to truly know Jesus through his Word, we found our purpose in starting our podcast, *Girls Gone Bible*, to share our stories and

help others find the same peace we've found in him. Our GGB community has become our family, whom we love and pray for daily. Our podcast was the first space we found to share about our love for God and all that he does for us. Despite feeling unqualified to speak about God, we knew he was calling us to step into this space, and after we released the first episode, it became clear how many people were hungry for him. It also showed us how God had been preparing and equipping us to connect with others in this new way. And now we have written the devotional you're holding as a way to share new stories about how God has been working in our lives the past few years to bring us to this point.

This devotional is meant to encourage and strengthen you in your season of struggle and remind you that God is still present and working in your life, even when you can't see or understand his plans. Whether the topic is relationships, careers, friendships, identity, or purpose, or whether you're simply searching for God's voice in the quiet, these devotions include scriptures and truths from our hardest wilderness seasons.

Each day opens with Scripture and a short biblical breakdown of the topic, because we want you to understand the importance of being rooted in God's Word. When we feel like God is silent, or like we can no longer hear him, we need to go to his Word—to the truth. Each day also includes a story from one of us. By learning bits of our stories, you'll see how God showed up when we needed him most and how he used difficult times to challenge and deepen our faith.

We pray that our stories provide hope that God is growing you in your own trials, that he hears you and loves you. In fact, he loves you so much that he allows you to experience the wilderness in the hopes that you fall at his feet.

Your time in the wilderness is only for a season. You have a life of purpose, meaning, and love on the other side, waiting for you to em-

brace it. We can't promise that by the end of this devotional your wilderness season will have passed, but we hope you will find encouragement, friendship, and godly advice as you journey through it and come out the other side stronger and even more in love with Jesus.

Let's get started, shall we?

## Day One



# Prepare the Way for the Lord

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

Now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

“I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

—JOHN 1:23–27

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.

—JOHN 3:29–30, ESV

John the Baptist clarified his identity and mission in this passage in John 1. He was not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet. Rather, he was the one preparing the way for the Messiah—Jesus. John’s mission was to call people to repentance and baptize them as a symbol of their commitment to change. His role was to ready people to receive Jesus and his message, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah and pointing to the greater work that Jesus would accomplish (Isaiah 40:1–9).

In these verses from John 3, John the Baptist expressed his joy and fulfillment in seeing Jesus's ministry flourish. Using the wedding metaphor, he illustrated his supportive role as the friend of the Bridegroom (Jesus), rejoicing in the success and presence of Jesus. John's declaration, "He must increase, but I must decrease," is evidence of his humility and understanding that his purpose was to prepare for Jesus, and now that Jesus had come, John's role would naturally decrease as Jesus's ministry took center stage.

### From Angela

Just as John knew his purpose, we, too, possess a deep yearning and essential need to have and know our purpose in life. Chasing empty ideals can leave us feeling unsatisfied, and a lack of purpose will lead to deep depression and a lifetime of emptiness. But as Christians, our purpose is clear: to know Jesus and to make him known. While some may think that sounds cheesy, I know now it is what God wants for me, just like he did for John the Baptist.

While I haven't always walked according to God's Word, I *have* been someone who prays. But honestly, even though I prayed my heart out in my younger days, my prayers were selfish. Back then, I begged God to fulfill my greatest needs and desires. I told him things had to go exactly the way I envisioned or else I'd just die.

But that all changed one day when I was twenty-five and God spoke clearly into my heart and told me that I had my relationship with him backward. He reminded me who was God (*him*) and who was not (*me*). He reminded me that *I* am to serve *him*, not the other way around. I had been treating my relationship with God transactionally, ignoring that he is the giver of life and creator of all, and I am but a servant. That interaction was one of the greatest moments of maturity in my faith walk.

Incredibly humbled, I realized I had a big heart change to make.

Since then, every morning when I wake up, I drop to my knees and ask Jesus what he needs from me. I offer him my day, saying, “I dedicate every moment of today to you. Where do you need me to go? Who do you need me to talk to? How can I serve you in all I do and everywhere I go?” I am now completely Christ-focused, which has changed my life forever. I have the most beautiful relationship with Jesus, in which I know my place as servant and his role as master.

In my submission to God, I found security. And joy. And peace. I discovered purpose like I’d never known before. I soon found a mentor who disciplined me and helped me learn more about God and the Bible. But the knowledge I gained wasn’t for me alone. It was for me to then go out and make more disciples (Matthew 28:19) by sharing what I learned. I began proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone, telling them what God did for my life and trying my best to articulate that he could do the same for them. I’ll explain more about the origins of *Girls Gone Bible* (GGB) in a later devotion, but the seed of its existence was planted in my heart at that time. I want my entire being, my entire existence, to be a means to prepare the way for the coming Lord. Serving God and his people fills my soul to overflowing.

The Bible says the first commandment is to love God, and the second is to love people (Matthew 22:37–39). Although I’ve always been a lover of people, loving Jesus expanded my heart’s capacity for loving others to an extent I didn’t even know was possible. Scripture also says that we love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). This is why loving Jesus is a prerequisite to loving people the way he intends for us to. When I fell in love with Jesus, I could no longer be passive or indifferent about people. Behind every set of eyes is a soul that Jesus cares about. And since Jesus cares for them, so do I.

In December 2023, Ari and I felt led to host a baptism in L.A. out of

this overflowing love of others. Jesus had given us the amazing gift of our GGB community, and it had been growing rapidly. The people in this community became my best friends, whom I get to commune with every Friday through our podcast. They are the ones I spend all week praying for. I care for them so deeply and love them with everything I have. They have loved Ari and me so well, and my life is full because of them.

And though it may have been GGB that drew these people to the L.A. event, it was the one true God, Jesus Christ, whom they came looking for. My heart was forever marked by the brokenness I saw in many who attended, and a burden was placed on my soul that has not lifted and I pray never does. Being able to look into the eyes of so many of our brothers and sisters in Christ—people we had been speaking to through our podcast but hadn't ever met—and to pray for them was a turning point for me. It was a reminder that people are hurting, and they need Jesus.

Yet, even up to this point, I had been attempting to hold on to control of my life. I had my own ideas and plans. That night after the baptism, alone on the couch at 2:00 A.M., I had an intimate moment with God. I whispered, “Jesus, I'm ready to give it all up. Anything I had planned for my life, I'm ready to let it all go for what we did tonight, for the rest of my life.” And I meant it.

I constantly pray that God instills in me the heart posture of John the Baptist—that my only aim would be to prepare the way for the Lord's coming, and that the people who hear me and think to follow *me* would immediately recognize the only one worth following is Jesus.

I pray that I will become less and less so that Jesus becomes greater and greater in my place. That when I speak, my words will point to Jesus. That when I move, my actions will point to Jesus. That when I love, my heart will point to Jesus. I am not worthy even to untie his san-

dal straps, so it is my life's greatest honor to be a small part in the big things only he can do.



Dear God,

Thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help me to make him known in every aspect of my life. Let my words, actions, and thoughts reflect his love and truth to those around me. Guide me to find my true purpose in Jesus, so that I may live a life that glorifies you. Lord, as I seek to be more like Jesus, I also ask for a spirit like John the Baptist's. Give me the courage to speak boldly of your coming kingdom, the humility to always point others to Jesus, and the dedication to prepare the way for him in the hearts of many. Strengthen me to live a life of purpose and service, drawing others to your light. May I decrease, so that Jesus may increase in all that I do.

In his name I pray, amen.

Your turn: What have you learned about Jesus in this devotion, and how does this apply to your season in the wilderness?

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## Day Two



# When Love Left, Jesus Stayed

Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.”

Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.

—MATTHEW 9:20–22

The Bible’s account of the bleeding woman appears amid the larger narrative of Jesus raising a young girl from the dead. The inclusion of the story in three of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) indicates that this miracle is significant. The unnamed woman would’ve been considered unclean due to her condition, leaving her stigmatized and isolated. By the time she met Jesus, she had heard of his healing ability and was desperate for a cure.

For twelve years, her existence had been one of pain and suffering. But when she brushed Jesus’s hem, she was healed. When Jesus asked, “Who touched me?” she came before him.

Where others would have cast her out, Jesus met her with mercy and grace. And while she is unnamed in the Gospels, Jesus named her “daughter” and claimed her as one of his children. Her faith saved her, but it was her pain that drove her toward her Savior. She had tried every

cure, but only Jesus could make her whole.

## From Arielle

Like the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, I was also desperate for a miracle. My three-and-a-half-year relationship had ended abruptly in 2022, and it felt like a nightmare I was waiting to wake up from. Anxious, hopeless, brokenhearted, and sleep deprived, I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. I was alive but not living. I was merely trying to survive. The emotional pain was so severe it felt physical, like a sickness with claws so deep it was unbearable. Here I was at thirty, eager to start my life with the person I loved so much and trusted the most—and then suddenly all my dreams of being a wife and mother were gone.

I remember lying on my floor with nothing left in me except my overbearing thoughts. My hands were splayed over my head because I couldn't take another second of the torment and self-blame that were replaying in my mind. *What now? How will I ever recover from this? Where is the person I had trusted? Did I ever even know him?*

After the breakup, I went back to Boston to be with family, but nothing healed the pain. Like the bleeding woman, I tried every physician, but no one could cure me. I lay in my Nan's arms, begging her to take the hurt away. I asked my friends the same repetitive question of what I could have done differently as I wrung my hands in anguish.

"Ari, you've got to eat something. It's been weeks," my dad said. But I couldn't even lift my head off the pillow, let alone eat. So every morning, he put a glass of chocolate milk by my bedside, the only thing I could stomach. I ordered books on depression and heartbreak, which only led me to feel more depressed. The doctors prescribed medications for sleep, but those only made me feel worse when I woke up. In therapy

I asked, “Will this ever go away? Will I ever be happy again?”

One night, I mustered up the courage to go out with friends. As everyone was talking and laughing, I noticed I couldn’t hear anything they were saying. Everything around me felt like it was caving in. I was in so much physical pain, I thought, *Is it in my head? Am I dying? Why can’t I hear anything? Just keep smiling—it’s all in my head.*

“Ari, are you okay?”

I stood up . . . and collapsed. Two friends carried me to the car and rushed me to the ER. The pain was so bad I couldn’t even see straight. Hunched over, I begged to be admitted to a room. After hours of testing, the doctor told me I had had a nervous breakdown. The emotional pain had taken such a toll on my body that it turned physical. I felt so much shame that I had gotten to this point that I couldn’t even tell my family.

I was completely lost and desperate. When I looked in the mirror, I didn’t recognize myself. I needed help.

About a week after my trip to the ER, by the grace of God, as I was driving, I noticed a church near my house and pulled in. Inside the empty sanctuary, I fell to my knees, trembling, and cried out, “God, can you help me? I can’t do this on my own. I need you. My heart is so broken it feels like I’m not going to make it through.”

In that moment, I felt *seen*. I sensed a comfort and a love I had never experienced before, like that of a parent holding me in his arms. I had never known true peace, but in that moment, there it was—the peace I had been searching for my whole life. That was the day I met God.

I became so dependent on him, like a little girl with her dad. I returned to that church frequently, where I would lie in the pews for hours, just being in his presence, talking and crying out to him. It was the only time I felt relief. Because of this newfound peace and love, I longed to be close to him. I started attending church every Sunday, and

people would pray for me. But even that wasn't enough to satisfy my hunger for understanding, so I watched sermons at home and learned about who God was.

I believe raw dependency on God comes from deep suffering. He saved my life through my brokenness and showed me true love. Though my healing was not a quick fix, I'm glad it wasn't. My pain had caused me to cling to Jesus's hem, because I had finally found what I longed for. So I held on tight. I told God that I couldn't get through this without him, and I brought every broken piece to him. Soon, my "Why, God?" turned into "Thank you, God."

As I look back on the days I could barely move, the mornings I wished I didn't wake up, the dark nights of pleading and crying and not understanding why the person I had loved most had left, I'm thankful because it led me to the only thing that really matters—God. I couldn't depend on myself or my partner for security, because genuine security is only found in God.

Can you relate? Is your heart so broken you feel like you will do just about anything to heal it? What if in the mastery of God, your broken heart isn't for your disappointment but for your development? Here's what I know: You have a heavenly Father, one who loves you more than anyone else in this entire world ever could. One who wants the very best for you, who will not only bind up your wounds, heal you, redeem you, and never leave you nor forsake you, but who is also a Father who will never withhold something that is truly yours. So when someone or something feels like it has been taken away, it's simply because it is not in God's will. There is something on the other side that he has for you that is so much greater. You just have to trust him with your broken pieces. All it takes is a small seed of faith to bring your sick heart to him. For as you reach out to him, you, too, can hear his voice gently saying, "Your faith has made you well. Go in peace."



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## Day Three



# My Mind Is a War Zone

Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

—2 CORINTHIANS 10:3–5

In these verses, the apostle Paul used military terminology to describe how our battle is not against flesh and blood; instead, it's spiritual. And we must fight with God's mighty weapons: prayer, faith, hope, love, God's Word, and the Holy Spirit. God must be the commander in chief, and our thoughts must be under his control if we want a fighting chance in the spiritual battle that is always happening around us. Saying "we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" speaks to the fact that we must tear down every prideful or anti-biblical idea that keeps us from knowing God. Paul then told us to take any thought that is against God or the Word of God—to *capture it*—and yield it to Christ. Otherwise, those thoughts will take us captive. We capture them by immediately recognizing them and bringing them to God in prayer and by speaking God's truth over them.

## From Angela

I battled severe anxiety and panic disorder for years before I was diagnosed with OCD. The National Institute of Mental Health describes OCD like this: “Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a long-lasting disorder in which a person experiences uncontrollable and recurring thoughts (obsessions), engages in repetitive behaviors (compulsions), or both. People with OCD have time-consuming symptoms that can cause significant distress or interfere with daily life. However, treatment is available to help people manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life.”<sup>1</sup>

Even though I was diagnosed with OCD, I reject the idea that it is a part of me or a part of my identity. I do believe I have a genetic predisposition to OCD, and before I was in a true relationship with Jesus it had a foothold in my life and intensely affected how I lived day to day. Today, I keep my OCD under control because of the blood of Jesus that has set me free. When I am weak, vulnerable, or perhaps not in total right standing with God, the enemy—Satan—attacks me with OCD-like thoughts and obsessions.

OCD is something I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. It makes you feel *craazy*. And it's so difficult to find the words to accurately describe how it affects your brain. I experienced OCD in the form of obsessive thinking, ruminating thoughts, and repetitive behavior. Most of my OCD centered around fixated thoughts and anxiety that absolutely plagued my life and brain. For example, since I was battling irrational health-related anxiety and always thought something was severely wrong with me, I would feel a sensation in my chest, near my heart, and I would gasp for air, certain I was having a heart attack. This resulted in a perpetual, looping internal battle convincing me of that. *What was that? Was that in my heart? Is something wrong? My heart is in bad condition.*

*I have to see someone. I have to see a doctor. I'm going to have a heart attack, and no one is here to help me. I'm going to end up dead.* I went to the doctor sooo many times, and did so much blood work and testing, only to be told every single time that my health was in perfect condition. Being told that nothing was wrong while desperately trying to find the answer to what *was* wrong made me feel incredibly hopeless and scared.

Obsessive and irrational fears were a major component of OCD for me. I developed countless fears and phobias: I couldn't go as high as a fourth-floor balcony without experiencing vertigo and getting faint. I had trouble driving for almost three years, and I avoided the highway whenever I could. If I couldn't, I stayed in the very right lane in case I had to urgently pull over due to a panic attack, which was often—like, multiple times every day. I developed agoraphobia, which is the fear of leaving environments you consider to be safe, fearing that you will have a panic attack.

OCD is often linked to addiction issues and disordered eating, both of which I have dealt with. My OCD resulted in an all-or-nothing mentality, which led to an obsessive relationship with alcohol and deeply influenced my relationship with food. It caused me to rely heavily on routine eating and safe foods, and any time that routine was disrupted, all hell would break loose in my mind.

One day in 2022, I was listening to a sermon, and the speaker mentioned 2 Corinthians 10:5, about how we have this ability to take thoughts captive. God spoke to me so clearly through this scripture. For the first time, I understood that I am not a powerless victim to what is going on in my head. I have the ability to take control of these thoughts through the authority given to me by Jesus and the empowerment from the Holy Spirit. At this point, I had already learned the power of speaking Scripture over myself, so every time I would lose control over my thoughts, I would repeat 2 Corinthians 10:5. Over time, my

thoughts became obedient to Christ.

Faithful, miracle-working, light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel Jesus. He didn't leave us as orphans, and he didn't leave us helpless. He left us with tools and practices and promises and the ability to overcome. He saved me. He healed me. I am victorious over OCD because Jesus nailed it to the cross. That doesn't mean it never shows up. But he delivered me. It's up to me to stay delivered by staying close to Christ.

When I was in my early twenties and trying to navigate my declining mental health, I didn't have anyone around me who understood. It hurts to think back to this young version of me, when my own brain was fighting against me. My mind was an absolute war zone. And it hurt. I was in so much emotional pain, with little to no relief. I was also scared—I felt so unsafe in my own head. I now know that Jesus was there, ready to rescue me, waiting for me to reach out to him as my redeemer.

If you are struggling with OCD, anxiety, or any other mental health issue, my heart aches for you. You are not subject to your thoughts. Your thoughts are subject to *Jesus*. You have the mind of Christ, and your mind belongs to him. You are safe. You are protected. Remember, “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you” (Isaiah 26:3, ESV).



Dear Jesus,

I thank you that you are Jehovah-Rapha, the God who heals. I declare 2 Corinthians 10:5: “I demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and I take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” I have the mind of Christ. Lord, I ask that you release a supernatural healing over my thoughts. I pray that you release

a supernatural peace in my mind and that all my thoughts are lovely, pure, and pleasing to you. I pray my mind is set on you. I pray you heal me and deliver me from any hereditary or genetic predisposition to mental health struggles. I trust that you are Lord over my thoughts. I believe that I am safe and healthy. I believe that you are taking care of everything concerning my thought life and mental health. I love you, Jesus. Thank you for keeping me in perfect peace. I fix my eyes on you.

In your name I pray, amen.

Your turn: What have you learned about Jesus in this devotion, and how does this apply to your season in the wilderness?

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