

PRAISE FOR *HOW DID I GET HERE?*

“It’s a time of upheaval. All of us feel a little shaky and Christine Caine steadies our anxious doubts. God is real. He is coming and our hope is secure. This book will bring you back to a faith that is full and alive again.”

—Jennie Allen, founder and visionary of IF: Gathering and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Get Out of Your Head*

“Through her own deeply personal stories, Christine pours out wisdom onto her readers once again. In *How Did I Get Here?* she reminds us that there is a little bit of doubt in all of us, but she lovingly guides us through and encourages us to get honest with God.”

—Roma Downey, Emmy-nominated actress, producer, and *New York Times* bestselling author

“If you know how it feels for everything around you to be okay while nothing inside you is, this book is for you. If you honestly don’t want to keep going but you *want* to want to, this book is for you. If you need a triumphant, trauma-scarred leader to give you a glimpse of your next, Christine is the woman for the job and this book is for you. *How Did I Get Here?* will fill you with soul-anchoring hope. This book is for you.”

—Dr. Anita Phillips, trauma therapist and host of *In the Light* podcast

“Christine’s book, *How Did I Get Here?* is like an honest conversation with a friend and mentor. Through her biblical insight and humor, she helps you recognize the patterns and areas of your life that are leading you away from the things of God—and then shows you how to shift your eyes back to him. As a personal mentor of mine, I can attest to the godly wisdom that Christine carries—and I know everyone who picks up this book will have an encounter with Jesus.”

—Sadie Robertson Huff, author, speaker, and founder of Live Original

“Christine Caine’s relentless pursuit to take the hope of Jesus to the world is deeply effective in her new book *How Did I Get Here?* She asks intimate questions that all of our hearts know well and points the wandering soul back home with compassion and strength. We thank God for Christine and her example in our lives as a leader, activist, teacher, and follower of Jesus. This book will encourage your life profoundly!”

—Rich Wilkerson Jr., lead pastor of VOUS Church

“Raw. Vulnerable. Honest. If you’ve reached a place where you’ve stopped hoping, stopped dreaming, or stopped praying . . . if things around you are flourishing and alive, but inside you’re anything but, if you feel like you may bend and break, this book is a map, showing you how to put the pieces back together.”

—Paula Faris, journalist, author, and podcaster

HOW DID
I GET
HERE?

ALSO BY CHRISTINE CAINE

Undaunted

Unstoppable

Unashamed

Unexpected

Unshakeable

HOW DID I GET HERE?

Finding Your Way Back to God When
Everything Is Pulling You Away

CHRISTINE CAINE



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How Did I Get Here?

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*To my darling Nick,
Jesus is the anchor of my soul, especially when the wind
and the waves want to take me off course, but you have
been the stabilizing force in my life. I like to think of you
as the gyrostabilizer of our boat as we sail through our
time on this earth—that engineering feat that keeps it all
afloat. How many times a day, through all the years of
our life and ministry together, have you kept everything
running and our boat from capsizing? You, Nick, are the
one who keeps it all upright, on course, and moving full
steam ahead. You are the ballast of our family’s life.
For this, and reasons a million more, I love you.*

For this reason, we must pay attention all the more to what we have heard, so that we will not drift away.

— HEBREWS 2:1

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INTRODUCTION

When I Wanted to Ring the Bell of Defeat

If you want to change the world, don't ever, ever ring
the bell.

—ADMIRAL WILLIAM H. MCRAVEN

For months, I tossed and turned. From side to side. From front to back. I plumped my pillow. I flattened my pillow. I piled on the covers. I threw them off. I stared into the darkness, my mind often locked in an endless cycle of thinking, fighting not to think, then landing in an emptiness that quickly refilled with flashbacks . . . of shifts I had seen coming and ones I didn't . . . of new beginnings I had managed to control and endings I couldn't . . . of narratives I wanted to rewrite so badly. I knew that rehashing the past couple of years would never make sense of the desperate feelings I was facing. But I also couldn't get away from what I was feeling. I was eager to rid myself of the turmoil, the chaos, the noise—just long enough to find some sort of peace, so I could

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sleep. Eventually, I would give up and get up. Night after night. At home. In hotel rooms. In every time zone.

So many nights I wanted to wake Nick. To talk it out. To try and figure it out. But there really wasn't anything new to say. He was such a faithful husband and friend, and he had listened to me hash it out, dig it out, desperately trying to unravel whatever was in knots. He was well aware and faithfully praying for me. There was no sense in robbing him of his sleep. We didn't both need to be awake.

This new season—this unwanted and unwelcome season—was unlike any previous season of my life. I've always been someone who has soldiered on. Stirred up my faith. Passionately pursued every new frontier. Thrived on being on the cutting edge of whatever God was doing and wherever he was going. But something had changed. Not just around me. In me. And I was unable to sort it all out.

Truthfully, deep down, I knew sleep wasn't really what I wanted most. I wanted answers. But in the moment, I needed rest even more than answers—though it was tempting to think answers would give me rest.

Still, I *wanted* answers. My mind *needed* answers. I wasn't used to having an undercurrent of feeling unsettled, of there being something I couldn't quite put my finger on.

For weeks I had tried exhausting myself at the gym. Going for a run. A bike ride. A swim. Anything to get myself off the mental treadmill threatening to overtake me. All to no avail.

Then one night, Nick suggested we watch a TV show. To relax before bed, he said. Only, he picked another one of those documentaries he loves to watch. I couldn't imagine how that could possibly help, but nothing I'd tried thus far had worked, so

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what did I have to lose? That evening's feature was an inside view of the most treacherous week United States Navy SEAL recruits endure to pass their training and be awarded the elite honor of calling themselves SEALs. The challenge is known as Hell Week.

Nick was all in from the beginning, but I was slower to engage. Perhaps if it had been *G.I. Jane*, the 1997 action-packed film starring Demi Moore, I could have been more on board. There would have been a suspenseful plot, a tense conflict, and finally a resolution leaving me with a boatload of winning emotions—and one iconic American hero. Jane would have inspired me to kick some serious Devil butt. Granted, it would probably have wound me up rather than down.

Nick's choice wasn't exactly riveting. Characteristic of documentaries, it was narrated. All the way through. By a calming monotone voice. Setting my phone aside, I chose to give it a fair shot. Five minutes in, to my surprise, skepticism gave way to curiosity, and before I knew it, I was intrigued.

There was something about the recruits' journey that began to tug at me. For days they are made to feel wet, cold, and exhausted. Lugging logs over their heads, treading water, jumping out of helicopters into more water, being rained on with shovels of sand. They crawl on shore, only to be dragged back out to sea, then hauled back to land, and left disoriented. Confused. Fighting to focus. Fighting to stay awake. They are forced to push their muscles past levels of pain that fade into numb. Some of the most brilliant and physically fit military personnel on the planet, they are demoralized in every way possible in order to reach a breaking point mentally and emotionally. And most of them do break. More than half of them cave. But that's the point. Better to break on a beach in California than on a mission in a volatile part of the world.

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To make their training even more brutal, a shiny, gold bell is always strategically placed in their line of sight. At any point in the training, just by ringing it three times, they can end their hardship. They can rescue themselves from the most grueling training on earth. No questions asked.

Ring the bell, and they no longer have to wake up at five o'clock—or endure sleeplessness altogether. Ring the bell, and they no longer have to brave the freezing cold swims in utter blackness. Ring the bell, and they no longer have to roll in the sand and be a “sugar cookie.” Ring the bell, and they can be freed from the pain of it all.

In one minute—literally in just one minute—they can change the trajectory of their entire destiny. By ringing the bell, they can find themselves transported at once from suffering to standing in a hot shower or putting on dry, clean clothes or eating a hot meal. Ending their misery can be that quick. That easy. They can tap out and go back to their familiar posts in the military and home to their families—letting go once and forevermore the dream of becoming a Navy SEAL.

Watching their vicious fight to deny their physical condition, to rise above it mentally, to overcome intentional and insurmountable odds, left me wanting to ring the bell for them.

And . . . for me.

No sooner did I have that realization than the deep-seated storm of emotion inside of me began to swell. Until that moment, I hadn't known how to describe the relentless angst in my heart and mind. I reached for my chest, trying to steady myself. The feelings that had been stalking me, drawing closer and closer until they felt like they were jumping out at me when I least expected, surprised me once more—and left me deeply troubled.

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Being surprised brings on a whole range of emotions I've never managed well. Even when it's a good surprise like a birthday party. For some reason, those are the worst. I've been told this stems from feelings and fragments of trauma left from the abandonment and abuse I experienced as a child. Suffice it to say, I like knowns. Not unknowns.

These troubled feelings, this tugging of anxiety, had been an unknown. Something to be explored or unraveled. But watching the SEAL recruits ring the bell, one after another, started to bring understanding, at least in part. Something had revealed itself. Something had poked its head up and snuck a peek at me—and I had caught a glimpse of it.

I turned to Nick, unable to stop the tears from tumbling. "I think I'm beginning to understand the last two years. I feel like I've been dropped out of a helicopter, left sitting in the cold, cold water, and I've been there for six hours, but I'm required to endure for eight. My brain knows I can keep going. My heart knows I can keep going. I know that I can actually stay in this freezing cold water another two hours. I know it's not going to kill me. I've lived long enough to know Jesus will sustain me. I've been trained, I'm physically fit, I'm called by God, I have the ability. I know what is required of me to keep going, and for the first time in my ministry life, I don't know if I *want* to. I literally don't know if I *want* to keep going. I think I want to ring the bell."

Have you ever said something and felt all the air leave your lungs with the last syllable of your sentence? That's what happened for me. Wrapping words around the angst that had been prowling around me for months shook me to my core like nothing ever had. It scared me in a way I'd never known. There had been moments in my life when I wanted to walk away—temporarily.

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Moments when I'd felt deeply betrayed, deeply disillusioned, deeply hurt, deeply disappointed, deeply flawed, deeply misrepresented, deeply discouraged, deeply misunderstood. But never had I hit a wall where I thought, *I don't know if I actually want to keep going.*

I couldn't hide my own shock. And I couldn't help but wonder, *How did I get here?*

BUT EVERYTHING WAS FLOURISHING

I thought I was strong because I had always been strong. For more than thirty years I had been pursuing Jesus with a passion, following wherever he led me with great gratitude and commitment. I had never forgotten what my life was like when he found me or all he had done for me in the years since. But make no mistake, it had been a costly journey—mentally, emotionally, physically, personally, spiritually . . .

- When my family didn't understand my decision to surrender my life to Jesus.
- When I had to say goodbye to some relationships to follow Jesus.
- When I walked away from a thriving career to answer the call to ministry.
- When I was the only woman leading in a ministry setting.
- When I had a huge dream and few resources.
- When it felt like I was all alone.
- When I was single and everyone I knew was married.

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- When Nick and I married and could barely make ends meet.
- When we had a child, lost a child, and then had another.
- When we traveled to the nations to preach the gospel and lived unsettled and unrooted for weeks at a time.
- When we moved our family from one continent to another.
- When we chose to launch a global anti-trafficking organization—A21.
- When we started a women’s leadership initiative—Propel.
- When I said yes to a television program that would reach the world—*Equip & Empower*.

It all had cost more than we ever anticipated, but the fruit was stunning. God had exceeded our every hope and expectation. He had been so gracious to us, so faithful, so kind. By the time we celebrated twenty-one years of marriage and ministry, everything was flourishing—everything except me.

I should have been on top of the world, but I wasn’t. I should have been enjoying the fruit of my labor, but I wasn’t. I should have been full of peace and joy, but I wasn’t. I should have been full of vision for the future, but I wasn’t. Something was off, and until that night, I could not quite pinpoint exactly what it was.

I was grateful to have a glimpse of clarity, albeit from a documentary, but now that I had some language to wrap around my feelings, I desperately wanted more understanding. The realization that I wasn’t sure I wanted what I had always wanted the way I had wanted it was startling. Did I really feel that what had always been worthwhile suddenly wasn’t? Was I actually questioning whether I wanted to keep following Jesus wherever he

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would lead me? Surely not, but I was definitely in a place I had never imagined.

I didn't know if I wanted to keep pressing in and pressing on. Reaching out for the next thing. Pursuing the adventure I had always chased. It wasn't a crisis of faith; rather, it was a sober realization that if I were to keep going, it would probably mean more sacrifice, more pain, more heartache, more exposure, more vulnerability, more attacks . . . even though all of that would mean more fruit.

The course Jesus had charted for me was worthy of my continuing—because Jesus was worthy of my continuing—but somewhere I had drifted from seeing that to losing myself in my feelings. And my feelings were screaming at me to ring the bell. I mean, I knew that I could keep going through the motions, and no one would really know I wasn't pressing in as hard as I once was, sticking as close to Jesus as I once did. Willing to keep taking risks as I always had. I could be just like the recruit who rings the bell and doesn't get to be a SEAL but is still in the military. Still one of the strongest and bravest. Still honorable and dutiful, serving his country. No one would know I rang the bell. Except Jesus. And his knowing mattered more than anything.

Maybe my beleaguered state was from all the years of being on the front line. Of pioneering. Of daring to go where no one else was going. Of relentless spiritual warfare. Maybe it was from running full steam ahead. Or from feeling exposed, raw, vulnerable, and sometimes like an easy target. Maybe it was caused by the failure of a project I had poured my heart and soul into. Maybe I was still being affected from losing my mum and three other family members the year before. Maybe the loss of intimacy in letting go of some friendships I had treasured, ones that had

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fractured, left me feeling hurt and misunderstood, perhaps even jaded. It had been a huge season of loss on so many levels.

But don't we all deal with being hit by compounding blows? Don't we all lose loved ones? Don't we all grow weary in our callings and careers? Don't we all experience disappointments? And struggle with being disillusioned? Don't we all want to walk away from time to time?

Truth be told, I've lost count of the number of times I thought of walking away from it all and opening a small café in Santorini, Greece. Just Nick and me and our girls tucked away in my favorite corner of the world. Can't you picture me suggesting another cup of coffee to go with your baklava? I imagine we all run to our own little escape destinations in our minds. To the lives we thought we might have but never will. Because deep down we love Jesus and his plans more.

Instead of letting myself go there this time, I turned and faced the journey ahead of me—one I had never anticipated. I found myself in a place where I wanted to take cover more than I wanted to take ground. Where I didn't feel that I had the strength, courage, or confidence to keep going. And yet, at the same time, I knew I would. Jesus had always been the anchor of my soul, so I would find what I needed where I always had—in him.

I found myself in
a place where I
wanted to take
cover more
than I wanted
to take ground.

PAY ATTENTION

And he did not disappoint. He did not leave me abandoned or unaided. He never has. He never will. A few afternoons later,

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while I was reading the book of Hebrews, words that I had read many times before seemed to jump off the page.

Therefore we must *pay much closer attention* to what we have heard, *lest we drift* away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Heb. 2:1–4 ESV, emphasis mine)

Pay much closer attention.

Lest we drift.

All of a sudden, I had a thought: *Perhaps this is how I found myself wanting to ring the bell. Have I quit paying close attention? If so, to what? Have I drifted? If so, from what?*

“Pay attention, pay much closer attention.” I had heard words of warning like this before. All throughout my childhood. I learned to speak Greek before I spoke English, and my mother always spoke to us in Greek. When she wanted to really get something across to my two brothers and me, she would use the same words as the writer of Hebrews: *perissoteros prosechein*. When she spoke these words, she was telling us to be careful and pay *extra* attention. Her tone would be urgent, serious, instructive, and commanding of our focus—especially when she was sharing about something critical to our well-being, like when she taught us to look both ways before running after a ball that had rolled into the street. Or when she wanted us to stay put on

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a bench and be safe while she tended to some business at a bank or in a store.

Perissoteros prosechein.

She said it when we learned to ride our bikes. Walk to school. Run across the neighborhood to a friend's house.

Perissoteros prosechein.

“Pay extra attention,” my mother said.

“Pay extra attention,” the writer of Hebrews said.

Why pay extra attention? *Lest you drift*. It's as though the writer knew the more familiar we became, the less attention we would pay—to God, his Word, and his ways. The more we learned, the more likely we would take it all for granted—and miss the awe of our salvation.

Pay attention.

Lest you drift.

IT'S SO EASY TO DRIFT

I know about drifting. My dad drilled the dangers of it into me when I was just a kid. Every year, he and Mum would take us kids on an annual trip to Umina Beach, just an hour's drive north of Sydney, where we lived. It was a great getaway we all looked forward to, but we always seemed to go when the pelicans were more populous than the swimmers. That meant we were guaranteed to get pelican itch from swimming in the water—so Mum always faithfully packed the calamine lotion. It sounds gross, and if you google pictures, it looks gross, but apart from giving us a head-to-toe rash and making us itch, it was harmless.

Going for a summer holiday also meant swimming against a

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strong undertow. Knowing that we could be swept out to sea, my dad coached us every year about the dangers of the undercurrent and what to do if we felt ourselves being pulled under or away from the shore.

Then, once we were out on the beach, he had a routine for keeping us safe. He would set up an umbrella in the sand—always one so vivid I felt sure everyone on the beach knew we had to be Greek. Other families had pretty ones or solid ones, but ours always seemed to outshine the sun and scream our lively heritage. There was no blending in for the Caryofyllis clan. After Dad positioned the umbrella, he would walk down the beach a short distance and essentially make a flag out of an equally brilliantly colored beach towel and a pole, standing it up in the sand. There was no mistaking Dad’s handiwork, even from way out in the water. But that was the point. Before he let us run into the surf, he would make us huddle up and listen to his instructions.

To this day, I can still hear him telling me, “The undertow is really strong today, so when you’re out there in the water, I need you to look up every now and again and check your markers. There’s the umbrella, and there’s the towel. Make sure you’re between the two of them. If you find yourself outside the markers, make your way to shore and walk back. If you look up every now and again and check your markers, you’ll be fine.”

My dad knew how easy it was to drift. He also knew there was an even greater danger if we did.

No matter how good a swimmer each of us kids was, no matter how confident, how strong, how knowledgeable we were of the sea and her currents, if we drifted too far, then drowning was the real threat.

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As the old saying goes, “It’s the strong swimmers who drown.” Dad understood the meaning of this saying all too well: those you think would never drown, could never drown, are the least likely to drown, are actually the ones who do. Those who think they are impervious to the power of the water and take the risky chances that a novice never would are more likely to perish. And once they start drowning, they are just like everyone else, helpless to survive. Despite how fit they may be, they have no control over their actions. They cannot stop drowning or perform voluntary movements like waving for help, moving toward a rescuer, or reaching out for a life ring. Because of that, drowning is almost always deceptively quiet.¹

Just like drifting. Dad knew one could lead to the other, so he first did all he could to keep us from drifting.

So did the writer of Hebrews.

Pay attention.

Lest you drift.

The writer was speaking to all of us, knowing that any of us at any stage of life could find ourselves in a place we never intended to be.

When we begin to drift in any area of our lives, it’s subtle. Hardly even noticeable. Barely detectable. It’s not a deliberate step we take but more like a gradual slip. Perhaps it occurs as we make small concessions or compromises. We don’t drift because we aren’t strong or haven’t walked with Christ for many years. It just happens. But once it does, if we don’t look up and check our markers, we will be taken places we never wanted to go—emotionally, physically, relationally, or spiritually. There is no aspect of our lives that is immune from drifting and no single person who is not prone to drift.

THE CURRENT OF OUR TIME

My dad did all he could to prepare us kids. I remember him telling us what to do just in case we got caught up in a current, started swimming toward shore, but grew too tired to keep going:

“Float. Save your strength. Don’t fight it.

And know that I’m watching. I’ll find a way to get to you.” I believed him. I always knew he would be ready to rescue us, all set to do whatever it took to reach us.

There is no aspect
of our lives that
is immune from
drifting and no
single person who
is not prone to drift.

Isn’t our heavenly Father just as eager to help us when we drift spiritually? He’s always watching. Always ready. Always wanting to get us from where we are to where we need to be. That’s what the

author of Hebrews was inspired to help us grasp. He was writing to the Christians of his day, to believers who had converted from Judaism and were being tempted to drift and go back to their old belief system. The current of their time was pulling them away from the truth of the gospel. Rome had been burned, and the emperor, Nero, was ruthless, deflecting blame from himself to the Christians. Because of his accusations, Christians were experiencing persecution, pressure, and insurmountable problems. They were losing their property, being shunned in their communities, and even becoming martyrs. It was a time of great struggle and heartache. How could the early Christians not have been tempted to go back to the seeming safety of temple worship? There they would be accepted and not marginalized. They would be comfortable and not ostracized. They wouldn’t be attacked just for being Christian.

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Doesn't that sound like the day and age we're living in? Where everything is chaotic, volatile, and unpredictable? Where everything that once was certain seems so uncertain? Where everything that can be shaken is being shaken? From politics and government to morality and normality to values and beliefs to right and wrong to truth and facts—everything seems to be shifting. We try so hard to be loving and gracious, inclusive and not exclusive, kind and gentle, while still being absolutely obedient to the truth of the Word of God, but it's not easy. It's not easy to stand out. It would be so much more comfortable to fit in.

No wonder the writer of Hebrews kicked off his message in chapter 1 saying,

For to which of the angels did [God] ever say,

You are my Son;

today I have become your Father,

or again,

I will be his Father,

and he will be my Son?

Again, when he brings his firstborn into the world, he says,

And let all God's angels worship him.

And about the angels he says:

He makes his angels winds,

and his servants a fiery flame,

but to the Son:

Your throne, God,

is forever and ever,

and the scepter of your kingdom

is a scepter of justice.

You have loved righteousness

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and hated lawlessness;
this is why God, your God,
has anointed you with the oil of joy
beyond your companions. (vv. 5–9)

What was the writer’s point? What was his focus? What was his emphasis? The unchallenged, uncontested, unequivocal, utter supremacy of Jesus. Jesus, who is greater than all the angels. Greater than all of creation. Greater than any enemy. Greater, I dare say, than even the times in which we live.

Then, in chapter 2, the writer urged the early Christians to keep going, despite the temptation to give up and give in: “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. . . . How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (vv. 1, 3 ESV).

It’s easy for us to keep going to church, keep attending Bible studies, keep leading small groups, keep worshipping and praying, keep declaring by faith . . . and be drifting at the same time. Don’t forget: the writer of Hebrews was talking to followers of Jesus. To people like you and me. He knew that we can be neglecting one thing simply because we’re paying attention to something else. That, by all accounts, we can look like we’re moving forward but actually be drifting.

- We can be diligently working on our education—and be drifting.
- We can be climbing the corporate ladder—and be drifting.
- We can be starting a business—and be drifting.
- We can be raising strong kids—and be drifting.

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- We can be building a cause-worthy nongovernmental organization—and be drifting.
- We can be saving lives in a hospital—and be drifting.
- We can be attending our church, faithfully, for decades—and be drifting.
- We can be serving in ministry—and be drifting.
- We can be reaching multitudes for Christ—and still be drifting.

When I found myself unsure if I wanted to keep going, I hadn't let go of anything. I was still reading my Bible and praying every day. I was still reading great books, attending conferences, listening to podcasts, memorizing verses of Scripture. I was still talking out ideas, plans, and thoughts with Nick, with trusted Christian friends and well-respected leaders. I was even enrolled in a master's degree program for evangelism and leadership with twenty other women. I wasn't going it alone. And yet, I was drifting. Somehow. Somewhere.

Here's what I came to understand: We can be doing all the right Christian things, saying all the right Christian words, but just like the followers in Hebrews, we can be adrift and drifting still further. Maybe because . . .

- We've been disappointed or disillusioned more times than we can count.
- We've been betrayed, and our hearts remain broken.
- We've suffered setback after setback and lack the strength to stand again.
- We've been skipped over too many times and feel left out and left behind.

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- We've been punched in the gut so hard we just can't catch our next breath.
- We've failed in some way and fear it is final.
- We've simply run out of energy, vision, passion, or motivation.
- We've forgotten why we started in the first place.
- We've gotten distracted or succumbed to other attractions.

It's easy to drift. It's even easier than we think to quit believing God in the midst of all our believing. To keep declaring doctrinal truths while allowing deadly disbelief to take residence in our hearts, leading us to a place where we are unsure about the future. Unwilling to embrace it. Unable to move forward.

LET'S KEEP GOING TOGETHER

If you had told me a few years ago that one day soon I'd find myself in a place where I wasn't sure I wanted to keep going, I wouldn't have been able to comprehend how that could be possible. I have worked hard for years to be strong spiritually, mentally, and physically. But what I realized recently is that sometimes life happens faster than we can run our race. We can't control everything that happens to us or around us. We can't control the decisions others make that deeply affect us. Even if we've walked with Christ for years and allowed him to do a deep healing work inside of us, we can still find ourselves in a place we never dreamed. A place we never intended to be. A place of wanting to ring the bell.

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If that's where you are in any area of your life, then I have good news for you. You are not in Navy SEAL training. This is not Hell Week. This is the kingdom of God, where grace and truth abound (Rom. 5:20). Where his mercies are new every morning (Lam. 3:22–23). Where there is always a way forward.

You are not a failure for feeling like you want to ring the bell. God loves you. God is for you. And he is working all things together for your good and his glory (Rom. 8:28). He has a hope and a plan for your future (Jer. 29:11). You don't have to perform for his love and acceptance (Rom. 3:24–26). Best of all, you alone don't have to figure out how to get out of the place you've drifted to. Since I've been there, I want to help you.

When I was tempted to stop being all in, God never left me. He just kept directing me. Helping me. Strengthening me, so I wouldn't ring that bell. What he showed me is what enabled me to stop drifting and start thriving again. What he showed me is what enabled me to keep going and keep growing. To stay on point, fulfilling all the purpose he's placed inside of me, pursuing all he's called me to do. I haven't discovered all the answers, but looking back and seeing how God moved me forward, I've done my best to capture the insights and understanding he has given me so I can pass them on to you.

Though I learned that paying attention was the antidote to my drifting, what I found even more important was to discover *what* exactly we pay attention to and *how* we pay attention to it, so we don't ever lose sight of it again. That and so much more are what I can't wait to share with you throughout the pages of this book. Through stories from my own life and the lives of friends I cherish, I will show you what I have discovered about the places

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where we all walk from time to time and the place where I'm walking now.

It's a new place, a peaceful place. One that includes staying on mission and launching the next adventure. One where I sleep better than ever, no matter where I lay my head.

I

DROPPING—AND SETTING—ANCHOR

Nothing is never nothing. It's always something.

—CECELIA AHERN, *THE BOOK OF TOMORROW*

“Chris, drop anchor,” Nick shouted to me from the stern of our little boat in the Aegean Sea. We were vacationing for a few days in Santorini, Greece—my favorite place on earth. (Yes, the same place where I’ve daydreamed about opening a little café.) It was fun to be out on the water and to reminisce about our honeymoon more than two decades before in this same paradise. Just like back then, Nick had rented a boat so we could explore the island and its coves.

Both Nick and I love boating. I especially love the beauty of gliding across the water, watching the sunset, and feeling the salt air on my face. Nick likes more high-octane adventure, and he never minds getting so far out that we encounter shipping lanes where our boat feels like the size of a life raft next to massive

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cargo ships. (Of course, those kinds of trips just cause me to pray more.)

Today, he just wanted to fish, which meant I could relax. As we left the marina, we headed in search of our favorite small cay and its secluded little lagoon. It was the perfect place to drop anchor.

Whenever we go boating, Nick often fishes while I close my eyes and soak up the sun. Don't get me wrong; I love to fish too . . . as long as I don't have to touch the fish. (Okay, I'll admit it—I'm a total screamer when they come flying into the boat.) The truth is, I like the thought of fishing more than actually fishing, so I suppose you can say sunbathing is my preferred sport.

As Nick set up his gear and cast his line, I went to the bow of the boat and dropped the anchor. Then I stretched out to rest and nap. It was the perfect kind of day. Just the two of us and lots of sun and sea.

I must have dozed off longer than I thought, because when I awoke, the mild breeze had turned into a biting wind. The heat of the sun on my skin had turned into a damp chill, and the boat was rocking way too much for our shallow cove. As I opened my eyes and sat up, I looked around to find us far from where I'd fallen asleep.

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Nick was stowing his gear. "Chris, did you drop the anchor like I told you?"

"Yes, of course," I answered him. (I always do my best to be a great first mate!)

"But did you set it? The current has taken us really far out."

"Did I what? What are you talking about? You asked me to drop the anchor, and I did. You didn't say to do anything else," I said in defense of my expert seamanship.

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“Chris, if you don’t ensure the anchor is attached to the ocean floor, then we aren’t really anchored.”

Well, no one told me that part of the equation.

Holding on to the side of the boat, with the waves looming larger and larger, I estimated that we’d drifted more than a mile out to sea—right into the shipping lanes, and this time it wasn’t for adventure. Apparently, Nick had taken a break from fishing to nap as well—and neither of us had noticed that we were drifting into dangerous waters, far away from the security of our calm little cove. I looked beyond the nearby ominous ships and saw a storm brewing in the distance, working its way toward us. We’d have to outrun it for sure. None of this was what I had imagined for our day.

As I held on, Nick began to navigate our little boat back in the direction of land. Fighting the current and the waves, he tacked back and forth through the choppy seas and against the fierce wind. I grew nauseated as the boat ran straight up a wave only to fall on top of the next—one right after the other. My knuckles grew white as I gripped the rail tighter and tighter trying to stay put on the seat.

Nick stayed with it. He’s always been an expert captain, so I knew we’d make it back somehow, but the journey was nothing less than arduous. It took us so long to reach port that when we idled into the marina, the sun had set and the docks were almost deserted. As we secured the boat in a slip and climbed out, it seemed every muscle in my body that had tensed for hours was letting go all at once. Wobbling toward the car with just a few streetlights and the moon to guide us, I reflected on all we’d just been through—and what had caused it.

Nick had positioned us correctly, facing into the breeze, when

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he asked me to drop anchor—something he usually managed that I never paid much attention to. If I had just dropped it, held on to the rope, and then given it a good tug as we floated away from it, we would have been secured. The water was so clear, I probably could have seen it take hold if I'd been watching it, but I didn't fully understand the connection between dropping the anchor and anchoring: a dropped anchor gives the appearance of stability, while a set anchor actually grants stability. Only the latter keeps you safe. The other lets you drift into danger, wherever the current is flowing. It will lead you somewhere, anywhere—most likely where you do not want to go. What I learned on the water that day was even more critical than I realized. More relevant than I had ever understood.

It is so easy to drift.

All you have to do is nothing.

THE CURRENT IS ALWAYS MOVING

What Nick and I experienced that day in Santorini was a snapshot of the power of oceanic currents to move us from one location to another. The world's waterways are always on the move. They flow in complex patterns around the globe, affected by many forces—from the topography of the ocean floor to the earth's rotation to atmospheric changes.¹

Not to give you too much of a science lesson, but from the time I was just a schoolgirl growing up in Sydney, I was taught all about the East Australian Current (EAC) running from the Great Barrier Reef down the coastline of Australia. It's sixty-two miles wide and nearly one mile deep, driven by the South Pacific

winds. It flows faster in the summer than in winter. And it is so powerful that it moves entire populations of marine life from one sea to another.² If you've seen the movie *Finding Nemo*, featuring the adventures of Dory and Marlin, then you've at least seen the animated version of the EAC, although it's not nearly as fast-moving as Pixar made it out to be. Still, if you get caught in it, then you will drift to where it takes you—whether that is somewhere you want to go or not.

Understanding this and knowing firsthand how easy it is to drift when you're out at sea, I can't help but think about other kinds of currents that are just as powerful and, perhaps, even more dangerous. Ones that involve intangible undercurrents like popular ideas and philosophies that work their way through our culture. And sometimes even into the church. These kinds of influencers are the currents of our time, driven by the winds of change. They take society—and sometimes us along with them—off center, away from the foundational truths of God's Word and into places we never wanted to go. All this happens silently, gradually. It goes on largely unnoticed.

I imagine you are probably more familiar with these currents than you might expect. Just think about how many times you have been forced to grapple with issues you never considered before. Issues that once might never have affected you or your family, but now they do.

Now that my girls are teens, I find myself having conversations with them that my mother never would have dreamed of having with me, but my daughters are facing a world my mother never knew. They are frequently confronted with ideas and perspectives that are much different from the biblical truths Nick and I have taught them. Sometimes these ideas they bring to us

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are complex and challenging to explain. In those times Nick and I listen, pray, and carefully direct our girls back to the Word of God, doing our best to address both the practical and the spiritual sides of the issues.

Together, over the years, at every age-appropriate level, we have talked about bullying, anxiety, identity, value, and sexuality. We have dissected morality, diversity, and misogyny. We have discussed poverty, prejudice, racism, and inequality. We have articulated everything from apologetics to science. We have covered whatever ground necessary to help Catherine and Sophia see the value of their Christian faith, of their relationship with Jesus and its outworking in every experience they might encounter—especially in the face of the hardest objections to Christianity. And we're still talking. We'll never stop talking. Because the world as we know it—as we have known it—is ever evolving, and it affects us. Oftentimes more deeply than we like to admit.

From our family talks and from what I see happening in the world, I'm all too aware that just as the EAC moves marine life, the currents of our time seem to be moving entire populations of people and how they think and believe to places we might never have expected.

I take comfort in knowing that none of this is a surprise to God. Not the natural disasters. Not the effects of war. Not the fluid shifts in culture. Not the injustices. Not the changes in morality, ethics, or plain common sense. God knew the winds of change would blow through every generation, including ours. And he knew how easy it would be for us to find ourselves drifting—even when we had every intention of never letting it happen.

God knows the frailty of our humanity. He has been

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contending with it ever since the fall. He knows how effortless our drifting is. In our thoughts. In our actions. In our day-to-day lives. In the simplest of things. He knows how tempted we are to gradually shift from having our hope in him to having it in other people—a common error that usually works well until someone disappoints us.

It's all too easy to stand on alternate sources of security and significance while saying we are standing on our faith. To put trust in *our* education, *our* plans, or *our* careers. To fall back on what *we* know, on what *we* think has made us successful. To rely on *our* gifts, *our* talents, or *our* abilities—as though we possess them apart from God (2 Cor. 4:7).

And we may be doing all this without even realizing it. Just like I thought I had anchored our boat, sometimes we think we are standing on our faith until we find ourselves somewhere we don't recognize.

For me, now that I know it's possible to drift unaware, that drifting doesn't happen all at once but over time, and that small drifts in our day-to-day actions can produce great shifts, I've built in the practice of taking a personal inventory on a regular basis to prevent myself from drifting again. I am paying closer attention than ever before. To my personal relationship with God. To what's going on in my heart. And where I'm placing my trust. To my family, friends, and colleagues. As Solomon wrote, it's the little foxes that undermine our relationship with God—the things we might not notice, that seem small, invisible, undetected (Song 2:15).

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of our humanity. He
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About my relationship with God, I ask:

- Have I stopped pursuing God and started deprioritizing my time with him?
- Have I stopped consuming God's Word and started living off leftovers?
- Have I stopped responding to the Spirit at once and started delaying?
- Have I stopped caring and started growing callous about former convictions?
- Have I stopped praying and started obsessing?
- Have I stopped seeking more of him?

And about my relationships with others, I ask:

- Have I stopped forgiving and started harboring?
- Have I stopped sharing and started withholding?
- Have I stopped committing and started shrinking back?
- Have I stopped laughing and started growing more critical?
- Have I stopped responding with grace and started responding with impatience?

And about my heart, I ask:

- Have I stopped having passion and started having resentment?
- Have I stopped dreaming and started settling?
- Have I stopped hoping and started sinking into despair?
- Have I stopped feeling and started growing numb?

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I have discovered—from making this list and digging into God’s Word—that there are a multitude of ways to drift, but there is only one way not to. And that is to drop—and set—anchor.

JESUS IS OUR ANCHOR

With so much change in motion, there is only one anchor I know that can hold us steady in such shifting currents. His name is Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews reminded the early Christians that God made Abraham a promise—to bless him and multiply his descendants—and God kept it. Likewise, every generation since has had a promise to hold on to.

For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself: I will indeed bless you, and I will greatly multiply you. And so, after waiting patiently, Abraham obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and for them a confirming oath ends every dispute. Because God wanted to show his unchangeable purpose even more clearly to the heirs of the promise, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. *We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.* It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain. Jesus has entered there on our behalf as a forerunner, because he has become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (6:13–20, emphasis mine)

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God sent us a savior—Jesus, this hope—as the anchor for our souls. But kept inside the boat, inside the grasp of our control, our anchor does us no good. It’s only when we drop it outside the boat, ensuring it’s embedded beneath the water’s surface in the ocean floor, that this hope we have as an anchor for our souls can go to work. We won’t know it’s working at first, when everything is calm, but when the winds kick up and the waves start to build, we will know Jesus is doing what he promised. If we keep our hope in Jesus, we can stay steady. Immovable. Firmly established. Even in the strongest of currents and the worst of storms. Even when we can’t see our anchor in the depths below. “Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees?” (Rom. 8:24).

God sent us a savior—Jesus, this hope—as the anchor for our souls.

Hope does what it was meant to when we simply trust Jesus and leave our anchor to do his work. Even when we feel the current swirling around us, forcefully wanting to move us, we don’t have to give in. Yes, our hope will always be tested—it doesn’t change the condition of the sea—but to let go of Jesus, the anchor of our soul, to quit trusting, to become distracted, to lose sight of what’s holding us in place, will only set us adrift.

Maybe your spouse has walked away, a friend has cut you off, or a diagnosis has totally blindsided you. Jesus wants to be your anchor.

Maybe you have a child you can’t seem to reach. Maybe you’ve lost your job and your savings are gone. Jesus wants to be your anchor.

Maybe your dreams have been shattered and you feel utterly

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lost with no idea what your next step needs to be. Jesus wants to be your anchor.

The writer of Hebrews assured us of this, and later in his writings, he shared that God promised us even more: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (13:8). How reassuring it is to know that Jesus is an anchor who never changes. His love remains the same, his mercy remains the same, his grace remains the same, and his compassion remains the same. Particularly when everything else seems to never remain the same.

What we have to learn how to do is stay anchored in him—especially as the currents of our time grow stronger and stronger.

CHECK YOUR ANCHOR

Every time Nick and I go boating, he does a routine safety check of the boat, ensuring we have plenty of fuel, life jackets, and everything necessary for any kind of maritime emergency. Part of his routine always includes inspecting the anchor and the chain attached to it. I’m always captivated by how he pays such careful attention, checking each link in the chain that connects to the anchor.

Anchors for boats come in multiple designs and are always in proportion to the size and weight of the boat. Simply put, the bigger the boat, the bigger the anchor. Attached to the anchor is the chain. The length of the chain to be used for a particular anchorage is usually five to seven times the depth of the water, and it’s dependent on factors like the nature of the body of water’s bottom, the present and anticipated weather, the tidal and current conditions, and the state of the boat’s readiness, as well as the length of time a boat may need to stay at anchor.³

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For Nick, carefully studying every link in the chain is how he ensures the entire chain is strong and will hold in the toughest conditions. If he were to find a link that was weak, or one that was broken, he would want to have it replaced immediately with a new, strong link.

Thinking back on our boating mishap in Santorini, even if I had known how to properly anchor the boat, if any one of the links in the chain had been weak or broken and given way, then we still would have found ourselves drifting into those shipping lanes. From these experiences I've learned that, while Jesus is the anchor of our souls, we need strong links in our chain to stay connected to him.

OUR WEAKEST LINK

When I found myself drifting, I hadn't abandoned my relationship with Jesus, but some of the links in my chain connecting us had weakened. Somewhere I had quit taking care of them, inspecting them, and strengthening them when they grew fragile. I had let go of something I had once believed, of something I had once held dear, of something I'll share more about in the next chapter, and the consequences were inescapable—just as they are for all of us.

- If we neglect paying attention to God, then our hearts will drift.
- If we neglect paying attention to our spouse, then we will find ourselves disconnected.
- If we neglect paying attention to our children, then we will experience distance.

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- If we neglect paying attention to our friendships, then we will find them strained.
- If we neglect paying attention to our finances, then we will find ourselves in debt.
- If we neglect paying attention to our health, then we will find ourselves sick.
- If we neglect paying attention to our learning and growth, then we will find ourselves stunted.
- If we neglect paying attention to our thoughts, then we will be hostage to untruth.
- If we neglect paying attention to our rest, then we will find ourselves exhausted.

I have heard it said that we are only as strong as our weakest link. Neglecting a weak link can make all the difference in our staying anchored or not. That's why God wants us to check our links . . . so we can stay connected to Jesus. When we find ourselves not where we expected to be, he isn't the one who moved. We are the ones who began to drift. Granted, it's most often unintentionally, but somewhere along the way, we failed to check our anchor, so despite our assurance that we were anchored in Christ—because we gave him our hearts—something gave way.

That's what I want us to explore throughout the rest of this book. I want us to check our most vital links—together—and strengthen the ones that have grown weak. I will talk about links common to us all. Together, we'll see how our links stay strong or grow weak—and the way that can vary depending on our unique life

When we find ourselves not where we expected to be, he isn't the one who moved.

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experiences. We'll also explore how we can grow through those moments. I'm hoping that by opening up and telling you when I failed and when I overcame, when I figured it out and when I fell in a heap on the floor, you can move forward with more wisdom and strength through everything life throws your way.

God has placed each of us here on the earth on purpose and for a purpose. He has plans for us to fulfill in every age and stage of life. But if you're in a place of wanting to ring the bell or wondering how you got here, you might need a little help to keep going. Just like I did.