

Introduction

# We Have to Start Here



AT SOME POINT IN THE core of every woman's soul, an ache begins to form. It starts with a glance or a glare, a conversation or a comment. It digs down deep into the wonder of our worth. But it ultimately takes the shape of a quiet question:

Why her?

*Her*, the neighbor. *Her*, the coworker. *Her*, the friend. *Her*, the sister. *Her*, the . . .

The competition.

Whoever she is, *her*.

“Why her?”

We don't dare ask this question out loud. Even addressing it in our journals is a no-no. It doesn't come up in our Bible study discussions.

We don't even want to admit we ever ask it. We shouldn't think such things. It's not nice.

But as we watch someone else living out what we desire most, and we don't quite feel like we're measuring up, we somehow can't seem to stop ourselves.

Why her?

What am I doing wrong?

What on earth is wrong with *me*?

## WHY HER?

As soon as we ask these questions, guilt consumes us. Why should it matter if *she* is so amazing, if *she* is so gorgeous, if *she* has so many nice things and can do it all so effortlessly? Yet for some reason, deep inside it still bothers us.

So we try to cover up the ache by making ourselves as impressive and put-together as *she* is. More to-dos. More striving. More makeup. More debt for more clothes. More perfect pictures on Instagram. We believe that surely somehow we can compensate for what's not enough about ourselves, compared to what's so incredible about *her*. But as much as we try to escape the comparison trap, we just can't.

Because . . .

She's there when we sit in meetings. Saying the witty things we wish we'd said. Sharing insights we wish we could see. Doing things we wish we could do.

She's there when we glance up and notice her behind us in the carpool line. The rearview mirror reflection reminds us what a great mom she is and how her hair roots are perfectly covered up every six weeks, while our roots end up looking like a skunk more weeks than not.

She's there in our minds late at night after a discouraging day. When disappointment distracts our thoughts. When we're angry at our circumstances. We lie there imagining how easy life is probably treating her tonight. Over there at her perfect house on Perfect Lane, with her perfect family, in her perfect world.

She's always there.

This threat of comparison isn't going away. I wish we could magically wake up tomorrow with an inner oomph that completely eliminates all our reasons for comparing. Instead, we'll likely be waking up to comparison shouts like these . . .

“Good morning, working woman—this is the day your low sales numbers get reported in that stand-up, pat-me-on-the-back meeting at the office.”

“Good morning, mom—your child’s teacher is calling to share with you how she’s not measuring up to others in the class.”

“Good morning, business owner—your competition is coming out with something today that’s going to leave you playing catch-up.”

“Good morning, single friend—look what your social media feed is saying about that girl you went to high school with, the one who got engaged last night. Happy single awareness day (again).”

Another day of longings unfulfilled. That’s often what seems to await us.

I recently began understanding this comparison struggle a little too well—not that it suddenly became new to me. It’s been there my whole life. But I began to see it as a specific problem that was threatening my day-to-day growth. And after some conversations with others and a lot of time talking to God, He led me to study one comparison-filled Bible story that I have learned so much from. And I’ve come to a solid conclusion:

**Truth will uncover the comparison con.**

The Enemy’s scam has convinced you and me to believe the lies of being less-than. And maybe it’s even seemed like he won. But in this book, I want to give you six truths that, when applied, can help set you up for a comparison comeback. They’ve helped

WHY HER?

me find my focus when I've felt like I was falling behind. And I believe they will do the same for you.

We will not let this struggle wreck us. We will learn to love this life again that God has entrusted to us. I will be the best me. You will be the best you. And she will be the best her.

Because truth, like always, will set us free.

And because free women don't need to measure up to anybody.

Not even *her*.

With you every step,

Nicki Koziarz

# Truth One

## You Need to Be Honest



# When Plans Make Us



**When You Ask:** Why Her?

**Truth One:** You Need to Be Honest

I AWOKE TO JANUARY MORNING light peering through my bedroom blinds—and to the sense that something wasn't right. A woman knows her body, even a nineteen-year-old girl who's still sort of learning hers. When something's off, you can tell. First you notice, then you wonder why.

Or in my case, you have a sickening feeling you know *exactly* why.

This would explain why I already had a pregnancy test in my purse. This would explain why my first inclination was to sneak quietly into the bathroom and follow the simple directions on the package . . . wait . . . and pray a *help-me-Jesus* prayer.

This would also explain the wave of panic that ran through my body when the double-line indicator that might make one woman squeal with glee and run through the house to show the exciting results to her husband, made me want to . . .

Disappear.

Shock. Disbelief. Fear. Confusion. Chaos.

## WHY HER?

All of it, in that bathroom with me. A terrifying secret I knew wouldn't stay tucked up in a ball with me there on that floor for very long.

Yet as hard as it is for me to talk about that gut-wrenching morning—even now, these many years later—that day and its aftermath are part of my story. I wrestled with whether to mention it here on these pages or not. I don't like the idea of perhaps inviting unwanted judgment and a critique of me or a discounted opinion of who I am, but . . .

*Let's be honest.*

Despite being tempted not to share much about my feelings and experiences, I can't think of a better way to set up the struggle that made me want to sit down and write this book to you.

Of all the things that have ever happened to me, the events that spun out from that defining moment in my life ended up spotlighting a secret struggle of mine. It started when I was only a little girl, though it certainly climbed to a much higher level when I became an unwed pregnant woman still in her teens.

This struggle has continued all these years, in ways that still surprise and shock me.

*Comparison.*

Feeling less-than.

The desire for feeling better-than.

Replacing my reality with my wants.

I have a suspicion you've dealt with or still deal with feelings similar to these. We know it's not good to hold onto these things, but for some reason we still do.

And yet something's just so wrong about all of this. All the misery that comes from looking to the left, looking to the

right—ahead, behind—feeling like the unhappiest woman in America. (Now *there's* a title we never hear announced at beauty pageants.)

I've missed so much by holding this posture, missing what is right here to be lived and enjoyed without comparing my past or present or future to somebody else's.

Have you been there too?

Has comparison made you feel like this sometimes?

Then let's go ahead and break out the first of these six truths that are able to start answering the *why her* question in our souls.

### **Truth One: You Need to Be Honest**

Sounds pretty simple, right?

But nothing about our current culture really teaches us to be honest . . . with the possible exception of those ridiculous dressing room mirrors in the department stores—you know, the ones that show three different angles of your backside? Have mercy, too much honesty.

We're good at keeping ourselves away from situations where we're forced to take a long, hard, *honest* look at ourselves. We've learned how to keep a filter wrapped around our souls so that we don't have to see things the way they really are—like how we pick and choose from those filters that help create the flawless pictures we take on our phones.

And you know why?

*Comparison.*

Comparison is what does this to us. It clouds our sight. It motivates us to create denial. Makes things not look the way they are. But what if we could just be *honest* for a moment? With

ourselves? With God? *Honest* about what makes us feel so compelled to compare our lives with others?

You most likely won't be broadcasting your biggest comparison struggles on Facebook tomorrow. But we all have a place—a place that frequently makes us see ourselves as less-than in comparison to someone else. A place where we feel the most intimidated, perhaps a place that goes back to something deeply rooted in our lives. Something rarely shared because we love to shout our successes but seldom show our secret sorrows.

We love to shout our successes but seldom show our secret sorrows.

But the more honest we can become about these areas that threaten our souls the most, the sooner we'll feel empowered enough to escape this comparison chase. So let's start by being honest right here, starting with the one verse that uncovered this whole struggle in me. Honesty through the filter of God's Word brings an understanding that goes beyond our capacity.

Here it is . . .

In measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves to themselves, they lack understanding.  
(2 Cor. 10:12)

Have you ever had one of those collisions between dreams, plans, and reality that left you a little broken, a little foggy, a little jealous of the world that seemed to be passing you by? I think you probably have. (I know *I* sure have.) We all end up learning at some point, usually the hard way, that sometimes we make our plans, and sometimes we surrender to plans.

Where was that destination you were headed toward before it resulted in a major detour? An invitation you didn't RSVP with a "yes," yet somehow found yourself there anyway?

I can think of many things from my own life: my marriage, my kids, my body, and my career. The fallout from those unhappy seasons can linger a long time. And they can come with an embarrassing mess to clean up.

We don't really want to look at all of that and at what got us there. *Honestly*. You know why? Because these situations would already be

bad enough, except they come with the added blow of seeing day after day where things all seem to be working out so well for *her*.

Watching *her* live out her hopes and dreams can leave us with an empty gap deep inside. It's always what comes of "measuring" ourselves, "comparing" ourselves, and lacking the "understanding" to just *be* ourselves (2 Cor. 10:12).

Sometimes we  
make our plans,  
and sometimes we  
surrender to plans.

## God-Struggles

Church ladies know we shouldn't be jealous and envious of *her*. In fact, we know we should actually be happy to see her succeeding. But maybe I'm not such a good church lady because I repeatedly find myself fighting the urge to compare myself with *her*—this woman who seems to have it all together, all figured out, living a life so full of God's favor. The failure to be honest with others and myself about this struggle has threatened to ruin me. More than once.

Because this isn't just a me-struggle; it's a God-struggle.

## WHY HER?

Sometimes there are struggles that are just ours. It's who we are. The way we're wired. The way we look, talk, or walk. And there's not always a whole lot you can do about it. But then there are struggles that go against the grain of who God created us to be. They keep us from thriving in our own skin. These are our God-struggles.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. (Eph. 6:12)

And we can't come out victorious from a God-struggle by clinging to denial and dishonesty.

So let's dismiss denial and dishonesty from our lives and ask honesty to transform our failures and future.

Comparison is a battle to see whose truth—ours or God's—we'll allow to rule our thoughts and actions. We need to let Him reshape our thinking around what's actually true in *her* life (which almost surely isn't as beautiful and blissful as we've built it up to be). But also we need to let Him reshape our thinking around what's actually true in our own lives (which probably isn't as soul-killing as we've let it be).

Comparison is a battle to see whose truth—ours or God's—we'll allow to rule our thoughts and actions.

There's a way to survive this comparison problem, but only if we'll get God-honest about it. And the best news? He welcomes us to the process.

Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts before him. God is our refuge. (Ps. 62:8)

Sometimes, though, we're just too close to our own stories to be able to see where the breaks in honesty are happening. We're blinded to the blessings, gifts, and favor of God on our own lives. But here's something I've found to be helpful: find someone who's walked through something even worse than your current reality, and see what you can learn from her story. In doing this, you're not trying to use another's situation as a way of determining how well you're doing, in a *make-yourself-feel-better* type of way. But by shifting your perspective onto someone else's experiences, you can start to see the lies of comparison more clearly, then make the connection to your own life. The real truth they've experienced can open your eyes. *If you'll let it.*

Thankfully, God has put lots of people in His Word for us to learn from because (sorry to say this, but . . .) there are some messed-up people in the Bible! In fact, when it comes to this whole *why her* comparison thing, I'm not sure anybody can top a couple of sisters tucked away in the book of Genesis. Allow me to introduce you to them.

## Just Call It Crazy

Rachel and Leah have what I consider one of the hardest comparison stories possible—two sisters who ended up married to the same guy, Jacob.

Most of their story is found in Genesis 29–30. The more you read of their story, the more you want to text about it to your friends with that little monkey emoji, the one holding both hands

over its mouth. I don't quite understand everything about this story, and you probably won't either. Some of it is truly shocking.

But if ever a story was able to unpack the *why her* question, it's this one.

Their situation was a little weird—the kind of weird that makes some people wonder how the Bible can ever be relevant to our modern life. I get that. Sometimes the strange cultural dynamics of Bible days are hard to identify with. A lot of things seem so odd and just . . . weird.

But remember, these people lived a really, really, really long time ago, under much different historical conditions. Our modern days would look strange to them too. Like, what if Jesus had a Twitter account? Or tasted the food we eat? *Snickers, Jesus?*

But we have to remember, while their rituals and behaviors may not exactly sound relevant, the Bible is always relevant because it reveals deeply rooted truths that never expire. I'll admit, I'm not always sure how to relate to stories like these from the Bible either. But as far as Rachel and Leah go, I can kind of understand their crazy.

The days immediately after learning I was pregnant were, to say the least, *crazy*. Life fast-forwarded for me at warp speed. I had to grow up quickly and make decisions that felt far beyond my capacity. It wasn't the most ideal setting for discovering how to be comfortable in my own skin.

About six weeks after that morning in the bathroom, I found myself at the altar, saying vows to a man I loved, yet barely knew. Kris and I began to settle into our sweet little third-floor apartment while my stomach began growing to a height and width I didn't know was humanly possible.

Then came the brightest day that my gray soul had seen in a long time, when the doctor said, “It’s a girl!” Taylor Marie entered our world with a headful of dirty-blond hair and soft skin that seemed to glow with a heavenly light. I loved her more than my heart could grasp from the moment I held her. But loving someone fiercely isn’t always enough to cover life’s scars—something we’ll soon discover in this story with Rachel and Leah.

Honestly, Taylor was catching us at a challenging time in our young lives, and things wouldn’t get any easier anytime soon. Financial struggles, marriage issues, health concerns, the whole shebang . . . with me constantly feeling like *that*

Loving someone  
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*girl*, you know, the one who got pregnant before she was married. I constantly thought people were thinking things like, “Nice couple, those two, but you know they *had* to get married.”

Still, somehow we’ve made it.

We’ve tackled the odds. I’m now a wife of seventeen years, with three girls—Taylor, Hope, and Kennedy. They’re beautiful and lovable, yes. But three daughters also bring a whole level of insanity one could never predict.

And because we apparently needed even *more* crazy in our lives, we decided to move our family out to a little piece of land we’ve affectionately nicknamed “The Fixer-Upper Farm.” It totally lives up to its name because of all the broken things, lots and lots of broken things. And the smells. Oh mercy, the smells—especially with a barnyard full of misfit animals, including my favorite: the donkeys. (You’ll hear more about them later.)

In the South we have this saying: *We don't hide crazy. We put it on our front porch with a glass of sweet tea.* It's hysterically true. And I wholeheartedly admit the Fixer-Upper Farm is its own brand of crazy. I mean, our pug thinks he's a farm dog. Far from it, but we let him sit on the front porch and pretend.

I know you have a lot of crazy too. And we may not be apples-to-apples with each other or with Rachel and Leah, but we've all got our wild issues we deal with.

But through this Bible story filled with lying and deception and manipulation and competition—and even polygamy—it's crazy upon crazy. And if God can use their weird, messy, and complicated lives to teach us wisdom, what could God do through our own honesty with this struggle?

## Compromised Plans

Since we're being completely honest here, I could tell you some other things about myself, beyond the getting pregnant at nineteen part. I could open my heart enough to tell you about the comparison struggles that have turned into many hidden hurdles I've had to get over. Things like how I can sometimes become jealous of people, how I can easily feel threatened about the level of my abilities, or how I can be oversensitive to signals that indicate to me I'm being pushed aside.

I could also tell you about another little unknown fact I've hidden behind for years. Despite how insignificant it may seem to you when you hear it, it's been a major source of my comparison issues. So here I go . . .

*I never finished college.*

Maybe you were hoping for more of a Lifetime movie-worthy type of confession? But I wish you knew all the lies that have built up in my head over time surrounding this one big disappointment. It's convinced me of my unworthiness as a person. It's suffocated my social sanity and my trust in my own potential. I've allowed it to define me for a long, long time.

In the midst of enjoying my senior year of high school, I thought I was all set to go to the finest college my GPA would allow. Which, let's be honest, I knew would be slim picking since I'd let my social life take priority over my academic life.

I was sure, once I got settled into said college, I'd find my Prince Charming, we'd marry, and he would whisk me off into the sunset. We'd adopt at least three kids from Africa. *Probably start our own orphanage.* We would always laugh. Our house would be encircled by a perfectly white picket fence, dotted with the most beautiful, colorful rose bushes. And he would constantly tell me how beautiful I was, every single day.

I'll wait while you gag. But that's not far from how naïve and unrealistic my thinking was at the time. (If you could only see the disease-stricken rose bushes I have now. #blackthumb.) So you can only imagine my tears and confusion when I stood in my parents' kitchen one day, holding my college rejection letter.

*What?! No!* This was my dream. This was supposed to be my next destination. There was no other plan. This was it.

And yet here, with the opening of one thin white envelope, all of it was gone. The only option left to me now was community college. I couldn't believe my college-of-choice dream was gone, and many days of crying followed.

Never had my younger self experienced this level of depression and unhappiness before—especially as I helped my friends

buy new bedding for their dorm rooms, attended their farewell parties, watched them drive away to their exciting new adventures—while I stayed behind, alone, wondering why *they* were getting to live out the reality I'd been planning all along for *me*.

Going to college is what kids in our culture do, right? We finish high school; we go to college. (Not a hundred percent true, but . . .) As far as I was concerned, the college I wanted to go to was *everything*.

Only a few months later I would find myself in that bathroom, holding that pregnancy test. And with *that* on top of it, the more I looked at others, the less value I saw in myself.

Comparison convinces us to chase the many things we can when we can't have the one thing we want.

Disappointment led to one compromising decision after another. I chased the things I thought would fill that void of disappointment. Comparison convinces us to chase the many things we can when we can't have the one thing we want.

All this chasing ultimately led me to feeling like one giant disappointment. To my parents, church leaders, friends, and to *myself*. When anything other than God becomes our everything, disappointment is soon to follow.

## What's Your Everything?

Let's take it back about four thousand years, where in Rachel and Leah's world *babies* were everything. Having babies during this time encompassed so much of a woman's identity. And throughout this two-sister story, as we'll repeatedly see, the issue

of having children (and not being able to have children) became a key point of comparison between them.

The struggle with infertility had begun a generation earlier. Their husband Jacob's parents, Isaac and Rebekah, experienced at least some level of struggle in the getting-pregnant department. We know this because the Bible tells us that "Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife because she was childless" (Gen. 25:21).

So this might be another good place for being honest.

I realize I may be bringing up a subject that's tender for someone. And I can't totally relate. But just because someone's struggle isn't the same as mine doesn't mean I shouldn't seek to understand. I know there are women reading these pages who are married, single, divorced, or widowed, some who are dealing with empty hearts in this particular life-plan area.

Just as I still cringe a bit whenever someone asks me where I went to college or what my degree is in, this could be a comparison point—when you hear other women's pregnancy announcements or see moms with babies at the grocery store.

Or maybe its something else altogether, coming from some other tender soul place.

But we all have a place.

And we all need to be honest about it.

Honesty is what gives us the chance to become hopeful that we can overcome this struggle. Becoming transparent about what causes us to compare ourselves to others the most will keep us from needing to compare ourselves to others at all.

Otherwise, we'll keep heading down this path toward comparison destruction.

## WHY HER?

Fueled by discontentment and discouragement, we'll get into the toxic habit of looking, and staring, then looking again. We'll keep wondering what's so wrong with us, questioning our worth, and even doubting God.

Then as *she* seems to walk off with our happy, we'll secretly whisper, "Why her?" to the all-too-receptive audience we find in our own hearts. And every time we ask the question, it will trail off, unanswered . . . because there *is* no answer.

Unless we're willing to live with *honest* answers.

## — This & That —

### ***Wrestle with this:***

What is something comparison has convinced you to chase?

### ***Remember that:***

We love to shout our successes but seldom show our secret sorrows.

Comparison is a battle to see whose truth—ours or God's—we'll allow to rule our thoughts and actions.

Comparison convinces us to chase the many things we can when we can't have the one thing we want.

# Honest Answers



**When You Ask:** Why Her?

**Truth One:** You Need to Be Honest

I DON'T HAVE A SISTER. But I do have three daughters. And I'm not sure there's anything quite like sister honesty.

My girls are quick to point out each other's flaws. I don't think they do it to be mean-spirited toward each other. They just feel the freedom to say what they want to say. If someone arrives at the dinner table with a fresh pimple on her face? It will definitely get a mention. If someone's outfit is a fashion fail? There will be no consideration of hurt feelings. If someone's hair needs to be washed? Or her breath is funky? There's no such thing as a safe-flawed-zone in a house full of girls. Whether you ask a question or not, honesty is coming.

And it starts at such a young age.

You know how people will come up and just randomly tell your kids how cute they are? My oldest, Taylor, got so used to it that after her sister Hope Ann was born, she would get insulted if others gawked over Hope. Once I was with both of the girls at Walmart and a sweet elderly lady came up to our buggy. She smiled and said, "I don't know which one is prettier, this one or

that one.” Taylor pointed at herself and firmly shouted, “THIS ONE.” I still smile whenever I think about two-year-old, confidently beautiful Taylor.

I never had to teach my girls to compare their physical appearances. They figured it out on their own. And still every day we look at someone else and find a reason for not liking something about ourselves.

It’s a timeless struggle.

Just ask Leah.

## Isn’t That Nice?

In the first chapter, we briefly met Jacob’s parents and learned about their infertility struggle. Isaac prayed for his wife, Rebekah, to bear children, and the Lord answered with a double blessing—twin boys, Esau and Jacob.

Their sibling rivalry started with battling each other inside the womb (Gen. 25:22, 26), followed by Esau trading his birthright for a pot of stew (Gen. 25:27–33). *Men take their food so seriously.*

Also, Jacob tricked their elderly, half-blind father into giving him the firstborn blessing (Gen. 27:1–40). Things got so bad between the two of them that Esau swore that the minute their father was dead, he would make sure his twin brother wasn’t far behind.

To keep these two from killing each other, Rebekah and Isaac decided they needed to send Jacob out of harm’s way.

Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. Arise,

go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother." (Gen. 28:1–2 ESV)

That's how Jacob ended up at the community well in a far-off village, where he struck up a conversation with some of the locals asking if they knew of a man named Laban. *Know him? Of course* they knew him. Not only did they know him, but look, "Here is his daughter Rachel, coming with his sheep" (Gen. 29:6).

Love began at that well.

When Rachel smiled, and Jacob was smitten.

She made an immediate impression on Jacob. No sooner had he introduced himself and made the family connection than he kissed her (v. 11)! *Fast moves, Jacob*. Rachel ran off to tell her father about it, and Jacob and Laban shook hands on a deal: Jacob offered to work seven years for the hand of Rachel in marriage.

Now depending on how much of a romantic you are, the thought of this deal will either make you gag or give a big love sigh. I mean, how stinkin' sweet is it that Jacob was willing to work seven years for this woman? Seriously. But to add a note of dramatic conflict to the story, there was soon to be another woman involved, Laban's *other* daughter, Rachel's older sister, Leah—although the Bible is not very kind in how it describes her.

Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. (Gen. 29:17 ESV)

All kinds of opinions exist about the meaning of this description concerning her "weak" eyes, but you can boil them all down to this: Rachel was beautiful; Leah was not. The first form of comparison we see in this story is based on appearance.

And of all places . . . IN THE BIBLE. Our physical appearances may be up for critique, but at least we are not being compared with each other in the Bible!

Wonder what it was like for Leah growing up in the shadow of her beautiful kid sister? I'm sure this wasn't the first time comparison had raised its ugly head in their relationship. I'm guessing she'd been made to feel less-than on many different occasions.

So when Rachel showed up at the house with the man she was going to marry, I wouldn't be surprised if Leah experienced a little bit of what you might call the "must be nice" syndrome.

Maybe you've had a symptom or two show up from that syndrome. *Me too, friend.*

Recently I was sitting in a meeting where someone brought up the new house that one of our mutual friends had just moved into. It really is *quite* the spread. Everything is brand spanking new, huge kitchen with a butler's pantry, and with all the perfect touches of light fixtures and furnishings.

My mind immediately drifted into comparison mode, thinking of our Fixer-Upper Farm which, while beautiful to me, is definitely what its nickname implies: a true fixer-upper. And you've got to have patience with a fixer-upper—something comparison loves to make me forget.

I turned to the coworker sitting nearest me (who was probably thinking the same thing about her own house), and we said almost in unison, "Must be nice, huh?"

*Must be nice.*

*Good for her.*

*Wow.*

*I wish I had . . .*

These thoughts are such subtle forms of comparison.

So I can imagine Leah sitting there watching this Jacob thing play out with her sister, and maybe some subtle thoughts slipped in . . .

*Must be nice Rachel has someone interested in her.*

*Must be nice everyone considers her the pretty one.*

*Must be nice our daddy thinks she's worth seven years of work.*

These “must be nice” thoughts can slip in anywhere, can't they? They're really at the core of our comparison struggle. We don't even need a sister like Rachel to plant the seed. I bet you can think of a time right now, back when you were a little girl, when your first *must be nice* thought slipped in.

I remember mine.

## Saddle Shoes

I spent the first few years of my childhood in the small town of Coolidge, Arizona, about halfway between Phoenix and Tucson. My family was by no means well-off. We always seemed to have just enough to get by. Rarely was there room in our budget for extras, like the pair of black-and-white saddle shoes I desperately wanted. Do you remember those? They were calling my name in 1985.

My dad was the high school football coach, so I spent a lot of Friday nights with my mom and brother in the bleachers. The game itself was anything but thrilling to me, but I didn't mind going because it meant I'd be able to watch the cheerleaders. *That* was exciting!

I dreamed of the day when I, too, might hopefully be out there in a pleated skirt with pom-poms, making the crowd roar with enthusiasm for our team. The cheerleaders must have known how much I looked up to them because in the middle of one football season, they invited my best friend and me to come cheer with them at an upcoming game.

Our elementary schoolgirl excitement was out of control. High school cheerleaders?! YES! We practiced in the backyard every chance we could get leading up to the game. One afternoon, we even put on our homemade uniforms.

But my zeal for this opportunity quickly faded that day as I looked down at my friend's feet. She was wearing a pair of brand new, shiny, black-and-white saddle shoes. The same kind the high school cheerleaders wore. My thoughts screamed silently with envy: *What? Where did she get those? I need a pair too!*

I went to my mom later that night and pleaded for saddle shoes, knowing full well our bank account didn't match my begging. No matter what I said, it didn't matter. We didn't have the money.

*Must be nice*, though, being a girl in a family who did.

But this event in my life, especially as I look back on it, helped me discover something about comparison that stuck with me. Honesty teaches us to stop fearing what we don't have so we can see what we do.

Honesty teaches us to stop fearing what we don't have so we can see what we do.

Right before that big football game, my mom actually did find a pair of black-and-white saddle shoes I could borrow from someone else. No, they weren't shiny and new like my friend's were. In fact,

they were pretty scuffed up and a little tight on my feet. But even though they were obviously not as nice—not as *beautiful*, to use Rachel and Leah’s comparison word—I was thrilled with them. I took pride in them. I loved them.

I mean, sure, every time I looked at my BFF in her saddle shoes, I felt a little stab of jealousy and discontent. But there were no new saddle shoes coming to me. I knew that. And by accepting the shoes I had, I was able to get *honest* with myself about it. To be okay with it. I decided I didn’t want my envy to ruin the excitement of this opportunity.

Honesty about the source of our comparison issues can lead us toward being hopeful again. Admitting the situations we face each day that try to make us feel less-than is an important first step—recognizing them as soon as possible, calling them out before they take root and spiral into a lifestyle. Being honest enough to call out comparison the moment it happens will help us regain our control of it.

Maybe you don’t desire to be the number-one person in your company. Maybe you don’t care if your house looks anything like a Pinterest picture. Maybe things like college educations don’t really faze you. But *something does*. Some sour reality that makes you feel like you’re not measuring up. And until you get honest about it, you won’t be able to conquer it.

For Leah, it was this situation with Rachel and Jacob—the latest blow in a lifelong comparison struggle with her sister. For you, it’s yours. For me, it’s mine. And when I think about these struggles in my own life, and what it means to be honest about them, God often takes me back to this verse:

Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to somebody else. (Gal. 6:4 NIV)

Comparison can sneak into my heart no matter how strong my level of gratefulness and awareness. But by taking the time to recognize and thank God for the blessings He puts into my life each day—by taking a good, holy, healthy kind of pride in my current situation—I’m much more able to stay honest and content with who I am and who I’m not. Staring too long at the success of someone else can make us miss our own satisfaction with life.

And there’s simply too much that’s beautiful about *you* and *me* to lose it all on *her*.

## Desperate Moments

When I think back on that season after I discovered I was pregnant, *desperation* is the most accurate way to describe it. Desperate to be around people who would still accept me. Desperate about my life plans that were changing quickly. Desperate to understand how I’d found myself in this position at such a young age. And the next few years of my life, if I’m being honest, were filled with even *more* desperation, which led to decisions that were often destructive.

That’s because desperation, I’ve found, is deceptive. It convinces us we’re immune from the chain reaction our choices bring. It leads us to confuse what we want with what we think we deserve. When life is less than we expected, we often make desperate, destructive decisions.

What would you tell the younger version of yourself? There are so many things I wish I could tell the younger version of *myself*. Things like, be patient. Stay close to God. Be you. Believe the best about others.

But really, these things are not that much different from what I'd tell this *current* version of myself. Dissatisfaction still tries to distract me. Feeling less-than when I'm around other people and other kids' parents and the cute women at work can still lure me toward the desperation of not measuring up. But . . . honesty teaches us to walk through desperate moments without having to do destructive things.

<p>Honesty teaches us to walk through desperate moments without having to do destructive things.</p>
--

Leah is about to find herself in a desperate situation. Let's see what we can learn from how she handles it.

The seven years were up. The day had finally come. Jacob had "worked seven years for Rachel, and they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her" (Gen. 29:20). But what happened next was just pure awful. Somehow, under cover of darkness, within the mysterious wedding customs of this ancient society, Laban was able to pull off a shameful trick. On *everybody*.

That evening, Laban took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and he slept with her. . . . When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Wasn't it for Rachel that I worked for you? Why have you deceived me?" (Gen. 29:23, 25)

If this had taken place today, I'd say Leah's therapy bill would be out of control. Can you imagine your own dad using you to trick someone like *that*? It was bad enough that she lived in her sister's shadow her entire life, but to be tossed into a situation sure to make things even worse? It's just awful.

Before she knew it, she was married to a man who didn't love her. And a week later, after Laban had swindled Jacob into committing to seven *more* years of work, her sister Rachel joined the family as Jacob's other wife. His preferred wife. His beloved, beautiful wife.

Can you say "Unhappily Ever After?"

That's the title of the story I thought *my* life was writing after watching my college dream fade into the background, after becoming pregnant, even after marrying into an unknown, unexpected future. It hardly set the stage for a best-selling fairy tale.

I tried covering up the hurt—like we do, whether it's with food, debt, shopping, escapes, addictions, habits, or behaviors. By God's grace, I functioned when I thought it was impossible. But I was miserable. Broken. Desperate. I lost touch with who I was,

We often lose who  
we are while trying  
to become someone  
we aren't.

trying to become someone I wasn't. We often lose who we are while trying to become someone we aren't.

My three girls came along, one by one. Our marriage settled into a rhythm. I loved my husband deeply, and our daughters became such a great delight in my life. And yet, when the girls were napping or asleep at night, the unsettling of my soul would surface.

Secret questions fumbled through my thoughts, and I became consumed with everything I didn't have and how I didn't measure

up. That's when I really started thinking more often about *her*. "Why her?" I felt like the circumstances of my life were challenging enough that I could ask it. But in reality, it was more than my circumstances.

My soul was sick. The combination of trying days and a troubled soul became the perfect emotional storm, stealing my joy, life, trust, and meaning . . . most important, stealing my hope.

I wondered some days if I would ever be happy again.

"Unhappily Ever After" can title any of our lives. Maybe it's where you are today. Its roots may be freshly planted, or they may be so deep they've been there for what seems like a lifetime. But it doesn't have to stay. God has given us a longing to know Him and be known by Him. And when we're honest with Him, He can cause things to happen—both in our hearts as well as in our circumstances—that can lead us out of comparison toward freedom and restoration.

## Be Wiser

There's a lot we don't know about what this unhappy season was like for Leah, though I think we can all agree her life had gone from bad to worse. But if you read between the lines, you can spot some honesty happening. As I've studied her story, here's what I *don't* see.

*I don't see her throwing a fit.*

*I don't see her begging for things to be different.*

*I don't see her throwing herself on Jacob to try winning him over.*

This doesn't mean her heart wasn't aching, her eyes weren't leaking, and her soul wasn't still asking, "Why her?" In fact, we'll see Leah wander away from this quiet place as the story of her life unfolds.

But for now, maybe (we don't know for sure) she was just trying to be honest. She knew how she'd gotten here. She knew what she was up against. She knew the differences between herself and her beautiful sister. And instead of going insane over this struggle,

Honesty can lead us to quiet places where we seek to understand rather than merely react.

maybe she knew enough not to keep comparing. Just to try being herself.

To stay quiet instead of competitive.

Honesty can lead us to quiet places where we seek to understand rather than merely react. We don't become doormats for the world to wipe its unfair feet on, but we are able to walk into those places where we've felt the urge to compare ourselves to others. And amazingly, we find something else waiting for us there. When we choose honesty over comparison, we gain wisdom.

For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. (Prov. 2:6)

Through God's grace and mercy working through our honesty, we're able to tap into an ability that helps us see past our insecurities and embrace a deeper level of maturity and perspective.

Webster's *Learner's Dictionary* defines wisdom as: "the natural ability to understand things that most other people cannot understand." I love that! Wisdom helps us move beyond the question,

“Why is this happening?” to ask a wiser question: “What can I do about it?”

When I feel like a failure, when life seems incredibly unfair, when everyone else seems to be getting further ahead and I’m falling apart, I don’t need any more information to help me know what to do. We’ve got more than enough information, advice, and input at our fingertips. But I desperately need God’s wisdom to help me see what I can or can’t control, help me see what I can or can’t change, and help me be honest enough to say, “Yes, girl, here’s an area where I’m struggling with comparison, and I need to admit it and call it out.”

Wisdom isn’t something God forces on us; it’s something He gives us to focus on.

God does that when we’re honest with Him.

He knows what we need and so freely gives it to us.

Could anything be more comforting than what He did for Leah when He saw her struggling and hurting as an unwanted wife, while her sister was being welcomed with seven years’ worth of desire?

When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was unable to conceive. (Gen. 29:31)

That’s how much God loves us. When we find ourselves in situations that appear to be ruining us, He will give us the grace to survive what comparison can do to us. Choosing honesty with

Wisdom helps us move beyond the question, “Why is this happening?” to ask a wiser question: “What can I do about it?”

God will give us understanding and a powerful perspective to look beyond what we can see. Ultimately, the honesty we find in trusting His gift of wisdom brings us hope.

## Honest Answers

As we wrap up this first truth to our *why her* struggle, we need to look around our own lives for a minute. I know there's a lot of "Unhappily Ever After" we could focus on if we wanted. Like Leah, we may not need to look far to see what others are doing and getting and enjoying that makes them so happy.

The practical side of our brains thinks we know the answers to this *why her* question. Answers like: She's prettier. She's smarter. She's thinner. She's more talented than we are. We recognize the patterns, the behaviors, the habits that seem to guarantee *her* success.

But even as we're looking, we're missing it.

Because that's not honesty.

*First*, if we're honest, we'll realize some parts of our own stories are still being written. And if we rush to cover up those pieces of our lives that lend themselves the most to comparison, we'll miss the powerful story of redemption that God is in the middle of writing.

We've yet to see His work in some of our comparison struggles, but I'll share this: God has helped me live with a new mindset on those parts that I've become honest about and wrestled through.

And the rest of the parts? I know those will come around in time as I keep approaching them with honesty and applying His wisdom.

*Second*, this uniquely beautiful, unexplainable life that God is building in each of us was never meant to look exactly like someone else's, regardless of the message our culture shouts at us. It tries to tell us what's good, lovely, and dreamy. Culture tells us to set our eyes on *IT*—this impossible standard, this prize that none of us can quite identify. But while we cannot control how the world tries to classify us, we *can* control what we chase.

While we cannot control how the world tries to classify us, we *can* control what we chase.

Honesty about those places where we feel the need to compare will set us free from what we think we've lost or missed or wasted too much time considering. Honesty will help us move forward and find answers that can counteract the damage this *why her* question has done to our souls.

So in light of this first truth—Truth One: “You need to be honest”—I'm going to ask you to become incredibly honest with yourself. Using the prompts below, have an honest conversation with yourself and God. You can do this here in this book or in your journal.

- First, list any areas where you're sensing a “must be nice” syndrome slipping in.
- Second, describe any part of your life right now that feels like an “Unhappily Ever After” situation.
- Third, write five things you're grateful for.
- And fourth, write a prayer to God, asking Him to help you stay honest and aware of this comparison struggle.

— This & That —

*Wrestle with this:*

Who was someone you compared yourself to as a child?

*Remember that:*

Honesty teaches us to stop fearing what we don't have so we can see what we do.

We often lose who we are while trying to become someone we aren't.

Honesty can lead us to quiet places where we seek to understand rather than merely react.

# Truth Two

See It Like It Really Is



# Maybe Now



**When You Ask:** Why Her?

**Truth Two:** See It Like It Really Is

THERE'S THE STORY WE SEE, and then there's the story of what's really happening.

We live in a culture where photographing a moment is on our agenda almost every day. I recently read an article that said the world captures about 1.2 trillion pictures in a year. *What?!* That is a LOT of pictures—of our food, our pets, our families, but especially of our moments. I mean, if there's not a picture of it, did it really happen? And even if it did, did it really happen like that?

Life looks beautiful across our social media platforms. It seems like we've got this thing together and our lives are just full of happy, blissful moments. But it's not always like it seems, is it?

A few summers ago, our family vacationed at one of our favorite beach spots for a few days. It was a great trip, with lots of fun pictures posted on Instagram.

With the exception of the last day.

When things got very non-picture worthy.

My youngest daughter, Kennedy, was in a fierce mood after too many nights of staying up way too late, too much junk food,

too much sun, and too much time together. Just as we were packing up to leave, she got a tiny splinter in her foot. One thing to note about my Kennedy: she has z-e-r-o tolerance for pain. I knew this was going to be *super fun* trying to get this thing out.

And so began the screams, the tears, and the horrible things kids say to you when you're trying to do something that will actually help them. I was positive someone was about to call Child Protective Services because I'm sure her screams of "DO NOT TOUCH ME!" and "GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME!" could be heard all the way to the ocean shore.

Frustrated, I said some unkind things and threatened to take her and her splinter to the ER if she didn't stop screaming. But my threats only made her scream louder. And louder. And louder. Nothing I could do or say would make her calm down. Not until after the longest two hours—yes, two hours!—of my life did I finally get the splinter out.

The silence was a relief when it came, but I was a mess, and so was Kennedy. I was embarrassed and crying for how I yelled at her. She was embarrassed and crying because she had been so dramatic. And my husband and other two daughters were mad that the last few hours of our trip had been spent like this.

No one was speaking, just throwing things in the car.

*How lovely. Yes, let's take a picture of this.*

Since that part didn't make it onto my Instagram story, anyone looking through our vacation pictures would assume the entire thing was so perfect. But things are not always as they appear. Not just in *your* life. Not just in *my* life. But also in *her* life. This fear of ours, the one that says our life and our experience isn't normal (or isn't right, or isn't okay)—just because it's not perfect, just because it's not like *hers*—is a lie.

I have so many issues with that word *normal*—because it’s nothing other than a comparison word. It’s a measurement of my life compared to yours. And almost always, what I think about *your* life (and what you think about *my* life) is not entirely based in reality. So we need to remember, when looking at people’s lives that appear perfect to us, there’s probably a not-so-perfect story happening there that’s never going to be told. Because we’ve all got our ugly. For most of us, it’s just more hidden than our beautiful.

We need to remember, when looking at people’s lives that appear perfect to us, there’s probably a not-so-perfect story happening there that’s never going to be told.

This is why we need *honesty* (Truth One). And yet honesty will only take us part of the way. Honesty helps us become more aware of what’s going on in our own hearts and in our own circumstances. But to take us to the next step, where we become more in tune with the world that exists all around us, we need a second truth.

### Truth Two: See It Like It Really Is

Two important things to mention about this truth and what it takes to see through the deception.

First, *it takes work*. Depending on where you look, within all the information and updates and news about world happenings that bombard you every day, you’ll find exactly what you hope to discover.

For instance, how many times have you thought you heard someone say something on social media, only to go back and

discover it was someone else? Or how many articles have you read that created a sense of fear or panic, only to look a little closer and realize it was a false source of information or from ten years ago? Ever had this happen? Me too.

We scroll so quickly through our phones that it's hard to remember who said what, when, and where. We lose perspective on what's really happening. One day, if it hasn't already, all this virtual connectedness is going to catch up with us.

In my experience, both personally and in journeying with other people, I've learned that when God needs us to see something really important about ourselves and the world around us, it takes the hard work of uncovering, because our Enemy is working desperately to cover it up. Daily we need to whisper this prayer:

God, give me eyes to see what I need to see,  
not what I want to see.

So yes, this takes work. It takes intentional efforts each day.

Second, *it takes light*. Ephesians 5:13 says, "When anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible" (ESV). This verse is one of many in Scripture that speaks to the importance of staying in the light. It means building our lives on what God's Word and His Spirit illuminate for us, rather than stumbling around in the chaos and confusion of the darkness.

God doesn't expose us to His light to shame us, guilt-trip us, or make us feel less than someone else. He exposes us to light because He doesn't want us to become drowned by deception (see 1 John 4:1). He wants us to see what's really happening in front of us.

I learned this truth again recently. The work I've been doing in crafting the words of this book has meant a lot of sitting, which

isn't the best position for your body. So to help deal with some of the aches and stiffness, I purchased one of those giant foam rollers to help me stretch out my back each night.

Whenever I'm done with it, I try to remember to put it away in the closet, but the other night I accidentally left it out. Somehow, though, it ended up rolling in front of our bathroom door. Where it sat, black and unseen, until Kris, my husband, got up to go to the bathroom and found it with one of his bare feet. Which then had a nicely swollen toe to go along with it.

That's what happens when we walk in the dark. We can so easily become oblivious to what's happening around us, blinded to how things really are. And if we're not careful, one of the things we'll start tripping over is the trap of comparison. *Softly. Subtly. Quietly.* We need to courageously ask God to open our eyes, to keep us in the light, especially when we're entertaining a *why her* thought.

That simple prayer seems to be exactly what I need over and over again.

God, give me eyes to see what I need to see,  
not what I want to see.

Otherwise, we'll fall for the deception of comparison.  
Like two long-ago sisters I could name.

## Maybe Now

The last we saw of Rachel and Leah in the previous chapter, Laban had tricked Jacob into taking Leah as his wife—seven years of work for a woman he didn't even want. It was a messy little

scenario all the way around—for Jacob, of course, but especially for Leah. And yet we’re about to see God’s compassion for her.

When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was unable to conceive. (Gen. 29:31)

I believe, as I mentioned in the last chapter, Leah started out dealing with this comparison issue with as much honesty as she could muster. We know her unloved heart attracted God’s compassionate attention. He stepped in to show Leah that He was with her, that He saw her, and that He was going to bless her despite Jacob’s lack of love for her.

I love that.

But there’s something else in this story we need to look at a little closer. Something we need to see like it really is. As you read the following verse, pay close attention to the last few words.

Leah conceived, gave birth to a son, and named him Reuben, for she said, “The LORD has seen my affliction; surely my husband will love me now.” (Gen. 29:32)

God had blessed Leah in the midst of her burden. But sometimes, like Leah, we want His blessing to mean what *we* want it to mean. We want to see it the way *we* want to see it. God, however, sees the bigger picture and knows what will bless us most in light of the story He is writing.

The words we hear Leah saying in this verse (and in other verses that follow) should raise a flag of caution. “Surely my husband will love me now.” That single word—*surely*—contains so much confidence and presumption in it.

Leah looked at the blessing God had given her in her firstborn son, and she saw it as a tool for manipulating a bad situation, for causing her husband to notice her, pay attention to her, and see something special in her. She saw it as a weapon to launch into the middle of her comparison battle with her sister so that she could get Jacob's heart, the one thing Rachel had that Leah wanted most. However, God's blessings are never meant to be a redemption bullet we shoot into someone else's life.

God didn't bless Leah to burden Jacob or Rachel. God didn't bless Leah to prove she was more valuable than Rachel. God blessed Leah to help her know she was loved by Him and to bring glory to Himself by fulfilling His purposes through her life.

Whenever we view His blessings as a way of gaining others' respect or of putting ourselves ahead of a perceived rival, we're counteracting what God is trying to do in us. We're not seeing things the way they really are.

Unfortunately, Leah's misreading of what was happening to her was only the beginning.

She conceived again, gave birth to a son, and said, "The LORD heard that I am unloved and has given me this son also." So she named him Simeon.

She conceived again, gave birth to a son, and said, "At last, my husband will become attached to me because

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in us.

I have borne three sons for him.” Therefore he was named Levi. (Gen. 29:33–34)

See the progression? Or rather the *lack* of progression? The rut? See how these thoughts, these desires, these words—this turning of blessings into redemption bullets—only emptied her heart even more?

Baby One: *Maybe now* Jacob will love me.

Baby Two: *Maybe now* Jacob will love me.

Baby Three: *Maybe now* Jacob will love me.

All those babies, and still no love for Leah.

She’d turned this into a competition for Jacob’s heart. But we’re not in competition with other people. We receive God’s blessings for what *He* intends, to make us who *we* are and should be, not to get what other people have or to keep up with what other people do.

## Climbing Charts

First jobs are filled with so much anticipation and excitement. My first job was as a cashier at a local grocery store. And I loved it. My childhood days of playing grocery store paid off! Literally.

I loved the interaction with people, loved the beeping noise the scanner made as you slid the groceries across it. And I loved making conversation as I worked.

Then one afternoon I noticed a chart someone had posted in the break room—a tally of how many minutes it took each cashier to scan a certain number of grocery items. The ones at the top of

the list had stars and smiles next to their names, visual evidence of their success. But my name wasn't up at the top. My name, I quickly found, was at the bottom.

And immediately, comparison began to convince me I needed to catch up.

So I started paying close attention to the faster cashiers' skill sets, to see how they were able to work so much more quickly and effectively than I did. The biggest thing I noticed was how few moments they spent talking to the customers. Their primary focus was on getting people through their lines as quickly as possible.

So I started to follow suit with their actions. I changed to become what I thought was expected of me. And at first it worked. My name slowly but surely moved up on that list.

And yet my items-scanned-per-minute ratio wasn't the only thing that was changing. I was also starting to hate my job. Comparison had turned into competitiveness in me.

And one day, my catch-up competitive plan backfired on me.

A woman came through my line with a number of grocery items, at the end of which was a birthday cake. She was obviously very frazzled—and made certain I *knew* she was frazzled. From her party planning, I assumed. But I was in a hurry, too, because, *hello!*—cashier competition.

In my rush to get her quickly through the checkout, I didn't see some of the other items that were behind the birthday cake. And as I kept the conveyor belt rolling, they began to press up against the cake. By the time I saw what was happening, it was too late. The cake was smushed.

And, oh, did this smushing of her cake send her already frazzled self into a frenzy of madness. She yelled—*screamed*, actually—while I apologized over and over. Then taking one look at

my name tag, she barked out some words I'll never forget. "Let me tell you something, Miss, uh . . . 'NICKI.' My day is about to get better. But your day? It's about to get worse!"

She snatched the receipt out of my hands and stomped off into the manager's office, where she told him exactly why I should be fired on the spot. Overreacting a bit? Yes, I think so. But I still felt horrible that I had ruined this woman's cake.

I had lost sight of what made my job enjoyable. I had become somebody I wasn't made to be, and had actually become less capable as an employee rather than better—all because of that ridiculous cashier comparison chart in the break room.

But I wanted acceptance. I wanted validation. I didn't want my name to be on the bottom of that list. And in trying to change it, in chasing those desires, my view of reality slipped out of focus. I had become miserable while trying to keep up with other people. I was no longer seeing things the way they really were.

Comparison brings out our competitive streak, which eats away at our contentment, which then starts to destroy our confidence, until we're fighting to keep up with an unrealistic standard.

So I can identify with the heart behind Leah's *maybe now* struggle. Comparison brings out our competitive streak, which eats away at our contentment, which then starts

to destroy our confidence, until we're fighting to keep up with an unrealistic standard.

*Maybe now* that I have these shoes, I'll feel pretty.

*Maybe now* that I have this couch, I'll have friends over.

*Maybe now* that this person is talking to me, this thing I want will happen.

*Maybe now* that I've got this job, things will really take off for me.

*Maybe now* makes it all about *me* being better than *her*. It tries to convince me that just one more step, one more thing, one more relationship, one more promotion, will be the key that leads to long-term contentment, in comparison with *her*.

But I've discovered something important in the process. The *desire* part is not really the problem. Desiring things isn't bad, unless our desires become greater than the One who gives desires.

For instance, Leah's desire to have children was not wrong. Over the years I've had desires for things, for relationships, for finances, for all kinds of stuff that are not bad to want. Desiring them isn't what's destructive. They become destructive when the desire becomes an idol, something that feeds our selfish desire to compete and compare.

Desiring things isn't bad, unless our desires become greater than the One who gives desires.

*Maybe now* is such a perception deception. It's fueled by a world that continually affirms our lack of measuring up to the woman next to us, across from us, or in our newsfeed. It tells us there's always more to strive toward. It plays games with our confidence—confidence which we must always keep in control, because too much of it, or too little of it, can mess with a woman's soul. If we're not careful, we'll be living with a *maybe now* mentality for the rest of our lives, leading us to more and more disappointment.

## This Time

I know this whole sister-wives thing between Rachel and Leah is kind of crazy and not normal for the culture we live in now. But in our society today, if you do something out of what's considered "normal," they'll probably put you on TV.

Occasionally I've peeked at a reality show based on a family that lives the polygamist lifestyle, out of sheer curiosity with questions like, "*How are they not jealous all the time?*" In my peeking, I've never found the answer to those questions. But I personally could never feel valued enough knowing my husband loved another woman. I would constantly be in a state of insecurity, fear, and jealousy.

Leah certainly felt that. She was having babies, and that was good. Being a mother gave her something positive in her life. But she remained in a situation where her husband didn't love her. And at the core of Leah's soul, all she wanted was to be loved. It influenced her toward this *maybe now* journey, which she battled for years through three pregnancies.

Finally, after Leah had given birth to baby number four, something changed inside her heart. Her response "this time" was different.

She conceived again, gave birth to a son, and said, "*This time I will praise the Lord.*" Therefore she named him Judah. Then Leah stopped having children. (Gen. 29:35, emphasis added)

I want us to lean into these words that Leah's soul whispered. "This time . . ."

I'm not sure her desire to win Jacob's love was the only thing that shifted in her heart. I mean, maybe she did get to the place

where she was just plain fed up with him. All these years, all these kids, and he still didn't love her? I would have been over it, that's for sure.

But since her circumstances hadn't changed, since there was no divorce to get, since there were no caring parents or even a sister with a compassionate shoulder on which to have a good cry, I wonder if this shift in perspective came about because she finally saw things for what they really were.

When our circumstances don't change, we only have two choices: settle and pout, or shift and praise. At this point, I think God allowed Leah to see something she needed to see that helped her move on from her comparison struggle.

Disappointment in life is inevitable. And I'm not just talking about a vacation mishap like I shared earlier. Each of us has something we've desired to see happen in our lives that hasn't happened yet. And when we don't see it, yet we see it happening in the lives of others, we often feel the need to strive even harder. Because if *she* can have it, achieve it, or be freed from it, why can't we?

Disappointment is inevitable. But God doesn't want us to settle. He wants us to shift.

I realize this shifting to praise is easier said than done. And while I don't know all the things that might make this choice particularly hard for you, the way it can be hard for me, here's what I do know: God is patient. And while He wants us to get to the place of praise as quickly as possible, He'll still be there even when praising Him doesn't feel possible.

Disappointment is inevitable. But God doesn't want us to settle. He wants us to shift.

In the meantime, until you get to a place of being able to give God

a “this time” praise, I have something to help you. Here are a few *This Time* affirmations for when you’re sensing a needed shift in your soul. Read them out loud, claim them over your ache, and let God show you something special.

### *This Time Affirmations*

*This time*, I will stop looking back at the things I cannot change. I fix my eyes on Jesus because He gives me something to look forward to.

We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.  
(Heb. 12:2 NLT)

*This time*, even though my heart aches, I will look for the good things God has given me.

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. (Col. 4:2 NIV)

*This time*, I will go to God’s Word instead of the world and believe His promises for me are powerful.

This is my comfort in my affliction: Your promise has given me life. (Ps. 119:50)

*This time*, I will look at this unfair situation and seek understanding through wisdom.

Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here’s what you do: Live

well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. (James 3:13 MSG)

*This time*, I will praise the Lord and trust His goodness.

She conceived again, gave birth to a son, and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she named him Judah. Then Leah stopped having children. (Gen. 29:35)

The more we affirm God's truth over our lives, the more it will affect our living.

If none of these affirmations are working for you, write your own. Affirmations based on God's Word help us hear what we need in the midst of our own struggles. They help us see things the way they really are. They remind us who God is and what His Word says, which can transform us deeply as we surrender to His truth, His will, and His perspective.

In fact, surrendering to Him might even give you new desires in place of the old ones.

## Seeing Surprises

My friend Amy is a fellow junker. What exactly is a junker? We are the people who have stickers adorning our car bumpers that say obnoxious things like, "I brake for yard sales." We also brake for free items tossed on the curb:

*Crates.*

*Dressers.*

*Chairs.*

*Bed frames.*

*Lamps.*

Because everything has potential to us. Everything. *Even donkeys.*

Amy texted me one morning to tell me she was stopping by one of my most favorite junking places, The Old Farmhouse. Junking is always a reason to clear my schedule, so I texted her that I'd be there in a few minutes. I knew I needed some old wooden crates for a project that had been stirring in my head.

But as soon as I crossed the railroad tracks and turned onto the gravel road, I immediately knew something magical was happening. The Old Farmhouse property also houses quite a few animals, and between two fence posts I saw the sweetest little fluffy ears pop up. A perfect baby donkey.

I got out of the car and began to *ooo* and *aah*. Amy smiled and shook her head knowing I was about to be in trouble. I assured her I was just going to take a peek at this little guy with the fluffy, pointy ears, pet him for a minute, and then I'd be on with my crate hunt.

This donkey stood just staring at me, almost calling out to me. It was a gaze that said he'd been waiting his entire life (short as it may have been at that point) to see me. I don't know what his name really was, but "Fred" just felt right to me. I think he liked it too. He came right over to me when I called him that!

Roger, the owner, came out to work some negotiating magic with Amy. A few tables had caught her interest. And so I popped into the negotiation, "Well, what if we bought the baby donkey, too? Fred."

Roger laughed.

Amy laughed.

I wasn't laughing.

So Roger gave me his price, and I gave him a firm, "Sold!"

I had just become a donkey owner.

Which meant I should probably call my husband. That would probably be a good thing. You need to know, at this point in our marriage Kris is quite used to my "*Heeeeyyyyyy, honey*" type phone calls. He knows. He can sniff out the saga as soon as he clicks "answer."

"Let me get this straight," he said. "You went to buy crates and you bought a donkey?!"

"I did! And, honey, I could totally put him in the back of the car. He'd definitely fit!"

Kris made me promise I would not put livestock in the back of our car, but if I could figure out some other way to get him back to our farm, he was fine with it. That's how Fred and his cousin Helen (that's a **WHOLE 'NOTHER STORY**) came to live with us. And I'm telling you, an excitement welled up in me like nothing I'd ever experienced.

A few years ago, I would never have dreamed that donkeys running across my yard could make me so happy. Living on a farm with a barnyard of misfit animals was never on my fifth-grade list of things I wanted to accomplish.

Mostly, I would never have dreamed of being content with the unique plan that God had written just for me. I don't mean I love His plan every day, especially the ones that involve a marathon of laundry. Some of my old desires still fire up in my soul from time to time, leading me down a comparison black hole.

But when I do feel a "Why her?" rising within me, I've learned to step back, cheer others on, and see the beautiful in others while realizing there's probably some ugly in there too—just like in me.

The surrender of my dreams and desires hasn't been easy. But I've seen a glimpse of the goodness on the other side.

I realize most people reading this book don't have a donkey. Most probably don't want one. But there's something you do want—something that makes your heart sing and come alive when you think about it. The last thing I would ever want to do is tell you to let go of that desire, if it's a good and godly one. I struggle when I meet people whose dreams have seemed to die, their hearts are aching, and they say things like, "Maybe it's just not what God has for me."

Maybe it's not, but maybe it is.

The thing I'd tell you is not to want it based on what others have, not to want it based on a level of striving, not to want it based on the attention it will get from other people, and not to want it based on a false narrative about what really matters in the world. Stop chasing the tails of *maybe now* hopes from one disappointment to the next.

There is always beauty in the midst of our burdens, and a God who blesses us there.

Start surrendering to what God truly wants for you in this time, at this place.

Start looking for the sweet surprises God has in store for you in the midst of situations that are just unfair. I promise He will show them to you. Maybe they're not donkeys, but there is always beauty in the midst of our burdens, and a God who blesses us there. It's up to us to see it.

— This & That —

*Wrestle with this:*

What is an example of a “maybe now” you’ve chased?

*Remember that:*

We need to remember, when looking at people’s lives that appear perfect to us, there’s probably a not-so-perfect story happening there that’s never going to be told.

Desiring things isn’t bad, unless our desires become greater than the One who gives desires.

Disappointment is inevitable. But God doesn’t want us to settle. He wants us to shift.

