

IS JESUS
WORTH IT?

Stacey Thacker



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Introduction

Have you ever started something and then wondered what in the world you were thinking? I'm reminded of the scene in the movie *Tangled* when Rapunzel bravely steps out of her comfortable tower room, where she's been sheltered most of her life. As she takes her leap of faith into the unknown, she joyously exclaims, "Best day ever!" However, in the next scene she is a weepy hot mess, lamenting her decision and branding herself a failure. She tumbles from heights of happiness to depths of despair, back and forth, over and over again.

This is a book based on a book of the Bible. Writing it has me experiencing all the feelings a girl can feel. I have bravely stepped out of my own comfortable tower room into what feels like the unknown.

On one hand, I'm ridiculously excited because I love the idea of inspiring you to put down this book and pick up the Book that truly matters. I've said it before, and it bears repeating: The one book I want you to read more than mine is the Bible. My passion for God's Word has only grown as I've placed myself at his feet and said time and time again, "What do you want your daughters to know about your book, Lord?" He has been faithful. I have been moved to tears more than once by his nearness and direction.

At other times, I find myself facedown on my bed, questioning my calling. I wonder what in the world I'm doing trying to pen words about holy things. I have quit so many times in my head. I've assured

myself my editor would be grateful if I just sent the contract back and said, “Truly, you have the wrong girl.” Surely they would receive my regrets with relief. Surely.

Have you ever felt that way about something you were sure God wanted you to do? Did doubts creep in and give sway? What did you do about it? Did you pray? Phone a friend? Post on Facebook? Maybe, like me, you did all three. I like to have all my bases covered, you know.

Teri Lynne is the girlfriend I knew I needed in my own best day-worst day moment last week. She told me it was okay to second-guess myself as long as I remembered who this work was truly about. She even loaned me a prayer: “Don’t ever let me think, dear God, that I was anything but the instrument for your story.”¹

The author of these words, Flannery O’Conner, struggled with this back and forth in her head as well. She was in college when she wrote that simple prayer. I was so moved by it I wrote it on the memo board in my kitchen and prayed it back to God while I was making dinner that night. It is such a sweet and timely reminder. The important thing for each of us to remember is that this is God’s story, not ours. As we place ourselves in his hands, he fills the pages of our lives with holy words that overflow into the lives of others if we let them.

I think maybe I get so worried because I care about God’s Word tremendously. I have a passion for other women to find the sweet treasure of his truth for themselves. I believe with all my heart if you and I are going to endure to the end, we are going to need God’s Word to get us through the tough days. That Word is absolutely vital to our being able to say, “Jesus is worth it,” because Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14).

The Word made flesh is worth it.

Even with Teri Lynne’s encouragement and Flannery’s prayer, I was still wavering back and forth between my own “Best day ever!” and “What have I done?” As I ping-ponged back and forth, I began to think about when I first fell in love with God’s Word.

In college, I would spend hours poring over the Word of God in part because I had the time. It seemed whenever I opened the Bible I

found a new truth to apply. Years later, after marriage and motherhood and life settled in with more time constraints and hardship aplenty, I stumbled into the book of Hebrews a bit jaded. But the sweetness of God's Word wooed my heart and extended an invitation to the mercy I desperately needed.

How about you? When did you fall in love with the Word of God? Was it when you read a particular Bible story? During a certain time in your life? When you learned to study the Bible on your own? Did a skilled teacher help you find the Word a joy? Did switching to a different translation make the difference?

I can relate to each of these because God has done the same for me. My friend Candace beautifully shared her own story with me, and it brought tears to my eyes.

During a very dark and difficult season in my life, God drew me in with his love letter. I grew up doing Bible studies and loved that aspect of studying God's Word, but this was different. God was wooing me and comforting me in ways I hadn't experienced before. A deeper love for God's Word grew out of that dark season. He truly was my only light. He spoke to me so clearly through the pages of his Word, and I learned more of our faithful God through those sweet moments with him.

His Word is not only a love letter but a
life-changing tool in our hands.

I've lived this. God drew Candace into his Word to comfort and encourage her during dark and difficult times. His Word is not only a love letter but a life-changing tool in our hands. It leads us to mercy. And oh, girls, we are going to need all the mercy for the days that lie ahead.

Who am I kidding? We need all the mercy right now.

A Girlfriend's Guide to the Bible (a Series)

Whenever I write I have a couple of things in mind. First, my passion is to point you to Jesus and his life-giving Word. My prayer is that when you put down one of my books, you will want to know God better. The book I want you to really dive into is his, not mine. When I look back over my life, every time I found myself in a deep, deep pit, the one thing that made it possible for me to climb out was the Word of God. I take great comfort in the promise of Isaiah 40:8: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." God's Word will not wither even when I think I might. And when my heart would rather fade into the background, God is just getting started. His Word is perpetual, unending, and continuous. So is the healing he wants to bring into my life and yours. Life lived with and for Jesus really does just keep getting better.

Second, I want you to feel as though you know me. I want you to see I'm just like you. I prefer a drive-thru, I drink way too much coffee, and I enjoy singing loudly and embarrassing my daughters. My hope is that we can connect on the normal things in life, as girlfriends do. We may not have met in real life yet, but we are more alike than you know.

As I prayed about the next books I would write, God began to unfold the idea of a series just for girlfriends like us. It would be a set of books, based on books of the Bible, that sound more like a conversation over coffee than a sermon. We would laugh and cry together (obviously), but in the end we would truly fall deeper in love with Jesus.

I should probably put a small disclaimer here. I am not a theologian or even a seminary graduate. I'm simply a girl who has a passion for studying God's Word and I've been doing it for almost 30 years. This series is not a commentary of the Bible. It is not comprehensive. I couldn't possibly cover every detail in every book of the Bible. What you will find are books *inspired* by books of the Bible. I will purposely leave a few things out and I promise you I will jump around a bit. Hey, that's what girlfriends do, right? We'll always have more to talk about the next time we meet. For example, you might want to know the next

book in this series will be based on Ephesians (you can read more about that in my note at the end of this book). I'm already praying about it even now as I'm introducing you to Hebrews.

Book 1—Hebrews: Is Jesus Worth It?

If you asked me what my favorite book of the Bible is, I would say Hebrews without hesitation. It has been my “pit” book. The one that lifted me from the depths of despair and has given me the strength I needed to put one foot in front of the other. It also has a great deal of Old Testament within its pages, which makes writing through it a dream. And Hebrews is one of the most Jesus-focused books in the Bible. Next to the four Gospels, Hebrews has more direct references to Christ than any other book.

Have you ever wanted to quit your faith journey? The Hebrews did. In your heart, have you ever wondered, “Is Jesus worth it?” The Hebrews did. In fact, they almost turned back to the life they had before they met Christ. They were a group of primarily Jewish believers who'd been raised with the Old Testament Law as their guidepost. Rules ruled, you might say. At the time the letter of Hebrews was written, they were facing a few trials and knew that more would come. Going back to what felt comfortable just seemed to make sense to them. Or maybe they could simply put their own spin on their new-found Christian faith. Surely no one would notice if they did that.

I am tempted to do this myself. Maybe I can be all Jesus wants me to be but hold back some of my own hopes and dreams for myself. I mean, when I sing “I Surrender All” perhaps I don't have to mean it 100 percent. Can I surrender 98.9 percent instead? God would be okay with that, wouldn't he? Or perhaps it's okay to need God and the approval of everyone around me at the same time? It's good to be “liked” and accepted, right?

When life gets particularly hard, I know these are the thoughts running through my head and my heart too. Sound familiar?

Sweet friend, trials will come. Your faith will be tested. God wants you to know your faith can endure and be ignited when it finds its true

source of life in Jesus. He is the heart, the help, and the hope we need when trials come our way.

Together, we are going to take a long look at Jesus. We're going to unveil our own hearts and see what idols may be fighting for our attention. We're going to fix our eyes on the author and perfecter of our faith. We're going to dive deep into the pages of his Word. Mostly, we will be in Hebrews, but we will also visit other books of the Bible. Everything in the Word truly is connected. But most importantly, we're going to answer the question, "Is Jesus worth it?" together, because that is what girlfriends do.

I can't wait to get started.

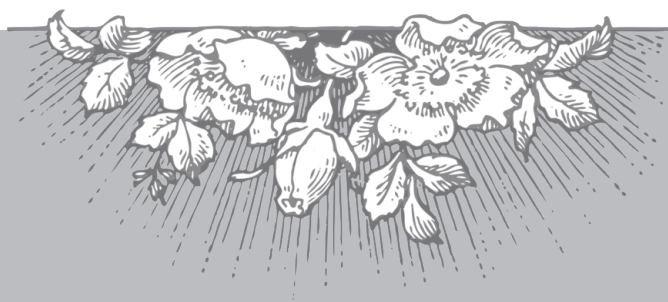
Looking forward,

Stacey



PART 1

The Heart, Hope, and Help We Have in Jesus





Start with Worship

I have nothing to preach but Jesus.

CHARLES SPURGEON

Hebrews 1:1-3; Matthew 9:20-22; Isaiah 6:1-8

We don't even know her name. She might have been 25 or 40. Was she married or single? She could have been a sister or a mother. Maybe she was a lot like you and me. What we do know is her life was one of pain and suffering of the cruelest kind. She was a broken-down woman desperate for change.

I think this woman living by the shores of Capernaum must have been following Jesus from a safe distance for quite some time—listening, seeking, and hoping he could help her. Up until now, no one else had been able to. Would he? Could he?

Scripture gives us the tiniest glimpse of the moment before the moment she reached out. I suspect she was having a full-blown conversation inside her own heart. Did she count the cost? Did she have doubts? She must have, “for she said to herself, ‘If I only touch his garment, I will be made well’” (Matthew 9:21). This unnamed, faceless woman was having a crisis of faith, but she must have believed the risk was worth it for she extended her hand to brush the tasseled hem of his robe. *Jesus was worth it.* He had fueled her faith precisely at the

moment she felt like quitting. And so with faith as small as a mustard seed, she reached for him.

This was all it took, and what happened next is one of my favorite encounters in the Bible. “Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, ‘Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.’ And instantly the woman was made well” (Matthew 9:22).

The millions of moments she had collected before this one no longer mattered. She was no longer *woman unclean*. She was *daughter made well*.

Jesus saw her and uttered the words she dreamed of hearing. “Made well” he said. He spoke courage to a girl who had known nothing but a daily reminder that she was broken. Did you notice he called her not *woman*, but *daughter*? We can hear so much tenderness in this one sentence. Women in her condition were not called *daughter*. They were called *unclean*. But Jesus erased that label with a word. Her faith, an act of worship, made her well in an instant. The millions of moments she had collected before this one no longer mattered. She was no longer *woman unclean*. She was *daughter made well*.

I don’t know about you, but I want the kind of faith that passes through the crisis point and reaches out anyway. I want to hear him say to me, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” Are you asking yourself if Jesus is worth it? Do you feel like quitting? Are your heart and head in complete disagreement over whether you should reach out to brush the hem of Jesus’s garment? We don’t have much to bring to the table besides our messy lives and minuscule faith. Our inner conversations don’t scare Jesus away either, because they don’t change who he is. He stands ready to fuel our faith in the most amazing way, if only we will take a look and extend our hand.

Sweet friends, this is our moment before the moment. Let’s take a deep breath and reach out—together.

My Own Crisis of Faith

Years ago I was a broken-down desperate woman too. I didn't have much left in me at the time. To be honest, I was in a pretty scary place. I had been following Jesus at a distance, waiting and wondering if he was aware of my pain and, honestly, if he cared. I knew one thing for sure: either my situation needed to change or I did.

I had the feeling the pit I'd plunged into headlong was not quite finished swallowing me whole. You see, my husband and I had felt the stirring from the Lord to surrender our lives and follow him into full-time ministry. We were certain of it. But the circumstances during this time screamed otherwise. It was almost as if when we said a resounding yes to God, we also said yes to a whole mess of trials. Those tribulations seemed dead set on scaring us into running the complete opposite direction. Don't think for a minute I didn't consider it. I thought, *If this is how Jesus treats his friends, I can't imagine how he treats his enemies.* I was worn thin by it all.

Instead of hitting rock bottom I ran right into Jesus—
arms-open-wide, beautiful, truth-telling Jesus.

With this all going on in the background, my friend Lisa signed me up for Bible study. She didn't ask me if I wanted to go with her. She just casually added at the end of one of our phone conversations, "Hey, Stacey, I signed you up for a Bible study on the book of Hebrews. You can sit by me. Oh, and there's free child care." Without waiting for my answer, she hung up. She was wonderfully sneaky like that.

I showed up on a Thursday at midday, with my two-year-old in tow, my beat-up study Bible, and a plate of cookies. I sat down next to Lisa and exhaled. The leader opened her notes and started sharing from the first chapter of Hebrews, and I was forever changed. Instead of hitting rock bottom I ran right into Jesus—arms-open-wide, beautiful, truth-telling Jesus. As it turned out, he did care. I touched his hem for the first time in ages, forgot about why, and worshiped.

Start with Jesus

The writer of Hebrews starts bold and just keeps moving. He has a go-big-or-go-home attitude I find inspiring. He starts by preaching Jesus and nothing else.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (1:1-3).

The fact that the writer doesn't identify himself has led to a debate about who penned this valuable letter. Some believe it to be Paul. The 1611 version of the King James Bible listed Paul as the writer. Others have argued that Barnabas had the authority to write it. Still, many believe the writer to be Apollos, as suggested by Martin Luther.

We will most likely never know who wrote the letter of Hebrews, but we do know a few things about him. He was a Greek-speaking, well-educated Jew who converted to Christianity. He had a strong knowledge of the Greek Old Testament called the Septuagint. We also have strong evidence that the writer was a second-generation believer who might have come to faith through the ministry of the apostles.

The writer isn't going to bother telling us important stuff we usually include in letters, like who he is, to whom he is writing, or even why he is writing. With a laser focus and a quill, he cuts to the heart of the matter. He starts with Jesus because he knows this is what his readers truly needed. "For, after all," Charles Spurgeon wrote, "this is the subject which men most of all need. They may have cravings after other things, but nothing can satisfy the deep real want of their nature but Jesus Christ and salvation by his precious blood. He is the Bread of life which came down from heaven; he is the Water of life whereof, if a man drink, he shall never thirst again."¹

Our deep, real want finds a deep well
of satisfaction only in Christ.

The writer of Hebrews knew everything else grows dim when we first fix our eyes on Jesus. He knew, long before Charles Spurgeon said it, that our deep, real want finds a deep well of satisfaction only in Christ. We may chase after other things, but they will never truly satisfy us.

Think for a minute about the last thing you thought you wanted. Was it a day at the spa, a new cardigan, or a date with a special someone? When you got it, did it bring you satisfaction of a lasting kind? Was that satisfaction sustainable over days and weeks? Or did it fade—and did you find your heart longing for something to replace it? Girls, our hearts were meant for more. Our hearts were meant to worship Jesus. Why would we start anywhere else?

When I sat in that Bible study so long ago, my deep, real want was security. I wanted everything in my life to be safe. Fear was waging a war in my heart. One look at Jesus in Hebrews chapter 1, and my deep, real want saw something I could plant my faith in. I saw that *Jesus* was the final word, the fullness of God's glory, faithful to hold all things together, and he finished the work of salvation.

The Final Word

God's nature is to speak. He has spoken from the beginning and in many ways.

- God spoke creation into being from nothingness (Genesis 1).
- God spoke directly to Moses, face-to-face (Numbers 12:8).
- God spoke to his people through the prophets of old who had dreams and saw visions (Joel 2:28).

John Piper brings all this into perspective for us.

God is not withdrawn and uncommunicative...He was not

silent. God communicates. He means to connect with us. He is not an idea to be thought about. He is a person to be listened to and understood and enjoyed and obeyed. He is a speaking Person. There is no more important fact than this: There is a God who speaks that we might know him and love him and live in joyful obedience to him. God spoke.²

Our creative God is a communicator. He is a speaking person who wants us to know him and love him. The thread of his speaking voice is strong throughout all of Scripture. But according to the writer of Hebrews, in these last days God did something different. He ceased speaking in many ways and spoke to us by his Son. His Son was his final Word. And his final Word was better than all former communication. Why? The book of John gives us a tiny glimpse.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1-5,14).

Jesus, God's Son, is the Word made flesh. He dwelt among us. The Word of God, which hovered over the waters and creation obeyed, now walked with men. God was speaking by his Son and now we could hear him speak with our own ears. God spoke in many times and many ways, but when God spoke by his Son, Jesus, his Word was complete. There is no other phase of God speaking to us because Jesus is God's final Word.

When we are in a crisis of faith, what we need to hear most is the Word of God.

This stops me in my tracks. God has spoken in his Son. Have I taken the time to listen to his voice? When was the last time I sat in prolonged silence and sought him through his Word? When we are in a crisis of faith, what we need to hear most is the Word of God. We need to hear from Jesus. Consider this:

When I complain that I don't hear the word of God, when I feel a desire to hear the voice of God, and get frustrated that he does not speak in ways that I may crave, what am I really saying? Am I really saying that I have exhausted this final decisive Word revealed to me so fully in the New Testament? Have I really exhausted this Word? Has it become so much a part of me that it has shaped my very being and given me life and guidance? Or have I treated it lightly—skimmed it like a newspaper, dipped in like a taste tester—and then decided I wanted something different, something more? This is what I fear I am guilty of more than I wish to admit. God is calling us to hear his final decisive Word—to meditate on it and study it and memorize it and linger over it and soak in it until it saturates us to the center of our being.³

Oh, girls, he is speaking, but are we listening?

The Fullness of God's Glory

“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3).

God has always been serious about his glory. After Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, he went outside their camp to a tent he called “Meeting” and asked God, “Please show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18). God answered, “I will make my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, ‘The LORD’...But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live’” (19-20). The Lord put Moses in a cleft of the rock and said, “I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and

you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen” (22-23). God’s glory was more than Moses could handle and live to tell about. Later, after Moses had done everything according to God’s plan, God’s glory filled the temple.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys (Exodus 40:34-38).

His glory filled the temple and Moses wasn’t able to set one foot inside. Imagine what that must have been like. I am awestruck by the thought. God did not leave his people for a minute and it was his glorious presence that led them by a cloud in the day and a pillar of fire at night. This is the image the Hebrew readers had of God’s glory. It is even more astounding when the author tells them Jesus perfectly reflects the majesty of God.

No more hiding in the cleft of the rock. Do you want to see the glory of God? Look to Jesus.

We could press *pause* and worship with our whole hearts right here. Nothing compares with the glory of God. But we have only just begun to see Jesus.

What the writer says next is profound. I think reading this verse in a few different Bible translations helps us grasp its meaning a bit better. And, girls, we need to do just that. Hebrews 1:3 says Jesus is:

- “The exact imprint of his nature” (ESV).
- “[The] flawless expression of the nature of God” (PHILLIPS).
- “The exact representation of His nature” (NASB).

- “The One who—imprinted with God’s image, shimmering with His glory...” (THE VOICE).

The Greek word used in this passage is *charakter*, which means “the instrument used for engraving or carving” and “a mark or figure burned in or stamped on, an impression.”⁴ When a writer during this time sent a letter, he sealed it with a bit of wax. The wax was still soft and pliable when he took a stamp or signet ring and pressed his seal, making an exact impression of his personal mark. This was the author’s way of saying, “This letter has my authority. I am the one who wrote it, sealed it, and sent it.” Jesus is exactly imprinted with God’s image and carries all his authority. He is flawless in his perfect expression of the nature of God. Quite simply, Jesus “gives us the best picture of God we’ll ever get” (2 Corinthians 4:4 MSG).

When God wanted to speak his final word, he didn’t send another prophet—Israel had had plenty of those. He sent Jesus, his Son, whose glory and character perfectly reflect and precisely portray his own character. Of this divine character, Charles Spurgeon said, “The character of God is a sea, every drop of which should become a wellhead of praise for His people.”⁵ The character of God is a sea for us to swim in, sweet friends—an endless source for praise. What a beautiful picture to push us forward, because there is more for us to grasp.

Faithful to Hold All Things Together

As if we need more, the good just keeps getting better. Hold on, dear friend, because this next statement is like the arms of God wrapping around his daughter. Hebrews 1:3 adds a promise, saying, “And he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” Jesus upholds everything and everyone. In other words, he upholds all the things, you being one of them. How does he do that? He manages and maintains the universe by his powerful, living, spoken Word.

I remember a time recently when I felt as though my own strength had vacated my entire body. I grabbed a verse a friend shared with me months before during the first few minutes after my dad suddenly passed away. It mirrors this truth found in Hebrews: “He is before all

things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). I love how Matthew Henry wrote it best: “He upholds all things by the word of his power: he keeps the world from dissolving.”

I wrote this in my book *Fresh Out of Amazing*:

And somehow in the blur, we packed all six of us into our van and drove for two days to Indiana to be with my mom, brother, sister-in-law and other family members and friends. We mourned deeply and I kept doing the next thing I had to do, one thing at a time. A dear friend, Lisa-Jo, told me, “Stacey, the only way through is through. No matter what, you have to go through it. And you will. And God will hold you together because that is what he does. He holds everything together, and everything includes you.”⁶

I promise you this is true in the moments we can’t stand on our own. It’s true when we don’t know what is coming next. It’s true even if we don’t feel as though it’s true. Jesus will hold you together because that is what he does. I’m living proof.

Finished the Work of Salvation

“After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3).

Do you know that in the temple’s most holy place, where the sacrifices were made on behalf of the people, absolutely no chairs were there for sitting down? Why? Because the priest’s work was never finished. He was always working. There were so many people, so many sins, and so many sacrifices. How could he ever stop? But Jesus, the final Word of God, reconciled us to God by purging all our sins, once and for all. And then he did something shockingly simple and yet bold in declaration: He sat down. This shows us he entirely finished the work of our salvation. Jesus foretold this during his testimony to the Sanhedrin, a gathering of Jewish leaders including priests and scribes, before he was taken to Pilate and later crucified: “From now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God” (Luke 22:69).

Can you imagine the look on their faces when he told them this?

They must have been stunned. He knew the work of salvation would be finished. He knew his rightful seat was beside his Father in heaven. He had no doubts.

His bold confidence reminds me, ever so slightly, of our daughter Abby when she was quite small. Every time she completed a task she would throw her hands up in the air and shout, “Ta-da!” She was so proud of herself. It didn’t matter what she finished. It could be dinner, a puzzle, or a toddler-sized art project. She let us know she had no doubts her project was complete. It was a ta-da moment. We were more than willing to celebrate with her and we did so several times each day.

I think the disciples must have felt like celebrating the same way when they were with Jesus after his resurrection. Mark records in his Gospel what they saw with their own eyes: “Then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and *sat down at the right hand of God*” (Mark 16:19, emphasis mine).

This was the moment. Everything Jesus had told them was true. Oh the joy they must have felt on that day. “Thus proving himself, by the more glorious name that he has won, far greater than all the angels of God” (Hebrews 1:4 PHILLIPS).

Jesus proved himself. In doing so he has won a far more glorious name than all the angels. The salvation work is complete. Together with the disciples and the great cloud of witnesses in heaven, we can raise our hands and say, “Ta-da!” He is so worth our worship. He is worth it all.

The Transformational Power of Starting with Worship

Every other book I’ve written has finished with a chapter devoted to worship. I believe when we work through the hard places in our lives and we find hope and healing, worship is a beautiful and appropriate response. The book of Hebrews might be my favorite book in the Bible because it begins and finishes with worship, saying in the final chapter, “Our constant sacrifice to God should be the praise of lips that give thanks to his name” (13:15 PHILLIPS). I’m praying this is true for us as we walk together through the pages of this book as well.

As I have reflected on this first chapter of Hebrews and the boldness

of the writer to start at the feet of Jesus, I was reminded of the prophet Isaiah. He started with worship too. What he described of his encounter with the Lord gives us a vivid picture of the transformational power of worship as well as a model we can apply to our own start-with-worship moment.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me" (Isaiah 6:1-8).

When Isaiah caught a glimpse of the Lord in his glory, it was during the year King Uzziah died. What do you think was going on in Isaiah's heart at the time? Do you think he was grieving? Was his life in a crisis of faith—maybe a bit like yours has been of late? I think it's safe to assume Isaiah might have had a few questions for the Lord then. History tells us for most of his life King Uzziah was a good king, at least on the surface. His people grew in economy and God gave him victories in war. But at the end of his life the truth of his prideful heart was

made evident. And when King Uzziah died, Isaiah, the prophet of God, was left with a people whose hearts were far from the Lord. They were a nation at a crossroads.

God chose such a moment to break through and reveal he was not a God in crisis. What Isaiah saw was the same final Word, fullness of God's glory, and rescuer we see in Hebrews chapter 1. The Lord sat high and lifted up with the train of his robe filling the temple. Did you know the robe of the priest had great significance? I didn't. My daughter told me recently a longer robe signified a priest's more glorious position. The train of our Lord's robe *filled* the temple.

I remember seeing the wedding dress Princess Diana (William and Harry's mum) wore on July 29, 1981, when she walked down the aisle toward her prince. It was glorious. Everyone was in awe of the long train trailing behind her. It went on for miles. Or seemed to. But did it fill the entire church? Not like the robe Isaiah saw. It filled the temple full of glory. Can you imagine?

While Isaiah was reflecting on the vision, he noticed the Lord was being constantly attended to in worship by a group of seraphim. The Voice Bible translation calls these angel-like beings "flaming creatures."

Like some fiery choir, they would call back and forth continually.

Flaming Creatures: Holy, holy, holy is the Eternal,
the Commander of heavenly armies!

The earth is filled with His glorious presence!

They were so loud that the doorframes shook, and the holy house kept filling with smoke (Isaiah 6:3-4).

What he witnessed brought Isaiah low. It humbled him to the point that all he could utter was the declaration of his own uncleanness. He was just as lost and sinful as the people he ministered to daily. He might have been the mouthpiece of God, but his own mouth was unholy in the sight of a holy God. The prophet was completely humbled in this moment of worship. A.W. Tozer put it this way:

The man who has not been humbled in the presence of God will never be a worshiper of God at all. He may be a church member who keeps the rules and obeys the discipline, and who tithes and goes to conference, but he'll never be a worshiper unless he is deeply humbled.⁷

True worship deeply humbles us, just as it did Isaiah. He saw the Lord and he knew immediately he was not worthy of the calling on his life to serve him. How many times have we gone through the motions of worship but not let God humble us? Tozer goes on to call this “a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe.” To be found on our knees at the throne of our exalted Lord is a beautiful part of our undoing, and it is a necessary work. We can join the fiery chorus and cry, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” knowing in the process we will certainly be changed and he is worth it.

As a true worshiper, Isaiah recognized a holy God and realized his own sin. Immediately upon Isaiah's confession, the seraphim flew to him and touched his mouth with a burning coal taken from the altar of the Lord, then said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for” (Isaiah 6:7). God received Isaiah's worship, restored him, and then asked, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (6:8).

Isaiah couldn't respond quickly enough to the question. He didn't look around to see who else could volunteer for the mission. He said immediately, “Here I am! Send me” (6:8). Isaiah knew in that moment he wanted to be the one who was sent by the Lord. In fact, I think he pleaded with God for the opportunity with his whole heart. Can you see the transformational power of worship at work here? Who else could take a grieving, broken-down prophet and stir him up to the point he begs to be sent back to the people who have rejected his every word? Only Jesus.

Do you need to sit and receive the finished work of Jesus today? Do you need to remember he holds you no matter what? Take your moment, friend. Sit and receive.

I don't know why you picked up this book. I don't know what is going on in your life today. Maybe, like me, you are feeling a bit weary and worn thin. Maybe you feel sweet tears pooling in your eyes because you've caught a tiny glimpse of who Jesus is from the pages of his Word. Maybe, just maybe, it has been far too long since you let your heart simply worship at his feet. I love what my favorite worship leader, Christy Nockels, once said: "Sometimes it is an act of obedience to just sit and receive what Jesus has already done for us."⁸ Do you need to sit and receive the finished work of Jesus today? Do you need to remember he holds you no matter what? Take your moment, friend. Sit and receive.

And when you have lifted your head and the question "Whom shall I send?" rises from his heart to yours, answer with a fierce determination, "Lord, send me."

Jesus will say, "Your faith has made you well. Go, beloved daughter. Go."