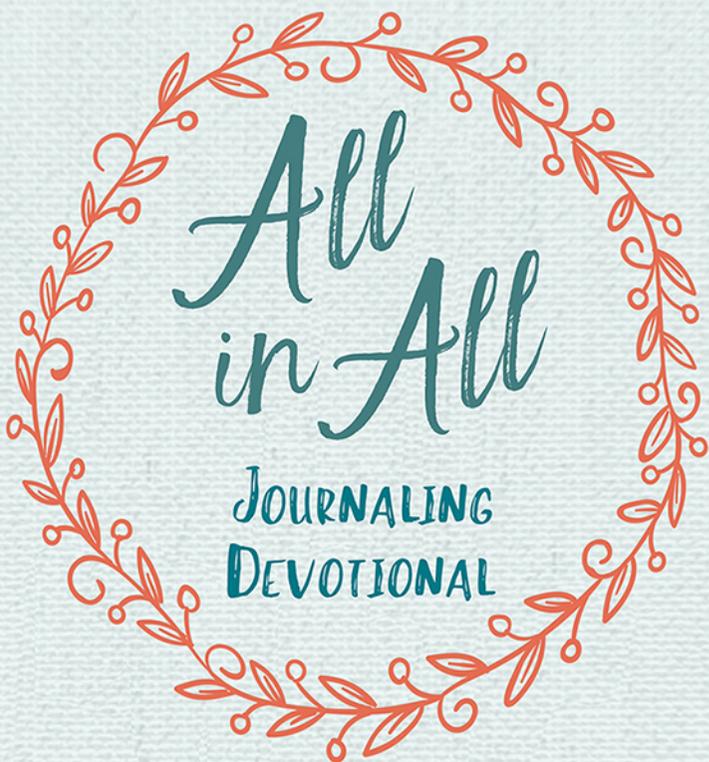
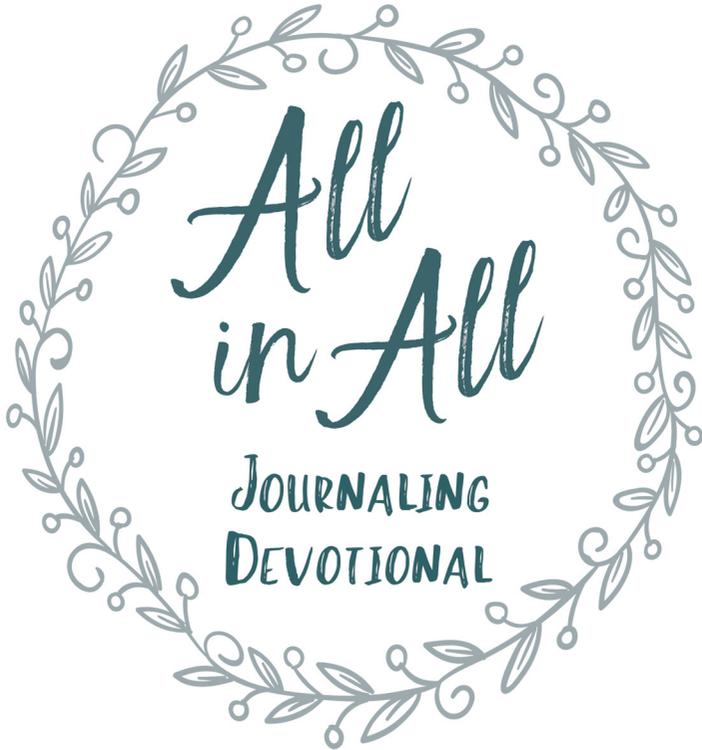


Loving God Wherever You Are



Sophie Hudson





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Nashville, Tennessee

Dedication

For my BCS girls

“I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you.”

—Philippians 1:3

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Introduction



There's probably some perfect way to start a devotional book. There's probably some perfect combination of biblically saturated wisdom and Spirit-infused words. There's probably some perfect tone—witty but not desperate, friendly but not overly familiar—and it would no doubt work beautifully with some perfectly crafted content that's so profound it's often mistaken for poetry.

That would all be so nice.

Unfortunately, though, I am *desperately* imperfect. I say the wrong things at the wrong times. I can be more than a little goofy. And sometimes I don't know how to pronounce words, so I just say them with authority and try to act super-confident.

I'm looking at you, *quinoa*.

Here's what I have going for me, though. And don't worry. This part won't take very long.

I've spent the last twenty-ish years working with teenage girls. And about sixteen years ago, I got a job teaching English at a Christian school here in Birmingham. I've been there ever since. I don't teach English anymore; that chapter (get it?) (punny!) ended about three years ago. These days I'm more of an on-campus mama to the girls in our junior high and high school. My official title is Dean of Women, although that sounds sort of fancy considering that most days I just do a lot of listening while I hand out Kleenex and Band-Aids® and Dove® Sea Salt Caramel Dark Chocolate. But when I tell you that I adore the girls I get to serve, I mean it. They are hilarious and brilliant and thoughtful and kind. They dream big and love bigger, and life is so much better with them in it. They ask deep questions and listen with their whole hearts.

I wrote this book for them.

And I wrote it for you too. Of course I did. It just so happens that these one hundred devotions are (mostly) related to the problems and questions and heartaches and joys that have shown up in my office over the last three years. Because if I've learned anything over the span of my life—the part

of my life when I've known Jesus as my Savior, in particular—it's that no matter what we're facing, He's the answer.

He really is.

(Well, I mean, I don't know that He's particularly concerned with the current state of my bangs—and oh, it is troubling—but that doesn't change the fact that for the last few mornings I've looked at my hair in the mirror and thought, *Fix it, Jesus.*)

(Sometimes we have not because we ask not, you know what I'm saying?)

And in all seriousness, my prayer is that these devotions—imperfect though they may be—will remind you of the perfect peace and perfect love and perfect grace of Jesus Christ. I pray they'll encourage you to dig deeper in your relationship with Him, to trust Him more than you did the day before, and to seek Him with your whole heart.

He is everything, you know.

No matter what. No matter where. No matter when.

He is everything.

He is our all in all.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

—Colossians 1:15–20 ESV

Day 1



J get it. You forget sometimes.

It stands to reason that you would. Because although, yes, this world is sacred ground—the spot you’ve been assigned to live and love and minister—it is also big and loud, and it often tells you it has the best solutions when it comes to you needing help. In the middle of confusion or chaos, it’s not always easy to remember what’s right and true.

It’s even tougher when, in the middle of crisis or conflict or sadness or even some good, old-fashioned idleness, the world starts to shout:

Your help, it says, is in your reputation.

Your help, it says, is in your friend group.

Your help, it says, is in more stuff and more money.

Your help, it says, is in manipulating people to get what you want.

Your help, it says, is in working like crazy to prove your worth and your value.

But listen. *Listen.* Scripture whispers to you even while the world yells, and Scripture always tells the Truth. Scripture says, “I lift my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:1–2).

That’s not just an answer. It’s a promise. It’s your safe place to rest and pray and wait.

Because the One who made this world and all that is in it—*He is your help.* No matter what, the Lord is your Source for wisdom, guidance, and direction. Through His Word, through His people, through prayer, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, He will lead you to the next right thing. He will show to you how to get out, move ahead, step aside, or get back.

And don’t forget this, either: in every situation you face, He is not only your help; He is also *at work.* God never forgets, never ignores, never takes time off, never gives up, never feels caught off guard, and never stops working out His very best for you.

Sometimes situations can be so overwhelming that you don't know which way to turn. So when you're worn down and worn out and hoping the world can fix what's broken, lift up your head and look to Him instead. Remind yourself that the God of the universe is for you. Remind yourself that *He* is with you.

Remind yourself Who your helper is.

He is Father.

He is Son.

He is Holy Spirit.

He is Counselor, King, Friend, and Companion.

He is Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and Healer.

He is Comfort, Peace, Joy, and Hope.

He is just, forgiving, faithful, and patient.

He is constant, unchanging, merciful, and gracious.

He is all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful, and eternal.

He is the beginning and the end.

He is your all in all.

And He loves you completely.

Amen.

READ ACTS 17:24-28.



1. Can you think of a time you turned to something the world offers to “help” you through difficulty or pain?

Day 1



I love college baseball. Specifically, I love Mississippi State baseball. And a few months ago, when I was walking (quickly, mind you) into the SEC Baseball Tournament so that I could watch my beloved Bulldogs play, I found myself in the middle of a mishap. The toe of my shoe caught on the edge of some concrete, and before I could say, “OH, NO—MY WEDGES HAVE BETRAYED ME,” I was facedown in the concourse and experiencing some significant pain in the upper region of my right foot.

As soon as I stood up, I thought, *Well, it would seem that I've broken my foot.* And about an hour later—after I'd been X-rayed and introduced to an orthopedic boot that would be my constant companion for the next two months—a trainer confirmed that my initial diagnosis was accurate.

I spent the rest of the summer in a sassy black boot, doing my best to take care of the bone that was broken. But even though I knew, in the midst of the brokenness, that I needed to heal, there were days when I was totally annoyed by the whole healing process. It was far easier to hobble around bootless than to feel constricted by that hot, heavy boot with the straps and the Velcro and the foam. I resented the recuperation time, to be perfectly honest.

But then the Lord did the sweetest thing.

Toward the end of the aftermath of “The Unfortunate Wedge-Related Accident”—as the boot continued to protect and support what was broken—I felt the Holy Spirit remind me of three words over and over again: “Take your time.” When I was tempted to hurry, when I was tempted to wear my favorite wedges, when I was tempted to think that my foot was back to normal and really, *I'm fine! The foot is good! Everything's awesome!*—that's when the Lord gave me a refrain: *Take your time.*

So often we want to hurry our healing, whether we've been physically hurt, emotionally hurt, spiritually hurt, or some combination of the three. No matter how our hurt happened, we can easily find ourselves wanting to

rush the recovery. But there are three good things to remember when we find ourselves in the middle of that process:

1. What looks okay on the outside still might not be okay on the inside. *Take your time.*
2. Before you're ready to run again—whether that's literally or figuratively—you have to relearn to use what's been broken. *Take your time.*
3. Just because it doesn't hurt as much doesn't mean it's healed. *Take your time.*

Rest in the knowledge and the hope that the Lord is the Great Physician. He is our Healer. Cooperate with Him as He mends the places in you that are broken.

Thank Him for His tender loving care today.

READ MATTHEW 11:27-30.



1. Are there any places in your life that seem broken right now? What are they?

2. When you hear the phrase “take your time,” what area of your life comes to mind? Friendships? Dating? Family? Church? Something else? Briefly explain why.

Day 3



Now I'm certainly no expert on spiritual warfare, but it seems to me that one of the enemy's favorite tactics—especially with women—is to come after our confidence and convince us to compare ourselves to other people. That comparison can manifest itself in all sorts of negative, one-way conversations inside our heads:

- “Sarah is so much better at talking to people than I am. I get shy and awkward when I'm around people I don't know very well, so it's no wonder I don't have many friends.”
- “Everybody I know is great at something; they all seem to be gifted in one particular thing. I'm just okay at lots of things, and I'm sick of being average.”
- “I would give anything to be as funny as Graham. I can't even tell a knock-knock joke without stumbling over my words.”
- “If my hair looked half as good as Melanie's always does, I'd be happy every single day.” (This one is not really a comparison. This one is **THE ACTUAL TRUTH** because my friend Melanie's hair is fantastic, and if I had her hair, I'd be happy every single day of my life.) (Also, this is not a lie from the enemy because facts are facts, people).

And in all seriousness.

There's a frequently repeated (or retweeted, as the case may be) saying that “Comparison is the thief of joy,” and if you ask me, the originator of that phrase is a genius. Because comparison is the voice that screams, “You are not enough,” and for some reason we not only listen to that voice, but we also *believe* it. Over and over again.

That's precisely why many of us stay trapped in a spiral of doubt and discouragement that can lead to some unmerited shame. And as soon as we think we're in the clear to jump onto steadier ground, the spiral picks us up, pulls us in, and spins us around even stronger than it did the first time.

It's a dumb way to live. And if that spiral weren't enough, there's this: comparison is a never-ending, pointless competition that no one ever wins.

You may be picking up on the fact that comparison is not my favorite.

And honestly, you have no need for comparison. The temptation to look from side to side as you size up the "competition" is not from God. It's just one of the ways the enemy likes to distract you. Don't fall for it, though. The Lord has so much more and so much better for you. He wants you to look up and reach out and walk confidently into the life He's given you.

Because you are more than enough—just as you are. There's only one person in the world with your personality, your gifts, your passions, and your abilities. You really are beyond compare.

Why settle for side-eyeing when you can get out there and get after it? Walk your road, sister.

You were made for it.

READ EPHESIANS 3:14-21.



1. In what areas of your life do you fight the temptation to compare?

2. Has comparison ever stolen your joy? Explain your answer a little bit.

Day 4



I have a real knack for overlooking the obvious.

For example, I was every bit of twenty-eight years old when I looked at a map of the United States and suddenly realized that the western border of my home state of Mississippi was in fact the Mississippi River. It had honestly never occurred to me before.

And it was only about eight years ago that I looked at the Target sign near our house and said, “Okay—I get it now! The Target logo is an actual target!”

I don’t know, y’all. I guess I just thought that the Target corporation had an affinity for dots and circles.

Given that, it probably won’t be much of a shocker to learn that I was well into my thirties before I started to notice the way God reveals Himself through His creation. Suddenly the seasons started to take on much deeper meaning. (I see you, spring, and how the old stuff dies away and God replaces it with new life.) I became a certified sunset junkie—seriously couldn’t get enough of them. Because here’s the deal: God didn’t have to make the sunsets beautiful. Same for sunrises. He could have just set an appointed time to turn the lights on and off, so to speak, and we’d have never known the difference.

But instead? He faithfully paints the sky using light and colors, clouds and shadows. The heavens are His canvas. He bookends our days with beauty, and He never creates the same painting twice.

So really, if the sky was all we had to remind us of God’s majesty, that would be enough. But He gives us so much more (and these are just a few of my personal favorites):

- Bright blue oceans as deep and as vast as His love for His children
- Baby green leaves that feel like signals of hope when they first appear in the spring

- Clear, brisk lakes with water that reflects all the life that surrounds it
- Crisp, colorful autumn leaves that remind us how beautiful it can be when what's dead falls away
- Patches of sunshine on the gloomiest days because the Light *always* breaks through the darkness

If you think about it, you realize that God could have just given us some light and some water and some air and then been all, FEND FOR YOURSELVES, PEOPLE. But He's given us a garden. He's given us more beauty than our eyes can behold, and it would be such a shame if we stayed so mired down in our Snapchat stories that we missed it.

So today, if you're feeling overwhelmed, if you're feeling lonely, if you're feeling tired or hurt or sad or angry, walk outside. Look at what God has given us! Take it in with your eyes and with your heart. Ask Him to increase your awareness and your appreciation for all of His good gifts.

Soak up the beauty of this great big earth.

All creation sings His praise.



1. What's the most beautiful place you've ever visited?

2. If you had to pick, what three things in creation make you feel closest to God?

Day 5



Hazel the Dog is the youngest member of our family. Our niece rescued her about three years ago, and as best we can tell, she had somehow gotten separated from her mother and her litter. So one Sunday afternoon, my husband and son drove to Mississippi to bring Hazel home to live with us in Alabama. I loved her as soon as I saw her. In fact, in the three years since Hazel joined our family, she and I have become so attached to each other that sometimes I worry that we're too close.

I mean, is it normal to tell your dog what you're planning to cook for supper? Or to ask your dog if your necklace looks okay with your shirt?

So Hazel and me, we're tight. But thanks to the abandonment Hazel experienced when she was a puppy, she has off-the-charts separation anxiety. If she hears me pick up my keys, she panics. If she sees us put on our shoes, she panics. And if I get home from work and don't immediately change clothes, she panics, because clearly that means I'm leaving again.

As you can imagine, Hazel panics a good bit.

A few nights ago Hazel and I were snuggling on the sofa because, well, that is what we do on most nights (please don't judge me). I was lying on my side with one arm underneath Hazel's head and the other arm draped across her tummy. I thought she was perfectly comfortable, but after a few minutes I looked at her face and realized that she was darting her eyes all around the room.

Since I like to think I can read Hazel's mind, I decided that she felt like she was trapped. So I very slowly moved the arm that was underneath her head, and I moved my other arm as well. I expected that she would jump up and run, but instead she stayed still as a stone—just as if she were still pinned in by my arms. I thought she might need some encouragement.

"Hazel," I said. "You're free, and you don't even know it!"

And then the truth of what I'd said hit me like a ton of bricks.

Because—*Yes, that could be said of so many of us!* Or maybe I should say it this way: We *know* we're free in Christ. But sometimes we sure don't live like it.

Listen. I don't know your life history. I don't know what mistakes you've made, what decisions you regret, what parts of your life you wish you'd done differently.

But here's what I do know: if you have identified with the gospel and surrendered your life to Jesus, YOU ARE FREE. If you've confessed your sin, Jesus has covered it. MOVE ON, sweet friend. I mean, I love my Hazel and all, but I'm not interested in following her example. Because it seems pretty obvious that we're not going to gain a whole lot of gospel ground with other people if we lie around acting trapped and scared when we're actually oh-so-free.

Throw off the chains. Live the life the Lord has called you to live.
He is your freedom.
Thanks be to God.



1. How are you a little bit like Hazel? Are there areas of your life where you live as if you're not free?

2. Do you believe you have freedom in Christ? Explain your answer.
