

The background of the entire image is a dark, starry night sky, possibly showing the Milky Way, framed by the dark silhouettes of evergreen trees. The trees are positioned around the edges, creating a natural frame for the central text.

SANDRA  
McCRACKEN

...

SEND OUT  
YOUR LIGHT

The ILLUMINATING POWER of SCRIPTURE and SONG

*Send Out Your Light* reads like a sound track, spotlighting God's illumination through Sandra's story and songs. It's a hopeful invitation to see the light God has given each of us, and a timely call to send that light back out.

**Ian Morgan Cron**, bestselling author  
of *The Road Back to You*

Sandra's songs have always felt like a balm for my soul and a shelter in the storm. Now she's written a book that sings with story, Scripture, and the kind of raw authenticity that beckons you to come as you are into the light of Christ, and warm your hands by the embers of His love. You're holding a lantern, my friend. Enjoy the journey.

**Ellie Holcomb**, Dove Award-winning  
singer/songwriter and author

Digging deeper into Sandra's own songwriting and personal story, *Send Out Your Light* reads like a conversation with a friend. Through Scripture and lyrics, she offers up an authentic picture of gospel hope through songs, stories, and personal reflections.

**Drew Holcomb**, Drew Holcomb and the Neighbors

Sandra McCracken's voice and words have been a companion to my faith for nearly twenty years. Honest, searching, at times lamenting, but always hopeful, she has resisted the temptation of much of Christian art to fall into sentimentality and clichés. In *Send Out Your Light*, she invites us more deeply into her songs and into her life. In reading along, we see how immersing our lives in the words of the Scriptures

can birth a spiritually alive imagination, more able to love God, love others, and see him alive and at work in holy moments that appear subtly but regularly in our lives.

**Mike Cosper**, author and director of  
Podcasts at *Christianity Today*

Sandra's music has been a transformational sound track for the good/hard seasons of our lives. Her lyrics are a prayer for weary souls; her melodies a salve for broken hearts. This book poignantly pulls back the curtain on Sandra's own good/hard story and artistic process, reminding us the most personal journeys toward the light are in fact the most universal.

**Katherine and Jay Wolf**, cofounders and  
authors of *Hope Heals* and *Suffer Strong*

*Send Out Your Light* is filled with enthralling stories, glorious and insightful reflections on the Lord's grace and love, and invitations to stop, rest, and reflect. It was like a breath of fresh air. Be ready to be refreshed, inspired, and reminded of God's unending love.

**Trillia Newbell**, author of *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*, *Sacred Endurance*, and *If God Is for Us*

Part memoir, part midrash, Sandra McCracken's beautiful book is a testament to the faithfulness of God, rooted in the sounds and stories of the psalms, and a reminder that, no matter how broken or inadequate we may feel, we are all by grace living epistles of Christ, emblems of God's steadfast

love. This is a hopeful book—and one that many of us desperately need!

**W. David O. Taylor** is associate professor of Theology and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary and the author of *Open and Unafraid: The Psalms as a Guide to Life*

*Send Out Your Light* is wise, engaging, and nourishing—just like a conversation with Sandra over tea. Not surprisingly, her writing voice is as beautiful as the poetry of her songs, inviting us into the honest stories of her life. Scripture is laced throughout the narrative as naturally as it weaves through her days. With hands held open to God, we receive grace from what Sandra has received—beauty, gentleness, strength, and hope. As Sandra’s life is a gift, so is this rich and satisfying book.

**Andi Ashworth**, author and cofounder  
of Art House America

**Charlie Peacock**, music producer and  
cofounder of Art House America

There are many books I nibble, content with only a taste, while others awaken a voracious soul hunger. I read Sandra McCracken’s *Send Out Your Light* with highlighter in hand, inhaling gospel hope with every mouthful, eager to exhale it to others. Her words are lyrical and redemptive, refracting eternal light through temporal tears, guiding the reader to the Author of life.

**Maggie Wallem Rowe**, author of *This Life We Share: 52 Reflections on Journeying Well with God and Others*

This is a book of hard-won wisdom and achingly lovely prose that provides much to ponder. Sandra's courage is such an inspiration, and she writes beautifully from a grace-softened heart that invites us to drink deeply from the same well.

**Kevin Twit**, Reformed University Fellowship  
pastor and founder of Indelible Grace

In the frenetic chaos of our lives, we experience a sort of numbing that slowly strips meaning from our day-to-day. Sandra's potent retelling of her own story inspires us to slow down and be attentive to the beautiful arc of a hope-filled narrative distinctively discerned through Scripture and song.

**David H. Kim and Amilee Watkins**,  
cofounders of Goldenwood

Sandra has given us a truly illuminating book. Like a rich conversation at a mountain cabin or around a breakfast table, Sandra's catalog of music, old hymns and the Psalms, shed light on all things called "life." She is that trusted voice you would want in whatever the season you are in, she is sharing the light of hope. I believe I will return to these pages over and over again, culling wisdom of a transfigured friend.

**Don Pape**, curator, Pape Commons

Enchanting.

**Savannah Locke**, musical artist

**SEND OUT  
YOUR LIGHT**

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SANDRA  
McCRACKEN  
...  
SEND OUT  
YOUR LIGHT

The ILLUMINATING POWER of SCRIPTURE and SONG

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Printed in the United States of America

978-1-0877-2967-1

Published by B&H Publishing Group  
Nashville, Tennessee

Dewey Decimal Classification: 223.2  
Subject Heading: BIBLE. O.T. PSALMS 43 / EVANGELISTIC  
WORK / CHRISTIAN LIFE

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## Acknowledgments

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This book has been a patient journey. I owe a debt of gratitude to the friends who have been my cheerleaders. Alongside the steady support of my husband, Tim, and our family, I'm grateful also to Emily Otteson, Taylor Combs and the team at B&H, Chris DeTray, and Jami Crocket for their day-to-day help in getting these words on the page. And I have been encouraged by Cindy Morgan, Don Pape, Kevin Twit, Danny Bryant, Ashley Cleveland, David Kim, Russ Ramsey, Lourine Clark, Jamie and Deanna Smith, Steven Purcell and Laity Lodge, Andrew Osenga, Peter Harris, Integrity Music, Andi Ashworth, Cassie Tasker, and Becca Jordan, and many writer "friends" I only know in books. Thank you for this opportunity. Thanks be to God.



Note to self: Trust the process . . . even when you don't have time to write. The Spirit gives the words. In him, there is no scarcity of time. Be faithful. Be joyful. Be full of trust.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. (Col. 1:9–12)



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## A Letter of Light

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One warm, summer weekend, I stayed on my own in a lodge with windows overlooking the Texas Hill Country canyon. I woke early. It was still dark. Across the room from the bed, I noticed a sliver of moonlight on the glass bottle on the table by the window.

A beautiful silence, there was not a sound. Almost morning. Almost night. It was in between. I watched the glowing ring of glass expand like a crown of silver on the rim of the bottle.

A few minutes later, I saw the dim light show up on the canvas window seat cushion, like a dewy glow. And the leather pillow resting sideways, its surface slick like a puddle of water, growing from faint to full, the increase of light expanding my spirit in real time.

I didn't want words to study. Simply taking in the slow change of the morning felt inherently prayerful. It was a holy display of the ordinary, full of peace and invitation.

Next, I saw the ledges of the windowsill light ever so slightly; then the knobby-carved arms of the recently reupholstered chairs, and the painted block print of the fabric.

After a bit, the sky began to give up the darkness. I could see a stripe. Was it a crack in the glass? Funny, I had not seen it before now. Maybe it was my contacts. Squint. Strain. Open wide. No, I saw it then. It was a stripe, a line. It was surely there.

Was it a wire? I could only see in part. Then, I saw, it was definitely a wire.

I guess I couldn't see it before because it matched the sky, so black, but then the sky was lightening. Then, there was contrast. Soon enough, there was vision.

But wait, there's another cluster of lines? Smaller ones, smaller wires. One, two three, I counted them. Yes, even four.

Four more lines appeared in the cloud-covered morning sky. It grew white like coffee with milk. Gray on gray before the color blooms. As it blooms, the song lyric from *Patient Kingdom* goes through my head, "Slow me down, let love do its work."

How much do we miss that comes to us as a slow beauty? How much of God's beauty is still waiting to be revealed? How often are we aware that the shadow view we see is not yet full sight? Patience is the path. Not-seeing comes before seeing.

We hurry from one place to another, weaving through distractions and hurdling details, prompted by the beeps and buzzes of our devices. Agrarian writer and novelist Wendell Berry talks about being part of the "Slow Communication Movement," pushing back against the pace of things as they

are in this modern life. Deeper still than Wendell's notion of slow communication is an even slower exercise—no communication. Just observation.

Watch. Listen. Wait.

As I sat propped against a stack of pillows watching the light, simply attending to the Spirit of God in the room, in that Texas canyon morning, I was just there to be *with*. I was not studying, not memorizing, not talking, not listening. Just present.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness hovered over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. . . . And God separated the light from the darkness. (Gen. 1:1–4)

Darkness does not define us. It attends to us, surrounds us in regular intervals, but it does not have the last word. God limits the darkness. He has authority over it and is not bound by it.

In him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5 NIV)

God enters our story in the opening words of Genesis. Or we enter his. He comes onto the biblical scene creating, separating, clarifying, shaping, and ordering light with the very first words of the Scripture.

He is still doing this within us, bringing order from chaos. It is like there is a whole galaxy within us, created by him, and he is separating, clarifying, shaping, and ordering our secret, spiritual life, just like he does in the natural world, with every sunrise and every season.

As the sky is above the soil, so are God's thoughts and his ways higher than ours. His abundance is like atmosphere stretching over us. Peace to breathe. Light to see. Joy to resonate a new song. A new day is coming, and at the same time, that new day is already here. With hands and eyes and voices, we usher it in.

In thoughts, in conversation with God, nothing has been lost or forgotten. You cannot exhaust his attentiveness. Be reverent. Be intimate. He already knows what you're afraid to tell him. Your memories. Your quirks and preoccupations. Your affections and anxieties. He wants to surprise you every day with your favorite things. He knows every detail, every nuance no other soul could know about you.

Even before a word is on my tongue,  
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.  
(Ps. 139:4)

You are seen before God. No blanket, robe, or shield can hide you from his loving gaze. Study your palms. Measure your fingerprint rings in the morning light. Lay on your back in the patchy, backyard grass under the night sky. Admit to him the fears you've been trying to conceal. Wring out your disappointments like a soaked beach towel.

Whisper your hopes. Don't filter your desires, not even the ones that seem out of reach. Just tell him. Then pause and listen for a compassionate reply. Turn off your phone. Read one psalm three times out loud. Ask him about the parts you don't understand. Talk to him some more. Tell him details about what happened this afternoon. Tell him what gold you see in the people you hold dear. Give a name to your fears. Catalog things with him that nobody else would even know.

This is prayer.

Remember your sixteenth birthday party. The car accident. The camping trip. The way you felt when he told you that he was filled with regret. The way you knew exactly what to do next, standing out beside the pond at Lanier Library. The dream you had about the getaway car. The other dream about the eagle lifting you up. The moon over the trees on your 36th birthday. The fireworks on the 4th of July at the rooftop in D.C. with the birthday baby. The laughter around the two-thousand-piece puzzle. The first moment of music, recording Psalm 42 in Brian's apartment. "Landslide" on the speaker in the corner store on Kent Ave. Laying on the sand in Morro Bay, peering over the edge of a sweatshirt, watching the birds descend and perch on the distant rock. The winding, shotty road on Maui in May. The Empire State Building pay phone in high school with Mom and Dad. The confused moment coming out of anesthesia. The pregnancy test. The middle-of-the-night phone call. The ambulance lights out the window facing the street. The

gardens at the Mepkin Abbey where my white heels dug each step into the soft, South Carolina soil.

There is nowhere you have been that God's Spirit does not know. Who else on earth can know and name your story in this way? There is no one. There are many who share pieces, depths, joys. But there is no other lover for your soul like him.

Make a list of moments, offer it up. Live a risen life, with the light of the Spirit giving life to us, giving life to the world. This book is a list of moments. It is a story of the light breaking in and sending me back out. From the morning sun through the window and the rising light from within each of us. By this light, may we see what we could not see before, through the illumination of Scripture and song. By his Spirit, may we be lifted.

Small, like the stripe of a fingerprint on  
the pillow, her hand, while she's sleeping  
Wide, like the panoramic, stroke of mid-  
night, Tennessee sky  
Grace, like the expectation of embers left  
after the fire of Epiphany  
Fear, it grows cold, in this hour we will  
choose who we are on the other side

Oh gracious Light, Oh gracious Light  
I have been walking, walking so long in  
darkness.

Live, leaning in when the pain is fierce.  
Oh the bough, it will break at his coming  
Stand, who can understand the design,  
the refining Holy fire?

O Gracious light, O Gracious light  
Pure brightness of the Ever-living Father  
in heaven,  
I have been walking, walking so long in  
darkness.  
("Gracious Light," from the album  
*Songs from the Valley*, 2018)



When my husband and I were dating long distance, we wrote letters to get to know each other. We had lots of dates and phone calls and spent as much time together as possible. I saved all of his letters in a tea box. These letters trace the story line of our beginning. They are a word-shaped diagram of two people coming together. They outline two trails across a distant landscape, intersecting, converging and now running side-by-side like a pair of roller skates.

I can see now in those ink pen words between us, that God was doing a miraculous, ordinary thing. Before that first letter, I didn't see how this blended family life we now live might come to be. How quickly it took shape, and how much prayer and provision has been required to see it through.

As letters point to love, so our love directs us to the circadian rhythms of shared life. In rhythm, we walk in step with love and love directs a course like Cupid's arrow aimed at the heart. By Love's direction we learn to be more fully ourselves, guided against the grain and grit of our self-reliance, and find our way back home to God.

For the joy of human love,  
Mother, sister, parent, child  
Friends on earth and friends above,  
For all gentle thoughts and mild.  
Lord of all to thee we raise,  
This our hymn of grateful praise.<sup>1</sup>  
—“For the Beauty of the Earth”

I started journal writing early. I wrote in notebooks, on lined sheets of paper, used envelopes—anything I could find. I am not a disciplined journal writer, but I have kept up with writing, in one form or another, scribbles, prayers, and poems for most of my life. Writing helps me to know my thoughts more clearly. It helps me to create a memory of an emotional frame in case I need to refer back to it for insight, or for comfort, or for songwriting. Most of my songs have germinated in one way or another within the pages of my journal.

God is writing our lives like a letter. He writes his words upon us. He has collected our words in his own tea box. And he has sent out his own life-giving words back to us. He is the author who is writing our narrative with his attentive Spirit (2 Cor. 3:2–6). Through story and song, his pen is

pointing and shaping my own life-letter toward a hopeful vision, a buoyant hope for what is yet to come.

As often as my work has required me to hear my own voice through a loud speaker, it has taken me a long time to be able to recognize the sound of my own *inner* voice. I've wondered what to do at the crossroads. At times I've awakened to unexpected news. When we find the landscape has been suddenly rearranged by circumstances out of our control, God's steady friendship is a lifeline. Even in times when we find ourselves squarely in the middle of some foolish predicament of our own making, God does not abandon the ones that he loves.

All other friends may desert you or cause you distress, but God is unwavering in his companionship. In seasons of change, joy may deepen within you rather mysteriously and spontaneously.

Sometimes in direct proportion to suffering, joy grows. Regardless of whether our pain can be traced back to sin, sickness, or unforeseen events, it's not one-to-one. God multiplies grace on his own metric. His metric is unmeasured abundance. I can trace the joy and the longing over the years in the songs I've recorded. Joy is documented in my handwritten journals since I was in high school, and it's seen in the evidence of my oldest friendships as well as in the new ones.

"The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant" (Ps. 25:14). He confides in his friends, and we do likewise.

The apostle Paul wrote to his friends when he traveled. This letter is an echo of his, one small notation of grace from me to you. Even before Paul, God is the first to write a letter to us through his word and through his work in our lives. In this, each of us are walking around like a letter, sent from God's heart. "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:2–3 NIV).

My friend Miranda and I wrote letters through the years of our friendship. She would write in script handwriting, right to the edge of the paper. She would write on all sorts of kinds of paper—cards, postcards, makeshift paper with lines, with colorful flowers or things she would find while traveling. She'd tell me about her travels, write portions of the Psalms. She'd report her prayers for me, the happenings of her family, and the things she was hopeful for.

Miranda died tragically in a car accident in South Africa in October of 2019. Just after her death, I pulled her last letter out of my drawer. It reads like a benediction. In the sorrow of losing her in this life, as I read her words again on the card, it became evident as I looked back through tears, that every one of her letters read like a benediction. With Psalms, prayers, encouragement, and care, Miranda lived a life that blessed others, from start to finish.

I carry her letters close to my heart and am reminded that God carries us close to his own heart as his letter to the

world. He calls us by name, lifts us up, and sends us out to sing from the mountaintops with a message of joy.

There is a day coming when the tragic situations of our lives will give way to wholeness. There is a day coming when we will gather around the table with those we have loved, with those we have lost, and we will recount our lives with vivid memory. Like a box of letters, gathered and treasured, tracing the goodness of God in all things.

And here, as I write on this chilly autumn morning, in the daily writing mingled with real life, in the ink blots and the scraps of paper, we each continue to catalog the story. And our stories point to that distant, hopeful day proclaiming that it is already here in part.

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Cor. 13:12)

One day we will see fully with color, laughter, wide-eyed wonder, and without tears. “For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 7:17).

Then, there will be a full telling of our stories, a reckoning of every injustice, and a mending of every broken system. This is the good news, the promise of peace, working backward from that future reality, bringing that healing

light-filled promise to bear on our lives, to shine on our present sorrows and on our yet-unanswered questions.

He is with us. It will be all right in the end. If it's not okay, then it is not the end.

This book is a letter of gospel hope. It's shot through with story and songs, only an echo of the Word written, broken, and dwelling among us. I have seen the light breaking into darkness. And not just in my house, or into windows refracted through glass bottles in a Texas canyon. I have seen light planted radiantly by God within my family, in my local congregation, and when I travel around and see rows of people singing together in a crowd.

The book has three parts. Part one is the beginning of the story, the becoming. Through song and stories of childhood and early years of writing, singing, and performing, I've struggled to identify my own voice, and I've learned to hear God's voice trumpeting through the noise, straight to the heart. The work of becoming has been a journey from invisibility into creativity, like the bottle appearing in view on the table, coming out of the shadows, brought into a new day.

The middle pages of this book pause to make space for the unexpected circumstances of loss, grief, and displacement. This middle stage, the testing of light, is a season that we all experience in one form or another when we are drawn out into the wilderness, through a baptism of tears. The struggles we face cause our light to shine more vividly, like stars against a night sky. Who we are is revealed more brightly when we are under fire. Light can be an agent of

exposure and heat. These unwelcome elements can push us toward growth and maturity or toward bitterness and self-preservation.

There have been times when circumstances have threatened my sense of belonging and made me wonder if God had left me or if he could really be taken at his word. Like the story where the Velveteen Rabbit from the children's book is thrust out into the real live woods; when she finds herself to be a real rabbit, and not just a stuffed rabbit from a child's nursery, she discovers she has real fur and heat and a heartbeat. She becomes real. She finds out what she is really made of.

We have been given God's light, and there comes a time for all of us, sooner or later, where who we are is called to reckon with our shadow. In the time when who we are is called into question, we can either circle back to reinforce our core beliefs, or pivot toward something new. The wilderness gives us an opportunity to readdress those fundamental questions of who we are and what all this means. Here, when the shadows settle in around us, we see our light shining in the darkness and find God's steady, strong arms holding and guiding us, a lamp to our feet (Ps. 119) even in the valley of the shadow (Ps. 23).

And the closing part of this book is the hopeful, gospel, "sending" part. Who we are is given, solidified, tested, and strengthened. Then we become generative. His Light is reflected through us. Light is ever in motion. It comes in and, just as fast as it came, it is sent back out. Love is not

static. It is dynamic. Light moves ever onward, carrying us along with it.

Self-reflection first brings us to our feet. Lament calls us to walk in authenticity. And when we are bolstered by God's love, generosity calls us to give it all away in gratitude. From grace to glory, we are made to reciprocate what we've been given. Love receives and gives.

All three of these parts are still happening in real-time as I'm writing this book. The light is given, tested, and sent over and again as we work out our salvation (Phil. 2:12).

Get comfortable being uncomfortable. The comfort of the Holy Spirit is ever available to us. Call out to him even as he calls to you like Samuel in the night. He calls, he sends, and he illuminates, as he is always writing within each of us a new chapter.

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor. 3:4-5)

We are a written letter; God is the author. By his words, God's Spirit brings us to life.

These pages offer up some reflections on what matters most to me in the creative process as I also share my own

experiences of where I have seen evidence of God's steadfast love. Where have you seen it? Where is the light coming in now? Can you see it piercing the shadows within you? Can you name a few of the shadows? As we share these questions, we answer the call of these deeper reflections, a hand-written invitation from the God who sustains and sends us back out into this broken, beautiful world.

May God send out his light again. Lead us on.

The people walking in darkness have seen  
a great light; on those living in the land  
of deep darkness a light has dawned. (Isa.  
9:2 NIV)

# DARKNESS DOES NOT DEFINE YOU. IT DOES NOT HAVE THE FINAL WORD; LIGHT DOES.

• • •

“A **HOPEFUL INVITATION** to see the light God has given each of us, and  
A **TIMELY CALL** to send that light back out.”

—IAN MORGAN CRON

“A balm for my soul and a **SHELTER IN THE STORM.**”

—ELLIE HOLCOMB

“**HONEST, SEARCHING**, at times lamenting, but **ALWAYS HOPEFUL.**”

—MIKE COSPER

“Be ready to be refreshed, inspired, and reminded of **GOD’S UNENDING LOVE.**”

—TRILLIA NEWBELL

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