

COME EMPTY

**Pour Out Life's Hurts and Receive
God's Healing Love**

By
Saundra Dalton-Smith M.D.



SonRise Devotionals
Lighthouse Publishing of the Carolinas

PRAISE FOR *COME EMPTY*

Come Empty is full of raw, real, and relevant spiritual insights. It is a rare devotional that challenges you to look deep within your soul while simultaneously lifting your eyes to Jesus. Sandra Dalton-Smith writes in a way that encourages those who are hungry and thirsty for hope to draw near to the Father. This marvelous book has my highest recommendation.

~ **Kurt W. Bubna**

Pastor and author, *Epic Grace: Chronicles of a Recovering Idiot* and *Mr. & Mrs.: How to Thrive in a Perfectly Imperfect Marriage*

Are you hurting? Are you hopeless? Are you empty? Or willing to be? Walk with this servant doctor as she leads hurting hearts on a 50-day journey to let God heal what we're willing to lay at His feet. A loving, daily guide for those needing encouragement to surrender all to Jesus. Inspiring, empowering, and encouraging.

~ **Patricia Raybon**

Award-winning author of *I Told the Mountain to Move* and *Undivided: A Muslim Daughter, Her Christian Mother, Their Path to Peace*

Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith had me crying at page one as compassion pours out through her words. I couldn't put the book down and wanted to dig deeper into the daily devotions. Resisting the temptation, I slowed down and worked through one day at a time for a heart-makeover rooted in Christ. I didn't just read through this book. I prayed through it and journaled my heart. Written in conversational format, the essence is pouring out your heart's cry and listening within your heart for His reply.

~ **Christine Abraham**

Founder and ministry director at WomensBibleCafe.com

We've all had those days when things don't go as planned, when life doesn't make sense. But sometimes we allow the hurt and doubt from those unmet expectations to cloud our hope and joy. In *Come Empty*, Sandra Dalton-Smith encourages us with a fresh, soul-penetrating hope that invites us into a genuine healing experience with God.

~ **Jo Ann Fore**

Author of *When A Woman Finds Her Voice: Overcoming Life's Hurts* and *Using Your Story to Make a Difference*

It's so important to be honest with God and tell Him where it hurts — to pour out your pain to Him, and not keep it bottled up inside, so that you can receive His healing. Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith's 50 Day Challenge is a wonderful way to focus on reclaiming your emotional and spiritual health.

~ **Christin Ditchfield**

Author of *What Women Should Know About Letting It Go: Breaking Free from the Power of Guilt, Discouragement, and Defeat*

I stand in awe of Sandra's honesty, determination, courage, and relevant spiritual insights. *Come Empty* offers a vision of guidance – where you are invited to share and witness fifty days of inspiring and captivating devotionals, leading you to experience all of the joys and blessings that God has intended for you. Your cup will definitely “run over” after these purposeful devotionals allow you to recognize the love and anointing that God has over your life.

~ **Angelia L. White**

CEO and publisher *Hope for Women Magazine*

Are you drained? Worn out? “*Come Empty*” is an invitation for you to join Sandra Dalton-Smith as she offers you a new outpouring of God’s spirit. As a physician, Dalton-Smith is used to asking her patients: “Show me where it hurts.” Using this same format, she openly and candidly discusses how spiritual conflicts affect physical health. Bluntly sharing personal prayers from her own painful journey in the “Your heart’s cry” sections for each devotional, readers are summoned to face their aches and losses. As hurt and pain are spilled out, spiritual refilling begins with a gentle response from Jesus in the “His reply” sections. If the reader wants to go even deeper, there are more opportunities to do so. The book’s practical accessibility through the 50 daily devotions makes it a handy tool for women on the go. Tough, tender, revealing, and healing, you will want to buy an extra copy of “*Come Empty*” to give to someone you love who needs to be refilled.

~ **Sheryl Giesbrecht**

Syndicated radio host, global influencer,
International speaker and author of
Get Back Up: Trusting God When Life Knocks You Down

Dr. Dalton-Smith skillfully conveys God’s message of healing and restoration in her newest release *Come Empty: Pour Out Life’s Hurts and Receive God’s Healing Love*. She masterfully weaves together a collection of devotionals that show us Jesus Christ is acquainted with our struggles and in Him we can remain undefiled before the world. Let this physician, led by the wisdom of the “Great Physician,” help you experience God’s restorative power in your situation. I highly recommend this book!

~ **Dianna Hobbs**

Award-winning publisher of *EEW Magazine*

Saundra's candid words ring authentic and true because she has lived out every chapter in this masterpiece creation called *Come Empty*. There is one problem with this book: you will have a hard time sticking to the daily reading plan. You will want to devour the book from cover to cover because you know that Saundra's insights hit the deepest longings and aches in your heart. But, she doesn't leave us in our broken places; she helps us to turn to Jesus, the only One who can satisfy our cravings and fill our empty soul. This book is a gift for all of us and I highly endorse it.

~ **Heidi McLaughlin**

International speaker and author of *Sand to Pearls, Making Bold Choices to Enrich your Life* and *Beauty Unleashed: Transforming a Woman's Soul*.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to everyone who has ever suffered silently. Know that when you don't have the words to articulate the deep pain inside, God understands every tear and extends an invitation for you to . . . Come Empty.

Chapter 1

The Problem with Pain

“*S*how me where it hurts.”

For many years I've made this request of my patients, waiting for them to point to the offending body part causing them physical discomfort. But, sometimes the place where it hurts isn't physical. Sometimes the deepest ache lies in the places no one can see, the places you don't dare to acknowledge for fear of arousing what's already scarred and numb. Yet, healing is only possible when you accept the challenge to break down the scar tissue and exchange its limitations for the flexibility of freedom, resulting in freedom from the pain and its power to control your emotions and thoughts.

So today, I ask you, “Show me where it hurts.” Is it the pain of losing a child? Is it the frustration of unanswered prayers? It may be the betrayal of an unfaithful spouse or the shame of being the unfaithful one. Could it be the regret of missed opportunities or overwhelming fear and anxiety about your life and your current

situation? Where is the place of your most pressing pain? What life events have left you with an emotional limp? Which loss has taken the most out of you? Show me where it hurts, so together we can move forward into a time of healing and restoration.

An Invitation

Pain is universal. It crosses gender, race, socio-economic status, and education. Pain does not discriminate. Pain is real and it can be debilitating. In my years of practicing medicine, I've yet to encounter someone who enjoys being in pain. As an Internal Medicine physician, I spend most of my time helping hurting people. However, much of the pain entering my medical practice is not the physical type. But rather, it is the emotional and spiritual kind. It is the type of pain that drains the life out of life and leaves you wondering if it is even worth the effort.

Those who come to me with these feelings are not suicidal or bad people. They do not want to feel this way, but life sometimes throws blows at you that seem to take the air out of your lungs. This can leave you feeling like you are drowning without a life-preserver, or any way to stay afloat on the sea of uncertain times. So, the pain becomes the focus, and alleviating the pain becomes the goal. Food, sex, entertainment, drugs, tobacco, and shopping are just a few of the painkillers you may down, trying to soothe the ache and revive your failing heart. And when these vices fail to succeed, life seems even more futile and empty.

It is here in this place of emptiness that you are given an amazing invitation, an invitation to simply come. Not an invitation to become, nor to seek, but rather to bring your stressed-out, worn-out, tired self to the well, brimming with Living Water. It is an invitation to be renewed, strengthened, guided, restored, and satisfied. It is an invitation to live fully, to come empty and be filled.

*S*outhern Exposure

A few years ago, there was a TV show called *Northern Exposure*. In the show, a young doctor was sent to a remote location in Alaska to treat patients as part of a medical equality program. I relate to that show since my own involvement with the National Health Service Corp took me to a small town in Alabama where, as they say in the south, “the rubber meets the road.” In my case, the rubber of my scientific, medical education met the road of my spirituality and faith.

Faith was the backbone of the community I lived in. Churches decorated every corner of town, and I could see why the South is called the “Bible Belt.” Having grown up in church, I was accustomed to the beliefs but had never imagined my faith and my education would confront each other.

I treated patients daily from all levels of the socio-economic ladder. Teachers, factory workers, radio personalities, and lawyers would come divulge their problems. Some would go as far as bringing a detailed written list of symptoms for me to review. Headaches, back pain, sore muscles, fatigue, dizziness, cloudy thinking, listlessness, nervousness, and restlessness were at the top of the lists. Many were desperate for answers and willing to try anything to find relief. Most had already been on anti-depressants and prescription painkillers, yet failed to find any relief. Many had gone to chiropractors, acupuncturists, or physical therapists, only to get limited results. Almost all had undergone numerous expensive diagnostic evaluations in search of a pivotal diagnosis. They hoped for a definitive treatment, only to be left with huge medical bills from a myriad of negative tests.

Are these people just making this up? I wondered. Are they all just attention-seekers looking for sympathy? Could it just be in their heads? Are they suffering from depression? Is it menopause? Is it some form of dementia, or are they all just crazy?

Like many doctors, my frustration with treating these disorders soon turned to cynicism. It's easy to judge someone with these symptoms until you begin to develop a list of your own. Time passed and word spread around town about my "compassionate but straightforward approach." I found myself quickly bombarded with a population of predominately unhappy patients, many afflicted with chronic pain, chronic fatigue, insomnia, anxiety, and depression.

Day-in and day-out, I was confronted with hurting and diseased people in need of a smile, a kind word, some attention, and treatment. No matter how much I poured into the life of one person, it did not help the patient in the next room. So, I poured out more smiles and more kind words, trying to create quality doctor-patient bonds. Eventually, I found myself depleted of reserves. "I've poured it all out in the last exam room," I told my husband one day, "I have nothing left to offer you tonight."

The **Crisis of Chaos**

You may know the feeling. You wake up and dread the thought of getting out of bed. You find no joy in life and see no point to it. Life becomes one meaningless circle of events where you seem to start and finish at the same point. No victory. No contentment. Life becomes a never-ending race around the

same obstacle course. What you once thought of as a career is now merely a job. The child who was once a blessed hope is now your daily trial. There is a heavy weight that seems to have attached itself to you like a leech, threatening to drain you of the blood needed to make it through just one more day.

As time goes on, you begin to have feelings of dread. You anxiously lie in bed, tormented by the events of the day. Sleep evades you like a wayward child. As you reach out to obtain it, it withdraws further away. Pride, moral guilt, and self-preservation cause you to attempt to control these emotions, leaving you with more stress. As you put on a façade of happiness for those around you, you feel like the valve of a pressure cooker, ready to erupt at any moment with the slightest change in emotional temperature. Each day, you go home to your family mentally, physically, and emotionally empty and finding nothing left to offer those you love, except the fragments of what was once a better you.

After years of being a support and guide to a neglected portion of the medical population, I found myself lacking. In many ways, I was worse than the ones who I was sent to assist. I no longer felt I had value or worth, and I carried myself in that manner. I took as little time and pride in my appearance as possible. I mean, what's the point in getting all made up just to exist? I ate whatever I wanted, as much as I wanted, as often as I wanted. Eventually, my 5'2" frame carried 209 pounds. I didn't care about anything. A mundane place of emotional, physical, and spiritual dryness took root.

Every Sunday and Wednesday, I attended church and sang in the choir. I attended Sunday school and led a Bible study in my home. All the while, I was dying on the inside and completely devoid of peace and joy. I knew enough about faith to know I was lacking in some areas, but had no idea how to rectify this. I was doing all I knew to do, with no results.

Days turned to months and months to years as I silently suffered from this condition. Some would have called it depression. Some would have called it chronic fatigue. Some would have classified my chronic neck and back pain as fibromyalgia. Because my pride would not let me go to another physician for treatment, I found myself consulting the Great Physician for answers. Like the Pharisees, I consulted God, not as a servant, but as an equal. *Why is this happening to me? I'm a follower of Jesus Christ, so where is the victory I'm promised? I tithe a tenth of my salary, so why am I not reaping the benefits in Your Word? I have cast my cares upon You, so why do I feel so heavy laden? God, are You there? Do You see how I am suffering? Do You even care?*

In a desperate attempt to hear from God, I found myself going to conference after conference, seeking a word, a sign, anything to help me make it through my life. During the intermission at one conference, my husband and I went to a local restaurant for lunch. A table with five women fellowshiping together caught my eye. These women had a look I'd never seen before. Each possessed a tangible glow of vitality that superseded any medical description I could term. I'm not saying they were all beautiful in a conventional way, but they all had a level of beauty that

was supernatural—a genuine contentment that was outwardly evident.

I found myself staring at these women. Toward the end of our meal, I noticed one of them looking in my direction. I quickly averted my eyes and thought to myself, “*Oh goodness, she saw me staring and probably thinks I'm crazy.*” To make matters worse, she walked directly to our table. I was quickly trying to think up some way to explain why I was staring at them, but before I could open my mouth, she began to pray over my husband and I.

By some miracle, that woman sensed we would be receptive to her prayer. In prayer, she addressed issues specific to our current situation. You've heard the term, “*she read my mail.*” Before we could comment, she turned to me and said, “God has seen your tears and heard your cries, and He does care.” She smiled, shook our hands, and returned to the table with her companions. My husband and I sat in silence as we absorbed her poignant words. Returning to the conference, I sensed a tangible change in my personal spiritual atmosphere. I contemplated her words and the experience, finding myself drawn to the story of another troubled woman meeting a stranger who had been “*reading her mail.*”

The Woman at the Well

A Samaritan woman was drawing water from a well in her hometown when a Jewish man approached. Since Jews usually did not speak to Samaritans, she was surprised when the man asked her to draw water for Him. The man told her that if she knew who He was, she would ask Him for living water. But the woman was confused. The Jewish man didn't have a bucket, so how would He draw water?

She asked the man, "If you are greater than Jacob, who dug the well?"

The man told the woman her well water would quench her thirst for a while, but He had water that would quench her thirst forever! The woman liked that. She wouldn't have to carry water every day. She asked how she could get this water. The man told her to bring her husband to see Him. When she replied, "I have no husband," He said, "That's right. You've been married before, but you are not now."

When the woman realized this man knew all about her life, she thought He was a prophet, and asked a common religious question about where to worship. The man, whose name was Jesus, replied, "We must worship in spirit and in truth; that's more important than the physical place. We must worship in our heart." (Paraphrased from John 4:1-42)

Like the Samaritan woman, I had found myself looking for a God-connection in a physical place, diligently trying to find the conference that would change my life. I found myself searching for somewhere to recharge my drained spiritual battery, a place

to replenish my depleted cup. During my meditations on this Bible story, one aspect echoed in my mind: “Living Water.” If there was one thing I was, it was thirsty. I was thirsty for peace, thirsty for joy, thirsty for hope, thirsty for relief from chronic pain and the disappointments of life.

Of all the possible diagnoses for my years of listless living, thirst had never come to mind. But, as I paralleled the symptoms of physical thirst with the symptoms I was experiencing within, I noticed numerous similarities. Recognizing you have a problem is only half the battle; actually owning your problem and making the necessary adjustments are where victories lie.

*D*ivine Dehydration

After years of wrong self-diagnosis, I ultimately succumbed to the reality that I was thirsty for more of God in my life. I had actually gone far beyond thirst and had reached a level of dangerous dehydration. A divine dehydration, a dryness of soul and spirit that left me without the energy to be a blessing to anyone, least of all to myself or God. I was in desperate need of intervention.

Medically, when I encounter a patient with dehydration, the course of treatment is easy. I supplement their fluid loss with intravenous (IV) hydration. I place a direct portal into their bloodstream and pour into them the missing elements and water they are lacking.

I needed the Living Water that only Jesus could provide and a direct infusion of His presence in my life. I needed a spiritual IV, and I needed it at a rate that would catapult me back to a

level of total wellness—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Hear Jesus Speak

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. He concluded we must worship Him in our heart. Although I participated externally in a lot of faith-based activities, I failed to internalize my worship. Outwardly, I knew all the right words, phrases, and praise songs. Inwardly, I had no discipline of my daily personal replenishing visits to the well. I was going to all the right places, but failed to go to the One who actually had what I needed. I had neglected to develop a personal, intimate relationship with the Source of my Living Water: Jesus Himself.

I needed to hear Jesus speak to me just as He spoke to the woman at the well. Amazingly, He always had time for me and welcomed my approach into His presence. His invitation was simply to come empty—empty of pretense, empty of self-sufficiency, empty of strength. So, daily I would return with my empty vessel. At first I felt ashamed. I did not want to be needy, but rather needed. I wanted to be self-sufficient. But, with each trip back to the well of His life-giving Word, I left with the understanding He was more than enough. I found when He pours into emptiness, He gives abundantly. So, I continued returning while journaling the words of hope, peace, and joy He supplied, then taking the overflow back to my thirsty patients to watch them drink deeply.

Within the pages of this book, I share some of the hard emotions I took into His presence. Some of these were my

emotions, some were those shared with me by my patients. In each dry place I presented before Him, I could hear Jesus speak. He did not speak audibly, but through the living reality of the Word made flesh. He spoke through the mercy seat of the Old Testament. He spoke through the real life emotions in the Psalms. He spoke through the finished work of the cross. And, He spoke through the visions of Revelations. When Jesus speaks, things happen. Hope is renewed. Purpose is realized. Peace is obtained. Fear is dispelled. Joy is birthed. Healing occurs.

You may be unhappy with your current circumstances: financial burdens, marital strain, family responsibility, and pressures may have left you feeling overwhelmed and in a state of disease. Pain is real, whether it is physical, emotional, or spiritual. The problem with pain is it demands to be relieved. It is here, in this place of seeking relief, that an invitation is presented. It's an invitation to come empty. It is my prayer that you will bring the pain and trials of this life daily into His presence, and let Jesus speak words of healing into every place life has hurt you.

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. Psalm 42:1 NIV

Chapter 2

The 50 Day Jubilee Challenge

*W*hat would happen if, for 50 days, you went deep into the places of your greatest pain? What would occur if, instead of coming with an agenda, a list, or a specific request, you came before God's presence, empty in anticipation of being filled? What would happen if you brought your lingering questions and your unanswered prayers to the One you feel is not replying? What benefits would you find in daily communicating with the Prince of Peace, the Healer, the Deliverer, the Lover of your soul? What miracles would be possible if, for 50 days, you made time to spend just five minutes before God, expecting to receive relief, healing, restoration, redemption, comfort, and freedom from past emotional and spiritual wounds?

The only way to find out is to accept this challenge to walk through the wilderness of your past pain on purpose. If you are reading this book, then I think it's fair to say you have some places where the pain remains. You may have buried it alive, but

it's still there. Pain demands to be relieved, and how you find relief will determine the ultimate outcome. Scarred or healed. Broken or whole. Empty or filled. Jaded or jubilant.

Why Jubilee?

Jubilee in the Old Testament was a time at the end of a forty-nine year cycle when debts were forgiven, property was restored to rightful owners, and those in bondage were set free. In Isaiah 61, a time of the Lord's favor is foreshadowed, and the coming Messiah's Jubilee is made known.

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. **Isaiah 61:1-2 NIV**

In Luke 4, Jesus is led into the wilderness to confront the areas He will be tested and tried by the enemy. Weak, tired, hungry, and empty of human strength, He left the wilderness with the divine strength of the Holy Spirit. He accepted the invitation to enter into the wilderness on purpose and walked out overflowing with the spirit of Jubilee. His words in the synagogue echo those of Isaiah and reveal the promises you can expect to receive during the next 50 days.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. **Luke 4:18-19 NIV**

The Message Bible translations of these passages give additional

insight into the promises of Jubilee. In Luke, the year of the Lord's favor is translated as "the year God will act." The year of the Lord's favor in Isaiah is translated as "the year of His grace." In your pain, know God has a time when He will step in on your behalf to reveal to you His faithfulness. When all your strength seems to be gone, be confident that God's grace is sufficient to sustain you through every obstacle, every disappointment, and every trial. His word is His promise, and it will not return void. Emptiness cannot remain an option in the presence of a loving God, but you alone must make the choice to pursue His presence in the midst of your lingering questions and unanswered prayers. Each promise of Jubilee is worth going through this journey from healing to wholeness.

The Promises of Jubilee

1. Assurance of God's presence in your difficult situations
2. Illuminated vision and perspective on your past emotional blind spots
3. Forgiveness of sins that have held your heart and mind captive
4. Grace to bring your disappointments, fears, and doubts onto holy ground
5. Freedom to fully live in the abundance of God's love

The Challenge

1. For the next 50 days read one devotional each day. They are short and can be completed in five minutes, but I encourage you to set aside extended time in His presence. Your resulting peace and joy are worth the effort.
2. After reading the **Your Heart's Cry** sections of this book,

add your own words in a journal, sharing with Jesus what is on your heart.

3. As you meditate on **His Reply**, spend a few moments simply listening for any additional words of healing He has for you personally.
4. Go deeper with the included scripture reading and reflection questions.
5. Conclude your time with a simple prayer.

There are eighty total days of devotions from which you will choose fifty that speak to your personal situation. Sixty of the devotions are based on uncovering your pain. You can start with the first devotion and move forward in sequence, or you can use the topical index to pinpoint the areas of your deepest pain. The last twenty devotions are based on moving from pain to the fulfilling of the promises of Jubilee. Spend 30-40 days working through your pain and the last 10-20 days transitioning into the fullness of all God has for you. Each person is unique and the time needed to heal is an individual process. Allow God's Spirit to guide you as you proceed through the 50 days.

Will You Accept?

Life is full of invitations to come empty. Every time things don't go as planned. Every time death comes unannounced. Every time disappointment rears its head. Every time illness strikes. Every time money is low. Every time your strength is gone. Every time fear tries to dominate. Every time faith is overshadowed by doubt. The invitations are countless. The question is not if you will get an invitation, but whether or not

you will come. Will you accept life's invitation to come empty and be filled?

I'm not saying the process will be easy. Some pain in our lives can be so deep it becomes a part of who we are, how we view life, and how we interact with others. These deep hurts can seem like an impossible mountain to move. The good news is you don't need to come filled with faith to experience the promises of Jubilee. You can come empty. God's Word declares that even the tiniest seed of faith is enough. Your part is not to do the mountain moving. Your part is to simply come.

I pray during these 50 days you will sense Jesus walking with you through the wilderness of your past pain. I pray He reveals to you the lashes He received for your healing and the wounds He bears, so you don't have to bear them. I pray He will be your cloud by day and pillar of fire by night as you navigate through the hard places in pursuit of His presence. May you experience the Sabbath rest of dwelling in the arms of The Most High and the freedom of being captivated by His love. It takes time to move from the captivity of pain into a new place of liberty in Christ—time which culminates in a season of Jubilee!

*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. **John 8:36 NIV***

Life's Invitations
Relationship With God

Day 1

An Invitation to Come Empty

Your Heart's Cry

I'm stuck, caught someplace between where I've been and where I desire to be. No direction seems clear, and no path looks right. I don't know how to move forward. Yet, here I am, in need, doubting if this, if You, if anything can help me. What can soothe the longing in my heart? What can ease the fears in my mind? What options are there when my situation seems impossible? What point is there to hope when it appears hopeless? Where should I go for help when I've exhausted all my resources?

It is here, when I'm at the end of my rope, that I can finally see the solitary lifeline of Your presence extended to me. It is here the emptiness, the void, the hollowness becomes most keen. How long has it been since I last turned to You in my time of need? When did my heart grow cold to Your call to draw near? Somewhere between the business of daily life and the desire to find my way, I've taken a wrong turn. Nowhere feels comfortable. No place feels like home. The tension pulling on my heart is my constant reminder that I am no longer enjoying the journey of my life. The sleepless nights remind me of my discontentment. The mounting addictions testify to my need to fill the emptiness inside. I'm tired of trying, and I'm done with denying what is obvious: I need help. I need help to move past this wall of apathy. I need help to go beyond the pain of past

disappointments. I need help to get back on track with truly living because currently, everything within me is slowly dying in a state of chronic disease, fatigue, and regret.

Come, let us return to the Lord. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.

Hosea 6:1 NASB

His Reply

Sit and allow the breeze of recognition to settle between us. How I long for those days when you would spend time talking to Me about your needs and desires. Not praying for an answer, but rather revealing your vulnerability and child-like trust in My ability to navigate every area of your life. I miss those moments of togetherness, those moments of connection when I would get an opportunity to speak words of love, joy, peace, and happiness into your life. Is it any wonder why life has become so difficult? What good is it for Me to speak when there is no ear listening?

Today, I am extending to you an invitation to return to Me with an ear to hear and a heart to receive. You who are weary and burdened. Come to Me with the wounds, bruises, and cuts life has inflicted. Come to Me with your worries, illnesses, and problems. Come to Me empty of this life, open to be filled with new life.

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. **Matthew 11:28 NASB**

Scripture Reading: Luke 15

*G*oing Deeper Questions:

1. What did Jesus speak to you through the story of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son in Luke 15? Which of these parables do you most relate to and why?
2. Do you accept His invitation to come empty daily? How does being invited make you feel? What does it say about His feelings toward you?

Simple Prayer: Here I am God. Meet with me.

Day 2

Barriers to Access

Your Heart's Cry

I feel like my prayers go no further than the thin air escaping from my mouth. Not reaching Heaven, but rather bouncing off an invisible barrier erected to prevent me from experiencing any breakthrough or peace. When did this wall go up, and who commanded its construction? What is the use of trying? Why get my hopes up, only to be let down again? My desire to pray has been lost in the sea of disappointment, deferred hope, and damaged emotions. This wall has not only blocked my prayers, but it has blocked my passion to pursue You. Like water dripping upon a flame, each unanswered prayer kills something inside of me. My heart grows colder with each drop, slowly extinguishing what once was ablaze. I don't know how to pray with faith when my faith appears to only be met with silence.

A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice.

Isaiah 42:3 NASB

His Reply

Access has never been denied you. Your prayers are forever before Me, but prayers grow best in the fertile ground of a surrendered heart. Surrender your heart. Return to Me those areas of your faith that have been torn down. Return to Me those areas of your heart that have been battered by past hurts.

Return to Me those areas of your hope that have been stricken by unbelief. Return to Me all that separates you from Me. Allow Me to daily remove each bandage as I bring to light the truth of My love. Allow Me to heal each area that needs mending. Allow My presence to come to you like a heavy rain, not to put out a flame, but to clean away all pain. Let it cover and saturate every area of your life. As the rain pours over all in its path, so shall My love pour over you. My rain of love will water the dry areas of your life and revive all that appears to have withered and died. If you will devote this daily time with Me, I will not disappoint you. My love will not fail you.

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer. 1 Peter 3:12 NIV

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 4:4-11

*G*oing Deeper Questions:

1. What unanswered prayers have left the deepest wounds? How have the bandages around these wounds entombed your passionate pursuit of the only One able to truly heal?
2. How did the life of Jesus open the door for you to come boldly before God? What prevents you from daily walking through the open door of access you have available to you?

Simple Prayer: Open my eyes to see the door back to fully loving You, God.

Day 3

Power in Presence

Your Heart's Cry

Standing in the middle of my ordeal, I feel utterly alone. Even when I look for You, I do not see You. I do not feel You. Alienated within the confines of my thoughts and emotions, buried under the debris of my anxiety, lies the part of me that once believed all things work together for my good. Now, I do not have the faith to believe this situation will end in anything other than more pain. Pain is my steady companion. Pain has become the presence walking with me daily, overshadowing all hope and mocking any attempts at joy. My tears have paved a trail in my heart for every time disappointment has visited with me. Where are You God when I need You? My heart aches from the loneliness I feel inside. If You are here, why can't I feel You near?

You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalms 16: 11 NASB

His Reply

Just because you cannot feel Me does not mean I am not there. Where can you go from My Spirit? Or, where can you flee from My presence? Presence is the state of being within your immediate vicinity. I am wherever you are. I am always available to you, but you are not always conscious of Me. With open arms, I welcome you to experience My presence. Listen for the sound of Me walking through the garden of your day. Do

not be afraid, and do not hide yourself from Me. I am near to all those who call upon Me. When you cannot feel Me, call to Me. I have not turned a deaf ear to you. I am a present help in your times of need. Do not wait until you feel Me to ask for My assistance. I am always ready to come to your aid. My presence may not change your situation, but it will always change you. If you want to experience more of My presence, enter in with praise. Not praise for the situation you are in, but praising the outcome you anticipate I am able to bring. Praise is the gateway to My presence that nothing and no one can close. Enter in as often as you desire. May My presence become as real to you today as the air you need to survive.

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. Psalm 145:18 NKJV

Scripture Reading: Psalm 139: 1-17

*G*oing Deeper Questions:

1. In what life situations have you felt alone? What painful emotional scars has that sense of abandonment left? Has the situation and your perceived abandonment affected your ability to trust God? Why or why not?
2. What does Psalm 139 reveal about God's feelings towards you as an individual? Since God is always accessible, what do you feel has blunted your awareness of Him? What blankets of comfort have you been cocooned inside of?

Simple Prayer: Surround me with Your presence. Let me feel You drawing near to me, God.

Day 4

Purpose of the Void

Your Heart's Cry

I feel empty on the inside. It's an emptiness that goes deeper than hunger and is more consuming than thirst, leaving widespread desolation in its wake. Famine of spirit, darkness of soul, cloudiness of vision, and nonexistent peace remind me of the void inside. The more I try to fill this void, the deeper the hole and the wider the gap between my current state and my desired contentment. What will fill the space? Comfort foods have provided an external cushion to the pain, but ultimately they fail to comfort. The passionate embrace of another has provided momentary satisfaction, but cannot restore my value or self-worth. Many substances help dull my awareness of the empty space inside, but none have poured in anything of substance. Each has only served to take more out of me. When all my vices have been spent and all my tokens have been played, will there be anything left of me to give, or will the shell that is left only be a hollow reminder of the person I could have been?

You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. Psalm 63:1 NIV

His Reply

Emptiness is not a hindrance to Me, but an opportunity. In the middle of the void lies capacity. The purpose of the void

is to remind you of the untapped capacity within you. I am the Master Potter, and I alone know your full capacity. You were made to be filled to overflowing. Allow Me to reveal to you your capacity to retain all I desire to share with you. Do not withdraw from the emptiness; it is only an invitation to come away with Me and learn what is available to you.

You can try to fill the void with all this life has to offer, but it will only leave you still wanting. I am the only One who can pour into this place of need. In Me is the fullness of all that is good and right, and I extend my portion to you. I allowed Myself to be poured out as a sacrificial offering so you never have to feel empty. Make room in your day for Me. Draw near to Me, and I will draw near to you. Identify the cause of your emptiness, and then open yourself to be filled by Me. It is My desire to not only dwell among you, but to also dwell within you. It is My desire to overflow your empty places with the realization of My completeness.

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. **John 10:10 NASB***

Scripture Reading: John 4:1-14

*G*oing Deeper Questions:

1. What have you used in the past to try to fill the void and emptiness on the inside that only God can fill? How did these substitutes work for you? Were they helpful or not in helping you reach a place of fullness, peace, and contentment?

2. Water is vital to life and health. Prolonged periods without it leads to certain death, causing many people in third world countries to walk for miles for this life-sustaining commodity. In John 4, what does Jesus say about water? How would drinking from His cup daily satisfy your thirst and fill the void? How far are you willing to go every day to get the drink you need to survive?

Simple Prayer: I need You today, God, more than anything or anyone else. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit.

Day 5

Return to the Place

Your Heart's Cry

Where were You when I needed You? If You had been here, this never would have happened. If You were who You say You were, I wouldn't be going through this right now. How will I ever be able to trust You again? Where is the victory in this situation? I don't see how anything good can come from something so bad. If the Bible is true and all of Your promises within it are mine, why are they not active in my life? Why am I not seeing Your goodness in my situations? Why am I being excluded from Your table of blessings? What did I do to turn You away from me? Why did You leave me in my time of greatest need?

How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God. Psalm 13: 1-3NKJV

His Reply

I am here now, and I was there then. I am the beginning and the end of all that concerns you. Nothing can separate Me from you, but everything tries to separate you from Me. I am standing in the place of your every need. I am your refuge and your portion. When difficulty comes, seek Me by faith. Trust that I am for you, and not against you. Believe that I will never leave or forsake you. When all seems lost, I know the way you should go. I know the path of healing and restoration. My thoughts surpass the

limitations of your understanding. I have made My home in your heart, and it is My desire to abide with you in this secret place. When you need Me, you will find Me in the place that belongs to you and Me alone. Go back to the place of your perceived abandonment. I was there. Stop looking for Me in the middle of the pain, and start looking for Me above the loss and disappointment. I am your covering. I am your shelter. I stand above every situation. I have never abandoned you, and I never will.

Every word of God is pure: he is a shield to those that put their trust in him. Proverbs 30:5 NKJV

Scripture Reading: John 11:17-44

*G*oing Deeper Questions:

1. In the story of Lazarus, Mary and Martha were disappointed Jesus had not come quickly to their aid. When in your life have you had an urgent need and it seemed as if no help was available? How did this time affect your relationship with God?
2. Psalm 13 shows that even King David had moments when he felt God had abandoned him. Where or in what life situation did your ability to trust God suffer the biggest blow? Where have you laid down your hope? Return to that place in your heart and your mind today. Open the door, and if the rock of pain covering that place is too heavy for you to lift, ask Him to roll away the stone for you.

Simple Prayer: Set my heart, mind, soul, and spirit free to trust You completely, Lord.

Day 6

Guilty as Charged

Your Heart's Cry

The sins of my past lay before me like flower petals scattered along the aisle, awaiting the soft steps of the coming bride. My shame is apparent for all to see. There is no use denying who I've been and all I've done. There is no point to acting as if it never happened. It occurred, and I was a willing participant. I chose the path I would take. I picked the companions I would travel with. I followed the counsel of those who I believed would help me reach my desired destination. Somewhere along the journey, the dim view of my purpose became a black hole, and I sank deeper into the prison of my guilt. Somewhere along the way, I lost my way. Instead of looking for a way out, I settled for a place called apathy. Tethered to the shame, I bear the weight of my past, daily laboring under the pressure of a debt I cannot pay.

My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.

Psalm 38:4 NIV

His Reply

I have never asked you to carry this baggage. You claimed it on your own, but you do not have to keep it. Lay it down. I stand with extended hands, offering you a divine exchange. Will you release what is in your hand to receive what is in Mine? I am your gift of forgiveness. I am your righteousness. Lay down the

weight of guilt, and pick up the gift of My redemption. Open up a door of faith to allow My mercy to rule in places where guilt once resided. Make room in your life for My unmerited favor.

Nail your guilt to the cross right now, in this moment. Receive My finished work for what it is. Every sin you've ever committed is erased. Condemnation has been replaced by acceptance. I have broken the power of guilt in your life. You are released, free to move with a lightness that testifies to your liberty. You have been freed through the power of My grace.

In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free. Psalm 118:5 NIV

Scripture Reading: John 8:1-11

Going Deeper Questions:

1. In Mark 2:17, Jesus compares the forgiveness of sin to the healing of disease. "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." In what ways has the guilt of your past sins brought disease into your life?
2. Right now, write down every sin that immediately comes to your mind you are guilty of committing, either in your past or presently. Is there a common theme among these sins? Do they primarily deal with a need to feel loved, are they centered around issues with trust, or can you see a pattern of fearful thinking arising? See Jesus drawing a line in the sand.

On one side stands every sin on your list; on the other side, Jesus stands shielding you. Your accusers no longer have the power to hurt you. You are covered. You are redeemed. You are free from the bondage of your past.

Simple Prayer: Lord, reveal to me the wonder of living in Your liberty.