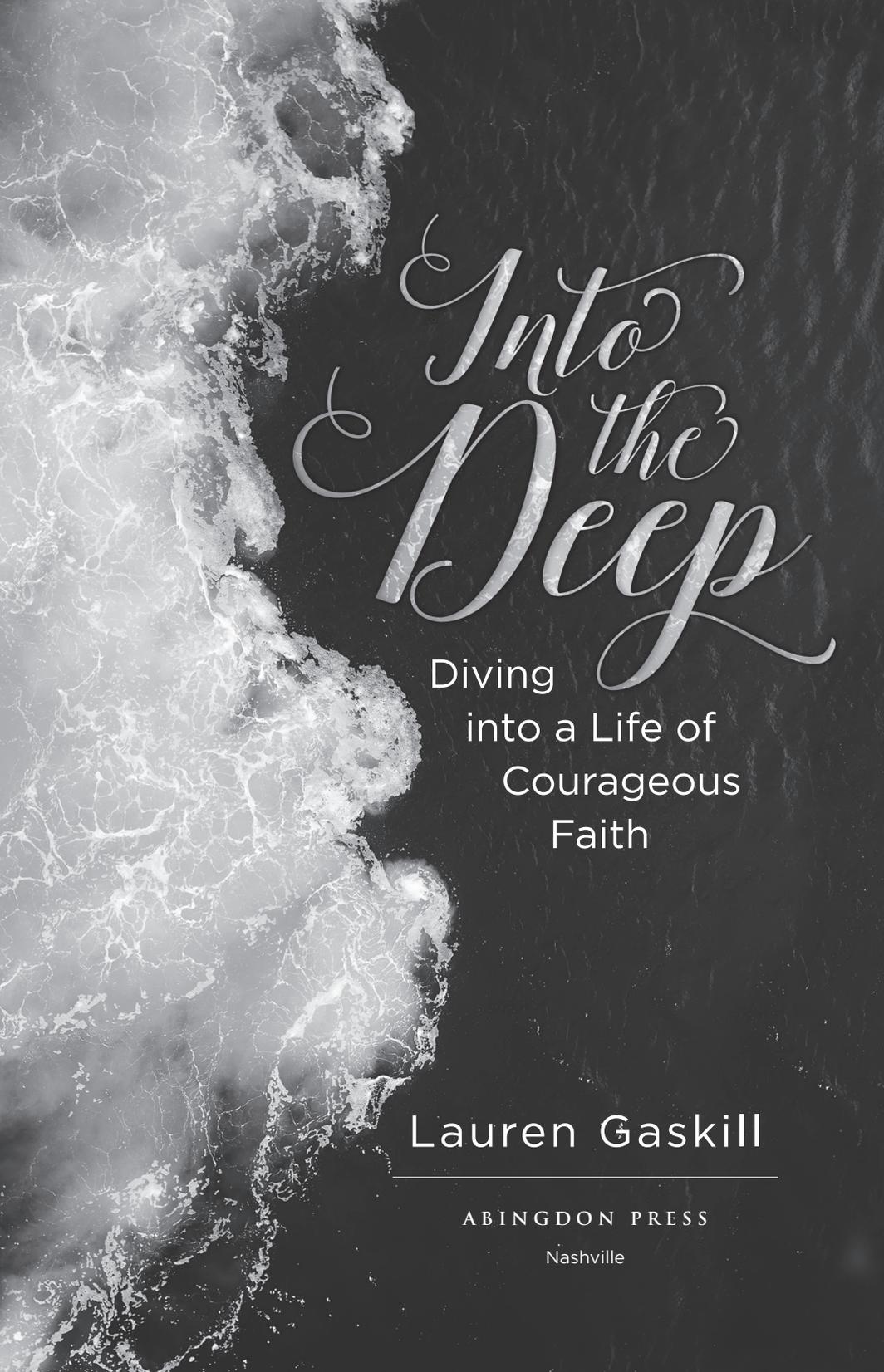


*Into
the
Deep*

Diving
Into a Life of
Courageous
Faith

Lauren Gaskill



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ABINGDON PRESS

Nashville

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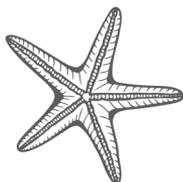
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Introduction

Take the Leap

Jump! Jump!”

I stood at the edge of the pier, unsure of what my next move should be. Behind me, my sister- and mother-in-law continued their playful encouragement.

“Jump!” they exclaimed.

Part of me really wanted to. But one look at the seven-foot waves made me want to run back to the safety of the sandy shore.

The warm saltwater air beckoned me to dive into the cool blue ocean below, but fear arrested me to a motionless standstill as it taunted me with thoughts such as *You don't know what sharks might be out there; You can't even see the bottom; What if you land on something and hurt yourself?*

I closed my eyes and flashed back to the previous Christmas when our family had gone boating in the Bahamas. At one point during the tour, our guide invited everyone to jump into the open ocean. One by one, each family member cannonballed into the deep blue waters, but I stayed on the boat because I was afraid there might be sharks or I might get too cold.

INTRODUCTION

Fear. From exciting adventures to everyday experiences, fear is a reality we all face. Our world is brimming with it. Headlines, social media statuses, and even some Sunday morning sermons are laced with twinges of it. We're afraid of nuclear warfare, unfair treatment, financial ruin, disease, and mass shootings. We're afraid God might not come through for us or even may have forgotten about us. We're afraid we don't have what it takes to make it through the tempests that rage around us. *Why are we so afraid?*

Standing on the edge of the wooden pier, I opened my eyes and saw that the waves were still crashing beneath my feet. But this time I decided that, despite my fear, it was worth taking the leap. Others had jumped before me, and I knew how to swim. I just had to have a little faith.

I breathed in the saltwater air slowly, letting it flood my senses and fill me with a calm, steady assurance. Sometimes we need to be reminded that the faith and peace we seek is within our midst if we would just breathe it in.

I asked my husband to count for me, and one, two, three, there I went, arms and legs stretched out wide into a star shape before plunging full force into the big ol' blue. The water felt cool and refreshing, and because I've been a swimmer for most of my life, I knew I didn't have to fear the waves. I knew how to stay afloat. I surfaced—a smile on my face and adrenaline in my veins.

A quiet laugh escaped through my lips, and I wondered why I'd been so afraid—why I'd let fear hold me back for so long.

I smiled again, knowing nothing was going to hold me back anymore.

This is what faith and freedom in Christ feel like.

Faith is not the absence of fear but the presence of courage. Faith says, "OK, fear, I know you're there. I see your big, mean, and intimidating self, but I'm not going to let you win. You're defeated in Jesus's name, and you cannot keep me from living the life I've been called to."

Beloved, you were not meant to live a life crippled by fear. You were

made to experience deep faith, joy, and freedom in Christ. This is what our good, good Father so desperately wants for you. It's what God has spent the last ten years helping me find, and it's what I want to help you find too. I've learned that the way to find it is to dive into a life of courageous faith that helps us overcome every high and stormy gale as we commit to swim through life with Jesus. And that kind of faith is birthed in the deep waters of life—in the trials and the testings. This is where we have the opportunity to sink into despair or put our faith into action.

As we begin this journey together, there are a few things you need to know. First, the book is divided into two parts: Out of the Undertow and Swimming with Jesus. Think of each section as a progression in the faith journey. Before we can swim with Jesus and go deeper in our faith, we first have to break any chains that are binding us and keeping us trapped in the undertow. Then once we've learned to reach out in faith for the saving hand of Jesus, we are ready to become a true warrior of the deep: a strong, courageous, victorious conqueror and overcomer of the waves of this life.

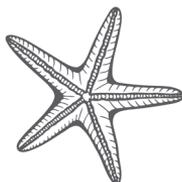
Second, at the end of each chapter you will find questions for personal reflection or small-group study. You are free to write your answers in the book or in a separate journal—whatever works best for you. Finally, each chapter ends with a prayer prompt, which you can modify however the Spirit leads.

Beloved child of God, with faith and Jesus there is nothing you can't face and overcome. It's time to take the leap into the deep. It's time to dive headfirst into the unknown and embrace a courageous faith and relentless hope in the Lifeguard who is never off duty. This is where the real adventure begins.

We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

PART ONE

Out of the Undertow



CHAPTER ONE

Help Me, I'm Drowning

*Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.*

—Psalm 42:7

The clock digits rolled to 2:00 a.m., and I groaned, scolding myself as I tossed and turned in bed for the hundredth time.

You have nothing to worry about, and you're being ridiculous. Just calm down and go to sleep, I whispered to myself as I felt the waves of another anxiety attack creep up inside me. Sleep is a luxury for college students, and at this point I'd be lucky to have a few hours of rest. Every minute counted too, because I had a psychology exam at 8:00 a.m. But knowing this didn't stop my mind from racing, my throat from closing, my heart from palpitating, and my stomach from churning.

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I clutched my comforter tightly and prayed for deliverance, but nothing changed. Instead I sank deeper into anxiety with each word I prayed. I wanted to jump out of my dorm room window and run until my lungs gave out. I wanted to scream until the anxiety drained out of my veins. I wanted to feel anything other than the sheer panic and helplessness overtaking my mind.

Minute after minute rolled by, and with no relief in sight I desperately reached for my phone and texted a friend from my Bible study group.

“Help! Please pray for me,” I typed. “Feeling lost, alone, and overwhelmed amid another anxiety attack. I don’t know what to do. I’m so afraid.”

A few minutes later my phone lit up with a reply.

“My dearest Lauren, trust me when I say everything is going to be OK! God is with you, and He wants to use this for your good. Have faith! Trust Him and hold on to hope! He will see you through, and with His help you will overcome the waves. Always remember you are a daughter of the Most High King. You are priceless and beautiful in His eyes, and in Him you have nothing to fear.”

As true as her text may have been, it didn’t make me feel any better about myself or my situation. At this point in my life, I’d been struggling with anxiety attacks on and off for two years since my junior year of high school when I began having some health issues. To the outside world, I was an accomplished student and swimmer who had it all together, but on the inside I felt like I was drowning—lost in a sea of anxiety, depression, and unexplained chronic pain that was tearing my faith to shreds.

Week after week, I listened to pastors talk about a God who delivers us from our problems, but hearing their words only made me more frustrated and confused. I wondered: *If God loves me, then why isn’t He rescuing me? If God is good, then why do I feel like I’m drowning in a sea of despair?*

Somehow I had missed the explanation of how a life with Christ

doesn't always mean crystal clear waters or sunny blue skies; how God is not distant but swims with us through the deep waters of life; how God not only sends help in these situations—He is our help, despite what we might feel or think.

When my life didn't turn around and my health worsened, I began to doubt God's goodness. But worse than that, I lost faith in God's ability to save me. I tried to soothe the ache growing inside me by reading and studying the Bible, but none of it felt real. The stories seemed like a distant fairy tale—something only for people who had it all together and not for someone as messed up as me.

It was a slow process, but somewhere along the way anxiety and depression greatly diminished my faith. I stopped believing things would get better. I stopped believing God had a plan or cared about my future. I watched the world change and move on without me, and with each passing month the “water” in my lungs rose a little higher.

I was drowning.

By God's grace, after graduating from college I finally started looking for a Christian counselor. At the time, the cause of all my physical symptoms was still unknown. I didn't know that I had an overarching condition that caused chronic pain and put me at a predisposed risk to anxiety and depression. I didn't know that there were medications and natural remedies that could help me manage my health and start to heal spiritually. The only thing I knew was that I couldn't keep living the way I was living.

Within a few days of my counselor search, I found myself sitting in one of those infamous leather chairs. You know, the chairs all therapists have in the movies and on TV. The ones that make you feel comfortable and uncomfortable all at the same time. You're comfortable because the leather is super plush and buttery, but you're also uncomfortable because you realize you're about to pour your heart out to a complete stranger.

I grabbed a mint from the bowl on the table and took a long, deep

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breath as the counselor and I discussed how anxiety and depression were negatively impacting me. Our conversation felt like the very unraveling of me, but the outcome of it was a turning point in my life that helped me begin to understand how I might learn to overcome the waves pulling me under, threatening to take me out.

“Tell me, Lauren. What do you know about God?” the counselor asked as he sat back in his chair and clasped his hands, waiting for my reply.

Silence washed over the room, and I sat speechless, frozen in place. As I contemplated my answer, I hugged my knees into my chest and curled even further into the brown leather chair, trying to find the words to describe what I knew about God.

“I know He loves me,” I began. “And He sent his Son to die for me.”

“That’s right . . .,” he replied. “Anything else? Or, how about this question: What do you believe about God? I know you know Jesus died for you, but do you believe what the Bible says—that He truly loves you and fights for you, that He will never leave you nor forsake you, that He can make you strong and courageous, that you are no longer dead to sin but alive in Christ, that the same power that raised Jesus from the grave lives in you? Because if you can find a way to truly believe that . . . that kind of faith changes everything.”

“Honestly? I don’t know what to believe anymore. If God is good and worthy of my trust, why hasn’t He saved me already?” I said finally, breaking into tears as the words left my lips. “All I know is that I feel like I am drowning, and most days I want to give up the fight. I’m scared, and I don’t know what to do.”

The counselor brought his hand up to cover his mouth as he glanced at the floor, contemplating the right words to say. And just when I felt like all hope was lost, he looked up and said, “Take courage, Lauren. God isn’t causing the problems you are experiencing, but I believe that in His grace, He is using them to teach you something. Maybe this is your chance to

reach out to Jesus and learn how to swim. Maybe it's time you embrace the waves and trade your despair for a faith that can help you overcome."

His solution did not make complete sense to me. After all, how does one go about trading doubt and despair for courage and faith? But despite my hesitation, I was willing to give the whole faith thing another try—anything to be rescued.

What Kind of Swimmer Are You?

When you're a competitive swimmer and your parents tell you it's time to apply for your first job, the logical, easy choice is to become a lifeguard or swim teacher, which is exactly what I did. Since my first lifeguarding job at Concord High School, I've had the pleasure of teaching children and adults how to swim on and off for more than eight years in four different states. Through this experience I've observed that there are three kinds of swimmers: swimmers who refuse to learn, swimmers who hesitantly learn, and swimmers who eagerly learn.

Three years into my teaching career, a couple in their sixties reached out to me for help in learning to swim. Up to that point I'd never taught anyone beyond the age of fifteen, but I was ready for the challenge.

"We figured since our granddaughter is learning how to swim, we should finally learn too, in case something happens and we need to help her or save ourselves," the wife told me. Though her face was riddled with hesitation in that moment, after the first lesson her reluctance gave way to an eagerness to learn. Four weeks later, she was floating and swimming in the deep end.

Her husband, however, refused to learn, and after the third lesson, I never saw him again. "I'll just stay out of the deep water," he told me. "I've been fine for sixty years, and I'll be fine for another thirty." I don't know if he will ever unintentionally find himself in deep water, but if he does, I fear

what the outcome will be. Without the practice needed to build endurance and put skills into action, he won't stand a chance unless a lifeguard is present and paying attention.

Learning how to swim is a lot like learning how to exercise faith. We have to want to try. We have to pursue a solution. We have to commit to practice skills and work toward building endurance. Similarly, when it comes to exercising faith in the deep waters of life, there are three kinds of people: (1) people who refuse to exercise faith, (2) people who hesitantly exercise faith, and (3) people who eagerly exercise faith.

Can you see yourself in one of these groups today? I have fallen into all three categories at one point or another in my life. Let's consider each one briefly.

1. People Who Refuse to Exercise Faith

When my struggles began in high school, there were moments I refused to believe in the basic affirmations of the Christian faith. I rolled my eyes at Christians who told me to "just have faith." When I found myself drowning in despair, I picked up my Bible—not to read it but to throw it against the wall. I even stopped showing up for youth group and started isolating myself from my friends. When anxiety attacks kept me from sleeping, killing both my personality and my morning appetite, my mom lovingly tried to encourage me with prayer and a plate of peanut butter toast.

"I'm not hungry, and praying isn't going to change anything," I would tell her.

"Sweetheart, you need to eat," she'd say. "And you need to remember Jesus is with you. You don't have to be afraid of this."

I wouldn't say a word. I'd just take a bite of toast and think to myself: *Is He with me? Because I don't see Him doing anything here to save me. I'm drowning, and He doesn't even care.* What I didn't understand in those

pre-college days was that I didn't see Him because I wasn't even looking for Him in the first place.

Instead of pursuing God, I obsessed over my problems. I didn't believe God was going to save me from the physical pain or anxiety I was experiencing, so I gave in to the waves of despair that swept over me, letting my arms go limp as I was sucked into the undertow. In these moments of swirling beneath the surface, the only thing I believed in was that I was destined to sink. So in a way, I guess you could say that I did have faith. But my faith wasn't in God; it was in my certainty of drowning.

If you're in a place where you believe that you're too far gone or that faith isn't worth the fight, hang on to this truth: the fact that you're reading this book is a sign that hope is still alive in you. Now ask yourself: *What would happen if I stopped refusing to have faith in God and started refusing to let myself drown? What if I embraced the waves, reached out to Jesus, and learned how to swim with Him? What if I traded my despair for a courageous faith that can help me thrive in the deep waters of life?* In this book we will explore together how to do just that.

2. *People Who Hesitantly Exercise Faith*

Sometimes we do not *refuse* to believe but we *hesitate* to believe. To hesitate is to pause, ponder, doubt, sit on the fence, think about, or see-saw and waffle (unfortunately, not the chocolate chip kind). This is where I found myself as I sat in that leather chair in the counselor's office.

Let me be clear: I should have drowned. When the waves became too powerful for me to face them alone, I gave up on faith. I can honestly say it's only by God's grace that I'm alive today. In fact, I believe one of the reasons He reached down and saved me was so I could share this message of hope with you.

The turning point came after hitting rock bottom in my college dorm

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room. In my weakest, most downcast state, I was afraid and hesitant, but I also allowed myself to ask the question: *What if?*

What if God could rescue me? What if I could learn to overcome the waves and swim in the deep with God? What if there was more to life than my pain and suffering? What if faith was everything Jesus professed it to be? What if the Bible's promises were true?

Asking these questions threw me into a big mental struggle, but here's what all of the wrestling taught me: Struggling is a good thing, because at the very least it means we are trying. It means we aren't giving in to the waves or refusing the possibility of a rescue. It means hope is alive within us. In the words of the band Tenth Avenue North, "Hallelujah, we are free to struggle. We're not struggling to be free."¹ God's love and Jesus's sacrifice have already set us free, providing a rescue for our weary souls. We just have to be willing to die to our doubt and cling to the faith and freedom we received when we first believed in Christ. This can be a struggle in and of itself, but holding on to faith and pushing back the doubt is worth it.

I wish I could tell you I am always eager to have faith. But after finally being diagnosed with Hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (hEDS) in 2015—which we now know to be the root of my chronic pain, anxiety, and depression—I'd be lying if I said I don't have days when I doubt or am hesitant to believe something. If that's you today, know that you're not alone and that feeling this way is completely normal and part of the journey! Just because we have hesitations doesn't mean we don't have faith. God doesn't love you any more or less if you're hesitant to trust Him one day and eager to trust Him the next.

The beauty of diving into faith, no matter how much or how little we have, is that when we reach out to Jesus, He is able to love us back to life. And in the flood of His great love, He longs to help us overcome any doubts we may have about who He is and what this life is all about.

As our Lifeguard who watches over and swims with us in the deep,

God gives us courage and helps us keep swimming when we feel like we can't take another stroke. We see this in Mark 9:22-24, when Jesus encounters an unbelieving man whose son is really struggling. Having no one else to turn to, the father asks Jesus to remedy the situation, even though his faith is lacking. "If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" Jesus said to him, "[You say to Me,] 'If You can?'" All things are possible for the one who believes *and* trusts [in Me]!" Immediately the father of the boy cried out [with a desperate, piercing cry], saying, "I do believe; help [me overcome] my unbelief" (AMP).

Beloved, if your faith is being weakened by doubts and hesitations, God can help you overcome the unbelief you're grappling with. I'm living proof that all we have to do is have the courage to ask God to give us the faith we need to keep seeking Him—for when we seek, we will find the Savior we are looking for (Jeremiah 29:13). It's not an immediate, Band-Aid-type solution, but it's a permanent promise; and if we will lean in to God's process and trust in His timing, we will see great beauty and transformation unfold in our lives as a result of our faith.

We don't need to have all the answers; we just need to have a heart that is willing to reach out for the Lifeguard who can rescue us and teach us to swim in deep waters.

3. People Who Eagerly Exercise Faith

I never thought God would restore my faith and make me an eager believer—someone who courageously embraces the waves and overcomes because of the faith she has found in Christ. But my testimony gives evidence that it can happen to anyone who willingly seeks God.

As I hinted earlier, I've had my fair share of doubtful days, but over time as I asked God to increase my desire for Him, He replaced my hesitancy with an eagerness to pursue and trust Him more. With this desire

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also came a hunger for God's Word. For the first time in my life, I *craved* quiet time and joyfully declared Bible verses over my circumstances. And you know what happened? Yes, the waves were still raging around me, but suddenly I wasn't drowning! It's hard for me to put the experience into words, but when I finally put all my faith in Jesus, saving hope entered my story. The darkness beneath my feet suddenly did not seem so dark, and if I squinted, I could see a tiny light shining through my despair.

Every verse I declared over my life brought new light and hope, and in the dawning of the light my prayers shifted. Instead of praying with desperation or hesitation, I began to pray with boldness.

Lord, thank You for never giving up on me. Thank You for allowing me to fall into the deep, where waves can encourage a deeper faith in You. I'll never understand Your love for me or why You saved me from drowning, but for the first time in my life, I believe that You are with me. I believe that You want to help me and will use this for my good. I believe that You will not let me drown and that You will always rescue me. Jesus, I trust You! And I can't believe I'm saying this, but I think I'm finally ready to embrace these waves with You. Take me deeper into You, Jesus. Increase my faith. Make me strong. Because the deeper I dive into relationship with You, the more courageous I become. This is what I know: With You, I will overcome. Keep holding on to me, Lord. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Prayers like this became my saving grace.



I used to be apathetic about going deeper in my relationship with God. The truth is, when life was all rainbows, butterflies, unicorns, and cupcakes, I was perfectly content practicing a superficial faith and hanging out in the shallows.

Life is easier when it only requires a shallow-end faith. We don't have

to learn how to swim because we can feel and see our feet planted firmly on the ground. We don't have to rely on Jesus and His Word to carry us through the waves because they are smaller in the shallows—barely a ripple. We can just hang out in a doughnut floaty while we sip iced lattes and soak up the sun, completely undisturbed.

But someday, whether by choice or by force, the wind will pick up and sweep us off our feet into deeper waters where the waves have the potential to take us out. Jesus promises us in John 16:33 (NLT), “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows.” But God's Word also tells us He's not going to let us drown in those trials, because He will never fail or abandon us (Deuteronomy 31:6 NLT).

When we reach this threshold in life—the breaking point between the shallow end and uncharted, deeper waters—we have two options. We can sink deep into despair, or we can answer God's invitation to dive into faith, where we learn to rely on Him to help us overcome the waves.

The Choice We All Have to Make

You know how you can acknowledge something as truth your entire life but never really believe it for yourself? That was me when it came to pursuing God, exercising faith, and believing in the power and validity of God's Word. I was raised in the church and memorized my share of Bible verses. I knew Jesus loved me and died for my sins. And yet as a young adult, the reality of what it meant for my life never hit home. When I looked at the world, God's truth seemed true for the lucky ones and a pipe dream for the rest of us. I never really understood that Jesus didn't “come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

I touched on this earlier, but I want to say it again: There is a difference between knowing and believing God, and believing changes everything. But we have to want to believe; we have to want to be rescued. Which begs

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the question, do you want to be rescued? Do you want to go beyond simply knowing God to trusting Him with every fiber of your being? Do you want to exchange double-minded thoughts for a faithful, steadfast mind?

In John 5 we meet a man who, despite his hopelessness, desperately wanted to be rescued. After living as a paralytic for thirty-eight years, he had no hope of being healed. But that was before he met Jesus.

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.”

(John 5:6-9)

What’s interesting about this story is that the man didn’t even know who Jesus was when He healed him. It’s not until verse 14 that we read he learned who Jesus was and went to tell the Jewish leaders about the miraculous healing. Because of this, we know the man was healed not because of his knowledge of Jesus but because of his faith in Jesus. The Savior told him to pick up his mat and walk, and that’s exactly what he did. He could have sat there and complained more about his situation or told Jesus that he was crazy, but he didn’t. He believed Jesus’s word over his life and put faith into action by following His instructions. So while the man’s first steps of faith may have been small, God honored them and rescued him from the hopelessness of his situation. When we put our faith in Jesus, He is faithful to do the same for us.

Shortly after my initial appointment with the counselor, I took the first step of faith I’d taken in a long time. I asked God to help me see and believe the Bible for what it truly is—much more than words on a page.

As Hebrews 4:12 (NLT) puts it, “The Word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow.”

As I worked my way through the New Testament, I began highlighting some of my favorite “faith verses”; and when I came to Romans 10:17 (NASB), the words stopped me dead in my tracks: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

The conviction I felt after reading this verse was palpable, and in my soul I knew why I had been stuck in the undertow of despair for so long: somewhere along the way I had stopped reading and believing God’s Word for my life—practices that are necessary to grow in faith. I had settled for a faux, shallow-end faith for the bulk of my childhood, which served me well until the wind and waves swept me off my feet and I discovered that I didn’t know how to exercise faith. I can only imagine how things might have been different for me if I’d chosen to go deeper in my relationship with God *before* the waves came rushing in.

*The waters that you
think might drown you
are the same waters
Jesus wants to use to
deepen your faith.*

We all need a faith that goes beyond knowledge to belief—a faith that trusts in Jesus to rescue us from sinking when we find ourselves in over our heads.

Maybe you can relate to my story. Perhaps you grew up in a Christian home and were taught that Jesus loves you, but you find that difficult to believe now because the world has beaten you down. You’ve been swept off your feet against your will and don’t know what to do. God’s Word seems distant, cold, or useless. Or perhaps you weren’t taught that Jesus loves you, and you’re struggling to make sense of the world. The water is rising over your head, and you’re skeptical or afraid of giving this whole faith thing a

INTO THE DEEP

try. You're afraid of what might happen or what God might ask you to do if you reach out and trust Him.

Wherever you find yourself today, I pray you will hear me when I say that the only way to survive and thrive in this life is to develop a faith that can survive the deep and all of its troubles and uncertainties. And you don't have to be afraid, because you are not alone in this journey. Jesus is with you, and He wants to be your Lifeguard and swim teacher. I'm also here as a friend to swim beside you as we navigate these waters together.

There is saving power in the deep, my friend. And the waters that you think might drown you are the same waters Jesus wants to use to deepen your faith.

Joy is not the absence of problems but rather the presence of a Savior.

This book is a guide for the journey, one that includes my story and the stories of others who struggled in the deep before reaching out for Jesus. It is an invitation to dive head-first into faith, leaving fear behind in exchange for the boldness and courage that come from relying on Christ. My prayer is that through its pages you will learn to swim with God as deep calls to deep (Psalm 42:7), where joy is not the absence of problems but rather the presence of a Savior.

The world may seem like a hopeless place, but hope is right in front of us—right in our midst—if we would just have the eyes to seek and find it.

Beloved, it's time to stop entertaining thoughts of sinking and learn to swim.

GOING DEEPER

1. What do you believe about God? Take out a sheet of paper and write down everything that comes to mind.

2. What has been or is currently the biggest hurdle in your faith journey?
3. Have you ever struggled or are you currently struggling with doubt or unbelief? After reading this chapter, what is God saying to you?
4. What is holding you back from diving deeper into faith today?

PRAYER

Father God, Thank You for being a God who loves deeply. Your love is overwhelming, all-consuming, reckless, and wonderful. Thank You for never giving up on me. I confess I haven't always been serious about my faith, and I am still unsure about so many things, but Father, I need You. I believe You sent Your Son to die on a cross for my sins. I believe Jesus rose again and conquered sin and death so I could be free in You. Lord, help my unbelief. Increase my faith today. I want You to be the air I breathe, the song I sing, the reason I live, and the One who helps me keep swimming no matter what. Be my everything, Jesus. In Your holy, precious name. Amen.

When to Seek Professional Help

Everyone feels down in the dumps, stressed, or anxious from time to time, but if your depressed or anxious mood lasts for more than two weeks and is affecting your quality of life (relationships, career, thought life), it might be a good idea to consult a mental health professional. If you are contemplating suicide, you should seek immediate help. Do not pass GO. Do not collect \$200. Seek help. It might just save your life.

Something to keep in mind: Traditional medicine works for some but can actually maximize symptoms for others. I have friends who swear by antidepressants and do well with them. In my own experience a particular medication put me in danger. The best thing you can do is talk to your doctor about treatment options and keep an open, positive mind while you try to figure out what works best for *you*.

Today I take a combination of natural remedies to keep my symptoms at bay. The best advice I can offer on this matter is to be patient as you work with your medical and/or mental health professional and pray for the Lord to guide you down the treatment path He wants you to take. Whatever remedy God provides, know that anxiety and depression don't make you any less of a Christian. And God gives us doctors and medicine to help us when we can't help ourselves.