
Kiss the Clouds

Part I, Face your fears, take the leap & experience newfound freedom!

• From *The More Series* with [Author & Board Certified Life Coach, Janell Rardon](#) •



BY JANELL RARDON, MA

Introduction

"I will be sure always"

"Is God trustworthy? I pondered. The question tumbled in my mind for days and sparked my journey into finding the answer! I think it is safe to say the place of trust is unique for every individual."

Trusting in God is much like a free fall.

To test my novice theory, I decided to go ahead and take a daring leap of faith. The owners of my local gym were professional skydivers and decided to host a special jump for gym members.

"Janell, you've got to join us," Scott smiled.

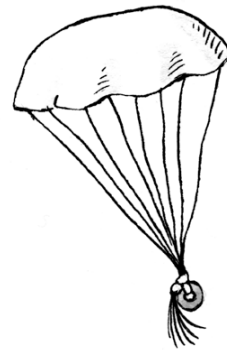
"You ready to take the leap?"

Without a moment's hesitation, I said, "Yes! Absolutely!" After my morning workout, I went home and told my husband.

"What? Are you serious?" he asked.

"Yep. Join me? The jump is scheduled for Father's Day. Let's do it!" I smiled.

He took a couple days to think it over and finally decided to take the leap with me.



Comfort Zones

"One's comfort zone refers to the set of environments and behaviors with which one is comfortable, without creating a sense of risk. A person's personality can be described by his or her comfort zones. Highly successful persons may routinely step outside their comfort zones, to accomplish what they wish. A comfort zone is a type of mental conditioning that causes a person to create and operate mental boundaries. Such boundaries create an unfounded sense of security. Like inertia, a person who has established a comfort zone in a particular axis of his or her life, will tend to stay within that zone without stepping outside of it. To step outside a person's comfort zone, they

must experiment with new and different behaviors, and then experience the new and different responses that then occur within their environment.”

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Time and time again, circumstances thrust us out of our [comfort zones](#)—out into the vast blue skies of total dependence on God. Questions arise in those momentary periods of the vast unknown—Where is God in all this? Will my parachute open? Will I come through this okay? Does God even care?

As I sat down and began crafting this study on trust, I found the task daunting, yet deeply compelling. Every thought is the culmination of many years of traveling on the journey of faith—studying God’s Word and ways, and of asking many, many questions.

As a writer, I ask questions.

As a follower of Christ, I ask questions.

As a student of His Word, I ask questions.

But, recently, one daunting question was asked that captured my attention: Is God trustworthy?

Is God trustworthy? I pondered. The question tumbled in my mind for days and sparked my quest into searching for answers.

I think it is safe to say the place of trust is unique for every individual. Through difficulty we might say to someone:

“I understand . . .”

“I know just how to pray . . .”

“I suffered with that...”

“I know someone who...”

but when it comes down to it, we must all find our own way, which is highly personal, to the sacred place of trust. I cannot crawl inside your heart and experience *your* pain. I can have compassion, empathy, and a certain degree of understanding, but your walk is not mine and is, therefore, uniquely your own. *You must walk through it—you and your God.*

I can and *will* walk beside you, pray for you, call back with encouraging words and ultimately, assure you of one very important truth: *God sees you and cares more than you will ever know.*

Finding this place of trust, in my opinion, is the ultimate spiritual free fall.

When thrust out into the vast blue skies of the unknown, you will be called upon to place every scared ounce of your body into the hands of God.

I Will Be Sure Always

A retired Army Jumpmaster told me two things every paratrooper and parachute rigger is trained to know:

1. Trust your equipment.
2. Live the motto of the rigger: "I will be sure always."

I will be sure always. As I let these five words sink deep into the fabric of my soul, I find a renewed impetus to trust God. They are so confident. So sure. So undeniably forthright.

.....
"At Jump School, you'll be introduced to your best friend—your parachute. You'll get to know everything about it. How to wear it, adjust it, use it, the works. You'll also learn all the techniques needed to accomplish your mission with absolute confidence. How to stay loose; get ready for impact; let your legs absorb the shock; roll and collapse your chute quickly; release your harness; unsling your weapon; and deploy into position."
(<http://www.baseops.net/basictraining/airborne.html>)
.....

With a reminiscent smile on his face, the [Jumpmaster](#) explained the intensity of a paratrooper's training. Hour upon hour is spent training for the first free fall:

- First, they practice jumping from a 34 ft. platform.
- They learn how to properly tumble upon landing.
- They learn to pack their own parachutes and jump from airplanes.
- Finally, they take the "Rigger's Pledge" upon completion of their training:
"I will keep constantly in mind that until men grow wings their parachutes must be dependable.

I will pack every parachute as though I am to jump with it myself, and will stand ready to jump with any parachute, which I have certified, as properly packed.

I will remember always that the other man's life is as dear to him as mine is to me.

I will never resort to guesswork, as I know that chance is a fool's gold and that I, a rigger, cannot depend on it.

I will never pass over any defect, nor neglect any repair, no matter how small, as I know that omissions and mistakes in the rigging of a parachute may cost a life.

I will keep all parachute equipment entrusted to my care in the best possible condition, remembering always that little things left undone cause major troubles.

I will never sign my name to a parachute inspection or packing certificate unless I have personally performed or directly supervised every step, and am entirely satisfied with all the work.

I will never let the idea that a piece of work is 'good enough' make me a potential murderer through a careless mistake or oversight, for I know there can be no compromise with perfection.

I will keep always a wholehearted respect for my vocation, regarding it as a high profession rather than a day-to-day task, and will keep in mind constantly my grave responsibility.

I will be sure-always."¹

The Believer's Pledge

Suddenly, the spiritual principles and parallels become crystal clear. As believers in Christ, we take a similar pledge when we commit our lives to God:

I will believe that in every situation God is dependable ([Romans 8:28](#)).

I will stand ready to serve God anywhere, at any time, in any place ([Matthew 24:44](#)).

I will count others' lives as more important than mine own ([Philippians 2:3](#)).

I will never resort to guesswork, but believe wholeheartedly in the Word of God ([Psalm 18:30](#)).

I will daily attend to the spiritual disciplines of study, meditation and prayer; for I know that "the little things left undone cause major troubles" ([Psalm 119:10](#)).

I will honor God with my work; giving 100% to all He has called me to do ([Ecclesiastes 9:10](#)).

I will strive for perfection (maturity and wholeness) in all I do ([Matthew 5:48](#)).

I will press on toward the high calling of Christ Jesus "keeping in mind my grave responsibility" to finish the race God has set before me ([Philippians 3:14](#)).

"I will be sure-always." God, in His infinite wisdom, directs each step of my life ([Psalm 115:3](#)).

"Jesus Christ demands of the man who trusts him," writes Oswald Chambers, "the same reckless sporting spirit that the natural man exhibits. If a man is going to do anything worthwhile, there are times he has to risk everything on his leap, and in the spiritual domain Jesus Christ demands that you risk everything you hold by common sense and leap into what He says, and immediately you do, you find that what He says fits on as solidly as common sense. At the bar of common sense Jesus Christ's statements may seem mad; but bring them to the bar of faith, and you begin to find with awestruck spirit that they are the words of God. Trust entirely in God, and when He brings you to the venture, see that you take it. We act like pagans in a crisis, only one out of a crowd is daring enough to bank his faith in the character of God."³

Here's the challenge—being the "only one out of a crowd . . . to bank his faith in the character of God."⁴

Kiss the Clouds is my attempt to come alongside of you and open the pages of scripture—in order to discover that God is trustworthy. God is the only person in whom “I can be sure always.” It is my earnest prayer that *Kiss the Clouds* offers words of hope, words of light, and the words of strength necessary to trust God wholeheartedly.

References

1. www.qmfound.com/riggers_pledge.htm
2. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Ulrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, Inc.), May 30.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

Chapter One

The Reckless Leap to God's Side

"The Holy Spirit may call us to a definite purpose for our life and we know that it means a decision, a reckless fling over onto God, a burning of our bridges behind us, and there is not a soul to advise us when we take that step except the Holy Spirit. Our clinging comes in this way: We put one foot on God's side and one on the side of human reasoning. Then God widens the space until we either drop between or jump to the other side. We have to take a leap—a reckless leap—and if we have learned to rely on the Holy Spirit, it will be a reckless leap to God's side."¹

The year was 1983. Standing on the stage of The Miss Virginia Pageant, my relationship with Trust went to a whole new level. Having spent every ounce of energy preparing for this moment in time, I was expecting great things. For years, coaches, trainers and well-wishers urged me forward in my pursuit for the crown of Miss America. *I thought of nothing else.*

Preparation was all-consuming: running eight miles a day, dieting, exercising, reading up on current affairs and social issues, mock interviews and practicing my talent until my blistered tap-dancing feet said, "Enough already!"



Now, the moment of truth had come. The announcer's voice filled the auditorium, "Ladies and Gentlemen, The Fourth Runner Up is.....The Third Runner Up is.....The Second Runner Up is.....The First Runner Up is.....and our New Miss Virginia 1983....."

"Wait a minute. He didn't call my name. Why didn't he call my name? What is happening here?" I stood frozen in time. Trying to remain composed and forcing my well-rehearsed, on-stage smile, I remembered the television cameras were rolling.

"Keep it together, Janell, just keep it together. Whatever you do, don't fall apart, For heaven's sake, you are on TV. A few more minutes and this will all be over."

Everything seemed to move in slow motion. But, then, without any warning, a warm, flowing peace melted over the top of my head and flowed to the bottom of my feet. I had never felt anything like it. Tucked inside this surprising peace was a love note from my Heavenly Father. This might sound a bit crazy, but I sincerely heard his soft whisper-of-a-word: "Trust me, my daughter, I am in control. This is not my plan for you. Trust me."

Thrust into the Depths of Trust

Trust. What a word. What vast shadows this five-letter word casts. Standing on that stage, a new believer in Christ, I had no idea what it really meant to "trust in God." I had only begun to scratch the surface of my understanding of trust. My initial reaction was to run to my hotel room and sob. I felt my whole entire world was crashing down.

But, there is no greater teacher than time and experience; now in hindsight, I see God's loving hand taking mine, saying, "Daughter, this is going to be good. Just give it some time. I will show you *the better plan*. Right now, I want you to take that leap. That reckless leap to my side."

Chuck Swindoll concurs, "The secret to responsible trust is acceptance. Acceptance is taking from God's hand absolutely anything He gives, looking into His face in trust and thanksgiving, knowing that the confinement of the hedge we're in is good and for His glory. Even though what we're enduring is painful, it's good simply because God Himself has allowed it. Christianity is trusting

Christ, not self. Perfect trust is resting all on one's weight on something else, not on self."²

Perfect trust. Webster offers this definition of trust—and I have gone one step farther and investigated the meanings of reliance and veracity:

Trust, v., a reliance or **resting of the mind** on the integrity, veracity, justice, friendship or other sound principle of another person.

Reliance, v. rest or repose of mind, resulting from **a full belief** of the veracity [habitual truth] or integrity of a person, or the certainty of a fact. ³

Several key thoughts come to the top of my mind here. Trust, when defined accurately, means confidence. Simple and direct. Taking that even further we see that when one trusts, one enjoys a "resting of the mind" or a "repose of the mind." Why? Because real trust results from a full belief in the one being trusted, in this case, the One being God. Veracity—habitual truth—is the cornerstone of God's eternal character. God can't lie. It isn't in his nature to do so. Numbers 23:19 concurs, "God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind" (See [Hebrews 6:16-18](#); [Titus 1:2](#)).

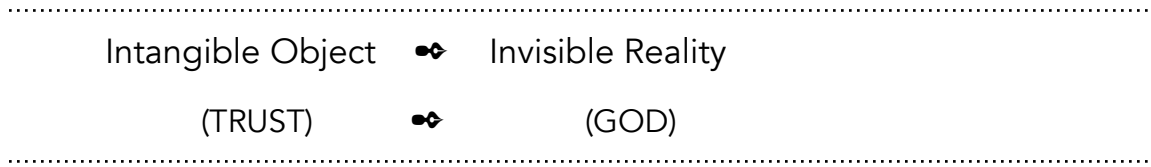
Trust is therefore synonymous with confidence. The two go hand in hand. They are inseparable. One cannot work without the other. In dissecting the above definition, there is one more common thread—full belief. Full belief must be active in order to truly have trust. Full belief—not half-hearted, maybe-I'll-think-about-trusting belief. Full belief. Full, obviously meaning, "complete; entire; not defective or partial."⁴

Typically, we hear the word "trust" attached to the little preposition, "in."

Trust **in** God.

Trust **in the** Lord.

It implies that we place this intangible object, trust, in an invisible reality, God. It requires a transaction in the spiritual realm, not the physical.



I can't physically touch or understand either of these two things—they are spiritual in nature. It's like trying to capture the wind, bottle the ocean or catch a falling star.

Standing on that stage so long ago, I wanted something I could touch. Words were not enough.

I share this time on my life map because it was pivotal. The loss of my dream, *something I thought was really going to happen*, didn't happen. Being a young woman, new to faith in Christ, I felt disappointed in God.

In my heart, I felt God let me down.

In light of this, I went on a treasure hunt for scriptures—which literally has lasted for over three decades now—that addressed this spiritual transaction of *trusting in God*. Somehow, I thought, this would help me be able to grasp the intangible reality of trust. And, it did help. I handpicked thirty scriptures and created a chart, which I call **The Trust Challenge**, to keep in my Bible. I knew there would be days that my trust in God would be tested. And, I was right. Over the next few days, take "The Trust Challenge." Take your time, there is no need to rush. I believe it will have the same effect on you, as it did on me!

[See the chart on next page]

Scripture Study	Promise	Application
2 Samuel 22: 31	God is my shield.	I can trust God.
Job 13:15	Job references "he" pointing to God. He has hope.	I can remain hopeful.
Psalms 4:5		
Psalms 5: 11-12		
Psalms 9: 9-10		God will never forsake me.
Psalms 16:1		
Psalms 17:7		
Psalms 18:2		
Psalms 18:30		
Psalms 20:7		
Psalms 25: 2, 20		
Psalms 31: 1-2		
Psalms 31: 6, 19		
Psalms 34: 22		
Psalms 37: 3, 5, 40		
Psalms 40: 1-5		
Psalms 44: 4-8		
Psalms 49		
Psalms 52: 8-9		
Psalms 55: 22-23		
Psalms 61: 1-3		
Psalms 62: 5-8		
Psalms 71: 5-8		
Psalms 73: 25-26, 28		
Psalms 91: 1,2		
Psalms 115: 9-18		
Psalms 118: 5-9; Psalms 125:1		
Psalms 119: 42b-48		

Kelly's Accepts the Trust Challenge

Kelly knows all about being wrung out by difficult circumstances. Unbeknownst to Kelly, she married Scott, a man with a serious drinking problem and undiagnosed bipolar disorder. Two weeks into her marriage, Kelly was misdiagnosed with cervical cancer. This journey involved two hospitalizations, business foreclosures, bankruptcy, and pending divorce.

After riding this roller coaster for over ten years, Kelly writes, "We had to start over, but honestly, even Scott would tell you that we wouldn't change a thing. We are exactly where we are meant to be.

What happened to us is what needed to happen to us.

Scott's accounting practice is doing better than ever, and he's content with what we have for the first time in our married life. Our marriage has been through the ringer, but I don't plan out a divorce in my mind like I used to—everyday. I'm learning about forgiveness. I know there's a reason why I am with Scott and why he is with me. We may bicker, but we've been through so much together, we know that it is minor compared to what we have had to deal with in the past. And when it comes to parenting, we are like matching bookends. I learned several things about trust after enduring these trials:

God is with me in my suffering.

Sometimes I need to be torn down in order to be built up.

God will bring the right people into my life.

Everything I have belongs to God. He can take it away as easily as he gives it, if I'm using my resources in a way that doesn't glorify him.

Sometimes God answers my prayers by not giving me what I asked for. God's will doesn't always match my will."

Kelly and Scott went through the ringer. But Kelly soaked in the Spirit and all the dry and brittle areas became saturated with God's grace—enabling her to be triumphant ([1 Corinthians 15:57](#)). *Her remarkable journey puts a face on trust.* God definitely widened the space in Kelly's life; forcing her to choose between

human reasoning and God. Somewhere, tucked between the lines of her life, Kelly made a choice. When there was nothing else to cling to—Kelly clung to the Holy Spirit.

Take the Reckless Leap to God's Side

Maybe, like Kelly, you find yourself in a difficult situation that seems hopeless. You feel dry, brittle and dare I say, “dead or numb?” Know that God will not forsake you. He can't. God can't turn his back on a child that is earnestly seeking him. The answer may be delayed, as in the case of Lazarus ([see John 11](#)), but God will come.

[Author Paula Rinehart](#) opened my eyes to what it means to truly trust in God, “Between your longings and the demand for their fulfillment is a place as real as any in the tangible world. But it is uncharted and uniquely tailored to your own personal story. You will only know you are there when you feel a little on the edge of your chair—and you are strangely at peace. Getting there, sometimes, feels like a miracle itself. It is the place of trust. Trust hangs somewhere between knowing what your heart longs for and trying to dictate the shape or timing or outcome of your heart's desire. It lies in the willingness to accept the particulars of how and when and where God chooses to intervene. It waits in the cool shade of surrender.”⁵

A Shepherd Boy Accepts the Trust Challenge

As a young shepherd boy, David learned all about being on the edge of his chair and being strangely at peace. He learned about the reckless leap to God's side. He learned these truths—up close and personal—in the Valley of Elah ([1 Samuel 17:1–58](#)).

In reading these poignant passages, it is easy to see why young King David was able to take the reckless leap to God's side. David, in obedience to his father Jesse, ran fifteen miles from Bethlehem to the Valley of Elah, to deliver food rations to his brothers, who were serving in King Saul's army. When David arrived on the scene, the Israelites were humming with horrid tales of a giant

named Goliath, who had been taunting them, morning and night, for forty days. Flaunting himself before the army of Israel, Goliath obviously was a tool of evil—his bravado and pounding, pulsating voice resounding deep into the souls of the Israelites, provoking great fear and panic.

Imagine being an Israelite, listening to this intimidating, haughty, thunderous, frightening voice; causing you to intake of its nauseating diet for a steady forty days and forty nights. Enough to make you go mad? I think so. Enough to make you run and hide? Definitely.

Why, then, we must ask, didn't David respond in panic or fear? Why didn't he run away like all the other Israelites? Why, instead, did he run towards the frontline to fight? I can only surmise that David's response is due to one thing.

Where had David been spending most of his time? Yes, in the pasture tending his father's sheep. While his brothers had been serving under Saul (and obviously learning some of Saul's bad habits), David had been doing one thing—becoming intimately acquainted with God.

Killing bears. Killing lions. Saving sheep. Singing melodies. Playing his harp. Writing worship songs. Learning to listen to God's still, small voice.

David had been set apart, in a seemingly menial task, according to his eldest brother ([1 Samuel 17:28](#)) to grow spiritually. While serving the sheep, God transformed a mundane, obscure pasture into David's school of the Spirit.

So often, in God's economy, training takes place over a long period of time—oftentimes, years before it is actually going to be put into use. Seemingly small, minuscule tasks are really very important. David triumphed over Goliath and the foes of darkness because he had been trained in the pasture—day in and day out—while no one was looking. While lying in the green pastures and spending time by the still waters, David learned:



- To set his roots deep in God.
- That the passage through the valley of the shadow of death is the finest school of the Spirit.
- That no matter where life's circumstances lead, God will be with him. United with God, David could face anything—any giant, any army, any foe.
- To magnify God, not self. David learned humility.
- He learned to listen to the voice of God. In the quiet, David's ear was fine-tuned, as evidenced later, while talking to his brothers in the battle zone—David heard Goliath's roar. With one ear on the earthly conversation, David heard God's whisper, "You can do it, David. I have trained you. Goliath is another bear. A roaring lion. Slay him, David. Protect my sheep. Pick up your slingshot. I am with you."
- Finally, David learned all about surrender. He learned that the battle was not his, but the Lord's. He learned to never underestimate the power of the ordinary and mundane; oftentimes, the best training comes amidst the everyday duties of life.

How Do We Surrender?

To surrender is to let go of the focus of our attachment. Think about that. When life wraps its forces about us tightly and traps us between a rock and a hard place, our first reaction is to panic, to react, to stress, and immediately to focus on the trauma. Our first reaction is not to focus on God or to trust. Everything within us fights such behavior. Our God-given nervous system, with its millions of nerve cells, rises like a strong army. God, our Commander-in-Chief, awaits our cry for help. He can silence the strong army of emotion and bring us into the place of trust. Surrendering enables us to let go of our focus on the natural realm and attach ourselves to the never-changing, eternal truths of the spiritual realm.

As I mentioned earlier, the place of trust is unique to every individual. We will all come to the edge of a precipice where we must make the decision to

trust. This precipice can take many, many forms—cancer, divorce, prodigal children, serious illness, addiction, infertility, unemployment, financial strain, aging parents, miscarried dreams or plans, or _____ (you fill in the blank) —each uniquely customized to draw us closer to the Lord. It's frightening to peer over the precipice—to take the leap and trust God—for it is a long way down. But as we build our faith on the integrity of God's eternal, unchanging character, our ability to trust Him with our day-to-day life will grow.

Time to Trust

1. Take the "Thirty Scripture Trust Challenge." This will take all week, so relax and read carefully.
2. Commit Psalm 9:9–10 to memory. Write it on a 4x6 index card and place it somewhere visible. I like to tape it to my bathroom mirror. My daughter tapes her memory verses to the dashboard of her car! Be creative, but put it somewhere highly visible.
3. Re-read our opening thought by Oswald Chambers, found on page 20.
4. After taking your "Thirty Scripture Trust Challenge," take a few moments to reflect on a circumstance, situation, relationship or condition you are currently facing where you have one foot on God's side and one foot on the side of human reasoning. Spend time in prayer over this chasm. Journal your prayers, thoughts, and hopefully—direction. Burn your bridges. Make a decision. Know the Holy Spirit is there for you.
5. Charles Fox wrote, "Five smooth stones. There are five stones which will bring down any giant. They are: **"God is, God Has, God Can, God Will, God Does."**" What gigantic circumstance are you facing? Over the next few days, take these five stones with you into the prayer closet. For example, my



husband and I had a house on the market for a year and a half. We sold it and then the new owners breached their contract. We were obviously shaken. Using my prayer stones, prayed:

God is faithful.

God has all the resources in heaven and on earth.

God can meet all of our needs according to His riches in glory.

God will bring us a buyer.

God does what He sees as best (Psalm 115:3).

As a visual reminder, I went to the craft store and bought a \$2.00 bag of decorative stones and beautiful little satin sachet bags. I placed five smooth stones in the sachet and dropped the sachet in my purse. Every now and then, I take the sachet out, place the stones in my palm, and pray the above simple prayer: ***“God is, God Has, God Can, God Will, God Does. Amen.”***

Endnotes

1. Oswald Chambers, *If You Will Ask* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1989), 67.
2. Charles Swindoll, *Perfect Trust* (Nashville, TN: J. Countryman, 2000), 4.
3. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828. Facsimile first edition (Chesapeake, VA: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967 and all subsequent editions).
4. *Ibid.*
5. Paula Rinehart, *Strong Women, Soft Hearts: A Women's Guide to Cultivating a Wise Heart and a Passionate Life* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, a division of Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001), 76-77.
6. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester, UK, and Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity and Zondervan, 1994), 428.
7. Isobel Kuhn, *Green Leaf in Drought* (Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Publishers, 1994).

Chapter Two

Deploy the Parachute of Prayer

*"Though compelled to live so much in the public gaze of men, his heart was always sighing for the secret place of fellowship with his Father, who waited for him there. It is impossible to perform our religious duties before men, without insensibly considering what impression we are producing, and how far their estimation of us is being enhanced. Here is a test for our alms, our prayers, and our fasting from sin and self-indulgence. If we do any of these things to maintain or increase the consideration that men have of us, they count for nothing in the eye of God. Seek then the secret place, where prying eyes cannot follow, and curious ears cannot overhear."*¹

"Ugh. I have to get a bigger closet. Sitting on these shoes is impossible," I mumbled. "Oh, well, like it or not, this is as good as it gets. I have to talk to God."

Over thirty years ago, as a young woman still living with my parents, I would crawl into my little 2x4 bedroom closet, sit on top of my shoes and pray to God. It was the safest, quietest place to pray. I didn't know anything about prayer closets or contemplative prayer—but I knew I had to talk to God.



There are times in our lives when we feel as though we have been pushed out of an airplane. Times when the gravity of the situation takes our breath away, much like a free fall. It is during these exact times that our highest priority must be to find a quiet place and talk to God. I found it interesting that free fall, accurately defined, means, "Falling under the sole influence of gravity"² and that "all free-falling objects accelerate downwards at a very fast rate—9.8 m/s/s, to be exact."³ Just think about this:

Do we not fall under the sole influence of gravity when a difficult situation arises? Gravity, in this sense, meaning “seriousness, magnitude, significance or importance.”⁴ In one second, life can change. The doctor reviews an MRI and life as you knew it is over. The click of a mouse opens an accusatory email. The ring of a phone brings news of an accident. A knock on the door finds a desperate friend needing help. A car runs a red light. The results of a physical exam cause alarm. We lose our source of income. Floods wash away our lives. More often than not, it is in these times, that *the gravity of the situation* sends us into a tailspin.

My Very Real Free fall Experience

I wasn’t nervous about my parachuting experience, until...my tandem guide, Jim, started pushing me toward the door.

“Dangle your feet over the edge,” I was told during our very brief training. “Jim will count and then off you go.”

At the exact moment my feet began to dangle, FEAR raced through every cell of my body. Jim’s strong hand pushed my head up to his chest, forcing me to lean back onto him.

“5, 4, 3, 2, 1...” Jim counted.

The next 90 seconds or so were one big, terrifying blur. The air so cold I could barely breathe. One overwhelmingly powerful thought ran across my head like ticker tape.

I am going to die. I am going to die. I am going to die.

I sincerely forgot that we had a parachute and that Jim would pull it. It was by far one of the scariest moments of my life.

When in this free-falling state—where we feel as though things are spinning out of control—doesn’t everything accelerate downwards—our thoughts, our heartbeat, our pulse, and most of all, our fears? Acceleration is derived from the Latin root, *accelero*, of *ad* and *celero*, to hasten. *Celero* meaning “quick.”⁵

Psychologists call this acceleration process, “panic.” Two words describe panic—“sudden” and “extreme.” Rooted in fear, panic wreaks havoc on the nervous system.

What can we do, when faced with such sudden, extreme emotion, to bring calm to the chaos surging through our body? To slow down the acceleration downwards?

Deploy the Parachute of Prayer

We can deploy the parachute of prayer. Pull the ripcord that releases heavenly resources. Deuteronomy 20:2–4 says, “When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. He shall say, ‘Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.’”

Right when I thought death was imminent (smile), Jim pulled the cord for the first decelerating parachute—about the size of a small balloon. And, then, maybe seconds later, he pulled the chute and *whoosh! The world went silent. Our mad free fall instantly turned upward.*

Jim whispered, “Relax. Take this all in.” He then asked if I wanted to take control over the reins.

All I could do was shake my head—“No.” All I wanted to do at that moment was keep leaning hard on Jim and let him do what he was trained to do.

Prayer is a Decelerator.

One thing is certain—when thrust into a sudden difficulty, I need God. It is only by his grace that I can resist giving way to panic. He will help me pull the spiritual ripcord of heavenly resources.

In the natural sense, a parachute is “a soft fabric device used to slow the motion of an object through an atmosphere by creating drag.”⁶ A parachute is

a decelerator. Did you catch that? A decelerator! Exactly what we need. One skydiving expert calls it “an air-braking device.”⁷ The word parachute is actually derived from the French words, “para, protect or shield, and chute, the fall.”⁸

Excuse me for a moment while I shout a loud “Amen!” Once again, did you hear that? Prayer acts as our parachute—a shield that protects us from the fall.

Prayer creates spiritual drag.

“Well, that can’t be good,” you might say. “That sounds quite dreadful.”

But creating drag is a good thing, in this situation. To “drag” is “to draw along slowly or heavily.”⁹ Free fallers, in the natural, can reach up to 120 miles per hour. If it wasn’t for the deployment of the parachute, which creates drag and deceleration, there could be a big problem—a fatal crash.

But, under the canopy of God’s covering, the acceleration of emotions is arrested, allowing time to catch our breath and place our panic at the throne of God. It may be a quick, “Help me, Lord!” or an elongated time spent in an “actual” or “virtual” prayer closet, but deploying the canopy of prayer is a critical response necessary to bringing our emotions under the sovereign control of God. It should only take a second to make the decision to pull the ripcord and initiate the deployment of prayer. Just like young King David, we must first run to God. We must run to the prayer closet.

What is a prayer closet exactly?

“Prayer closets” aren’t talked about too much these days. Some might say it is archaic. So, you and I are going to open its door, cross the threshold of the here and now and become reacquainted with this sacred place.

Prayer closets come in all shapes, sizes and locations. Just think about all the many places God’s people have met with him in private:

David in the sheep pasture.

Joseph in Pharaoh’s prison.

Daniel in the lion’s den.

Lydia beside a river.

Jonah in the belly of a whale.

Moses in front of a burning bush.

Hannah on her knees in the temple.
John the Baptist in the wilderness.
Jeremiah in the bottom of a pit.
Deborah under a palm tree.

Abraham on top of a mountain.
Mary in her bedroom.
Elijah beside a brook.
John on the island of Patmos.

“The prayer chamber conserves our relation to God. It hems every raw edge; it tucks up every flowing and entangling garment ([2 Timothy 2:4](#)); it girds up every fainting loin ([1 Peter 1:13](#)). Satan has to break our hold on, and close up our way to, the prayer chamber, before he can break our hold on God or close up our way to heaven.”¹⁰

One commonality stands true of all “prayer closets” —they embody solitude and silence. In the prayer closet, the chaotic tunes of the song of life are quieted. [Matthew 6:6\(MSG\)](#) says it this way, “Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense His grace.”

Role-playing, something we all do so well, seems to cease when alone in a room with God. At least it did for me. I found I no longer had the energy required to keep up the façade that “*everything-is-fine-really-it-is-fine.*” Somewhere in the process of meeting alone with God, the masquerade melted and vulnerability and transparency emerged. I realized I could relax and be myself. I didn’t have to prove anything. I didn’t have to pretend. All God required was that I be.

“There is no place where trust grows so readily and richly as in the prayer closet. Its unfolding and development are rapid and wholesome when they are kept regularly and well. When these appointments are sincere, full, and free, trust grows increasingly. The eye and presence of God give active life to trust, just like the eye and presence of the sun make fruit and flower grow and all things glad and bright with fuller life.”¹¹

Standing on the Shoulders of the Greats

William Wilberforce

Isaac Newton once said, "If I can see farther, it is because I am standing on the shoulders of giants." [William Wilberforce](#), the great British Parliamentarian of the late 1700's, was a giant who visited his prayer closet daily. It is written he felt he was "called to order his life according to the pattern set by Jesus Christ and to give himself to prayer."¹² Wilberforce believed "the experience of all good men shows that, without constant prayer and watchfulness, the life of God in the soul stagnates."¹³ He understood the vitality of daily solitude and valued it so highly that he admonished his own son by saying, "Let me implore you not to be seduced into neglecting God in the prayer closet. There is nothing more fatal to the life and power of religion. More solitude and earlier hours—prayer three times a day, at least. How much better might I serve if I cultivated a closer communion with God?"¹⁴

Lilia Trotter

[Lilias Trotter](#), relentless English missionary who pioneered a work in Muslim North Africa in the early 1900's and known for her punishing pace of overworking, is said to have been "equally relentless in setting aside significant blocks of time for daily periods alone with God, sometimes early in the morning, other times breaking away from activity for that purpose."¹⁵ Anyone who has read her insightful book, [A Passion for the Impossible](#), or witnessed her breathtaking artwork, can see that she was a woman who spent time with God. Her solution to the vigorous attacks of the enemy "was to seek avidly times of daily refreshment with God, and— she would gradually come to realize—to secure times of retreat within terms of service."¹⁶ I have grasped that mantra for myself, "Times of retreat within terms of service."

Let's Pull the Ripcord

So, without further hesitation, we are going to pull the ripcord. Deploy the parachute of prayer and open wide the doors of our prayer closets. Perhaps

you don't have a prayer "closet." Find a space in your home that you can designate as your "official prayer place"—be it a quiet corner, a seat on the front porch or a bench in the middle of a flower garden. Primarily, I use my bedroom closet. It's just big enough to sit down in. A few years ago, while looking for a new home, one of my biggest concerns was the closet of the master bedroom.

Is it big enough to sit down in?

Where will my new prayer closet or space be?

After sharing this concern with my son, he made it his concern as well. Going ahead of me, he would enter the master bedroom and call back, "Mom, wait 'til you see this closet!"

As I told you at the beginning of this chapter, in my early twenties, when I still lived with my parents, I used to squeeze in my little bedroom closet, sit down on all my shoes, and pray. As I look back, that was a sweet time alone with God.

You might ask, as others have at the onset of this journey, "What do I do when I go into my prayer closet? Can I talk? Do I meditate? Where do I begin?" At first, it is uncomfortable, even awkward. I have found the following seven principles to be very helpful.

1. Come to Jesus.

Matthew 11:28 says, "Come to me [Jesus], all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." I have read that "breathing is easy in free fall—but talking is almost impossible."¹⁷ There are times when our only response to a situation is silence. There are no words. There are no questions. There is only silence. Birthed by grief, perhaps, but somehow silence offers the only comfort.

Scholars today have coined this practice of silence and meditation —"[contemplative prayer](#)."¹⁸ Beginning each day with five, ten or fifteen minutes of silence in the confines of my closet provoked real change as I began to see the cares, concerns, pressures, demands, and drivenness of my soul dissipate.

Over the course of several months, I trained myself, with God's immeasurable help, to experience a full thirty minutes of silence. As I said earlier, this process was painful. It took me a long time to slow down the pace of my life. I was wrapped tighter than a drum. My mind raced like a champion horse, wanting to avoid the silence, the quiet, and the solitude. But, as I plodded along in this discipline, I found that my spiritual free fall—my ability to take the leap and trust God—became easier to navigate. Brian Germain agrees that "some form of mental preparation"¹⁹ is necessary for skydivers on the way to altitude. "What most do not realize is how incredibly important this is. The mental state that we are in prior to exiting the airplane determines how we respond to any given situation, and this response is the most important contributing factor in how the situation ultimately evolves. In other words, mental preparation is every bit as important as a pin check."²⁰

Learning to Slow it Down

In 1999, while on a family vacation to California, I fell in love. Yes, I fell in love with the beautiful city of [San Luis Obispo](#). A quaint college town on the central coast of California, San Luis Obispo welcomed this weary, worn-out woman with open arms, and embraced me with their definitive message, "Come, and experience the SLO life! SLO has charm at every corner!" And while standing on a picturesque corner of this charming city, I noticed the license plate of a beautiful white, seemingly angelic, BMW: SLO LIFE.

"Slo life," I thought to myself. "What in the world is a SLO LIFE?"

"Look at that," I nudged my husband. "Wouldn't that be nice?"

"Sounds good to me. Do you think you could handle it?" he smiled.

"Well, I know one thing. God is trying to tell me something. I'm going home with a message from God . . . and I'm going to put that on my license plate."

So, I left San Luis Obispo, my new love, with a fresh vision from God. Riding down historic Highway One, I felt the weight of my overloaded life begin

to lift. I started to unwind. My mental state was renewed. The beauty of Big Sur swallowed up my stress and gave me a new leaf on life. I did return to Virginia and marched right down to the Division of Motor Vehicles.

"I'd like to get personalized tags, please."

"Certainly," the clerk smiled. "What would you like on them?"

"SLO LIFE," I spoke with bated breath.

"SLO LIFE—interesting. Let's see. Okay—it's yours," she said.

I couldn't believe it! SLO LIFE was mine. All mine.

My friends all laughed when they saw it.

"Oh, Janell, that is the farthest thing from your life."

"Well, consider it my long-term goal. I am speaking my future into being!" I exclaimed.

So, every day I am reminded that God wants me to slow down the pace of my life. This may seem far beyond your reach, at this present time, as it did when I first saw that license plate in [San Luis Obispo](#), but if I can change, I know you can, too.

2. Close out the world.

[Matthew 6:6](#), our watchword, says, "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen." How do we close out the world? Let me help:

- Light a candle. For some reason, this simple practice seems to always invite serenity—but don't forget to blow it out when you are done!
- Breathe deeply. Concentrating on your breath will take you into the present moment. [Study [Mindfulness](#) for more information].
- Inhale. Exhale.
- Begin meditating on one simple scripture verse, such as, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" ([Psalm 23:1](#)). If necessary, repeat it quietly over and over again until your mind is quieted and focused on God.
- Repeat a simple prayer, "Lord, I am listening."

Let me caution you here, at the beginning of this journey. Your mind will race and begin shouting messages like: “You need to fix dinner! Can’t you hear the phone ringing? Is that little Tommy calling? Don’t forget you have ten loads of laundry that need to be done!” And on and on and on. Knowing how to manage these distracting voices is paramount to the success of your time alone with God. How do you do this? Pastor and Author [Bob Sorge](#) offers this advice:

“Waiting on God is so powerful that the enemy will do everything in his power to dissuade you from maintaining your watch. He will tell you that you’re insane to keep waiting on God in the midst of your pressing circumstances. He’ll tell you that waiting on God is changing nothing. But, there is a day coming when God will change everything in a moment of time. He may take seemingly forever to get around to it, but once God moves, He can change everything in a day.”²¹

3. Climb under the canopy of His protection.

[Psalm 91:1-2](#) assures us that we will find rest under God’s protection. David uses the metaphor of nestling under the shadow of God’s wings. The Message says it this way, “You who sit down in the High God’s presence, spend the night in Shaddai’s shadow, Say this: ‘God, you’re my refuge. I trust in you and I’m safe!’ That’s right—he rescues you from hidden traps, shields you from deadly hazards. His huge outstretched arms protect you— under them you’re perfectly safe; his arms fend off all harm.” Let’s think of it this way—when we deploy the parachute—the canopy of prayer—we nestle under God’s huge, outstretched arms of protection. All of a sudden our flailing stops. God’s arms wrap around us and He takes control of the reigns. He begins to “fend off all harm.” This one action produces a great sense of calm. Rest enters our hearts.

Slowing Down Can Be Challenging

My biggest lesson on the futility of flailing came when I locked myself in my husband’s retail kitchen showroom. One bright, Saturday morning, years ago, I was rushing to a women’s conference at my church. Midway through my

trip, I realized I had forgotten the door prize I had promised to bring—a beautiful Corian® cutting board.

“No problem,” I said to myself. “I’ll stop by Rob’s showroom and pick it up. That should only take a second.”



I quickly adjusted my travel plans and stopped by his business. I unlocked the front door and entered the store. Without a thought, I turned to lock myself in, just as a safety precaution (the store wasn’t open yet). When I did so, something sounded very unusual. I jiggled the key, but to no avail. The door was jammed. The key was stuck in the lock.

“This can’t be happening,” I stressed. “No way! What am I going to do?”

I’m not sure who I was talking to, but I continued on with my conversation.

“I have thirty minutes to get to the hotel. I have the door prize. I am supposed to speak. I have to speak right before the main speaker. Fifteen minutes. My fifteen minutes.”

Minute by minute, my blood pressure was rising. Stress was invading my body. I was getting frustrated and angrier by the second. I began banging at the door. Screaming at the door to open. Flailing would be the best way to describe my actions.

“In the name of Jesus, open up! Door, open!” I prayed. (Actually, I screamed. I don’t think prayer had anything to do with my actions.)

“Okay, Janell, get a grip. Call Rob. He can bring the key.”

So, I called home. Gently, my husband told me to call his partner, Dennis.

“He’s scheduled to be there in a few minutes. Maybe he can come a little early to rescue you. Calm down, it’s going to be alright.”

“Sure, easy for you to say,” I mused. “I have to speak—don’t you understand?”

Just so you know, being asked to speak at a women's conference was a big deal to me—back then. It gave me a big ego boost. Even if it was for fifteen minutes, it was going to be the best fifteen minute session it could be. My personal identity was still wrapped up in the praise of man. So, understand, being locked away was not my idea of a good thing.

In the midst of this ordeal, which lasted longer than I care to admit, I heard a still, small voice in my ear.

"Janell, sit down. Rest. This situation is out of your control. I am in control. Why don't you pray for the conference? Pray for the speaker. Pray for all the details."

With a great, big "if-I-have-to-I-will" sigh, I sat down. I relented. And I did exactly what God said to do. I prayed for the meeting. I gave up control. I submitted to the delay.

"There's a reason," I confessed. "I am so sorry, God. Please forgive me. Once again, I have let my emotions get the best of me. This kind of behavior is never part of your plan. You are a God of peace and rest."

After that simple, sigh-filled prayer, something amazing happened. I felt peace.

Shortly thereafter, Dennis arrived. My knight in shining armor. But, not a minute too soon. The timing of his arrival was in God's hands. God had work to do in me. I needed to learn to climb under the canopy of his protection and allow him to give me his perspective on things.

The world looks different from this vantage point. Remember, the canopy serves as a decelerator—an air-braking device—that stops the free fall and enables us to slow down and gain perspective. Perspective is highly underrated.

Look At Life From God's Vantage Point

Several summers ago, while taking a walk down the beach, I noticed red flags waving feverishly in the wind.

"What are the red flags for?" I asked onlookers wading in the surf.

"Rip currents. No swimming advised!" they chided. "Can you believe this? We've come all this way for a week of fun in the sun and the lifeguards tell us to stay out of the water."

Needless to say, these beachcombers were angry and many were not heeding the red flag warnings.

"Don't they know they are putting their lives on the line?" I thought to myself. "They obviously have no idea how dangerous rip currents can be."

When I returned home, I did a quick search on this life-threatening ocean current. The most fascinating element of my discovery was the fact that "rip currents are not always easily discernible to the untrained eye. An experienced ocean lifeguard with an elevated vantage point, will know where the rip currents exist. This helps direct bathers from these dangerous areas,"²² hence, the red flags. It is advisable only to swim in guarded areas. The lifeguard knows best.



God, our heavenly Father, who resides on his throne in heaven, has an "elevated vantage point"²³—a heavenly perspective—that allows him to see where the "rip currents" of our lives exist. He sees the whole picture—from beginning to end—we see in part. From his eternal perspective, he knows best.

4. Consider God's Ways.

Hebrews 12:1-3: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

This was the most restorative part of the process for me. Instead of considering my long list of “I-wants or I-needs,” I began considering and viewing with careful examination God and His magnificence. Consider the following scriptures:

Psalm 5:1	Psalm 8:3
Psalm 77:12	Psalm 107:23
Psalm 119:15	Psalm 119:128
Psalm 143:5	Ecclesiastes 7: 13-14
Luke 12: 24-27	Job 37:14

As Job was told to “stop and consider God’s wonders,” shouldn’t we do so as well? As we keep in step with the words of the ancients, [Psalm 107:43](#), “Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord,” we will advance spiritually. Mulling over scripture has increased my ability to pray more effectively. So many times I don’t know what to pray or how to pray for a situation. When I turn to scripture, I have an effective means of voicing my heart in prayer. Bible Scholar and Reformed Thinker, [Wayne Grudem](#), concurs:

“The regular reading and memorization of scripture, cultivated over many years of a Christian’s life, will increase the depth, power, and wisdom of his or her prayers. For this reason knowledge of Scripture is a tremendous help in prayer.”²⁴ Reformer Martin Luther’s famous maxim, “To have prayed well is to have studied well”²⁵ affirms the need to know and consider God’s word; utilizing it to pray more effectively.

5. Confess your sins.

[Consider Psalm 51](#). Here, under Divine Guidance, see yourself at the foot of the cross, exchanging a negative behavior or pattern of sin with a divine virtue, for example: pride for humility; lying for truth; hate for love; judgment for mercy; pain for healing; criticism for acceptance; strife for peace; wrongdoing with good deeds ([Matthew 5:16](#), [1 Timothy 5:10](#)); and gossip for truth. For example, if I have lied during the day, I will confess this, lay it down at the foot of

the cross, and ask God to help me tell the truth. I would pray, "Lord, I lay down my lying tongue and ask that you give me a spirit of truthfulness from this moment on. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight ([Psalm 19](#)). Amen."

6. Cast your cares.

[First Peter 5:6–7](#) admonishes, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." Having laid down the sins that are entangling you at the foot of the cross, it is now time to lay down your cares—you know, all the little worries that gnaw—bite by bite, little by little—at your joy!

Solomon says it so well, "Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom" ([see Song of Solomon 2:15](#)). Obviously, "vineyard" here is metaphorically used to speak of love. How quickly "little foxes" come to eat away at our relationship to God and to others. It takes only seconds.

Watch Out for Little Foxes

Flashback with me to a very special day in the life of my family. Our three children had made the decision to be water baptized on Independence Day, July 4th. Our church was going to a local beach to have the baptism service. This was going to be a big event. We were excited as we loaded up the car and began our journey to the beach.

After a fifty minute drive to the beach, we arrived. It took forever to find a parking space and then it cost us \$4.00 to do so. We unloaded the car, which seemed to take forever, and began our walk to the church's "spot." Unable to locate anyone who looked remotely familiar on the crowded beach, we kept walking . . . and walking . . . and walking . . . in the blistering heat.

One by one the little foxes began to emerge:

"I'm soooooo hot, Momma!"

"Where is everybody?"

"I can't carry these things anymore!"

"I'm soooooo thirsty!"

"Whose idea was this?"

"Doesn't anybody know what's going on?"

"Where's the pastor?"

"Remind me to stay home next year!"

"We should have done this in a pool!"

"This is not my idea of fun!"

You get the picture. Murmur, grumble, murmur, grumble . . . before you know it, we were no longer the exuberant, expectant family anymore . . . we were the Israelites wandering aimlessly in the desert. Thank the Lord for our strong leader, my husband, their Dad, who shooed away the little foxes and strongly urged that we all change our attitudes.

Little foxes are cunning, sly, and known to be very fast! They are known for concealing their trail and outwitting many different kinds of animals. It doesn't take but a few seconds for an entire brood of little foxes to wreak havoc upon a family or a relationship. Bible Commentator Matthew Henry describes this brilliantly, "Seize the little foxes, the first risings of sin, the little ones of Babylon, those sins that seem little, for they often prove dangerous. A charge to all in their places to oppose and prevent the spreading of such opinions and practices as tend to corrupt men's judgments, debauch their consciences, perplex their minds, and discourage their inclinations to virtue and piety."²⁶ I love the way Matthew Henry describes the little foxes—the first risings of sin.

Think about all the little foxes that run across your daily path. All the "first risings of sin."²⁷

- Perhaps a sharp-tongued response from a family member.
- A phone call that breeds frustration and leads to anger.
- Gossip and rumors being spread about your child.
- A husband that forgets an important meeting.

- Laundry that is touching the ceiling and nobody offers to help.
- Your comfort zone is being pinched and prodded—requiring you to reach beyond it. We’ve all been in these situations, some far worse.

How do we keep these sly creatures from resting in our homes?

We pull the ripcord and deploy the parachute of prayer—right then and there. Do we have to be in a literal prayer closet? Absolutely not. It might be a shopping mall. In the middle of the church foyer. Or on a hot, overcrowded beach. We bring [1 Peter 5:6–7](#) to life. This is how I overcame our day at the beach. First, I recognized the foxes.

I recognized the first risings of sin.

“Wait a minute, here, Satan. You want to ruin our day. Listen to us all grumbling and mumbling,” I prayed. “This is a great day. I will not let anyone, anything, or any little fox eat up my joy today. My three children are making one of the greatest declarations they could possibly make here at this beach. In the name of Jesus, I submit to doing the right thing here. Help me, Lord, to silence my tongue. Help me to be an example to my children. Amen.”

That sounds incredibly simplistic, I know, but that prayer was a turning point. The ceremony at the beach demonstrated the love of a church community to onlooking beach-goers. We sang. We prayed. We watched many of our church members make a public declaration of dedication to Christ. Does it get any better than that? I say not.

Learning to Put Down Our Heavy Burdens

Learning to cast our cares is crucial to living an abundant life. One day while standing in line at the grocery store, I began to feel a burning pain in my shoulders.

“Why are my shoulders on fire?” I wondered.

Without realizing it, I had been holding two very heavy shopping baskets—one in each hand. They were weighing me down and causing great pain.

Carrying the weight of this world is no different. Without realizing it, we carry them around until they begin causing us great pain. The pain acts as a signal and finally gets our attention.

The solution to this problem was simple—put the baskets down. The same is true for the cares and concerns we carry around—put them down at the foot of the cross. There, and only there, can we move forward, experiencing true freedom in Christ.

7. Cooperate with God's spirit throughout the day.

[Psalm 89:15-18](#) is our closing declaration as we exit our prayer closets. This is the crowning moment, exiting God's presence renewed, revitalized, and refreshed in spirit. The outcome of this hidden work is radiance and righteousness ([Daniel 12:3](#)). When we spend time deepening our relationship with God, our life will [radiate His presence](#) in the dark world in which we live, move and have our being. It is from this time that we will be able "to gather strength to participate more fully in life."²⁸ Be encouraged by these words:

"Solitude uncovers layer after layer of our life, driving us deeper and deeper to the core. God does not leave us to dig alone; He's at the top layer, and He's waiting at the core. What we discover may be troubling—who knew we had so many fears, so much sin, so much sadness, so much criticism of ourselves and others? But solitude urges us that we keep reaching, because God's hand of grace keeps reaching out to us. Once we clasp His hand and realize His forgiveness, His peace washes over our hearts like a light spring rain. Ultimately, it is the spiritual serenity that we cultivate in solitude. We seek a calm, restful center from which we can gather strength to participate more fully in life."²⁹

Initially, these seven steps will seem formal and cumbersome, but as you continue to practice, they will become second nature.

Time to Trust

Consider these words by author Donald S. Whitney:

“We expect a writer to dedicate a room in his home for writing, or a musician to set aside space in her residence just for music, or an artist to use one of the rooms where he lives as a studio. Many people do all or part of their daily work from offices at homes. Why, then, shouldn’t a Christian have a place in the house devoted exclusively to the work of prayer?”³⁰

How true. As I write, I am sitting in my lovely writing room my husband designed for me. But, now that I have a laptop, I’m mobile. Kirk Byron Jones coins this, “portable devotion.” He writes, “Rushing severely hampers our ability to discern the ineffable mystery of God in the mysterious and ordinary blessings of ordinary life, those things that are beyond us and those things that are right in front of us. One the best ways to apprehend God’s reality is to show up in life. This is portable devotion, worship that is not limited to precise times and special places. It is possible at any time; discernment determines whether or not we are awake within such moments.” In light of this newfound sense of “portable devotion,” the sky is the limit concerning “place” or “space” to be alone with God.

1. Take the challenge this week “to have a place in the house devoted exclusively to the work of prayer”³¹ or find a quiet space somewhere, albeit your public library (the new one in my hometown is quite lovely!). Now that you have your very own “prayer space,” re-read [Matthew 6:1-18](#). Consider Jesus’ directives:

Pray → in closet (secret) → behind closed doors → God will reward

2. The ministry of prayer and intercession is an invisible work, here on Earth, but quite visible in heaven. Revelation 5:8 says it clearly, “When he had taken it [the scroll], the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down

before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls on incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”

Our prayers are as incense in the marketplace of eternity. In a culture where public recognition and affirmation are front and center—the discipline of prayer can be difficult to maintain. I can’t walk around and sing my own praises, “I spent three hours in prayer today —isn’t that amazing?”

So, then, why do we pray? Do we pray in vain? Not according to [Matthew 7:7](#):

“Ask and it will be given to you;
Seek and you will find;
Knock and the door will be opened to you.”

Journal your thoughts.

3. Prayer acts as a decelerator and creates spiritual drag. It keeps our feet firmly planted on the ground. Over the next few days, exercise holy thought by reading these scriptures:

(see next page)

Feet Firmly Planted on the Ground	Meditation
Psalm 26: 12, "My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the Lord."	Level, in its truest form, means even and flat. What helps you keep your feet on the ground when a difficult situation arises? Be specific.
Psalm 37: 31, "The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip.	What is the directive here?
Psalm 17:5, "My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped.	When the psalmist says "your paths" what does he mean? What are the ancient paths?
Psalm 40:2, "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.	Pray for someone today that needs to be lifted out of a slimy pit. Out of the mud and mire. Pray that God will be their Rock.
Psalm 44:18, "Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path."	Isn't it interesting here that the psalmist writes first about the heart, and then about the feet. This is definitely the proper order. Our heart leads our feet. Because the psalmist's heart had not turned back – turned from following the scriptures – his feet didn't stray. Is there any situation or circumstance that is tempting you to stray from the path? What can you do to stay on the path?
Psalm 56:13, "For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life. Extra Reading: Psalm 140:4, "Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; protect me from men of violence who plan to trip my feet ."	Key thought: "feet from stumbling." To stumble (v) is "to obstruct in progress; to cause to trip or stop." In what specific ways has God delivered your feet from stumbling? Who wants to trip us or obstruct our progress? Are you aware of the Devil's desire to trip you on a daily basis?
Psalm 73:2(MSG), "But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold."	What causes the psalmist to nearly lose his foothold? Can you relate? I find great encouragement in the little word "almost—"don't you? They "almost" slipped.

Endnotes

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Chapter Three

Worry Wrinkles in the Fabric of Our Faith

"Worry is a cycle of inefficient thoughts whirling around a center of fear."

-Corrie Ten Boom

Within minutes of arriving at the airport where Rob and I would be jumping, we saw three men on their knees folding parachutes. At first sight, I felt a bit queasy.

"I sure hope they know what their doing," I said to my husband.

"No kidding," he said.

Being a novice at this whole parachuting thing, I once again asked some questions.

"How did you learn to fold parachutes?" I asked.

"A very long and rigorous training program," smiled the rigger.

I learned later that the Federal Aviation Association (FAA) offers certification and licensing. I was happy to read that riggers have to spend at least (3) years and >100 parachutes practicing the skill.

One thing I noticed while watching them was their careful attention to the "wrinkles" in the fabric of the parachute. With great precision, they folded and re-folded, pressing the air out of the parachute and eventually pressing the wrinkles out, as well. I remembered that one line in "The Rigger's Pledge," "I will never pass over any defect, nor neglect any repair, no matter how small, as I know that omissions and mistakes in the rigging of a parachute may cost a life." Right then and there, I silently prayed for my rigger (smile).

Worry is a wrinkle in the fabric of our faith.

Before we go any further, let's take a look at what worry really means and cut it into easy-to-digest bites:

Worry	Dwell	Allow	Anxiety	Feeling
To give way to anxiety or unease. To allow one's mind to dwell on difficulty or trouble. Mind defined: the element of a person that enables them to be aware of the world and their experiences to think or feel.	Live in or at a specified place. Key? "live in or at"	Admit (an event or activity) as legal or acceptable.	A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. Key? Feeling	an emotional state or reaction. Feelings defined: the emotional side of someone's character.

If you have a highlighter, take a minute and highlight the following words: anxiety, unease, nervousness, imminent, trouble, difficulty, uncertain, feeling, reaction. What do all of these words have in common? I'd say they share the common thread of what I call, "trust busters." Subtle behaviors that sneak in the back door of our mental state—leaving us either sad, depressed or "less than our best." [Corrie Ten Boom](#) says it this way, "Worry is the cycle of inefficient thoughts whirling around a center of fear." I think she nails it, don't you? I've added to her thought, "Trust, then, is a cycle of efficient thoughts whirling around a center of faith." *Thoughts?*

Wrinkles

Literal wrinkles come in all shapes and sizes and show up in the most unforgiving places. On clothes, bed sheets, and much to our displeasure—our faces! But, there are even worse wrinkles—trust wrinkles—invisible to the naked

eye that show up in the spiritual realm of our lives—especially prominent in the fabric of our faith.

One evening as my youngest daughter was dressing for an evening service at our church, she bounded the steps to ask me if she looked okay.

“What do you think, Mom?” she asked.

I couldn’t help but notice the incredibly wrinkled shirt she had chosen to wear. I am sure it had been buried in the bottom of her dresser drawer for days, perhaps weeks.

“Well,” I commented. “I think you might want to change that shirt—it is really wrinkled.”

“Can’t you iron it?” she asked.

“I don’t have time to iron it, just change to another shirt,” I calmly (well, that is how I remember it) replied. Displeased with my suggestion, she ambled slowly, resistantly, back upstairs, wearing a nice frown, to change into another shirt.

Should I have reacted that way? I asked myself.

For a moment, I came down on myself for making her change her shirt.

What difference do a few wrinkles make, anyway? Am I making more of this situation than I ought? Am I being an obsessive-compulsive mother who cares more about my daughter looking perfect than about her heart? Am I being a hyper-spiritual zealot? The last thing I want to be is a controlling mother, who demands perfection of her children.

No, I concluded. This isn’t about the wrinkled shirt; it is about the wrinkled attitude. Prior to this disagreement, we had already been dealing with several “wrinkled” attitudes.

Within a few minutes, she came back down the stairs, eager to go and wrinkle-free. As I reflect back on this it seems so small, yet, in reality, my daughter was testing her limits, testing her boundaries, and testing me. Deep down in her sweet little heart she knew I would disapprove of her wrinkled shirt,

because we had been dealing with personal hygiene issues for weeks. If I let her slide, her wrinkled attitude wouldn't have been dealt with and a price, later in her life, would have to be paid.

Before the evening ended, I wanted to seize the opportunity to share a practical life lesson with my daughter. We gathered around the ironing board and read from [Ephesians 5:25-27](#) where the apostle Paul talks to the church in Ephesus. He writes,

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of the water of the word, and to present himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

"You see," I shared (perhaps again being a bit over zealous), "We are the bride of Christ. Jesus desires that we present ourselves holy and blameless, without spot or wrinkles. It is important that we help each other not have any wrinkles in our character. When you see something in me that is 'wrinkled', i.e. not Christ-like, you can press out any wrinkles in my character by telling me—in love, of course! Then I can ask God to help me change. Does that make any sense?" Together, we took the hot iron to her wrinkled shirt and watched every last wrinkles press into a smooth surface.

One Very Big Wrinkle in the Fabric of Our Faith

Wrinkles are defined as "small ridges, furrows or prominences formed by the shrinking or contracting of any smooth substance."⁶ I like to notice these two words: shrinking, contracting.

Worry causes a shrinking or contracting in our ability to trust in God. In fact, the Bible has a great deal to say about worry: (see chart on next page)

What the Bible says about worry	Spiritual Anecdotes to my worry. Add your own thoughts right here:
Matthew 6:25, "I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear."	Philippians 4:19, "God will meet all of my needs according to HIS glorious riches in Christ Jesus."
Matthew 6:27, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?"	Psalms 31:15, "My times are in Your hands."
Matthew 6:34, "Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own."	see Psalm 25:5
Matthew 10:19, "Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."	see Proverbs 10:11
Luke 21:14, "But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves."	see Ecclesiastes 8:16-17
Matthew 13:1-23, especially verse 22, referencing "the worries of life."	see Proverbs 2

After reading through these thoughts on worry, ask yourself: How does worry contract or shrink my faith? My ability to trust *in God*?

Transforming From Worrier to Warrior

As you read through the above scriptures on worry, did you happen to notice that Jesus had strong feelings about the subject of worry. It seems he was always teaching his followers *to not worry*. I think it is safe to say that he didn't want us to fall into living our lives in a cycle of worry ([Romans 14:23](#)).

In light of this, let's do our very best to transform from worriers to warriors—women who dig deep and practice putting our trust *in* God. How are we going to do this? One baby step at a time. AND, we're going to do it together. We are so much better together.

A Long Line of Worriers—Is Worry in Your DNA?

Many, many women have shared their “worry wrestling” with me.

“I come from a long line of worriers,” Mary shared through blinding tears. “My mother worried. My grandmother worried. Help me stop the cycle, please!”

“Okay, well, it's time to change,” I shared. “Break the cycle. Build a new pattern of trusting *in* God.”

Easier said than done? Yes.

Fight the Good Fight Against Worry

Please know that I would never ask you to do something I haven't done myself. A few years ago, Worry kicked my butt. Not once, but twice. As a little girl, my daughter Brooke woke up with a big bald spot, the size of a half dollar, on the top of her head. She went to bed with hair. Woke up with a bald spot. No warning—it came out of nowhere. I felt as if I had been pushed into the blue skies of the vast unknown. The doctor's diagnosis was [Alopecia Areata](#), a highly unpredictable autoimmune skin disease resulting in hair loss. He wasn't alarmed and encouraged me to not worry, but told me to keep an eye on the situation.

“Don't worry,” I thought. “I can't think of anything else.”

My imagination soared. As I researched the condition (big mistake, by the way), it soared to even greater heights. Day and night, I thought about the possibilities and the “what-ifs.”

You see, worriers live in the Land of What Ifs”:

- *What if she loses all her hair?*
- *What if she is bald the rest of her life?*
- *What if she can't put her hair in a bun. Being a ballerina, what will she do?*
- *What if I can't fix this problem? Find a solution?*
- *What if, what if, what if?*

And, to add fuel to the fire, ABC's news program, 20/20, featured a segment on ["Locks of Love,"](#) the very night I found the bald spot. Needless to say, I couldn't sleep. It thrust me into a spiritual freefall. A tailspin of uncontrollable worry. Every time I thought about it, I felt physically sick.

So, my battle began. I tried desperately to hide my fears, because I didn't want her to fear, but it wasn't easy. Day after day, I struggled. I prayed. I wept quietly in my prayer closet. I searched for nutrients, products, doctors...anything that might help. We stood in prayer lines. [We anointed her with oil.](#) Nothing seemed to work.

Finally, I turned completely to God and his Word. Why was this my last resource? Because I had drained all natural resources and had absolutely nowhere else to turn. To the best of my ability, I targeted my worry with the ancient text of God's Word. Promises my head knew were truth. But they needed to work their way down into my heart of hearts. I failed over and over again. Where I failed, God's grace fell like a refreshing summer rain. *Sometimes God waits for us to exhaust ourselves of ourselves.*

When the "what-ifs" crowded my mind—creating unrest and anxiety and fear—I fought back by re-minding myself of one particular scripture: [Matthew 10:30](#), "Even the very hairs of Brooke's head are numbered." I'm sure I repeated these words a million times. Brooke and I said them out loud together. Still to this day, I smile when I hear it somewhere.

After I came to the end of myself, I surrendered to the truth that God loves my daughter more than I ever could and that he knew exactly what her future held.

Sandy's Trust Challenge

Around the same time as my struggle, my dear friend, Sandy, was enduring her own worry crisis. Her youngest daughter, Olivia, who was only seven at the time, was facing a medical ordeal. Faced with a battery of extensive tests and x-rays, medical visits, hospitalizations and eventual surgery, Fear and Anxiety took over.

So, Sandy's battle began.

One day, as we were talking and praying on the phone, she said, "Janell, I am drowning in what-ifs. God told me to put my what-ifs into His box of I-ams."

- *What if the X-rays are too strong for her little body?*
- *What if she gets too much radiation?*
- *What if the doctors misdiagnose?*
- *What if she gets a staph infection?*
- *What if? What if? What if?*

Create Your Very Own I-AM BOX.

Being the kinetic, hands-on learner that I am, I took her idea one step further. I created an I-AM BOX. Something tangible that I could go to with my worries. Fast as lightning, I started my treasure hunt for "I AM" scriptures. Here's a sampling:

(see next page)

Scripture Reading	The Great Promise
Genesis 15:1	"I am the shield and your very great reward."
Genesis 17:1	"I am God Almighty."
Exodus 3:14	"I am who I am."
Psalms 46:10	"Be still and know that I am GOD."
Isaiah 41:10	"Do not fear, I am with you. Do not be dismayed, I am your God."
Isaiah 44:6	"I am the first and the last; apart from me there is no Savior."
Jeremiah 3:14b	"I am your husband."
Jeremiah 32:27	"I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. <i>Is there anything too hard for me?</i> "
Matthew 28:20	"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
Mark 14:62	"I am," said Jesus.
John 6:35	"I am the bread of life."
John 6:51	"I am the living bread that came down from heaven."
John 8:12	"I am the light of the world."
John 10:7	"I am the gate of the sheep."
John 10:11	"I am the good shepherd."
John 11:25	"I am the resurrection and the life."
John 14:6	"I am the true vine."

Next I searched for a box that I could use as my "I-AM BOX." Have fun with this (smile). Search garage sales, discount stores, antique stores or create your very own. Then write the above scriptures on little pieces of paper and place them in your box. When you find yourself dwelling in "The Land of What-ifs," go to your box and replace that "What-if" with an "I AM." Sometimes, as women, we need a little extra encouragement. I can honestly say that God and this practice have

transformed me from a worrier to a warrior. That doesn't mean I don't get concerned or troubled, we aren't superhuman (smile), but there is a vast difference between worry and concern [defined: a matter of interest or importance].

Please remember that you are not alone. Together, we'll walk the road towards learning to fully put our trust *in* God. We can do this, I am 100% certain!

Time to Trust

1. Consider a time when worry overwhelmed *you*. Maybe you are in that time right now. Take a few moments to write down your "What-ifs." Somehow, by writing them down they lose power.

2. Now, transform your "What-ifs" into "I-AMS." Create your "I AM BOX" and replace your "What-ifs" with the power of God's "I AM" verses. This might take some time and it will definitely take a great deal of practice...but eventually, the worrier in you will transform into [WARRIOR!!!](#)

Stay Tuned

Chapters 4-6 are on their way!

I pray this short study has been a blessing to you. Please feel free to send any questions or comments you might have to janell@janellrardon.com.

*always learning,
janell*