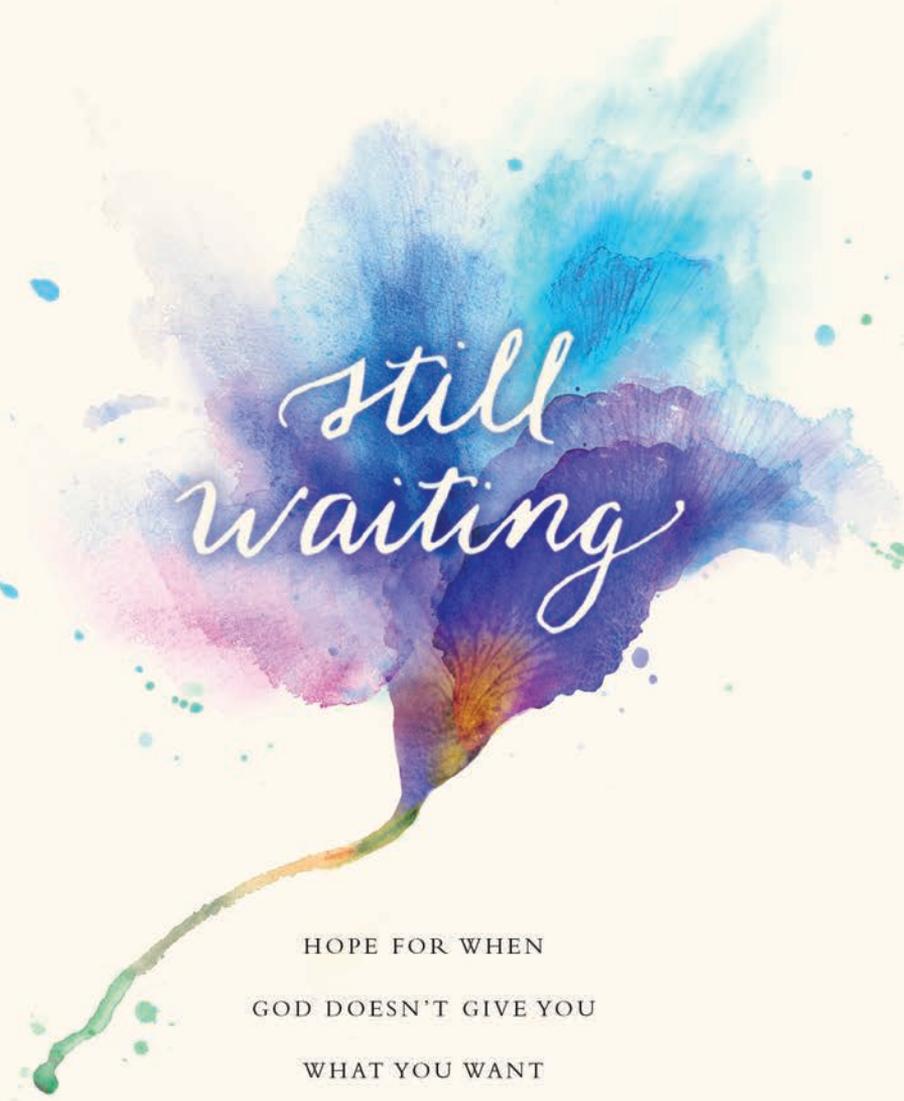


FOREWORD BY JESS CONNOLLY

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *WILD AND FREE*



*still
waiting*

HOPE FOR WHEN
GOD DOESN'T GIVE YOU
WHAT YOU WANT

ANN SWINDELL

ENDORSEMENTS

So few of us know how to wait well. Ann has lived a long wait and found God in it. We need the vulnerability—laced with the wisdom God has imparted during her years of waiting—that Ann Swindell offers on these pages. As only a skilled storyteller can do, she invites us to find our own stories within hers and within the narrative of Scripture that is written for us, the waiting ones.

SARA HAGERTY

Author of *Every Bitter Thing Is Sweet*

Ann has taken us through a tender, personal journey that we can all relate to. We understand the ache of shame, and we have our own stories of waiting for relief. With biblical truth and the gentle wisdom of a good friend, Ann tells both the Bleeding Woman's story and her own, and leads us to our present hope and fullness in Christ as we wait.

RUTH CHOU SIMONS

Founder of *gracelaced.com*, artist, and author

In *Still Waiting*, Ann gives us insight into what to do while we are waiting. Not only what to do, but how to stay attached to the bigger God-story in the midst of our struggles. Ann has not only given us insight and truth but has lived it out in her own life. May this book stir you to love Jesus more and believe that he is able to meet with you, even in the waiting.

JIMMY SEIBERT

Senior pastor of Antioch Community Church and president of Antioch Ministries International

The remarkable biblical story of the Bleeding Woman whom Jesus healed is the backdrop for this treasure of a book. Weaving in the intimate details of her own ongoing journey to healing with honesty and insight, Ann Swindell creatively, compassionately, and gently takes us by the hand and leads us to Jesus with astonishing wisdom that can only come from personal experience. Her skillfully written words spoke deeply into my often impatient, questioning heart in seasons of waiting, pointing to life-changing truth and providing encouragement and hope. We come to see each element of the waiting as a gift with an eternal purpose, drawing us closer to the one who sovereignly knows our need.

TERRI KRAUS

President of Redbud Writers Guild and author of the Project Restoration series

Still Waiting offers wisdom and hope in an area I have long struggled to overcome: the ability to wait well. Ann lovingly guides us through Scripture and comes alongside us with her own story as we go on a journey to learn what it means to wait in a way that isn't lazy but provides an open space in our hearts and schedules for God to meet us in the midst of the unknown. And that is always, always, worth the wait.

CRYSTAL STINE

Freelance writer, speaker, and host of the Write 31 Days challenge

Grab a cup of coffee and meet your new best friend. That's how you'll feel after reading this expertly crafted book, which is about far more than waiting. It is about how to live—how to take what life is offering at any moment and be whole and at peace. Swindell intimately weaves together painful

and touching stories from her own life with Scripture and reflections, and creates a very real space of hope.

SHAYNE MOORE

Author and founder of Redbud Writers Guild

Ann is passionate, raw, and inviting—on and off the page. Her insight into the life of one woman in the Bible, as it relates to our stories of struggle, carries a mantle of hope and solidarity to those of us waiting on God today.

KAREN STOTT

Founder of Pursuit Community

In *Still Waiting*, both Ann's faith and her struggles are creatively woven together with a biblical story in a way that gives each of us hope for our respective challenges. This is a great reminder of God's faithfulness in spite of our circumstances.

MIKE BAKER

Senior pastor of Eastview Christian Church and author of *Jesus Speaks*

Life constantly (and painfully) reminds us how hard waiting truly is. In fact, waiting may well be one of the most challenging spiritual tasks that's set before us. Ann Swindell gently invites us to learn from someone intimately familiar with waiting: the hemorrhaging woman described in Mark 5. As Ann explores, the short glimpse Scripture gives us of this woman's life and faith is rich fodder for aiding us in our own weakness and waiting, encouraging us to keep reaching out to Jesus in expectant hope.

KELLI B. TRUJILLO

Editor of *CT Women* and author of *The Busy Mom's Guide to Spiritual Survival*

We all have to deal with some degree of waiting in our lives. Through a beautiful retelling of the story of the Bleeding Woman—as well as honest glimpses into her own story—Ann points us back to Jesus in every stage of the waiting process. *Still Waiting* reminds readers that the waiting period can provide fertile soil for our roots to run deep, knowing that our hope lies not in our circumstances but rather in the Lord.

DIANNE JAGO

Founder of *Deeply Rooted* magazine

Ann Swindell tells her story of waiting with winsome honesty. Readers who have fought secret battles will recognize her exhausting effort to avoid shame. Anyone who has prayed the same prayer for years will resonate with her struggle to be content in all circumstances while at the same time holding on to the hope of healing. *Still Waiting* helps the reader not only experience Swindell's story but lift our gaze from her life and our own to the healing love of Christ.

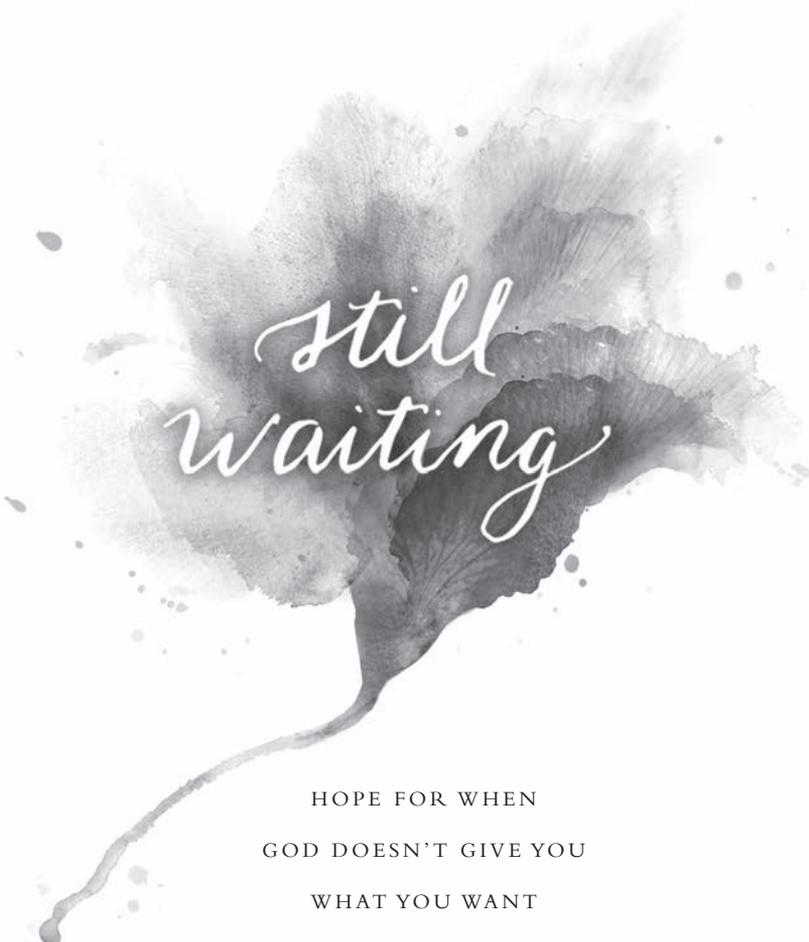
BETSY CHILDS HOWARD

Editor for the *Gospel Coalition*

The way Ann weaves large swaths of Scripture into narrative puts skin on what can seem like just an old Bible story. This book's look at the Bleeding Woman and also Ann's personal testimony provide a strong and welcomed toehold for anyone who has grown tired of waiting as she suffers.

HAYLEY MORGAN

Bestselling author of *Wild and Free* and social entrepreneur

A large, artistic watercolor splash in shades of grey and black, resembling a flower or a cloud, serves as the background for the title. The splash is centered and has a soft, ethereal quality with some darker, more saturated areas.

*still
waiting*

HOPE FOR WHEN
GOD DOESN'T GIVE YOU
WHAT YOU WANT

ANN SWINDELL

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FOREWORD

The other day I hit a breaking point about something. I realized I was being really selfish and silly, and I wasn't trusting God regarding a big old heart issue I was having. I cried, read a bunch of Bible verses, wrote in my journal, and Instagrammed about it—you know, vaguely enough so no one would know specifically about my busted-heart issue. I woke up the next day with the subconscious belief that since I had repented and submitted, God was going to give me my way.

But he didn't. In fact, that day a little salt got into that tiny wound: the heart issue was exacerbated by circumstances totally out of my control. And you'd better believe I wanted to have a spiritual hissy fit—because I had prayed, I had humbled myself, and I had *waited* for a whole eighteen hours for God to do his thing.

The passage of Scripture that's been messing with me the most lately is a really simple verse at the very beginning of Genesis 41. It's smack dab in the thick of Joseph's story of waiting: he has been unjustly imprisoned, and the guy who was supposed to help him out has totally forgotten about him. In Genesis 41:1, the Bible casually mentions, "When

two full years had passed . . .” (NIV). Oh, just two years? No biggie. Joseph was just kicking it in jail for two years while life and love and the world passed him by. But I’m over here losing it over my eighteen hours of pain and anguish.

God’s people are often called to be a waiting people—not because he is unkind or unloving, but rather the exact opposite. God’s people are a waiting people because he is an on-time God, not an on-demand one. So it seems we’ve got to figure out this waiting thing in a holy and wholehearted way.

We all know we live in a microwave culture—even a microwave *Christian* culture. We can get anything we want, and we can make anything happen, and if someone won’t give us what we need, we’ll get it from somewhere else—cheaper, faster, and with free shipping too.

But the Lord has never, ever worked this way. And my friend Ann? She knows this. She has lived it. She *is* living it. She has lived his faithfulness, even when it feels like his favor is missing. She has longed to understand his heart, even when she hasn’t seen his hand moving. She has grabbed hold of the fruit there is to find in waiting—the fullness of God and the strength of his Spirit.

A good leader goes first, and Ann hasn’t just gone first into the tepid waters of waiting; she is also pushing us to receive grace by receiving it herself and telling her story with some brutally beautiful words. Really, she’s telling *our* story—as we’re all a part of this now-and-not-yet waiting Kingdom of God.

Read on, friends; be blessed; and dive into the grace that waits for *you*.

Jess Connolly

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is not, ultimately, a record of my life but a recollection of my journey, so for the sake of time (and your sanity), there are places where I have collapsed or tweaked the timeline in order to save you from confusion and repetitive details. There are also places where I have changed the names of individuals in my story in order to protect them. But the people, events, and places in this book are all real and deeply meaningful to me.

The life of the Bleeding Woman was real too—although Scripture doesn't offer us much in the way of details. I've spent time in the stacks of libraries studying and researching and piecing together the facts that I could about her story, but not many exist. And so, while based on research, much of her narrative—which I offer as a fictional counterpart to my own—is conjecture. We don't know her age when she met Jesus, and we don't know why or how, exactly, she was bleeding. My assumptions in this book are broadly built on the study and suppositions of scholars who have steeped themselves in the realities of the first century. You will find

STILL WAITING

references to many of these texts at the end of the book, if you wish to learn more about her.

Ultimately, my desire is that the story of the Bleeding Woman, along with my own journey, will point you to the truth and goodness of Christ Jesus. He is the reason I set out to write this book in the first place—and why I have a story to tell at all.

INTRODUCTION

A Woman Acquainted with Waiting

There was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment.

MARK 5:25-27

The story of the Bleeding Woman has echoed through my life for years now. I find myself thinking about her, wondering about her, searching out bits and pieces of her story in theological books and commentaries. I want to know who she was and what her existence was like in the years before she met Jesus. I want to uncover what her story reveals about the character of Christ and how he draws near to those who are hurting.

The Bible gives us tiny ribbons of insight into her life. She had been bleeding for twelve years. She had no money left, having spent all she had on doctors who were unable to help her. Physically, she was worse off than she'd ever been before.

And then one interaction with Jesus upended her broken life and changed everything.

Still, that's about all we know. Braided together, these ribbons offer me a thin rope to climb when it comes to understanding this woman. I don't know her name, I don't know her age, and I don't even know how her bleeding began.

There are conjectures, theories, and possibilities about her that number to the skies. She remains a mystery.

Yet this mystery helps me identify with her. Where I cannot see her face, I have been able to imagine my own. Where I cannot know her name, I have placed mine between the lines of the Scripture. I have likened myself to the Bleeding Woman.

I do not claim to have experienced the same level of suffering as this woman. I don't know what it's like to bleed for a dozen years with no end in sight or to be ostracized from my community. But her story is, in many ways, a story of waiting—and at the same point in our lives, all of us, like her, find ourselves waiting for something.

I, too, have known years of waiting—years of hoping and praying and dreaming of a cure no doctor could offer, years of waiting for a healing encounter with Jesus. Every new morning was a reminder that I was promised no healing and guaranteed no end stamp on the condition I carried.

Like the Bleeding Woman, I was waiting for Jesus. As I waited, I walked my own journey with God—perhaps similar to the one she lived. No, I didn't walk the same roads or live in the same circumstances, but I asked the same question: Would he give me what I was seeking? As the waiting stretched on, the questions multiplied. Would I still love him, no matter what? Would I still trust him?

It was in the middle of these questions and prayers and confusion that I found myself waiting for a God I couldn't always make sense of or understand.

But I met him *in* the waiting.

And for me, that changed everything.

CHAPTER 1

When Waiting Makes You Broken

Her name, I imagine, was Sarah. A good name—the name of the wife of Abraham, the father of her people. Her parents had named her twenty-odd years ago, when she was a tight ball of legs and arms still grabbing at air, grasping at nothing. She had been small and sickly when she was born, and they were not sure if she would make it. So they named her Sarah, hoping that a strong name would make her strong too.

Whether it was the name or the favor of the God her family worshiped, Sarah made it through that uncertain first year to become a healthy, happy little girl. Like other girls in her village, she stayed home with her mother and learned the work of cleaning and cooking and telling stories. Her father made respectable money from his metalworking, and he would arrange for her to marry a

godly man when it was time. Her dowry was fair enough to secure an upright husband, and her father's good name was enough to bring suitors when she was only twelve.

She bled for the first time when she was fourteen. At first, it was cause for quiet celebration in the family—she had reached menses; she had attained womanhood. That week her mother explained to her what she could now expect from her body and what that meant for her in terms of ceremonial purity within the larger community. Each month there would be a time when she would have to stay away from communal worship and the homes of other people. But this was not a punishment; it was simply the way with women.

Then her mother smiled and told Sarah about the future that lay ahead of her. Within the year, she might become betrothed, and within another year or two, she would be wed. Could she imagine, her mother whispered, the joy of having her own children in a few years? Perhaps she might have two children—or three, if God blessed her—before she turned twenty.

Sarah marveled that such a small trickle of blood could change everything. She felt excited about her new status—and happy at her mother's happiness, happy at her father's smile of approval. Life transformed in front of her. Now she was a woman. She would be leaving home soon.

But after two weeks, the bleeding had not stopped. Her mother, who had once been so happy over this news, now started to worry herself around the house. Sarah could tell by the way she kneaded the bread every morning—too much, too hard, too long. Their dinner loaves became misshapen and tired looking. When Sarah asked her mother when the bleeding would stop, her mother told her that

it should have stopped already. "Only a week at a time," she said. "Seven days at once, not more."

Sarah did not understand what was going on—in her own body or in her mother's mind.

After three weeks, Sarah overheard her mother talking to her father in low tones after they thought the children had fallen asleep. Sarah shared a mat with her younger sister; her older brothers had already left the house, and her younger brother was only five, heavy with sleep. Sarah heard the fear in her mother's voice, and she strained to understand the words.

The whispers were too low to comprehend, but she knew something was wrong—wrong with her.



The account of the Bleeding Woman is a small story in the Bible, repeated in three of the four Gospels. But it is remarkable in its power and its ability to startle me back to God.

It is the backstory that I daydream about—the life of this woman before her encounter with Christ. To me, that seems to be at least half of the story. The writers of the Gospels note, calmly and evenly, that she had been bleeding for twelve years. But I can't read those lines without wondering about the substance of those days. There was nothing calm or even about those years, I imagine, because not only had she been bleeding for twelve years; she had been *waiting* for twelve years. And waiting is not a calm and even business.

Most of this woman's story in Scripture focuses on her moment with Jesus—that moment of healing, the inversion

of her existence. But she had lived through those twelve years, and she suffered through them in ways that are unknown to us. I find myself drawn to those years—drawn to the marrow of them, drawn to the inside of them, drawn to the hurt that must have lingered in every moment of those 4,380 days. Because who but a bleeding woman can know the pain of life leaving your body every moment of the day? Who but a bleeding woman can know the struggle of waiting for a healing that has proven impossible to find?

I am drawn to those years of hers—those days—because I have had years of waiting of my own. Years of brokenness and longing that stretched past twelve.

My own journey unfolds less dramatically than hers—less obviously, perhaps. But it is still full of shame and hiding, still full of the waiting that threatened to undo me.

Where My Story Begins

Like the Bleeding Woman, I grew up immersed in the things of God. Before I was old enough to talk, let alone know any words, I was baptized into Christianity. Held high in a white gown by a pastor in a gray robe, I was sprinkled with water and invited into the life of the church. Not only did that moment signify my parents' vow to raise me in the faith, but it was the first moment of many in my journey toward Christ. Because, as simple as this sounds, I can never remember a day when I haven't loved God. I have always wanted to know him. I still do.

Everything was spiritual to me; I grew up as a deeply attentive child who wanted to see connections running

through every flower, every song, every person. I believed that God's presence could be found anywhere, if only I could open my eyes wide enough to see him. I sang songs to God that I made up in my head. I hummed to him as I discovered bark patterns on curving trees in the backyard, and I danced for him as I bent low to smell the strawberry-sweetness that poured from the lilies of the valley splayed across our lawn.

I prayed with childlike fervor, falling asleep with both dreams and fears while trying to understand the concept of eternity. One night, when I was seven or eight years old, I cried for my mother in the dark, terrified that life would go on and on forever. She held me but couldn't give the answer I wanted, because she couldn't explain the unexplainable—that dizzying notion of infinity.

Still, even with my fears and the many things I couldn't comprehend, I continued to pray every night that I can remember. I made recitations to God of my hopes and my thanks, my desires and my wishes. I whispered into the dark of my bedroom, praying in a hush that I trusted he could hear. I believed he was listening.

But also like the Bleeding Woman, my story with suffering—trivial as it might initially seem—starts when I was young. I was eleven. It was an unassuming beginning, something small and originally unmagnified in my life. I was in the school play in fifth grade—*The Pirates of Penzance*. In case you've never heard of the comic opera by Gilbert and Sullivan, it's a tongue-twisting musical that includes pirates, a group of sisters (of whom I was one), and a hero and heroine who fall in love. A classic romance story—with a pirate

twist! I loved the music, loved the eyelet dress I got to wear, loved the heat of the lights on my face, loved the rush of color and sound and storytelling swirling around me.

I had been wearing glasses since third grade, but in fifth grade I asked my parents for contacts. They agreed, and I got fitted for gas permeable contact lenses—a long name for hard contacts. Every morning I tucked the tiny plastic disks over my pupils, feeling them swim and settle onto the centers of my eyes. Every evening I diligently popped them out, cleaned them, and snapped them into my contact case. Click, click.

What happened during those months in fifth grade before *The Pirates of Penzance* is that I developed a fascination with my eyes—particularly, with my eyelashes and eyebrows. When showtime came, I applied theater makeup, which included mascara. I had never worn makeup before, and adding mascara to my lashes created another layer of captivation with my eyes. I started touching my eyelashes and running the tips of my fingers along them. My eyelashes were long and very full; I had inherited them from my father. They were lovely.

It happened during one performance as I stood in the tiled hallway: I waited for my cue to enter (stage left), and I pulled out my first eyelash. I remember the moment, remember the feeling. It felt good, like the release of a sneeze. It felt like the pop that comes from unscrewing a pressurized jar. It felt like the start of something I didn't understand.

That day I plucked out my first eyelash and, although I didn't know it at the time, started a habit that snowballed into years and years of pulling out my own eyelashes and eyebrows.

It is odd, I know. It is strange.

What started as a passing moment avalanched a deep struggle into my young life. After that, I pulled out eyelashes every day. Every single day.

It felt like a release of tension; it felt like I couldn't stop.

At first, I don't remember my parents noticing that I was pulling out my eyelashes, and later, my eyebrows. I didn't think too much about it either. But soon the bare patches of skin framing my eyes became visibly obvious.

I didn't know what was happening, and my parents seemed to be as mystified as I was. They would tell me to stop playing with my eyelashes, to stop touching them. I would tell myself the same thing. But even though I didn't like what I was doing—even though I hated how it made me look—I found that I couldn't stop. When I felt a little stressed or uncomfortable or slightly anxious—a tendency passed down through my genes—my hands would start floating up to my lash line, ready to pluck out a lash or two. Or three or four.

But I didn't always pull out my lashes just because I leaned toward perfectionism as a child, just because I was prone to low-grade anxiety. Sometimes I tugged on my lash line when I wasn't thinking, wasn't worried, wasn't stressed. I've always been a reader, and I would spend hours on our family room couch, diving into rich worlds on the page, devouring whole books and series over the course of a few days.

The problem? I found that every time I read, the pages of my books were covered with eyelashes. Tiny brown Cs, peppered like unwanted snowflakes across the pages. I cried when I saw them; I didn't know how to stop doing what I

didn't want to do. My parents cried with me; they didn't know how to stop me either.

And so they started doing some research. My father, a physician, discovered that what I was struggling with was a real condition, odd as it seemed.

The diagnosis: a medical condition called trichotillomania. It turned out I wasn't the only one with an itching desire to pull out my eyelashes and my eyebrows; it actually had a name. Some people pull hair from their heads or from their arms; I pulled out my eyelashes and brows. Trichotillomania, as we came to find out, is fairly common—it's estimated that up to 4 percent of people across the globe and one percent of Americans (or about 2.5 million people in the United States) live with the condition.¹ But it remains mostly unknown to the general public, and chances are, you've never even heard of it. That's because it is rarely discussed. Why?

Shame. That's why.

How do you explain to someone that you can't stop pulling out your own hair? How do you say that what you feel is like a gravitational pull—although no one is forcing you to do the thing that you hate? How could I explain that in my brain, the urge to pull on—and out—my eyelashes was a low-level earthquake constantly rumbling below the surface?

I couldn't. It was too strange, too weird.

Imagine it for yourself: you aren't pulling out your hair in a dramatic display of biblical despair, as Ezra did when he learned that the people of God were disobeying Yahweh (see Ezra 9:3). You aren't shaving it off as a mourning ritual, as Job did (see Job 1:20). Your hair isn't falling out due to old

age or chemotherapy—both socially acceptable reasons for losing hair. You alone are responsible for pulling out your hair, for ruining your own appearance. And as much as you want to stop, you find it to be impossible.

Unlike self-harm, trichotillomania is a medical diagnosis that isn't necessarily based in self-hate—although many sufferers report feelings of low self-esteem due to their condition. *The American Journal of Psychiatry* defines the condition this way:

Trichotillomania is a poorly understood disorder characterized by repetitive hair pulling that leads to noticeable hair loss, distress, and social or functional impairment. The peak age at onset is 12–13 years, and the disorder is often chronic and difficult to treat. . . . In DSM-IV, it is categorized as an impulse control disorder. . . . Although rising tension and subsequent pleasure, gratification, or relief are integral to the current diagnostic criteria for trichotillomania, many people with debilitating hair pulling do not endorse these criteria.²

So this urge I had to pull out my lashes as a little girl? This inability to stop? It was textbook behavior. But as my father continued to research, he also discovered that according to most sources, trichotillomania is incurable. Medical books told him it was unexplainable. Some of his fellow doctors said it was permanent.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to treat. There is no cure.

Some people with trich start pulling due to trauma, either familial or physical: the divorce of parents, the death of a pet, even a move to a new town. I dealt with none of these things. I had a stable home life, loving parents, and a fun little sister. I struggled for a while with my weight, but other than that, my biggest trauma had been that Peter didn't want to date me in fourth grade. Yes, I was a little on the worrisome and anxious side—I always wanted to do things right, and well. But my onset of trich had no clear medical reason, and now apparently my diagnosis had no clear solution.

I wonder if this is, in some small way, how the Bleeding Woman felt. There was no clear reason for the onset of her bleeding—at least, not that we know about. There was no clear solution for how to treat it or how to fix it. There was no direction at all. Just a physical, shameful, confusing problem that led to days of waiting and then years of waiting—waiting for a cure that never materialized. It would take a miracle for her to be healed.

It would take a miracle for me to be healed too.

The Brokenness We Bear

All of us live with brokenness in our lives. To varying degrees and in various ways, brokenness is more normal than foreign in the human experience. And although I know there were many other ways I was already broken as an eleven-year-old, trichotillomania was the clearest way I started to understand brokenness in myself. Up until that point, I had been a “good girl”: I did what I was supposed to do, I finished my homework assignments, I sang loudly in the church choir, I ate my

veggies. And I genuinely liked being a good girl—I've always been a rule follower by nature, another soul in a long line of rule followers on both sides of my family. Like my parents and grandparents and great-grandparents before me, I felt secure when I did the right thing. This way of living offered me a sense of internal control.

But with trichotillomania, suddenly I couldn't do what I believed was the right thing. That insatiable compulsion to pull out my eyelashes and eyebrows—and the fact that I kept pulling them out, even when I wanted to stop—made me *feel* broken. That was the first time I experienced the emotion of knowing my own brokenness. It was also the first time I felt helpless to change my brokenness. Even though I wished and hoped and prayed it would disappear, trich wouldn't leave me alone.

It felt like a blot on my young life, like a red X on what had previously been a perfect test. Up until the age of eleven, if I'd had real brokenness, I'd been able to effectively ignore it or mask it. That Koosh ball I stole from my cousin as a five-year-old? I apologized and never did it again. That mean thing I said to my little sister? I stopped saying it. But when it came to trich, I couldn't stop. I couldn't *ever* stop. My parents couldn't fix it, and I couldn't fix it. *Stuck* isn't a strong enough word to explain how I felt. *Trapped* comes closer. Ultimately, when it came down to it, the only thing I could do was wait—and hope that I might grow out of trichotillomania.

In ways both small and overwhelming, we all know what brokenness feels like. And sometimes our own brokenness—or

the brokenness of those we love—seems like too much to bear. Whether it's buying more than we can afford or striking out in anger at the people we love or eating more than we want to or pushing people away when we need them most, we all have places where brokenness is painfully apparent in our own hearts. We all have parts of our lives where we are waiting for things to change.

Whether we're waiting for physical healing or emotional wholeness or spiritual breakthrough, we are all waiting for our brokenness to be mended. We wait because we are broken, and we are broken because we are waiting.

We wait because we are broken.

What we know in our bones is also declared in the Bible: all creation is tattered, destroyed, and torn. And it has been since that first act of rebellion in the Garden of Eden. The decision Adam and Eve made to disobey God toppled the perfection in that place, and ever since, everything around us—and everything within us—has been damaged by sin and death. All creation groans for renewal:

The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation,

but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

ROMANS 8:19-23

The world itself is in a season of waiting, of groaning, of yearning for completion. Brokenness is all around us. Yes, one day God will come and make everything new. But until then, we wait in the brokenness. What we cannot secure on our own—ultimate peace, physical health, environmental abundance—we wait for from the hand of God.

We are broken because we are waiting.

At any point, God could end the waiting. He could renew all things in a moment. But he hasn't done so yet—and we don't know when he will. Until then, we are the waiting ones—the ones who are betting it all on a God who saves, on a God who promises to come through. For as long as he prolongs his coming, we remain broken. And yet—*and yet*—even his prolonging is a kindness. He prolongs his coming because he is patient:

Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will

pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

2 PETER 3:8-10

The day is coming—coming like a thief—when the waiting will finally be over. Until then, though, we remain broken. And so we must learn to love this patient God in the waiting and in our own brokenness.

We know the defeat of broken waiting.

Having trichotillomania as a child made me feel sad and sorry and broken in a way I hadn't known yet. This was a brokenness so persistent that I couldn't escape it, not even for a day. I knew Jesus then, even loved him. But I didn't know what difference he was making in this part of my life. Although I prayed for him to take away my condition, he didn't seem to be hearing that particular prayer. While my little life looked squeaky clean from the outside, there was one segment of my life I couldn't gain mastery over: I couldn't be good enough to will trichotillomania away.

I remember sitting on the blue leather couch in the family room of our old house, my legs stretched out over the three cushions, pretending to be reading when I was really just counting the eyelashes on the page.

Seven, eight, nine.

I didn't have words then, at the age of eleven, to name what I was feeling. But what I was feeling was *defeated*. Completely defeated. Like an utter failure.

Maybe you know the feeling. Maybe your body has betrayed you, or maybe your family is falling apart. Maybe you're reeling from a broken heart or the sting of professional rejection. Maybe you struggle with the pain of unmet dreams and shelved goals that might never happen.

Whatever it is and wherever it comes from, we all know the hollow truth of brokenness, of feeling defeated, of seeing ourselves as failures.

Looking for a Miracle

As I write this, I am in the midst of Holy Week. And like any Easter where I live, Resurrection Day comes between winter and spring.

It is April in Chicagoland, and this past weekend was lovely. It was warm enough to wear a T-shirt and shorts, and I was actually able to forgo what has been my constant companion for the last half a year—a cardigan. Although my sister teases me about my cardigan collection, I love the truth of a cardigan: it does what it advertises, shielding me from the biting wind that sinks its teeth into Chicago even on the days when the sun has come out.

Still, even with the cardigan gone this weekend, after so many months of winter it's hard to have faith that spring is actually on its way. It's easier to believe that I've been cold forever—and that I *will* be cold forever. The cold has swirled around me so long that I've nearly forgotten warmth; even the air has smelled stripped and sterile, devoid of life and abundance.

But this past weekend I actually wondered if spring might

fight its way through the chill and the cold that has settled in my bones. The sun and the warmth this past Friday and Saturday gave me a taste of spring—and with it, the hope that winter might truly be over.

Then yesterday, after a weekend of seventy-five-degree days, it snowed. And it didn't just snow for minutes. It snowed for hours. *Hours*. In April. White, crystalline snow, piling on the bushes and in the pockets of newly blossomed tulip leaves like tiny white anthills. The clouds came back, and the sky turned gray. The sun was nowhere to be found.

So I did what I had to do: I shut every blind and closed every door and sat in denial inside my house. I couldn't bear to see it again, this fight between winter and spring. I couldn't watch the snow beat back the flowers that were just daring to bloom. The flowers wouldn't make it. The tulips and the daffodils that had worked so hard to fight through the earth and blossom—now they would die.

And I remember, here in this Holy Week, that thousands of years ago, something similar happened, but on a scale much grander and greater. It appeared that Jesus might be coming into the spring of his own life and ministry. He performed miracles, raised people from the dead, gained a following. The shouts rang out like bells as people welcomed him into Jerusalem, lifting palm branches and flinging their coats under the hooves of the colt he rode.

But suddenly the winter of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday came upon him. The events that transpired on these days—both of them—were heart wrenching. Betrayal,

abandonment, false witness, political mongering, beating, whipping, spitting, splitting, breaking, bleeding.

These days marked a sudden turn back to winter and death. Jesus, hanging on the cross: the flower of his life beaten back by a darkness so great he bled and died.

Jesus bled too.

He knows what it's like to have blood leave the body in great rivers, in unstoppable streams.

He knows the reality of being ostracized. He knows what it is to have no way out of his circumstances. He knows what it is to be broken, in his heart and in his limbs. His body pulverized. His spirit abandoned. He knows what it is to wait for God to come through—and to die in the waiting.

I dare not write about brokenness and pain, about weakness and shame, or about the difficulty of waiting without turning first to the Cross. My struggle with trichotillomania as a child, the brokenness of the Bleeding Woman, the sorrow of unmet desires, the pain any of us walk through and with—all of it is found in that torn man on the cross. And in the death he died.

The Resurrection will come, and with it every promise of healing and wholeness will be fulfilled. But there is no guarantee that we'll experience that resurrection wholeness until the final return of our Lord. And so, until that day, all of us find ourselves in a season of waiting—the waiting between Jesus' going and his coming. The waiting between the groaning of creation and the day when all things are made new. The waiting between all of this pain, suffering, death, and destruction, and the time when every tear will be wiped away.

STILL WAITING

In one way or another, all of us find ourselves in the metaphorical hours between Friday and Sunday, because we are all waiting in some way. Waiting for test results, waiting for our marriage to turn a corner, waiting for a job that pays the bills, waiting for our child to return to God, waiting for healing, waiting for hope. Waiting.

Like the Bleeding Woman who needed a miracle, all of us need one too.

We are waiting for Jesus to swing his robe wide enough to grasp it, that we might be made whole.