

FOREWORD BY PHYLCIA MASONHEIMER

Kaci Nicole Harlow

so
much
better

*daring to trust God when you're
waiting, impatient, and expectant*



Kaci's love for the Lord and her willingness to follow Him wherever He leads is contagious. In *So Much Better*, she shares her journey of learning to trust that in every season and circumstance, God's ways are always better than her own—even in seasons of waiting. Kaci doesn't just write about surrender; she lives it, continually pointing our hearts to Jesus, the source of true hope, joy, and peace.

GRETCHEN SAFFLES, bestselling author of *The Well-Watered Woman* and *Word Before World*

Reading *So Much Better* reminded me that waiting isn't God withholding His goodness from us; it's God preparing us for it! Kaci's story and Scripture-centered wisdom helped me see my own seasons of delay as places of deep formation rather than disappointment. If you're wrestling with unanswered prayers right now, or wondering in your waiting what God is up to, this book will help you see your season through the lens of God's perfect plans and purposes!

KIRBY KELLY, speaker and author of *You Can Be Free* and *The Fabric of Hope*

Kaci's book is such a beautiful and hope-filled reminder that God is deeply at work in every season of waiting. I love how she speaks to everyone—no matter what we're longing for—and gently points us back to who God is: faithful, loving, and purposeful. Her honesty, biblical wisdom, and heartfelt prayers in each chapter make this feel like a warm conversation with a trusted friend. If you've ever found yourself waiting on God, this book will refresh your heart and renew your trust in His perfect timing.

ASHLEY ARMIJO, Coffee and Bible Time

There is nobody we would want the young women in our church looking up to more than Kaci Harlow. Her life of faithfulness, truly living out what she teaches, is an uncommon gift. We pray that this book blesses you beyond measure in your own season of waiting.

DR. BUZ HANNON AND TARA HANNON, lead pastor and women's ministry director, Element Church

This book offers a timely and necessary message for anyone in a waiting season (which, let's be honest, is all of us). Kaci shares her heart in a way that is deeply compelling, rich with wisdom, and anchored in what the Lord has taught her through one of her hardest seasons. She draws us back to an eternal perspective—the only place where hope can stay steady in the midst of waiting and longing.

ALLYSON GOLDEN, author of *Arise and Shine* and founder of Words Are Golden

One of Kaci's strongest yearnings is to connect with people on a deep heart level—but even stronger is her passion to point them to Jesus. This book is nothing less than a culmination of those desires emanating as heartfelt encouragement for the soul. Whether your waiting season involves finances, family, health, career, or calling, Kaci brings sincere comfort while masterfully drawing attention to the profound work God is doing in our souls during those seasons. There is no way you can walk away from

this book without feeling inspired to pursue God—and without recognizing how He is actively pursuing you.

TYLER HARLOW, husband and pastor

Kaci writes as a trusted friend who gets it. This book is the perfect mixture of advice, biblical teaching, and storytelling. If you're struggling to trust that God has a plan and it's good, this book is for you. I needed this book, and I highly recommend it!

GRACE VALENTINE, bestselling author of five books, @thegracevalentine

This book is a beautiful blend of warmth, authenticity, and scriptural encouragement—just like Kaci. In a culture where we're taught to forge our own paths and wait for no one, this message is a gospel-centered lifeline, reminding us that God's ways and surprises are worth fighting for.

TARA SUN, bestselling author of *Overbooked and Overwhelmed* and host of the *Truth Talks with Tara* podcast

Kaci offers a clear and hope-filled perspective on the purpose God weaves into our waiting. Her insights are both relatable and deeply rooted in Scripture. This book is a gift to anyone longing to trust God more fully.

TAYLOR ALESIA, Christian content creator and YouTuber

This book offers hope, biblical truth, and practical wisdom to all of us who are waiting on God (and learning to trust Him more in the process). Kaci beautifully peels back the layers of her story and shows where God was all along, inviting you to take a second look at your own story and see His hand there too.

MELODY ALISA, Christian content creator and YouTuber

So Much Better is a soul-filled guidebook for anyone who has ever found themselves in a season of waiting and hasn't known how to move forward. Kaci weaves together personal stories, hard-won wisdom, and gentle encouragement to explore waiting and expectancy from every angle. The result? A book that feels like both a companion and a road map for learning to wait well. I found myself wishing I could gift it to my younger self—the version of me that desperately needed someone to come beside her and show her how to wait with hope. If you're feeling weary in your own waiting room, let Kaci's tender, grounded voice be the one to step in and whisper, "You're covered. You're seen. You're not alone."

HANNAH BRENCHER, author of *The Unplugged Hours*

This book offers thoughtful encouragement for anyone walking through a season of waiting—which, in one way or another, is all of us as we wait for Christ's return! Kaci keeps the focus where it belongs: on the character and faithfulness of God. She writes with honesty, compassion, and a raw, honest sensitivity that will help readers feel less alone as they trust the Lord in the in-between.

FAITH WOMACK, Bible Nerd Ministries and bestselling author of *No More Boring Bible Study*

Kaci Nicole Harlow

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foreword

The only thing standing between me and my engagement was a job for my boyfriend. Every day on my lunch break, I walked from the gray cubicle of my alma mater's admissions office to the church next door. I'd enter the tiny prayer chapel, close the door, and pray for a job for Josh. This went on for almost a year—to no avail.

It wasn't that Josh wasn't qualified. He was completing a computer engineering degree; he'd taken math classes I couldn't dream of comprehending. I was quite proud to be dating an engineer. He'd done internships and even gone to trade school to supplement his engineering work. But the market in our city was saturated with engineering graduates, and most jobs in the field were given to interns who'd worked at the company for several years. Like most poor college students, we needed money to get married. So Josh needed a job for us to get engaged.

In my day after day hike (because it was a hike) from the admissions office to the prayer chapel, I found myself increasingly frustrated by the wait. I'd waited to find a good man;

now I had one, and we couldn't get married! Little did I know how often I'd be in this position over the years: waiting on the Lord for something, with very little direction, not many signs of change, and an incredible need for faith and patience.

When I look back at the many times in my life when resilient faith was needed, I wish I'd had Kaci's words in my hands. Perhaps I would have grasped sooner the greater work God was doing in my soul through chronic illness, unemployment, financial loss, misunderstanding, friendship breakups, and secondary infertility, all of which were to come. I had to learn the hard way, and Kaci did too. But the beautiful thing about the book you're holding in your hands is that Kaci opens up her story so you can learn from *her* experience how to trust God's plan when you can't see the ending.

Josh eventually found a job, but it wasn't in engineering. It was a blue-collar job that required extensive travel. Our first year of marriage, we were separated a total of six months. This was followed by an engineering job in another state that pulled him away for sixteen to twenty hours a day. When he finally found an engineering job with normal hours, he was let go in company layoffs after only a year there. No matter how careful we were with our money, no matter where we moved, it seemed like our clear path to an engineering position (what I thought was an ace in the hole for our family future) was constantly turned upside down. In 2020, after spending three years in a terrible workplace environment, Josh came home temporarily to support my blossoming ministry, *Every Woman a Theologian*. He never left. Five years later, we work together in ministry, privileged to lead women around the world to the truth of Jesus—side by side!

Those difficult years of job hunting, moving, saving money, losing money, and wondering about our future all played a part in who Josh and I are today. His management experience and work ethic have led the ministry to safety and success. And the faith I learned to walk in when we were moved from state to state, as I spent long days alone, strengthened me for the demands of ministry life. I never could have anticipated what God would do.

If you're in a similar waiting period, experiencing the disappointment of dashed dreams or the delays of a path you didn't plan on, Kaci's words will strengthen you for what lies ahead. She writes honestly and personally, not from a place of arrival but with sympathy and compassion. She, too, has wondered if God was teasing her. She, too, has asked if He forgot her in His plans. She, too, has had to choose radical trust when doors were closing.

I hope you're encouraged to keep the faith when things aren't turning out the way you wish. One day you'll look back and realize that God's way really is the best way, even when we can't see around the corner.

Phylicia Masonheimer

Founder of Every Woman a Theologian

introduction

“I just don’t understand why God isn’t answering this prayer,” I whispered, my voice shaky. A lump formed in my throat. “Why would He give me this desire if He isn’t going to fulfill it? I’ve been waiting for years. Does He even care?” The question of my heart slipped through my lips as tears began to roll down my cheeks.

I looked around at the intimate circle of women surrounding me, faces full of compassion. Each of them had the thing I wanted most. This stirred in me feelings of frustration and desperation, even self-pity. *Why not me? Why is God staying silent on this issue despite the prayers I’ve poured out?*

Waiting can feel isolating that way. It can seem like everyone else’s life is moving forward while yours is on standstill. It can even be tempting to think that God must care about *them* but not you. *I know God is good . . . but is He good to me?*

While waiting can feel isolating, in actuality, it’s something we *all* experience throughout *all* of life. This reality clicked for me as I sat surrounded by the circle of women in my Bible study

that evening. After I expressed my deep desire for God to bring me a godly husband, my friend shared her request. She wanted prayer to trust God's timing about getting engaged. She had been dating her boyfriend for five years and yearned for the next step. "I just want it to happen already," she said. My next friend, who was engaged, asked for prayer about the stress of wedding planning. "I just want to be done with all of this and be married already," she shared. Another friend, who had been married for a few years, wanted a baby. She had suffered a miscarriage, and she and her husband had been trying for a while to get pregnant again. "It's hard to see the purpose God has for me in this season; I just want to be a mom already," she said. Finally, my last friend shared. She had been married about ten years, with three

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kids. "I'd love prayer for God to show me who He created me to be and the purposes He has for me," she said. "I wish I'd had more time before getting married to learn who I am in Him."

Maybe you're longing for marriage or motherhood. Or maybe you're longing for clarity about an unresolved health condition. Maybe you're longing for a relationship to be restored or for a loved one to come to faith. Maybe it's a job you're longing for, or a house, or financial provision, or maybe you're longing to finally know what God wants you to do with your life. Whatever you're waiting for, God cares. He sees the desires of our hearts and the things we long for. But hear my tenderness toward you in your

longing as I say this: God also cares deeply about who we're becoming while we wait.

So let me ask: What is it you're waiting for? Could it be that through the very circumstances you're wishing would change, God is wanting to change *you*?

Even if we get the things we long for and they are good gifts from God, none of them will fully satisfy us. Why? Because, ultimately, our souls long for the unbroken communion we will experience with God in heaven and because there is a certain completeness we will only experience when we meet Him face-to-face. Yet while we are here on earth, God uses our longings in this life as a sort of leverage to work deep, beautiful, good purposes in and through us—purposes we don't want to miss.

We'll unpack these purposes together as we walk through this book. I pray that on these pages, you will know God's heart more deeply, grasp how present He is in your life, and see how He's working in significant ways even as you wait.

God's plans often don't unfold how we want or when we want. This tests our patience and frustrates our desire to be in control. But in the end, we wouldn't want it any other way. Because while God's timing, ways, and plans are not our own . . . they are so much better than we could ever dare to dream.

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the applause of the audience

Whose approval are you living for?



Am I the only one who feels self-conscious dancing at weddings? Don't get me wrong, I love to dance. In fact, I'm often one of the first people on the floor. But while attending a wedding recently, it struck me: While I was dancing, there were very few moments when my mind wasn't consumed with, well, me. *Do my dance moves look dumb? I hope I don't seem awkward. Oh no, I'm suddenly by myself. What do I do?* Even in some of the moments I was able to let loose and have fun, I was still vaguely aware of how I might be coming across to others. *I hope they see how cool, confident, and carefree I am right now!* LOL. Guess I just exposed myself.

Whether you're the wedding guest who lives for the dance floor, the one who hides in the bathroom, or a little of both (like me), these social dynamics reveal something: We all long for approval. We want to be thought well of, and we want to avoid

judgment. Sometimes we seek to achieve that by showing off what we've got; other times we seek to achieve it by hiding—out of fear that we don't, in fact, “got it” (whatever *it* is). The irony is, most of the time no one is actually judging us—they're too busy worrying about what other people think of them!

I once heard that if you live for the applause of the audience, you'll also live bound by the applause of the audience. When I heard that, I instantly knew it was true. And it's not just true of wedding reception dance floors either. For most of my life, the applause of people served as a sort of script for me. I paid close attention to the people around me, particularly those who were well liked and those who were not. The subtle cues of approval and disapproval they received told me who to be—and who *not* to be.

If the popular girls were buying a certain brand of clothes, I wanted them. If they were making fun of a certain way of dressing, I avoided it. The applause of the audience dictated far more than my fashion preferences. When I saw that people were mocked for being too cheesy or too goofy, I made sure to let only certain people see that part of my personality (even though I'm the queen of cheesy puns and goofier than you might guess). Having grown up in a Christian home and given my life to Jesus at the age of nine, I saw that it was good to love God but not to go overboard with it like one of those “Jesus girls.” I did my best to go with the flow, careful to keep from saying or doing anything that would make me stand out.

I avoided anything that would make me too vulnerable or exposed, especially when it came to boys. I was tight-lipped about my crushes unless I was certain they liked me back. I

covered my insecurities in a cool confidence because I saw how my peers were regarded when their insecurities were obvious. I understood the implicit message, loud and clear: *Just be yourself! Unless, of course, “being you” means being shy or insecure. Cover that at all costs. Confidence is attractive!* Has anyone else noticed the irony here?

Now, years later, my people-pleasing tendencies still exist—they just look different. For example, I tend to be acutely aware of where people stand on different issues and who I can talk openly to about what. When it comes to theology, I’m careful about how I word certain things, being mindful of whether the person I’m talking to leans more charismatic or more Reformed. When it comes to political views, I know who I can level with and who it’s best to keep things more “politically correct” with. And then there’s motherhood. Around some mamas, I feel like I should hide the fact that my kids eat too much sugar sometimes, out of fear they might judge me. Around other mamas, I hesitate to talk too much about the ingredients in different snacks, out of fear they might think I’m judging them.

As a result of all this internal back-and-forth, I sometimes stay quiet. Other times, I’m a bit bolder—but then I feel clumsy in my delivery as I try to balance confidence in my conviction with sensitivity to how it might be received. I end up overthinking what I said or wondering what people think of me. Even now, I feel a little vulnerable sharing all of this. I wonder if you’ll play detective with my words to determine where I land on different issues and what opinions you’ll form about me as a result. I want you to like me! (Whew—does anyone else need a nap after getting a peek into my mind? People-pleasing is exhausting!)

Most of us are all too familiar with the temptation to allow others to dictate what we say and do, but it doesn't seem to be something the apostle Paul struggled with. At least, it wasn't a struggle he succumbed to—and I have a hunch about why this was the case. As one of the greatest missionaries in the early church, Paul proclaimed the gospel all across the modern-day Mediterranean region, including to a group of churches in Galatia. After receiving the good news of Jesus, the Galatians began to veer from the true gospel by listening to false teaching. Rather than accepting salvation purely as a gift of grace received through faith, they started to make additional requirements.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul sought to correct this misguided theology. He rebuked them with strong language, telling them that anyone who preached a gospel contrary to “by grace alone” should be accursed. *Yikes*. Paul didn't pander to the people or stay silent so as to not offend them by telling them their beliefs were wrong. Why? He was more concerned with pleasing God. In Galatians 1:10, Paul writes, “Am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

Often, we try to shape our message—or our very selves—to please people. We slap filters on to camouflage our imperfections. We post only the things we know will garner likes. We feel good about ourselves when the likes come rolling in but not so great (and maybe even a little naked) when they don't. Being liked, whether online or off, is our lifeline.

Paul was unafraid to speak bold truth precisely because his goal wasn't to please people. When the applause of people is our aim, we find ourselves tossed to and fro trying to chase it.

But when we live with conviction, we're set free from the need to please people. The only thing more intoxicating than the approval of people is the purpose of God.

And being motivated by the latter is what frees us from the former. In Christ, freedom from the prison of human approval is possible. Praise God, He continues to grow me in freedom the longer I walk with Him. But as I know firsthand, this doesn't happen overnight or all at once. There was a time when I didn't live in much freedom at all.

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An Audience of One

When I was in high school, I started wearing makeup and curling my hair, and around the same time, I started getting more attention from guys. I enjoyed the feeling, but I tried not to make it obvious that I enjoyed it. If you were to ask, my guess is most people at my small Christian high school would have described me as bubbly, friendly, kind—someone who got along with most everyone. I liked being liked and I feared feeling disliked, so the applause of people was more than a nicety for me; it was a necessity—I'd do anything to keep it. A friend once told me that a friend of his who didn't know my name referred to me as "the girl with perfect hair." After hearing that, I was suddenly afraid to be seen in any state other than perfectly done up. That's when I realized a truth about labels: Even the positive ones have the potential to become chains.

Maybe you know what I'm talking about. Perhaps you've always been told you're a "good girl" and an example to others, so when you mess up, you're afraid to say anything. Or maybe you're the funny one, so you're afraid to ever be serious or vulnerable. Maybe you've always been praised for being positive and happy, so you're afraid to admit when you're having a bad day . . . or year. This is why our identity can't be found in what others say or think of us, whether bad or good, because the opinion of others can shift at any second. The only safe place for us to find our value is in Jesus, the One who is unchanging—yesterday, today, and forever (see Hebrews 13:8).

When I was growing up, my dad often did renovations on our home. This meant that at any point, there was probably some exposed wall or outside stucco surrounding a window trim still unfinished. When we had people over, we mostly invited them to the rooms that were finished and put together. That's sort of how I was too. I had determined what the presentable parts of myself were, and those were the parts I let people see. The rest—my insecurities, the things I was ashamed of, my struggles, fears, doubts, sin? Those were the parts I rarely let people see. Whenever an opportunity arose to pray with others, I found it easier to share superficial requests, praise reports, or petitions on behalf of someone else. But to share what I was actually going through, what I was actually wrestling with? No, thank you. I had yet to learn that freedom is found not in impressing people with our perfectly put-together selves but in allowing God's glory to be displayed through our struggles as well as our victories. It was a dichotomy: On the one hand, I longed to impress people with my put-together rooms. On the

other, I longed to be known in all my rooms, both the pretty ones and the messy ones.

Igniting a Spark

From a young age, I desired marriage, which was also tied to my need for approval. I always admired the young wives with cute families in my church, so I thought being a wife would make me admired too. I wanted to be married young—twenty-one sounded ideal, at the latest.

Every summer as I was growing up, I went to a Christian camp in the mountains of California. I had been a couple of times in the fall for father-daughter retreats too. The summer of my sophomore year in high school, I went to a seminar where the speaker talked about praying for our future husbands and keeping a journal of those prayers. As soon as I got home from camp, I started my own “husband journal.” From the tender age of fifteen, I began filling that journal with prayers for the man I hoped to marry one day. This was another area where a dichotomy existed. I approached any love interests with the mentality that I needed to impress them with my presentable rooms and applause-worthy performance. Yet in my heart, I deeply desired that my husband would be someone I could safely invite into *all* my rooms.

God began to get ahold of my heart toward the end of high school, and as He often does, He used people to do it—my friend Marlene being one. Marlene was encouraging and joyful and genuinely kind. She was also known as the “Jesus girl” at our school. While the rest of us sang worship songs softly in chapel,

there she was, voice loud and arms raised high. She didn't seem concerned with whether people admired her—but the object of her admiration was clear. She organized prayer times on Friday mornings and even hosted conferences where girls could learn about their identity in Christ. As Marlene and I grew closer, I began to realize she had something I didn't have but wanted. She didn't just love God because she was supposed to; she had a real relationship with a real person. And I wanted one too.

“God has such great plans for your life,” she told me one day as we were talking. Her words were full of conviction, and with them she breathed a new sense of possibility into me. I had never thought of myself as someone God had any particularly special plans for, but her words echoed the truth Scripture speaks about all of us: “We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10, NIV). For perhaps the first time, I felt like God was not only someone I learned about in church but also someone who wanted to personally draw near to me. This understanding changed everything.

Marlene’s fire for God ignited a spark in me to take my own faith seriously. The summer before my senior year, I fractured my ankle playing soccer, which meant I spent summer camp in an ankle brace that year. Instead of getting caught up in the games and recreation and free time like I normally did, I was forced to slow down and pay more attention to the messages and worship and time alone with God. By the time my senior year rolled around, for the first time, by my own conviction, I knew I wanted to build my life on the foundation of God. I had also recently broken up with my boyfriend and decided I didn’t want

to date anyone for a year so I could focus on my relationship with Him (spoiler alert: it ended up being *much* longer). But even as my faith grew, I continued to hold to my little script that kept the audience applauding. My script had kept me safe—at least, it had for the first eighteen years of my life.

But when I got to college, my little script shattered.

Finding Your Voice

During my freshmen year of college, someone—a boy someone—saw past my script and my perfectly presentable rooms. He dug deeper, asked questions that made me think, and saw *me*. It was terrifying and exhilarating. I felt known in rooms of my heart that I hadn't even known myself before.

But like a firework, it was a brilliant burst of color, then quickly fizzled to black. College Guy was gone, and I was lost.

Suddenly, my little script didn't work anymore. Not because the behaviors that once made me likable were no longer likable but because my experience with College Guy made me afraid to even get back onstage. My whole life, I'd found it easy to make crowds clap. But when someone sees the real you and doesn't choose you, you're no longer compelled to get out and give performances that make audiences applaud. You start to feel safer hiding backstage.

That's where I found myself my junior year of college. At the time, I couldn't even put words to what I was experiencing, with the stages and scripts and whatnot. All I knew was that I had envisioned a future together, and now, with the rug ripped out from under me, my heart hurt. I staggered robotically through the motions of classes, work, and friends.

Maybe you've been there too: Things don't go at all how you imagined, and you're left to deal with the fallout. It's disorienting. You start to wonder, *Where is God in all this?*

I spent most of my time on campus forcing smiles and hoping nobody would maintain eye contact for too long. My heart breathed a sigh of relief whenever it could settle into one of its safe spaces. My friendship with Brittany was one of those spaces. It seems to me that's what a best friend is: Someone who pulls you off the stage. Someone you don't have to wear makeup around, figuratively or literally.

One year I hosted a birthday party for Brittany at my apartment. She requested karaoke, and it took people a while to warm up. But soon, everyone was dancing, singing, and having a blast. I plopped myself on the couch after my rendition of "Wannabe" by the Spice Girls and watched as my friend Parris took the stage. I don't remember what song she sang, but I do remember that it was soft, beautiful, and sincere. Her talent wasn't a surprise, but it did reveal something to me. The other partygoers had chosen one of two options. There were the quiet, shy performances, where you could barely hear the singer's voice. Then there were the over-the-top, hand-motion-utilizing, audience-involvement type productions, where the girl with the microphone made it clear she wasn't serious, she wasn't *actually* trying to sing. What struck me about Parris's performance was that she was unafraid to use her true voice. She didn't shrink back, but she also didn't mask herself with theatrical gestures and an onstage persona. Instead, she sang audibly and steadily, with a voice that was her own. In doing so, she took a risk—and her vulnerability was beautiful.

Long after Brittany had blown out her candles, Parris's performance lingered in my mind. I thought about how easy it is to either shrink back or hide behind a performance persona. We create and monitor an image that is funny enough, busy enough, cool enough, happy enough, or enough of whatever it is we feel we're supposed to be in the eyes of others. Because to reveal our true selves would be a risk. What if we're too much . . . or not enough? At least if we're hiding behind something, it's not our true selves that will be judged, and that's a bit more bearable.

I thought about the courage Parris sang with and those I knew who lived with the same courage—girls who were confident, boldly themselves, unafraid of what others thought. The types of girls who served in youth ministry and led mission trips. Girls like the one College Guy had chosen over me. Girls like that didn't appear to be after the applause of the audience. At least, not an audience of imperfect human beings. Rather, they seemed to live for an audience of One. Much like the apostle Paul.

Paul wasn't concerned with pleasing people because people weren't his audience—God was. Living for God's applause is the only way we won't need people's applause. And when we don't need human approval, we're free to live out God's incredible purposes—purposes He planned for each of us before we were even born.

Did you know that before Paul was Paul—missionary, evangelist, author of about a quarter of the New Testament, Christian extraordinaire—he was Saul: *murderer* of Christians? When Paul encountered God, what happened to him is what happens to all of us when we meet Jesus: He was *changed*. For Paul, this conversion was dramatic. He was en route to a city called Damascus, for

the purpose of persecuting Christians. But on his journey, God shone a bright light and spoke to him from heaven. For three days, Paul was physically blinded, but ironically, through this he came to spiritually see. If you read through the whole story in Acts 9 (which I highly recommend), you'll see that almost immediately, Paul was baptized and began proclaiming Jesus. Knowing all that Paul went on to do in the name of the Lord is even more awe-inspiring when we know where he started, because it boasts of the transformational power of our God.

Some people have dramatic conversion stories like Paul. For others, our testimony of God chasing our hearts is more gradual, progressing over time. What has God's pursuit of your heart looked like? How might He be softly stirring in your heart even now? Whether your story is more similar to Paul's or more similar to mine, this truth holds: Jesus bids us come to Him as we are, but He never lets us stay there. The lifelong journey of being changed more and more into His image is called sanctification. When we put our faith in Jesus, God declares us holy by the blood of Jesus, who gave His life for us as a ransom. Then He uses our entire lives to help us become who He has already declared us to be. And it tends to be the unexpected twists, hardships, and waiting rooms of life that He uses most significantly to bring about this change.

Pure Gold

The process of having our hearts transformed is a little like the process of refining gold. The heat of the fire brings the impurities to the surface so they can be removed. There are a few

different methods for refining gold. One is called the Miller process. It's the quickest and cheapest, but the resulting gold is only about 99.5 percent pure. The Wohlwill process, on the other hand, requires more time and cost. But the gold it produces is nearly 100 percent pure. If you are in Christ, this is God's goal for your life: to conform you into the image of Christ Jesus, His Son. His desire is to take you through a lifelong process of making you pure and blameless for that day when you meet Him face-to-face.

When God reveals something, whether it's sin, insecurity, or a disordered desire, He does so for the purpose of healing us and cleansing us from all unrighteousness (see 1 John 1:9). Through my longing for marriage and a journey to the altar that felt longer than expected, God revealed impurities in my heart and transformed my view of Him, others, and myself. Slowly, God changed me into a girl who invites people into both my pretty rooms and my messy rooms because I know it's not about being seen as perfect but about God being glorified in my weakness, where *His* power is made perfect (see 2 Corinthians 12:9). He changed me into a girl whose goal isn't to be admired, but for others to admire *Him*. He changed me into a girl who can sing boldly with my one true God-given voice. And He continues to change me every day: freeing me from fears, healing me of hurts, stripping me of sin, and making me look more like Him.

A story can be defined as the account of a character who wants something and has to overcome something to get it. But the purpose of a story isn't whether the character gets what she wants—it's the character transformation that happens along the way. Who is your waiting turning you into? The pain we

experience in this life can cause us to become bitter toward God, or it can be a part of the process of sanctification. If we allow God to work in our suffering, our pain points can draw us deeper into His heart and change us into His likeness.

What is that pain point for you? That turn of events that took you off guard and took your breath away—but not in a good way? That roadblock you keep hitting as you’re striving toward a certain goal? That thing you’ve been waiting for and praying for year after year? May I pose the question once more: Could it be that through the very circumstance you’re wishing would change, God is wanting to change you?

The truth is, each of us has something we’re waiting for: marriage, financial stability, healing, a positive pregnancy test, career achievement, making it through a toddler’s *terrific* twos, clarity about where God is leading us—the list goes on. And on this side of heaven, we always will. God cares about those things we’re waiting for, but He also cares about who we are becoming while we wait.

One last shout-out to Paul (in this chapter, anyway). My favorite verse is 2 Corinthians 3:18, which says, “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

Every trial along my journey—and yours—is simply a tool in the hand of God, who cares about our sanctification. Not only so we can become brides or mothers or thrive in the callings He has given us but because we are *His* bride, who He is committed to making blameless before Him (see Ephesians 5:27). How might God be refining you while you wait? What if His goodness isn’t only available to you on the other side of the wait but right here

in the middle of it too? What if there's something significant He wants to do in you right here and right now—perhaps even more significant than whatever it is you're waiting for?

The good news is, there is—and I'll applaud for that.



Prayer

Lord, help us to have a holy reverence for You so we desire Your approval alone and so we can be set free from the need to please people. Thank You for being present and active in every part of our lives, even in the places of waiting, where things feel stagnant and silent. Show us how You are using the waiting to bring about good purposes and make us look more like You.