

# GOD, WHERE ARE YOU?

UNMASKING  
Your Pain,  
UNCOVERING  
His Presence

DOMINIQUE YOUNG

It can be easy for Christian women to feel like they need to put on masks and perform. Dominique does a wonderful job guiding the believer from untruths to powerful, life-changing truth! Countering the lies we're told is one of the biggest issues in women's ministries today. This book is a must-read for anyone who struggles with their identity and value in Jesus Christ.

**FAITH WOMACK**, author of *No More Boring Bible Study* and Bible study content creator at Bible Nerd Ministries

*God, Where Are You?* is a lifeline for anyone tired of pretending everything's fine. Dominique writes with honesty and grace, inviting you to take off the mask, face the hard questions, and experience God's presence—even in the middle of your pain. She doesn't hand out clichés or quick fixes but points you to real hope and truth. If you've ever felt unseen in your struggle, this book is for you!

**JENNIFER PARR**, host of the *Winning Women Podcast* and cofounder of Let's Equip

Dominique writes from the trenches, not from theory or polished stories. *God, Where Are You?* offers honesty, hope, and a steady biblical vision of God's presence in life's hardest seasons. Her insight, drawn from real struggles and unwavering faith, guides readers to encounter God even in the valley.

**BRITTANY J. TURNER**, founder of the Seated Sisterhood

This book is a *must*-read for any woman who has ever felt the ache of divine silence. For over twenty years, we have known Dominique Young to be a woman of profound faith and deep authenticity. In *God, Where Are You?* she has poured out—from the depths of her heart—that very same essence. With incredible grace and biblical wisdom, Dominique walks alongside us through the valleys of doubt, rejection, and confusion, not with

easy answers but with the steady, loving presence of a friend who reminds us that we are not alone. She gives us permission to feel our emotions while gently guiding our hearts back to the truth of God's unwavering character. This is a book we will recommend to every woman we know who is navigating life's toughest questions.

**PASTORS JOHN AND ROSLYN DAS**, senior pastors of Revive Church  
Charlotte

*God, Where Are You?* is a gentle embrace and a wake-up call for hard seasons. Dominique Young writes with kindness and courage, offering thought-provoking questions, simple practices, and real hope. She takes your hand and leads you to the God who is nearer to you than your next breath. When the enemy whispers, *You're invisible*, these pages remind you that God is with you—you are not alone. He sees you and you matter. If you keep saying "I'm fine" while internally hanging on by a thread, this book is for you. You will find clarity for your confusion, language for your pain, and the strength to keep going. Read slowly; journal and pray as you go. Let this book guide you toward healing.

**PASTOR COURAGE MOLINA**, founder of She Knows the Word

In *God, Where Are You?* Dominique Young invites readers into a brave space of honesty about our hurt, rejection, and failure, but she doesn't leave us sitting in our pain. With both tenderness and wisdom, she takes us by the hand and leads us toward healing, offering gentle practices and biblical truths that free us from pretending we're fine. Through powerful personal stories and life-giving insights, Dominique reveals the deeper reality that God is with us even in our darkest moments. This truth changes everything: Light pierces the darkness, hope rises from despair, and love fills the emptiest corners of our souls. Written with clarity and compassion, this book allows readers to see their own

stories through the lens of faith, hope, and healing. It is a timely and much-needed guide for anyone longing to experience God's presence in the midst of pain.

**CHRISTINA PATTERSON**, founder and president of Beloved Women

*God, Where Are You?* is a refreshing and impactful read from a godly woman who has surrendered her life to Jesus and opened her heart wide to share her story. Dominique invites you to reflect on your own experiences, trace God's hand, remember His mission and promises, and embrace who you are in Him no matter the circumstances. Packed with truth and encouragement, this book speaks to the heart of anyone longing to walk faithfully with God. Wherever you find yourself, *God, Where Are You?* offers wisdom and hope for the road ahead.

**JENNIFER ROTH, DMIN**, spiritual advisor

For the brokenhearted woman who feels overtaken by wave after wave of struggle, *God, Where Are You?* is more than a book; it's a lifeline. In these pages, Dominique Young writes with the honesty of someone who's lived through deep pain and the grace of someone who has found God right in the middle of it.

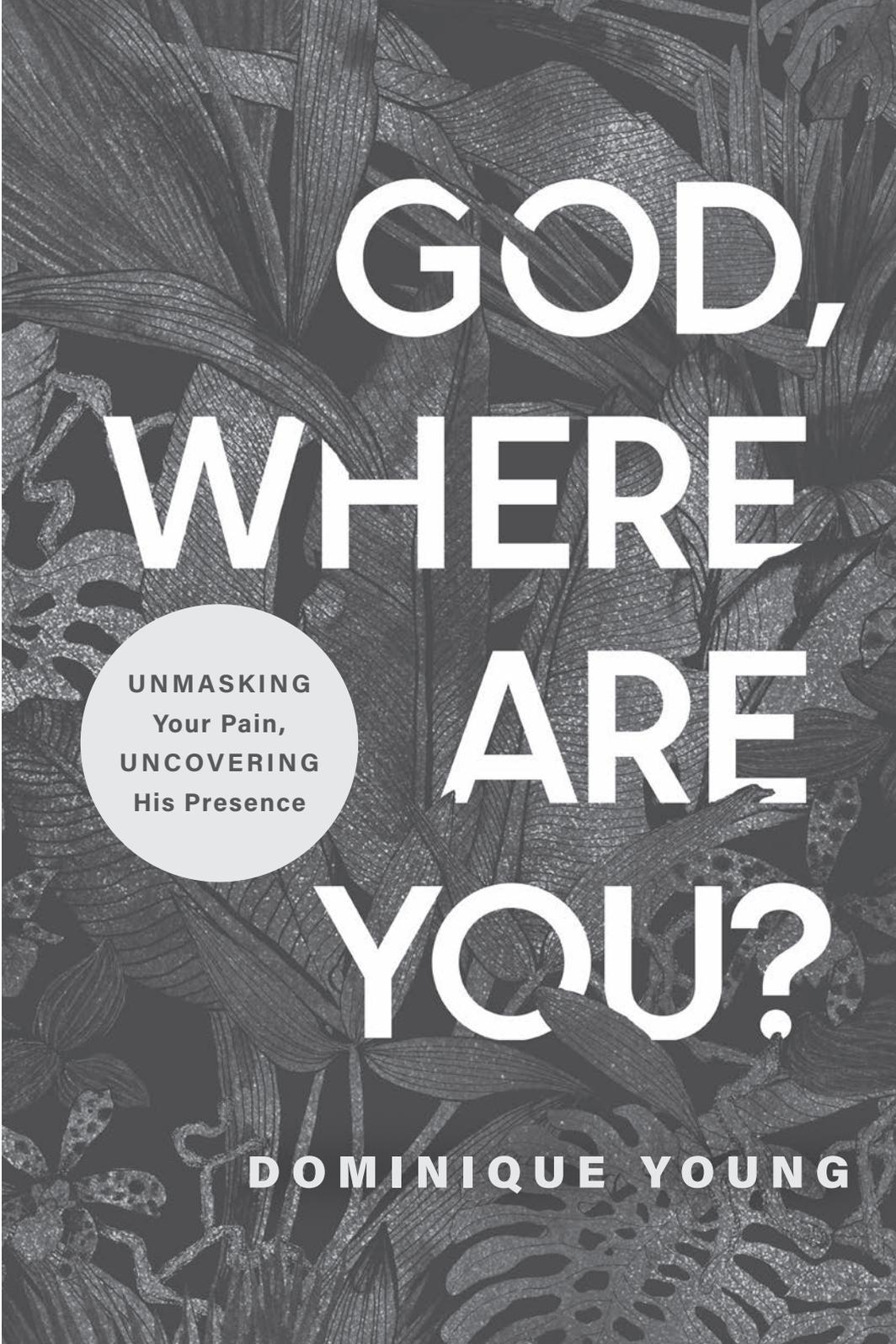
This isn't a book of clichés. It's a raw, relatable, and faith-filled journey for anyone who has ever whispered, "God, where are You?" and felt met with silence. With the voice of a trusted friend, Dominique gently walks us through doubt, pain, and the journey back to belief.

I've asked that question before. I've worn the mask and held back tears. Dominique's words reminded me I'm not alone, and neither are you. God hasn't abandoned you. He's been closer than you've realized, even in hidden places.

**JACKIE SMITH-BELL**, author of the "Abiding Hope" Bible plan and founder of She Remains Ministries



*Published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers*



# GOD, WHERE ARE YOU?

UNMASKING  
Your Pain,  
UNCOVERING  
His Presence

DOMINIQUE YOUNG



NavPress.com

*God, Where Are You? Unmasking Your Pain, Uncovering His Presence*

Copyright © 2026 by Dominique Nicole Young. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers

NavPress and the NavPress logo are registered and/or common law trademarks (as applicable) of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO, registered in the USA, to the extent applicable, and common law trademarks in various other jurisdictions around the world. All rights reserved. Tyndale is a trademark of Tyndale House Ministries, registered in the USA, and a common law trademark in various other jurisdictions around the world. All rights reserved. See [tyndale.com](http://tyndale.com) for a full list of trademarks owned by Tyndale House Ministries.

The Team:

David Zimmerman, Publisher; Deborah Sáenz, Acquisitions Editor; Elizabeth Schroll, Copyeditor; Lacie Phillips, Production Assistant; Libby Dykstra, Cover Designer; Brandi Davis, Interior Designer

Cover photograph of tropical pattern copyright © by Арина Трапезникова/Adobe Stock. All rights reserved.

Interior illustrations of monstera leaves copyright © by Paintors/The Noun Project. All rights reserved.

Author photo copyright © 2023 by Chaye Butter Studios. All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,<sup>®</sup> *NIV*.<sup>®</sup> Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.<sup>®</sup> Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotation marked CSB is taken from the Christian Standard Bible,<sup>®</sup> copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible<sup>®</sup> and CSB<sup>®</sup> are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The ESV<sup>®</sup> Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version<sup>®</sup>), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version,<sup>®</sup> copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

The author is represented by the literary agency of Embolden Media Group, [emboldenmediagroup.com](http://emboldenmediagroup.com).

Some of the anecdotal illustrations in this book are true to life and are included with the permission of the persons involved. All other illustrations are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is purely coincidental.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at [csresponse@tyndale.com](mailto:csresponse@tyndale.com), or call 1-855-277-9400.

ISBN 979-8-89802-021-7

Printed in the United States of America

32 31 30 29 28 27 26  
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# CONTENTS

Introduction

*I Get It!* xi

## **PART 1 FINDING YOURSELF 1**

1 Hide-and-Seek

*Facing the Truth About Where You Are* 5

2 The Costume Closet

*All the Ways We Cover Up Our True Selves* 21

3 “911, What’s Your Emergency?”

*It’s Okay to Be Found Broken* 35

4 The Lies We’re Told

*Learning to Stand on the Truth* 49

## **PART 2 FINDING GOD 61**

5 Is That a Rhetorical Question?

*Noticing God’s Attributes and Kept Promises* 67

6 The Darkness You Can Feel

*God amid Abandonment, Rejection, and Hurt* 81

7 Drowning in Failure

*God Is Near Even When We Fall Short* 97

8 Finding God in the Storm

*Seeing Clearly When Life Is Out of Control* 113

**PART 3 FINDING US 125**

9 What Is the Goal?

*Moving from Revelation to Transformation* 129

10 The Power of Us

*Discerning Our True Identity in God* 141

11 It's Time to Grow Up

*God's Plan Is Bigger Than Our Own* 157

12 Allow Me to Reintroduce Myself

*Living in Strength and Power* 167

Acknowledgments 179

Notes 181

# I GET IT!

Have you ever walked into church and wondered if anyone could tell you were wearing a mask?

As you leaned in for that infamous church hug (the one that gives the appearance of closeness while ensuring that the two bodies don't actually touch), did you ever wonder if the other person could sense your pain? If you're like me, you may have wished for a super-Christian with all the answers to miraculously find you, strip away your façade, and offer tailored advice. You wished to stop pretending to be happy and finally experience true happiness. I get it.

Pain within the modern church is the elephant in the room. It takes up tons of space and everyone tiptoes around it. As a Christian with "enough faith," you're supposed to be able to move mountains, heal sicknesses, and ward off demons. Depression, anxiety, panic attacks, extended grief, and other struggles—we all seem to think those shouldn't be part of a Christian's life, especially not of one who has life all figured out, right?

I remember being confused by these untruths and drowning in traditions that seemed to stifle rather than uplift. I'd escape to bathrooms to hide my panic attacks, plaster on a big smile to conceal my anxiety, and quietly conclude that I didn't have what it took to be a joyful, at-peace Christian. To mask my weaknesses, I took on works. I led our church's praise and worship team, started Bible study groups, and encouraged others. Meanwhile I was falling apart inside, hoping that something I did would show God I was worthy enough for Him to fix me.

All this striving for worthiness landed me on a hard bed at a mental hospital after a breakdown that threatened the safety of myself and those around me. That's the beginning of my journey to find God in the real struggles of life. I learned to trust God with my maskless self, and He led me down uncharted paths of faith and vulnerability.

As we go down this adventure of discovery, you should probably know who your travel buddy is. When I tell people about myself, I tend to start with the roles most important to me. I am a wife, a mom of four amazing kiddos, and the caregiver of my awesome godson. So yep, there are five children living in our house, along with four chickens clucking around outside.

For years I have wrestled with depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and additional mental health concerns that rear their ugly heads anytime my hormones shift. I know that listing these issues may make some people uncomfortable. You may feel the urge to say, "Don't claim that." But bear with me here; I'm giving you some necessary context. My parents are

divorced, and my younger years are sprinkled with beautiful moments and traumatic ones.

I have a bachelor of science in psychology and a master of arts in theology. These degrees prove not that I am smart but that I have been searching for God (theology) amid my mental health woes (psychology) for my entire adult life. I have been in more prayer lines than I can count and cried more tears than I can number. Writing this book was a labor of obedience and love. Obedience to the direction I believe God is leading me and love for you, someone who is searching for God in life's pain and trauma.

On this journey I found out that faith isn't a façade; it's not about donning a mask and pretending to have all the answers. It's about embracing the complexities, the doubts, the questions, and the pain that life can bring . . . while trusting Jesus' truthfulness in the here and now and placing all our hope in His promised return.

As Christians, we often grapple with this tension—the tension between our very real hope and faith in Jesus Christ and the reality of the pain, trauma, and suffering we attempt to hide. We fear that our struggles will expose us as inadequate at best or unfaithful at worst, and we desperately yearn for someone to come along, knock off our masks, and show us the way to authentic happiness and unwavering faith.

This book is for all of us who have felt the weight of that mask, fought to maintain the façade, and hoped for someone to rescue us from our pretense. I want you to know that you're not alone in this struggle and that admitting you're hurting is okay. That's where the healing begins.

We're often told that, as Christians, we should have it all together. We're supposed to be unbreakable, armed with unwavering faith and unyielding joy. But the truth is, having faith doesn't mean you never experience pain, doubt, or fear. Rather, it means you let God guide you on life's journey, and you learn to embrace the inevitable bumps, bruises, and brokenness that occur along the way. Clinging to faith while accepting the journey of life will lead you to a profound realization: God isn't absent during your pain; He's right there with you.

So if you've ever worn an invisible mask and felt like a misfit among the "perfect" Christians, know you're not alone. You're not alone if you've ever hidden in the bathroom to escape a panic attack or put on a brave face while consumed by anxiety. If you've ever felt like you don't have the "right stuff" to be a faithful Christian, I want you to know: *You're not alone.*

In the chapters that follow, we'll navigate the tension between faith and pain. We'll uncover the strength that rises from vulnerability and find authentic answers to the questions that have weighed on our hearts. We'll seek the God who isn't absent in our suffering but is right there with us, offering us hope, healing, and a deeper connection to Himself. Together, we will explore the question that echoes in our souls: *God, where are You?*

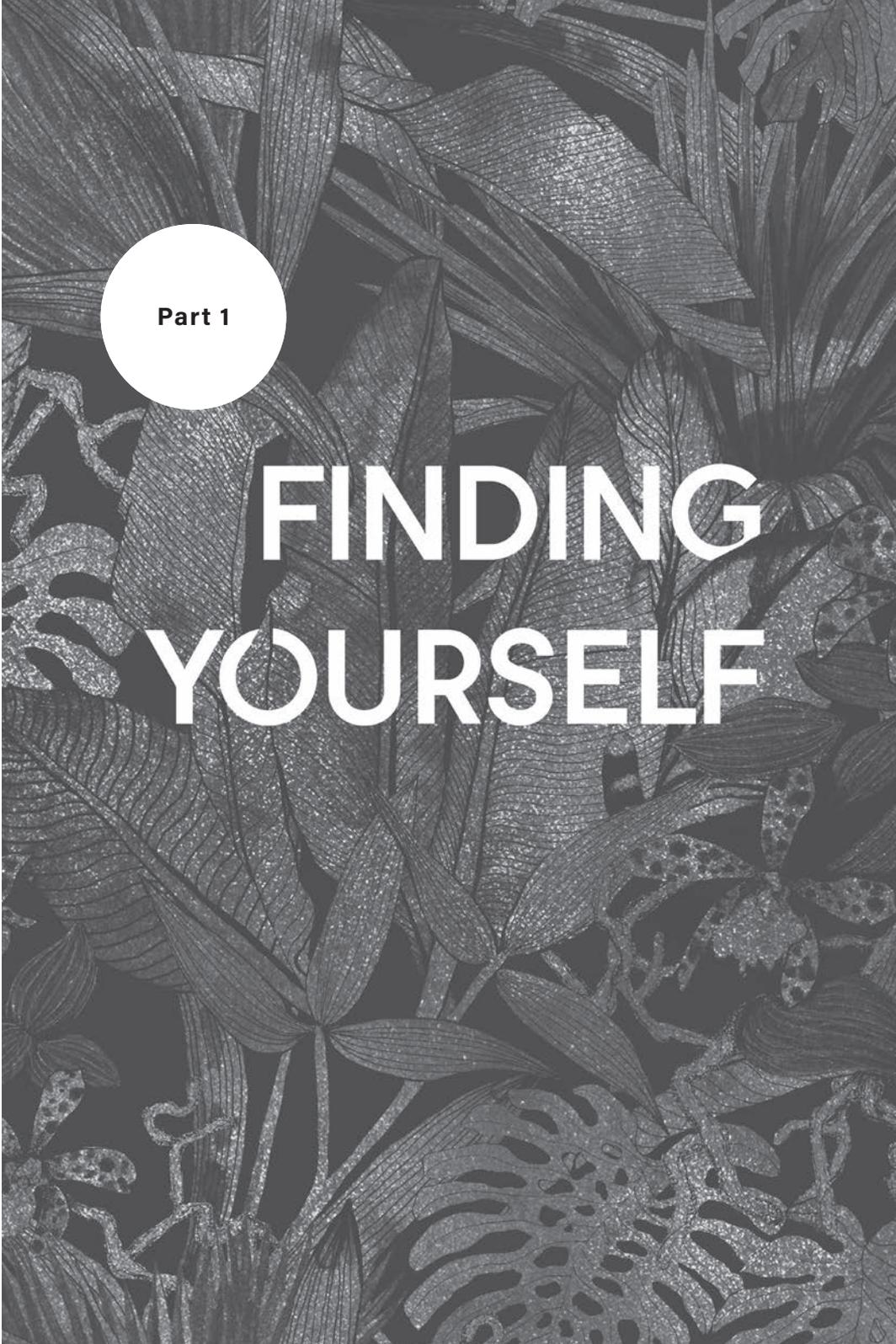
You may not know where God is right now in your situation. Your eyes may be so blurred with tears that you would struggle to recognize Him even if someone pointed Him out. I understand what it's like to feel alone, abandoned,

and forgotten by God because He doesn't seem to be removing your pain or evaporating your tears. But let's embark on a challenge to look for God, not in the distance, but right here in the darkness. We may find that He was never as far off as we thought.

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**ROMANS 8:38-39**





**Part 1**

# FINDING YOURSELF

**T**he first part of this book is about finding ourselves. Of course, we want to find God, but first we must be honest about where we are. It's possible amid life's traumas and difficulties that it's not God who we have lost; it's *us*. In this section you will uncover where you may have a disconnect and then reconnect with where you are in your unique life and circumstances, which will also help you see where God is in your life and circumstances.

## CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Let's look at an outline of what we'll cover in part 1.

**Chapter 1 • Hide-and-Seek: Facing the Truth About Where You Are.** In this chapter we will identify where we are mentally and emotionally. When we attempt to hide from ourselves and from others, we lose ourselves. And when we are lost to ourselves, we can find it challenging to find God even if He is right next to us.

**Chapter 2 • The Costume Closet: All the Ways We Cover Up Our True Selves.** In this chapter we will identify things that we use to cover ourselves up. The invisible costumes that we find ourselves wearing can cause us to feel disoriented and disconnected. Peeling off the masks and removing the costumes will help us see and be seen more clearly.

**Chapter 3 • “911, What’s Your Emergency?”: It’s Okay to Be Found Broken.** When we call 911, the first thing we do is explain the emergency. But when an emergency hits in our emotional life, we are often scared to say that we are broken. We don’t want to admit our heart is in shambles and we have been showing the pain down. This chapter is about learning to be okay with being found broken.

**Chapter 4 • The Lies We’re Told: Learning to Stand on the Truth.** We have been told countless lies since we were children. Some may seem small, some may seem big, and many may be lies we think we have forgotten. The truth is these lies burrow their way into our hearts and we begin to live our lives, build our relationships, and view God through a skewed perspective. It’s time to uncover the lies we’re told.

## GOALS OF THIS SECTION

In this section you will learn to

- express where you are mentally, emotionally, and spiritually;
- understand which doctrines or cultural teachings promote hiding;
- identify lies from your past that are affecting your life today; and
- admit the areas of your life where you feel pain, brokenness, and hopelessness.

I do not know everything. I am on this journey alongside you. I pray that my experience of finding God amid debilitating depression, health issues, and suicidal thoughts will help you find Him in your darkest places also. I do not want to pretend that God walked me through these struggles in the time it takes to read one book. Community, therapy, Bible study, and tears (a lot of them!) filled the path. I have no intention of taking the place of your therapist, your local community, or God. I am just here to share: *You are not alone*. Perhaps what God showed me in the darkest of seasons will provide a glimmer of light amid the darkness you may be navigating right now.

# HIDE-AND-SEEK

*Facing the Truth About Where You Are*



For most of my life, I have been good at hiding.

As a child, I always won at hide-and-seek. I could find crevices that no one else could, and I could contort my body so that no one could see me. Eventually I got so good at this game that I could hide in plain sight. My friends would walk right by me as I held in laughter, watching them search. As I got older, I continued hiding. I hid my pain behind a smile, and as in my favorite childhood game, I could tuck my feelings away in plain sight. At five years old, I thought hiding was fun. It was as if I had the superpower of invisibility. But as an adult, it was lonely. When I gave my life to Jesus at age eighteen, I thought my newfound faith was my ticket out of hiding. *I will finally break free, feel happy, and enjoy life*, I told myself. Imagine my surprise and dismay when the hiding got worse, along with the depression.

The prosperity gospel permeated every sermon I watched at that time. It was in every book I read and was the primary topic of Sunday's lessons at the church I regularly attended. I learned things like "If you have enough faith, you can heal sickness, remove financial difficulties, fix marriage problems, and even get rid of depression." So I began to wield my "faith" like a magic wand. I did it secretly, though, because I didn't want anyone to know I was depressed. I would do what I was taught, ask God for it (whatever "it" was), and then begin thanking Him as if it had already happened. "God, please heal me of depression," I'd pray, and then add: "Thank You for the healing, God. Thank You for healing me from depression. Thank You for healing me." The next day I woke up still sad and depressed, with my true self still hidden.

Perhaps I prayed wrong. I scoured books and sermons, and I came across someone who shared, "Don't beg and plead with God; He's your Father. *Tell Him* what you want." That sounded a little foreign to me because I didn't live in a household where you could go around "telling your father" things. Respectfully requesting something was one thing but commanding? That was a no-no. Still, I figured, *Hey, it's worth a try*. So instead of saying "please," I submitted my plea more like an order: "God, heal me of depression," and then, of course, proceeded with the "thank you" because I had read that was important. Weeks, months, and years later, I was still depressed, still struggling with extreme sadness and hopelessness.

I had attempted to use my "faith" to get what I wanted, but it wasn't working. I had waited in more prayer lines than I care to admit; I had read the books, taken the courses, and

listened to the sermons. Yet here I was, even more hidden than before. In childhood, hide-and-seek was a game to play when I wanted to. As a teenager, hiding behind the mask of a smile felt lonely but seemed worth the cost. Later, as a Christian adult who couldn't seem to muster enough faith to fix herself, hiding felt like the only thing left to do. So I began to hide in plain sight, but unlike in the childhood game, I *wanted* to be found. I wanted God to find me, to rescue me, to save me from this depression I was sinking into. I cried daily, and these words bubbled out of my lips more times than I could count: "God, where are You?" I meant that question, that whisper. I really wanted to know where He was. I could not understand what I was doing wrong. Had I upset God? Did I not have enough faith? Was He hiding from me because of a past sin that I hadn't adequately repented of?

### **A LIFE-CHANGING JOURNEY**

This hopeless, hidden dark place that I found myself in for years was the start of a journey that changed my life forever—that of finding God in pain. And now, I am walking with you on your journey because *I get it*. If you live in a world that says, "Don't say you're depressed, or you're claiming it as your identity," "Don't cry too long because you need to act like you know who your Savior is," or "If you're sick it's your fault because you don't have enough faith," it can be very easy to shrink and hide. It can become easy to plaster on a smile and sashay down the church aisle with the response "Blessed and highly favored" to everyone who asks how you're doing.

But I believe you picked up this book because you're tired of hiding. You've cried those tears wondering where God is, and you genuinely want the answer. So let's go on this journey together. It's not an easy one. But trust me—it *is* worth it.

I wrote this book for you because I get it. Because I walked through my own dark place. Because I cried the same prayer night after night. So I will not judge you or tell you to “pull yourself together and act more like a Christian” in these pages. I also won't insist that the reason you're asking *God, where are You?* is because you don't have enough faith to believe He's with you in your pain. Nor will I suggest that this book should be your one-stop shop for figuring out how to get God to fix all the problems in your life.

This book is a journey; it is an opportunity for us to be honest about where we are in our relationship with God and acknowledge the areas where we have felt abandoned by God. The truth is we don't talk about this enough as believers. When was the last time you sat down and admitted to another believer the ways you've felt neglected, rejected, or abandoned by God? Often we cover our pain with an acceptable response to the situation like “God is in control,” “It is well,” or “God will get the glory.” These catchy phrases are true, but they are not the full story. When we limit ourselves to sharing only the safe or polished parts of our experiences with other believers, we miss the opportunity to process the real pain and honest questions we carry—especially in our darkest moments. We push down our frustration toward God as long as we can until, from the depths of our hearts, a broken cry crackles through: *God, where are You?* In this book, we will not shy away from

talking about these very real emotions, and I promise I won't shame you for having them.

This book is also an adventure. One thing I love about adventures is that they take you places you never thought you would go. Like any adventure, this book will lead you to discovery. You will discover God in places you never expected to find Him, including in parts of your past where you never noticed Him before. And you will discover *you*, an experience that may be its own adventure.

This book is also a beginning. I will not promise you that I have all the answers. I am not all-knowing, and I will never claim to be. The truth is I need Jesus every day, *just like you*. I am walking alongside you as you acknowledge pain, struggle, and brokenness and discover God where you least expected to find Him. But this book will not be the end of the journey; it is only the beginning. As we go, we will share from the heart—a place we may find uncomfortable—because that's how healing can happen. I am going to be honest and vulnerable with you, and I encourage you to do the same.

## **WHERE ARE YOU?**

Have you ever tried to find someone else when you couldn't determine where you were? The person may have been telling you their exact location, but because you didn't know yours, you had no point of reference.

When I was a teen I was at a park with friends. I decided to explore the wooded area because I love nature and adventure. A few minutes into my aimless wandering I heard a

friend shouting my name. She was trying to get my attention because it was time to load up the car and head home. I yelled back, “Where are you?” She told me exactly where she was—by the bathroom in front of the water fountain. I remembered exactly what that looked like because I had passed it at some point during my wandering. The problem was, I didn’t know where I was in relation to that spot, so I didn’t know how to get to my friend! Eventually she asked me to describe my surroundings, and she used my description and the sound of my voice to find me and take me to the car. I couldn’t find my friend not because *she* was lost but because *I* was.

Similarly, how are we supposed to find God if we are not willing to describe our emotional and mental states authentically? Many Christian doctrines encourage us not to be honest about our experiences out of a misguided fear that acknowledging them will somehow make them truer. Our culture is often caught up in semantics and encourages us not to say things like “I have depression” or “I have cancer” because (we’re told) that means we accept our situations and therefore can’t do anything to change them. But the Bible reveals quite a different truth.

In Mark 9:17, a father speaks up on behalf of his son: “He is possessed by an evil spirit that won’t let him talk,” he explains (NLT). In Mark 5:23 a father speaks to Jesus on behalf of his daughter: “My little daughter is dying,” he declares (NLT). And the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:22 cries out to Jesus, saying: “My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.” In each of these instances (and in plenty of others in the Bible), the individual comes to Jesus with a

clear understanding of a painful circumstance in their life. They do not try to sound politically correct or avoid naming the source of their heartache lest they somehow “claim” it in the process. On the contrary, each person is painfully honest about the situation causing their distress.

Now it is your turn to be painfully honest. Honest about the roles that you hold, honest about the pain and struggle that is present, and honest about why you are here and why you picked up this book. Shame will jeer, *How can you feel this way or admit you are experiencing this? Aren't you a Christian? What's wrong with you?* I encourage you to ignore that voice. The mask of pretense will claim, *You can't say that you are dealing with this pain or that pain.* It's lying. You may even have a script that you regularly recite to mask your true feelings. Ignore that, too. Together, we will lay aside the weight of shame and the mask of pretense. We will trust that there is room for our honest assessment of exactly where we are emotionally and mentally.

I'd like you to share a little bit about how you're doing right now. You may be looking at this page thinking, *There is no way I will share my feelings with a book*, but please, stay with me here. Take out a journal or notebook and answer the following questions:

- What is your name?
- Which roles in your life are most important to you?
- What pain or trauma do you find yourself wrestling with? (Trust me, writing this down doesn't mean you are “claiming it.”)
- Why did you pick up this book?

This may seem like a silly prompt, and you may be tempted to skip it, but being honest about where we are emotionally and mentally helps us begin the journey toward healing. Since the Fall, humans have been determined to hide from God and others. Much like Adam and Eve covered themselves with fig leaves, we often cover ourselves with a big smile, makeup, or a busy lifestyle. We walk around outwardly looking like we have it all together while inwardly we're breaking, and the same question God posed to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:9, I pose to you today: *Where are you?*

Once you've answered the questions, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Give yourself a pat on the back. We may not have uncovered God's presence just yet, but we have taken one step closer to uncovering where you are, and that is worth celebrating.

You may not be excited about what you wrote down, and that is okay. Liking where you are is not a prerequisite for being truthful about where you are. When a person dials 911 after a car accident, they tell the operator where they are, not because they like their current circumstance but because revealing their location is the first step toward getting the help they need.

You may wonder if you can trust God with your authentic assessment of your present emotional and mental state. You may wonder whether admitting your circumstances out loud will make them worse or cause God to dislike you.

In 1 Kings 19:3-4, we find Elijah on the run for his life. God had just worked through him to complete an amazing miracle, but it also caused the queen, Jezebel, to become very angry with him. Verse 3 states, "Elijah was afraid and

ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.'" In these few verses, Elijah is honest with God about where his heart and mind are. And if you read on in this chapter, you'll see God meet Elijah where he is with food, drink, and love.

This is an example of God's heart, which is often misunderstood when we attempt to block ourselves and others from honest self-assessment. I am here to loose shackles with truth. Being honest about your mental and emotional health does *not* mean you are declaring that you want to be there forever. Being honest about your mental and emotional health does *not* mean you are claiming this as your identity. Being honest about your thoughts and feelings will *not* cause God to turn away from you. Honesty about your thoughts and feelings is just that, and it is necessary for health and flourishing.

When we visit a doctor, they examine us and ask us questions to assess our current physical health. They may write a prescription tailored to our unique needs. Oftentimes in our respective walks as believers, we want to jump to a prescription without a prior examination. For example, consider Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." Some people read this as a prescription for the spirit, mind, and emotions without knowing *why* the Philippians needed this

advice. Paul was aware of their struggle: the difficulty and persecution these believers faced by following Jesus amid a culture steeped in nationalistic idolatry and patriotism. The apostle Paul's advice was not given without first knowing the context and very real struggle of his spiritual protégés.

Being honest about where you are is the first part of your journey, and that honesty may come in waves. You may have been able to answer the questions on page 11 quickly, but as you go through your day, more thoughts and emotions may reveal themselves. That happened to me. Once I allowed one true thought or emotion to surface, more began to emerge. Genuine self-assessment can be overwhelming and lead to tears, and you may need professional help sorting through the years of repressed thoughts and feelings (I did). It may feel like work, but it is work worth doing.

A word of caution: Now is not the time to fix the situation. When we feel the uncomfortable emotions and thoughts that we have been attempting to ignore, we can become very focused on “fixing” the situation to bring ourselves to a more comfortable place. This could lead to making decisions before we are ready or attempting to repress the thoughts and feelings all over again. I encourage you to take out your journal and add the thought or feeling that is making you uneasy to the list. Resist the urge to fix or change the emotion right away; instead, acknowledge and record it as you grow more and more aware of your emotional and mental state.

I told you this would be an adventure. It won't be the final solution but the beginning of a voyage. The question plaguing your heart is *God, where are You?* But the question we will start

this journey with is *Where are you?* We are trying to discover where you are emotionally and mentally without trying to mask anything. Within the cry to God is also a cry for yourself. A cry to be seen. A cry to be heard. A cry to be found.

When I was a child, sometimes I would get tired of being good at hiding. I wanted my friends to find me. So I would jump out of my hiding spot and say, “Here I am!” and we would laugh. As I grew up, I forgot that that was an option. I had become so used to hiding that I forgot I could jump out and say, “Here I am!” And the longer I hid emotionally, the less I knew where “here” was. It may take a while to be able to express where you are, and that’s okay.

## TRACING GOD

In each chapter, we will have a section called Tracing God. We will look at Scripture to see what the Bible teaches us about the topic we just covered. This will be followed by reflection questions. The Bible is a great place to get to know the character of God. The truth is we may not always be able to find God’s hand or power the way we want to, but if we begin looking for His character and His heart instead, we will be surprised at where we find it. We will learn how to trace God’s heart even in life’s most challenging moments.

### *Scripture*

The man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees

of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man,  
 “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

**GENESIS 3:8-10**

### *Devotional*

This conversation comes immediately after the first human sin. Although our pain and brokenness are not always a direct result of our personal sins, something happens directly after Adam and Eve sin, an emotion that feels familiar when any type of pain or brokenness enters the chat (or world). This emotion, which can also occur when we are depressed, broken-hearted, or anxious, is shame. Pay attention to what happens when shame enters the picture: Adam and Eve hide. Shame causes us to hide from God.

Now let's look at how God interacts with their hiding. He doesn't say, “Adam and Eve, come find Me.” He says, “Where are you?” We know that God is all-knowing. He knew exactly where they were, but did *they* know where they were? Were they able to admit where they were? Well, Adam responds, “I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

While it was a good start, Adam and Eve never fully shared their situation with God. They left out some key details. Where were they really? Adam and Eve were craving more power (which they thought the fruit would provide), they were living in shame, and they had sinned. But Adam and

Eve never said any of that. They never fully shared with God where they were.

This introspection that God calls Adam and Eve to in the Garden of Eden is something we see throughout the Bible and throughout our lives. When we are spiraling in shame, whether because of sin, depression, or sickness that hasn't gone away, we begin to hide from God and one another. If we stay in that shame, we will feel lost, alone, and isolated. Shame is a lonely place, and God calls out to us in that place. But He does not say, "Find Me; get up and search for Me." He first asks, "Where are *you*?" When we are painfully honest with our answer, we break free from shame's grasp, and we can trace the grace, mercy, and love of God that are difficult to see when we're hiding. I know that to be true because of what happened when Jesus walked the earth. In His never-ending grace and mercy toward humanity, Jesus came to earth physically. Some people He met were unwilling to admit that they were broken, sinful, lost, and in need of God's love and compassion. They walked around like they had it all together, attempting to hide their weaknesses and limitations under the mask of power and titles. But other people were painfully honest about their circumstances. They admitted, "I have a demon," or "I have an issue of bleeding," or "I am a man of unclean lips." The same Jesus walked before both groups of people, but one group never truly saw Jesus even though He was right there. They couldn't see Him because they never truly saw themselves.

Oftentimes our search for God starts with a search for ourselves. Asking *Where am I?* is the first step out of hiding.

And as we become more and more painfully honest about our circumstances, we will be surprised to find God was never very far away.

### *Reflection Questions*

This is a book not just for reading but also for reflection. Remember, we're on a journey. We will pause often to contemplate where we've been and where we're going. You may write down answers to the questions and then come back hours or days later to add more clarity and honesty to your response, and that's okay. So let's take some time to reflect.

1. Where are you in your emotional life? How do you think you got there?
2. Where are you in your thought life? How do you think you got there?
3. Where are you with your physical body? How do you think you got there?
4. Where are you in your relationship with God? How do you think you got there?

### *Prayer*

Dear God, I pray for the one reading this book. I thank You for leading them here, and I pray that this journey of discovery sets them free from shame and helps them find hope in Your presence even in their pain. There are so many things I desire for them because I know what it's like to feel trapped in the darkness of shame, brokenness, depression, and pain.

In this very moment, I pray that You give them strength to be painfully honest about where they are, to cry the tears they have been holding in, and to tell the truth about the pain in the secret places of their heart. In Jesus' name, amen!