



LOVE
is OXYGEN

*How God Can Give You Life
and Change Your World*

JARRID WILSON

Everyone is searching for love, but many are searching in the wrong places. Pastor Jarrid Wilson has written a life-changing book, *Love Is Oxygen*. In this gospel-centered book, Jarrid gently and thoughtfully leads the reader on a journey to know and experience the unparalleled, unequalled, and unmatched love of God revealed through his Son. When you get to know God intimately, you will realize that love isn't something God does; love is who God is. Read this book now.

CRAIG GROESCHEL

Senior pastor of Life Church and author of *Divine Direction: 7 Decisions That Will Change Your Life*

Jarrid will help you catch your breath and discover how to inhale more hope, more healing, more Jesus in your life.

MARGARET FEINBERG

Author of *Fight Back with Joy*

Jarrid Wilson is more than just a compelling writer; he is also a compelling human being. I know this because I am privileged to call this gifted, lovely young man my friend. In these pages, Jarrid gives us a window into his life, where we see him being transformed by the Love about which he writes. This, of course, is what makes his message credible. As you read, I trust that you will come to love God and others more deeply. You will probably also find yourself wanting to become a better person. Thank you, Jarrid, for such a beautiful and compelling book.

SCOTT SAULS

Senior pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee, and author of *Jesus Outside the Lines* and *Befriend*

In *Love Is Oxygen*, Jarrid Wilson cuts through the noise of today and points us to what matters most—the extravagant and inexhaustible love of God. To know God's love is the journey we are all created to be on. Encountering the depth and height of God's love is a lifelong discovery that will continue throughout eternity. God's love for you is so extravagant that it can be hard to comprehend, but it is so easily available for those willing to receive it. Jarrid so brilliantly articulates the revolutionary truth that Jesus is God's gift of love to us and how that affects every area of our lives. *Love Is Oxygen* is a timely gift for

those yearning to know the love of God and grow deeper in their understanding of the great mystery of his love for us. Not only will your life be changed, but as you give God's love away, those around you will also be transformed.

BANNING LIEBSCHER

Founder and pastor of Jesus Culture

Why is it the simplest tenets of the faith are the hardest to realize and live? I'm grateful for the unwavering truths Jarrid Wilson shares in *Love Is Oxygen* because they remind me of this settled fact: I am loved, and it is God who does the loving. Succinct, heartfelt, and full of real-life stories, Wilson's book will empower Christ followers to live and breathe and move within the powerful grasp of God's love.

MARY DEMUTH

Author of more than thirty books, including *Worth Living: How God's Wild Love for You Makes You Worthy*

When Jarrid says that "love is oxygen," he means it, but beyond simple love, it's the honesty he writes with that will encourage you the most. He puts it all on the page, and his refusal to clean up the messy parts, to polish the prose until his pride is protected, is what makes this book so good.

JON ACUFF

New York Times bestselling author of *Do Over*

What I love about this book is how Jarrid lets you under the surface and reveals his real story. He not only shares his vulnerability but also speaks passionately of Jesus. We all need Jesus more than we realize. *Love Is Oxygen* brings us closer to him and helps us see Jesus more clearly.

DANIEL FUSCO

Lead pastor of Crossroads Community Church and author of *Upward, Inward, Outward* and *Honestly*

Jarrid's vulnerability and honesty will quickly capture the hearts of those who have ever struggled with depression or with simply being overwhelmed. The victory and overcoming principle of love will serve as refreshment for all.

DR. JOHNNY M. HUNT

Author of *Demolishing Strongholds*

Throughout this book, Jarrid's brutal honesty inherently highlights the greatness of God's love. His writing reminds me of Paul's teachings on boasting only about our weaknesses.

JOEY SVENDSEN

Pastor and host of the *BadChristian* podcast

In a world of divisiveness and negativity, Jarrid Wilson is convinced that your life can burst with kindness and grace. But it's Wilson's authenticity, not optimism, that makes this book sing. Wilson tears open his chest and drains his beating heart onto every page, sharing raw stories of what love looks like in real time. Do not read this book if you're content inhaling the stale air of our pessimistic age—because one whiff of *Love Is Oxygen* will force you to love bigger, broader, and better than ever before.

JONATHAN MERRITT

Contributing writer for the *Atlantic* and author of *Learning to Speak God from Scratch*

Jarrid Wilson is one of the most genuinely loving men of God I know. His ability to communicate gospel truths in a fresh and biblical way perfectly positions him to stir you to something you've never experienced and to also change your view of God and people. This book is going to feel like a breath of fresh air for your spirit.

JOSH HOWERTON

Lead pastor of The Bridge Church, Spring Hill, Tennessee

Jarrid Wilson writes with simple grace about how love rises from the ashes of depression. He reminds us all how God is love, and so as we love others through our actions, we are loving God. As you read, you will want to grab hold of the ever-present opportunities to act out of love and discover life.

BECCA STEVENS

Founder and president of Thistle Farms

Jarrid Wilson writes with great clarity and openness about the remarkable love of God. He shares his story so transparently and points all of us to the greatest love of all. *Love Is Oxygen* is inspiration, application, challenge, and encouragement in one remarkable book.

JUD WILHITE

Senior pastor of Central Church and author of *Pursued*

Some people just see things differently. Jarrid Wilson is one of those people. Just when you think you've heard everything there is to hear about love, you encounter Jarrid. I'm so grateful for Jarrid's voice—it challenges me.

CAREY NIEUWHOF

Author and founding pastor of Connexus Church, Ontario, Canada

Battling with depression, anxiety, and loneliness is something many of us face at some point in our lives. Jarrid does an amazing job at shining light into the depths of hurt and confusion, while resting in what truly matters.

CHELSEA CROCKETT

Author of *Your Own Beautiful*

All our lives we've heard the phrase "God is love" without any real understanding of what it actually means or its implications for our lives. Now, Jarrid Wilson's new book, *Love Is Oxygen*, takes everything we thought we knew about love and turns it on its head. For anyone who has ever struggled with love or being loved, for anyone who thinks God is a hard taskmaster, or perhaps most important, for anyone who thinks love is nice, clean, and G-rated, this book is for you. You'll never look at love the same way again.

PHIL COOKE

Filmmaker, media consultant, and author of *One Big Thing: Discovering What You Were Born to Do*

There are positive people who make you laugh and feel better about yourself. And then there are "hope dealers," who offer something much deeper. Jarrid Wilson writes about a hope not born of this world, but in a loving Father. Your very soul will be encouraged by this book.

MICHAEL LUKASZEWSKI

Founder of Church Fuel

It's been said that we accept only the love we think we deserve. This book will expand your potential to accept the empowerment of God's great love.

KEVIN GERALD

Lead pastor of Champions Centre and author of *Good Things*

God knew the world needed a huge dose of gracious encouragement, so he sent Jarrid Wilson into it. His writings continue to nudge me, and so many others, toward choosing to show relentless love instead of reactive judgment. *Love Is Oxygen* is one of those must-reads for every believer—and every skeptic, too! We all need to breathe this in deeply!

BRANDON COX

Lead pastor of Grace Hills Church in Bentonville, Arkansas, author, and leadership coach

This book is exactly what the world needs today. From the very first page, Jarrid takes you deep inside his soul and shows us all how God's unfailing love can take us from broken to beautiful.

JASON ROMANO

Former ESPN producer and current host of the *Sports Spectrum* podcast

My dear friend Jarrid reminds us of the truest truth in the universe: that God loves us. Undeniably, irrevocably, unashamedly. God's love is fierce—fiercer than the pain and wreckage of this life, as terrifying as they can be. And believing in and receiving this mind-boggling love of God changes everything about our lives. This book contains the message that can shake the church and the world upside down. This book is gold.

MATT BROWN (@EVANGELISTMATT)

Evangelist, author, and founder of Think Eternity

From his very first sentence, Jarrid boldly shares his journey to embrace God's love and share it with others. Filled with trademark vulnerability and biblical examples, *Love Is Oxygen* points us to God's love—our deepest need and most powerful resource. If you roll your eyes when you hear about God's love, you need to pick up this book!

SCOTT SAVAGE

Lead pastor of Cornerstone Church in Prescott, Arizona, author, and writer at ScottSavageLive.com

Jarrid Wilson does a brilliant job of helping us discover the power of God's love and how it can transform every area of our lives. His transparency and authenticity will draw you in, and you will experience a life-giving relationship with God.

MATT FRY

Lead pastor of C3 Church in Clayton, North Carolina, and author of *I Am*

Breathe in the power of Jarrid's words! They are his honest and human pursuit to discover what God's love truly meant for him and what it will mean for you. Fantastic read!

STEVE CARTER

Teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church and author of *This Invitational Life*

Jarrid Wilson has done it again! In a world filled with sound bites, *Love Is Oxygen* offers so much more! He offers an encouraging yet challenging opportunity to breathe in the love of Jesus so that we can breathe it out to a world desperately in need of the love only Jesus can provide. *Love Is Oxygen* is more than a breath of fresh air. It's a call to action! It's a call to receive love but also to live love. I want to answer that call!

PASTOR J. R. LEE

Founder and lead pastor of Freedom Church

As long as I've known Jarrid Wilson, I've been impressed with his raw vulnerability and willingness to blaze a trail down a road most are too fearful to venture, bringing light to the valley of the shadow of death. During my NFL career, the place of darkness I found myself in was excruciatingly lonely. Far too many of us have bought the lie we need to look the part. Suck it up. Have it all together. Publicly performing, while privately dying. *Love Is Oxygen* will fill your heart with hope and awaken courage you always possessed but never saw—until now.

CLINT GRESHAM

Author of *Becoming*, Super Bowl XLVIII winner, and international speaker

The best books are the ones written from our own understanding—the sacred place of wrestle, lack, and hope. Jarrid Wilson has fought for every insight in *Love Is Oxygen*, and it shows. I appreciate the honest,

tender truth presented in the pages and the straightforward lessons the reader can easily glean for life application. Good work, Jarrid. May this book be the healing balm and teaching tool you penned.

LISA WHITTLE

Speaker and author of *I Want God*

Jarrid, your willingness to bare all about your experience with depression will bring help and healing to many souls. Thank you for reminding us all that even when we feel like God has failed us, his heart beats relentlessly with love toward us. This is a wonderful book!

JAY HAIZLIP

Founder and senior pastor of The Sanctuary Church in Los Angeles and cast member of *Preachers of L.A.*

In *Love Is Oxygen*, Jarrid Wilson displays an impressive level of vulnerability that is both refreshing and disarming to the reader. This book provides a Christ-focused, hope-filled response to many weighty issues that confront our culture today.

CURTIS ZACKERY

Pastor and author of *Soul Rest*

Jarrid's authenticity and transparency are so refreshing! *Love Is Oxygen* is one of those books you can give to anyone and it will impact them! My friend Jarrid Wilson is such a kind and refreshing person. His story of brokenness and pain is a powerful testimony of God's love. I believe this book will help many see God's true heart toward them!

JASON KIMBROW

Pastor at New Life Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas

Love Is Oxygen engages us on a journey of rediscovery. Jared's insight, transparency, and personal experiences are seamlessly woven throughout the threads of this book perfectly. If you desire to read and

learn more about God's love and his designed path for your life, this book will not disappoint.

TIM TIMBERLAKE

Lead pastor of Christian Faith Center in Creedmoor, North Carolina, and author of *Abandon*

When you read *Love Is Oxygen*, you'll learn a lot about authenticity, redemption, and love . . . I did. Jarrid's story will intersect with yours because we all have a bit of bottled brokenness in us.

DAVE STONE

Pastor at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky

Love Is Oxygen is showing up in our world at exactly the right time. In my forty years of living, I'm not sure I can remember a time when LOVE was more needed. Love for one another but also love for ourselves: the kind of love that only God can supply. I'm thankful for Jarrid Wilson sharing his story with us and helping us see the transformational power of love.

TYLER REAGIN

President of Catalyst Leader

Love Is Oxygen is more than a book; it's a road map to a new beginning for anyone who has ever felt heartbroken, hopeless, or just tired of trying. No matter where you are in your journey, this book's powerful truths and inspiring stories will infuse your heart with encouragement and renewed faith. This book will change your perspective, and in doing so, it might just change your life.

DAVE WILLIS

Pastor and bestselling author of *The Seven Laws of Love*

Jarrid's message of love is real and palpable. I was reminded of all the years I spent able to take in only shallow breaths of God's love for me—and how wonderful it was when I was finally able to breathe him in fully. If you have wondered about God's love for you or about how to better love those around you, read this book.

ANNA LEBARON

Author of *The Polygamist's Daughter*

L O V E *is* O X Y G E N



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is O X Y G E N

*How God Can Give You Life
and Change Your World*

JARRID WILSON

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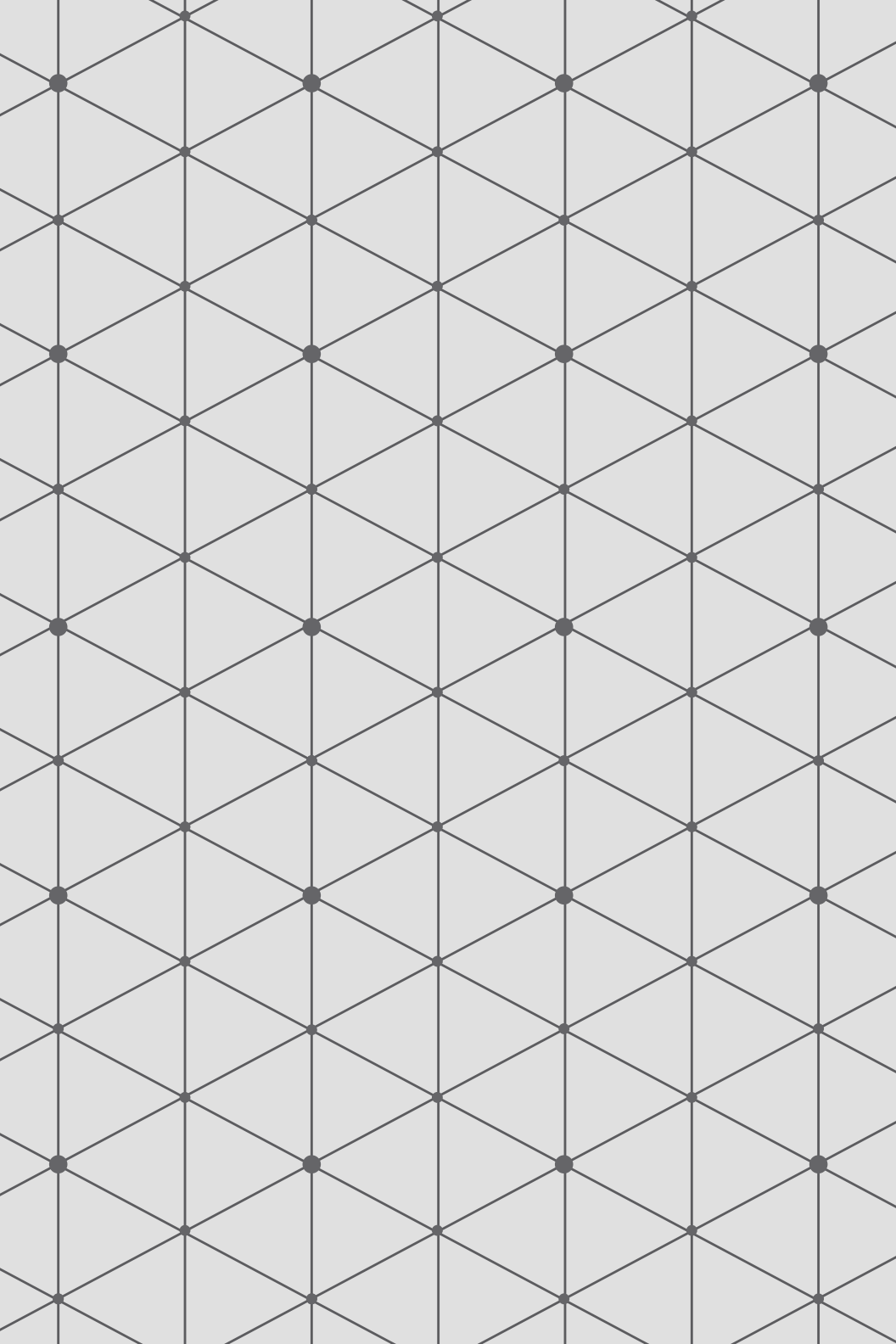
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Chapter 1

D I S C O V E R
the W O N D E R



There I was, sitting in my light tan 1997 Toyota 4Runner, googling “painless ways to commit suicide.” I was broken, empty, full of hatred toward God, and severely depressed. I felt as if I were drowning. I had made my way up to an area known as Skyline, just outside my suburban residence in Southern California, and had parked on the edge of a cliff that overlooked the entire county. To my right was San Diego, and to my left was Los Angeles. Two beautiful cities, and I was between them, overwhelmed by darkness and hopelessness.

I never thought I’d reach this point. I didn’t love myself, and I didn’t love my life or anything about it. Growing up, I’d had an answer for just about everything, but now I couldn’t get my head around what was happening. I didn’t know where to go.

I was standing in front of a spiritual blockade. God’s love seemed blatantly absent in my life, and my heart was like a dried-up well. I felt as though I was alone in the corner while the rest of the world passed by without noticing me. And I was searching for life in all the wrong places: in the party scene, in drugs, and in relationships. Anything that kept me from feeling lonely and worthless. I was yearning for hope, but shallow realities were giving me none of it.

I know I'm not alone. A lot of us have been there before, in that place where everything just seems to fall to pieces.

I was twenty years old and trying to figure out where I fit in the world. I wanted to love God, but I just didn't know how. The people around me who claimed to have a relationship with God seemed full of joy and hope. Something was different about them. They were excited to go to church on Sundays, liked to read their Bibles, and lifted their hands during worship. I saw what they had and wanted that for myself.

I wanted a relationship with Jesus. But I just didn't know where to start. I wanted to find forgiveness for my sins. But I just didn't know what to do. I wanted to be used by God. But I just didn't know how to ask. Being full of God's love wasn't as easy as pastors and Sunday school teachers had made it out to be.

Because of my depression, I believed the lie that nobody in the world, least of all God, would blink an eye if I were gone. And that my brokenness was too big a burden for even God to bear. No amount of Zoloft could keep me from feeling down. No amount of counseling sessions could keep me from thinking I was worthless. And no amount of truth could keep me from believing the lies I repeatedly told myself. I was my own worst enemy, and I seemed to be very good at defeating myself daily. I was ready to say good-bye to everything I had known in life—which was right where Satan wanted me. It was a frightening place to be.

Maybe I was depressed because of the sports injury that almost led to my leg being amputated during my sophomore year of high school and completely destroyed my chances of playing professional soccer. Or maybe it was because I had found out that I had a rare blood disorder resembling leukemia and was only days away from starting chemotherapy. I assume my feelings of worthlessness had more to do with the fact that I had been digging my feet in the sand in an attempt to hold back God from my life. I think I was just scared of fully committing my life to someone. And I couldn't find a way to keep joy within my life, no matter how hard I tried. I felt like a kite without wind, a river without a current. Everything seemed useless, and I blamed God for what I was feeling. Even though I wouldn't have called myself a fully devoted follower of Jesus, I still figured God would see my pain and agony and do something about it.

The thing is, he was giving me all the answers I needed. I just wasn't listening.

Sometimes what we perceive as God being silent is actually our sin and selfishness keeping us from turning an ear to his voice. As the Bible says in Jeremiah 1:5, God had been speaking to me before he had formed me in the womb—his voice echoed with truth before any of us had been formed. But I'd been choosing a life that relied solely on my own strength, desires, and schedule. For us to fully grab hold of God-centered lives, we have to be willing to let go of our self-centered ones.

The Unexpected Rescue

I'd heard the phrase "God is love" plenty of times, but I never really took it to heart. After all, "God is love" seemed to contradict the way in which some Christians had treated me and others. I was never good enough for them, never acted holy enough, and didn't look the way a supposedly "good Christian" was supposed to look. I was a misfit. But I realize now that God specializes in the utilization of misfits.

It was the darkest time of my life, and I was tired of hearing about the love of God from friends and family members. I didn't care who God was or what he had done for me. I wanted results—tangible results I could find hope in. And I blamed God for how I felt. Why couldn't he take this pain away? Why couldn't he help me? Why couldn't he have kept me from experiencing the things that led me down this dark road?

Depression has a way of making you blind to everything true. It's a blockade that keeps you from feeling anything other than complete darkness. It's something millions of people struggle with, and—sadly—suicide was the tenth leading cause of death in the United States in 2013, and it's the second leading cause of death for people between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four.¹

I know not everyone in this world has dealt with depression or anxiety, but I'm 100 percent certain that you've felt broken, lonely, and hopeless at one time or another. Love and

acceptance were nowhere to be found. You felt as though you weren't good enough. God seemed absent.

Maybe right now you feel "just okay," and that is actually the best you've felt in a very long time. Your brokenness traps you because of things that happened in your past. Things you wish had never taken place. Maybe they're regrets or failures.

Or perhaps you've yet to let go and find peace amid the violent storm of your worst memories—the ones you've tried to lock up in your closet. The ones you don't like people knowing about. You're hurting. You're frustrated. You're in repetitious, unwavering pain. You ask yourself, *Does God even care?* I've asked that question. I've been in that place far too many times.

The beautiful reality is that God *does* care about you. And he cares about me. God loves us. He feels your pain. He feels my pain. And while he sometimes responds to us in a way that might not be exactly how we anticipate, it doesn't mean he hasn't heard our cries. He cares—deeply—about our pain and yearning for hope. I wish I could go back in time and tell myself that. Oh, the sorrow I could have avoided! But then again, I believe God works everything out for a reason.

I'm reminded of a passage in the Bible that illustrates so beautifully the uncertainty of our hearts:

We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines

bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly
as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he
knows us!

I CORINTHIANS 13:12, MSG

Though we sometimes wonder what is happening in our lives, and though we cannot see clearly what lies ahead or know which direction to take, we have this hope: God promises that he will clear the storms and give us direction. He sees us, and he will bring us out of the haze we find ourselves in.

Over the course of my life, I've found myself furious at God on multiple occasions. Why? Because I'm human. I've yelled at God, cursed at God, and even threatened God because he wasn't providing what I felt was the best response for my current situation. As if my feeble and frail threats had any impact on his decisions. You and I are but specks compared to his majesty and greatness.

I'm sure he looked at me patiently, waiting for me to finish my rant, and knew that I didn't really mean what I was saying. I was just upset, broken, and frustrated beyond belief. He knew I wasn't yet accepting the love he had for me. I was too blind to see it. But in God's grace and patience, he allowed me to vent to him. He allowed me to use him as a punching bag. That's an aspect of the beauty of God—he's big enough to handle anything I throw at him but wise enough to not give me everything I ask for. A loving Father at his finest.

You might think God is unfair for not giving you all you

desire, but in reality it's quite the opposite. It's not God's job to live up to our personal expectations. God's will is not dependent on our wants. He does what he knows is in our best interest and for his glory. Our job is to trust him through the process, no matter how hard it might be.

That's easier said than done, I know. But when you learn to truly let go of yourself and instead grab hold of what God has laid out for you, life will begin to make a lot more sense. A sense of purpose and identity will come over you, increasing your yearning to pursue him that much more. God's love is available to all of us, no matter where we're from, what we look like, or what we've done. God's love is for anyone who calls upon him for life and hope.

When you put your life in God's hands, you must trust him fully, even when you don't understand what he's doing, why he's doing it, and for how long. Some things have only one answer: Trust God even when it doesn't make sense. Trusting God in the midst of your brokenness is a beautifully painful but spiritually deepening experience. Every time you put your trust in God, another scoop of your self-obsession is removed and replaced with the righteousness of God.

You must trust God with your brokenness but realize it's okay to be mad at him, frustrated, and even downright confused. He can handle it. God doesn't expect you to understand everything he does. You can question what's happening. You can wave your fist a little. You don't have to act as if you have

it all together. God can handle it. He wants you to let it all out and be honest with him about what you're really feeling.

When you give God the room he deserves, your soul finds supernatural refreshment and peace in his presence. After all, we were created for the partnership of God. We were created to do life hand in hand with the one who created us in his image. God's love is in the business of rescuing those who feel as though they're suffocating, though he often acts in ways we don't expect. But it's still love, and we desperately need it.