

The book cover features a textured, light beige background. A large, hand-drawn circular frame in shades of grey and brown is centered on the page. Inside the frame, the title is written in a mix of cursive and sans-serif fonts. The text is surrounded by artistic watercolor splashes in warm orange, red, and green tones. Small, delicate bird silhouettes are scattered across the page, particularly around the circular frame.

*...and yet,
undaunted*

EMBRACED BY THE GOODNESS OF GOD
IN THE CHAOS OF LIFE

PAULA RINEHART + CONNALLY GILLIAM

I've been a fan of Paula Rinehart since my twenties. Her ability to combine sound, biblical theology with her sensitivity as a counselor is remarkable. This book is no exception—it's a must-read for anyone seeking to make sense of their story in light of God's greater story.

LAURA STORY, singer-songwriter

If life has turned out differently from what you expected, read this book. Paula Rinehart and Connally Gilliam skillfully write about our longings, our realities, our disappointments, and our hope for a life that's more perfect. *And Yet, Undaunted* will take you into a deeper understanding of God's Larger Story. The authors aren't afraid to ask hard questions about why a good God allows bad things to happen. You'll learn how to experience fresh faith, restored joy, and rediscovered hope as you apply Scripture to your life and find yourself surprised by God's goodness. This book is powerful, thought provoking, unsettling (in a good way), and chock-full of biblical wisdom. Don't miss it!

CAROL KENT, speaker and author of *When I Lay My Isaac Down*

These women's sage words are a beacon for those of us desperate to find him within the chaos and ache and uncertainty of our lives.

SARA HAGERTY, bestselling author of *Unseen: The Gift of Being Hidden in a World That Loves to Be Noticed* and *Every Bitter Thing Is Sweet*

In their lovely new book, *And Yet, Undaunted*, coauthors Paula Rinehart and Connally Gilliam invite women to dwell with the tension between what we long for and what is. Sharing stories from their own lives, Paula and Connally invite us to see the gospel at work, redeeming our broken lives and offering us hope we can cling to when we encounter our own sinfulness, unfulfilled dreams, and deepest losses. The gospel, with its promise of a full and future redemption, is powerfully at work now, providing the only true answer to the despair we may incline toward as we face *what is*. Tears and hope mingle in these pages, a gift to their readers.

MARIAM KAMELL KOVALISHYN, assistant professor of
New Testament Studies at Regent College

Hopeful and tender, *And Yet, Undaunted* is for anyone whose life hasn't turned out as planned or who yearns for something more. With remarkable candor and insight, the authors tell their own stories of loss and longing, asking the question we all secretly wonder: *Is God really good?* Their answer, underscored throughout the pages of this book, brought me to a new understanding of my own story and God's redemptive power in it. I highly recommend this book!

VANEETHA RENDALL RISNER, author of *The Scars That Have Shaped Me*

It's rare to find a book that encompasses gorgeous writing, authentic and hopeful storytelling, and sound biblical truth, yet Paula Rinehart and Connally Gilliam have pulled it off in their book *And Yet, Undaunted*. When life doesn't live up to our expectations and our world is full of more disappointment, pain, and suffering than we ever imagined, Paula and Connally help us see the goodness of God as it breaks through the clouds both in our present life and in God's promises for our future. If you have been longing for something more in life, pick up this book and get ready to discover what C. S. Lewis once observed: "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." My prayer is that this book will be read by thousands of men and women as it provides the grounded and joy-filled message we all need to hear.

DR. JOEL S. WOODRUFF, president of the C. S. Lewis Institute

Connally and Paula's writing makes my heart ache—ache for the way things ought to be and ache for the way things will, one day, be—all while dignifying the longing, disappointment, and suffering wrapped up in the now. I am so grateful for these two women: for their wisdom, honesty, and call to hopeful courage. This book will faithfully point you to Jesus as you are drawn in to engage with the deep longings and questions rumbling inside your heart.

JEN GUZI, women's leadership development, Hope Community Church

Sooner or later, and not without pain, we all come to realize that the world is not as it ought to be. We are also not as we should be. This book exposes our longings for a better world and then points us forward to the way things can and will be redeemed by Jesus Christ. Because of that, we can live realistically and joyfully—even undaunted—in this beautiful but broken world. Sharing openly about their own lives, Paula and Connally invite us to do the same and live not our best life now but our *real* life now.

BRUCE HINDMARSH, DPhil, FRHistS, James M. Houston
Professor of Spiritual Theology and professor of the history of
Christianity, Regent College

This wise, beautiful book will undoubtedly serve as a guide and friend through the dark valleys of life, a balm and a spur to those weighed down with regret, disappointment, and unmet longing. *And Yet, Undaunted* shows the possibilities of finding courage and joy in your life story, by pointing at the Larger Story—*what ought to be, what is, what can be, and what will be*—and the ways in which Love himself unites the plot and pervades each scene.

CHERIE HARDER, president of The Trinity Forum

PAULA RINEHART + CONNALLY GILLIAM

*...and yet,
undaunted*

EMBRACED BY THE GOODNESS OF GOD
IN THE CHAOS OF LIFE

NavPress 

A NavPress resource published in alliance
with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.



NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

For more information, visit www.NavPress.com.

And Yet, Undaunted: Embraced by the Goodness of God in the Chaos of Life

Copyright © 2019 by Paula Rinehart and Connally Gilliam. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

NAVPRESS and the NavPress logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

The Team: Don Pape, Publisher; Caitlyn Carlson, Acquisitions Editor; Elizabeth Schroll, Copy Editor; Libby Dykstra, Designer

Cover photograph of canvas texture copyright © andersphoto/Adobe Stock. All rights reserved.

Cover illustration of watercolor photograph © Leyasw/Adobe Stock. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of bird silhouettes copyright © satika/Adobe Stock. All rights reserved.

Photograph of Paula Rinehart taken by Tierney Farrell, copyright © 2015. All rights reserved.

Photograph of Connally Gilliam taken by Laura Merricks, copyright © 2018. All rights reserved.

Cover illustration of circle hand-drawn by Libby Dykstra. Copyright © Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.

The authors are represented by the literary agency of WordServe Literary, www.wordserveliterary.com.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible,® copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® NIV,® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version,® copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. All rights reserved worldwide. Mounce Reverse Interlinear Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament. Edited by William D. Mounce. Copyright © 2011 by William D. Mounce. All rights reserved.

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, or call 1-800-323-9400.

ISBN 978-1-63146-968-8

Printed in the United States of America

25 24 23 22 21 20 19
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Introduction: The Larger Story 1

Reflections on The Larger Story 15

What Ought to Be || CREATION 19

CHAPTER 1: Longing for More:

It Helps to Know You Aren't Crazy 23

Reflections on Longing for More 35

What Is || FALL 37

CHAPTER 2: Grappling with *What Is*:

Outside the Garden . . . and Feeling It 39

Reflections on Grappling with What Is 55

CHAPTER 3: Naked, Afraid, and Not So Nice:

Sin Is Not a Dirty Word 57

*Reflections on Naked, Afraid,
and Not So Nice* 79

What Can Be || REDEMPTION 81

CHAPTER 4: The Starting Point:

What Redemption Looks Like 83

Reflections on The Starting Point 105

CHAPTER 5: Seeing Redemption in Interior Spaces:
Wound, Lie, Choices, Truth 107

*Reflections on Seeing Redemption
in Interior Spaces 123*

CHAPTER 6: Redemption Always Includes Others:
You Can't Have Deep Relationships
on the Cheap 129

*Reflections on Redemption Always
Includes Others 147*

CHAPTER 7: Saying Yes to God:
Where Might That Yes Take You? 151

Reflections on Saying Yes to God 165

What Will Be || **RESTORATION 167**

CHAPTER 8: How Hope Plays Backward:
Little Tastes of Goodness Leave You
Hungry for More 171

Reflections on How Hope Plays Backward 189

CHAPTER 9: And Yet, Undaunted:
Living Well in the Unfinished Symphony 191

Reflections on And Yet, Undaunted 209

*I wonder what sort of a
tale we've fallen into?*

SAMWISE GAMGEE, *THE TWO TOWERS*

INTRODUCTION

THE LARGER STORY

Once upon a time, there was a Garden. A world filled with flawless beauty and goodness, where all was right and good and whole.

We can still see so many reminders of that original goodness. Grandchildren playing in the front yard. Pink azaleas springing to life. Dinners with friends where the laughter is even better than the food. Trips to places you thought you'd never get to visit. Bike rides through beautiful green hills. Faraway places where God is doing incredible things. If there's so much goodness to be had now, how wonderful must the original world have been? This world God created that he himself said was "very good" indeed.¹

But that goodness has been tainted. There's a worm in the apple now. Life has taken a chunk out of our hide. We all have hard things in our stories, twists and turns and sudden drops. Something is not right—really not right. It appears for all the world that God has withheld the one thing we really want. *If only*. If only what's missing could suddenly be ours, we could loosen our tense muscles, let out the breath we've been holding—a great *exhale*. Life would be complete. We

¹ Genesis 1:31.

find ourselves looking over the wall into that Garden with a hidden angst, longing for what can never be ours again.

A dark voice whispers the same old questions: *Really, can you trust what God has said—what he's doing in your life? I mean, look at the mess around you. Does God have your best interests at heart?*

Is God good? Is he really good?

Living life well—smiling at the future²—boils down to how we answer that question. In the face of a world that will, indeed, take a chunk out of your hide, is God good, and can we trust him?

We are two women who have wrestled with this. We have been friends for years, knocking around in the world of ministry and counseling and speaking to groups of women. We've laughed until we cried—and we've also been to hard places together.

Our personal stories are different. We've both known lost dreams, but those dreams have been as unique as our stories. Paula's family has dealt with fertility struggles. Connally has a dozen nieces, nephews, and godchildren, but she hasn't lived the daily realities of raising children. At the same time, Paula hasn't experienced Connally's world—working at an urban theological college in Philadelphia or taking the metro to a downtown-DC job at an international public-policy think tank. And while Connally's lifelong interest in racial tensions is part of our conversations, Paula has always been compassionately confounded by the topic.

² Proverbs 31:25, NASB.

As we walk through the arc of our stories in this book, you may see bits and pieces of your own. Our stories aren't anything special—in fact, they're pretty ordinary human stuff. But to answer this question of God's goodness, we all need to look our stories square in the face, to sit before the beauty of this great narrative we call the gospel and discover that our stories are part of something so much bigger. As you join us, we think you'll discover how the beautiful reality of God's goodness trickles down into the gritty places of your own life. And we believe in this truth: In your journey into God's goodness, you'll find a bedrock sense of peace—and a way to smile at the future.

WHEN GOD DOESN'T SEEM GOOD

Paula

I could hear the anxiety in my son's voice over the phone.

My husband and I were on vacation, hiking a few California trails, and I badly wanted to hear what my son was saying. So I plunked myself down on an antique bed in our cheap-but-quaint hotel room, trying to get comfortable on a mattress that sank, deceptively, toward the middle.

"Well," Brady began, "I don't want you to worry, but Hannah and I just returned from the doctor's office, and this thing of having a baby could be more complicated than we thought."

When they tell you not to worry, that's when you start to worry. "Go on," I replied, as the pit in my stomach fell to the floor.

His next words were careful. “Well, you see, there are these problems. Something is off here, not quite right there, but not to worry, not to worry, modern medicine has so much to offer. There are surgeries. Medications. In vitro procedures with catchy three-letter names.”

I'm not hearing this right, I thought. Surely I was not on the phone talking about infertility with my not-yet-thirty-year-old son.

After he and his wife married a few years before, I would sit across from them at the table, staring innocently, mixing and matching their facial features to guess what their children would look like. *Beautiful children*. That was always the picture in my head. Little boys playing endless hours of Legos. Girls with pink ribbons in their jet-black hair. Sometimes I wish I hadn't seen it so clearly.

But, really, my hope for grandchildren had been shaped by a boatload of prayer. Though I've always been a bit prayer challenged, so to speak, when it comes to praying for my children, I pray like a crazy woman. And I don't stop with just my children. I have prayed, for thirty years, for my children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Why stop with one generation?

The prophet Isaiah inspired me in this practice. I discovered his words many years ago and have prayed them so often I know them as well as my home address: “. . . that God would pour out his Spirit on our offspring, and his blessing on our descendants, and that they would spring up among the grass like poplars by streams of water, writing

on their hands ‘Belonging to the LORD’ and naming Israel’s name with honor.”³

As Brady explained their options for having children, these words floated through my mind, comforting me. Surely thirty years of prayer meant something in all of this. Surely God’s goodness would mean that the door to this longed-for child would open in due time. Surely.

As a therapist, I hear the twists and turns of people’s stories all day long. You’d think that I’d be better prepared for those moments in life when, suddenly, I wake up in a story that is mine but sure feels as if it’s someone else’s.

You’ve probably been there, right? You are flying blind. Your sense of God’s goodness is threatened.

That, I’ve discovered, is the actual problem with life.

You and I have come smack into the middle of a story—our own story—only to discover that we aren’t in control of where that story goes. We honestly didn’t know we had an agenda for our life until life itself did not comply. Until our story zigged just when we thought it should zag. We are like a dazed kid who stumbles into a movie halfway through, trying to adjust our eyes to a darkened theater, wondering what is going on here. What, exactly, is the plotline in this narrative?

There are doggone-good reasons for that dazed feeling, for the days when we think we’ve lost our way. We are outside the Garden. And we are not yet where we’re heading.

³ Author’s paraphrase of Isaiah 44:3-5, niv.

Think about the story you are living now. Maybe you are in the middle of that dazed feeling. You've gotten a phone call that blew you out of the water. Your perfectly good plans got flipped upside down. You woke up and wondered whose life this is. If you're honest, even if you don't feel that way right now, you've felt that way before. And you're probably going to feel that way again.

In the immortal words of the poet Madeleine L'Engle, "Someone has altered my lines. I thought I was writing this play."⁴ I bet you know what she means. Our stories can be absolutely confounding at times, for two good reasons.

The Story Doesn't Go according to Script

Once, when Connally and I were speaking together in Latvia, I gave a talk about how God's goodness is reflected in the book of Genesis and how our every need and longing was completely met in the beginning. Afterward, as Connally and I sat in a café, drinking our decaf lattes, I asked for her feedback.

She hesitated for a moment, then said, "When you teach those pieces out of Genesis about how our every need and longing was so completely met in the Garden . . . the first thing I feel is anger. And then, disappointment. Honestly, I don't know what to do with this. 'Every need and longing being met' is quite far from my experience, in spite of much prayer."

Together we sat there and mourned the great gap between the world we were created for and the present reality with

⁴ See Madeleine L'Engle's well-loved poem "Act III, Scene II," which begins, "Someone has altered the script . . ."

which we contend. Our stories haven't gone according to the scripts we carried.

If you had a latte with Connally, you would probably immediately have a question about her story that you would not voice: How is this lovely, stinking-smart woman, who traipses around the planet at fiftysomething, still single when she'd like to be married?

Well, Connally would say, her unintended singleness is part of her story.

The script she was handed—as the only daughter in a southern family—definitely included a white wedding dress, a minivan of children, and a significant place smack in the center of To-Be-Expectedville, USA.

When Connally turned thirty, it hit her that she would never have toddlers in her twenties. She had dated many guys, but nothing had really clicked. How had she missed this loop called marriage? It wasn't for lack of trying.

But when her fortieth birthday rolled around—an extravaganza complete with sequined skirt and catered canapés—one friend declared, “This is like your wedding but without a groom!” Everybody (kind of) laughed, but no one missed the irony. You don't have a wedding without a groom.

Unintended singleness is only part of Connally's story, but it's a major place her tale went off script.

What script have you carried? You probably don't have to scratch very deep to find this disconcerting gap between that script you genuinely believe a good God would want to provide and the story that is your unfolding reality. Our actual lives, with disturbing regularity, refuse to follow our plans.

You Can't See What's Coming

There's another reason why we often feel a bit dazed by our lives, struggling to figure out the plots of our stories: We are creatures with limited vision.

When I was young enough to sport hair in its natural color, I assumed that women who were old enough to get their hair color from a bottle knew the ropes. Surely life didn't take them by surprise anymore. They had graduated into a special realm of certainty and insight. They had their act together.

Then I became a woman who gets her hair color out of a bottle. And I discovered that I am now only more keenly aware of my vulnerability to hard and terrible things. I have a greater repertoire of experience with the utter faithfulness of God, yes. But in crucial moments, each wild leap still feels way too much.

That's the problem with our finiteness. We are always going around a blind curve.

When my son and his wife were trying to have children, dealing with all those failed fertility treatments, our visits to their home were hard. Their house in Atlanta was just so quiet, as though the house itself ached for the pitter-patter of little feet. I felt all of this in stereo—my own losses and their losses. It felt like a double barrel of pain, some hidden cost to being a mother.

And then there were the things we couldn't see coming. A woman in Florida "chose" our son and his wife to adopt her child, who would be delivered by C-section two days after Christmas. Oh, what a party we threw!

A week before the holidays, she changed her mind.

Christmas came, as it does, whether we are ready or not. As long as I live, I won't forget gathering around that holiday table and thanking God, truly, for the baby who came. Jesus' coming was so real to us that year. How could we possibly carry such profound disappointment if, indeed, the Christ child had not come?

Two months later, we learned that the woman had faked her pregnancy. She was sufficiently overweight to pass for pregnant and collect the pass-through money from four different adoption agencies.

So many big pieces of what happens in your life, you just can't see coming.

As I grappled with all the blind alleys that infertility took our family into, I found myself sometimes singing along with one of Laura Story's first songs: "All I know to do is lift my hands to You. Take all of my life, all of my life, and *make something beautiful*."⁵ Yes, that was exactly what I asked of God—that somehow he would take the broken pieces of this pain and bring beauty from ashes.⁶

I find no small comfort in what the exercise of our faith actually means to God. He knows we can't see farther than the ends of our noses. And he has not left us to fend for ourselves. We choose to trust him, though we can't see the future. We cannot see around the corner—ever. And that exercise of our faith matters to the living God. As the apostle Peter reminds

⁵ Laura Story, "Make Something Beautiful," *Great God Who Saves* © 2008 INO Records.

⁶ Isaiah 61:3, NASB.

us, this sort of faith is like gold, bringing “praise and glory and honor” at Christ’s coming.⁷

In fact, the clear teaching of Scripture is that when Christ returns, he won’t look for big cathedrals and throngs of people but rather these invisible places in our hearts where, against all odds, we believe and follow.

THE NEED FOR A LARGER STORY

So this is how the tale of our lives plays out. We walk far enough on the trail to discover there are twists and turns we didn’t see coming. The story we are living appears to go off script. Life is uncertain. We ache for things to be made right. Or as Andrew Peterson sings in his song “Is He Worthy?,”

Do you feel the world is broken?

Do you feel the shadows deepen? . . .

Do you wish that you could see it all made new?⁸

It’s to this Larger Story that we now turn. All the good coping strategies and self-improvement schemes are not enough to carry us through the things we face. Life just gets too hard. But the good news is that the God who is over all of history has shown up in Jesus to redeem the future, starting now. Belonging to Jesus means that our stories have been

⁷ 1 Peter 1:7.

⁸ Andrew Peterson, “Is He Worthy?,” *Resurrection Letters: Volume I* © 2018 Centricity Music.

caught up in a much larger tale-to-be-told. Our lives don't hang in thin air like a purple balloon on a skinny string.

Your story actually unfolds beneath a sacred canopy.⁹ A larger frame. And if you learn to see how the real story began in the beginning—and where it's headed—you will glimpse the good heart of God that will anchor you when your world feels chaotic or your life gets crazy.

Before us is a brave new world, full of possibilities, and the miracle at the center of it all is this beautiful God who, once in history and continually still, enters our story. This is the Jesus who actually walked in our shoes. This Hero who stepped onto the stage and took the very worst part in the play. Everything you dread. All the hurt and the pain—and even death itself.

And in taking it all on, he transformed it.

The Lion of Judah allowed his roar to be silenced by sinful men—and in so doing, he gave us our true voice. He endured this death you and I will one day die, and a thousand humiliations we will face, and then turned the tables and destroyed death—which means that your life and my life can come back from the grave in a hundred ways, even on this side of heaven.

If you look at the life of Jesus closely, you will find he lived in this Larger Story we're talking about, and he is inviting us to join him there. What is this Larger Story? It is the four dramatic acts of God's redemptive story: *what ought to be*, *what is*, *what can be*, and *what will be*. And Jesus went before us. He lived within it all.

⁹ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

- He was present in creation, enjoying his handiwork—this world—as it truly ought to be. This world—as it truly *ought to be*.
- He likewise experienced this sin-stained life as we do: haunted by death, with the echoes of just-missed goodness, in the fallen reality of *what is*.
- His death and resurrection simultaneously opened amazing possibilities for what life, even on this planet, *can be*.
- His promise of life to come, which is beyond all that we can think or imagine, is the guarantee of *what will be*.¹⁰

Here, in this Larger Story, we can find meaning and perspective and hope in our particular journey.

In my own life, I probably would have remained despondent if I thought the news my son shared on that phone call was the end of the story. I think it's true that if your story is the only reference point, there isn't much to hold on to in times of disorientation. There's nowhere to place yourself when the zigs and zags of life throw you off track.

But because you and I live inside the Larger Story, we live in the anticipation of where God will take us. An

¹⁰ Many thanks to Mike Metzger, whose writing helped us see that the classic Christian categories of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration—the four-chapter gospel—can be roughly translated into the categories of *what ought to be*, *what is*, *what can be*, and *what will be*. See Michael Metzger, "Living the Gospel in Culture," Ideas for the Common Good, accessed May 27, 2019, <http://208.106.253.109/essays/living-the-gospel-in-culture.aspx>.

undercurrent of hope flows in the worst of circumstances. *What can be.* Redemption.

Our particular redemption showed up in another phone call, this time announcing the birth of a little girl. Sydney is her name. She is the gift of an Hispanic birth mother who chose to push past the taboo of adoption in her culture and give her child life at no small cost to herself. Sydney came to my son and daughter-in-law with a head full of black hair, making throaty little noises from the day she arrived, her own baby way to reach out and “talk.”

She is now a beautiful six-year-old who throws back her head and laughs as she insists on changing her princess outfit four times a day, complete with sequin tennis shoes and an armful of bracelets. A sister and a brother have joined her.

Honestly, there are moments when these children break into big smiles and it feels like I’m peeking behind a veil. I get a tiny, heart-stopping glimpse of what Isaiah calls the splendor of the Lord.¹¹ And *it takes my breath away.*

I am tasting and seeing the goodness of the Lord. It comes in a different package from what I originally pictured and yet, oddly enough, that only makes me more aware of what many would call *grace.*

As we learn to trust this God we cannot control, his goodness becomes more tangible and real. Following God down paths we thought we’d never walk can be strangely liberating. And sometimes, those wild detours in our lives turn out to be the actual paths we were looking for all along.

¹¹ Isaiah 61:3, NIV.

Christians are fond of calling the gospel “Good News.” We have the audacity, if you think about it, to claim that the gospel is unique, shout-it-from-the-housetops good news. Yet if that gospel shrinks to mean that Christ has come simply to fulfill my (even very good) dreams, I will end up disillusioned. If the gospel in my head is just about making life work out now, I am more lost than I know. For when the dream doesn’t materialize, I will feel stranded. It will look like God has tricked me. Like he simply does not deliver. Like he is not good. And the gospel will not sound like good news at all.

If you long to journey through your story with hope, with your heart intact and able to love, you need to see yourself within the Larger Story of God. The gospel in its entirety will show you how you were created, why this world always leaves an ache, and how you can thrive within the hope of what is to come. What you do with that ache and that hope largely determines your life. But you do not walk this path alone. The power of the risen Christ will help you smile at the future, because you’ve been let in on the secret truth.

There is more, more, more to come.

Reflections on

THE LARGER STORY

- 1.** What is most engaging to you about the thought of living inside the Larger Story, where the greatness of God’s goodness revealed in the gospel envelops your life? What actual difference could it make for you?
- 2.** Paula describes several times where life has “taken [a] chunk out of [her] hide.” Take a few minutes to reflect on something in your life that hasn’t gone according to script, where your life has zigged when you thought it would zag.
- 3.** In what ways have the unexpected turns in life challenged your faith in God’s goodness? What brings you back to an awareness or a hope of experiencing God in the midst of life as you encounter it?
- 4.** One of the most beautiful places in Scripture where the gospel is on display is Isaiah 55. Read through the passage on the following page, thinking about your own journey in the Lord. Where do you feel “thirst” and where do you take your “thirst”? What is God asking of you here?

AND YET, UNDAUNTED

Come, everyone who thirsts,
 come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
 come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
 and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
 and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
 hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
 my steadfast, sure love for David.¹²

- 5.** We are hungry, thirsty people, lost in a broken world. In the next piece of Isaiah 55, you are hearing the plea of God's heart for us. How would you put this in your own words? What do you hear God saying?

Seek the LORD while he may be found;
 call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,
 and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion
 on him,
 and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
 neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

¹² Isaiah 55:1-3.

so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.¹³

- 6.** How does this last piece of Isaiah 55 speak to where you find yourself? Where do you find comfort? Where are you challenged?

For you shall go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall make a name for the LORD,
an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.¹⁴

- 7.** Perhaps the best part of the gospel is that whatever is happening in your life is never the end of the story. How does the promise of living in a much Larger Story affect the way you look at your life in the present?

¹³ Isaiah 55:6-9.

¹⁴ Isaiah 55:12-13.

A circular frame with a watercolor splash background and birds flying. The frame is composed of two concentric, slightly irregular lines, creating a ring-like effect. The background is a light, textured surface with dark, organic watercolor splatters and several small, dark silhouettes of birds in flight scattered throughout. The overall aesthetic is artistic and ethereal.

What Ought to Be

CREATION

WHAT IF EVERY NEED we had were met or possible to meet? In the Bible, the book of Genesis paints a picture of life as our creator intended it—life without lack, where humanity was created and called to be fully connected with God, with one another, and with the creation itself. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, strolled easily with God. They were freely naked with each other. And when they weren't naming the animals, they were cultivating gardens full of beautiful and tasty fruit. Rich worship, real human bonds, meaningful work.

No wonder God declared the whole scene very good.

What might an *ought-to-be* life look like today?

The living God of the universe would be walking with you, everywhere, present as an honored Father for whom your respect and love were ever deepening. His eyes would be twinkling, and he'd smile at you like a parent with his cherished young child, or a father whose daughter danced with her groom. Your days would be filled with some amazing combination of worship and laughter, conversation and silence.

With your other friends, you could share your heart and dreams without fear—no shame, no need to watch your back. You would experience relational bonding without bondage. Your family would thrive. With men and women alike, you wouldn't have to protect your beauty, hide your gifts and talents. Unmarred, those things would pose no threat to others or invite another's ill intent.

You would live free of evil lurking at your doorstep, of fear hanging in the shadows. Innocence would reign. No broken promises; no dreams crumbling to ashes. You could count

on tasting the fruit of your labor; things would really work as designed. And, at a far more mundane level, you wouldn't have to moan over your emerging double chin or less-than-sculpted arms.

By returning to an image of how things could have been, we can remind ourselves of the goodness of God's original design—of how things *ought to be*. This goodness is an integral part of our Creator God—goodness that he has designed, goodness that he longs to share, goodness that never goes away.

This memory of the Garden is a visceral knowledge that we were created for a world where all is as it should be. We were made for more than we can ever quite lay hold of in this life. This awareness alone is proof we aren't crazy when we find ourselves longing, even in the best of times, for that elusive something. To the contrary—when we listen to what our longings tell us, we are on the cusp of discovering something (and Someone) very, very good.

And so we ask this question on our journey into hope: *What do our longings reveal about the goodness of the God who created all things, including us?*



CHAPTER 1

LONGING FOR MORE

It Helps to Know You Aren't Crazy

Connally

I remember a time in my early forties when I discovered the importance of knowing and honoring the *ought-to-be* life. It was a sultry summer evening, and I'd just come from a five-o'clock church service. Taking Communion and singing corporately had been particularly sweet joys for me—moments where the veil between heaven and earth seemed to grow thin and the fragrance of eternity wafted in. As I received the bread and the cup, my worship had flowed with abandon.

Driving away from that service in my convertible, I realized that I had been refueled for the work that lay ahead of me. We have all been called to cultivate fruit just as Adam

and Eve were; my current version was working for an international ministry—writing, speaking, and mentoring. And that night, after I encountered the Lord so deeply, the lifeblood for my work seemed reinvigorated.

But in that same moment, even as I felt fundamentally grateful for God's gifts, I also felt the concurrent, too-familiar twinge of unmet longing. I was—after years of praying and getting hundreds of others to do the same (and even writing a book on the topic)—still single. This didn't bother me most days anymore. But every now and then, sitting unpartnered at church touched this place in me. It was a strange irony: With my heart opened wide in the Lord's presence, my quiet, background disappointment was free to come to the light. I could stroll with the Lord in the Garden, so to speak, and I could cultivate good fruit in the world around me. But nakedness—intimacy, being *known*—with an Adam? And a family of my own? Well, all of that was perpetually elusive.

Of course I knew—intellectually, and even in a chunk of my heart—that finding a partner was not the whole story. So much relationally good, substantive human connection was woven like gold thread into my life—friends close by and around the country with whom love flowed back and forth. In that sense, I really did have the relational piece at least *halfway* there. But if I were honest, the relational gap still felt real. As if this was not how life was supposed to be, at least for me. And tonight, I felt tired of this snake pit in an otherwise beautiful Garden.

I legitimately doubted that it was purely in my power

to fill the gap, to meet my own longings. I'd done my part for the past twenty years. Worked on my stuff. Been open to date a lot of men, even when we weren't a very good fit. Recently, I'd even ventured with a friend into my first-ever speed-dating experiment at a snazzy bar.¹⁵

But at this moment, driving in my car, I suddenly felt the very strong pull to do anything possible to get rid of the gruesome gap. It just felt too bad. Why should I put up with this ridiculously noisy, unmet longing that I didn't have the power to fill?

I considered ways to silence the noise. Maybe that longing for a literal bridegroom needed to be totally spiritualized—I could forget flesh-and-blood guys and realize that Jesus was my husband and my ministry organization, my family. There was *some* truth in that, after all.

Or perhaps that longing for someone special to build my life with needed to be treated as dead weight, no longer meriting my time, attention, and care. Or cynically tossed—with rolling eyes and a knowing scoff—into the “cheesy” category by this smarter woman who now knew better.

But even as I contemplated these options, something else crept into my imagination: that Genesis-shaped mosaic of how life *ought to be*. It glimmered, faint at first, like gold in the light of a dim candle. But its light grew, and in no uncertain terms, it radiated its ancient, simple truth: *These longings*

¹⁵ Actually, this was telling. There was the yoga lover whose joy was balancing his chakras. Next was the ex-Mormon missionary trying to find a new path. Then the handsome, divorced tennis pro who offered to give me lessons. Last was the brilliant Jewish doctor who listened to me for two minutes and told me that though I was “great to talk to,” I was clearly looking for a Christian, and he hoped I could find one. He even joined me in scanning the room, and our eyes met again in recognition that the odds weren't in my favor.

*for connection—with God, with others, and with creation—are right and good. I've made you for this.*¹⁶

There was no promise of a certain kind of future. No insight into big next steps. No guarantee I'd get that for which I was made. Only the increasingly vivid reminder that wholeness came into being from the heart of our good Creator God. This was the way he'd originally designed life for his beloved image bearers. For you. For me.

It was admittedly painful to recognize that a beautiful aspect of life as it *ought to be* was frustratingly beyond my control. Perhaps you've felt this too: the pain of a genuine good always just beyond your reach. But I didn't have to excise a piece of my heart. To risk wanting that goodness—while accepting that it may not ever be mine—was not and never could be foolish. Risk meant remaining a human with an open and a living heart.

Laying my head down on my pillow that night, I realized how close I had come to buying the lie that there's no such thing as an *ought to be* in this life. The lie had such appeal. How simple it would be to tidily decide that good worship, good bonds, and good work were nice if you wanted them and could get them. But if you didn't or couldn't, no worries. Just pick the bits of the package you liked or could make happen (like worship or meaningful work), discard the rest,

¹⁶ There is a God-made beauty in female union with good male strength, but—of course—not every woman on the planet wants (or needs) to get married. C. S. Lewis offers a lovely reminder in *That Hideous Strength* that many women "can bypass the male and go on to meet something far more masculine, higher up, to which they must make a yet deeper surrender." In a profound sense, Jesus really is *the consummate husband* for women and men alike. And, at a far earthier level, one only needs to know one or two married women to realize that the *idea* of marriage is not the same thing as an actual lifetime commitment to a particular man with all *his* aches and unmet longings. In other words, marriage is a good to be desired, but not a "must" to be demanded. (C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 312).

and watch the gaps disappear. Cut yourself off from the achy parts of your own humanity, and then—presto!—pain gone. Move on with your life.

This lie had come so close to sounding like wisdom for the journey.

God had not shut off that desire in me that, for whatever reasons, had remained an open ache for longer than I would have ever imagined. But that meant I was actually holding on to God's gift of my own heart. That gentle, Genesis-shaped reminder had done its work, telling me that my urge to merge wasn't crazy, nor should it be unnaturally aborted. To the contrary, that reminder gave me the courage to once again offer my whole heart—gaps and all—to my creator. Then, while gratefully laying hold of the real good in my life—like a great church, a lot of friends, committed extended family, and meaningful work—I could keep moving forward.

KNOW HOW IT WAS SO YOU CAN LIVE WELL WITH HOW IT IS

Paula

When Connally and I teach about life as it ought to be, there's a predictable reaction. We brace ourselves for it. People get angry. Frustrated. They are only more aware that their "best life now" is a far cry from what they envisioned. Good worship, relationships, and work feel like tales from another planet.

In the Garden, everything we were created for was abundantly present. And if we put ourselves into the first few chapters of Genesis, I suspect we'll find our breath taken away.

In the Garden, we know who we are. Our Father is the one who has been in relationship with the Son and the Spirit forever. Our Father is the creator. Our Father is the one who has made us, male or female, in his image.¹⁷ From the outset, we are relational and creative, strolling with our Father in the cool of the day. Can you sense the contentment?

We stroll, too, with one another. For Adam has seen Eve and knows that “at last” he has one to whom he can hold fast. And Eve, made of the same stuff as Adam, knows the goodness of oneness with this man. They are naked, but there is no shame between them, no self-conscious preoccupation, no quiet disappointments.¹⁸ Words like *lonely* or *lost* haven’t even made it into the lexicon. Our identity is secure. Surveying the situation, our Father declares it all—and you can almost see the smile on his face—very good.¹⁹

But it’s not just good in our relationship with our Father or each other. We are planted smack in the middle of a world where instead of fighting with the creation around us, we are blessed in our stewardship of it.²⁰ Imagine bluebirds, dolphins, cows, and earthworms all delighting in their place in the created world, even as we delight in them. If there were mosquitoes, they weren’t biting. And our work in this garden? God’s instructions are simple: Cultivate this amazing creation; bring out its fruitfulness. Multiply the edible beauty that surrounds us.²¹ We get to grow tomatoes, so to speak,

¹⁷ Genesis 1:26-27.

¹⁸ Genesis 2:23-25.

¹⁹ Genesis 1:31.

²⁰ Genesis 1:26.

²¹ Genesis 2:9.

without the slightest threat of aphids. And we are called to turn our ripe tomatoes into a salad that would make the Barefoot Contessa proud.

Sigh. Our hearts ache for what we lost. If we stare at the here and now of our lives, we know that even our best relationships and achievements are missing something. We can see litter in the landscape of the dreams that have died. And that ache can turn to anger and frustration easily. Very easily.

There's a great temptation to just *deny the ought* of life as God intended. To pretend it doesn't matter. To numb out and take a class in French cooking. But even though we're tempted to pretend that things are okay when something inside us knows they're not, here's the truth: Pretending and avoiding is a crazy maker.

Some part of your soul knows the real scoop. Your family gatherings should indeed be glorious affairs—with no one kicking you under the table. Ministries are meant to flourish, not fall apart. Your body is literally made to bear children.

The world should not be this way.

Oh, that you could hear the heart of God echoed in your disappointment. You really aren't crazy. There's something terribly amiss. What you are dealing with is so far from God's intention that he gave his Son to transform what is to what could be.

And one day what *could* be—*will* be.

One summer, after surgeries and infertility treatments had failed, Brady and I sat on the back porch, overlooking the Appalachian mountains, both, in our own way, mourning.

For Brady, I think it felt like God had played a dirty trick on him. None of his friends had, as yet, encountered a roadblock this severe. I remember saying, as though the words were put in my mouth, “You know, every single cell of my body—and yours—is fallen. Every cell bears the mark of the Fall.” Eventually, that reality is inescapable.

The Fall, the brokenness of *what ought to be*, might show up as diabetes or infertility or a chronic illness. But it shows up for everyone. You aren’t crazy to feel the loss.

If that Genesis story is really something more than just an old fable, your disappointment makes perfect sense. Your lament is just as it should be. You aren’t crazy to feel the ache.

Rather, the ache is *the first stop on the train to hope*.

The contrast between how life *ought to be* and what happens in a fallen world can take your breath away. But the truth in that gap opens up something extraordinary: the opportunity to experience your longings—with hope, without bitterness, and without shame.

LEARNING TO LOVE YOUR LONGINGS

Years ago, I stumbled on a book called *Addiction and Grace*.²² The author, Gerald May, wrote it mostly for the community of recovering people who suffer from a tangible addiction.

But the further I read, I realized that May was saying something more: Addiction is our universal human

²² Gerald G. May, *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (New York: HarperOne, 1991).

dilemma. I, me, us . . . we become overly attached to states of being, particular experiences, people whose approval we crave, familiar identities, and sometimes, a substance like alcohol or food.

In a profoundly human sense, our addictions are where our longing for the Garden shows up.

So what intrigued me was May's claim that in the recovery community, people do not make progress until they come to *love their longings*. He said that to live as a child of God is to live with love and longing, an ache for a fullness of love that's never quite within our grasp. That ache is meant to prepare us for the embrace of God. And so, in the meantime, we must come to love our longings.

To live as a child of God is to live with love and hope and growth—but it is also to live with longing, with the ache for a fullness of love never quite within our grasp. Our attitude toward that ache can prepare us for an embrace with God. We must come to love our longings.

In our longings, God is pulling us back to his original intent for us, to a deeper understanding of the Garden. As we own those longings and take them to God, we can wholeheartedly receive whatever fruitful directions he opens to us—day to day, moment to moment. Or in a phrase my recovery friends have taught me well: We take the next right step. Only in owning desire, taking it to God, and risking with others can we be delivered from the shadow world.

Loving your longings can take endlessly different shapes, but it is not an esoteric exercise:

- Perhaps you have moved to a new city and don't have anything like a sense of community there. Let the longing in this moment give you courage to seek out the community you were created for.
- Or you are painfully aware that your job doesn't remotely fit your gifts or your desires. Let your longings take you past the fear of making the phone calls that could open a door.
- Or you long for healthier, more trustworthy relationships. Perhaps for you, this means admitting to God and a friend or two that your occasional snarky comment might be cutting off the relationships you were meant to enjoy—the first step toward wholeness and trust.

LONGINGS AS A GUIDE TO HOPE

Our longings point us toward the goodness of God. When we look at how life *ought to be*—how God created it in the beginning—we see clearly that God wills our good.

Look at what he made you for in the beginning—really look there. Do you think he will leave you stranded outside the Garden forever? Will not his goodness track you down in a hundred meaningful ways? That's how the familiar

Psalm 23 ends: God will pursue you, tracking you down—not to nail your hide to the wall but to show you his goodness and mercy.²³ Now, goodness and mercy may not appear in the form you pictured, or in the time you thought was right. But your longings can keep your eyes open—because in due time, God’s goodness will appear. And you don’t want to miss seeing that because you stuffed all those longings away.

Loving your longings widens the lens for how you look at life. You were created for more than this world will allow you to experience. But all is not lost. There are tastes and glimmers of God’s original mercy now—and that helps us trust him in places where the fog is thick and heavy. There is permission to *exhale*.

Going forward, live with one eye looking over your shoulder, a gaze that includes all that God longs to give you—his original intent for you. That gaze will steer you down the path that leads to life now. It will comfort your disappointment. You won’t just stuff it all in the attic, behind the notion that you’re crazy.

Though they are just the beginning of the story, your longings for *what ought to be* are essential to the journey.

²³ Psalm 23:6.

Reflections on

LONGING FOR MORE

- 1.** What does it mean to you that the life you are living is not really the world that God created you for? Where do you find hope in that?
- 2.** Open up the Bible and read the second chapter of Genesis in a leisurely, I-am-there way. Take a few moments to let yourself walk around in that world where “it’s all good,” where all is as it should be. God is so immediately present in your relationships and your work. Nothing is missing. Nothing is wrong. What in this picture most strikes a note of wistful longing in you? Why?
- 3.** What does the Garden say to you about the character of God and his original desire for your life and all humans?
- 4.** When you realize what a far cry this world is from the life God created you for, you can either shut down your heart or let the longing drive you to God. Where have you tended to shut down desire and longing in your life? Why?

AND YET, UNDAUNTED

5. David said in Psalm 27:13 that he would have despaired unless he had believed he would see “the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.” His last words in this psalm (verse 14) are: “Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD.” Can you let yourself believe that you will see “the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living”? What does it mean in your life to “let your heart take courage”?

BUY NOW