

365  
DEVOTIONS



# Savior



LIVING ABUNDANTLY  
WHERE YOU ARE, AS YOU ARE



SHAUNA NIEQUIST



## OUR STORIES

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple  
and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?*

—1 CORINTHIANS 3:16

These are my stories, the stories of life as it reveals itself in my field of vision, and the cast of characters are my friends and family and neighbors. I'm telling these stories because they're the only ones I know and the only ones I have the right to tell, believing that in them you will find your own stories, with your own beautiful and strange characters and plot twists. I believe that these love letters to my own quotidian life will unmask the tiny glimmers of hope and redemption masquerading as normal life in your corner of the world.

The world is alive, blinking and clicking, winking at us slyly, inviting us to get up and dance to the music that's been playing since the beginning of time, if you bend all the way down and put your ear to the ground to hear it.

You have stories worth telling, memories worth remembering, dreams worth working toward, a body worth feeding, a soul worth tending, and beyond that, the God of the universe dwells within you, the true culmination of super and natural.

You are more than dust and bones.

You are spirit and power and image of God.

**YOUR STORY** is worth telling—it's part of God's story, and his Spirit dwells within you. Take a few minutes to thank God both for your story and for his Spirit in you.



## START WHERE YOU ARE

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

— P s a l m 23 : 5

My friend Laura's New Year's resolution is "start where you are." I love it. Whatever thing seems too intimidating, whatever new skill seems too far off to develop, whatever project has been hanging over your head forever: *start where you are.*

Each of us has been created by a holy God with love, on purpose and for a purpose. But so many of us feel afraid or unprepared. This is the secret, though: No one is prepared enough. No one is perfectly ready.

Let's choose together to take one step forward today, whatever that means—a phone call, an hour of writing, a day away to dream. Sometimes even just a half hour to brainstorm or plan gets us unstuck. No one lives out an exciting calling without just plunging forward at some point, full of fear and uncertainty.

The world is full of people who can talk your ear off about all the reasons they can't possibly just begin that thing they're longing to begin. Let's not be those people. Let's start where we are.

**WHAT'S THE** dream or vision or project you feel called to in this season of your life? What's one tangible way to start where you are?



## BITTERSWEET

*Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?*

—Job 2:10

The idea of *bittersweet* is changing the way I live, unraveling and reweaving the way I understand life. Bittersweet is the idea that in all things there is both something broken and something beautiful, that there is a sliver of lightness on even the darkest of nights, a shadow of hope in every heartbreak, and that rejoicing is no less rich when it contains a splinter of sadness.

Bittersweet is the practice of believing that we really do need both the bitter and the sweet, and that a life of nothing but sweetness rots both your teeth and your soul. Bitter is what makes us strong, what forces us to push through, what helps us earn the lines on our faces and the calluses on our hands. Sweet is nice enough, but bittersweet is beautiful, nuanced, full of depth and complexity. Bittersweet is courageous, gutsy, earthy.

So this is the work I'm doing now, and the work I invite you into: when life is sweet, say thank you and celebrate. And when life is bitter, say thank you and grow.

**SPEND A** few minutes thanking God even for the bitter parts of your life, trusting his love and goodness even in the midst of loss.



## A PIECE OF A STORY

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.*

—1 JOHN 1:1

When my friend Doug told me that the pattern of death and rebirth is the central metaphor of the Christian life, he was giving me the currency that he earned through his own brokenness. He was telling me something that God had written on his life as a part of his story. The reason I didn't understand it at that point was because I didn't need to, but then several years later, I did.

You tell what you know, what you've earned, what you've learned the hard way. You watch it fall on what seem to be deaf ears, and you mutter something under your breath, something about pearls before swine. But then ten years later you realize that one fragment of your story has now been woven into someone else's, as a bridge to a new way of understanding and living. I didn't need proof from a theologian or a tip from a church practitioner. I needed a piece of a story, something real and full of life and blood and breath and heartache, something that someone had lived through, a piece of wisdom earned the hard way. That's why telling our stories is so important.

**WHOSE STORY** has helped bring you to a new way of understanding and living? Who has been helped by hearing your story, your hard-won understanding?



## THIS IS IT

*I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.*

—Ecclesiastes 8:15

This is what I'm finding, in glimpses and flashes: this is it. This is it, in the best possible way. That thing I'm waiting for, that adventure, that movie-score-worthy experience unfolding gracefully. This is it. Normal, daily life ticking by on our streets and sidewalks, in our houses and apartments, in our beds and at our dinner tables, in our dreams and prayers and fights and secrets. This pedestrian life is the most precious thing any of us will ever experience.

I believe that this way of living, this focus on the present, the daily, the tangible, this intense concentration not on the news headlines but on the flowers growing in your own garden, the children growing in your own home, this way of living has the potential to open up the heavens, to yield a glittering handful of diamonds where a second ago there was coal. This way of living and noticing and building and crafting can crack through the movie sets and soundtracks that keep us waiting for our own life stories to begin, and set us free to observe the lives we have been creating all along without even realizing it.

**EVERYDAY LIFE** is an exquisite gift. What would it look like to really pay attention to that gift today?



## WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

*Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll—are they not in your record?*

—P s a l m 56:8

If you've been marked by what might have been, you don't forget. You know the day, the years. You know when the baby would have been born. You know exactly what anniversary you'd be celebrating, if the wedding had happened. You know exactly how old she'd be right now, if she were still alive. You'll never forget the last time you saw your child, or the last time *cancer* was a word about someone else's life, or the day that changed absolutely everything. It makes the calendar feel like a minefield, like you're constantly tiptoeing over explosions of grief until one day you hit one, shattered by what might have been.

I don't know what date it is for you—what broke apart on that day, what was lost, what memories are pinned forever to that day on that calendar. But I hope that on that day you hold yourself open and tender to the memories for just a moment. As one who also grieves, I grieve with you, for whatever you've lost, too, for what might have been.

**HAS YOUR** life been marked by what might have been? What meaningful traditions or moments have you practiced on those days? Today, allow the God who loves you to carry your sadness for you.



## CIRCLING THE WAGONS

*Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

—1 CORINTHIANS 13:6–7

I believe friendship is God's greatest evidence of himself here on earth. Everyone needs a home team: a go-to, show-up, middle-of-the-night, come-in-without-knocking tribe that gets us through when things fall apart. I believe in circling the wagons—gathering your people around you to tell you the truth when all the voices out there are shouting bad news. And of course, I believe all this love and truth-telling and prayer and laughter happen best around the table.

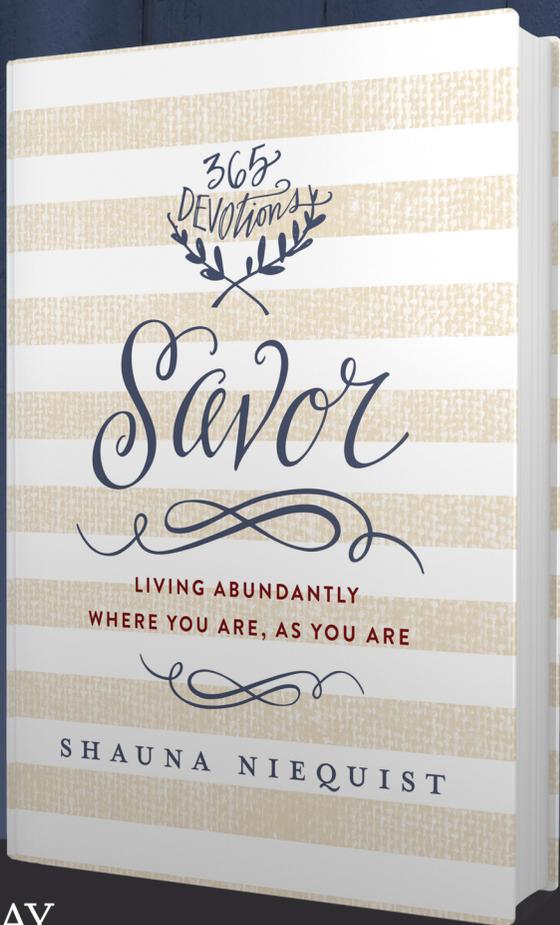
That's why I love Thursday nights, because Thursday night is small group night. We always eat together. We pray together, to begin and end our time together. We create space for each person to be heard, to talk about what's good and what's hard, to ask for prayer and help. We take confidentiality and the safety of the table very seriously. We don't always do a study. Many times we read the Bible. Sometimes someone leads a liturgy or reading. Sometimes someone leads an exercise that helps us interact with a section of scripture or a set of ideas or spiritual practices. But every week, we gather around our table, and every week, my heart is so full and thankful.

**WHO'S ON** your home team? How do you nurture those connections and relationships?

# Savor

"I forget so easily that there's a bigger picture.

I'm easily distracted by the bustle of the day—lunch and laundry, deadlines and dinnertime. I forget that it's all held together by a holy, loving God, and that we get to be his partners in restoration and healing.



"LET'S SAVOR THIS DAY,  
*the beauty of the world God made, and the richness  
of family and friendship.*"

—SHAUNA NIEQUIST



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