



BETH GUCKENBERGER

START
WITH
AMEN

How I Learned to Surrender by
Keeping the End in Mind



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To my mom, Ruth Ewing:

*I have a thousand memories of your Bible open on
our kitchen table. Thank you for teaching me about
the rock from which I was cut. After a lifetime of
your influence, I know for sure: presence matters.*

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why
it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

—2 Corinthians 1:20 esv

a·men

/ä'men, ā'men/

exclamation

1. uttered at the end of a prayer or hymn, meaning “so be it.”¹



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PROLOGUE

The week before I was headed out of town, the usual anxiety crept in. *Should I be going? Did I hear this assignment right? Am I one mess-up from a disaster, and this might be it?*

I woke up straight from a dream so real I knew right away it was from the Lord. There was a heaviness about it, and it was in Technicolor, the way Jesus dreams seem to be. I was building a bridge across a rushing river, but I had run out of materials, which left me stranded. I seemed unsure of what to do next. How was I going to get to the other side?

In the morning, I recounted it to my husband, Todd, and we assumed it was about our impending adoption. Many times I had expressed how in-over-our-heads I felt about it. Todd mentioned maybe I was to pray for more “materials.” This explanation satisfied me, and I didn’t think about it again.

Later in the same week, I left to speak at an adoption conference. It was a heavy season of “going,” and my metaphorical cup was not feeling full. The needs of the women in the room weighed on me, and I dreaded walking into dozens of conversations with

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questions I didn't feel equipped to answer. I closed my remarks, and within minutes, women came forward, mostly for prayer. Normally, I love this, but today it felt overwhelming.

A woman made her way to the front, leading with, "Beth, there's something I *have* to tell you . . ." I felt myself shrink, but she didn't seem to notice. "While you were speaking, I had a vision. It was of you building a bridge over some sort of dangerous river, but you didn't have enough material to finish it." The typical bustle of an emptying-out ballroom faded, and her voice pierced my fatigue.

I grabbed her hand, and we found a quiet corner. "I had that same dream just this week. I thought it was about something else, but . . ." My voice trailed off as my mind caught up to how weird this was. "Who *are* you?"

Her name was Dr. Susan Hillis, and she worked for the Centers for Disease Control as a global health adviser specializing in the orphan crisis. She told me the Lord had given her the picture of the bridge many times over the last two years. She believed it was tied to the passage in Ephesians: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (1:17).

"Wisdom is the entire truth of God and all that he has created. Revelation is the sweet whisper of the Holy Spirit we hear behind us, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" She looked at me as if this should all make sense. (I wasn't sure it did.) "If the bridge stops in the middle of the river, we are only walking in wisdom or only walking in revelation."

I was sure she meant *me* when she said *we*.

"Beth, you can't be caught halfway," Susan implored. "The

river below is too dangerous and the stakes too high. You need them both to take others across.”

I knew Susan and I had a divine date orchestrated by God himself, but what could this mean? We ended up talking all afternoon about something she called the “orphan spirit.”

An orphan spirit isn’t experienced exclusively by orphans; it’s a sense in any of us that we need to earn God’s favor. It’s coming to God with a “pretty please give me what I ask for so I believe you like me” attitude. It’s the daughter of a plantation owner, but it acts like a slave, begging at the master’s door for a scrap.

The orphan spirit smells of duty and shame. It self-rejects and seeks comfort in counterfeit affections. It’s competitive and makes everyone a rival. It’s guarded and conditional, living in bondage and fighting for what it can get. It’s unbridled sin crouching at the metaphorical door, desiring to master its host. It lacks spiritual confidence because it thinks we need to earn favor, and there is no way to ever satisfy our debt.

God is our chief teacher and is always the loudest voice in the room. He might use a conversation and someone else’s voice, but when he is authoring the content, your spirit just knows. It leaps in response. God knows what I need to learn and uses whatever vessel he wants to bring me his truth. Some days, he teaches me a lesson through a child; other days, through a song, his creation, or a well-timed message. Today, he used this energetic new friend. *We have to live like daughters.* It’s critical to our surrender.

The orphan spirit is diverse in its host, from the well-established professional who can’t ever seem to work enough to the parent who frantically makes her children her god. It’s in the person who never commits, jumping from relationship to relationship, or who has addictions he is never able to manage.

“The orphan spirit looks to land where we allow it.” Susan leaned in conspiratorially. “It is *the* epidemic crisis spreading exponentially across the globe.”

I shook my head. I wanted to have a clever answer. Or better yet, a plan. I knew God wanted me to hear this; the dream led me to this conversation. I sat quietly, processing.

“Do you know how many children around the world have been abused, meaning assaulted physically, verbally, emotionally, sexually?” She pulled off her glasses and dared me to respond.

At this point, I had nothing. God hadn’t told me that in any dream.

“One billion. Of the two billion children in the world today, half of them have been compromised.”¹

Had God thought this conversation would be better for me than a dozen versions of small talk? I prayed at some level, although there were no words. It’s amazing how we can just sit in the bigness of a message and feel overwhelmed by the Spirit and not know what it’s for. I was searching for something to say, but all that came to mind was profanity.

Susan looked at me, expectant. There was a long pause, and I felt desperate to fill it.

Finally, I whispered, “Amen,” and the word was pregnant with meaning. It was simultaneously an affirmation of her message and a release of tension as I handed this conversation over to the Lord. I remember thanking her and looking for the exit. I slipped into my hotel room and sat on the bed with my legs crossed and my Bible open.

Orphan spirit. Bridges without enough material. One billion children. Counterfeit affections.

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“What do you want from me, Lord?” I bowed my head and spoke out loud. “I trust you. I trust you are still God, even though one billion of your littlest people are hurting. What will you do? What can you do? What should you do? What is there to do? I don’t even know which question to ask. What do you want me to do? This orphan spirit is just the by-product of an ongoing attack on your creation. We live in brokenness. I am broken. Amen! We need your strength. *I* need your strength. Amen! Come for us, dear Jesus.”

I don’t know how long I sat there, waiting for him to answer. It takes more discipline than I would like to sit and be still. I prefer to war with another or, even better, war against the world, but the most intimate of wars happen within my own head.

Lamentations came to mind:

I remember my affliction and my wandering . . .

I well remember them,

and my soul is downcast within me.

Yet this I call to mind

and therefore I have hope:

Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.

They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him.”

The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him. (3:19–25)

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Prayer is a discipline, not just a conversation. I willed my thoughts into submission. *Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.*

And my spiritual confidence swelled. I had no more answers than I did an hour or so before, but I was reminded anew that God is on the move. The tears fell, but they felt more like a spiritual bath than an emotional release. He *is* a communicative God. He longs to impress upon us his presence, the very opposite of an orphan spirit. He wants to give us his good gifts so we can turn around and share those good gifts with others. As I wrestled with God that afternoon (*teach me, show me, help me, use me*), I confessed the one billion are his responsibility, not mine.

As for me? I am to live and love like a daughter, talk like a daughter. I am to invite and extend myself and risk. Life's sweetest tastes come from risk. I am to root myself in his identity and not gorge myself on counterfeit affections. I am then to testify every chance I get: freedom is found in forfeiting my own way.

Amen.

This is that testimony.



CHAPTER 1

SO BE IT

The Posture of Amen

Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

—NEHEMIAH 8:6

I sat on the Mount of Olives and gazed at Jerusalem’s Old City. I noticed the series of gates built and boarded up in the centuries since Jesus walked there. The gates rest on Bible stories we’ve read hundreds of times, yet the meaning of the architecture seems to have gotten lost. These ancient entryways were once specific points of passage for kings and commoners, for merchants and grand processions, guarded through the centuries by tradition and diplomacy.

Among them was a tiny sheep gate. First mentioned in the book of Nehemiah, it was the entrance for sheep used in sacrifices. The door is clearly much smaller than the other gates, and although no animal was passing through it on that day, I imagined a line of sheep, wrapped around the city, being brought in for major Jewish holidays. Sheep as far as the eye could see. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, almost a quarter million animals walked through the thin gate during the Passover week, the week of Jesus' death.¹

Imagining Jesus coming down the hill on Palm Sunday, with everyone waving their branches, I wondered where he entered. The Bible doesn't tell us, but I can't imagine Herod would have let Jesus enter through his gate. I stared for a while at the walls. He was a king who became a common man who then became the sacrificial lamb. So how did he enter this city?

Whether Jesus went through this particular gate or not, his was the sheep's gate.

Later in the afternoon, we visited a Greek ruin. I couldn't stop taking pictures of the extraordinary buildings: enormous theaters and coliseums, bathhouses and schools.

I stood on one of those wide roads, mouth open, sketching what I saw, being so impressed with what man could do. My mind flitted back to the scene of the gates earlier in the day, and, for a second, a verse ran through my head.

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matt. 7:13–14)

It was as if God had posed the sweetest of questions. *You want to be impressed with what man can do? That's your choice, but it will lead to your own destruction.*

If you want life—real life—follow me. I'll be entering the city through the narrow gate.

Together, we will be laying down our lives.

I sighed as I realized that a sheep gate awaits me every day. Above it hangs a sign: “This is the Way. Surrender.” Through it I find blessings I never imagined, as sacrifice reveals itself as the entry point for peace. Jesus found shalom in obedience to the will of the Father and has been inviting us to discover the same ever since.

I want the peace. I want to not worry when circumstances or relationships induce panic. I want the latest incident to be my excuse to exercise a growing muscle in me that says, *Amen*. As I cross the sheep gate threshold, this little word means, *So be it. I trust you. I don't understand, but I surrender. It's in your hands now.*

WHEN AMEN TOOK OVER

In 1997, my husband, Todd, and I moved to Monterrey, Mexico, to serve orphans and vulnerable children full-time through Back2Back Ministries. Living in a developing country for a long time means you exponentially increase your odds of being robbed. It's not unusual, and you take extra precautions, but the risk is still there. I say this because it was a ridiculous purchase. As a missionary, I had long carried purses that looked like a combination of army backpack and bohemian sling bag. Why

I lusted one day for a purple Coach purse in the window of a Texas outlet is still a mystery to me. That light-lilac suede was so impractical. I didn't even wear much purple, but I am sure it symbolized something to me about another world I could live in if I wanted.

I was at my son's soccer game when it was stolen. Someone shattered the window in my car and snatched it a few feet from where I stood. I should've panicked about the credit cards that needed to be canceled or the cell phone I could've used to call for help or the pictures of my children I carried in my wallet. But I immediately started grieving the loss of the purse.

After making some police reports, I went home and commandeered my nine-year-old daughter's dress-up purse and used it for the next month, knowing soon I would be flying into the United States and could replace it with something more practical. I vowed *never again* to the purple purse.

I flew into Cincinnati, Ohio, weeks later and had only one hour before a speaking engagement, so I searched a nearby strip mall to see if I could quickly pick up a new purse.

My only option was a luggage store. I stepped in and saw a rack with cool leather backpack purses, a bit of a hybrid between my earlier choices and the Coach. I had never heard of the brand, but it looked nice and sturdy, so I took it to the counter.

"That'll be \$276," the lady said, ringing my purchase into her cash register.

My eyes went wide at the price, I muttered, "No, thank you," and left the store. I didn't think about it again, as now I was late to my engagement. I pulled into the place where I was meeting the others, grabbed Emma's ratty purse, and told the Lord I understood my roots.

I knew he didn't value or care about purses, and neither would I.

Finally, the evening's event was over, and I headed to my mom's house, where I was staying for a few days. I settled into my childhood room and looked over mail accumulated since our last visit. I'd had a birthday since my previous trip to the States, and I sat on the edge of the bed, reading cards. At the bottom of the mailbag, there was a package from my college friend, who had remembered my birthday and sent a gift to my mom's house. I thought fondly of her as I opened the box, and then threw my hands to my mouth when I saw what was inside.

It was my \$276 leather backpack purse. Exact. Same. One.

A flood of thoughts came over me as I held it.

She and I had never exchanged gifts so generous before.

She didn't know about the theft, did she?

Is this for real? God picked this out for me *before* I wanted it today?

I was so sure he didn't care about designer purses. I had spent a month disciplining my thoughts so I wouldn't grieve something as silly as a purse. Yet here he was, reintroducing me to himself all over again. *I care about everything you care about*, he seemed to say.

That night, before I fell asleep, I thought about all the wasted time I had spent wringing my hands over something God already had in the works to redeem. What if when I didn't like what was happening (a lost purse, broken relationships, poor health, traffic accidents, unexpected bills) I prayed in anticipation of the Lord's hand, confident of his sovereignty? What if instead of second-guessing him, my prayers sounded more like *Amen. So be it. This happened. It's all good. I'm yours. Change my*

heart. Take captive my thoughts. All I have is in your hands. Bless the thief. Dear Jesus . . . ?

In this case, I can stretch and pray for the person who took my purse or remind myself mentally of my blessings. I can stretch and be grateful I wasn't assaulted or trust for future provision. What do I gain from worry or, worse yet, fury?

That night, I committed to Jesus that I would rest in the God of Amen.

From now on, I would start our holy conversations by anticipating his hand.

"Amen," I began before any other words followed.

AMEN IS COMPLETE DEPENDENCE

Back to Israel. Our guide, Bible teacher Ray Vander Laan, took us to a hill where we watched sheep graze under the careful eye of their shepherd. Ray invited us to make observations, and some immediately mentioned the straight line the sheep walk in. They looked like they were playing follow-the-leader. He told us the root word from which we derive the phrase *path of righteousness* is the same root word describing sheep walking in a line. Sheep literally walk along the path of righteousness.

Others commented on the goats that were running around, trying to make their own way and staying off the path of righteousness. Finally, I asked why the shepherd was tending his sheep on a hillside without grass. Everywhere I turned, it seemed brown and rocky.

"Look under the rocks," he encouraged me. "The dew from the morning gets caught under them, and there are small grass

clumps that grow. See how the shepherd is walking among his sheep? They know his voice, and he's pointing out to them where the grass is found."

I located the thickest tuft of grass, and it was still smaller than a human fist. Do you know how long it takes to bite, chew, and swallow a small tuft of grass? From our observation, about the time it takes to go three or four steps. Then the sheep has to listen for where he can find the next bite. The sheep stay on the path of righteousness so they are within earshot of a shepherd who is actively pointing out where they can go to get what they need.

I started to think about Psalm 23, and our guide pulled out his Bible. As we talked about the imagery for this passage, we agreed our idea of being led to green pastures conjured up images of waist-high grass, careening in a gentle wind, as far as the eye could see. But my picture of a field of grass represented my total independence. I could eat however much I wanted, whenever I wanted, wherever I wanted. I could tell God thanks beforehand, but all other factors were in my control. David, however, was on hillsides like this rocky one when he penned those words. His idea of God's leading us to a green pasture places us in a posture of dependence, looking more like what I was watching that afternoon. God's way puts me in a position where he might provide only what will sustain me for the next three or four steps. Then, dependent on him for more, I stay on the path within earshot and listen for his leading so I'll find what I need. Listen. Bite. Step. Repeat.

God knows I need to hear his voice more than I need the field of grass. Surrendering to a life of *so be it* is about discerning the difference, holding a posture where I am wholly reliant and deeply committed to believing his voice is the door to provision.

Today, *amen* is most often our sign-off to a prayer or a testimony of agreement, but it was designed to be so much more. Its intent is to describe a spiritual position before God. Nehemiah explains it as: “Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, ‘Amen! Amen!’ Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground” (Neh. 8:6).

This is amen: hands raised, faces bowed, hearts at peace. There our metaphorical spiritual buckets get filled, and there is plenty to offer each other. Unity is felt among the church, and communion is a reality. Here, in this posture, I am always surprised by what God has for me.

If I could pray no other word ever again, I would be okay. *Amen* speaks affirmation and commitment. It says yes to a lifestyle where he is to be trusted and I can rest in him.

When I talk to God, I start with *amen*, and, with it, we communicate intimacy and a sense of knowing.

I know he’s *got* this.

He knows I’m letting him *have* this, whatever in the moment “this” may be.

As amen permeated my life and prayers, I noticed a newfound confidence in my faith. I woke up one day along my journey and sensed a fresh boldness in my faith. It wasn’t a result of new head knowledge or better self-discipline. It was simply a longing for miracles and revival; I wanted to see God be God. I developed a craving for intimacy with him. This idea of amen, or surrender and submission, opened doors of restoration in my relationships—and in my soul.

But be warned. *Narrow is the path that leads to righteousness.* Developing a faith rooted in amen doesn't come without its roadblocks and diversions. Sometimes it was my sin (and, honestly, sometimes it still is); other times it was another's. We have an enemy, one who seeks to get us as far away from God as possible, to have our lives ruled by chaos and decay.

The way of amen always starts with the Savior, the one who entered through the sheep's gate to make a way for reconciliation with the Father. Because he sacrificed himself, we can say *amen*. Because he showed us what unflinching obedience looks like, we are capable of the same.

God intended this word *amen* to be a moment of intimacy, drenched in reverence, replete with peace—a moment when you rest in him and are rejuvenated by him. He wants to give us so much more.

AMEN IS OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S COVENANT

God gave up his rights long before the week of Palm Sunday. In Genesis 15, he laid the groundwork for which gate he would one day enter. In order to secure a promise he made to Abram, that he would give him as many children as there are stars in the sky as well as the land in which they would dwell, God made a blood path covenant with him.

Blood path covenants were long the tradition between two parties making a pledge to each other. The Lord could have just said his promise and then expected Abraham to believe it. But he used a practice familiar to Abraham in his cultural context to

give him the faith he would need. As was the custom, Abraham would take several animals and split them in half, creating a small, bloody river between the carcasses:

So the LORD said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. (Gen. 15: 9–10)

Then the two parties would walk through the blood path, committing to one another and to the witnesses, “If I break my end of this deal, I will pay the price with my blood.” There are all kinds of nuances in these arrangements, but the most important piece is both parties must commit. God knew, however, that Abraham couldn’t keep his end of the deal, so the Bible says, “As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. . . . When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces” (vv. 12, 17).

God walked through the blood path on behalf of himself *and* Abraham. He was in essence saying, “I will keep this covenant, and if I don’t, I will pay the price with my blood. You will keep this covenant, and if you do not, *I* will pay the price with my blood. I would rather my life be divided than break a covenant relationship with you.”

The story of which gate Jesus would one day metaphorically enter was put into motion when he walked through the blood path. Theologians call this story a Christophany: the appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. Before they even knew

who Jesus was, his people were set up to understand that someone would pay for their sins in mercy.

Throughout Jewish history, it has been the custom of priests to offer sacrifices on the altar twice a day, at 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. We read the instructions of this practice in Exodus 29 and in Jewish literature.

The 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. ritual would have been active on Good Friday, when Jesus entered into the city as the sheep and not the king. Mark 15 tells us Jesus was put on the cross at 9:00 a.m.—when the first sacrifice was being made.

There he hung for six hours.

This doesn't make any sense. If I were Jesus, I might have said, around 1:30 in the afternoon, "Enough! I will still die and resurrect, I will still conquer death, and I will still have people tell my story, but not one minute more!"

Instead, in Matthew 27, we see a Savior who held out until orchestrating his own death perfectly at 3:00 p.m.

God does not deal in coincidences. He was proving a point. He was fulfilling a promise he had made long before.

This is a God who is always *perfectly* on time. This is a Savior who shows what a life of *amen* means—unflinching obedience and power in sacrifice. His life has long been defining what keeping a promise looks like.

So why do I doubt him? Why do some days I pout over something not happening fast enough, knowing full well that he is actively working so those details will unfold perfectly in his time? I doubt because in that moment I have not surrendered. I might pray, but they are words strung together designed to manipulate a holy God to adjust to my will. I will finish the prayer with *amen*, but I don't mean, "So be it." I mean, "*So do it.*"

Amen is the verbal equivalent of hands raised. It can be translated as “So be it” or paraphrased as “It is as you say.” It’s more than our modern understanding of “uncle” or “I give up.” It is surrender in a spirit of “It’s up to you; you do it,” and “I made the promise, but only you can fulfill it.” So I whisper, *You sell the house. You move her heart. You heal that body. You open the door. You provide. You go before them. Amen. So be it. In your time. I trust. I surrender. Amen.*

And this one word reorients me, calibrating me with a God whose covenant he will never break.

START WITH THE ENDING

Amen is a word found in virtually all languages around the globe, originating in Hebrew and then brought by Paul and the missionaries to the Greek world. The Greeks didn’t have a translation for it, so they just adopted it, and cultures have been following suit ever since. Wherever faithful people gather, you can be sure to hear it uttered in affirmation and in conclusion of their time in prayer.

When I am in conversation with Jesus, I really do want my first soul steps to be, “*Yes, so be it. It is as you say . . .*” Otherwise, I can too easily start down a path where I am whining or begging or negotiating or accusing. Beginning with *amen* sets my pace as I go down that path; it stills my heart and reminds me with whom I am talking.

Jesus often began his comments with the Hebrew word *amen*, which is translated in the Gospels as “truly” or “verily” nearly seventy times. In John 3, when Jesus was talking to

Nicodemus, he said literally, “[Amen, amen] I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (v. 3 NASB). Whereas prophets had to declare, “Thus says the Lord,” Jesus simply acknowledged his own authority, “Amen, I say to you . . .” His words were the truth, and just by him saying them, we could have confidence *in* them.

That’s what I’m looking for: a spiritual confidence that supersedes circumstances, a peace that passes understanding (Phil. 4:7). These are promises accessible to me on earth, and the barrier between those promises and my reality lies in direct correlation to how quickly I acknowledge, “So be it. It is as you say.” The slower I am to get to *amen*, the more painful my faith journey seems. In contrast, the more this word passes my lips, the lower my knees sink, landing me in the peace I long for.

Starting off with *amen* dates as far back as the prophets.

Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD. He said, “Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD’s house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon.” (Jer. 28:5–6)

“Amen! May the Lord do so . . .” What if I spent more time trusting the Lord will do this and less time wrestling with him? Isaiah 65:16 reads, “Because he who is blessed in the earth will be blessed by the God of truth” (NASB). Using the original language, this verse could also be translated, “He who is blessed in the earth will be blessed by the God of *Amen*.” This word has long been less of a sign-off and more of an avowal.

Each time I say *amen*, it's like lifting a huge barbell with my faith muscle. It simply makes me stronger. *Amen. You are to be trusted. Amen. You do have a plan. Amen. So be it. I surrender.* Each time I use it, my muscle rips and grows, enabling me to lift a truth or a reality I couldn't before. When I start my time with *amen*, it eliminates my transactional conversations with him as I recognize more quickly, who am I to make deals with God?

Amen is also used as a descriptor of God. John shares in Revelation 3:14, "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words *of the Amen, the faithful and true witness*, the ruler of God's creation." This gives me hope. I need a relationship with someone who will be faithful. I want to trust his witness is not false, and I am grateful someone is ruling this creation because I need to talk to him.

I watch as daily life slams against a theology of *amen* I long to live by. Will I believe it to be true? Will it give me hope? Does it have enough grit to sustain me when I am tired or afraid? When a calling stalls or someone wounds me, God promises, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). When my own sin disrupts a relationship, *amen*. I can raise that barbell over my head and say, "There is therefore now no condemnation" (Rom. 8:1 ESV). Knowing he is the faithful and true witness helps me hold on to his words.

Living *amen* is a sacred rhythm. It is surrender to sovereignty in all circumstances. The result is a rapport with the living God so intense it permeates everything. It affects how I talk to my husband, interact with neighbors, spend money, make plans, and raise my kids. It influences how affected I am by other people's thoughts of me or someone else's crisis. It's the antidote to fear and control when they raise their heads in my

thoughts. Surrendering to a life of *so be it* is an acknowledgment that my knee is bowed and someone else is on the throne. I care about who holds a political office, but I don't have confidence in it. I can cry over a difficult news story, but I trust he is using it for his glory. With my limited human understanding, I wonder how he allows all that he does, but whether I am shaking my fist or holding up my hand, the same will always be true: he has forever been and forever will be the King.

Typically when we pray, we start with *Dear Jesus*, and requests or confessions follow. I have lots of both. I want things for myself, my family, and this world. I am always telling him what I want. I confess to him thoughts not held captive and carnal intentions I struggle to control. By starting with *amen*, I get to sing the song of "It's all good" throughout the prayer.

If I get what I want (for myself, my family, or this world), wow. It's all good. Thank you, Lord.

If I don't get what I want (children stay sick, planes stay grounded, governments continue to wage war), it's all good. He is in control. I can trust. Thank you, Lord.

When we start our holy conversations with the spirit of *so be it*, we say, "I trust you. I hope in you. I yield." And then, knowing we can't sustain that kind of courage on our own, we have to finish the prayer with the plea of *Dear Jesus*.

Just to be clear, "It's all good" is not the same as "I'm fine." I'm fine is a defense mechanism, another way to say, "It doesn't matter." (It does to him.)

"You wouldn't care." (He does.)

"You aren't worth it." (He is, and so are you.)

"I don't want to deal with it." (We need to.)

My friend Emilee told me once, when I answered her question

with “I’m fine,” that *fine* is the Christian f-word. Spiritual confidence isn’t rooted in “I’m fine,” which looks like gritted teeth, a plastic smile, and glazed-over eyes. Spiritual confidence is rooted in “It’s all good,” which means, “Thank goodness I can trust him who is in control, because clearly I am not.”

As we train ourselves in a life of *amen* first, we experience tremendous benefits: intimacy with God and others, the reward of abundant grace and peace, reconciled relationships, and less overall human drama. Mostly, walking in abandon results in being reintroduced to this multifaceted God over and over again.

In my relationship with Jesus, there have been seasons of passionate interaction and newlywed-like infatuation—and other periods of cooling off, when I dabbled my toes in waters where they didn’t belong. I have wrestled with him over circumstances, stomped my feet over loss, questioned him in my doubt, and clung to him during brokenness. If there is something you can ask of or about Jesus, I’ve done it. I’m spiritual by nature, and I am always stirring the soul waters inside.

I don’t know the exact moment when it happened, this crossing over from believing in God to believing God, although I now know I don’t want to go back. I have finally settled myself at his feet. Some days I feel anticipation, so I stand there on tiptoes. Some days I feel exhausted, so I am facedown, without words. On days with questions, I raise my hand. On days of celebration, I dance spiritually like I wish I could physically. I have decided to permanently take up residence in the throne room, heart rendered to his sovereignty. If this spiritual posture could talk, it would say, “Amen. So be it.”



NOTES

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