

So Long, Normal

*Living and Loving the
Free Fall of Faith*

Laura Story



Praise for *So Long, Normal*

“Laura has been a friend of mine for quite a while. This is a beautiful story of love and hope and Jesus. As you read these pages you are going to laugh, you are going to cry, and best of all, you are going to think.”

—Bob Goff

Author and speaker; Sweet Maria’s husband, dad
of several kids, and grandpa of a couple more

“Change, upheaval, and tough transitions. They’re God’s favorite way of shaking you up and out of what’s ‘normal.’ Yes, it’s hard, but it’s necessary if we are to grow in grace. My friend Laura Story speaks to this beautifully and powerfully in her wonderful new book, *So Long, Normal*, and I give her work a double thumbs-up! Read it and you’ll understand why saying goodbye to ‘normal’ is your passport to a faith-filled life of surprise and adventure.”

—Joni Eareckson Tada

Joni and Friends International Disability Center

“With a lightness of touch akin to her piano playing, Laura Story helps us to stay steady in a world turned upside down.”

—Alistair Begg

Senior pastor Parkland Church, Cleveland, Ohio

“Laura is a voice I trust, so much so that I invite her to join me every chance I can at Fresh Grounded Faith. And this book is another affirmation of why I love her! It’s a guidebook for navigating the unknown written by one who has traveled that land herself. So if you’re struggling to feel secure in an uncertain world, Laura’s wise and gentle voice is for you.”

—Jennifer Rothschild

Author and founder, Fresh Grounded Faith Events

So Long, Normal

Also by Laura Story

What If Your Blessings Come Through Raindrops?
*When God Doesn't Fix It: Lessons You Never Wanted
to Learn, Truths You Can't Live Without*
I Give Up: The Secret Joy of a Surrendered Life

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Laura Story

with Bill Wood



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So Long, Normal

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*To Martin, Josie, Ben, Griffin, and Timothy—
Our lives have been anything but normal, but I wouldn't
miss this adventure for anything in the world!*

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The Truth About Normal

The church where I work has an adventure treetop ropes course. I know, it's kind of bizarre. When I first started working there, I noticed the shiny steel wire crossing over a massive swimming pool and assumed the church had some crazy way of doing baptisms. But I soon discovered that Presbyterians use less water when baptizing, not more.

The zip line had been built for the church's camp ministry, which serves thousands of kids every summer, teaching them the truths of the gospel in a fun, engaging way. Honestly, I didn't really care what they used it for, as long as I never was required to do it! I like the ground. And I especially like when my feet are firmly planted on it. But sure enough, I got that dreaded email one day: *Staff Team-Building Opportunity*.

My coworkers and I would be going through the ropes course in an effort to bond, or something like that. And it was mandatory.

I hadn't signed up for this.

I put on my bravest face and headed out to "bond" with my team. I'm pretty outdoorsy anyway. What could go wrong? The first few exercises were easy, including a trust fall and a small rock-climbing wall. But our last challenge? You guessed it. The dreaded zip line. As I crawled up to the tower using the cargo net, many

things ran through my mind. *I'm unbelievably out of shape. Would it have killed me to do a few push-ups over the past few years?*

As I ascended higher, the ground—my good old friend—seemed to be leaving me. *Should I have made a will like my parents encouraged me to do? Is it more probable I'll die from shock or the impact of my body splatting on the pavement?* Many such thoughts rolled around in my head as I climbed to the top of the sixty-foot platform. By the time I made it, my whole body was shaking.

At the top, a young man with a kind voice greeted me. “Are you ready for this?”

I wanted to smack him. *Are you seriously asking me this right now?!* But considering there was no easy alternative way to get back down, and my life was literally in his hands, I kept my mouth shut and just smiled. While connecting my rope lanyard to the 1,350-foot line, he noticed my anxiety. Perhaps what gave it away was the tears welling up in my eyes, or the trembling from head to toe, or the way I was gripping the poor guy's arm so tightly he was no doubt losing circulation in his right hand. Whatever it was, I will never forget his words prior to gently nudging me off the platform.

“Laura,” he said, “I could tell you that this zip line can hold up to five thousand pounds, but that's not going to reassure you. The step you are about to take requires courage. And having courage isn't about the absence of fear. It's acknowledging that fear and being willing to take the next step anyway.”

So long, normal.

Friends, at this point I feel like I need to be honest with you. My name is Laura, and I am not a normal person to begin with. As I say this, it feels as though I am introducing myself in a support group, but I want you to know for at least a couple of reasons. First, as you read this book you will quickly discover that this claim is not my

attempt at humor. Second, anyone who knows me already knows I am not normal. It's not a well-kept secret.

For those of you who are new friends, let me give you a quick snapshot. I am a musician, a member of that free-spirited sect of individuals known for their eclectic quirks and abnormalities. I am also a Christian. This means, in a sense, I am a person with dual citizenship. I am a citizen of the here and now, and I am a citizen of what is often described as an upside-down kingdom. A kingdom that is already and not yet. Confusing enough? It gets even more interesting.

I am married to a man with a disability, and we have four children. Vocationally, I work at a church the first half of every week, then jump on a plane and travel to speaking events or play at concerts most Fridays and Saturdays, usually with a few of my kids in tow. To many, my job in itself seems a bit abnormal, especially when you add in our family situation and the way we go about life.

So far I have only described the outward things, which are visible. However, if I told you about all my personal oddities this early in the book, you would probably close it immediately! The point is, there is very little about my life that would be considered normal, even by my own definition.

Surprisingly, I can say this without shame or regret. I gave up my pursuit of normal a long time ago. To begin with, I was terrible at it! It is difficult for me to put my finger on when and where, but somewhere along the way I realized the normal I sought was a vapor. Whenever it appeared within reach, I was unable to grasp it. Have you ever tried to grab your breath on a cold morning? This was my dilemma. I soon realized that if I did in fact achieve some state of "normal," I might actually be bending down low, settling for something less.

But what if God had designed me not to bend down but to stretch up and reach for the stars? Not that normal is bad, but why

should you or I settle for normal when we've been created for something far greater?

Normal. It's a fairly subjective word, yet we all seem to understand what it means. Encyclopedia.com defines it as "conforming to a standard; usual, typical, or expected."¹ This gives me mixed feelings. Sure, everyone likes to have some guidelines or, at the very least, a general road map to follow in their lives. We were all built with an innate desire to have our feet planted on something solid rather than having our lives suspended in midair.

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Normal appears to offer this. Normal promises to be our steady. This brings us comfort and keeps us on task. Pursuing normal gives us a sense that we are in control as we set a standard upon which to base our expectations.

At the same time, normal shows us that we are not in control. When we were kids, normal was the home we wished we were born into, the color we wished our skin had been, or the texture we wanted our hair to have so we would fit in at school. Normal was the job we envisioned having, which hopefully came with health insurance and a 401(k). Normal was the natural cycle of life and death we expected to see in our families, with grandparents passing on peacefully at ripe old ages rather than children being pulled from our hands way too soon.

So how can normal be both our standard *and* our unattainable?

I wrote this book because my life testifies to this contradiction. As anyone who knows me can attest, my life has been anything but dictionary-definition normal. My childhood was pretty ordinary; I

was raised in a small town in South Carolina by two loving parents and with two siblings who fought an ordinary amount for siblings. After graduating from college, I got engaged to my high school sweetheart, Martin, and we enjoyed a fairly normal engagement and first year of marriage. Yet as we began that second year, Martin began to struggle with some issues with his memory and energy level.

Initially, it was hard to be sure something was wrong. What husband doesn't sometimes fall asleep while watching football or forget to mow the lawn? But when Martin fell asleep at the wheel on the interstate, we sought answers. Ultimately, Martin was diagnosed with a brain tumor.

This was decidedly not normal. And it was shocking news for this couple of newlyweds. The bright future we had envisioned now held a substantial roadblock. As Christ followers, we placed our full trust in God to help us through it. Knowing God could heal or fix anything, we fully anticipated seeing him work in tremendous and surprising ways through our trial. Looking back now, I see our faith wasn't misplaced. But we were a bit naïve. God did in fact accomplish tremendous and surprising things through Martin's brain tumor. He still does. But the scope of his work has proved vaster than anything we anticipated. Our greatest surprise has been in seeing how God chooses to bring himself immeasurable glory through what he has *not* healed and what he has *not* fixed.

After his surgery, Martin spent three months in the hospital, which was about two and a half months longer than expected. His tumor had been deeper and larger than estimated, the surgery had been more traumatic than anticipated, and he suffered complications that left us wondering from day to day whether he would, in fact, pull through. Yet as those long ICU days passed, we began to see small improvements, like the removal of tubes and the slow returning of speech and other mental faculties.

If you were to meet Martin today, it's possible you would have no idea he has a brain injury. He is the most charming, inquisitive, and jovial person you will ever meet. Just don't be surprised if he has to ask your name a few times. He lives with a short-term memory deficit as well as a substantial vision deficit. These disabilities have made it difficult for him to find work, and due to his vision loss, he is unable to drive. Still, his cognitive and reasoning abilities are untouched. He is an exceptionally bright guy. But his inability to see well or remember the smallest of details makes his life, and our family's, anything but normal.

My story may look different from yours, but each of us has something in our lives that has forced us to let go of whatever normalcy we envisioned. Maybe you are single and longing to be married, or you find yourself single *again*, carrying the forever ache of a promise not kept. Maybe you have had to embrace a different vocation from the one you had trained for, or you've been passed over for a promotion you had rightfully earned. Maybe an aging parent or the loss of a job is causing you to relocate, to move from the home and community where you have put down roots. Any number of things could be causing a departure from normal.

Or maybe normal isn't something you are leaving but something you never feel you had. Due to a shameful past, caused by your mistakes or maybe someone else's, normal has been something you have never experienced or could never quite attain. Where normal signifies wholeness, all you've ever known are brokenness, shame, and regret. Now you are just barely hanging on, wondering if anyone even notices. I don't know your story, but I can say that I've never met anyone who has said their life turned out exactly as planned. Every one of us has endured uninvited change. Every one of us will again be forced to wave goodbye to normal.

When Normal Says So Long to Us

Together with our neighbors, together with our country, and, in fact, together with the world, we entered 2020. Who could have known the year would go down in history as the most abnormal of our lifetimes? Not in our wildest dreams would we have imagined beginning the year with news of a dangerous virus with potential to spread beyond the single country where it originated. At first, we began thinking through how to ratchet up our household precautions against germs. Within weeks, government buildings worldwide were shutting down, countries were closing, schools were transitioning to remote learning, and businesses were shuttering—some to never reopen. And that describes only what happened logistically.

A good friend of mine is a chaplain in the Dallas area. Having extensively studied trauma, he defines it as “any situation or event that adversely disrupts the normal routine of someone’s life.”² If you agree with this definition, we must conclude that in 2020 we all endured trauma. Not one of us escaped having our normal affected by the global pandemic of COVID-19.

To truly process our collective trauma, we must begin by acknowledging the dramatic transformation of our homes—yes, those four walls in which you spent more time in 2020 than you ever imagined you would. I absolutely love my family, but I remember moments in those first few months when I would pretend I left something in my car just so I could go sit in it and have ten minutes alone without the incessant soundtrack of “Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!” I probably shouldn’t admit that, but I also know I’m probably not alone. (You know who you are!)

For most of us, the home suddenly became the epicenter for all of life. This had its pros and cons. Families gathered around the dinner table, some for the first time and some for the first time in a

long while. Working moms like me relearned to cook. We watched a lot of Netflix and Disney+, which I'll place in both the positive and negative categories. The pace of life we kept before was no longer an option, so we all slowed down. I've heard many people say that quarantine life provided them with a stillness they knew they needed but hadn't been able to achieve before.

While we've seen positive aspects of this pandemic, we're also aware of many negatives. People returning home to empty tables. Sitting alone, surrounded by a solitude that feels like dense fog. Desperately desiring the company of a friend or family member. Unable to overcome loneliness through the illusion of gathering with others through social media.

As the pandemic marched on with no abatement, many folks hit such a financial slump that their tables, once full, were now bare. And then there was the global impact of the pandemic measured in lives lost or health impacted. COVID-19 hasn't been a slight departure from our normal. It has turned everything upside down.

Gee, thanks, Laura, you might be thinking. You don't need to remind me of everything that changed and everything that has been lost.

I know it's hard, but please hang with me for a moment. It's important to honestly assess our losses and grieve them properly. But there is also a picture developing of what God is doing in and through our collective suffering. We need to see this every bit as clearly as we have witnessed the damage.

The tragic global and personal effects of the virus are not an ending to a final chapter. Our story is still being written. The daily changes and challenges that come our way feel new and often confuse or frustrate us. In reality, though it may be hard to understand or even believe, this present affliction is simply one chapter of a greater story—one that has been unfolding from the beginning of time. And it's certainly neither new nor surprising to the Author.

If, by the time you read this, you're living on the other side of those pandemic days, I'm sure something else is now at work causing strain and upheaval in your life. COVID-19 wasn't your first disruption of normal, and it won't be your last.

Sometimes normal simply says goodbye to *us*.

Reflecting on changes that result in the disappearance of normal is useful. When we are rocked back on our heels, when we find ourselves disoriented, we're forced to reconsider how desperately we've been holding on to things that we thought of as normal. If we are honest we know that it's during these times of uninvited disturbance that we are able to assign proper value to things lost. As the saying goes, we don't know what we have until it is gone. This has never been so evident as it is today.

Going through this strange season, I have been forced to consider how the so-called normal things of life have such a profound grip on me. When I think of the high schoolers I know who missed out on the milestones they've long anticipated—their senior proms, their baseball seasons, and even their graduation ceremonies—I grieve their memories, forever lost. One occurrence I realized I had long taken for granted was a simple hug or handshake at church. Because I'm a worship leader, one of my favorite parts about Sunday was coming off the platform after the service and hugging the necks of friends and meeting visitors I didn't recognize. But social distancing, by definition, doesn't lend itself to affection. And it became increasingly harder to say to fellow church members, "I am with you" when I couldn't actually be with them. It felt a little funny to say to visitors, "Our church is so warm and inviting! Just don't get closer than six feet from me, and I probably won't even recognize you next week, since we're both wearing masks!"

But the losses are even weightier. I've heard of folks who had recently risked their life savings, along with borrowed money, on a

dream of having their own restaurant or boutique, only to be shut down within a few weeks of opening. Dreams snuffed out before they ever had a chance.

And of course, countless families had to say goodbye to loved ones over the phone or Zoom, unable to sit at their bedsides holding their hands as they passed into glory.

Even as I recount these instances, I'm thinking of dozens of other stories. I'm sure you are too. Perhaps even your own.

A Greater Story

What could possibly compensate for such painful losses? As a Christian I truly draw comfort from the Word of God, but quoting a Bible verse in the midst of such grief feels like a spiritual Band-Aid. The truth is we don't always have satisfying responses for such questions. But if we can believe that God is writing a greater story, we may be able to move ahead without definitive answers.

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So let me ask a different question: Is it possible God is working in and through these circumstances in ways we can't imagine this side of heaven? And is it possible the work he is doing begins with us saying goodbye to normal?

That day on the zip-line platform, I was forced to wave adios to my normal, my steady, my comfort. And the next thing I knew, I was soaring.

I was also screaming and flailing and feeling my breakfast come up a bit. But I was soaring. My coworkers looked like little ants

below me, cheering me on (or maybe just laughing at me). Sometime between leaving that wooden platform and whizzing past the blur of trees and church buildings, I realized something: what felt like a free fall wasn't that at all. I never ceased being safely tethered to something sturdy and sure.

I'm not here to sugarcoat the brokenness we see around us. I promise you my goal in writing this book is more than merely encouraging an attitude shift toward positivity. My hope for you and me is that whenever we face the loss of normal, we encounter God, seeing with fresh eyes the work he might be doing there. It's why I've included five unique stories from other families and friends in our church, people who have faced their own unique challenges with normal and seen God use those challenges to grow them in ways they weren't expecting. If you are willing to go with me on this journey, all I ask is that you keep an open mind, open heart, and open hands. Maybe you need a nudge, like I did with the zip line. Consider this book your nudge, because little by little we can learn to say so long to normal.

I can assure you that the benefits will outweigh the perceived losses. As we begin, we must be willing to discipline our minds to process information and events in a manner that may be counter-cultural. In this journey, we will travel through our hearts as we grieve the heaviness of life and the loss of relationships. Yet "hope springs eternal in the human breast."³ Our hearts will be renewed with hopefulness. Finally, we'll be able to open our hands and let go of things, people, and paradigms we once leaned on that, as it turned out, weren't sturdy enough to support us forever.

As you wave goodbye to these things, the future may not be as clear as you desire, but you will face it with fresh spiritual eyes. You'll see something that is greater by far than the normal you've held so tightly. Slowly but surely your mind will align with the

mind of Christ and his Word. Your heart will find joy in the someone who is sturdier than your circumstances.

You may feel frightened, as any person in their right mind should as they step away from a seemingly secure foundation. Your surroundings might get a little blurry as you wait for the rope to snatch you, saving you from the expectation of certain death. And when it does, you'll experience a jolt that will take your breath away.

But here's what I can assure you: the rope will hold. You may flail and flounder, but the rope will hold. You will be held by a foundation of promises, pledged to you by the one who gave his very Son that you might know his love, his peace, and his provision. And the hands of the one who holds us are sturdier than any old normal we once held on to with a death grip. He is our sure and steady hope that guides us to embrace the beautiful story unfolding before our very eyes.

The invitation is simple. Join me on this exhilarating adventure of saying goodbye to normal and hello to unshakable faith!

Part One

Understanding Normal

He has made everything beautiful in its time.
Also, he has put eternity into man's heart,
yet so that he cannot find out what God has
done from the beginning to the end.

—ECCLESIASTES 3:11

Chapter One

Why We Crave Normal

Every morning right at 6:00 a.m. the glorious sound of percolating begins. I head downstairs to my seat. And when I say “my seat” I mean the spot on the couch I guard passionately. It features a small lamp, my Bible, a notebook, a few books, and a little spot for my coffee cup. It’s my seat.

Actually my morning routine begins even before I get up. The previous night, I meticulously prepare my trusty coffee maker and check the timer twice to make sure it’s fully equipped to do its job the next morning. I like to get a jump on the day. Every now and then, if I’ve been out late at an event, I’ll sleep in until eight o’clock or so. But let’s face it, sleeping in and having young children are not exceedingly compatible.

Martin and the kids know there is nothing that will get them a cold bowl of cereal for breakfast quicker than sitting in my seat. My husband thinks it’s completely irrational that someone else sitting in my seat has the ability to completely turn my day upside down. But, strangely, somehow it does. I like my seat! I like my routine! Step off, family, and give me this one thing in life!

The truth is, I don't fully understand why my routine is so important to me, but most people I talk to share the same affection for theirs. What's your morning ritual? Maybe you're an early riser, or maybe you're a more nocturnal soul who loves to sleep in. Your morning routine might include a favorite coffee shop where the owner greets you by name and has your order started before you reach the register. Maybe it's going for a run at daybreak or an early workout. Or perhaps it's simply checking your news app of choice to see what events happened the day before.

Something in us likes to create patterns in our days and stick to them. Don't get me wrong; I love an adventure. Many of our family outings are spent hiking, barreling into the unknown with a can of bug spray and some Betty Crocker Fruit Roll-Ups. But when the adventure is over, it's nice to return to the familiarity of home, the predictable rhythm of a schedule—not to mention the convenience of an indoor toilet. What is it about normal that feels so safe and comforting?

The deeper we dig into this question, the closer we'll come to identifying a key reality about ourselves as humans. Our yearning for rituals, routines, and established patterns is not a new concept. But why do we crave them so?

First, let me ask you this: How do you think this yearning found its way into the fabric of who we are as humans? We can gain some insight into this from the book of Ecclesiastes. This is a book of the Bible that most of us either love or love to skip over. I have often thought that if Solomon, widely considered the author of Ecclesiastes, were writing it today, his publisher would have warned against making "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity" his opening line (Eccl. 1:2). Yet by the third chapter, Solomon brings everything into balance.

"He [God] has made everything appropriate [some translations say *beautiful*] in its time," it reads. "*He has also set eternity*

in their heart” (Eccl. 3:11 NASB, emphasis added). This can be a difficult verse to understand. In one sense, this setting of eternity in the heart represents the image of God that is in all humans, his *imago Dei*.

In Genesis 1:27, we read that “God created man in his own image.” If this is our starting point, we can surely understand our restlessness, our yearning to know this God in whose image we’ve been created. There is a longing deeply settled in the souls of mankind that wants to touch the infinite, to share in the Immortal’s eternal existence. Saint Augustine (AD 354–430) summarized it this way: “You have made us for Your sake, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”¹

Much further down the road, Canadian missionary Don Richardson discovered that this idea of eternity in our hearts was understood even in the most primitive of cultures, which made it an effective way of communicating the gospel despite cultural barriers. Though the tribal people he served in New Guinea had never before heard the name of Jesus, they somehow knew their hearts held a unique need that they alone were unable to fill.²

Let’s go back to our vanity-of-vanities book for a second. Chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes may contain the answer to our question of why normal feels so safe and comforting. It also seems to answer the question of why we crave it. Read with me:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter
under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace. (vv. 1–8)

I've heard this passage read aloud at funerals of both Christians and non-Christians. There is something deeply comforting about the orderliness of life. It soothes us to know that there is an appointed time for every thing and every event this side of heaven, even death. Solomon in his wisdom wasn't coming from a fatalistic mindset, implying that we are all simply victims of cosmic forces beyond our control. He was writing to console and reassure us.

Look again at the list above. Notice the balance of truths. Life contains hard things we must deal with. But those things are counter-balanced with positive and even desirable outcomes. Is there death and dying in this world? Yes. But there is also a time for birth. Will there be wars and strife? Sadly, yes. But there *will* also be a time for peace.

Here's one I find particularly compelling, having experienced such a long season of social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic: Are there times to embrace? Yes. As we've learned, there are also times to refrain from embracing.

Do you see how each of these simple yet profound back-and-forth statements points to the many facets of our lives? These patterns repeat over and over from one generation to another,

and they hold true for everyone, everywhere. This is the universal experience of all humans. As we set out together, this broader understanding of life's natural rhythms helps us understand why we're attracted to familiar patterns.

Just like I'm attracted to my morning routine. (Keep out of my seat!)

Back to the Garden

Although it precedes my era in the music industry, I think of a line in a Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young rock song from long ago: "We've got to get ourselves back to the garden."³ When I sing lyrics like this, I resonate with the yearning it expresses. Whether we discern it or not, it sits at or below the surface of who we are and how we interact with others. We all long for security, stability, and firm footing. We all long to get ourselves back to the garden.

But what could this yearning possibly have to do with the garden? And do we agree with Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young that we're trying to get back there?

Consider the wonders of the creation of the world and the garden of Eden. To understand this normal we crave, let's go back to the very beginning.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and

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get ourselves
back to the
garden.*

there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Gen. 1:1–5)

God was creating cosmic order! He spoke, and that which had never existed now came into existence. Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, but God made light itself! Can you even imagine such a scene? And he didn't stop there.

And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. (vv. 6–8)

God continued to create something out of nothing on days three, four, and five. For the sake of time, let's skip forward to his tremendous work on days six and seven.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and

over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. (vv. 24–27)

This, in a nutshell, is the story of the creation of the world. Out of the chaos, God brought order. And once the land, sea, and animals were in place, he created man. The description of God’s next actions are also captured in Genesis. “The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed” (Gen. 2:8 *NASB*). This was an anticipatory move on God’s part, given his divine omniscience. He knew what man would need before man became aware of his own needs.

The garden wasn’t only meant to supply man’s need for a bounty of fruit and vegetables. You see, God placed man in the garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it, to give him meaningful and purposeful work. And God also knew that more would be needed. He hadn’t designed man to flourish from work alone. Nor had he designed him as a solitary being. So once again God did what he always does: he provided what was necessary before man even recognized his lack. At this point in the narrative, Eve joined Adam. Now, not only did Adam have meaningful work but, with Eve as his companion, he no longer labored alone.

Think for a moment of your own job. Ever struggled with budget cuts? Long work hours? Sudden layoffs? Constant pressure from leadership to please shareholders? Scrap all those ideas when it comes to Eden. Together Adam and Eve worked the garden, and their labor was not toilsome. Their daily work was not unwelcome, and they didn’t resent its place in their lives. It was simply a part

of the natural rhythm of life that had been ordained by God the Father.

Work was joyful. It was life-giving rather than life-draining. This work was held in proper balance along with the other facets of their lives. Remember that during the creation process we saw God himself model a rhythm of work and rest.

So often, we see work as a necessary evil, something to avoid. This was not Adam and Eve's experience. Work was received as a blessing from God.

Life for Adam and Eve was something we can only imagine or dream of experiencing. They lived together in perfect harmony with each other. There were no marital disputes. No tiffs over socks left on the floor or squabbles over who unloaded the dishwasher last. Not only was there no external conflict; there was no internal conflict. No anxiety. No depression. No need that went unsatisfied. Just beauty. Safety. Peace.

The first couple routinely fellowshipped with God the Father in the cool of the day. I imagine them sitting comfortably with their creator, asking questions similar to the kinds my own children ask me—youthful and innocent. No embarrassment, no fear of looking stupid, and certainly no impatience on the Father's part. Are you beginning to see what made Eden so amazing?

Reading the account in Genesis, we can glean insight into the rituals that were Adam and Eve's "normal." Of course, there is much we can't know. Filmmakers have tried to portray life in the garden. Writers have attempted epic poems and novels about it.

Sit back for a moment and let your mind imagine anything that would make your life wonderful. A cruise to the Caribbean? A day at the spa? Or how about just one conflict-free family gathering? I believe that whatever comes to your mind won't begin to compare with the daily experience of Adam and Eve. It was, after all, the garden of Eden.

Living East of Eden

What changed? And how did this change so distort normal that no one's been able to re-create it this side of heaven? We know the change involved a serpent and some fruit. But more than that, it started with the question, "Did God really say . . .?"

A simple question with incredible implications. This question set Adam and Eve on a path that forever changed their relationship with God, their relationship with each other, and their relationship with their environment. When human sin entered the garden, it brought with it changes of cosmic proportions. Changes that would reach through generations and across all cultures. To this day, we still suffer the consequences of this question and Eve's response.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:1-5 NIV)

How interesting that Adam and Eve were so content, and yet somehow the serpent was able to suggest there was something better! He planted a thought: *God is holding out on you*. In effect, this was really an attack on the most fundamental question: *Can God be trusted?* Despite all their pleasures, Adam and Eve began to doubt.

After reading this story over and over, I've come to a mini-revelation. Adam and Eve were living life to the fullest. Theirs was a life of harmony, peace, and fulfillment. And as I look back over my own life, I'm amazed that I, too, have enjoyed seasons when life was filled with ease and prosperity, relatively free of hardships. My experience during these good and easy times has been that I've dropped my guard a little—just enough to begin living life in my own strength, moving through my days and weeks with little consultation with God. So what's my revelation? It's been during those times of relative ease that I've been most susceptible to the whispered question of the serpent, "Indeed, has God said?" which in turn has led to doubts about what I've been called to do or, in some cases, not do.

Like many of you, I'm also driven to doubt when under severe stress, dealing with hurt and pain, or facing unknowns. But for some reason, during those harder times, I'm more likely to run to the Father. It's when I have no hurdles or resistance that I begin to function on autopilot. Perhaps I've been fooled into thinking I

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Can you relate?

Isn't it fascinating to consider how everything in creation and in our own lives was turned upside down because of Adam's and Eve's sin? And yet, even through the disappointment of the first couple's fall from grace, we see the kindness and faithfulness of God. After Adam and Eve were deceived and ate of the forbidden fruit, the story

continued. “They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Gen. 3:8–9 NASB).

The God who created everything and knows everything bent low toward Adam and Eve and played along with their childish game of hide-and-seek. “Where are you?” he asked (v. 9 NASB). His question was amazing and far more profound than the question asked by the serpent. Whereas the serpent’s question resulted in destruction, God’s question resulted in restoration. God knew exactly where Adam and Eve were—not just physically but spiritually and emotionally. He was God! No, this question was for the benefit of Adam and Eve. God was helping them become self-aware. In a sense, the serpent’s promise was indeed coming to pass.

They would know things they had never known before. And yet, even through the disappointment of the first couple’s fall from grace (Gen. 3:22–24), we see the kindness and faithfulness of God.

As God lovingly pursued their hearts and walked them through a very deliberate process of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation, he set eternity in their hearts on another level. He offered them a promise, the same promise he offers us today. A promise of future deliverance, a promise of one day returning things to a God-designed normal.

However, until the day Jesus returns, their journey—and ours—will be filled with peril and challenges as well as moments of joy and thanksgiving. Hearts will be shaken. Lives will be rocked. Yet God will remain steadfast.

Does this help explain why we crave normal? Does it make your heart ache for what was lost and long for what is to come? My hope is not to leave us in a depressing place, or leave us mad at Adam and Eve for blowing it for all of us. My point is this: we were designed by

an orderly God to thrive in an orderly world. But just like Adam and Eve, we have no choice but to say so long to the garden and step into the world that lies east of Eden. Until Jesus returns, and the garden is restored, we'll continue to crave a sense of order and normalcy that will always be beyond our reach. The first step is this acknowledgment about ourselves. The next step is seeing how this affects our day-to-day lives and our world.

Chapter Two

The Shaking of What Can Be Shaken

Have you ever chosen a word of the year? Until a few years ago, I didn't realize this was even a thing. Several of the women in my small group mentioned they had benefited from selecting a single word, maybe an attribute of God or a biblical truth, to focus on throughout the year. So in January 2020, I decided to try it and chose the word *steadfast*. I had just finished a Bible study by that title,¹ and with all the craziness of my life, it seemed like a great choice for my word of the year. One of my friends even made me a key necklace with the word *steadfast* engraved on it. What could possibly go wrong?

As a matter of fact, 2020 did start off pretty normal. We had our whole year planned out, with concerts and speaking events almost every weekend, including a couple of international trips. Our daughter, Josie, was rocking first grade, things at the church where I work were plugging along, and our family dynamics were fairly stable.

But that all changed the second week of March.

“Have you heard anything about this new coronavirus?” a co-worker asked. “They’re thinking we may even have to cancel church this weekend.” Cancel church? In the forty-three-year history of Perimeter Church, never had Sunday service been canceled. Even that time we had a tornado literally rip through our campus on the morning of Good Friday, knocking out the electricity, we *still* held a service at noon!

Little did we know, the following weeks and months would be spent taping a series of services to stream online over the coming Sundays. Our building would close and remain that way for months to come. And in addition to the drastic changes at work, things were quickly changing at home. We made bizarre grocery-store runs, fully masked and gloved. Early on, I felt fearful showing up to empty store shelves, not sure what I would feed the kids. Another level of fear arrived when the toilet-paper section stayed bare for weeks. I won’t even tell you how creative our family became in that area!

And then followed the joyous experience we came to know as remote learning. I became teacher, headmaster, guidance counselor, and lunch lady in one fell swoop. Yes, I had some sweet moments with Josie, like when she was learning how to do fractions for the first time. But she and I both recognized early on that I should have been paying better attention in elementary school myself. I like to joke about the predicament we found ourselves in, but I don’t mean to make light of it.

In the weeks that followed, we would hear many stories much harder than our own. We saw the headlines of lives lost, jobs ended, and continuous political fallout. As families went into quarantine, grandparents could no longer visit their grandkids. Friends were relegated to hanging out on Zoom. Businesses shut down, workers were laid off, and live events were canceled.

And personally, when I say live events were canceled, I don't mean a few dates on a calendar. I mean twenty-five to thirty speaking and singing engagements I had planned and prayed for, and concerts and retreats for which tickets had been sold. I'm speaking of events that planning committees had worked on tirelessly, investing both time and money. The mass of cancellations was jarring to say the least, especially as I reflected on my use of album sales to purchase diapers for my two-year-old!

Steadfast? I kept asking God. *Is that really my word for this year?*

As if the widespread instability of a global pandemic wasn't enough, another incident knocked me to the ground. And I mean literally knocked me to the ground. Three weeks into our state's mandated lockdown, I headed out for a bike ride. With everything from coffee shops to state parks closed, riding was one of the only ways I could still find a bit of me time. As I was pulling out of the driveway, while adjusting my shoelaces and taking a call for work (yeah, really dumb, I know), my tire hit a small patch of leaves I hadn't seen. Within half a second, *wham!* I hit the pavement hard enough to fracture my right elbow, and I badly scraped my arm and leg as I slid. Long story short, I ended up in the emergency room watching a very nice nurse pick gravel out of my flesh with tweezers. I departed with a cast that went from my armpit to my fingers.

The following two weeks were some of the most difficult I had faced in a long while. While trying to homeschool Josie, balance work-related Zoom calls, and manage the cancellation and rescheduling of our entire spring tour, I was operating with only one working arm. One arm to change the baby's diaper. One arm to chop potatoes for dinner. I couldn't drive, or ride my bike, or do a thousand other things I had taken for granted.

Blessedly, the whole family was eager to help Mommy. The kids helped with meal prep. Martin, a diaper-changing champ, picked up

any slack with Baby Timothy. Josie stuck close by my side, helping me get dressed, tying my shoes, even fixing my hair. I had become her life-size American Girl doll. I wish I had thought to take some screenshots of my extravagant hairdos for all those Zoom calls! Griffin became my little encourager, bringing me flowers and pictures he had drawn. Benji and Timothy, on the other hand, did not like the new one-armed Mommy. Tim just stared at the long cast on my arm that made it impossible for me to pick him up, screamed at me, and ran off. Benji, feeling the same way yet more verbally articulate, announced each morning, “I’m gonna go hug Dad instead. I like hugging people with two arms!”

I can now look back and laugh, but I also recognize the deep work God was doing in my heart. If there are two aspects of my personality in which I often place too much trust, it’s my planning and my abilities. I like to have a plan, preferably one that covers twelve or even eighteen months in advance. With a good, thorough plan, I feel pretty confident in my ability to carry things out. We schedule the events and book the flights, then go do them. If it’s on the calendar, it’s as good as done.

But in 2020, it was as if someone took a big eraser to my well-planned life. Every meticulously detailed preparation suddenly vanished. The personal strengths I had once leaned on to do what needed to be done in any given moment appeared worthless.

And my word of the year? I needed steadfastness more than I could have ever dreamed. With everything constantly changing, I needed to trust God to be our steady, our rock, and our firm foundation. My word of the year became a running joke around our house. We even decided to hang the key necklace my friend had made on a small nail by the refrigerator. Whenever I became overwhelmed and appeared about to blow, Griffin would whisper to the other kids, “Quick! Mom needs her key!”

The More Things Change

Whether your situation looked similar to mine or not, every one of us has experienced something in life that has shaken us.

Change comes in many shapes and through many different circumstances. The changes that shake us can be serious, such as the loss of a job or the death of a loved one. Or they can be positive, natural progressions of life, like a child graduating high school and leaving home to start college or a job promotion that requires a change in the family's daily routine and maybe even a geographic change. Anyone who has ever taken that exciting journey of fostering or adopting a child knows that even the clearest calling to take such a step doesn't ensure an easy road.

Disruption of our normal can arrive slowly over time, or it can happen overnight.

Life is like a familiar, well-worn path. As you walk along, sometimes for years, you give little thought to the path until, seemingly all of a sudden and without the courtesy of forewarning, the path beneath your feet that once seemed so solid, so sure, begins to shift. At first it may be hardly discernible. This is a favorite ploy of sci-fi films. The filmmaker manipulates the audience at a subliminal level by showing just enough to create anxiety. The audience senses impending doom, though they may not know why. They desperately want to call out to the character, "Watch out! Things are not what they seem to be!"

As we discovered in the previous chapter, things are *not* what they once were. We live east of Eden. Ever since the fall of humanity in chapter 3 of Genesis, normal has been distorted. We reach for anything solid to stabilize us along the path, but most of those things we thought were sturdy eventually give way.

Change is a wild card, introducing an element of uncertainty. Change feels shaky. No wonder we resist it.

Any life change causes stress. In the business world, there are entire areas of study on the topic of *change management*. I heard once that when organizations are super-resistant to change, they engage in “guerrilla warfare.” Remember those big monkeys battling in a postapocalyptic world in the old classic movie *Planet of the Apes*? Not that kind of gorilla—but that’s what I pictured when I first heard this. When I snapped back into the conversation, I learned that because change is so stressful, personnel will work to appear on the surface as if they’re on board with changes while in fact they’re plotting undercover to keep everything exactly as it is.

We can try to fight it, but to live is to change. Yes, change is often hard, but change is inevitable. If we’re no longer experiencing any changes in our lives, there is a good chance that our body temperatures have settled to room temperature. So, with this as our reality, here is the question: *How do we become the kind of disciples who embrace change?*

Becoming Unshakable

Here is the good news not only of this chapter but of the book as a whole: when life becomes shaky, we do not have to be shaken.

As my key necklace often reminds me, we can remain steadfast. How can I say this with such confidence? Because this is what the

Scriptures teach. The Bible speaks clearly about a type of shaking that our loving God allows. This shaking is not random. This shaking is not unsupervised. This shaking is not without some purpose that will benefit us.

Throughout the entire Bible, Scripture tells us not to be fearful or discouraged when we

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are in the midst of this God-allowed shaking. Why? Because it's a means to an end. God is leveraging our circumstances to make us sturdier and more stable. He wants us to have an unshakable faith.

But in the Christian's experience, this does not happen overnight.

Let me illustrate this point with something my kids and I observed in our neighborhood. On our bike-riding days, we often passed a vacant lot. One day the lot that had been vacant for so long was transformed. Bulldozers had been brought onto the property, and they had dug a deep pit. It looked like an army bunker. The kids were confused. They knew this was going to be a house, but nothing about it seemed to line up with their experience of houses.

I'm no architect or builder, so I can't tell you exactly what the builders were doing beyond creating a foundation, but I can testify that they did it for a long time. They measured the area, leveled the surface, and poured concrete, then repeated that process over and over. Every few days when we rode by, we saw little visible evidence of progress. Then one day they began to build the actual house. The floor was laid, the walls were erected, and in no time at all a house was standing on a piece of land that had formerly been a field. The kids were amazed. Heck, who am I kidding? I was amazed also.

The illustration is obvious. To build a dependable house, one must follow a process to lay a proper foundation. Engineering must take place. Codes must not be overlooked. The construction of the actual house would have been in vain if the foundation had been unstable.

I can't help but be reminded of the parable Jesus told about two builders. One built on shifting sand, and the other on a firm foundation. I suspect, on first glance, the house built on shifting sand didn't appear much different from the other house. But then "the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed

against that house; and it fell—and its collapse was great” (Matt. 7:27 NASB). You could Joanna Gaines the inside of that house all day long, but without a stable foundation it wouldn’t stand.

During the housing market crash of 2008, we purchased our home for about 60 percent of its value, which is why we could afford it. When we moved in, we knew there was much work to be done. One of its not-so-fabulous features was a back deck that was missing a few support beams underneath. “Don’t even step on it,” we were strongly warned.

I noticed it wasn’t visibly sagging. “It can’t be that bad,” I said to Martin. “Do we really need to replace it? Can’t we just throw some patio furniture on it and see what happens?” Martin has always been wiser and more cautious in these kinds of situations, and he made me promise I wouldn’t risk it. And I’m so very glad he did. His caution no doubt saved us from serious injury—because even though it appeared sturdy, that deck was an accident waiting to happen.

On a spiritual level (pun intended), is it possible that God in his mercy might allow our lives to be shaken for the sole purpose of exposing a faulty foundation? If he is as rich in mercy and abundant in love as we believe him to be, wouldn’t it be unkind for him to allow us to keep building our lives on faulty foundations that will ultimately give way? Is it possible that in *kindness* he allows trials, yearning for us to let go of the false building blocks of this world, training us to cling only to that which cannot be shaken? Let’s dig deeper into this idea.

Where Hope Is Built

The writer of Hebrews quoted an Old Testament prophecy that spoke of a shaking that would happen to the people of God. ““Yet

once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ This phrase, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain” (12:26–27). In the prophecy’s original context, God wasn’t just allowing the prophesied shaking; he was causing it.

That’s a whole lot of shakin’ going on! Let me try to simplify the core of this passage. Sometimes God, in his kindness and mercy, intentionally allows a shaking away of the shaky foundations in our lives. It’s like panning for gold. Our family did this once when we traveled to Alaska for an event. Our kids stood in the rain wearing bright yellow ponchos, catching sandy mud in a pan, then shaking and sifting all the debris out until, ideally, all that would be left was gold. Josie, being the first to find a minuscule speck, exclaimed, “Is this really it? I thought it would be bigger!”

Let’s get personal. If the gold in this illustration is Jesus and his rich promises and plans for us, what are the dross and debris? Ask yourself, *What do I fill my life with that I cherish as if it were gold?* As one of my favorite theologians, F. F. Bruce, said, these things might be good things! I am not suggesting we compare our spouses, children, parents, jobs, feelings, homes, or other hard-earned stuff to debris. Those could be wonderful desires. But the only way we will know for sure whether we are holding them in their rightful place is through the sifting process. It is ultimately for our benefit when God allows good things to be shaken from our grip! He’s teaching us to stop looking to them, rather than him, for our identity, security, and satisfaction.

When we allow God to be our source for these things, everything else becomes a blessing rather than a necessity. We stop expecting perfection from our spouses. The performance reviews that used to sting us to the core can be sources of vocational betterment rather

than indictments on who we are as people, because we know Jesus declares our value, not our supervisors. When our children misbehave, as children tend to do, we can forgive them and shepherd their hearts with grace and endurance, for our hearts are not anchored to their successes and failures. Instead, our hearts are anchored to the forever-faithfulness of a perfect God. As 1 Peter 4:19 reminds us, we can commit “the keeping of [our] souls” to our “faithful Creator” (KJV).

When God is our foundation, we can let everyone and everything else off the hook.

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Consider Martin’s motives in our real-life scenario with the precarious deck. Was he trying to put a damper on my fun? Absolutely not. He desired my safety. He would never let me place my trust in something he knew would collapse and hurt me in the long run. And it is infinitely truer that God’s motives are good. He longs to see us thrive, to live abundant and full lives. He loves us too much to allow us to tether our hearts to weights that will ultimately sink us. He cares too much to leave us standing on

shifting sand when he rescued us from the dominion of darkness to stand on the only sure foundation: himself.

Over time, I have realized that I spend an enormous amount of emotional and mental energy trying to feel stable and secure. If I can book a full slate of concerts each year, I feel secure financially. If Martin maintains his current regimen of medications and diligently meets with his team of skilled doctors, I feel secure in his continued good health. If my children bring home good grades and glowing progress reports, Martin and I feel more secure about their educational outcome. With a good education, they’re more likely to find stable jobs—and eventually move out and do their own

laundry! You see what I mean? Though these are certainly not bad aspirations, they're not foundations upon which to place my hope.

If I know rationally that the things of this earth will give way, and the eternal things, the promises of who God is and what he has done, are the only true sources of stability in life, why in the world do I keep trying to lean on that which I know intellectually will not hold me?

Why do we keep investing so heavily in foundations built on shifting sand?

You may have your own reasons, but here's mine: Worldly things I can control. God I cannot. Worldly things I can often predict, manage, regulate, and manipulate. God I cannot. Worldly things I can see (and often, with the right resources, acquire). God I cannot.

I feel as though I have laid my heart before you. I hope you will not think less of me. But let me make one final admission about control: I love it. I love determining outcomes and directing resources as I see fit. But I now understand that control is an illusion.

No one asked me if all this shaking in the year 2020 was okay! No one asked me how long it should last. No one asked what level of shaking I felt comfortable with. And frankly, for a person who wants to be in control, I've been a little miffed. But I'm learning that my foundation of control is weak and unstable. It's shifting sand.

There is one foundation, and only one, suitable for you and me to stand on—God himself. As Psalm 62 reminds us, God alone is our rock and salvation. And as David says, with confidence, "I shall not be greatly shaken" (v. 2). We will always find God unshakable, worthy of our trust.

How much easier faith would be if we could just sit down with Jesus over a cup of coffee! Some of you might think of him as a pour-over kind of guy, but I'm pretty sure he's just a regular old Folgers fan like me.

Anyway, I would sit with him in my morning spot and tell him what's been going on lately, about how hard it has been to potty train Timothy. I'd ask him how I might be a better mother to the older three. I'd ask how I could know which one is lying when I find a family heirloom broken and every single one of them says, "I didn't do it!" (Actually, I could just ask him which one did it. He is, after all, omniscient!)

And I would ask the hard questions. Should I expect my foundation to be shaken again anytime soon? Will Martin's health issues relapse? Will we get to grow old together, or will one of us pass on to glory sooner rather than later? And what was God thinking when he made me so quirky? I bet Jesus would listen to my incessant ramblings. He'd probably chuckle at how worked up I get about silly things. And he'd reach over and wipe away a tear when I shared my deepest insecurities and most vulnerable failures. Just being able to sit across from him would bring such comfort to my soul.

I bet you, too, could rattle off a list of questions you'd like to ask Jesus. One day this will be a reality. One day it will be our only reality. Can you imagine? What a sweet day that will be.

Staying Steadfast

Meanwhile, you and I already possess much of Jesus. What we have today must be today's foundation. We have assurance of our salvation, orchestrated by our heavenly Father, accomplished through Christ's finished work on the cross, and sealed by the Holy Spirit. We have a Comforter, sent by Jesus to shore up our failing hearts while we await his return. We have the gift of his Word, sweeter than honey on our lips—a lamp to wandering feet and a light to shadowy paths. His Word is rock-solid truth in a world of shifting sand.

It may sound trite, but this is what we must cling to: God is our foundation. And he is no wobbly deck. We can throw our full weight and our whole hope upon his promises, believing he is sturdy enough for whatever shaking we may endure. His steadfastness warrants ours.

Joni Eareckson Tada, one of my heroes, demonstrates this kind of faith better than anyone I know. As you may be aware, Joni, now in her early seventies, survived an unfortunate diving accident as a teenager that left her a quadriplegic. Despite her disability, she would tell you her life has been full. Through her thriving speaking ministry and the foundation she began more than forty years ago that comes alongside families dealing with disabilities, Joni has blessed literally millions of people.

A few years back I had the honor of joining Joni onstage as her accompanist. She was supposed to speak and I was supposed to sing. But the more she shared her story, the more she burst into song! Don't get me wrong; she was honest about how hard life is for her. But it was as if she was incapable of sharing her story without singing of God's faithfulness through the struggle. Everyone joined as we sang anthem after anthem about God's goodness, including a hymn from 1834, "The Solid Rock," until the event organizers finally kicked us off the stage! Joni's determination not to allow her trials to dampen her worship, but rather to deepen it, was contagious. You won't find her focusing on what she has lost but on the work God has done in her and through her, *through* all she has lost.

The words from that old hymn still ring true today.

My hope is built on nothing less
 Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
 I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
 But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand—
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In ev'ry high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.

His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the o'erwhelming floods;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand—
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.²

Remember, Christ never said we must have big faith to not be shaken. On the contrary, all that's needed is faith the size of a mustard seed in our big God (Matt. 17:20). It is not the greatness of our faith that upholds us. It is the greatness of our God.

Let me ask you this: What “normal” thing in your life do you think God could be sovereignly shaking to reveal to you something that is sturdier, truer, and ultimately unshakable?

Pray for courage to embrace change, knowing that when our world is shaken, we will always discover an unwavering God in the center of what may at first appear to be chaos. We can learn to say so long to all that God lovingly shakes from our lives, another step on our journey of saying so long to normal.