

The background of the entire image is a composite of two scenes. The top half shows a dark, starry night sky with a bright meteor streaking across it from the upper left. The bottom half shows a desert landscape with sand dunes, illuminated by a warm, orange and yellow light from a low sun or moon, creating a gradient that blends into the night sky above.

Whispers *in the* Wilderness

*7 Devotions of Hope
for Uncertain Times*

April Fiet

INTRODUCTION

*For my own heart and for all people
searching for peace, simplicity,
understanding, and closeness
in a time of global crisis.*

As you practice each devotion, I ask you to:
READ from the Bible, **LISTEN** for the whisper in the
wilderness, take a few moments to **BREATHE**
with intention, and **PRAY** with me.

April Fiet

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Devotion 1

Finding the Thin, Quiet, Still Voice of God

READ

1 Kings 19:1-12

“After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the Lord wasn’t in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet.”

1 Kings 19:12, CEB

LISTEN

Before Elijah encountered God in the still small voice, he wanted to give up. For three years, drought had caused a famine, and the famine had become severe in Samaria. King Ahab and Jezebel wanted Elijah dead, especially after he had humiliated and killed the prophets of Baal. Terrified, Elijah fled with his assistant to Beer-sheba. From there he continued on alone another day’s journey into the desert. Exhausted and afraid, he sat under a lonely broom bush. He thought he was as good as dead.



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Under that broom bush, Elijah thought he had reached the end. He did not yet see that something new was beginning.

Elijah twice fell asleep and ate a miraculous meal before undertaking the forty-day journey that would culminate with Elijah encountering God. He reached a cave, went inside, and fell asleep. After this, he would be awakened again - this time not by a messenger and a meal, but by the word of the Lord.

God had seen Elijah and his distress. God promised to pass by Elijah and draw near to him. But, before Elijah could experience the sheer silence, the still small voice, or the thin quiet of God’s presence, the damaging wind, the earthquake, and the fire had to pass by. Only then could Elijah, from the entrance of the cave, cover his face and step out and meet God in the silence.

As I read this story of Elijah in the midst of an uncertain and anxious time, I wonder if Elijah’s journey into the cave might serve as a reminder of the importance of paying attention to my inner life. In the world all around, the storm is raging. The dangers are real. The anxieties at times are overwhelming. But, I wonder if - just as Elijah journeyed through the wilderness and into the cave - times of duress and seeming hopelessness might be an invitation to journey within. Perhaps by resting, taking steps to pay attention to our inner selves - who we are in Christ - and by listening, we will find the thin quiet and still small voice of God.

BREATHE

As you breathe in, imagine taking up all of your struggles, worries, anxieties, and fears. Hold your breath in for just a moment, and acknowledge that these difficulties are real. As you exhale, imagine these burdens leaving you. Repeat this exercise as often as it is helpful for you.

PRAY

Lord, there are struggles on all sides of me, and sometimes I feel like giving up. When I have reached the end of my own strength, invite me to sit beneath your shade and rest. Fill me with your peace, the peace that passes all understanding. Amen.



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Devotion 2

Of Fear, and Faith

READ
Psalm 56

**“Whenever I’m afraid, I put
my trust in you.”**

Psalm 56:3, CEB

LISTEN

David wrote Psalm 56 from a place of desperation. He cried out, “God, have mercy on me because I am being trampled. All day long the enemy oppresses me. My attackers trample me all day long because I have so many enemies” (CEB). David was under siege. He was trampled, oppressed, and weary. Little clues throughout this passage, as well as the title given to the psalm, possibly connect these words of David to 1 Samuel 21:10-14, where David was on the run from Saul. As his enemies pursued him, David was overwhelmed and afraid.

Verses 5-6 continue to recount David’s struggles. His enemies seem to know what he’s going to do before he does it. They think about doing evil against him.

They set traps for him, and they even hope for his death. It is hard to imagine a situation more dire. In between the desperation of verses 1-2 and the urgency of verses 5-6, David wrote these startling words, “Whenever I’m afraid, I put my trust in you.”

When we are afraid, we are being invited to put our trust in God. Faith and fear are not mutually exclusive.

Psalms 56 speaks a needed word into the situation of our world today. We are living in frightening times. We have more unknowns than knowns, as we see the struggles that are in front of us. We read stories that are frightening. Many of us have experienced difficult things. We have lost things that have provided a sense of security - our routines, our communities, and even our jobs.

We are living in a time with many uncertainties, and those uncertainties may leave us feeling afraid. When we are afraid, it is precisely then that we are being invited to put our trust in God. Our fear is not a sin. Our fear is not indicative of a lack of trust in God. Fear is an invitation to offer our fears to God and to trust that God is able to hold them and take care of us at the same time. We may not be surrounded by an army seeking our lives - though it may feel like it at times - but we are also surrounded constantly by the presence of God who is trustworthy.

BREATHE

Take a moment to write down your fears. Don't worry about feeling silly or being judged. These are only for you to see. Pause and read these fears back to yourself. When you are ready, take the fears you have written down, and offer them to God. You could crumple them up and toss them into the recycling bin. If you have a cross somewhere in your home, or a place where you pray, you could place these fears there and ask God to hold them for you.

PRAY

Lord, I am afraid. I am facing uncertainties in my life, and I have lost things that were comforting to me. Surround me with your loving and trustworthy presence. Take these fears, and hold them for me. Amen.



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Devotion 3

Looking for Hope and Regrowth

READ

Isaiah 65:17-25

“They will build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit”

Isaiah 65:21, CEB

LISTEN

Gardening is the work of the defiantly hopeful. Every year, when gardeners push seeds into the soil, they have no idea what will happen. Will voles nibble off the new seedlings? Will there be enough rain, or will hail or a late frost destroy the plants? The world is not always a hospitable place for plants, but the gardener plants seeds anyway. Without the promise of a plentiful harvest, the gardener sows the seeds and waits with hope.

Isaiah 65 was written to a people who had been through immense suffering. As exiles, they had struggled to figure out how to live as God’s people in a distant land. After exile, they weren’t sure how to live life in their own land, nor were they certain how long this good thing would last. What if another army invaded and took them away? What if they had to suffer all over again?

Isaiah 65:17-25 was a word spoken into the uncertainty and pain of a wounded people in need of hope. It was a window through the suffering to a new and beautiful thing God was already doing. Whatever our suffering may look like, Isaiah 65 is a window for us, too - a holy picture of the mending and healing God has in store.

Verse 17 is an invitation to peer through the window: “Look! I’m creating a new heaven and a new earth: past events won’t be remembered; they won’t come to mind.” *Look.* What a breathtaking little word! In this topsy-turvy world, it can be hard to notice that anything is being made new. There is so much

suffering. The future is uncertain. As we slog through the muddy, messy times in our lives, we may find ourselves staring down at the mud, and wondering if new things are even possible.

Look.

In the early spring as I plant my garden seeds, I find myself wondering what the harvest might bring. Will these plants make it through whatever is in store for them? Will they grow and thrive? I am amazed time and again as new plants push through and open up to the sun. New things are all around, if only we pause to look.

BREATHE

Go outside and look. Take a walk, or pull up a chair and sit. Leave all of the distraction behind and see what you might see. What pictures of hope do you find? Take a moment to record these in some way. Take a picture. Write in your journal. Or even sketch what you see.

PRAY

Lord, sometimes I have a hard time seeing what you are doing in my life and in the world. Refresh my eyes, and heal my weary spirit. Amen.

Devotion 4

Blessings in the Ordinary

READ

John 4:1-42

“A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink.’”

John 4:7, NRSV

LISTEN

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well is a story of things that shouldn't have happened. Jesus shouldn't have gone through Samaria. The Samaritan woman shouldn't have been drawing water at noon. And Jesus, as a Jewish man, shouldn't have been conversing with a Samaritan woman. Yet, for all of the things that shouldn't have happened, the story wouldn't have happened at all without something entirely ordinary.

The story begins with Jesus traveling through Samaria. Verse 4 says, “But [Jesus] *had* to go through Samaria” (emphasis added). Jesus did not go through Samaria because it was the only way to travel. In fact, most Jewish people would have gone around Samaria to avoid having to interact with Samaritan people. He went there, not because it was the only way to go, but because he needed to go there.

While he was sitting at Jacob's Well, he encountered a woman who shouldn't have been there either. Most women would have gone to draw their water before the heat of the day, but this woman came when she did, most likely hoping she would not run into anyone along the way. Instead, she met Jesus, and they had an astonishing theological conversation about the coming day when worship would not be restricted



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to one mountain or one place. This was a theological conversation that shouldn't have happened. But, at a time and a place where none of this should have happened, the woman discovered the living water that would never run dry.

For Jesus, the story began with taking an unexpected path. But for the woman, the story began in the most ordinary of ways. She needed to draw water for the day, and she encountered Jesus as she did something she needed to do every day.

In difficult and unusual times, sometimes the most healing things are the most ordinary. As we take the time to make ourselves a cup of tea, spend time reading a book, or take a walk around the block, we may find that these ordinary activities are the place where we encounter something extraordinary. In the simplest of moments, we may find ourselves grounded,

centered, and opened up to the possibility of something we hadn't expected. Perhaps we, too, will come face-to-face with Jesus as we remember to drink water, even on the strangest of days.

BREATHE

Make time for something ordinary today. Make a cup of tea. Remember to drink water. Or play a board game. Notice the way God greets you during these everyday activities.

PRAY

Lord, in complicated times, sometimes I try to make finding you complicated, too. Help me to look for you in the simple things so that I might find the water that never runs out. Amen.

Devotion 5

Comfort in Repetition

1. The Talmud is the collection of Jewish oral law and the commentary on the law. The word hallel is the Hebrew word for "praise." Psalm 118, as the Great Hallel, is a psalm of praise that leads the worshiper through a sweeping overview of God's mighty acts throughout history.

READ

Psalm 136

**"O give thanks to the Lord,
for he is good, for his steadfast
love endures forever."**

Psalm 136:1, NRSV

LISTEN

Psalm 136 harnesses the power of repetition. The refrain of the psalm—*his steadfast love endures forever*—occurs 26 times in 26 verses, each repetition after a praise to God's faithfulness. This psalm, known in the Talmud as the Great Hallel, was recited on the Sabbath and during festivals as a way of remembering and recounting God's fathomless love throughout history.¹ Psalm 136's repetition is not a weakness; its rhythm is its strength. It helps worshipers participate in a kind of call and response as the psalm is read. The repetition makes the psalm easier to remember and memorize. The constant, humming refrain of Psalm 136 gives us both the words we need

to express our thanks and praise, and a place of grounding and comfort to cling to during chaotic times.

Repetition is comforting. When the world feels like it is falling apart, I pick up a crochet hook and a ball of yarn. The repetitive motion of the hook while I crochet has a way of centering me and helping me to slow my breathing. As I move the hook forward and back, and as the loops begin to build upon each other and make something new, I find myself transported beyond what I'm doing. I find myself better able to pray, and I tell people that each stitch of the items I make is infused with prayer and love. The power of crochet is both in the creativity and in the repetition. The repetition of Psalm 136 is like being held and rocked as the sway of the words remind us of the embrace of God.

When Psalm 136 has been read and recited during times of plenty and goodness, it has offered an amplifier for our praise. During times of distress, Psalm 136 has provided an anchor and place of refuge. The rhythmic remembering of this great psalm of

praise helps us to breathe and re-center. As we read and recite this psalm, we are given the opportunity to be transported beyond the struggles in front of us into a place where we can pray.

BREATHE

Take some time to reflect on your habits when you are going through difficulties. Do you have a repetitive activity you try during these times to help you find peace and comfort? If not, consider trying one. Psalm 136 is a wonderful place to begin.

PRAY

Lord, you created the heavens and the earth with poetic rhythm, and you created me for rhythm, too. In chaotic times, I struggle to find your comfort and rest. Help me find peace in the simple rhythms - like the dawning of a new day - and in the comfort of your word. Amen.

Devotion 6

Seeing God in the Wilderness of Uncertainty

READ

Genesis 16

“So she named the Lord who spoke to her, ‘You are El-roi’; for she said, ‘Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?’”

Genesis 16:13, NRSV

LISTEN

When Hagar ran away from Sarah, she ran into the wilderness. The wilderness was something most people would have run *from*, but in Genesis 16, Hagar ran *toward* the wilderness to escape. Sarah had despaired of ever being able to have a son of her own, and so she hatched a plan to have a son through her servant Hagar. The plan worked, but rather than healing Sarah’s pain, it spread the pain to Hagar. Hagar no longer viewed Sarah the way she once had, and Sarah lashed out at Hagar. Hagar ran into the wilderness, a place of barrenness and danger. She ran away into a place of uncertainty to get away from the known suffering she was experiencing at Sarah’s hands.



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When I think about Hagar, I think about courage. From the youngest of ages, I was afraid of things I couldn’t see. I didn’t want to go on rollercoasters because you couldn’t see the end from the beginning. I didn’t want to try something new because I couldn’t see in advance how it would all turn out. I attempted to avoid pain and suffering by staying away from the unknown. Instead of staying in what she knew, Hagar fled from her suffering into a place of unknowing. She had no idea if she and the child she carried would survive. She had no resources and no means to protect herself, but she went anyway.

She couldn’t see the end from the beginning. She didn’t know how things would turn out. She had no guarantees and no assurances. But, in the midst of a desolate landscape and a desperate situation, Hagar was able to see God. In the place of unknowing, Hagar saw and experienced the One who cannot be fully known. In a place of death, she saw the One who restores life.

When the uncertainties of life crowd around us, the temptation is to avoid them or dig our heels deeper into what we know. We immerse ourselves in our work. We create lists and set up routines to try and keep ourselves from having to confront the unknowns and the fear. Hagar teaches us the importance of confronting the unknown. When Hagar went into the wilderness, she encountered a spring of water. By that stream of water, Hagar saw God. She named God “the one who sees me,” because in seeing God, she felt seen by God. Just like Hagar, in our unknowing, we may just find the One who surpasses our knowing. And, in finding God, we may find that we, too, are found.

BREATHE

Clench your fists tightly. Imagine that inside your hands are all of the uncertainties and anxieties you are facing. As you feel comfortable, open your hands and release them.

PRAY

Lord, I offer to you the things I do not understand and the uncertainties that make me afraid. Help me to find you in the uncertainty, and comfort me with the assurance that you were already searching for me. Amen.



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Devotion 7

The Peace of Purpose

READ

John 14:25-31a

“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid.”

John 14:27, CEB

LISTEN

When Jesus shared his final teaching with his disciples, he promised them his peace. Jesus told them he was leaving them his peace during a time when tensions with religious authorities were on the rise and in the midst of his teachings about his suffering and death. The disciples, who must have been shaken by Jesus’s words, may have struggled to hear his words about peace. Could they hear these painful words and believe at the same time that they would receive his peace?

Peace is something that most of us want, but many struggle to receive. Paul wrote about peace as something that “exceeds all understanding” (Philippians 4:7, CEB). Yet, in the book of Colossians we are told to “let the peace of Christ rule in [our]

hearts” because that is our calling as part of the body (Colossians 3:15, NRSV). In days of turmoil, how can we find this peace that defies understanding? How can we discover the peace we cannot comprehend but to which we are called?

In this world, peace is often reduced to the absence of conflict. The peace Jesus gives to us is something comprehensive and all-encompassing. The peace that Jesus gives is shalom - or wholeness - a kind of wellbeing that can exist within us even when it does not yet exist in the world around us. As Jesus gave his peace to his disciples, he was demonstrating to them - and to us - that peace can be found even during chaotic times.

The kind of peace that Jesus gives is about purpose and belonging. It’s not about making the tough stuff go away, but about being caught up in the movement of God who is making all things new. Sometimes this peace washes over us like smooth waters, but more often than not, this peace comes to us in the midst of our difficulties and suffering. This peace is our purpose. It is both who we are and the mission to which we are called. As we experience the peace of Christ, we are invited into the assurance that we are God’s people, and we are called to the work of bringing wholeness and healing to a world much in need of it.



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BREATHE

When have you experienced the peace of Christ? Think of a simple way to share this same peace with someone else.

PRAY

Lord, your peace is beyond my understanding. Help me to rest in the assurance that you love me. Amen.



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