



CHRISTY NOCKELS

THE
LIFE
YOU
LONG
FOR

LEARNING *to* LIVE
from A HEART *of* REST

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THE LIFE YOU LONG FOR

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. . .

*For the Fellowship of the Farm Table:
My Beloved, Nathan, and our treasured children,
Noah, Elliana, and Annie Rose.
Resting with you will always be my favorite!*

. . .

*And for anyone who's tuckered out from trying and striving,
those who feel like you're worth more when you do more
and build more, and for anyone feeling small because
you had to lay down what you were building.*

I get you.

*May you find true rest and the Life
that you are longing for.*

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HIS BANNER OVER ME IS LOVE

IMAGINE IF YOU AND I WERE TO SIT DOWN TOGETHER to get acquainted, and before we begin, someone gives us specific parameters for our conversation, guidelines to help us skip the small talk and go straight to the meaningful and memorable stuff. You and I are challenged to introduce ourselves without alluding to anything we do or have done in terms of a vocation or trade. We are told to focus only on our interior lives and matters of the heart.

To be honest with you from the get-go, there was a time in my life when such a challenge would have left me a bumbling mess! While I would have been elated to nix the small talk, I would've felt stripped bare in having to bypass my exterior world and abandon the crutch of my career, which I have a tendency to lean on when describing who I am. Even now, it might take a few stops and starts for me to find the

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right words to reveal the heart of who I am.

How about you? How would you introduce yourself to me? I wonder what pieces of your story you might reveal, insights that describe the making of *you*. Would you be hard pressed for words, maybe even feel small and unseen, if you had to leave out what you do, or would you be relieved in some ways?

What if, after what I'm sure would be a refreshing and revealing introduction, our mediator proposed another prod-ding challenge? What if we were asked to describe to each other the life we truly long for? However, as we describe our wants and dreams, we cannot include any milestones, accolades, or any level of success we'd hope to achieve. How would you describe the life you long for?

Would you say that your soul seems to ache with something you can't quite put your finger on? Maybe you've achieved some milestones in your exterior world but you're left with a surprising, insatiable longing for more. Perhaps you've had to lay down your career for a season and that has caused an unrest in your soul.

I think we'd both agree that life has become more complicated than we ever imagined, as everywhere we look, we are inundated with conflicting messages. Some say we should rest, some say we should run wholeheartedly after our dreams and never look back, and some urge us to find the balance in between. We feel pulled in more directions than we even knew existed, having given the world twenty-four-hour instant access to our psyches and our souls.

Have you become weary amid all these competing pressures? Maybe you started out with a pure devotion to pursue

the dreams you believe God placed in your heart but lately it's begun to look and feel tainted. How often has our devotion turned into busyness and our commitment turned into a craving for recognition? Everywhere we click and scroll, it seems like everyone's out there doing something big. We feel compelled to take on the pressure to keep building big things too. Then there's our longing for connection with the people in our lives. Yet family can feel like juggling endless practical responsibilities while stewarding sacred relationships. Our longing for community often becomes a struggle against lives stuffed too full to get our calendars lined up. Or maybe we've been burned in some of our dearest relationships. Wounds, both given and received, seem an inevitable result of braving the messy middle of pursuing a life of togetherness.

I've experienced all the above—the chronically overscheduled life, an imbalance between family and work, the pressure to build big things, and even the complications of trying to achieve authentic community. I lacked the ability to be present for anything in my life as I felt compelled to plow through what I know now were precious seasons, just to get to the next seemingly urgent thing. As a new mom, while I was head over heels in love with my family, I mostly felt in over my head about how to truly care for them when I considered how much I also cared about the things that I felt God had placed in my heart to share with the world.

Inevitably, I reached what felt like the end of my own ability and capacity, and I became thoroughly tired. *Bone tired*. The kind of tired that robs you and me of the very things we long for in this life—peace, joy, contentment, belonging, and *rest*.

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If you and I did get to sit down to explore these dilemmas together, I bet we'd find that we have more in common than we'd imagined. I also bet we'd bump into a bit of mystery as we got to the bottom of the funnel of who we really are. We'd have to acknowledge a certain sanctity to our lives that we sense but can't quite put words around, as well as a longing we're still trying to define. I believe that at some point in our conversation, our Belovedness would inevitably peek through our peripheral shells and the stuff of real life would start spilling out.

Beloved. (I'm going to call you this quite often, so you might want to go ahead and try it on and see how it feels.) This is the one big something that I know is true of you: you are God loved, which is essentially what the name Beloved means. I find it beautiful that God both *made* us in His image and *named* us in His image. First John 4:8 says, "God is love," and then all throughout Scripture you and I are called Beloved—or as the Greek says, "loved by God."¹ It's as if we're the response to who He is, and right from the start, He is the fulfillment of our greatest need: *to be loved.*

You've likely seen this name Beloved in Scripture. You might even have worn it on a T-shirt or a necklace. But maybe you've become a bit numb to its true hold on you. What if I told you that living from your Belovedness changes everything? That it could unfold the *true you* as well as give you an unimagined capacity to be about the things of God and the life you've longed for. If I showed you how the true you could emerge from a place of contentment and rest, would you be willing to crawl into this kind of chrysalis and yield to the process?

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There is such a place, and I'm grateful beyond words that God called me to it, to be able to experience the catapulting capacity of His rest. It was here that I discovered what He truly requires of me and also what He doesn't. It was here that I was surprised to find what is most valuable to Him as well as some things that I didn't know were priceless to me. I was also blown away to discover that in finding true rest in God, I'd watch Him unfold the life I was longing for in a way that I could never have dreamed or planned.

MEETING GOD IN THE BROKENNESS

At the end of 2017, I found myself wanting to hold on to every last bit of cozy that celebrating Christmas brings but also ready to kick to the curb all the clutter that I could see piling up in my house. We had gotten quite merry with decking the halls that year, especially because we were celebrating our tour for my first Christmas album. Yet, in the after-Christmas glow, I began to crave the clean slate of remembering Jesus in the form of a fresh year and a new beginning. So I made plans. Like, hit-the-ground-running kind of plans for the new year:

Word for the year? Check!

Game plan to purge my house of clutter? Check!

Themes laid out for my podcast for the next six months? Check!

I was going to get organized, study, create—even start this book—as I *thrived* my way into the new year!

Insert the narrative of that scene from the movie *Father of the Bride Part II* where the main character foreshadows how

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his life is getting ready to go topsy-turvy: “All those who think they have it made, take one step forward. Not so fast, George Banks.”

Not so fast, Christy Nockels. Only eight days into 2018, I found myself sitting in an ENT’s office while he dropped on me the diagnosis of sudden sensorineural hearing loss. I’d gone in to address what I thought was a possible ear infection, so I didn’t bring my husband to the appointment with me. I remember how the doctor’s mouth moved as he spoke but I was grasping only about every other word, not because of my hearing loss but because I was in disbelief. I did gather that an MRI might be a good idea to rule out the big stuff that could be causing the hearing loss, like a tumor.

I walked out to my car and sat at my steering wheel with my body sweating, my head spinning, and my eyes filling with tears. I called my husband, Nathan, to try to explain the news, and all I could think of was how many questions I didn’t ask the doctor. The MRI, a few days later, produced only more questions as I was told that I’d need to have a neurosurgeon look at a spot on my brain.

So much for all that clear direction on what my year was supposed to look like! Overnight, I had walked straight into one of the biggest health scares of my life. For several weeks, I felt at a total standstill. It was like a part-time job trying to get in to see all the right people and getting all the right people to call me back. I have a whole new compassion for people who are dealing with health issues for themselves or family members. I remember scrolling through Instagram, feeling sidelined while watching everyone else suit up and take the field.

Most afternoons that winter you could find me tucked beneath my bedcovers, watching snow fall outside, while my ears roared with tinnitus. It was borderline maddening, as well as physically and emotionally alarming, to hear this persistent swish and hum in my ears. Yes, this was certainly devastating news for me as a singer. Music is so dear to me that I couldn't even really allow myself to think of what it might mean for the future. Apart from that, though, I realized this was a devastating development for me as a *human*. All kinds of fears surfaced. *Will I always hear this roaring in my ears? Could I lose my hearing completely?* I imagined the loss of so many beautiful sounds that I love: the music of my husband's soothing voice, the harmony that I hear in my children's laughter, and the gentle rush of the wind through the trees that surround our country home.

Yet, as I'll explain in more detail later, God met me here in this big change of plans. I don't know why I didn't see it coming because He's been meeting me like this over and over through the years. For a multitude of reasons that I may never understand, God used the brokenness of my physical ears to compel me to place the ears of my soul against His heart, desperate to truly hear from Him. If I had started that year full speed ahead, with healthy ears, I shudder to think about all that my spiritual ears would have missed out on.

HIS RELENTLESS LOVE

As the Beloved of God, we can be sure that He is relentless in revealing places in our hearts that He's not done fighting for.

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He loves us that much. When I think about all the hurry-up-and-wait and the things-didn't-go-as-planned seasons of my life, I'm suddenly aware of how those seasons have brought more forward movement and fulfillment than anything else I can remember. I have to believe it's because those seasons drew me back into remembrance not only of *who* I am but, most important, of *whose* I am.

Andrew Murray said,

Abiding in Him is not a work that we have to do as the condition for enjoying His salvation, but rather a consenting to let Him do all for us, in us, and through us. It is a work He does for us as the fruit and the power of His redeeming love. Our part is simply to yield, to trust, and to wait for what He has promised to perform.²

Throughout my life the Lord has shown up in relentlessly loving ways to draw me in and show me who and whose I am. As I share with you some of those stories and the lessons He's instilled, I pray your eyes will be opened to all the relentlessly loving ways that He is coming after *you*.

I had much to own (and still do) in terms of my Belovedness. I've come face to face with the fact that there is an enemy of my soul working hard to keep me from living from my truest self. In fact, you and I both are in the middle of a battle with this enemy. He is relentless in coming against our very identity as the Beloved.³

I can't help but think of a home movie from when I was about three years old, singing my favorite song. I was a '70s baby, so this movie is silent. But because I was doing little

hand motions to the song, I can tell that it was the first worship song I ever learned, which says, “I’m my Beloved’s and He is mine; His banner over me is love.” The most endearing thing about the whole picture is that I have a toy rifle strapped around my chest as I’m singing! It makes me giggle because it’s such evidence that I was the only girl being raised with all brothers and boy cousins. But recently as I watched it again, I couldn’t help but be filled with the truth that worship is a weapon. Worship is simply our response to God, and learning to live as the Beloved is a beautiful response. It’s always our best defense against a soul-killing, identity-stealing enemy. And once we start to live from our own Belovedness, we begin to fight on behalf of others so that they can live and rest in it too!

Beloved, hear me fighting for you when I say God’s banner over you is love! In fact, I believe that He’s calling you to come and rest and *live* underneath that banner even now. You and I actually have a real-life mediator who is here to help us get to the heart of the matter.⁴ His name is Jesus. He was the first one to be called Beloved by His Father, and we have been called by His name.

Jesus consistently asked prodding and challenging questions when He walked this earth. In fact, when He met some of His first disciples—as He noticed them following Him one day along the road—He turned and asked, “What do you want?” It sounds a bit abrupt but, at the same time, stunningly bracing in the best way. People who ask these kinds of questions have likely discovered the answers for themselves, and in Jesus’s case, He *is* the answer. I also think He knew that some of life’s best answers are questions. “Where are you staying?”

they asked Him.

He replied, “Come and see.”⁵

Beloved, I believe that this invitation is extended to us. To *you*.

Will you heed His call to come and see? To discover who you really are and what you’re truly longing for?

FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Without referring to any milestones, vocations, or achievements, how would you describe the life you long for?

2. In what ways does our culture—even at times Christian culture—give us conflicting messages about the following: rest and achievement?

building community and not being overscheduled?

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following our dreams and being present in the moment?

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PART ONE

The Calling of the Beloved

BELOVED, THE HIGHEST CALL ON YOUR LIFE—above any personal passion or pursuit—is to be loved by God and take your place as His child.¹ This means you are to be holy and set apart so that everything you do is done in the name of the Lord Jesus.²

This is a *worthy* calling but one that we often don't feel worthy enough to uphold! Because of this, we all have the tendency to labor and strive. Jesus knows this about us, and in His mercy and gentleness, His call to the Beloved rests like a banner over our lives: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”³

This call of Jesus is not about a set of rules or

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a program to sign up for. He says (and in the original language the “Come” is exclamatory⁴), “Come! Rest in Me.” This is a life-changing invitation, especially since He gives us a clear picture here that there *is* work to be done. However, as the Beloved, we’ve been invited to come and yield ourselves to His “yoke”—where we work from *His* strength, knowing He has already borne the heavy load for those He loves!

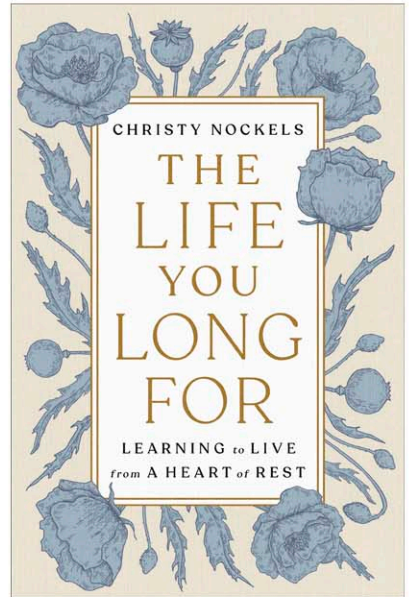
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