

HOLLEY GERTH

*hope
your
heart
needs*



5 ENCOURAGING REMINDERS
OF HOW GOD CARES FOR YOU

Introduction

God is the strength of my heart.

Psalm 73:26

“How are you?”

“I’m fine.”

It’s the answer we all give. Often what we really mean is, “I’m a little tired. A bit overwhelmed. Longing for something more.” In this world, our hearts grow weary. We want hope, joy, peace, and purpose. Surely all of this is around the next corner, we tell ourselves. If we hurry, if we try hard enough, then we’ll find it.

One morning I curled up under a cream-colored blanket that felt like the edge of a cloud. I turned on the lamp by my bed and sipped tea from a red

cup with a little chip in the rim. I didn't want this day to be like so many before. I wanted to know the answer to the restlessness in my heart. I needed a real solution.

I did an internet search. I texted a friend. But on this occasion, neither of those would do. I reached for my Bible then and flipped through the pages. I began to notice verses about who God is and how he loves us. And suddenly I came to a turning point: I realized what my heart needed wasn't a simple answer to a problem. No, I was looking for, longing for, a Person.

We all are.

Someone bigger than us. Stronger. Able to handle everything. Someone who will care for us, fight on our behalf, and extend grace to us always. Someone limitless and loving, beyond our imagination, and right there in the intimate details of our lives—always the same and yet forever doing a new thing in and through us.

"I already know God," we might say. And, yes, that can be so beautifully true. But thinking we know him completely is like believing we have

held every grain of sand from all the shores of the world in our hands. No matter how much we love him, however deep our faith goes, there is always so much more. This is a wonder and a gift. With every new discovery, our hearts are filled and freed, strengthened and helped, restored and empowered.

Or maybe God is still brand new to us. We feel a bit shy around him, like someone on a first date. We want to know more, but our knees are knocking and our heart is pounding. Maybe we've been hurt by religion or don't feel good enough or have a thousand reasons why we want to stop reading and walk away. If so, that's absolutely okay. This is a come-as-you-are book, because that's the kind of God we'll get to know on these pages.

The God who scattered stars like diamonds across the velvet of the universe, the keeper of every sparrow, the maker of us all is inviting us to draw closer to him. He is the place where our hearts can go on the hard days and the happy ones, in the highs and lows, when we are sad or

frustrated or downright giddy. He is what we have been searching for all along.

No amount of words could ever even begin to contain all of who God is. What's on these pages is only a sliver. But understanding more of God's character and how he loves us changed my life in beautiful, powerful ways. As you begin this journey, I'm praying it will do the same for you.

We don't have to settle for "I'm fine." Someone is whispering to us, inviting us, showing us in every moment, "I am God. I love you. You are mine."

XOXO
Holley

Bright Morning Star

I am the . . . bright Morning Star.

Revelation 22:16

The rough wooden boardwalk is cool beneath my feet as I make my way to the sand. The sky is still the thick, deep blue of night, and gray shadows sway in the salty wind. I sleepily take my husband's hand. I'm not a morning person, but we're on vacation and I'm determined to see the sun climb like a rising warrior above the waves at least once.

As we get closer to the shore, we can see more people who have decided to forsake pillows for flip-flops along with us. They sit on huge pieces of stranded driftwood, stroll along the edge of the water with cameras in hand, or sip from coffee cups with dazed looks on their faces. I notice one woman lifting her eyes to the still-night sky and I am curious. What does she see?

When I follow her example, I am greeted by diamonds thrown out on velvet. One star in particular winks brilliantly back at me. I find out later it's actually the planet Venus, otherwise known as the Morning Star. Here is its mystery and beauty: Venus is known for rising in the darkest part of the night, just before dawn.¹

Jesus said, "I am the . . . bright Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16). This means, among other things, he is not afraid of the deepest dark. He is not frightened by the secret places in our hearts. The ones that haven't seen daylight for years. The kind with the locks on the doors. The sort we don't say out loud or even fully admit to ourselves. He is not running scared from the tragedies in our lives.

Hope Your Heart Needs

He is not backing away from the brokenness and the bitterness and the shattered dreams. He is not intimidated by the monsters under our beds or inside our minds. He is not avoiding the struggles or the addictions. He is not waving his hands in surrender to the enemies of our souls. He is not saying, “This is too much for me.”

He is not afraid to step right into the night. Not afraid to even dwell in the middle of it. Because he is light, and in him there is not darkness at all. This means darkness can surround him and he cannot be defeated or diminished by it. He came as a baby into a midnight world and announced his arrival with a shining star. He conquered death in a dark tomb and rolled the stone away, making a way into the brightness for all of us. In the thickest gloom, *the Morning Star* rose.

“The LORD’s mercies . . . are new every morning” (Lam. 3:22–23 NKJV). As I watch the sun slip into the morning sky and fill it with gold and flame, I bear witness that these words are true. Venus, the Morning Star that foreshadowed all this light and blazing glory, seems to be more than just a

planet; it suddenly also seems to be a promise. A daily reminder from the heart of our Creator that even the deepest night will lead to dawn. The dark cannot win; the light will never be overcome.

*Bright Morning star,
you truly are the Light who comes
into our darkest places. Today I need
you to shine on this area of my life:*

*Thank you for your faithfulness and for the
promise that no night will last forever. Amen.*

Helper

Because you are my helper,
I sing for joy in the shadow of your
wings.

Psalm 63:7 NLT

I grew up a city girl, but once a year I got to visit the livestock and rodeo show, a wonderland of farm animals and funnel cakes. On one such trip, I spotted a plump hen in a corner of a coop, feathers fluffed and a surprisingly ferocious look on her face. At first she appeared to be the only occupant, but as her caretaker gently tapped her on the tail feathers, a ball of fuzz attached to delightfully pink feet appeared. “Peep!” declared

the chick as if sounding an evacuation alarm, and soon its siblings followed. I counted them—one, two, three, four. It was like watching the old circus act where clown after clown climbs out of a teeny-tiny car. How did they all fit under their mama? And what were they doing there in the first place?

It turns out hens have used this trick for ages. If a hen senses a threat to her brood, she calls her youngsters to herself and tucks them under her wings. It's a smart strategy to evade circling hawks or nosy farmers. These mothers are telling the world, "If you want to get to my kids, you're going to have to come through me first."

This is the imagery the psalmist David used in Psalm 63:7 to describe the kind of help he received from God: "Because you are my helper, I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings." These words may sound strange coming from a warrior king. We might imagine him talking about help in terms of battlefields, swords, and giant-slaying. But this time a mother bird best conveyed what he wanted to express. When we look closer at the

word *helper* in Scripture, this begins to make more sense. Sharon Jaynes says in *How Jesus Broke the Rules to Set You Free*:

The Hebrew word “helper” . . . is ezer. It is derived from the Hebrew word used of God and the Holy Spirit, “azar.” Both mean “helper”—one who comes alongside to aid or assist. King David wrote, “O LORD, be my helper” (Psalm 30:10 NASB). . . . Ezer appears twenty-one times in the Old Testament. Two times it is used of the woman in Genesis 27, sixteen times it is used of God or Yahweh as the helper of his people. The remaining three references appear in the books of the prophets, who use it in reference to military aid.¹

What this speaks to my heart is that the help of God is both tender and powerful. Strong and gentle. Protective and mama-bear fierce. This comforts me because on my toughest days I want someone to not only defend me but also comfort me. I long for someone to not only beat back the bullies but also tuck me into bed. I want someone who will gather me under their feathers not only

Hope Your Heart Needs

because of what's circling overhead but also because it is the closest place to their heart.

This is the kind of mysterious and beautiful help we receive from our God. It is help that is near. Help that knows our name. Help that enables us to sing even in the scary, hard moments because we're secure under mighty, merciful wings.

Helper,

thank you for offering not only your strength but also your very self on my behalf. In a world that can be full of uncertainty, you alone are my security. Today I especially need your help with

I'm so grateful for your covering of love over me. Amen.

I Am

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

Exodus 3:14

This morning I stood on burning-bush ground. Only I was not Moses in the wilderness. I was a girl in an office chair with a computer screen in front of me. On that screen was the face of someone I loved dearly who had been hurt. I had been brought in to this video meeting to help sort out the pieces, to set the bones and offer a sling and wipe away the salty tears with words. I walked into the room nervous, unsure of how it would go.

Hope Your Heart Needs

There were things to figure out about the future, and the possibilities for anger and conflict and disappointment lay right there like matches in a box we were all trying not to touch.

But instead of those things, at a particular point I felt a certain Presence, a falling of peace like silent snow settling on our hair and shoulders. Sifting down to our hearts. I know this feeling—this kind of moment when the divine intersects the ordinary and suddenly you are in a holy place because heaven is so near you can feel its soothing breath like a mama's kiss on the curve of your neck.

There's a curious thing about these times and it's this: they only happen in the present. I have never felt this way when I have looked back on the past. I have never gotten this sensation when I've been worrying about the future and imagining how it might hold bombs or poisoned lollipops or squirrels leaping into the road. I have only ever really found God in the *now*.

A lot of very smart scholars have debated about why God calls himself "I AM." Many of them probably know far more than I do when it comes to

what can be looked up in books or found on ancient scrolls. But I can tell you with the best kind of knowing I have, which is real-life experience, that I believe part of this name has to do with how God is somehow, mysteriously always present tense. He didn't say to Moses, "Tell them 'I was' sent me to you" or "Tell them 'I will be' sent me to you." No, instead, he insisted, "Tell them 'I AM' sent me to you."

Sometimes when I look back with regret at the past or toward tomorrow with fear, it can be disturbing because I can't seem to find God in those places. And I think all the while he might be saying, "I was there when you were. And I will be there when you arrive at that place tomorrow. But right now I'm right here."

Elmer Towns writes in *The Ultimate Guide to the Names of God*, "The significance of this name [I AM] is that Jehovah . . . is and will become to us exactly what we need when we feel that need."¹ This is true all through the New Testament too. When our hearts are hungry, Jesus says, "*I am* the bread of life" (John 6:35, emphasis added). When

Hope Your Heart Needs

darkness comes to our lives, he says, “*I am* the light of the world” (John 8:12, emphasis added). When we feel like we’ve lost our way, he says, “*I am* the good Shepherd” (John 10:11, emphasis added). Whatever you need right now, Jesus is saying, “I am . . .” He’s not only present; he’s actively providing in this very second.

The meeting eventually wrapped up, and as I stepped out of that little room and into the great big world again, I thought about this beautiful mystery: whatever year, month, or moment it may be, our God is with us. The burning bush is inside us. And wherever we are standing right now is holy ground.

I Am,

it’s so comforting to know you are here with me and you promise to provide for my every need. Help me not to focus on the past or fear the future but instead fully embrace this moment. I trust you with all my yesterdays, all my tomorrows, and right now too. Amen.

Hiding Place

You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of
deliverance.

Psalm 32:7

It's a gray winter day with clouds like a quilt laid over everything. I'm half awake as I slide into the driver's seat of my car to head to a local coffee shop for a morning of writing. I press play on a new podcast a friend has recommended. I hear Christy Nockels, voice like honey and light, talk about what it means to find a hiding place in God.

She shares how a friend of hers, years ago, described this place like the center of a bull's-eye.

Hope Your Heart Needs

We serve and do in the outer rings. But the center, she says, “is where we’re fully known as beloved by God. Inside the bull’s-eye, this is who you are. It’s the place you do everything from.”¹ I take a deep breath and my eyes pop open as if I’ve downed a shot of espresso.

Just last night I had curled under layers of covers. A comforter, blanket, another blanket. Two pillows. I had burrowed down into my bed and closed my eyes. It had been a tough day, and I thought of how modern life, especially social media, sometimes leaves me feeling overexposed. I reflected on the legacy of my grandparents who owned a small Christian bookstore in a little town, who served simply and quietly for a lifetime. I whispered a paradox prayer, “Use me. Hide me.” Whether it’s in our work, personal circumstances, or relationships, we all have moments of feeling overwhelmed and vulnerable.

Yet it’s still hard for me to utter this short prayer, because I’ve always thought of hiding as somehow bad. We live in a “go out there and be bold” kind of world. But it seems a longing for hiding is built

into us. We tuck our faces into the necks of our parents as babies. We play hide-and-seek with our childhood friends. As adults we hide in less conspicuous ways, behind the screen of a computer, in the bottom of a glass, underneath all that makeup. So perhaps it's not about whether we will hide but rather where and how.

And this is the beautiful reality: God himself says he will be our hiding place. He will be the retreat and the fortress and the silent space in a chaotic, busy world. Where does this mean we are hidden? In love. Because "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Christy goes on to say, "When we hide in the place that's already been carved out for us to hide in, we emerge from that place our truest selves."² In other words, when we find our refuge in God, we can be who we are, do what we're called to do, live without shame and guilt and fear.

When Adam and Eve fell, they hid. God came looking for them and asked, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9). It seems a strange question because, as God, he already knew. Perhaps he needed to ask because *they* didn't fully realize the truth. Maybe

Hope Your Heart Needs

he is asking the same of us today. *Where are you?* No matter the answer we may give—“in the middle of depression,” “on the battlefield,” “at the center of a stage”—he wants us to know that is not our truest, deepest location. Where we belong, where we’ve been all along, where we always are in some mysterious way is *in him*. Secure. Loved. Known. He is our Hiding Place; he is our heart’s true home.

Hiding Place,

*no matter where I am or what I do, I
am always secure and cared for in you.
That is a mystery and miracle to me.
Help me dwell in you and believe that
no one can separate me from your love,
the place where I truly belong. Amen.*

Caretaker

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:7

I stand in a sea of people. A wave of business travelers with their dark suits and polished leather bags walks by, deep in conversation about spreadsheets and mergers. A family follows, two toddlers pointing out the ice-cream vendor to a sleep-deprived mama with a weary hand up to her forehead. A high school sports team comes next, loud and high-fiving in jerseys the color of four-leaf clovers.

“Are you ready?” my husband asks. “We need to get to the gate.” I nod, but the reality is, I’m tired.

Long flights. Big airports. Heavy bags. I lag behind Mark as he strides in front of me. At some point he turns around and looks at my computer bag, the one slung across my shoulder that's making my back ache and slowing me down. He reaches out his hand. "I'll take that for you," he says, and I watch as my manly man proceeds down the corridor with a girly bag in hand. Because he loves me. I stand a little taller, pick up the pace, bypass the tempting scent of coffee. We arrive just as our boarding announcement comes over the speakers.

I think of this moment months later when I read these words: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). *What does that really mean?* I wonder. I find the answer: "the word 'casting' used in 1 Peter 5:7 was the Greek word *epiripto*, a compound of the words *epi* and *ripto*. The word *epi* means *upon*, as *on top of something*. The word *ripto* means *to hurl*, *to throw*, or *to cast*, and it often means *to violently throw* or *to fling something with great force*."¹

That day in the airport, I couldn't get rid of my heavy bag fast enough. I didn't second-guess

Hope Your Heart Needs

my husband's offer. I didn't try to press on out of pride. I let go of that weight as quickly as I could. But the same isn't always true in my everyday life. Instead of casting my cares, I caress them. I pull them close and guard them. And all the while Jesus is saying, "Here, let me take that for you." Thankfully, Jesus understands this is the way of humans. We can be slow to surrender. We have a tendency to cling to what weighs us down. So he offers not once but again and again, gently and with great compassion. It's never too late to take him up on his compassion.

The word *anxiety* in 1 Peter 5:7 also means more than I originally thought. It's not just that fluttery feeling in our chests, not only the worry that barks at us in the night. It describes any trouble or difficulty, any challenge or hardship, all the fears and uncertainties. Every bit of it.

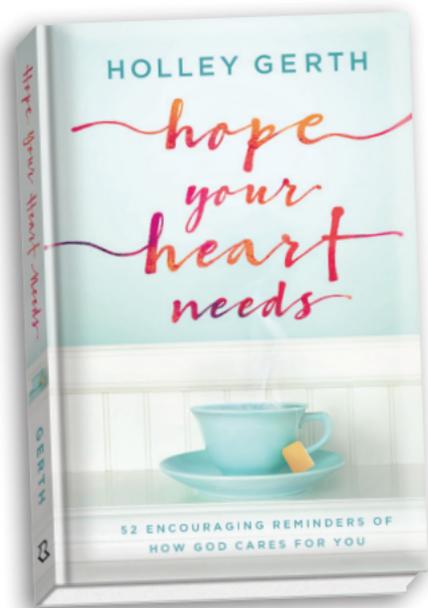
I write these words about releasing our cares, knowing this is more easily said than done. I have a nervous system that leans toward stress. My fear circuits are sensitive. Sometimes it seems I battle worry all the time, every day. Do I always

immediately hand over the bag? No. Often I carry it until I simply can't anymore, until it slips from my shoulders because I'm flat-out exhausted and can't take another step. But you know what? Jesus takes it even then. And I am learning, slowly, to let go sooner.

Knowing Jesus is my caretaker isn't an easy fix. It's not a simple one-time solution. For me, this truth means there is always hope. It means I'm discovering a different, freer way of being. It means I'm believing that by the time I reach my final destination, I will be traveling so much lighter.

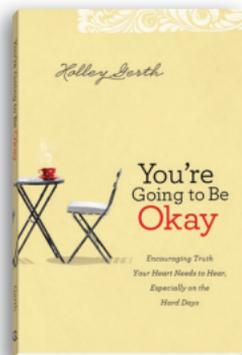
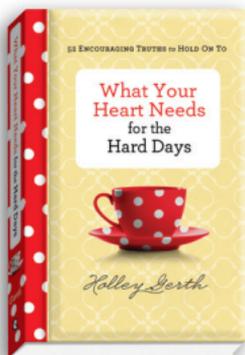
Caretaker,

thank you for so graciously taking my burdens, fears, and anxieties. Nothing is too big for you to carry and nothing is too small for you to care about. I choose to release what's been weighing me down into your loving hands. Amen.



**More reminders
of how God cares
for you can be
found in *Hope
Your Heart Needs***

**More hope and
encouragement
from Holley**



Connect with Holley at
holleygerth.com


Revell

a division of Baker Publishing Group
www.RevellBooks.com