



THEME 1

Healing Through
Forgiveness and Grace

River's Song

BEFORE YOU BEGIN



Book Summary: *River's Song*

The year is 1959. Following her mother's funeral, widow Anna Larson returns to her childhood home to sort out her parents' belongings. Situated on a picturesque coastal estuary in Oregon, Anna's unique family home is filled with an assortment of memories—some lovely, some difficult. Anna had hoped that her daughter, Lauren, who had just graduated from high school, would join her on the trip home, but their strained relationship kept them at arms' length from each other. At first Anna felt guilty about leaving Lauren behind, but her mother-in-law, Eunice, made it perfectly clear that she had everything under control—including Lauren. Anna was beginning to feel that she was no longer needed there anyway.

Anna comes to the river of her youth feeling empty and lost, but she soon remembers how much she loves being on the water and revels in its healing properties. Anna is also flooded with memories of her Grandma Pearl, who was a full Siuslaw Indian. Though Anna's mother had rejected her Native American heritage for a more modern lifestyle, Anna had loved being with her grandmother, learning how to make traditional baskets and listening to her ancient stories. She finds comfort in her grandmother's objects and artifacts scattered throughout the home, the connection to her past growing stronger minute by minute. As she settles in, Anna meets Hazel Chenowith, an energetic grandmother who has travelled to the river to research the Siuslaw Indians. Gathering information for her doctoral thesis, Hazel is ecstatic to discover Anna's heritage, and Anna invites her to stay in her grandmother's old cabin while Hazel collects information.

Soon Anna is feeling better than she has in years, surrounded by Hazel and Babette, her mother's old friend who lives nearby and takes Anna under her wing. As Anna begins to reconnect with her heritage and the rustic ways of river living, she begins to realize how miserable she has been over the past years, living with her wealthy mother-in-law, Eunice, and dealing with her relentless verbal abuse. Eunice had been livid when her son, Adam, married Anna, and when Adam returned home from war, broken in body and in spirit, Anna and Adam had moved into Eunice's home with their young daughter, Lauren, where Anna had cared for Adam until his tragic death. Though Anna and Lauren remained in the home after Adam's death, Anna quickly became subservient to the sharp-tongued and manipulative Eunice, whose dominance seemed inescapable.

But here now, on the river, Anna begins to hope and to dream of a different life, one that is lived on her own terms and celebrates the healing environment of the river. With Hazel's encouragement, Anna realizes her skills in hospitality and begins to transform the beautiful house and property into an inn—a place that can be a healing retreat for many, many people. Then, when Hazel's contractor son, Clark, comes to visit, Anna's heart is awakened. Clark's kind, encouraging manner steals her heart, and she begins to open herself up to the possibility of being worthy of another's love. Their relationship grows, and when Clarke proposes marriage, Anna is eager to accept, overjoyed by the promises of her new life.

By transforming her old family home into Shining Waters Inn, Anna creates a place of healing—a place where guests experience peace, grace, and new beginnings for themselves—while transforming her own life and growing into the woman that God intended her to be.

Character Sketches

Anna

Born in the early twenties, Anna lived a quiet, protected life with her two loving parents and grandmother on the banks of the Siuslaw River. Anna's mother, a Siuslaw Indian who'd been born and "educated" on the reservation and experienced the hardships and horrors there, grew to resent her Native American roots and chose to live as a "white woman" and married a Scandinavian immigrant. When the grandmother returned to her "old ways," Anna's mother came to resent her as well. However, Anna enjoyed a rich and interesting relationship with her grandmother until the grandmother died when Anna was around twelve. Anna grew into an intelligent and beautiful woman. Tall and strong and independent, she was just starting college when she caught the eye of Adam Gunderson who persuaded her to elope before the onset of World War II. Anna's only child, Lauren, is born shortly before Adam goes to war, and Anna feels trapped by Eunice, her mother-in-law. She feels even more oppressed when Adam returns with serious injuries and later takes his own life. During Lauren's "growing up" years Eunice wields her control over Anna and Lauren, treating Anna like a slave and Lauren like a princess. It's not until Anna's mother passes away (shortly before Lauren goes to college) that Anna makes her break from Eunice.

Hazel

Born in the late 1800s, Hazel grew up with the belief that women were equal to men. Unfortunately the society she lived in seldom agreed. However, Hazel entered college and was nearly finished when she became pregnant with Clark. Unfortunately, Clark's father didn't wish to marry. So, Hazel began to raise her son with the help of her mother while continuing her education and career. Hazel has one less than happy marriage, but she eventually turns her attention to her career as an anthropology professor and to raising

her child. By the time she meets Anna, she is working toward her doctoral degree, writing a dissertation on Northwest coastal tribes and folklore stories. Delighted to meet Anna and discover the old stories of Anna's grandmother, a firm bond forms between the two women. Hazel becomes a mentor and mother figure to Anna. And, eventually Hazel's son Clark enters the picture too. A match made in heaven (or by Hazel) ensues.

Clark

About five years Anna's senior, Clark (raised by Hazel) grew up in a non-conventional home as an independent thinker. Although he earned a degree in law, his stint in the Army Air Corp during World War II (dropping bombs) instilled a desire to return home and "build things instead of destroy them." Subsequently he becomes a contractor and occasionally uses his legal expertise to help others. Clark's first wife didn't appreciate his transition from attorney to carpenter, and the marriage disintegrated. However, Clark remained committed to his son Marshall, maintaining a healthy relationship despite the failed marriage. Eventually, his wife remarried, selecting a more "successful" man. By the time Clark enters Anna's world, he's weary of building post-World War II houses, and he wants something more challenging. He not only falls in love with Anna but the river, and her vision for running an inn as well.

Babette

Babette (of uncertain age, but much older than she appears) was a good friend to Anna's parents and even helped them to run the store on the river. As a beautiful young woman, Babette emigrated from France and lived in San Francisco, where she married an old, unsuccessful miner, and after he passed away she married a second miner and businessman (Bernard) who was successful. Bernard passed away not long after coming to the river, leaving Babette well-off but alone. Her generosity and cheerful spirit gained many friendships along the river. And when Anna returns to her roots, Babette takes her under her wing and proves as valuable as family.



WEEK 1

THE JOURNEY TO HEALING

Scripture for the Week

*Let my whole being bless the LORD!
Let everything inside me
bless his holy name!*
Psalm 103:1



Excerpt from *River's Song*, Chapters 1 and 2

In twenty years' time, nothing had changed on the river. Or so it seemed. Although mid June, the sky was gloomy, the color of a weathered tin roof, and the river, a few shades darker, was tinged with mossy green. The surface of the water was serene, barely moving with the ebb tide, and the sounds of birds and churning boat motor were muffled, hushed by the low-slung clouds...

[Anna] pushed the door open with her foot and reached for her suitcase. Taking a deep breath, unsure of what to expect, she went inside. It had only been six days since her mother had died right here in this house. She knew that Mrs. Thorne, a neighbor from upriver, had stopped by last week to share a bucket of clams, but had found her mother on the kitchen floor. The doctor said she'd been dead for a day or two, but had in all likelihood died instantly. Probably a stroke or heart attack. No need for an autopsy, he'd said, nothing suspicious about a sixty-nine-year-old woman dying in her own kitchen. Anna swallowed hard and closed the door behind her. She set her suitcase on a straight back chair and looking around, she sighed in relief. Thankfully, all signs of the recent tragedy had been removed. Everything looked scrubbed clean and neat with even a vase of wild snapdragons on the kitchen table, probably from Mrs. Thorne, or maybe Babette. River folks were like that—they looked out for each other.

Anna set the box of food on the kitchen table, putting the perishable items in the old icebox, which was cold as well as recently cleaned. Now she went straight to her mother's beloved piano. She gently ran her fingers over the keys, playing a scale. Still in tune, but the sound was slightly jarring in the otherwise silent house. Daddy had sent for the upright piano when Anna was around four. It was to be a Christmas present for Mother. Anna still remembered looking on in awe as Daddy and three other men carried the enormous crate from the dock and into the house. She stood in the doorway, watching

as Daddy used a crowbar to pry big pieces of wood from the crate. She had been told to keep watch in case Mother came up while he was unpacking it, but Mother had more than enough to keep her busy that day with last-minute holiday shoppers flocking into the tiny store. Anna had hoped that there was a pony inside the big box, and was slightly dismayed when a tall brown piano appeared instead. Mother had cried when she saw it. Then to Anna's amazement she sat down and played—beautifully. It turned out that Mother had taken lessons (in exchange for housekeeping) as a child. And her dream had been to teach Anna to play as well. Consequently, almost every day after the arrival of the piano, Anna was subjected to a long hour's worth of lessons and practice.

She studied a silver-framed photo on the piano. She had seen it hundreds of times, but suddenly it was like seeing it for the first time. It had been Easter Sunday when her family had posed for a neighbor in front of their store before church, all three of them in their Sunday best. Anna must've been around seven or eight, because it was before the Great Depression and the last time she would have pretty shoes like those for a while. The shoes were soft white leather with dainty straps and not a bit practical for life on the Siuslaw River, but Daddy had thought they were pretty and brought them home for her just a few days earlier.

Although the photo was black and white, in her mind's eye she could see it in color, and her dress was a delightful robin's egg blue with several layers of ruffles on the skirt. Mother had made it for her. Anna's long dark hair was pulled back with an oversized bow that matched the dress. Even as a girl, it was easy to see that Anna would take after her father in build and height, already resembling a gangling colt, and her face took on angles not normally seen in the Siuslaw people. But her eyes were dark and clear and full of life. Eyes that Anna had not seen in years.

The dark-eyed girl in the photo was smiling happily. Life had been good for them. She was her parent's little pearl, and the world was her oyster. Anna's focus moved to her mother. How incredibly young she looked! Almost like a girl herself. Her mother stood nearly a foot shorter than her six-foot-tall husband, but unlike many of her race, she was neither squat nor heavy. Her facial features were traditional Siuslaw—broad nose, big dark eyes, and full lips with the corners turned slightly up—but her eyes were downcast, as if she were too shy to look straight into the lens of the camera.

In this photo, Mother's sleek black hair had been recently cut into a stylish short bob. Anna could still remember the horrified look on Daddy's face when Mother had come home from town after having her long tresses cut. He had lamented the loss for some time, then must have noticed Mother's somber face close to tears, and he quickly recovered, reassuring her that she looked very nice in her new "boy's" hair. Mother wasn't a beauty, but she was attractive in a wholesome way. Her dress, like all their clothing, had been sewn by her. It was an off-white linen, straight and sensible, not unlike the fashion of the times, and her lace-up shoes were sturdy and sensible. Her appearance was exactly what one would expect for the wife of a store proprietor in the late twenties; except, of course, that she was Indian.

Anna's gaze moved over to Daddy and she smiled. He stood ramrod straight, looking directly into the camera as if he were the proudest man on the river. Not the kind of pride associated with arrogance, but happy and satisfied with life. His jacket was slung casually over his arm, and he had on his good suspenders, or braces, as he called them. His long narrow tie seemed to exaggerate his height, but Daddy had never been a bow-tie man. But it was his smile that stopped her. Big and broad and sincere. It was that smile that brought people into the store even if they didn't need to make a purchase. Old Mrs. O'Neil had once commented that "Oscar Larson's smile was just like sunshine." And with overcast days so common to the Oregon coast, a slice of sunshine could be a priceless commodity indeed.

After all these years, Anna would still agree with Mrs. O'Neil. How she missed that sunny smile and those clear blue eyes that crinkled at the edges—Daddy's whole face seemed to light up when he smiled. People used to say that Anna had her father's smile. Certainly, no one would make that claim anymore. Time and trials had worn it away. Just last week her mother-in-law had commented that perhaps the reason Anna was approaching forty without facial wrinkles was because she rarely showed emotion. Anna might have received that as a compliment, but her mother-in-law quickly added, "I guess that's just the way it is with your people. I've always thought that Indian faces look as if they're carved in stone." Anna had wondered if her mother-in-law's heart might also be carved in stone. But, out of habit she had held her tongue. She had long since learned that to respond to her mother-in-law's continual barbs only made matters worse.

Anna replaced the photo and moved to the north windows that looked out over the river. She slid back the faded blue-and-white gingham café curtains that her mother had sewn before the war. For a long time she stood there, mesmerized by the watery world outside of the north window. Eventually the deluge eased itself into a steady drizzle and Anna continued to stare out across the river. Her river. Even on a gray and rainy day, there was a soothing quality to the slow moving water. It was constant and dependable, ebbing and flowing with the tide, yes, but continually moving westward on its journey to the sea. The Siuslaw had always filled her with a sense of peace. A calm reassurance that life would continue. But how long had it been since she'd experienced that kind of peace in her own life? Was it possible she could ever experience it again?

How many times had she stood in this exact spot, looking out over her peaceful river world, thinking that it would never change? Truly, the river never did change. Outside of its seasonal rhythms and tidal flows, its song remained the same. A timeless melody of blue and green, water and trees, sunshine and moonlight, rain and wind. And for a brief moment she felt as if nothing in the entire world had changed.

And yet, she knew, nothing was the same.

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"Truly, the river never did change. Outside of its seasonal rhythms and tidal flows, its song remained the same."

DAY 1: COME TO THE WELL

Read God's Word

Jesus had to go through Samaria. He came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, which was near the land Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down at the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." His disciples had gone into the city to buy him some food.

The Samaritan woman asked, "Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (Jews and Samaritans didn't associate with each other.)

Jesus responded, "If you recognized God's gift and who is saying to you, 'Give me some water to drink,' you would be asking him and he would give you living water."

The woman said to him, "Sir, you don't have a bucket and the well is deep. Where would you get this living water? You aren't greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave this well to us, and he drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water!"

Jesus said to her, "Go, get your husband, and come back here."

The woman replied, "I don't have a husband."

"You are right to say, 'I don't have a husband,'" Jesus answered. "You've had five husbands, and the man you are with now isn't your husband. You've spoken the truth."

The woman said, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you and your people say that it is necessary to worship in Jerusalem."

Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you and your people will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You and your people worship what you don't know; we worship what we know because salvation is from the Jews. But the time is coming—and is here!—when true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth. The Father looks for those who worship him this way. God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth."

The woman said, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called the Christ. When he comes, he will teach everything to us."

Jesus said to her, "I Am—the one who speaks with you."

Just then, Jesus' disciples arrived and were shocked that he was talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" The woman put down her water jar and went into the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who has told me everything I've done! Could this man be the Christ?" They left the city and were on their way to see Jesus.

John 4:4-30

Reflect and Respond

It was a normal day for the woman who came to Jacob's well to draw water. Scholars theorize that the woman was an outcast—that she came to the well to draw water in the heat of the day, at noon, long after all the other women had left. Maybe she wanted to avoid the nasty glances and not-so-hushed gossip from the other women in the village. She wanted to go about her day in peace, but this day she went to the well unaware that her life was about to change. A Jewish man walked up and sat down, and he spoke to her. This surprised her; Jews and Samaritans hated one another and actively went out of their way to avoid one another.

But Jesus didn't avoid her. Instead he looked her in the eyes. There was no anger or sarcasm in his voice, only a knowing look and words that penetrated her soul. That day God surprised her—with truth and with an invitation.

I remember when God first surprised me. I was in high school and had proclaimed myself an atheist several years earlier. I think it was actually my secret cry for God to show me He was real. Thankfully, He did reveal Himself to me when I heard the gospel message (for the first time ever), and it miraculously resonated in my soul. I knew it was real and true and just the lifeline I needed. I went from atheist to believer in an amazing moment—and I've never turned back.

Have you ever been surprised by God? What happened?

What does Christ offer the woman?

What did he mean when he offered her "living water"?

We don't know much about the woman who was at the well that day, but Jesus knew everything about her. Jesus' question about her husband was not a casual inquiry but an invitation to offer him the hurts in her life. So, she admitted that she did not have a husband. "You are right to say, 'I don't have a husband,'" Jesus answered. "You've had five husbands, and the man you are with now isn't your husband. You've spoken the truth" (John 4:17-18).

I remember when God first surprised me. I was in high school and had proclaimed myself an atheist several years earlier. I think it was actually my secret cry for God to show me He was real.

This woman's situation may be nothing like ours, but it's not hard to see ourselves in her. Many of us have spoken half-truths and lies to ourselves and others in order to cover up our pain. We've said, "It's no big deal. I'm over it. That was a long time ago." Many of us, like Anna, have tried to fade into the background of our lives and communities, believing there are no second chances. We are afraid to acknowledge how big and deep our hurts are for fear that we will be judged and rejected—that what we've done and what we've experienced will be too much.

But it's not too much for God. Though we may be afraid to speak the truth, God already knows it, and God invites us to come just the same and drink living water. God is not unaware of our pasts. God knows the depth of our sin and pain and wants us to run to Him for healing.

If we are
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How does acknowledging our pain and hurt bring those things out of the darkness and into the light where they can be known and healed?

When God nudges you to acknowledge a sin or a hurt, how do you tend to react?

Read Luke 12:7. How does this verse speak to God's knowledge of you?

Read John 15:16. What does this verse say about God's pursuit of us?

Our journeys are littered with heartache and healing, pain and purpose. Just as Jesus blessed the Samaritan woman with a revelation of who He is, so He has revealed himself to us through his Word and the Holy Spirit. If we are believers in Christ and trust in His redeeming work on the cross, none of our past sins holds us back from being accepted and forgiven. We are chosen and favored, and God will never let us go. We can boldly proclaim God's favor, as the psalmist in Psalm 103:1: "Let my whole being bless the LORD and never forget all his good deeds: how God forgives all your sins, heals all your sickness, saves your life from the pit, crowns you with faithful love and compassion, and satisfies you with plenty of good things" (vv. 2-5).

Jesus told the woman at the well that he was the long-awaited Messiah; He had not yet revealed this truth even to His disciples. What do you think she felt when Jesus told her that He was the one so many generations had been waiting for?

What healing have you been waiting for in your life? How is God inviting you to experience Him in the waiting?

Talk to God

Dear Lord, I am that woman at the well. I have turned to lesser gods to fulfill the needs and desires of my heart. I have spoken half-truths and lies. Thank you for offering me the well that never runs dry. Thank you for the invitation to know you and to be healed in the way that only you can. Give me the faith and courage to follow you. Amen.

As You Go

Spend time in prayer today, asking God to reveal to you the areas in your life that need to be healed. Ask for sensitivity to God's leading and courage to follow Him to healing.

DAY 2: THE HIDDEN MOURNING

Read God's Word

"Examine me, God! Look at my heart! Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts! Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me, then lead me on the eternal path!"

Psalm 139:23-24

Reflect and Respond

Returning to her childhood home for the first time in twenty years, Anna is unsure. Though the place feels familiar and welcoming, Anna is overcome by memories as she returns to this place that has so shaped her life.

Excerpt from *River's Song*, Chapter 3

With hungry eyes, Anna looked around her childhood home. Thankful that Mother had changed so little over the past two decades, she was relieved to see that even the furnishings were in the same places. Maybe that was Mother's way of preserving the past. Even the smells were the same. Pungently comforting. The ever-present mustiness that came from living near water; the faint aroma of sweet cedar from the wood paneling on the ceiling; the smoky smell from the fireplace that never drafted properly in a windstorm, and all tinged by the lingering fragrance of dried lavender.

Life had been so sweet and simple then. Anna sighed. If only it were so simple now. She looked out the window again. At the present moment, her river didn't look any more like the Shining Waters than she felt like an Indian princess. She set [her grandmother's] woven basket down and sank onto the old, familiar camel hair sofa, pulling a shabby pink and green knitted afghan over her legs. She fingered the crocheted throw with sadness. Already it was falling apart, whether from moths or too much use, and it would soon be a useless pile of pink and green yarn bits. And yet her mother's own hands had meticulously hooked each loop on this blanket. Anna still remembered how, so many years ago, after several months of crocheting each evening, her mother had draped the pink and green fruit of her labors over the back of this very sofa with such pride. . . . And now the blanket looked so shabby and pathetic and stringy. Compared to the beautiful Indian baskets on the coffee table, the afghan seemed rather silly. . . and useless. . . and sad.

And for the first time, in a very long time, Anna cried.

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“I’m in mourning” is not a phrase that you’re likely to hear from the people in your life. And yet it is a phrase that aptly describes what Anna was going through—and what many of us are going through, as well.

Though mourning is usually associated with the death of a loved one, we go through the same emotional process of grieving when we feel the loss of what once was or what could have been.

Anna, who in her youth never really understood her mother, grieves for the relationship the two of them never really had. She mourns the time in her life when she believed anything was possible, when life was simpler and more certain.

Mourning is a part of each of our journeys in some shape or form, flowing in and out of our lives as we grow and change. Perhaps you have lost someone you loved who played a big role in your life. Maybe you moved away from your home and your friends and family and are starting over in a new town. Perhaps you've lost your innocence or your independence or a friendship that you cherished. Or maybe your life just isn't what you always dreamed it would be.

We all experience loss in our lives, but when it happens, we don't always know how to process it or what to do with the strong emotions we feel as a result.

What do you think about when you hear the word *mourning*?

Is mourning a process you've been through?

When you feel a loss in your life, how do you typically respond?

Many psychologists say that there are five stages of grief (or loss): denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.¹ Have you ever experienced any of these stages? If so, what were the circumstances surrounding that time in your life?

Are you experiencing any strong emotions that you don't quite know how to handle? Maybe you're dealing with anger or depression or anxiety or restlessness. How might these emotions be pointing you toward some loss or disappointment in your life that you need to mourn?

We may be afraid of our strong emotions, but God is not. Throughout Scripture we see God comforting, reassuring, and healing the hearts and minds of those who love him. When we are overwhelmed and confused, God is present and patient, diligently caring for us.

In today's Scripture from Psalm 139, we find a plea for a thorough heart examination. The psalmist cries out, "Examine me, God! Look at my heart! Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts! Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me, then lead me on the eternal path!" (vv. 23-24). God knows the extent of our pain and grief and how to lead us through it.

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In his play *Macbeth*, Shakespeare writes, "Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak whispers the o're-fraught heart, and bids it break." How can our unspoken, or unacknowledged, grief affect our hearts and minds?

Read the following verses. What comfort or encouragement does each offer for times of mourning or grieving?

Isaiah 41:10

Matthew 5:3-4

John 11:35

1 Peter 5:7

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4 says, "There's a season for everything and a time for every matter under the heavens: . . . a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." Though mourning is not a quick or easy process, Scripture encourages us that "God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Although I haven't lost too many loved ones to death, I am well acquainted with grief. Both of my sons have suffered some devastating challenges and setbacks, unexpected events that have broken this mother's heart . . . including a serious diagnosis of a mental disorder for one and a struggle with addiction for the other. The only way I could survive these ordeals was to fall on God and to trust Him for the outcome. Thankfully, time passed and life eventually improved for everyone.

Is there some hurt or loss in your life that you need to acknowledge and mourn? If so, what is it?

If there's something you've been ignoring or avoiding, how are you currently dealing with it? How is it affecting your heart and life?

How might God be calling you into mourning so that you can walk through this hurt or loss and, on the other side, be able to dance again?

Talk to God

“Investigate my life, O God, find out everything about me; Cross-examine and test me, get a clear picture of what I'm about; See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong—then guide me on the road to eternal life” (Psalm 139:23-24 THE MESSAGE). Amen.

As You Go

As we'll learn in the next few weeks, God's grace is big enough to cover every grief and sorrow we have, and God wants us to experience His grace and love even as we are walking through struggle and pain. Today, be reminded that God walks with you in your journey and can be trusted with your heart.

DAY 3: GOD IS ENOUGH

Read God's Word

When they came back down the mountain to the other disciples, they saw a huge crowd around them, and the religion scholars cross-examining them. As soon as the people in the crowd saw Jesus, admiring excitement stirred them. They ran and greeted him. He asked, "What's going on? What's all the commotion?"

A man out of the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought my mute son, made speechless by a demon, to you. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and goes stiff as a board. I told your disciples, hoping they could deliver him, but they couldn't."

Jesus said, "What a generation! No sense of God! How many times do I have to go over these things? How much longer do I have to put up with this? Bring the boy here." They brought him. When the demon saw Jesus, it threw the boy into a seizure, causing him to writhe on the ground and foam at the mouth.

He asked the boy's father, "How long has this been going on?"

"Ever since he was a little boy. Many times it pitches him into fire or the river to do away with him. If you can do anything, do it. Have a heart and help us!"

Jesus said, "If? There are no 'ifs' among believers. Anything can happen."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the father cried, "Then I believe. Help me with my doubts!"

Seeing that the crowd was forming fast, Jesus gave the vile spirit its marching orders: "Dumb and deaf spirit, I command you—Out of him, and stay out!" Screaming, and with much thrashing about, it left. The boy was pale as a corpse, so people started saying, "He's dead."

But Jesus, taking his hand, raised him. The boy stood up.

Mark 9:14-27 *THE MESSAGE*

Reflect and Respond

As our lives change and the years come and go, we will experience losses, whether small or life changing. Sometimes these losses can really throw us for a loop, making us question our faith and even the goodness and sovereignty of God.

You aren't the first, and you certainly won't be the last, to struggle with trusting God. Though we as believers have the Holy Spirit in our lives to guide and comfort us, we often believe the lies and untruths that God is not enough. Like Anna, we begin to believe that we are on this journey alone. And so we doubt and we wonder and we struggle to believe that God is enough to heal us and make us whole.

Today's Scripture from Mark 9 tells the story of a father who was struggling to believe. This father, dismayed and desperate, came to Jesus for help. We don't know exactly what the man had heard about Jesus' teachings and power, but he most certainly believed that Jesus was an important man and that he had some ability to heal. The man said to Jesus, "If you can do anything, do it." *If*: A small word filled with doubt and uncertainty yet full of hope.

Have you come to Jesus with your own *if*—full of hope but doubting nonetheless? In what ways have you struggled to believe that He can heal you or your situation?

How would you define your need for "healing"? What are your expectations for being healed—emotionally, relationally, spiritually, or physically?

The father was struggling, full of doubt and fear, and Jesus called him to believe. Then the father spoke one of the purest prayers ever recorded: "*I believe. Help me with my doubts!*" This simple prayer from a helpless sinner is an acknowledgment that everything comes from God—even faith itself—and that God is the only one who can conquer our doubts and fear and help us believe His promises.

God isn't afraid of our questions and fears. God is big enough to handle them all. In fact, God is so committed to our healing and salvation that He sent his Son, Jesus, to earth. Jesus said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. Go and learn what this means: I want mercy and not sacrifice. I didn't come to call righteous people, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12-13).

Jesus came for you—despite all of your sin and doubt and self-reliance; despite your inability to trust and to receive. Jesus came to make you whole. And He is able to do just that.

Why is the father's prayer—"I believe. Help me with my doubts!"—such a powerful prayer?

Through Jesus' death on the cross we have been forgiven and made righteous. Though we may struggle and doubt, God's forgiveness has already been done for us.

Read Isaiah 53:4-5. What does this passage say about Jesus' commitment to heal us and make us whole?

Verse 5 says, "He bore the punishment that made us whole; by his wounds we are healed." All of the verbs in this verse are in the past tense, indicating that this is something that has already been done, that is finished. Through Jesus' death on the cross we have been forgiven and made righteous. Though we may struggle and doubt, God's forgiveness has already been done for us.

Why, then, do you think we often struggle with doubt?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9. Do you believe that God's grace is enough for you? How might truly believing this affect your daily life?

Read Luke 11:9. How does this verse encourage you to trust God and God's healing work in your life?

Talk to God

Dear God, I want to know you more, to trust in your love and goodness. God, help my doubts and my unbelief. Help me, each day, to put down my fears and my doubts and to pick up your love and faithfulness. Remind me that because of your amazing gift of salvation through Jesus, I am free to experience the kind of healing in my heart that only you can provide. Amen.

As You Go

Consider the father's prayer: "I believe. Help me with my doubts!" About what area(s) of your life can you pray this prayer today?

DAY 4: HELP ALONG THE JOURNEY

As we continue on this journey to healing, we no doubt need help and support along the way. In the coming weeks, we will explore how God has equipped us for this journey and how God sends others to walk alongside us to support us and enrich our lives. What we'll find is that God gives us exactly what we need, when we need it.

Read God's Word

But Moses said to the LORD, "My LORD, I've never been able to speak well, not yesterday, not the day before, and certainly not now since you've been talking to your servant. I have a slow mouth and a thick tongue."

Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives people the ability to speak? Who's responsible for making them unable to speak or hard of hearing, sighted or blind? Isn't it I, the LORD? Now go! I'll help you speak, and I'll teach you what you should say."

But Moses said, "Please, my LORD, just send someone else."

Then the LORD got angry at Moses and said, "What about your brother Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak very well. He's on his way out to meet you now, and he's looking forward to seeing you. Speak to him and tell him what he's supposed to say. I'll help both of you speak, and I'll teach both of you what to do. Aaron will speak for you to the people. He'll be a spokesperson for you, and you will be like God for him."

Exodus 4:10-16

Reflect and Respond

God has plans for your life, just as God had plans for Moses' life. God created you for good things. And what God has created you for, God will equip you to accomplish. If you have your doubts, just read Ephesians 2:10: "We are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives." God will give us the strength and faith we need for the journey ahead and will be with us every step of the way, just as he was with Moses.

Of course, Moses had his doubts at first. When God shared his big plans for Moses to be the instrument that would lead the Jewish people out of enslavement in Egypt, Moses was timid and afraid that he was not capable of what God was asking him to do.

What were Moses' fears, and how did God respond?

God has plans for your life, just as God had plans for Moses' life. God created you for good things. And what God has created you for, God will equip you to accomplish.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt incapable of doing something that God called you to do? If so, what was the situation, and what was the outcome? What did you learn from the experience?

The good news is that God listens to us. God understands our insecurities and fears and knows that sometimes we need others in our lives to help us along the way. Moses was afraid to speak, and so God gave him a helper with a voice—his brother Aaron.

We need other believers in our lives to fight for us—to pray for us, to speak truth to us, to walk with us.

Mark 2 tells a beautiful story of the role that faithful friendship played in one man's life:

After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home. So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven! . . . Get up, take your mat, and go home." Jesus raised him up, and right away he picked up his mat and walked out in front of everybody. They were all amazed and praised God, saying, "We've never seen anything like this!"

Mark 2:1-5, 11-12

Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ." Those four men literally carried their bedridden friend to where Jesus was, and when they ran into obstacles and hardship, they did not give up. They fought for their friend's healing, and Jesus honored their faith and determination.

We need other believers in our lives to fight for us—to pray for us, to speak truth to us, to walk with us.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11-22. What are some ways we are told to live in community with other believers?

Read Colossians 3:15-16. In *The Message* paraphrase, Paul admonishes these early believers to "let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in

step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing.” Why do you think Paul gives this instruction?

Why is it important for us to walk in community with other believers?

Who has God put in your life to walk with you these next several weeks as you explore healing in your life? What kind of help and support can you ask for from them?

A true blessing in Anna’s life was Hazel, a woman of strength and confidence who walked with Anna and helped her realize new dreams for her life.

Excerpt from *River’s Song*, Chapter 11

[Hazel said to Anna,] “You treat me too well and I will never want to leave this place.” Hazel got a thoughtful look. “You know this location would be a wonderful spot for an inn. Have you ever considered that? After the lumber people move on—and I suspect they will—it will be up to people like you to help the land and the river to heal again.”

“To heal again—” Anna rolled those words around in her mind. “I like the sound of that.”

Hazel smiled. “I suspect you have a healer inside of you.”

“What do you mean?”

She waved her hand over the cabin. “You took something that was ailing and in need of help. . . and you made it better. You, my dear, are a healer.”

Anna felt a rush of pride and wonder. “I hope that’s true. I usually think of the river as having the power to heal me. Maybe I could help it to heal too.”

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Oftentimes physical places can be conduits for our healing—places where we can go to experience peace and calm, and to dream and hope for new beginnings.

In addition to people, sometimes God uses places to help us along our journeys. In The Inn at Shining Waters Series, the river is a place of healing for Anna, and it becomes the impetus for Anna's hope and dream to create an inn that will be a place of hope and healing for many people. The natural beauty of the river and the remote location seem to lend a sense of calm, serenity, and groundedness to the lives of those who come there.

Often physical places can be conduits for our healing—places where we can go to experience peace and calm, and to dream and hope for new beginnings. Like Anna, for many of us being surrounded by nature can give us a renewed sense of joy and purpose, while others are most inspired by the majesty of a beautiful cathedral or the comfort of a quiet, cozy corner in which to meditate.

What physical places restore and revive your spirit? What places and spaces move you?

Read Psalm 19:1. How can beauty—especially the beauty that is found in nature—encourage and comfort us? Why do you think we are so affected by and connected to nature?

Read Psalm 122:1. Do you relate to the psalmist's joy? Why or why not?

During this journey to discover healing, what places can you go to for refuge and encouragement? Is there somewhere you can regularly go for peace and calm and meditation?

Talk to God

Lord God, I know that I am not on this journey alone. You have called me onto this path of healing, and I know that you will provide everything I need along the way. Thank you for so faithfully looking after me and caring about my needs. I want to know you

more, God. I want to know your love and healing and grace. Open my eyes to see you; open my ears to hear you. Amen.

As You Go

As you spend time in God's Word through this study over the next several weeks, consider what you need to make the most of each lesson. Do you need to reserve a space in your home where you can focus and meditate peacefully? Will you need to enlist others to help you protect this space and time? Today, plan how you can make the most of this study.

DAY 5: LET MY WHOLE BEING BLESS THE LORD

The text of Psalm 103 will be our foundational Scripture throughout this study. This psalm, written by David, speaks to God's just, holy, and loving nature and proclaims the love, care, goodness, and healing that God extends to us on a daily basis. In the remaining weeks, we will consider how the text of this psalm relates to the stories of healing in The Inn at Shining Waters Series, as well as to your own journey of healing.

Read God's Word

Read through the following psalm several times, reading it aloud at least once. Circle or underline phrases and words that speak directly to your heart. Meditate on the passage and pray the words of the text.

*1 Let my whole being bless the LORD!
 Let everything inside me
 bless his holy name!*

*2 Let my whole being bless the LORD
 and never forget all his good deeds:*

*3 how God forgives all your sins,
 heals all your sickness,*

*4 saves your life from the pit,
 crowns you with faithful love
 and compassion,*

*5 and satisfies you
with plenty of good things
so that your youth
is made fresh like an eagle's.*

*6 The LORD works righteousness;
does justice for all who are oppressed.*

*7 God made his ways known to Moses;
made his deeds known
to the Israelites.*

*8 The LORD is compassionate
and merciful,
very patient, and full of faithful love.*

*9 God won't always play the judge;
he won't be angry forever.*

*10 He doesn't deal with us
according to our sin
or repay us
according to our wrongdoing,*

*11 because as high as heaven
is above the earth,
that's how large God's faithful love
is for those who honor him.*

*12 As far as east is from west—
that's how far God has removed
our sin from us.*

*13 Like a parent feels compassion
for their children—
that's how the LORD feels compassion for those who honor him.*

*14 Because God knows how we're made,
God remembers we're just dust.*

*15 The days of a human life are like grass:
they bloom like a wildflower;*

*16 but when the wind blows through it,
it's gone;
even the ground where it stood
doesn't remember it.*

*17 But the LORD's faithful love is from forever ago to forever from now
for those who honor him.
And God's righteousness reaches
to the grandchildren*

*18 of those who keep his covenant
and remember to keep his commands.*

*19 The LORD has established his throne
in heaven,
and his kingdom rules over all.*

*20 You divine messengers,
bless the LORD!
You who are mighty in power
and keep his word,
who obey everything he says,
bless him!*

*21 All you heavenly forces,
bless the LORD!
All you who serve him and do his will,
bless him!*

*22 All God's creatures,
bless the LORD!
Everywhere, throughout his kingdom,
let my whole being
bless the LORD!*

Psalm 103

Reflect and Respond

The first half of David's psalm (verses 1-14) is devoted to praise for God's mercy and miraculous gift of salvation to us—sinners who desperately need mercy. Verses 9-11 proclaim that God does not deal with us as we deserve but loves us faithfully beyond measure.

Read John 3:16-17. How do these verses speak to the fact that God “doesn’t deal with us according to our sin or repay us according to our wrongdoing”?

Read Zephaniah 3:17. How does it make you feel to know that God is fighting for you?

Read Psalm 103:3-5 again, circling the verbs that describe what God is doing for you. Which one is most meaningful to you today, and why?

The second half of the psalm (verses 15-22) proclaims God’s consistent faithfulness and His power and authority. Though our lives are short and filled with uncertainty, we can trust in God because God does not change. The Lord, infinite and strong, watches over the days of our lives, covering us with mercy and goodness. God was there when the earth began and will continue long after we are gone. Therefore we can trust God with our lives.

What does Jeremiah 10:12 say about God’s power and authority?

Though our lives are short and filled with uncertainty, we can trust in God because God does not change. The Lord, infinite and strong, watches over the days of our lives, covering us with mercy and goodness.

Anna would never have dreamed that the previous years of her life had been preparing her for a life of fulfillment and happiness. She was pleasantly surprised to find, however, that the years of taking care of Eunice and Lauren and their household were paving the way for her natural gifts of hospitality to shine through.

Excerpt from *River’s Song*, Chapter 16

After the meal was finished, Clark politely thanked Anna, complimenting her again on her fine cooking abilities. It was pleasant to hear his praise, but as she cleaned up the breakfast things, she wondered if he saw her beyond a good cook and housekeeper. Oh, she knew that fairly adequately described her life. Certainly that’s what her mother-in-law had trained her to be. In fact, it seemed that Eunice had spent the past two decades trying to obliterate Anna’s spirit by reducing her to the role of domestic servant.

As she scrubbed a dish, just like she’d done thousands of times before, Anna could relate to James Dean’s Rebel Without a Cause, except that Anna thought she had a cause worthy of rebelling against. After all, didn’t she deserve a life beyond cooking and cleaning? What was she getting herself into with her dreams to run an inn? Wasn’t that just like signing up for more of the same . . . or worse? What if she was, like Daddy used to say, jumping from the frying pan into the fire?

Yet strangely, as she took her time to clean up and put things away, she found a sense of solace and comfort in doing these familiar everyday things. Was it that she actually enjoyed menial tasks? Or perhaps her pleasure came from knowing she was not doing this service for her mother-in-law—who could never be pleased—but for herself. Not only that, but she could do these things when and how she liked—or not at all if she so chose. And it was her business if she decided to do these tasks for others. As long as she was happy and content like she felt now while drying a platter and looking out over the sparkling river, why should she doubt herself? Why not simply enjoy it?



**Consider this question: Do you believe God's power is at work in your life?
How does the way you live your life reflect the answer to this question?**

Talk to God

Lord God, I praise you for your faithful love for me. Help me to trust you completely with my life. I believe that you are walking this journey with me, God, and that you will be with me on my journey to healing. May my whole being bless you! Amen.

As You Go

Choose a verse or short passage from Psalm 103 to meditate on throughout the day. Pray that God's words will penetrate your heart. Journal your thoughts about this passage—or the entire psalm—and how it speaks to you (journaling pages are provided at the back of the book).

VIDEO NOTES

A FEW MINUTES WITH MELODY

INTERESTING INSIGHTS:

POINTS I'D LIKE TO DISCUSS WITH THE GROUP:

