

JAMIE GRACE

MY JOURNEY TO PEACE IN AN ANXIOUS WORLD

Finding Quiet



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This book recounts events in the life of Jamie Grace according to the author’s recollection and information from the author’s perspective. While all stories are true, some dialogue and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved.

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*To the over-thinkers and hopeful believers,
and to the anxious hearts that are graciously beating,
we have our fears, insecurities, doubts, and setbacks,
yet seldom give ourselves credit for how far we've come.*

*So let's silence the noise that says we cannot achieve,
let's embrace the silence whose joy is noisy.
To the children, men, and women who are anything like me,
let's remember we are fighters, and there is a grace
that covers every one of our needs.*



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PROLOGUE

JAMIE GRACE! JAMIE GRACE! JAMIE GRACE!

The crowd chanted as I stood offstage in a unicorn onesie.

I had just turned twenty-five and was celebrating by releasing the song “Party Like a Princess” and doing a concert a day later in Minnesota, one of my favorite places to perform.

(A little backstory on the onesie: I started my career by making YouTube videos, so a lot of people who know my music have also watched a lot of the comedic and lifestyle videos I share on my channel. One thing that has weaved its way into these videos is my love for wearing onesies—and unicorn onesies in particular.)

I had decided that at the end of the show, we would black out the lights and I would run backstage, change into a onesie, and return to perform an encore of “Party Like a Princess.”

While I knew that a lot of people had bought and streamed the song online, I wasn’t prepared for what happened next.

As I headed back to the stage after changing, I heard the chants.

JAMIE GRACE! JAMIE GRACE! JAMIE GRACE!

I was overwhelmed and excited but also a bit nervous. While the song had reached number one on iTunes the day it was released—just one day before the concert—I was slightly worried that doing an encore with a song less than twenty-four hours old might have been an odd choice.

But the second the song started, with its intense bass line and drums, the crowd went wild.

They know it! I thought.

I walked onto the stage and began singing and, to my surprise, almost everyone in the room sang my words back to me. I kept looking to the side of the stage where Morgan, my sister and best friend, stood, as if to ask, *Are you seeing this? Are you hearing this?*

This was the first song I had released since leaving a record label and becoming an independent artist. The concert was booked and promoted through my own management and not by a major booking company. I was blown away to see how many people believed in me. I could barely process how much they were supporting me.

I had a message I wanted to share, songs I was passionate about, and I was so grateful that every little dream in my heart was coming true.

Halfway through the song, I made a spontaneous decision to talk over the music, inviting every girl in the crowd wearing a onesie to come onstage and dance with me. The girls rushed the stage, and the energy in the crowd carried itself onto the platform as we jumped, sang, and screamed. It was one of the most memorable moments of my entire life.

My Career Is Far from Quiet

Even when I'm in the studio and it needs to be quiet so I can get a clear recording, it's *still* loud. Before recording, I check the room to make sure I won't be faced with any unexpected noise—including the low hums and rumbles of my laptop (it's really old and I'm really frugal) as it tries to load software, or the sudden starts and stops of the air conditioner desperately fighting against the Southern California heat. Any sound, big or small, must be silenced so that the quality of the recording is not compromised. Yet once I actually find the quiet I've been looking for, I press Record, and the quiet dissipates as I start singing or playing guitar.

It's *never* truly quiet. Whether I'm in the studio, attending an event or a meeting, performing, or doing an interview, it's rare that I find myself embracing quiet, and for more than ten years this has been my reality.

When I was nineteen years old, I was nominated for a Grammy for a song I had written while sitting on the floor of my dorm room. I was the youngest nominee that year, and I went home as the Dove Awards New Artist of the Year, with three other nominations. I would later see myself on 7UP cans around the country, as the winner of a fan-voted award through K-Love radio.

My next four radio singles would go on to be number ones; my songs would be on rotation at major retail stores, in commercials for Belk and Dell, and even on reality shows on VH1 and MTV. I would get phone calls and emails from NFL players and politicians from various parties whose children were big fans of my music, offering tickets to major games and events

in exchange for my creating a video greeting to someone for Christmas or a birthday. There was even a moment when my song was played on ESPN *accidentally* because one of the announcers had it as a ringtone and forgot to silence his phone while broadcasting.

I found myself performing on *The View*, and ended up taking home a pair of Whoopi Goldberg's shoes that she took off and handed to me. And I sang a duet with my *favorite* artist, Reba McEntire, at her request.

While I was humbled and excited by all the success, it often seemed increasingly difficult to find quiet.

For most of my years in the public eye, I was single. I made videos and songs about being content in my singlehood while at the same time praying that I would someday get married. I approached the topic with humor and a little bit of attitude—gracefully, of course—and

began to receive emails from girls, teens, and women in their twenties and thirties thanking me for being vulnerable and open about my story.

Kids all around the world were dancing to my music with their friends and classmates, and sometimes moms would tell me that I helped keep their children on a good path. College students would tell me that my songs were a part of their hope and support system as they grew up and as things in their lives begin to change.

While I was humbled and excited by all the success, it often seemed increasingly difficult to find quiet.

As I was growing up and leaning into my passion for music and the gift God had given me, some of my most joyful and

peaceful times were late at night when it was just me and my piano or guitar. At night I tried to keep the recording to a minimum; it was my assurance that I would be honest and sincere, and use my songs as a time to pray instead of work—the exception being when I felt led to document something for a later time.

I would sing about things I was thankful for and things I didn't understand. I would sing worship songs from church and make some up on the spot. I would write songs full of joy as well as lyrics that were sometimes too painful to sing.

Then, I listen.

I enjoy sitting in the space where everything is laid at God's feet and the expectation is to hear what He has to say. There was never the presumption that it would be a major announcement from heaven with glowing lights and a play-by-play of upcoming miracles, but I *did* find peace in the quiet and hope in those moments with the Lord.

But somehow, as my career grew and changed, I felt the need to change too. There was no more time for late nights of spontaneous writing and listening, and I succumbed to the pressure that any time I made music, it should be made into a moment. The joy in writing to worship was gone, and my number-one priority became writing for work.

I had always written songs in hopes of connecting with my feelings or with the feelings of the listener, but as the pressure mounted, it seemed like feelings became a currency. Every career high reinforced that it wasn't about how I could use the pain, joy, and beauty of life to find quiet moments to listen, be challenged, and grow. Instead, the goal was to use the noise to fuel even more and to avoid simplicity at whatever cost.

But that's not who I was. It's not who I am. And in the moments that may have seemed that I was at my highest, I was often drowning in the deep end, searching for the voice that always spoke. I simply had to listen.

Growing Up, Quiet Was Easier to Find

One of my earliest memories of growing up in the '90s is when I fell in love with Jesus. I was only seven years old, and it wasn't a romanticized concept of Jesus being my boyfriend or superhero. It was a quiet moment with my dad as he led me through a prayer that I wanted to pray, accepting Jesus to be a part of my life forever.

Thinking back to that day, I don't remember what room we were in. I don't know the exact date it happened, and I certainly have no recollection of what I was wearing or what I had for dinner later that night. But I specifically remember the sounds, as I know for a fact that there weren't many.

When I gave my life over to God and decided to follow Christ, I was overwhelmed with a peace and resolve that could only be explained as something spiritual even though it translated into the physical. I wasn't persuaded or pushed into making a decision, I simply knew it was what I wanted, and my dad helped me take the next step.

God doesn't move any more or less in rooms because of their volume or lack thereof. Yet for me, someone whose mind is constantly competing in a relay race of passing the baton, trigger after trigger, my heart stood still when God met me in the quiet. Because that was a place I craved more than anything.

I was surrounded by a lot of sounds in my childhood: We lived near an old train track that had the most inconsistent midnight hours; there were *many* outdoor dogs in our neighborhood, including mine; and I'm a preacher's kid, so our days and evenings in church were full of music, conversation, and sermons that were as deep as they were loud.

But I still managed to find quiet.

My mom—a homeschooler and pastor with a knack for interior design that made our house feel and look like it belonged in a magazine—loves quiet. And that's a little ironic because she and I both are outgoing and talkative, and if we can get the whole room laughing, it's a good day. But she would always recharge in silence.

When my mom, my sister, and I would drive to one of our homeschool groups, or when the whole family was driving to church, she would often turn off the radio and encourage us to just listen. Sometimes we would end up having deep conversations about culture, and other times we would end up cracking jokes and telling funny stories. But many times we would just sit in the quiet.

That was difficult for me. I would rather talk and tell jokes. But I knew that there would always be a safe place for me to find quiet if and when I needed it.

Morgan and my dad are naturally quiet.

As many similarities as I have with my mom, they have their own as well. My dad is an electrician by trade and is also a pastor. There's no way he could wire houses and troubleshoot *any* electrical issue if he didn't have the incredible ability to focus in the quiet. And my sister is very much like him. She's well-known as a poet and artist, and so much of her work

takes intentional focus and concentration. They are both disciplined in a way that, to me, is a learned skill.

I remember when my dad took Morgan and me camping for the first time.

We were around nine and seven years old.

We drove out to the woods, where my dad set up the tent to get ready for our daddy-daughters weekend. I don't remember everything about the trip, but I do remember that both Morgan and my dad were acting as though it was completely normal to put a tent in the woods. I remember them working in silence to get everything ready, and my disbelief grew as I slowly processed that I would be expected to sleep there.

I started asking questions about where we would sleep (just to make sure), what and how we would eat, and where we would go to the bathroom—to which my dad replied by just showing me a bucket.

Looking back, I can see that they were pursuing an evening of both quiet and adventure, of peace and freedom. But I was far from interested in pursuing it myself. So I asked my dad if he would take me home. And he did.

That was the last time I went camping.

While I am still positive that camping is not for me, I'm grateful to have the kind of dad who pushed me to try something out of my comfort zone and the kind of sister who was ready to try something new too. And I'm grateful to have the kind of mom who went, and still goes, against the mold, whether it's in regard to design or car rides, always challenging the status quo.

That was the essence of my childhood. It was peculiar and out of the ordinary—and everything I could have ever

wanted. My parents were, and still are, madly in love with each other, graciously committed to us girls, and passionate about being missionary and founding pastors of our intimate local church.

Our home was full of learning, music, and really, really good food. We were not perfect. We seldom had money for extra-curricular activities, and sometimes not even for rent. But we were honest. We were joyful. We were trustworthy and full of love. And years later, we still have a connection and a bond that's unmatched.

We were loud—even on the days when my sister and I were reading, our mom was working on an art project, and our dad was reconfiguring one of our electronics. Our love and joy reached a decibel level that resonated throughout our home and our lives, whether we were making sounds or not.

So when it came to finding quiet, that was easy. Peace seemed to go hand in hand with any moment that we faced.

Yes, life was challenging. We had disagreements, like any other family, and as a pastor's family, we were seldom in our home without others who needed our support. But somehow, in the midst of the noise, we would always find quiet.

We didn't have a lot of money for bookstores, but we loved books, so our mom took us on trips to the library. We fell in love with the smell of books and the soft sound of the pages turning.

We stayed late after church most Sundays, and we got there early, before the sound system was even turned on. We could hear the soft creaking of the wood floor as we walked up and down the aisle, listening to our dad practice his sermon.

Somehow, in the craziness and busyness of childhood, we always found quiet.

This Book Is All about Finding Quiet

But it is *not* about learning to tune out every sound. God can speak to us even in the midst of noise. He can speak to us even while our minds and our ears are being filled with other sounds. God *does* speak to us in the middle of the noise and the sounds and even the mundane and the simple. God is always moving, always speaking, and it's up to *us* to find quiet.

*Somehow, in the
craziness and busyness
of childhood, we
always found quiet.*

Life is full of noise, sound, and occasional reckless volume that we wish we could shut out. And sometimes we can. Sometimes we can step away, break away, move away from the commotion that causes us to feel like we're drowning in turmoil.

But other times, we can't silence the noise.

We can simply hope to find quiet while the sound plays on.

As I've gotten older, there have been many unexpected moments in my life. From health challenges to friendships falling apart to pursuing living out my dream career, I have faced my fair share of both highs and lows. They have all had the potential to become so overwhelming that I would forget how to step back, take a deep breath, and embrace quiet—and sometimes I have.

In this book, I share the day-to-day of finding quiet. Together, we'll journey through things such as learning to let go,

comparison, friendships, relationships, purpose, and more. We will talk through the lows of pain and self-doubt, and tackle the lies we hear from others and the ones we tell ourselves. We won't tiptoe around our insecurities, but instead we will face them head on as we press in to tangible action steps toward knowing and living in freedom.

With a career that is deemed successful only when it is at its loudest, I have found it increasingly difficult to find quiet. But when I do, it's worth the effort, and I know it will be for you too.

INTRODUCTION

I love interviews. And while I'm genuinely honored when interviewers ask me questions about upcoming projects or recent releases, more than anything, I enjoy listening to others' interviews. I listen to talk shows, podcasts, and YouTube shows while I'm getting ready for my day, on long drives, and while I'm spending my one to two hours a week prepping meals.

I've found that this has given me an abundance of random knowledge. I've learned about the discographies of obscure artists, the housing markets in certain areas of the United States, and all of the stories celebrities share about their kids and holiday vacations on late-night television.

My fascination with interviews started with a love for variety television shows like *Zoom* and *The Amanda Show*. I've always taken time to study transitions and structure, and to compare the delivery between improvisation and script. Growing up as an aspiring writer (and director, actress, producer), I knew the possibilities for learning through observation were endless.

As I got older and became a writer (and director, actress, producer), my observation became habitual. I watch sketches or interviews out of fascination and curiosity, but now as an adult with other tasks and obligations, I run out of time to watch the full show. And I don't want to walk around the house *listening* to comedy sketches or monologues, which are oftentimes made better by physical comedy or body language, so instead of watching, I developed the habit of listening to interviews, as I described, which I call *background interview listening*.

It's funny (and by *funny*, I mean sad) how we often don't realize the negative effects of some of our day-to-day routines. I remember with clarity when this realization came for me about my interview habit. I was sitting in a counselor's office in the spring of 2019, sharing the details of what it's like when my brain decides to run a marathon. I told her about my professional ability to overthink, which often can lead me to overact and to the late-night thoughts that keep me up.

I explained to her that because of my anxiety and OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder), I often have obsessive thoughts that are out of my control, and my anxiety feeds into those thoughts all too well. I also told her that I am fully aware that not every imperfect aspect of my life could or should be attributed to my neurological idiosyncrasies, and that I was constantly working to differentiate the two.

I told her that as much as I love social media and the ability to do a web search or place an online shopping order and instantly have access to anything and everything I could possibly need, the instantaneous nature of our culture often added stress to my life and caused me to feel rushed, frustrated, and inadequate.

After talking a mile a minute, trying to get all of my thoughts and feelings out as quickly as possible (partially because I was feeling anxious, but mostly because I'm frugal and I like to get the most of a fifty-minute counseling session), she asked me if I ever had moments when I felt at peace.

My face lit up.

I told her all about interviews. I also told her about music, shows, and podcasts, but I especially emphasized the interviews and their ability to help me find a steady pace throughout my day. I was almost proud to be able to say that I had found a "solution" for quieting my mind and aiding my ability to focus, when she asked me a question that stopped me in my tracks:

Is your mind ever quiet without noise?

I'm not sure if that is verbatim or not, but that's certainly how I heard it and will always remember it—which I've learned is significant about conviction. It's the moment when you not only hear what you've been asked or told, but you hear your response immediately after and you know that it's not the "right" response.

My answer in this case was *no*.

In that moment I realized that in an effort to quiet my mind, my anxious thoughts, and my rushed mentality, I wasn't seeking peace or finding quiet—I was simply muting it with a different kind of noise.

As much as I had listened to interviews featuring an actor and his new film, a philanthropist and her latest mission, or an entrepreneur and her road to success, I wasn't retaining knowledge as much as I was gaining information. And in the end, what good is a significant amount of information at the

expense of a hurried mind? As Jesus asks in Matthew 16:26 (and Mark 8:36),

What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?

It may seem as though I am being extreme or dramatic in saying that I shouldn't listen to interviews because it's too much noise. I want to clarify that for many people who struggle

So many times we have the opportunity to face our pain, but we choose to allow noise to cover it instead.

with anxiety or something similar, finding things to listen to is a helpful coping mechanism, and embracing that balance in our lives to help prevent panic attacks or other stress can be incredibly helpful. Yet when speaking in the sense of a "need" for more and more sound, the problem is not the persistent audio I hear while I put on my makeup or drive

to the studio. It is the inability to sit in quiet and breathe in the silence in the presence of the One who made me, and to be just who He made me to be.

How many times do we listen to music to escape heartbreak?

How often do we go to a movie and allow the surround sound to drown out the volume of pain in our everyday lives?

How often do we intentionally turn on a song when we're sad or angry, knowing it will only push us deeper into our sadness and despair?

So many times we have the opportunity to face our pain, but we choose to allow noise to cover it instead.

Life Tracks: Demos or Fully Produced?

I enjoy producing music. It's part of my job, but it's also a genuine hobby, and if I'm not spending time with my family, cooking, or listening to an interview, you can find me in my home studio working on a song.

Even though the guitar is my primary instrument, I usually start producing a song with either drums or piano. I find a tempo and set the metronome, oftentimes called a click track, which helps me stay on beat as I start to record. From there I supply some vocals as I finish the lyrics, gradually adding guitar, bass, and any other instruments I want.

I tend to work at a pretty fast pace. Once I have a concept in mind, my brain starts moving a mile a minute and I try to get all the melodies and rhythms recorded as soon as I can.

I almost always mess up. Like any other producer I know, I have to go back and rerecord mishaps or even new ideas, because that's simply part of the process. But occasionally I miss something. I don't realize that I hit an off note, or I simply record something differently from how I originally intended, but before I know it, I've spent hours on a song, adding instrument after instrument, track after track, and still not realizing that one little tweak has yet to be made.

It's likely I won't notice the hiccup until I go to officially record or share the song. While it's just a "work tape" or "demo" on my computer, I don't stress myself out over fully developing or producing every little moment. At this point it's something for me to listen to, continue to work on, and grow from, and nothing more. It's loud, busy, and fun, and I don't even notice that there's a random drum sound or background noise

buried deep down that I probably didn't intend to be a part of the finished product. Or in some cases I *do* notice it, but since the song is only a demo, I can always go back and make adjustments later.

Sometimes we allow our lives to operate like a demo.

We experience a moment that breaks our heart, upsets us, causes anxiety, or tears us apart, and instead of choosing to right the wrongs or face the pain, we pile noise on top of the broken pieces. We add instruments, vocals, melodies, and drum pads on top of the broken piano tracks and share with the world unfinished products, hiding the depths of who we really are.

It's only the people who truly know us—and oftentimes only ourselves—who can peel away the chaos and uproar to find the fragmented pieces that we rushed over, sitting there buried beneath the noise.

A lot of times I love the demo or the acoustic, artist-interview interpretation of a song more than I like the one that charts on the radio. I would rather my favorite artist sing in my living room than hear the fully produced and perfected track through my headphones. It's imperfect and complex and maybe even a little off-key, but it reflects the reality of life and is far more relatable than anything perfectly tuned.

More important, God isn't looking for us to be perfect. He has no interest in us pretending that our days or minds or hearts exist without flaw. But He *is* interested in us bringing those flaws to Him. He is in the business of righting wrongs, mending hurting hearts, and putting broken pieces back together.

So why do we hide our brokenness?

Why do we bury our pain?

Why do we cover up our hurt?

For many of us, when we face pain, everything shuts down. When we find out that our dream job or school is out of reach . . . when we go through a breakup . . . when someone takes advantage of us physically, emotionally, or sexually . . . when we can't resolve an argument with someone we love . . . when we let down the person who has continually believed in us . . . when we break another's heart . . . when we hear of the death of a loved one—it feels silent. It feels like the world around us has stopped, and for a moment, it's only us—and so much uneasy quiet.

We face this every day if we're battling anxious thoughts or even a diagnosis of anxiety. We are triggered by a thought, a smell, or even a sound that takes us back to the hopeless and daunting feeling of being absolutely alone.

When we're faced with such quiet, we have only two options:

We can fill the room and fill our heads with countless sounds and noise to drown out the pain that we don't want to face,

OR

We can find refuge and maybe even strength, allowing quiet to be more than the absence of noise and to be truly the epitome of peace.

We can enjoy the imperfect demos as well as the impeccably produced songs, allowing our lives to dance even while flawed and broken, as we rush to the feet of the perfect One who mends all.

I will forever love music, podcasts, and interviews. I will listen to piano ballads when I'm in my feelings, dance to upbeat

songs when I'm in a good mood, and crave a good interview when I want to learn something new.

Simultaneously, I will actively seek *quiet*. I will embrace the moments that make me feel weak and allow my mind to be pursued by the One who does His best work *in* my weakness.

And throughout this book, I'll invite you to join me. There will be moments filled with memories of when I found quiet, some poems, and strategies.

Together, we'll find the balance of beautiful noise that carries us to places we've never been, while choosing to face the fear of the simpler times when quiet becomes our fortitude.

We'll have moments of joy and laughter as well as challenges and convictions. But through it all we will grow and learn on a crazy, exciting, and resilient journey to finding quiet.

—Jamie Grace

one

The Toll of Daily Anxious Thoughts

When I was seven, I made a decision to love Jesus for the rest of my life.

When I was eleven, I was diagnosed with anxiety (as well as Tourette Syndrome, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder).

I daily experience an exceptional amount of anxiety.

I daily experience an exceptional amount of faith.

Every day I struggle with the fear of allowing the wrong side to win.

My faith tells me that anything is possible. It tells me to allow my Creator's strength to be made perfect in my weaknesses. It tells me that while I am not perfect, my Creator doesn't make mistakes. I am loved as I am. Yet I am in need of perfect grace to carry me. The grace is available—new mercies every day. And if beauty were a sound, my faith would be the loudest.

But anxiety's voice is speaking too.

My anxiety tells me that silence and uncertainty mean I am not loved. It tells me that if I make a mistake, I should replay it until I make a new mistake that's worse—and then I will start replaying that one. But the only thing that happens is a never-ending cycle of ruminating over what I've done wrong or what I said that was awkward, instead of extending even a small amount of grace to myself. Anxiety tells me that people might not like me—a problem that is *my* responsibility (it's not) and needs to be solved right away (it doesn't). It tells me that I can't get out of bed sometimes, so I stay there. Or that I can't spend time with my friends (for no reason), so I cancel. It leaves me in utter panic that if I go out or leave my room, I am making a big mistake.

It tells me that if I text someone back right away I seem too anxious, but if I wait too long they must think I don't care enough. So I leave my texts unread for weeks, often feeling my breathing speed up at the idea of apologizing for taking so long to get back to them. I'm convinced that they believe I've gotten "too famous" or simply don't care, so I stare at the words, hoping for relief until I eventually find the courage to say something. Anything.

Usually their response is incredibly chill. But I can find a way to overanalyze that too.

It's difficult to understand because it's hard to explain. I've spent most of my adult life trying to figure out the line between my clinically diagnosed anxiety and my character flaws and emotional weaknesses—and how in the world I should recover.

I tried medication.

I was pretty heavily medicated from ages nine through fifteen. My tics from Tourette's were becoming increasingly aggressive and violent as my legs flailed and kicked whoever was standing by, or my neck jerked while I was in the car and my head slammed into the rear door window. In an effort to keep me safe, my parents and I decided together that I should try medication, but the results were not worth the side effects. The goal of the medication was to calm my tics down, but as a result, I became sluggish and exhausted and lacked the drive or motivation to do much of anything. In the end, it made sense to avoid those medications altogether.

I tried to pray.

I tried the soft, sweet prayers where I talked to Jesus like I'm on a smoothie date with my best friend. It's almost like we walked into a local juice bar and placed our orders of Krazy Kale Blast and Strawberry Banana Bananza to sit down and quietly talk through our differences. I would politely and calmly say, "Jesus, I want to talk about my illness," and our conversation would continue from there. I have humbly requested to be delivered from a lifestyle of worry and repetitive, often self-deprecating, thoughts.

I tried talking to Him like He was a best friend who stabbed me in the back, but not in the metaphorical sense. The anger and frustration of feeling betrayed, misled, and manipulated built inside of me as I tried to understand how and why the One I trusted most would take something from me—my peace, my joy—and not give it back. I have screamed, yelled, and possibly been too proud, nearly demanding freedom. I have felt moments of relief. Moments of peace. But my daily battle is still being fought.

I tried medication—again.

In my early twenties, I was working too much. I love my job and would never trade it, but I was a full-time college student who was touring five days a week, as well as writing and creating a record on my off days. I met with my neurologist, whom I hadn't seen since I was fifteen, and we decided that a low dose of antidepressants might be helpful. It was, for a season. But that season didn't last forever.

I tried counseling.

My alma mater required all counseling majors (which I was for a semester) to go to at least one session with the campus counselor. I was terrified at first. But when I realized that I could sit across from someone and talk through *all* of my over-analyzations (fifty minutes' worth, anyway) and she was legally obligated to try to help *and* to keep it all a secret? I was overwhelmed with gratitude and desperately wanted her to be my new friend. After our session I even tried friending her on Facebook—until she told me that counselors and clients couldn't be friends like that. I felt embarrassed and awkward, and the humiliation and insecurity sent me into a few days of isolation and I avoided her office at all costs.
#anxiety

In 2016 I found a counselor who walked with me through heavy pain and anger. I was happy to find hope again after moments of thinking it had been lost. We met weekly for a few months, and on two or three occasions we even met twice a week. She asked thought-provoking questions that led me to want to grow spiritually and emotionally, and walked me through steps to make those changes. She helped me understand words like *trauma* and *victim*, and helped me learn how

to not only receive grace from God and extend it to others, but to extend it to myself too.

A year after I met her, I moved from Atlanta to Los Angeles and didn't want to face the anxiety of trying to find a new person to trust. It was so challenging that it was nearly a year of living on the West Coast before I found a new counselor. My first meeting with him was exceptional. He asked me questions about myself and shared quite a bit about his process. I went back the second week, confident about digging a little deeper, when about halfway through the session he said something that counteracted with my faith. It was unrelated to both our session and my story, but I shut down. I never went back.

In 2019, another year later, I finally pursued counseling again. And much like my Atlanta sessions, it has now become a weekly source of encouragement, support, accountability, and even laughter. I enjoy my counselor, our meetings, and even her office and the noise machine in the hallway. And while I don't expect to ever live a perfect life, I still have moments of anxiety that are further from my own expectations.

I want to live a life free from overthinking. I want to be able to say what I believe should be said, live as I have been called to live, and love others the way I believe we all deserve to be loved, without picking things apart. I want to be able to have conversations without being stuck on the way I said hello, and watch a movie

I'm able to hear the voice of reason and rationality, and I want to live a life where it speaks louder than fear and doubt.

with my family without the fear that their silence (remember, we're watching a movie) means they're upset with me.

I'm able to hear the voice of reason and rationality, and I want to live a life where it speaks louder than fear and doubt.

Breaking Point

One day when my husband, Aaron, came home, about two months into our marriage, I broke down crying the second he walked through the door. It was only the second time it had happened since we got married (note: I'm currently worrying what you think of me as I'm typing, and trying to convince myself I shouldn't delete this paragraph), which would seem like an improvement compared with previous seasons in my life, when I would have breakdowns almost every day. But looking back, I realized I had settled on a new way of coping—instead of counseling, prayer, and/or medication, I had begun bottling up all of my tiny feelings until they became a big pile of feelings that simply couldn't be bottled anymore.

For weeks, I had taken every small alert in my head and buried it. I hadn't talked about anything because of the fear of how I would be perceived. I was afraid to speak up because I was nervous of what Aaron would say if I needed to talk for fifteen minutes about something incredibly random, off-topic, and analytical just to calm myself down. So instead, I carried around irrational fear until a day when it was just too heavy.

This day's spiral had started with a phone conversation with my mom, which led to my dad joining on speaker. They were

attempting to reassure me that I was overthinking a small detail, but anxiety assured me that panic was the only option. When Aaron walked in the front door that day, I broke down. I cried. I ranted. I sobbed. I could barely catch my breath while trying to explain all of the seemingly minuscule stresses that had built into this massive breaking point.

I remember him asking me if there was anything he could say, do, or even not say or do. I told him there wasn't anything for him to do, and I didn't know how to calm down or stop my tears. So he simply asked if he could sit with me until I would be ready to talk, and hold me, so I didn't have to cry alone. I said yes. And that's exactly what we did.

While there is no such thing as a perfect human, I know that Aaron is the perfect one for me (#cheese), because in that moment, instead of judging me or making me feel worse, he decided to sit with me and be the physical representation of love and support that I needed.

Fear, Truth, and the Result

My parents tell me that I've repeated this cycle since I was a kid. I had anxiety about personal issues like what to wear to a friend's house or who I should or shouldn't invite to my birthday party. And sometimes issues that were bigger than I weighed me down and kept me up at night as I felt overwhelmed by the fact that I wasn't old enough to be a foster mom or that I didn't know exactly how to end homelessness in America. I would start to overthink, overanalyze, and even self-deprecate, to the point that my anxious thoughts became anxious feelings, and I would find myself falling onto

the couch or into my parents' arms, crying, panicking, and worrying.

My parents have told me these stories, and many of them I remember for myself. Every new life change, whether good or bad, brings about new anxieties and new learning curves. But no matter how great the classroom, I don't always like the lesson.

It's a terrible habit to bury your pain until it eventually overflows. So in the spirit of being a human who seems to thrive on repetitiveness, I've begun to create new habits for myself in an effort to find healing:

I make a choice to say three things to talk myself back from whatever downward spiral my mind is attempting to chase:

1. My greatest fear
2. What I know
3. The truth

Fear, What I Know & the Truth

I was afraid he would judge me.

I knew he wouldn't judge me.

He didn't judge me.

I was afraid he would think I'm too much.

I know he doesn't think I'm too much.

He doesn't think I'm too much.

I was afraid he would seem frustrated.

I knew he wouldn't seem frustrated.

He wasn't frustrated.

I know the truth.

I have a faith in the truth.

I just have anxiety too.

I don't know what my life without anxiety and OCD would look like. I don't know what the future for an overactive mind looks like. I don't know when I'll have a bad day of overthinking again or if I've reached the worst of it. I don't know if this is all mind, some emotions, mostly personality, a sprinkle of neurological abnormalities, or a mixture of it all (likely the latter).

But I do know that I can't live like this. With a diagnosis of asthma, which requires me to have a prescription nebulizer, I know I cannot be trapped in my own mind, believing that I need an inhaler more than my actual lungs.

FINDING QUIET

My earliest memories are loud, ambient, and full of racing and anxious thoughts. They are flooded with fear and insecurity. Low self-esteem. Significant self-doubt.

Except when they're not.

I *do* have peaceful memories: When I was five and sang at our school's graduation. When I was six and sang at the pavilion in Stone Mountain. When I was seven and I sang along with my mom while she led worship. This list goes on.

I like the way it feels to sing. But more than that, I like to know that the words I'm sharing just might help someone

get through the week, the day—the moment. And maybe, if I really press in to what it means to feel, the words can reach me too.

The joy in writing and sharing what’s on my mind is one of the greatest thrills in life. Singing, talking, creating a video,

dancing, writing . . . I get anxious because I’m ready to share the next word, yet I’m at peace because I get to.

It’s easy to believe that everything will be okay when everything is okay.

And that’s what brings us here.

It’s the moments when we feel like everything is crumbling before us . . .

My journey of finding and accepting peace as much as I can. The great, the challenging, and the everywhere in between of finding quiet in the midst of diagnosed anxiety, overthinking, and overanalyzing.

that faith proves just how powerful it can be.

And whether or not you have clinically diagnosed anxiety or deal with any other trace or form of anxious or racing thoughts, I hope you know that it’s okay to feel that way and still have faith. Faith that you can *still* have joy. Faith that you can *still* have a song to sing—even if you’re not a good singer. ☺

If we’re being honest, our faith *during* these times is what can show us just how powerful faith truly is. It’s easy to believe that everything will be okay when everything is okay. It’s the moments when we feel like everything is crumbling before us and completely falling apart that *faith* proves just how powerful it can be.

We’re going to get through this.

We're not going to pretend that a book or a song or any earthly treasure can lead us to any version of a perfect life. But we are going to work hard to find hope and support as we navigate toward the definition of *quiet* and our choice to embrace it.

On our journey to finding quiet, here are three reminders that can help us along the way:

- 1. You are not alone.** You might *feel* alone because you can't hear other people's thoughts and insecurities, but other people are afraid that they are being judged too. There are other people who are scared about the future or regretful about the past, and there are so many people who are praying for peace.
- 2. Not everyone is going to understand, and that's okay.** You can still have faith that the right people will be placed in your life at the right time. Even people like Job didn't get the support from his friends that he thought he would, and Jesus himself was let down by people close to Him. This is all a part of life, but it doesn't mean that you can't have faith that there *will* be people you can count on.
- 3. It's okay to ask for help.** You are not alone—you do not have to walk through this alone—and that may mean that you have to take the first step toward building community. I'm grateful for my family and their choice to continually invest in me. I also have to make the choice to go to my counselor's office, to be honest with my medical team if I feel like I'm having a setback, and to be transparent with my mentor and friends when issues arise.

We won't allow anxious thoughts to take our peace hostage.

We won't allow anxiety to captivate our rest.

We won't allow overthinking and over-analyzation to dictate who we are.

We will find quiet.

Oftentimes we will have to seek it out more than once, pursuing it again and again. There may even be times when peace will coexist with pain, and rest will seem to collide with our tears and sleepless nights. But we have come too far and invested too much to give up now.

We will persist.

We will press on.

We will fight and we will surrender.

Truth. 09.22.19

I choose to let truth have the final word, even though lies are easier to believe.

I fight in a daily battle against anxiety that tells me that I'm not enough.

I'm not beautiful.

I'm not successful.

My voice doesn't matter and my words don't hold value.

And I can't even say that anxiety says that I'm not loved and cherished. Because anxiety takes a step further into my insecurities and says I'm not even able to be loved. I'm not even capable of giving love.

I should hang up my coat or throw in the towel or give up the hope of hoping to matter because I am far from

*loveable, not even decent, just breath and bones with
density decreasing moment by moment each minute
of the day every second of every hour I hear my mind
say just stay in bed, don't get up, why would you add
to the world?*

*You're a burden, you're too much, you're too cliché—
rhyming girl with world.*

You have nothing to offer.

You have nothing to say.

*The songs they liked were a onetime thing. The videos will
fade, just stay in bed, don't get up.*

*Don't brush your hair, don't eat, don't sleep, just stare at
the wall and think about the most awkward things
you've said.*

Ruminate over the worst parts of your day.

*Start a cycle of pain, fear, and doubt where you can't
function or process freedom or being freed from the
weight that's on you heavier than shame, heavier than
pain because it bears the reality of every negativity ever
named.*

Don't text your friends.

Give it weeks at a time.

Don't answer your phone.

*Let it ring, but push that little button so it rings on silent
so people think you're busy changing the world and
writing songs when you're really in a dark, quiet room
staring at a wall.*

I fight.

*Some would say to fight is to be free from all pain. But
the reality is my fight is the ability to see pain. To see*

my brokenness broken before a battle every day, where I choose to let truth have the final say. I'm not asking my pain to never exist because without disgust, beauty could never exist. Without pain, I wouldn't understand healing and without being weighed down I couldn't appreciate freedom.

So when my mind starts to wander and my thoughts start to scream, I let them have their moment to open the show because this gig doesn't pay a thing. Not my time, not my attention, not even lousy applause, I write down the exact lies that my mind wants to tell and I let truth step up to the mic and be the headliner. Because my mind says that I'm not enough. But truth says that I don't have to be. Because I was made by the epitome of enough for me and He does His best work when I am weak.

My mind says I'm not beautiful and I'm too big and too weird. But truth says there's something wonderfully made about me, and I can't get my truth from a scale or a mirror.

My mind says I talk too much and I should just be quiet. But truth says what if there's a new season that could change the world? What if your story is the pilot?

What if our minds are the biggest liars?

Somewhere between anxiety, depression, and our character flaws? What if they're not yet trained to always tell us what we need so instead all we hear are despicable, disgusting things?

And what if instead of being consumed with the fix, we sat in the hurt, the pain and the sick. We wrote down

the untruths and the doubts and the worst and we choose in a moment to let truth have the final word. Even when lies are easier to believe. When sad songs are more fun and isolation more convenient. Or even when it's painful to break down day after day but somehow it's easier than speaking up and asking for help. When panic attacks are easier to understand than peace even though they tear us apart and leave us feeling weaker than the moment we started.

I fight a daily battle.

And I make a daily choice.

In the discombobulated truth that is my world, when I don't always believe it and even when I don't know how, I choose to let truth have the final word.
