

Finding God in the Hard Times

Choosing to Trust and Hope
When You Can't See the Way

Matt and Beth Redman



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Dedicated in loving memory of
Rachel McColl
and Natalie Kathryn Brown



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Foreword to the First Edition

Stunned!

Shocked by circumstance!

Set back!

Shaken by life's earthquakes!

We've all gone through difficult times, but not all of us have managed them well—at least not when we were hit by the first of the many collisions that are a part of life. At some time, we will go through overwhelming and staggering events that will seem to shatter our life's horizon. These events come like lightning bolts—unpredictable and blinding—only to be inescapably followed by the rolling thunder of whatever aftermath the unwelcome eventuality brings.

Matt and Beth Redman have experienced such events and, as a result, not only have they given us a wonderful song to assist us in the face of such circumstances, but they also offer this

book to encourage us. If you've "been there, done that" when it comes to having experienced trials that, while not shaking your faith, have left you shaken with questions, then you'll be blessed as Matt and Beth share these letters and their own stories of how in the midst of life's shattering moments, the Holy Spirit can bring us stability in the presence of the One who alone is able to calm our fears and address our questions with *himself*—the ultimate and only adequate Answer.

This song became an anchor to the life of our daughter Rebecca, as well as to the entire congregation at The Church On The Way, when Scott Bauer, Rebecca's husband, our son-in-law, and the congregation's senior pastor, died almost instantly at age forty-nine due to a massive hemorrhage from a brain aneurysm. In what we see as the prime of life, a beloved husband, father, and shepherd was suddenly transported to his eternal home. And while the confidence of his being "present with the Lord" held—and yes, *holds*—great spiritual comfort, derived from our faith in Jesus Christ, when such a shocking event occurs, seldom does immediate consolation come to the raw surfaces of our emotionality or the rough edges of our mind's reasoning.

God isn't offended by this. Indeed, Jesus' tears at Lazarus's tomb—even in the face of His knowing that He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead—are enough to assure us that He understands our grieving over life's losses, trials, or shaking circumstances. We *do* have a place of refuge in, and recourse to, the One who is "touched with the feeling" (Hebrews 4:15 KJV) of our weaknesses, pain, and struggles.

We, and our church family, tasted that compassion when Matt and Beth's God-given song became rich ministry to us and became a balm of healing in the congregation's life. Rebecca had called me the day after Scott died and said, "Dad, could we sing 'Blessed Be Your Name' on Sunday? I keep playing and singing it over and over here at home."

To my chagrin, I had to admit that I didn't know the song. Because Scott had assumed the oversight of the church, my travels had disallowed my keeping current with the congregation's worship repertoire. But I learned Matt and Beth's song that Sunday, and I can hardly describe the progressive infusion of faith it gave us—even more, *the joy beyond sorrow* that spread through all of us—during those first days after Scott's homegoing. We sang:

And when the darkness closes in, Lord,
Still I will say . . .
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your glorious name.

Oh, what comfort! What a strong, stabilizing, comforting, dynamic, and Word-centered declaration!

And so, Matt and Beth, my deep thanks are extended to you. I understand, as composers do, that songs do not come without having paid a personal price to learn their truth. You have enriched us all by drawing us to the deep truth that, ultimately, knowing Jesus isn't about "getting blessed" or "receiving blessings." Rather, it's about knowing Him—the changelessly faithful One—no matter what is going on around us!

As you, dear reader, take up this book, I believe that you will be blessed and taken into the dimensions of enrichment that are only found in finding God's love and comfort *within trial and beyond sorrow*. Not only are God's love and comfort evident in the testimonies written in this book, but they are also timelessly and preciously promised in *His Book*: the solid, unshakable covenant of God's Word, which assures us,

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. . . .
When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned
(Isaiah 43:2).

Pastor Jack W. Hayford
Chancellor, The King's College and Seminary

Foreword to the Second Edition

The phone rang at 5 a.m. Two dear friends were on the line. Their four-year-old was dying of a brain tumor and had been taken into the hospital—would I come and pray? For the next couple of hours, I just stood silently in the corner of the hospital room, pleading with God as two remarkable people tried to come to terms with every parent's worst nightmare as they comforted their young son in his last days.

Around 7 a.m., I got another call. This time it was Sarah, another church member, who was terminally ill with cancer. She had experienced a massive seizure that morning and had been rushed into the hospital. I went down to see her in the accident and emergency ward, and after she regained consciousness, we started chatting together. Sarah was a woman of great faith who knew that she was dying. We talked of our Christian hope of a new heaven and new earth, and agreed that one day

we would like to “do” the coast of Donegal together! I treasure the memory of how keen she was to know whether I thought there would be Guinness available! She was still smiling when the hospice staff arrived to take her into their care.

All the while, however, I was anxious to make two phone calls of my own. The first was to Simon. The day before, he had technically died four times before being resuscitated. That morning, he was having life-saving heart surgery in Brighton. I wanted to pray with him before he went down to the operating room. I only just caught him in time. The second call was to my grandmother, who was in the hospital and very unwell. I really wanted to get to see her, but it was a three-hour drive and I needed to explain why it was not going to be possible that day.

Eventually at about 10 a.m., I got in the car and tried to go into the office. I didn’t make it. I felt overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted. There was no way I was going to be able to concentrate. So I went to the beach, sat on the shore, and watched the waves come in.

Over the next three months, I was to bury three of those four people. Over the next three months, I was to sit on that beach many times.

What Matt and Beth have done in this beautiful book is to provide simple yet profound advice to help prepare Christians for those “beach moments.” *Finding God in the Hard Times* provides the reader with the tools for lament—how to mourn in the presence of God. This book is, in effect, a framework of Christian thinking to help us filter and view life’s pain. Of course, nothing can prepare us fully for suffering. Quick-fix

remedies do not work and, I am glad to say, are not found in these pages. What is sensitively written here points us toward a God who longs to reveal himself in the worst of circumstances, a God who continues to bring victory in the face of death, a God who can still bring beauty out of the most awful and ugly things, a God in whom hope springs eternal.

Richard Wurmbrand, who himself was imprisoned and tortured for his faith, tried to explain it this way: “In prison we had to unlearn our theology and relearn *Theos*—God—the one of whom theology speaks. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that a Bible verse will comfort you. It’s the living God of whom the Bible verse speaks who can only bring comfort in our suffering.”

It is this God whom this book encourages us to meet in our pain. Blessed be His name!

Andy Hickford
Senior Minister, Maybridge Community Church
Worthing, England

Blessed Be Your Name

Blessed be Your name in the land that is plentiful,
Where Your streams of abundance flow,
Blessed be Your name.
And blessed be Your name when I'm found in the desert
place,
Though I walk through the wilderness,
Blessed be Your name.

Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise.
And when the darkness closes in, Lord,
Still I will say,

Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your glorious name.

Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down
on me,
When the world's "all as it should be,"
Blessed be Your name.
And blessed be Your name on the road marked with
suffering,
Though there's pain in the offering,
Blessed be Your name.

Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise,
And when the darkness closes in, Lord,
Still I will say,

Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be Your glorious name.

You give and take away,
You give and take away,
My heart will choose to say,
“Lord, blessed be Your name.”

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Introduction

A few years ago, while on sabbatical, we found ourselves writing a little song called “Blessed Be Your Name.” Wrapped around the themes of worship, suffering, and the sovereignty of God, the song was borne out of a deep conviction that, come pain or joy, to worship God is always the best decision to make. The song was the soundtrack to so much of our journey in God—fatherless times when He proved to be ever faithful, and seasons of rejection and abuse when God proved to be closer than we ever knew He was. By the grace of God, we’d seen enough to trust Him—no matter how dark things appeared to be. And trust gave birth to worship.

Since writing the song, we’ve heard so many stories of how the people of God have responded to Him in trust and praise—in some of the harshest life circumstances that we’ve ever come across. Letters, conversations, and emails have unveiled many different tales of abuse, rejection, and heartache—or stories of those who’ve lost loved ones in the most shocking

of circumstances. Yet there's a common theme linking all of these reports together—a determined choice to press on with lives of praise amidst a world of pain. All of these worshipers have found themselves surrounded by the storms of life, and yet they have decided to respond to Jesus with a faithful cry of “Blessed be your name” in their hearts. Come rain or shine, come hardship or ease, come confusion or clarity, they are an army of worshipers making the daily choice to respond to God with an unshakable devotion. This book is for all those who long to be counted alongside this inspiring group of worshipers.

Matt and Beth Redman



God remains as faithful as the day He
created you in love, and as powerful as
the day He spoke the world into being.

one

My Heart Will Choose to Say

Worship is always a choice. At times it's an easy, straightforward one. When life is peaceful and painless, the choice to respond to God in thanksgiving and praise may not be such a hard one to make. But at other times in our lives, worship becomes a much gutsier decision. Caught up amidst a whirlwind of pain and confusion, the decision to cry out, "Yet I will praise you!" is a costly act of devotion. In the life of every worshiper, there will come times when worship meets with suffering. And these moments shape what kind of worshipers we will become. Yes, praise be to God for times of abundance and plenty in our lives—those carefree days full of peace and laughter. Yet we praise Him also in the wilderness times—those dark and stormy

seasons of the soul when we're left crying out with the psalmist, "How long, O LORD, how long?" (Psalm 6:3).

When trials come, trust must arise. When there's nothing to rock the boat, our trust in God is rarely tested. Seasons of stillness and calm are wonderful, yet before too long, the winds will start to gather, and we'll find ourselves caught up once again in the storms of life. The question then is this: Can we still find our way to the place of praise? We may have faith to believe in God as Lord of the *calm*—but do we also have faith to believe in Him as Lord of the *storm*? He is Lord of both the hurricane and the gentle breeze. The One who rules and reigns amidst all of the earthquakes of this life—those times when our whole world seems to be shaking and breaking apart.

For each of us, growing up was not an easy journey. Our childhood and teenage years were marked by family breakup and loss. Looking back now, our little stories are a testimony to the rescuing and restoring nature of God.

Matt Redman

For the first seven years of my life I was a carefree and contented little boy. All that changed one night in March 1981 when my dad died suddenly. It was a shocking time, and looking back now, I can still picture the moment I was told of his death. A few years later, I found out he'd actually committed suicide—which came as a bit of an aftershock, and brought with it some more painful questions. Was it anything to do with me? Did he not love us enough to stay around? But by the grace of God, this painful season propelled me toward Him, not away from Him.

A year or two later, my mum (herself a passionate follower of Christ) remarried—and at first it felt like I had a new father. However, a couple of years in, things turned sour, and we soon discovered that he wasn't the man of integrity and faithfulness he claimed to be. After mistreating us as a family and abusing my trust, he was forced to leave. And again we found ourselves "fatherless."

In these dark seasons of the soul, faith is either strengthened or broken. Contentment and trust build us up. Bitterness and complaint eat us up. History is full of people who chose the path of bitterness and found themselves in an even worse place than where they started. But wise worshipers know that the only healthy way ahead is to take all they know of God and turn it into trust and praise. By His grace, even in those early teenage years, I had seen enough to know that God was good—and that time would tell He was in control. Looking back now, I can see His Father heart and His sovereign hand all over that season of my life. The passage of time has demonstrated what all along I knew to be true—that God is always closer and kinder than we know; He is a father to the fatherless.

Beth also had a grueling childhood, bullied and abused by people she should have been able to trust. The key for both of us was that we'd seen enough of Jesus to enable us to endure. And while the enemy may have tried to use those bad circumstances to contradict the goodness of God in our minds and hearts, by the grace of God, we'd encountered Him strongly enough to trust Him—even in seasons when nothing seemed to make sense.

Such times are like a case of spiritual car sickness. Motion sickness when you travel in a car is caused by your senses contradicting each other. Say, for example, you choose to read a book as you travel. The balance sensors in your ears tell you that you're moving quickly—yet your eyes report that you're not. It's a case of conflicting senses. One way to cure the sickness is to add more evidence to what you know to be correct. For example, rolling down the window and sticking your hand out of a fast-moving car will help confirm to your brain that you are indeed in motion.

The same is true of the spiritual life. There may come seasons of pain when we desperately try to cling to what we know to be true about God, and yet we are utterly confused by a hardship we're experiencing. Our knowledge of Scripture tells us that God is eternally good; yet at the same time, a very tough life situation seems to be screaming the complete opposite at us. Before long, we find ourselves in a case of spiritual motion sickness—living in the tension of what we think we know to be true, and the deep pain that seems to contradict it.

The key is to reinforce what deep down you know to be true, by adding extra revelation. Spiritually speaking, roll down the window and stick your hand out. Open the Bible and feed upon the truths of God and His faithfulness. Strengthen your understanding of His ways as you read. Find encouragement in the lives of those who chose to trust His power, grace, and purpose amidst their darkest hours. Look over His track record in your own life and in the lives of those you know to love Him.

See how often He has poured out the oil of kindness in times of trouble. How on many occasions He has rescued seemingly at the last possible moment—or turned around something that at the time seemed like it could never lead to fruitfulness. All of these things build faith in us. And faith will always fan the flames of worship.

The book of Lamentations gives us a great example of a worshiper who experienced pain and yet used the act of remembering as a pathway to praise. *The Message* words it like this:

I remember it all . . . the feeling of hitting the bottom. But there's one other thing I remember, *and remembering, I keep a grip on hope.*

Lamentations 3:20–21, emphasis added

What a fantastic way to give voice to this powerful principle! The discipline of remembering helps us keep a grip on hope and find our way on the paths of praise.

In the next verses of this chapter, the writer reminds his soul:

GOD's loyal love couldn't have run out, his merciful love couldn't have dried up. They're created new every morning.

Lamentations 3:22–23 THE MESSAGE

Returning to the car-sickness illustration, the worshiper here is consciously rolling down the window and sticking his hand out into the air that he might be affirmed and strengthened in what his heart, deep down, knows to be true about God.

The writer of Lamentations was not alone in his faith-building technique. The psalmists were constantly practicing this discipline. In so many of the psalms, the writer recalls the story of God's faithfulness as a bridge toward worship and hope. Psalm 13, for example, begins with a desperate cry but ends with a reminder of God's track record in his life:

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?
vv. 1–2

Five urgent questions from a worshiper longing to be free of his suffering. Yet he ends his song with the choice to believe and trust in the powerful and merciful nature of his God:

But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing the LORD's praise,
for he has been good to me.
Psalm 13:5–6

The psalmist here teaches us a beautiful truth: *Remembering releases rejoicing.*

Throughout the ages, the people of God have found strength in this approach. Take, for example, the writer of the old hymn "The Solid Rock"—a song deeply rooted in the truth of an unchangeable, unshakable Savior:

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace.¹

In other words, in times when we can't seem to perceive God amidst our pain, and the clouds of anxiety and fear close in on us, the way forward is to remind ourselves of what we know to be true and dependable—the unchanging grace of God.

It's a little like looking at the moon. We've all seen a full moon and therefore know something of its form. But we don't always witness it like this. Some nights we see a half moon, at other times just a small sliver of moon. And on some occasions we see almost nothing at all—just the faintest outline hidden by a cloudy night sky. Yet the point is this: Even when the moon is obstructed from our view, we are still convinced of its existence and true form because of what we have seen in the past. The same is true of our walk as worshipers of Jesus. At times, painful life circumstances seem to obstruct our view of Him and His goodness. But we have seen the form of the Lord many times before—in life and in Scripture—and know Him to be as good and as kind as He ever was. Faced with challenging times, a wise worshiper looks over the form of the Lord—recalling the soul-refreshing wonders of His nature and attributes—and through this finds a way to the place of praise. Our Father in heaven has an incredible track record.

Faced with anguish and distress, the psalmist even talked to himself. To find strength and hope, he repeatedly speaks to his soul, reminding himself that there is One who can save him. Twice he cries out in Psalm 42:

Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.
vv. 5–6, 11

If you yourself are in a season of struggle, take a moment now to remind yourself of the God who sees your struggle. It's possible to talk your soul into a place of hope. We worship a triumphant Savior, a victorious King. The all-powerful and all-loving God, who is faithful in all He says and gracious in all He does. The One who has never been anxious, overwhelmed, or outsmarted. The God of unbroken promises. When He acts, no one can reverse it. When He speaks, His commands never return empty. The God who never wastes His words. The doors He chooses to open, no one can close; and the doors He purposes to close, no one can open. No plan of His has ever been thwarted. No one has ever outmaneuvered Him, outlived Him, or out-loved Him. He remains as faithful as the day He created you in love, and as powerful as the day He spoke the world into being. And in your brokenness He stays as close and as involved as you want Him to be.

To worship God is to tell Him that we believe Him for who He says He is. Every day we're faced with the choice either to acknowledge and proclaim Him as the great and merciful God He declares himself to be or to deny Him. Intense though it may sound, the truth is this: If we deny something good about God, we automatically imply something bad about Him. If we deny God's sovereignty and power, we imply, to a degree at least,

that He is weak and has lost control. If we can't bring ourselves to trust that He is full of mercy, then perhaps, at least in part, we're implying that He has a mean or uncaring streak. There is actually no middle ground. He is either the all-powerful, all-loving God His Word declares Him to be, or He is not.

That may sound a touch harsh. Please hear it in the context of the incredible wealth of patience, kindness, and compassion stored up for us in the heart of God. For in His amazing grace, our heavenly Father finds delight even in the most broken and fragile of our offerings—in the same way that an earthly father will rejoice upon receiving a simple yet heartfelt piece of art from his young child. Yet this is only one side of the mystery, for our God is also the majestic and holy King—worthy to be trusted and believed in for the wonderful truths He says about himself. He desires and requires faith, trust, and obedience—He wants worshipers who stake their lives on the truths of His nature and attributes.

Note the heart posture of a Nazi concentration camp prisoner who once scribbled these lines onto the wall of his cell:

I believe in the sun,
Even when it is not shining.
I believe in love,
Even when I feel it not.
I believe in God,
Even when He is silent.²

Yes, every act of worship is a choice—a decision to believe and respond to God for who He says He is—no matter how

pressing our circumstances. And the greater the pain we're experiencing, the greater a choice it may be. Sometimes we will walk blindly, unable to understand why we are going through a certain situation—our only comfort being the knowledge that God himself is not walking blindly, but instead is wisely, kindly, and firmly in control. Indeed, as we will begin to see, so often our Father in heaven will take our broken moments and weave them into a powerful tapestry to the glory of His name.

Questions for Reflection

1. This chapter talks about the uneasiness we feel when bad circumstances conflict with our understanding of the goodness of God, calling this imbalance “spiritual car sickness.” Write down several spiritual truths—perhaps verses you’ve memorized—that you can remind yourself of to reinforce what you know to be correct.
2. “Remembering releases rejoicing.” Think back on some times in your past when God has revealed His goodness and love for you. Can you think of a way to keep these memories at the forefront of your mind when you’re struggling with doubt and pain?
3. “Worship is a choice.” Can you think of something you could do today to help you choose to worship, or as Matt and Beth put it, “Find your way to the place of praise”?



The church of God needs her songs of lament just as much as she needs her songs of victory.