

Chapter 1

Be still and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10, NIV)

Bright, fluorescent lights flash by overhead. Foreign sounds come from all angles, voices fade in and out, the hum of stretcher wheels are slowly discerned. The movement down the hall causes confusion, fear, and dread. I shouldn't be here.

2020 is a year burned into our minds. It's a collective marker in history we each experienced in personal ways, and yet it was an extraordinary shared experience. I started that year in a brand new job, at a new school, with all new people. My emotions cartwheeled through excitement, nervousness, anticipation, fear, and apprehension. Through all of those emotions I found there was peace. I knew I was where God alone had placed me. The journey that led to the job taught me I have to obey God's direction, and He will be faithful to give it when I seek Him. My faith was firm that God would be enough for this new experience.

I dove into learning the job, and spent the next three months on an intense learning curve. I sought His guidance continually, having conversations with Jesus as I walked the halls to the next crisis needing my attention. By March I found myself extra tired. Our spring break was lurking and I was really looking forward to a week off, the rest it would give me. It was a little surreal to reflect that it had only been a year since God had changed the direction of my work. It felt like He put me on a path, and then kept whispering "Hurry up. You need to keep going." There had been an urgency to the whole process.

In my part of the world, the pandemic really showed up in March. Just before the scheduled break it was announced the schools would not reopen to in-person learning. Staff were suddenly told to take all personal belongings home, take everything you would need for teaching from home, and don't leave anything like plants in the rooms. It was unreal. It felt ominous. What was happening? What did the future hold?

That week I slept a lot. I started experiencing a fatigue like nothing else. When I was awake all I could think about was when I could go back to sleep. I would sleep for hours and wake up exhausted. It didn't make sense. I should be catching up, regaining my energy. I knew I had been working hard, and I figured the stress of the new job must have been more than I realized.

We started back to school virtually. That was a whole learning experience. Every day involved solving new challenges we had never faced before. I discovered having the whole day spent sitting in front of a screen was not a pleasant experience. I felt more tired than ever. I blamed it on the virtual environment. Then one day I noticed my right leg felt kind of funny, sort of weak. It wouldn't work properly when I went up and down the stairs. I suddenly needed the railing to make sure I didn't fall. This weakness progressed over a couple of days, and soon I needed to hold the wall just to walk. The fatigue piled on, and felt like a weight pressing down on all sides. I made an appointment to see the doctor. They were initially wanting just a virtual appointment because of the pandemic, but when the doctor heard my symptoms she wanted to see me in person. Keith drove me to the appointment, because by that point I couldn't walk without assistance, and driving was out of the question. At the appointment the doctor examined me, didn't say a whole lot, printed off my medical chart and handed it to me. "You need to go to the hospital, and you need to go straight there from here." *Oh good grief. This doctor is overreacting!* I was having a hard time comprehending what she was saying. I had to get back

home so I could get back to work. Why didn't she tell me what was wrong with my leg? I remember leaving the doctor's office wondering what was going on. I wasn't worried, but puzzled.

We called our three sons from the road, letting them know where we were headed. All I could tell them was I was having weakness in my right leg and the doctor was sending me to the hospital. There was no sense in them coming to the hospital as they wouldn't be allowed in anyway. Thanks to Covid there were very tight restrictions, and it was mostly patients only. When we arrived, Keith had to get a wheelchair to get me into the hospital. It was almost dreamlike. I was having a hard time comprehending everything that was happening. As they were registering me, the woman looked at me then at Keith, contemplating. "You can wheel her down the hall yourself." she said. We had no idea how important that decision would be for us.

Once I entered the emergency room area things started to happen very quickly. Keith was told he could stay with me, but couldn't leave the curtained area where I was. I was examined by an intern, and then by a doctor. An IV was started and I was sent for a scan. I began to wonder if this might be a little more serious than I thought. Back from the scan, we prayed together, and I thanked God for arranging for Keith to be with me.

My experience with hospital ER's is one of waiting, often for long periods. This time was totally different. It seemed like they were working quite quickly. Within two hours of entering the hospital, two doctors were standing in front of us. They both lowered their masks and their faces were very serious. *What is happening? They look so serious. This can't be good!* They proceeded to inform us that I had a brain tumour. Shock rolled through like a bulldozer, taking out everything that was standing in its path. *This has to be a mistake. I'm a healthy person. I've always been very healthy, rarely getting sick, and I work in classrooms that can be like petri dishes. A brain tumour!* I looked at Keith. The shock, confusion and pain that I was feeling was mirrored in his face. How was this happening to us? Why was this happening to us? The doctors explained that further imaging was needed and I would be admitted. Thanks to the Covid protocols, this would mean saying goodbye to Keith. I had just been given the worst news of my life, and now they were going to separate me from my husband. I would have to stay at the hospital, separated from everyone I loved, and try to process the news that I had a brain tumour by myself. This was too much. My mind swirled. *I can't do this! I don't want to do this! Someone tell me it's a mistake!*

I was wheeled up to the neuro floor and taken to a room. It was evening by then and there wasn't a lot of activity. I looked around at my surroundings but didn't really take anything in. It was like my mind couldn't make the proper connections, the thoughts just wouldn't connect. My entire body was reeling, waves of disbelief and shock kept washing over me relentlessly. Questions pounded in my head. *What? Brain tumour, this is bad! How did this happen? Why is this happening? What does this mean? Will I ever walk again?* At some point I broke. It was like a damn let loose and the grief and pain came rushing over and flooded every fibre of my being. I sobbed like never before. Those tears were fuelled by fear, by grief, by uncertainty, by anger, by loneliness. Even now as I write this the pain of that moment rises up in my memory and I experience the intensity of it again. I remember thinking that I just wanted to scream, but didn't want to have nurses come rushing and disturb everyone else. So I sobbed as quietly as I could.

I'm not sure how long I cried. I was completely disconnected with time. At one point the nurses came in to give meds to the others in the room. The nurse who checked on me had compassionate eyes above her mask. She took in my tear stained face. When she asked if I needed anything I could hardly comprehend the question. I had started my day in the comfortable familiarity of my own bed, and now I didn't recognize anything. "You've had quite a night. Try to get some sleep." I could hear the kindness in her voice, but it didn't really connect. How was I supposed to sleep?

As the night marched on, my tears eventually ran dry. I was left feeling hollowed out, empty and exhausted. The reality of my circumstances was creeping into my being and slowly demanding to be acknowledged. I had a brain tumour. My life was completely upside down. I had absolutely no control. My default mode of 'doing' was absolutely useless. I was stuck in a hospital bed, alone, and scared. Now as the quiet of the night overtook my room, I noticed the sounds around me; the rustle of my roommates, the footfalls in the hallway, the beeps of all the monitors. In that quiet I began to pray. Up to that point my prayers had been single words "What? Why? Help!" Now I was able to focus my mind and my heart more. I found myself experiencing a stillness unknown to me. I was stuck in this time and place, and didn't have control over what was happening to me. It was a forced stillness, new and uncomfortable. I didn't want to be here. I was desperate for someone to wake me up from the nightmare. Yet the stillness provided space for my mind to quiet down a bit, for the speed of my racing thoughts to slow down from their frantic pace. In that stillness I was able to put words to my thoughts and turn my full attention to God. As I poured out my heart to God I knew with utmost certainty that He was right there with me listening to every word. It was raw, honest prayer. I had been stripped down to the end of myself and knew that Jesus was the only thing I had. It took every ounce of strength I had just to form the words. My prayers expressed the agony of the experience. *Oh God please no, no, no! Why is this happening? God please make this stop! How did this happen? Please help me! I can't do this God! Please help my family! Jesus I'm scared!* It was a depth of pleading that I had never gone to before.

Life has a way of handing us circumstances that challenge our faith, and this was one of those times for me. I was presented with a choice there on that hospital bed, my pillow soaked with my grief. Did I really believe that God was enough for these circumstances? Was He really God, and if He was what did that really mean? I was still, but did I know that He was God? You see, the thing about that verse is that there is a period there. Be still and know that I am God, PERIOD. There's nothing else asked of us. I must stake everything on the belief that God is who He says He is. It strips away all of the fringe things that can become part of our faith, and exposes the core of our belief. Lying in that hospital bed, in the middle of a long, dark night, I was forced to confront the core of my faith. There was a choice to be made. I had been a follower of Jesus for a long time, but did I really believe that God is who He says He is? Was I willing to be still and know that He is God?

What does it mean to know something? The thirst to know things has driven humanity since the beginning. It has led to all kinds of discoveries, and taken the human race beyond the borders of our planet. It has also been the driving force behind the development and success of things like social media. This desire to know can challenge us to grow, but also take us to

places that lead to destruction. After all, the human drive to know was behind the temptation and ultimately the sin by Adam and Eve. They had the privilege of knowing God in a very intimate way. The daily communion was a physical presence of the Almighty. Every need was met, and they knew God in such a personal way. Yet they wanted to know what God knows, to understand all knowledge. They were tempted with the desire to be like God. The relationship they had with God wasn't quite enough. It wasn't just about knowing God, and all the intimacy they shared with Him in the garden. The temptation to be like God proved overwhelming. In essence, giving in to this temptation signaled that their circumstances were not enough. They had a personal, intimate relationship with the creator, but somehow that wasn't enough. They wanted to be like God, to possess divine knowledge. Seems a little ungrateful at first glance. Here they are living in perfection, with everything in creation providing their needs. Almighty God is a daily real presence in their lives. Seems like perfection. Why want more?

I'd like to think that I would have sent that serpent packing straight away. I would have seen through his deceit and the lies he was spewing. I would have run to God and told on that nasty serpent! But that's just arrogant thinking. Adam and Eve knew God in ways that I am only scratching the surface of. The reality of having a relationship with God is that we will be confronted with our limits and get to the end of ourselves pretty quickly. We are commanded to be still and know that He is God. The distinction between who He is and who we are is clear. Blurring that line leads to all kinds of difficulty. You only have to continue reading the story to see that Adam and Eve faced a whole new reality once they disrespected the boundaries, one that now included pain and suffering. Having the comfort of my health suddenly stripped away forced me to consider what I really believed about God. It was like running up against a cement wall. No matter where I looked I couldn't see a way around it. There wasn't any where to go, and I was forced to confront what my beliefs really were. Did I really believe that God is real? Was He really the almighty, powerful creator? Lying in a hospital room wracked with grief, pain and uncertainty, was He enough for this circumstance? You see, in the garden, God was enough for Adam and Eve, until they made the decision that He wasn't. God didn't change who He was, their perspective changed. Now at this crossroad in my life, I faced a challenge to the foundation of my faith. What perspective was I going to choose? In walking with God, did I really know that He was God without any doubt?

Foundations are one of those things that I don't really give much thought. I walk into all kinds of buildings and notice the aesthetics, but never consider what makes the building possible. Without that foundation, purposefully laid, nothing lasting is built. There are different materials that are used to build on, from wooden platforms to poured cement. Some are more lasting than others. If I want my life to truly be built on God, then I have to be purposeful about a lasting foundation. As I wrestled with my questions, God brought to my mind the whole previous year's journey, the process He took me through to prepare for a new direction at work. He deliberately took me on a journey, down a path that I didn't choose. I never felt alone in that process. I couldn't see the end but I was confident of the direction. God gave me exactly what I needed when I needed it. I knew in my heart that He was my God, and He was in charge. So I took what God had carefully built, and applied it to my new circumstances. God had been building the foundation of my faith through those experiences, and now that foundation was what I had to rely on. I chose to believe that God was still with me, that He knew the path I was

on, and that He would give me exactly what I needed when I needed it. It was a real act of my will, to decide that I was going to believe that He is God.

At some point in the middle of that night, the same kind nurse showed up at my bedside again. "Still not able to sleep?" I could only shake my head no. "That's understandable." She paused thoughtfully, then continued. "Your body really does need sleep though. Why don't I get you something to help you sleep?" I shrugged and managed to croak out "OK". She brought me a pill and a blanket and helped me arrange myself more comfortably. As I laid there, waiting for the magic of that medication to kick in, I continued to talk to God. *Ok Lord, I've decided. I believe you are God. Please help me!*

God, I will be still and know that you are God.