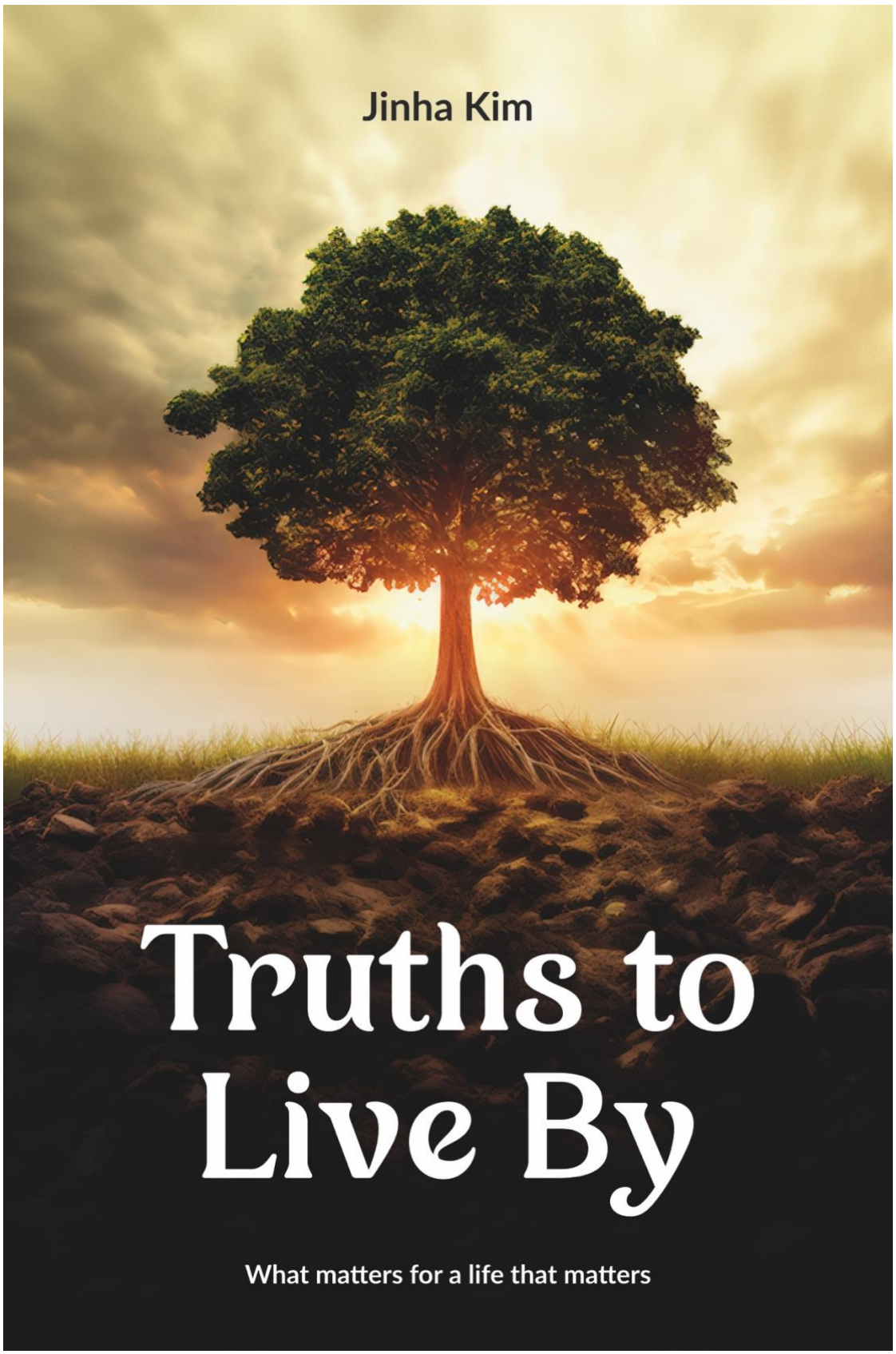
Jinha Kim
Truths to Live By
What matters for a life that matters

SAMPLE DRAFT of TRUTHS TO LIVE BY

by Jinha Kim

Introduction

I wrote this book for my boys. I hope they read it when they become adults and wonder what truly matters in life.

When they first learned to read, I posted a list of statements on the fridge. I wanted them to internalise these statement that I titled "Micah and Joshua's Truths to Live By." The list included declarations like, "I am loved. I am unique. I am strong. I am kind. I can make mistakes and try again."

I asked the boys to recite them every day, but they resisted—after all, they were only five and eight years old at the time.

I was hoping that repetition would imprint in their minds this blueprint for happiness, for I have learned that happiness comes when you know who you are, where you belong and what you live for.

However, my boys have taught me that we learn best by observing and emulating lives well-lived, rather than merely repeating statements.

So I have written down some "truths" along with stories of incredible individuals who have embodied each truth in ways that have personally inspired and impacted me. I have also shared some of my own story and how I have tried to make sense of life's joy and challenges, opportunities and trials.

I work as a pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and so some of my professional and church experience is inevitably part of my story. I realise this world might be unfamiliar to many people—but I hope you will persist through this unfamiliarity and discover that pastors are people, too. Whatever our education, profession, experiences and circumstances, we are all trying to work out what matters most and how to live by the truths we know and hope are true.

At the end of each chapter, there are some reflection questions and suggested next steps. I invite you to keep a journal to chronicle your own journey through the book.

While the book has been written so that you can read one chapter a day for a month, you might choose to read it slower in order to engage more meaningfully with each chapter. Perhaps you can read this book with someone you want to know better, or someone you want to learn alongside.

So, this book is not only for my boys. It is also for all of us who want to live a meaningful life—a considered life, where you choose who you become by taking the time to engage with the questions, ideas and opportunities that we often ignore in our busyness. I believe this is what matters for a life that matters.

When my boys are older and facing difficult choices, I hope they can journey through this book and find purpose and direction.

I hope you can, too.

1: Everything Can Grow Again

"The tree is more than first a seed, then a stem, then a living trunk, and then dead timber. The tree is a slow, enduring force straining to win the sky."

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, writer and aviator

I was born in a major port city in South Korea to a mum, dad and older sister with strong convictions and even stronger hearts. Their love was like a canopy, providing shelter from all sides: my mother, with her palpable concerns and considerations for my wellbeing; my father, with his quiet but consistent support for my endeavours; and my sister, with her determined and enduring devotion to my happiness. They taught me much of what I know to be true, much of what I have had to re-learn.

My mum always said that she tried to raise us with deep roots so that, no matter what happened, we would always have entrenched values and connections to bring us back home.
That was true when we immigrated to the United States when I was eight years old, when I left home to attend university when I was 18, when I moved to Australia to start my own family at 28, and when I was experiencing burnout at 38.

The last shift felt the hardest to navigate, perhaps because shifting mindsets requires more courage than shifting continents. My resilience had run out somewhere between the demands of parenting young children and the various repercussions from a global pandemic, including living through the world's longest COVID-19 lockdowns—in Melbourne, Australia.

In the morning, I didn't want to get out of bed. At night, I didn't want to go to sleep.

During the day, I lost my patience with the kids. In the evening, I lost patience with myself. Regrets fuelled my insomnia with thoughts like:

I shouldn't have yelled at the boys.

I should have ran that Zoom meeting better.

I shouldn't eat this ice cream.

I should stop scrolling.

At the end of 262 days of COVID-19 lockdowns, as life started to pick up pace again and remote learning came to an end, I was incredibly grateful and relieved—but I also wondered whether I could muster up the strength to stay on top of all the juggling again.

Work, social engagements, and household chores all felt much harder to navigate and I felt like quitting and crawling into a cave.

I had to learn that rebuilding resilience takes time and, above all, hope. Hope that renewal is possible. Hope that it's all worth it.

As I started writing this book, I began to feel that hope. As I researched the lives of people who have inspired me over the years, I began to recognise myself once more.

For example, Tony Rinaudo reminded me that everything can grow again.

When Tony was a young boy in country Victoria, Australia, he loved climbing trees and running through the blue hills and valleys. So he was dismayed to witness trees being felled and indigenous flora and fauna bulldozed to create tobacco fields. Pesticides killed the fish in nearby rivers and made the streams unsafe to swim in. When he watched the news and saw images of children around the world going to bed hungry, Tony felt angry at the adults who had destroyed the land for short-term profit.

One day he found some discarded books lying in a shed and picked up two volumes that caught his eye—*I Planted Trees* and *Saharan Conquest* by Richard St Barbe Baker. Tony read the books from cover to cover, transfixed by St Barbe Baker's insight, "When the forest go, the waters go, the fish and game go, crops go, herds and flocks go, fertility departs. Then the age-old phantoms appear, stealthily, one after another—Flood, Drought, Fire, Famine, Pestilence."1

Tony decided to study agriculture and do something to address the environmental destruction, injustice and poverty in the world. But what could he do? How could he do it? Frustrated with his powerlessness, Tony prayed, "Father God, please use me somehow, somewhere, to make a difference."2

After graduating from the University of New England in New South Wales, Tony and his new wife Liz trained to become agricultural missionaries in Africa. On September 26, 1981, Tony, Liz and their 6-month-old son, left Australia and headed to the Republic of the Niger.

For several years, Tony joined the efforts of previous volunteers who spent millions of dollars planting, fencing, and guarding thousands of tree saplings in an attempt to reverse the devastating effects of deforestation in Madaoua, Niger. Tony tried planting all kinds of trees, exotic and native, at various time and places, but less than 20 per cent of the seedlings survived, and even those remnants were taken by desperate people needing firewood.3

The locals called him crazy for wanting to plant trees on precious farmland and refused to listen to his pleas that trees would increase their crop yield by decreasing the temperature of the ground, bringing back springs, and increasing biodiversity that would fertilise the soil.

He had nothing to show for his years of sacrifice and hard work. It all felt so futile.

Then, in May 1983—coincidentally, when I was born—Tony was driving his small truck across the arid land and feeling ready to give up, when he stopped to adjust the air pressure in the tyres. As he crouched down, he noticed a small shrub nearby. Upon closer examination, he realised it was actually a tree that had been hacked down. It looked like a bush, but it was a tree stump that was trying to regrow.

Suddenly, Tony had an epiphany. He didn't need to plant new trees! He only needed to prune and protect the root system that already existed underground, remnant of trees that had been chopped down. There were hundreds and thousands of such "shrubs" dotted around the landscape, and they only needed help to grow! Superfluous branches, which sapped the nutrients and stunted the growth of the tree, needed to be cut off, while the strongest and tallest branches needed to be protected. Repeated regularly, this pruning and protecting would transform the "shrub" into a tree.

At first, Tony faced a lot of resistance to this new idea. Entrenched ideologies, attitudes and practices were even greater problems than the Sahara Desert, budgets or lack of resources. He realised, "If it were peoples' destructive actions that had brought the environment to its knees, it would require people's restorative actions to reverse the damage. If people are the problem, they must be part of the solution."4

It took Tony many years of patient and persistent promotion of his concept, coined Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR), but his perseverance paid off. Without planting a single tree, over the next 30 years FMNR grew back 240 million trees across 6 million hectares of farmland in Niger.5 FMNR practices are now being implemented in many countries around the world.

For Tony, it's not only the regeneration of trees that make his work and life worthwhile. Now that families are self-sufficient, their dignity is restored. It's not merely the trees, crops and biodiversity that are returning, but hope.

Oscar- winning filmmaker Volker Schlöndorff made a documentary about Tony in March 2019, entitled *The Forest Maker*. Towards the end of the film he narrates, "Nothing is lost. No tree is dead. No root is dead. Everything can grow again."6

As I heard those words, I remembered my roots.

Everything can grow again.

Hope. Faith. Love.
Dreams. Purpose. Direction.
Community. Justice. Reconciliation.

Growth and change are possible, one day at a time.

The roots of transformation are already there.

Do we have the courage to believe?

Reflect: *What feels hard or "dead" right now in your life? What are you hoping to (re)grow?*

Act: *Identify and write down the thoughts, practices or obstacles that hinder the desired change. Identify and write down the thoughts, practices or opportunities that promote growth. Write an action plan to "prune" the barriers and "protect" the opportunities.*

1. Richard St Barbe Baker, *I Planted Trees* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1944), page 244.
2. Tony Rinaudo, *The Forest Underground* (Melbourne: ISCAT, 2021), page 50.
3. ibid, page 141.
4. ibid, page 155.
5. ibid, page 12.
6. Volker Schlöndorff (director) (2022) *The Forest Maker* [Documentary], Zero One Film, Germany.

2: Be Thankful, Always

"It is not happiness that brings us gratitude. It is gratitude that brings us happiness."

—David Steindl-Rast, monk, author, lecturer

I was almost 8-years-old when we had to pack our lives into just eight suitcases.

My father had decided to move our family from South Korea to the United States—and we had to leave almost everything behind.

Friends came to help us pack the essentials and took everything else away, including many of our personal and valuable items. My mum cried. I was too young to understand what she was leaving behind—not only material possessions, but her family and friends, country and comfort zone.

Our lives changed drastically when we crossed the Pacific Ocean.

My mum had been a stay-at-home mum, but now she had to get a job working in a factory. She wrote beautiful poetry, was a natural public speaker and a fantastic teacher. But none of those skills transferred to a new country where she did not know the language and culture.

In Korea, my dad had a promising career working for the Korea Immigration Service as part of the Ministry of Justice. But now he had to work as a night security guard and church janitor. As someone who had been top of his class in school and a respected member of the community, it was difficult for him to be at the bottom of the ladder in this new society.

My sister and I had to learn English quickly—not an easy language to acquire—and navigate a new school system and culture. I remember struggling to make "th" and "r" sounds and glancing at others to see how to use a knife and fork.

Immigrant life did not get easier with time. We lived hand to mouth and barely made the rent each month for our small two-bedroom apartment. We had to forego school excursions, birthday parties and social outings. Some Sundays, we helped our parents make and sell things at local markets.

But my parents did their best to provide my sister and me with opportunities and experiences. They sacrificed, scrimped and saved to take us to landmarks like the Niagara Falls and the Statue of Liberty. We explored countless museums and monuments in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and Williamsburg, Virginia. We went camping every summer by the beach.

I had started piano lessons in Korea, but lessons were too expensive in Los Angeles. A Korean woman who lived in the same apartment building knew how to play, so my mother arranged for her to give me occasional lessons in exchange for my mum regularly babysitting her toddler.
Somehow my dad lugged a donated upright piano up three flights of stairs to our apartment, and despite its broken keys, it made music that brought us joy.

No matter how exhausted she was after a 10-hour shift or no matter how tight her grocery budget, my mum cooked us labor-intensive, nutritious meals. As a mum myself now who often orders take-away, I appreciate more than ever how much mental, emotional and physical resilience this would have taken for her to do every day.

My mum eventually recruited my dad into the kitchen and he was in charge of our lunchboxes. Our homemade veggie burgers took him an hour to make every morning.

And no matter how long it took and how much petrol it cost, my dad drove us to every activity we ever signed up for without complaint, waiting patiently outside or arriving back at least 15 minutes early so that we would never have to wait for him.

Sometimes the financial stress was overwhelming. There were months when my parents couldn't find employment or when extra expenses like car repairs added tremendous pressure to the household budget. But my parents taught and inspired us to be grateful for small blessings, for the small things add up to become life-changing.

One Friday, we didn't even have $20 to buy petrol for the car to drive to church the next day. My parents prioritised church and served in various capacities within the community, so it was unthinkable for them to miss a day. We prayed together as a family. Later that afternoon, when my dad checked the mail, there was an envelope with a $20 bill inside. Someone had sent the cash and letter a few days earlier, saying they had felt impressed that we might need it.

Small miracles.

Twenty years later, I once again moved across the Pacific Ocean—this time, to Melbourne, Australia, where I started my own family.

I often remind my two boys to be grateful for living in one of the most liveable cities in the world and for having more books, toys, birthday parties, and holidays than both my husband and I had in our entire childhoods. They lack nothing and I sometimes wonder whether they can truly appreciate just how fortunate they are.

But every week, we go around the family table and share what we are thankful for. Sometimes, they mention the newest experience or toy. But always, they say family—and it makes me feel that in a small way, I am passing on my parents' gift of counting our blessings.

And what a gift it is—to be able to see that no matter what our circumstances, we are still so rich.

Reflect: *What are you thankful for today?*

Act: *Start a gratitude journal, where every day you write down at least three things you are thankful for, including people you are grateful for, things that went well, and what you are learning from your challenges.*

9: The Opposite of Stress Is Kindness

"No kind action ever stops with itself. One kind action leads to another. Good example is followed. A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees. The greatest work that kindness does to others is that it makes them kind themselves."

—Amelia Earhart, first female aviator to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean

My first day at Princeton University was September 11, 2001.

Because Princeton is only an hour from New York City, I had planned on skipping orientation and visiting the Big Apple. But my older and wiser sister—in her second year at Princeton—convinced me to be a good girl and stay for orientation.

A few hours later, someone ran down my dormitory hallway yelling, "The tower's been hit!" New students and old huddled together in the Student Centre around the big screen and watched in disbelief as a second plane hit the Twin Towers.

Panic and fear gripped the nation as reports and rumours of more terrorist attacks rippled and multiplied.

Meanwhile, when US airspace was closed indefinitely, 38 planes carrying 6579 passengers from 92 countries were diverted to Gander, a town in Newfoundland, Canada, with 9651 residents and four traffic lights. These re-routed passengers were scared, confused and exhausted as they waited on the tarmac for hours for updates about their interrupted travels.

The entire town of Gander mobilised to accommodate these guests. Businesses and individuals donated mattresses, clothes, medications, toiletries and food. Volunteers drove buses to transport the passengers to community halls, schools and churches, which had been converted into emergency shelters.

For five days, the people of Gander hardly slept as they took care of their unexpected guests, inviting strangers into their homes to use showers, internet or beds, and taking them hiking, boating or fishing to distract them from their anxiety.

There was one plane full of terminally ill children who were supposed to be at Walt Disney World through the Make-a-Wish Foundation. The local police constable organised a party for all 350 children: stores donated gifts, the local co-op shop baked a 5-metre-long (16-foot-long) cake, and volunteers stayed up all night making wands and tiaras for the children.

When the visitors were finally told they could get back on their planes, thousands of tearful goodbyes took place. One Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer chose to send off the guests by standing at full attention at the airport, where a blind girl from Germany carefully touched his curved brim hat and wool tunic, to know "what kindness felt like."1

Despite donating thousands of dollars' worth of supplies and services, no-one would accept money. They all said, "You would have done the same for us. . . . it's the Newfie way. If you have a slice of bread and your neighbour don't, you have half and you give him half."2

This neighbourly attitude transformed what was a traumatic event into a communal experience, where lifelong friendships were formed and whose true stories inspired the award-winning musical, *Come from Away*.

I watched the Melbourne production of the musical between COVID-19 lockdowns, a time when fear drove people across the globe to panic buy, hoard supplies, and shift blame, while others chose to practice kindness instead of discrimination, generosity instead of greed.

For example, Dr Catherine Barrett, who was also living through Melbourne's lockdowns, set up a Facebook group #TheKindnessPandemic where individuals could share photos and stories of acts of kindness. Within a month, more than half a million people from around the world joined the group, inspired by the power of kindness to combat fear and isolation.3

These examples of altruism show us what is possible in the face of crisis, that there is another way to cope with stress rather than fight or flight. According to Dr David R Hamilton, author of *The Five Side Effects of Kindness*, the opposite of stress is not peace, but kindness. Physiologically, participating in or even witnessing acts of kindness produces oxytocin, the hormone that lowers blood pressure and cortisol levels.4

So why don't people choose kindness more often? In 2021 the University of Sussex carried out a "Kindness test," where more than 60,000 people from 144 countries were asked to fill out a questionnaire about public attitudes towards kindness. Respondents said that the most common barriers to kindness were concerns of being misinterpreted (66 per cent), not having enough time (58 per cent), use of social media (52 per cent), not having the opportunity (42 per cent), or kindness being seen as a weakness (28 per cent).5

People hesitate to help because they're not sure their help will be appreciated. And yet, 99.9 per cent of respondents said that when they were the recipients of an act of kindness, they were grateful, happy and relieved.6

So the chances are, kindness will make a positive difference.

By being kind, we can bring healing to ourselves and others.

By being kind, we protest against the pain and chaos in the world.

Reflect: *Think of a time when you felt kindness. How can you pay it forward? When do you find kindness difficult? What helps you choose kindness?*

Act: *Do something kind for someone today without expecting anything back.*

1. Konrad Marshall, "The tiny town behind a heartwarming 9/11 tale," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 30, 2019, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/north-america/the-tiny-town-behind-a-heartwarming-9-11-tale-20190326-p517pe.html>.
2. ibid.
3. Erwin Rinaldi, "Kindness becomes 'infectious' during the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to the power of storytelling," *ABC News,* March 24, 2022, < https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-24/kindness-part-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-legacy/100933260>.

4. David Hamilton, “Kindness is the opposite of stress,” August 6, 2021, <https://drdavidhamilton.com/kindness-is-the-opposite-of-stress>.
5. Alice Ingall, “Two thirds of people who took part in The Kindness Test think the pandemic has made people kinder,” *University of Sussex Broadcast*, March 9, 2022, <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/57570>.
6. Claudia Hammond, “What stops people from being kinder?” *BBC*, March 25, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20220323-what-stops-people-from-being-kinder>.

28. Listen to the Pain

“*If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.*”

—C.S. Lewis, scholar, writer, professor

At first, I thought I was experiencing back pain.

For several months, I had trouble sleeping at night because of intermittent but intense pain between my shoulder blades. I thought it was due to bad posture or a poor mattress—and I tried to ignore the pain.

Then one evening, as I was hosting a dinner party, I suddenly felt such a sharp pain in my abdomen that I could barely breathe. I collapsed on the floor and felt nauseous. I hesitated about going to the hospital, especially as I had guests. But Roy said I looked very pale and our guests looked worried, so we gave our apologies and headed to the emergency department.
Test results showed that my liver was inflamed. At first, they sent me home thinking I was a low risk for some of the more serious causes. However, they recommended an ultrasound just to be sure.

As soon as my ultrasound was completed the next day, I was urgently sent back to the hospital for an emergency gallbladder surgery that lasted five hours. The surgeon told me that I had five gallstones blocking the ducts and that they had a tricky time removing them along with my gallbladder. If they had not operated when they did, I would have had life-threatening infections.
I thought I had back pain.

I had ignored the pain for months.

We sometimes do the same with silent pain, the kind that is not caused by skinned knees or broken bones.

When we experience disappointment, loneliness, discouragement, anxiety or grief, we sometimes bury our pain, put on a brave face and keep going. Perhaps we try everything in our power not to get hurt, by building walls around our heart and not letting anyone in. But the pain is still there.
So then we might try to numb it with our drug of choice—perhaps overworking, binge-watching, comfort-eating, drinking, scrolling, shopping—but the pain is still there.

Avoiding, denying or repressing pain doesn't bring us healing, physically or in any other sense.
Doctors tell us to pay attention to our pain to discover the root of our problem, so treatment and healing can begin.

So what does it look like to listen to our pain, figuratively speaking?

For me, it means having the courage to ask why there is so much pain, not just in my own life but in the world. As I grapple with the existence of suffering, I am forced to also confront why the presence of pain bothers me so much.

If we are here by chance and all of nature is evolving, isn't pain just a part of natural selection? Isn't death a necessary process for the survival of the fittest? Why do the suffering and death of strangers bother us? Why does it feel so wrong when bad things happen to good people?

Could the pain in our own lives be telling us that there is right and wrong, and we should hold ourselves and each other accountable? That Earth suffers because it is the battlefield where morality, justice and goodness are simultaneously championed and opposed?

C S Lewis, known as "Jack" to his friends, was four years old when his dog was killed by a car. Then his beloved mother died when he was nine. His father then sent him to a boarding school in England, where he felt completely alone, miserable and ill. He found solace in music and literature.

He was a brilliant student and was awarded a scholarship to Oxford in 1917, but within a few months of commencing his university degree he enlisted to fight in World War I. Only 19-years-old, Jack experienced the horrors of trench warfare, witnessing the deaths of close friends and being wounded himself. For months, he lay in the hospital, homesick and depressed, but his father did not visit him. By the time he resumed his studies, he declared himself an atheist.
He became an English Literature professor and taught at Oxford University for 29 years and Cambridge University for 9 years, until his death.

Because he loved literature, Jack found within the great writings of Christian authors G K Chesterton, Dante and George MacDonald the profound pull of Christianity. But he still resisted the idea of God.

Then he had a long talk with his friend and colleague J R R Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings*, about religion and mythology. Jack noted that Greek, Egyptian and Nordic mythologies all talk about a young god dying and coming back to life and asked how can we know whether Jesus wasn't another myth, too. Tolkien replied that yes, it's a myth. But it happens to be the one myth that is true. Tolkien told Lewis that while all religions show a glimpse of God, Christianity was the ultimate narrative of redemption.1

Jack slowly but steadily accepted the story of a God in pain, a God on the cross, a dying divinity who cared for a suffering humanity, not only as a story that evoked the imagination but also as a historic reality that changed his worldview.

Thanks to his conversion to Christianity at the age of 33, we have such books as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*—part of the *Chronicles of Narnia* series—*Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *Surprised by Joy*, and *The Problem of Pain*, among his legacy of more than 30 books.

During World War II, the BBC asked Jack to give a defense of the Christian religion on radio. Those broadcasts became extremely popular; sometimes more people tuned in to listen to Jack than Winston Churchill, the British prime minister.

Jack personally responded to all fan mail, and an American woman named Joy Davidman Gresham became a regular correspondent for two years. Jack found her to be even more well-read than he, with

an enormous intellect and a great sense of humour. They became friends and eventually married when Jack was 58 years old. Sadly, Joy died from cancer four years later.
Overcome with grief, Jack wrote a series of raw and personal reflections that was published under a pseudonym as *A Grief Observed.* He wrote of his anger towards God, his unanswered questions, his unending grief that felt like fear. He did not repeat platitudes but laid out his pain in bitter accusations and unedited doubt.

He could have buried his pain and pretended he didn't have doubts. But by listening and giving voice to his pain, Lewis' faith and comfort in God returned even stronger than before, like waves upon the shore, ebbing and flowing, crashing and surrendering. *Poi si tornò all'eterna fontana: "then unto the eternal foundation turned."2*

By facing the source of our pain and allowing ourselves to wrestle with the full implications of that truth, we too may find comfort and faith in realising that pain is not the end of the story.
Healing is still to come.

Reflect: *Where does it hurt? What areas of your life, past or present, cause you the most pain?*

Act: *Watch "Kibera," an episode addressing the question, "If God is good and all powerful, why doesn't He get rid of all the pain?" at <https://waymaker.com.au>.*

1. Walter Hooper (editor), *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Vol I, Family Letters 1905–1931* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), page 967.

2. C S Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (London: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 1961), page 76.