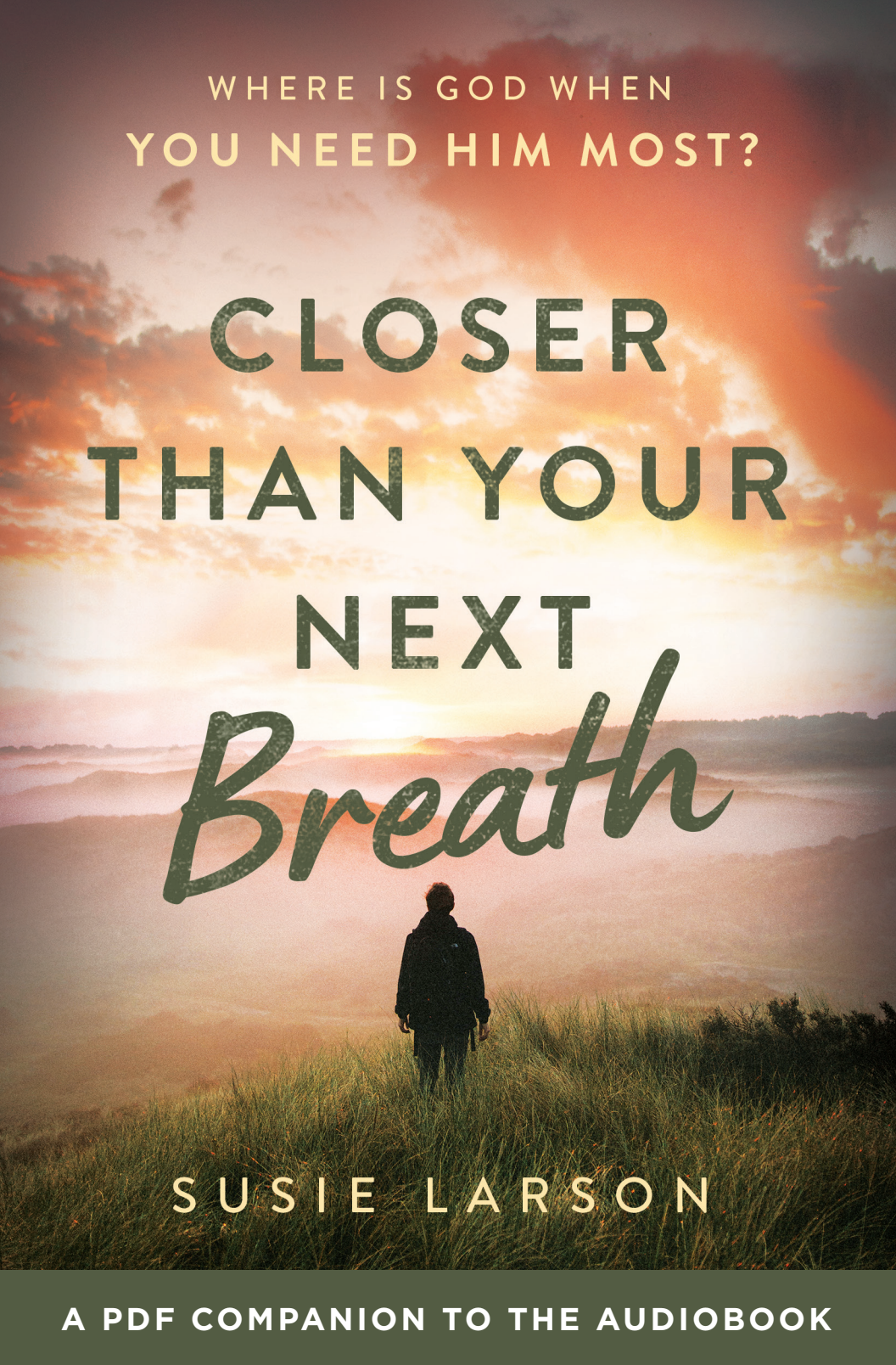


A person stands on a grassy hill, looking out over a vast valley. The sky is filled with dramatic, orange and yellow clouds, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The person is silhouetted against the bright light of the sun, which is low on the horizon. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

WHERE IS GOD WHEN
YOU NEED HIM MOST?

CLOSER
THAN YOUR
NEXT
Breath

SUSIE LARSON

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

Closer Than Your Next Breath

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one

God Walks Through Walls

Reflect

1. Read through John 20–21 and note the various supernatural moments you find in these chapters.¹⁹ How many did you count, and what was God's purpose (as best you can discern) for each of these encounters?
2. Of the supernatural encounters you found in John 20–21, which one means the most to you or most stands out to you? Why?
3. We all get distracted in different ways. What's one thing in your life that continually pulls your gaze away from God?
4. Sit with the Lord a bit. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth. What's behind this distraction? What's God's remedy for you? Wait. Listen. Write down what you sense the Lord saying to you.

two

God Draws Near

Reflect

1. Though God passionately and consistently loves us, most of us only conditionally trust Him, if we're honest. We lose sight of His goodness when life's not good. We let go of His promises when they seem incongruent with our current reality. Yet He is more trustworthy than our circumstances. Circumstances change. God will always be good. Write about a time when you (like me) accused God of being someone He's not, and it turned out that you were wrong, not Him. How did God meet you in that circumstance? If you've never had such an experience, write about a time when you doubted that God was who He promised to be.
2. Read Romans 8:1–9. Pause on verse 6 and answer this question: As it pertains to God's presence and your awareness of

His presence, how might the sinful nature Paul talked about here cause you to misinterpret your circumstances?

3. Still pondering verse 6, answer this second question: If you allow the Holy Spirit to guide and guard your thoughts, Scripture says you'll have peace. Is it possible to walk through a time where God seems silent yet still enjoy a sense of His peace? Write down your thoughts.
4. Read Romans 8:31–39 and reflect on the juxtaposition of pain and presence. If nothing can separate us from His love, and He is love, then nothing can separate us from Him. And if you still wonder if that's true, read Psalm 139 and write out a personalized, paraphrased version of Romans 8:31–39, letting the psalm guide you. I'm praying faith awakens your heart as you write.

three

God Is Good

Reflect

1. Consider the boldness of some of the women mentioned in Scripture:¹² Ruth, Esther, Deborah, Mary the mother of Jesus, the Samaritan woman, the woman with the issue of blood, and the Syrophenician woman (whom I called “Ariel”). These women were not content to take a passive role in their stories. Once they saw themselves in the bigger story, they acted, and God moved. Where are you right now with regard to your posture of expectancy? Bracing for impact—static faith—or wrestling with God? Explain.
2. Pick one of the women mentioned above, read her story in Scripture, and explain why you chose her. Then answer the following question: At what point in her story did she decide to act? Explain.

3. Even though God isn't always mentioned in every story, He's involved. Where do you see His involvement in the story you read?
4. How does her story tie to your story?

four

God Is Awesome

Reflect

1. Moses first encountered God near Mount Sinai when he noticed a flaming bush. He drew near and the Lord spoke, changing the trajectory of Moses' life and the greater kingdom story. In Exodus 19, we find Moses back at Mount Sinai. Read Exodus 19 and write everything you observe about God's presence in this passage.
2. After Moses received the Ten Commandments, he came down from the mountain. Read Exodus 34:29–35 and note how God's glory rested on Moses. Write down your thoughts.
3. Read Psalm 34 and write about what most stands out to you in this passage. Ponder verse 5 and write out a personalized prayer around this verse.
4. Read 1 Kings 19:1–13 and imagine Elijah's state of mind. Consider a time when you felt battered by your storm and it seemed that

the Enemy was winning the day. God met Elijah in this place. Picture Elijah conversing with God, who told him to stand on the mountain while the presence passed him. Wouldn't you imagine it was God when the wind started to blow? And when the earth began to shake—that must be God, right? But God wasn't in the wind or the earthquake. He manifested His presence after the shaking through a still, small voice. What do you suppose God wanted to teach Elijah here?

five

God Lavishes Grace

Reflect

1. Read 1 John 1 and consider that this letter was written to Christians. Even in biblical times, some Christians thought they could profess Christ but live the way they pleased. We may reason that we're okay since we're not "doing what *they're* doing." But sin is sin. Selfishness is selfishness. Jealousy is the gateway sin to many other evils. Not that God wants us to be perpetually and fearfully sin-conscious. But neither does He want us to make light of sin, because sin destroys. Sin gives the devil an entrance into our lives. Jesus wants us to be Spirit-conscious, which means we'll be finely in tune with His voice in our ears and His work in our hearts, but we'll also feel His wince in our souls when we betray our conscience. Write down your thoughts about this idea.

2. Read 1 John 2 and notice that sin often reveals itself in the ways we relate to others (whether we love or not) and the extent that we're tied to the things of the world. John didn't mince words. Verse 28 is especially interesting, given that this letter is addressed to Christians. We know and believe that grace is amazing, wild, and accessible. And it'll change our lives! But it's important to understand that some believers (who sincerely trusted Christ for salvation but repeatedly engage with the world) might lose their courage and shrink back in shame on the day He returns. It'll be a powerful yet sobering day—something we should consider now. Write out your thoughts on this chapter.
3. Read 1 Corinthians 1:26–27 and write a paragraph about your transformation. Who were you, and what were you like when God first called you? What has He done in your life? How have you changed? What do you know now that you didn't know back then?
4. Read Romans 8:1–14 and ponder the difference between those who have the Spirit of God within them and those who don't. Write out the defining characteristics of both.

six

God Offers Life

Reflect

1. Look up John 10:10 in several translations and write out a personalized, paraphrased prayer for your life.
2. Read Ephesians 1:3 and note the past-tense words: *has blessed*. He “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.” This is a profound statement that deserves our attention! Do some word study and searching on your own and learn what it means to be blessed with—to have access to—every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.
3. Read Ephesians 1:4–11 and write out some of the benefits of being a child of God. (Remember, Psalm 103:1–5 reminds us to bless God with our whole heart and forget *not* His benefits.) You may count as many as sixteen blessings/privileges depending on your Bible translation.

4. Read Ephesians 1:15–23 and list Paul’s desires for his readers. How many did you count, and how did he describe them? Gather Paul’s prayer requests for you and write them out in a faith declaration over your life (and even over those you’re praying for).

seven

God (Sometimes) Seems Silent

Reflect

1. Think about a time when you felt God had abandoned you. Consider the timing of that moment and the Enemy's intent to steal from you. What did you learn from that experience?
2. Read Hebrews 13:5 and write out a faith declaration based on this verse. Keep it handy if the Enemy ever tries to make you doubt God's love.
3. Think about proximity for a moment. God draws near to the humble. He draws near to the brokenhearted. Can you remember a time when you tangibly sensed His presence? Write it down.
4. Consider Job, right in the middle of the most unimaginable trial. Read Job 19:25–27 and consider that Job made this declaration *before* God restored him. What declaration do you need to make today while waiting for your breakthrough?

eight

God Matures You

Reflect

1. Read Jeremiah 17:6–8 and write a paraphrased, personalized version of this passage.
2. Where in your life do you see growth? And how about barrenness? Write down your thoughts.
3. Read Psalm 92:10–15 along with this study note from the *NLT Life Application Study Bible*:

Palm trees are known for their long life. To flourish like palm trees means to stand tall and to live long. The cedars of Lebanon grew to 120 feet in height and up to 30 feet in circumference; thus, they were solid, strong, and immovable. The writer saw believers as upright, strong, and unmoved by the winds of circumstance. Those who place their faith firmly in God can have this strength and vitality.¹⁰

4. How has God built strength into your character? How has He taught you to persevere? To what life experiences do you owe the most significant growth?

nine

God Has Called You

Reflect

1. Read Ephesians 2:10 and write a personalized, paraphrased version of this passage.
2. Based on this passage and Romans 8:28, here's what's true: You are a beautiful, masterful work of art, created by God's hand. He's called you to do good work for His glory. He promises to take every aspect of your story—*all things*—and work them together for your good and His glory because you're called and living according to *His purpose*, not yours. As you sit with these beautiful truths for a bit, ask the Lord to uncover any lingering insecurity or lack of confidence. Ask Him to show you what's at the root of these feelings. Write down your thoughts.
3. Is there a story from Scripture that you return to time and

time again? For example, Ruth, Joseph, or Deborah? If so, reread the story, ask God to highlight what He wants you to see, and write down your thoughts. And write down the parts that God highlights for you. If no story comes, consider reading Esther's story prayerfully.

4. If God were to move mightily in your day and ask you to step out of your comfort zone, what might that look like?

ten

God Remembers; God Forgets

Reflect

1. Read Malachi 3:6–7 and consider God’s appeal for His children to draw near only to have some respond this way: “How can we return when we have never gone away?” Write down your thoughts about that exchange.
2. Read Psalm 106:24–25 and consider the glorious promises written over God’s chosen people. Yet they refused to believe His promises were true. How did they respond? Write down their response and a modern-day example of what it looks like to reject God’s promises and thus stay in the smallness of your circumstances.
3. Read 2 Peter 1:1–10. Write down the verses that stand out to you and what you sense God is saying to you through this passage.

4. Go back to the book of Malachi and read Malachi 3:16–18. Though the lines on earth may seem blurry regarding who walks with God and who doesn't, there's perfect clarity in heaven. Write out this passage and make it a paraphrased prayer.