



breathing eden

CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

ON LIGHT, FRESH AIR, AND NEW THINGS

jennifer j. camp

“The older I get, the hungrier I am to hear God’s voice. And the place I often hear it the clearest is through women who are willing to share their stories. I can’t sit close enough or long enough with these women. When my faith feels fickle, I can lean in close and catch a whisper of God again through their words. Jennifer Camp has given us the gift of letting us pull up a chair in a circle of 40 women, where we can sit down and soak up their questions and God’s answers. Wherever you feel dry or hurt or broken today, I am convinced this book has a message intended just for you.”

—**Lisa-Jo Baker**, author of *Surprised by Motherhood*
and community manager for (in)courage

“For every woman who questions whether her story matters, or who wonders what God thinks of all she brings before His feet, hope and healing are found in these pages. Jennifer Camp whispers truth from the heart of the Father to his daughters, awakening our remembrance of life breath that was first kissed at creation. This book will transform your days as it shows how to walk in the reality of a love that shapes our identity.”

—**Kristen Kill**, author of *Finding Selah*

“Reading *Breathing Eden* was a sacred experience that moved me deeply, drawing me towards a very personal God who hears us, loves us, and never forsakes us. This book is for any woman whose life didn’t turn out the way she planned—any woman who has doubted that God hears her cry. He hears. And He responds in a deeply personal way. Read this book and encounter the gentle whisper of God.”

—**Jennifer Dukes Lee**, author of *The Happiness Dare*

“If you’ve ever felt lost, alone, afraid, mixed up, or beyond the place where you believe you can hear the voice of God, this book is for you. With relatable stories and tender words, Jennifer Camp has threaded this beautiful book through and through with the love of the Father for his beloved daughters. Settle into a cozy corner and open these pages to remind yourself that you were created to walk in the garden and hear the voice of God speaking over you. Turn these pages, oh Daughters of Eve, and remember what it feels like to breathe in Eden.”

—**Logan Wolfram**, Speaker, and author of *Curious Faith: Rediscovering Hope in the God of Possibility*

Breathing Eden will delight your soul afresh as you unexpectedly uncover a way of communicating with God that is simple, organic, and life-changing.

—**Elisa Pulliam**, author of *Meet the New You*

“Jennifer’s brave soul did more than inspire me—I heard God speak. And that makes all the difference in this pain-filled world. I am grateful for the truth she delivers in *Breathing Eden*—that God has spoken, and we can wildly rejoice together that He is still speaking today if we only listen!”

—**Belinda Bauman**, founder of One Million Thumbprints

“Have you ever questioned God? Have you ever struggled to believe he cares? In *Breathing Eden*, Jennifer J. Camp has once again done what she does so beautifully: she has given us space for our stories and our struggles. With honest and emotive stories of women just like you and me who are finding their way in all of life’s uncertainty, Jennifer creates space for us to ask honest questions, wrestle with our doubts, and be reminded of God’s goodness and grace.”

—**Jenni Catron**, author of *CLOUT: Discover and Unleash Your God-Given Influence*

“Not many books have captivated my heart the way this one has. What starts with women’s heartbreaking stories ends with a mantra of hope—no matter what pain you’ve endured. Even though I haven’t experienced the same circumstances as all of these women, I felt God whispering His love and comfort to my soul through their stories. *Breathing Eden* is a raw, glorious, and breathtaking invitation into the heart of our Father. Its stories will lead you into new revelations of God’s love, ultimately unleashing healing and hope over your life—just as it has with mine.”

—**Karen Stott**, founder of Pursuit Community

“Through storytelling that reaches into the lives of every woman, Jennifer Camp touches on many heartaches and issues women face today. But she doesn’t simply highlight the anguish—she weaves God into the narratives, showing that He is deeply concerned for us and, ultimately, connected to us. Refreshing read!”

—**Mary DeMuth**, author of *Worth Living: How God’s Wild Love for You Makes You Worthy*

“*Breathing Eden* is unlike anything you’ve ever read before. It will help you to identify God’s loving voice amidst the noise of the world.”

—**Shelly Miller**, author of *Rhythms of Rest: Finding the Spirit of Sabbath in a Busy World*



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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER



DEAR SISTERS,

When Brenda and I first heard Jennifer read from an early draft of *Breathing Eden*, we were sitting around our dinner table. From the first words, we knew we were hearing something special. Long after the guests had left that evening, we found ourselves talking about how powerful we felt the book would be for women who longed to hear God's perspective on the joys and struggles of their lives.

We all need that. We all need to hear His voice. We all need light, fresh air, and new things. So it's our great pleasure to offer this book to each of you, along with a prayer that God reveals his heart for you. For *you*.

May you see your life as he does, and may that be a breath of Eden.

Blessings to you,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Don'.

Don (and Brenda) Jacobson

 **ZEAL**books

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



THIS BOOK BEGAN WITH AN EXPERIMENT. It began when a few questions arose during hours of conversation with friends and as many hundreds of emails went back and forth with readers of the popular *Loop* devotional, in which I wrote down what I sensed were God's whispers to his daughters, his girls.

Your stories, your questions, our discussions, prompted me to wonder: How are we changed when our hearts are open to hearing the voice of God? How can our conversations with him affect how we view ourselves, our lives, our pasts? How do our voices connect with the Voice who made us? And how can we hear God's voice, his truth, in the regular, ordinary moments of our lives?

What might God say to the woman whose marriage is ending or to the woman who has lost a child? How might God respond to the woman who is mad at him and wonders why he didn't rescue her when she was raped? What might he say to the woman overwhelmed with depression, or the woman struggling with her identity, or the woman who believes she needs to starve herself in order to get control of her life? Not all readers will connect with every story. And that's okay. It's God's voice we're listening for together.

The words of *Breathing Eden* are inspired by your stories. Not all the stories were communicated to me through conversations with you. Some were. But some were what I heard whispered to my heart. I pray you found yourself in these words. But mostly, I pray the whispers back to you, from God, as you write and speak out your own story, are the treasure.

FOREWORD BY STASI ELDREDGE



So many of us find ourselves feeling lost in our own lives. It's so easy to lose perspective. To lose our way. To lose Jesus. To lose sight of him and thus to lose sight of ourselves.

We live in a demanding world that continually requires more and more from us. We get overwhelmed when we try to navigate our way through it on our own. But here's the brilliant news: We are not on our own! Every moment of our lives, every detail of our days are seen and known by the one who has won everything. God desires that we might come and draw more deeply into his heart. He whispers to us to come and know him as we are known. God does not wait to embrace us until we feel worthy of being embraced. He is captured by us now—in our imperfections, in our longings, in our glories, in our desperation, in our failings. The love of Jesus is not far away—it is close. He is close. And he desires for us to know him intimately, so that as we do, we come to face our days not with fear or a sense of being overwhelmed, but with strength and hope.

We can live lives of value and love. We can live lives that are free from shame, and are not bound by self-reproach or the accusations of the enemy and his lies.

The world needs you. Your world needs you. The people in your life whom you are called to love, serve, and walk alongside need you. But none of us can rise to the need or to the occasion of our lives without Jesus. And Jesus is here. He is Emmanuel. God with us. God is with us right now. He is our breath, our light, our hope, and our strength.

There is beauty and goodness in having knowledge about God. But knowledge alone will not see us through. We need to truly know God—to know that he is our champion. We need to grow in our ability to recognize his light, his breath, his call, his wooing, and his presence in our every moment. We need intimacy with God.

My friend Jennifer Camp is a woman who has an intimacy with Jesus that breathes life and light into her life. She is compelled by the love of God to invite other women into the deepest reality of this truth: that intimacy with Jesus is available to each one of us, and that truly knowing and experiencing his love changes everything.

So, dear ones, let light in. Let this tender and powerful book breathe life into you. Through the stories of these beautiful women, you will recognize your own story. You will be encouraged in your journey towards a deeper understanding of God's loving presence. He invites you to let that love inhabit your every moment. The words written here are designed to draw your heart more deeply into God's and to open your eyes to see yourself through his. You will be drawn into an intimacy with Jesus that is based solely upon his deep understanding and unconditional love for you. Oh, how we all need that. Oh, how I need that.

Jesus wants to share life with you. He wants you to embrace your story, and in doing so, come to know that God loves you intimately today, as you are. He sees you. He has not turned his face away. He wants to share your every moment.

Come, read, and accept Jennifer's invitation to breathe Eden.

Stasi Eldredge

JENNIFER



Introduction (the Desire to See)

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

Romans 8:26

I CAN'T BEAR IT.

That's what I tell God as my friend's words tumble out one after another. Her face is in her hands. She's perched on the edge of the chair, shoulders trembling, sobbing. No, my heart can't bear this. She definitely doesn't think she can.

I've been there. I know her desperation. I know weary, overwhelmed. I know what it's like—being convinced that hope is not for me. I am on my knees near her now, part of a circle, other sisters gathered around. Our hearts ache as we begin to pray—*No, don't remain here, dear one. You don't have to stay here. There is so much more than this moment—more above it, more below it. So much more beyond it.*

Our dear friend is in the place where walls press in and the

air lies thick and night feels all around. There is nowhere to go. Not when you've gotten to this place. Only shadows. No light. All around. She wants God but isn't sure how to reach him. *Are you here, God? Do you hear me, see me? Can you come?* She is confused. She wonders where God is. And we all wonder with her. All around. *Yes, I know this place.*

We gather close, these sisters and I, helping her forward, toward a different place. Toward new life. Toward the light that must be beyond here.

It's all about perspective, after all. God's perspective. She isn't trapped, no matter what she thinks now. I know the truth; I've escaped this place. I know now there is more to life than what we easily see.

What does it take to step into light when what surrounds us feels only dark? The sorrow feels too deep. The mistake seems too big. The wounds lie too buried. *Oh God, where is healing? Where is hope?* It is difficult to believe there is more than guilt, fear, worry, pain.

Pain can make us blind to—or desperate for—truth. Which is it going to be for her? For us? *Come on, girl. Come on.*

She sits there. We've held each other, shared a hundred cups of coffee, trusted each other with our stories. She is my sister, and she feels lost in this darkness. And because I love her, I feel stuck here, too. I want to carry her pain, to relieve it somehow. *How do we get to you, God? How do we stand and believe light can shine here, right here?*

I wonder.

I wonder—how does God see this? How does he see *us*? How does he see our stories, our pain, our struggles? How does he see the infidelity, the eating disorder, the abuse, the everyday anxiety that makes it difficult for us to lift our heads? How does he see our celebration, our worship, our experiences of freedom, hope, joy?

How would seeing God's view of our stories spur healing? Would it grant hope?

No matter our circumstances, we need God's perspective on them. We need to know how he sees us. *Come on, girl*, he says. *Let my light shine in.*

I am desperate for his eyes. I am desperate to see this pain and beauty—with new eyes. I am desperate to believe there is more than what my human frailty can see.

Do you want this too?



Prayer takes a listening, a looking deeper. Real prayer uncovers hope that is impossible to see on our own. God knows the wide-ranging emotions we feel—the cries of pain when we are overwhelmed and alone, the songs of joy when we are captured by his goodness and majesty. But what happens when he unearths the silent prayers we didn't know we had—of sadness or worship, confession, freedom?

How do our prayers sound to him? How does he see us, *really* see us, when we share our hearts with him? How does he respond? And how might this change us? I need to know.

This book consists of our prayers to God and his answers. Forty women. Forty prayers. Forty women's conversations with God.

But that's not all. Following each story is a personal invitation for you to enter into the dialogue with your own story. Forty invitations for your response. At the end of each conversation, you are invited to "Listen," to consider how you relate personally to what has been shared. You are invited to "Think," to wrestle with questions individually or in a group. You are invited to "Trust," to do something as a means of exploring what God might be communicating to you. And finally, you are invited to "Pray," to ask God

to help you continue to process what he is doing in your heart.

My prayer is that in reading each of these conversations, and entering into them through prayerful response, you will recognize how light shines in your own life, even if you can see it only dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Come listen to women who plead for God to be near. Come listen to women rejecting complacency. Come listen to women, choosing to seek God's freedom rather than fear in their everyday lives. Come listen to women who just want to speak to God and have him speak back. Come listen to women who just want to praise God and be heard. *Father, can I hear you? Will you heal me? How do you see things? Where were you in the night, when the darkness came and I felt abandoned and alone? You've come so many times; will you come again?*

You are in these pages. Your mothers and sisters and daughters and neighbors and girlfriends are, too. Your prayers are collected here, and heard.

Will you listen for God's response?

Do you want truth?

Do you want light, fresh air, and new things?

Turn the page.

L A I N E



In the Bright Place

WE KEEP THE WEDDING PHOTOS in an album tucked into the alcove underneath the stairs. It's next to the flower vases I almost never use, old mason jars and napkin rings stacked in the far corner. The album's pages are stiff, the cover's leather soft, worn from years of fingers. The kids pull it out sometimes, stretching it open across their little laps. *Mommy, sit with me. Tell me what the day was like, the day you and Daddy got married.*

I like to play the game with them, whispering the same stories over and over. My dress was my grandmother's, and my mom wore it too. Yes, I look like a princess. No, my shoes weren't slippers made of glass. Yes, Daddy looks so young. And yes, his smile is funny too.

I notice his hold of my hand, the two of us side-by-side down the red carpeted aisle. The girl in the photo is beaming. She believes there is only good ahead. I remember his first words to her, whispered in her ear after "I do." "You are my starlight. You are so beautiful."

That young girl, barely twenty-two, believed love would lead. She believed love would lead every future decision she would make. She believed the details would figure themselves out.

Was she just naïve?

Jesus, that girl didn't know what she didn't know. I think about her innocence; she believed she was going to be immune to tough times. Her story, of *course*, would be a happy one.

It never dawned on her she would face challenges in her marriage.

I wonder about her, this night twenty years later, easing my bare feet down the creaky stairs while the house sleeps. The old floorboards sigh, adjusting to changes in temperature, hot passes of day to the cool stretches of night.

Jesus, that girl of yours was bright and sweet but didn't know you like I know you now. Those dark moments I didn't see coming? That's how I found you. That's how I learned you stand steadfast. So many nights, knees tucked underneath my chin, bare feet on wooden floor. You taught me how to sit with you.

Can I just curl up next to you now? I lean against you. Will you hold me tight and let me stay here? I no longer have the answers that young girl had, yet I still want to believe I can make this marriage beautiful. I still want to believe I can live a story worth telling. I still want to believe I can paste pages of hope in an album my children will want to read. All because of you.

I am done chasing fairy tales. I am done faking this, done pretending everything is okay. I want your kind of real life. I want to choose love here—even if it is more work than I ever thought.

So give me wisdom, Jesus. Let me see the path. Set my feet upon it. Let me hear your voice: *This is the way. Walk in it.* I will receive your wisdom and stay here with you, your arms wrapped fast around me, never letting go.

I believe in you. I believe in light flooding dark places. I believe in change, hope, transformation.

I believe anything is possible with you.



MY DAUGHTER, I WILL STAY here with you. I will stay here as long as it takes. Holding you, drawing you close to me, is what I love to do most. I'm not going anywhere.

I love sitting here, too, you know. I love having you close. I will stay here with you. I will never leave you, if you want me to stay.

I love comforting you. I love reminding you how precious you are to me. I stay here with you, listening to the rise and fall of our chests. It's nice here, you know. You with me.

Real life here is better than anything you could dream up on your own. It is hard and beautiful, all in one. You weren't naïve when you believed love would lead. You did not have an incorrect view of marriage, only an incomplete one. The romance you yearn for is a true desire. It is good. I've placed within you the desire to be wanted, seen, pursued. It's how I've made you. The hard part is that love requires the dying to self.

Dying, you see, is never easy.

It is strange, I know, that love begins with death; but you know, as you look to my Son, that this is true.

Don't give up on romance. Don't give up on love leading. See that window there? It will not be night forever. See that hint of gold shining through? The sun can't help but come in. You know this: You can't close out light, child. You can ignore it. You can run. But it will shine all the same. You see it by knowing it's there, even if you only feel darkness around you.

The light is large enough to cover everything, each sliver of darkness that wants to remain. No darkness stays dark. No problem stays the same when the light touches it. Darkness cannot stand against the light. It has never overcome it.

I stay here with you, watching light come in. I stay here with you, helping you desire light. I stay here with you, teaching you what light feels like on the skin, on the face, how it reaches every dark place—each corner of this room, each corner of your heart.

Tell me where you want the light to shine. Ask me how you can open yourself up to it. Take my light in you and raise it high. In my name, nothing can withstand it.

I have given you the light, and I hold you in it, and you are filled with it, and you are not the same as you were before. All who see you and hear you and stay with you are responding to my light in you.

That light, daughter, lets nothing stay the same.



LISTEN

Sit with Laine for a moment as she talks to God. What words resonate with you? What do you want to pray to God in response?

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing.





THINK

For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light. (Ephesians 5:8)

1. Laine says she didn't know God like she does now, after going through difficult times. Can you relate? What experience(s) in your life prompted you to deepen your relationship with God?
2. How do you crave wisdom? In what situation do you desire to see God's path for you?
3. How have you ever felt disillusioned? How do you crave God's light to shine on you? How do you desire his presence now?



TRUST

Go outside in the sun or in a bright place near a window. Close your eyes. Lean back and feel the light on your face. Stay there for a few moments, eyes closed, shoulders relaxed. Let the light illuminate your face and touch your eyelids. Imagine God as light. Let the light cover you. Think about God's love blanketing you. Safe. Radiant. Warm. Beautiful.



PRAY

Father, so many of your daughters are struggling. They want more of you and ache for your light to shine—in their marriages and in their hearts. I need you too, God. I can't figure out how to live well without your guidance. I don't have wisdom on my own. I can't fix all my mistakes. Help me trust and seek you with my whole heart. I believe your light floods the dark places of my heart and life. You bring hope, love, and joy. Flood my heart and life with your light. When I feel disillusioned, help me know your never-changing truth. Help me seek you and see you. I surrender all of me to your light. I am yours. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PHOEBE



Then. Always. Now.

IT IS DEAFENING, this quiet.

Just Mark and me, together in a house that once shook with noise. Kids pounding through the narrow kitchen, footballs clenched under arms. Chairs scraping against wood floor so we can sit all together at dinner. Voices bickering about toothpaste mess on the counter and that too-small mirror in the hallway bathroom. I knew I'd miss it—tucking them in at night, giving backrubs under open windows in the summer dark, lives filling up these now near-empty rooms.

I knew how to be a mom. I knew how to sacrifice, stretched through the long days. But a wife? More than thirty years of love-filled chaos—five kids lived within these walls—and now silence. I'm not sure what to do now, how to remember how to connect with him. I search for signs, hints, any trace of a map showing how to be a loving wife, how to find my way back to Mark's heart.

There is hope for us, I think. In this new season, we sit on a new leather couch, side-by-side, no kids sprawled between us. He reclines to support his bad back. I sit next to him, needlework in my lap. We can watch whole television shows in the evenings, if we want. It's just us. We get to decide, together. It's nice.

But it's quiet.

We find each other's hand sometimes. We take walks in the orchard, the branches bent like lovers, praying as we walk the rows. How did we fall in love? Can I still remember? A mischievous grin, a saucy joke sparking his cheeks aflame, his jealousy for me, the sheets wrinkled up around our feet? Can I see him anew, now? How do I communicate my heart?

It seemed easier, I guess—the kids filling up the space between us all those years. Easier to stay busy with parenting. Easier to look past the man I had fallen in love with at only seventeen. Together and separate, during the years we forgot what energized *us*. We forgot what once made *us* crack up and smile. In the forgetting, we let ourselves forget who *we* were. Is it possible, Father, that we let ourselves forget the beauty of marriage, too?

My grandmother taught me love can't be corralled or tamed or controlled. "Love," she said, "is either going to take over every little space in the room or it's going to head right on out the door to find a home someplace else."

I've forgotten how to connect with Mark, God, but I won't give up. Will you give me hope? Will you make the love in our marriage fill the room, like my grandmother said? Can you make it fill a quiet house? Show me—what do I need to do? What do I say? How do I say it?

How do we find each other's heart again?



MY DAUGHTER, you feel like you are lost. But you are never lost if I know where you are.

Look—I am coming. Watch me lift the both of you. Watch me bend low and catch you up, just like your grandmother did when you were small. Watch—I do not hold back my love. Nor should you. I am

yours. I am with you and I am not going anywhere.

You have a fierce strength—but now it is tender, wounded. It is difficult to recognize how your current relationships can be affected by the love—or lack of love—you experienced when you were little. You have been trying to convince yourself you are okay, and you are. But know the truth: You are only okay when you know that you are loved.

Do you know how much I love you, right now, just as you are, my darling? Do you know I have always loved you more than you could imagine?

Your struggle is not what you think it is.

You see the symptom. I shall cure the disease.

You pray for a flower. I must nourish the root.

You want to reconnect with Mark? You want to love him with freedom and abandon? You want me to teach you how to love? You must do something first. Return now to the place where we began. Remember when you first knew me. Remember when you believed I was close. Next, let me show you where I was in the hard moments. I have always been near.

Because in the moments when you felt abandoned, ignored, unimportant—I was with you, my daughter.

Because in the moments when you ached for the “I love you” that never came—I was with you, my daughter.

Because in the moments after you were married, when you tucked the children in and you slept by yourself, so many nights, I was with you, my daughter.

You grew up thinking you were too much to love. Too needy. Too loud. Too present. Too weak. And you’ve carried these lies into your marriage. It is time to hear this, my darling. I want you to know this and live like you believe it: You were never too much. You were never too much to spend time with, have fun with, dance with, laugh with, hold hands with. You are beautiful and you are cherished.

This is what I want you to remember:

You are the one I choose.

You are the one I've always wanted.

You are the one I want to be with.

Then. Always. Now.





THINK

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

1. What is the biggest life change you've experienced? How did that transition affect your most important relationships?
2. What relationship presents the biggest challenge to you right now? How do you struggle to love that person?
3. God's response to Phoebe includes insight into her previous relationships as a child, and how they affect how she loves people now. How do you relate to what God says to Phoebe?



TRUST

Sit down. Think of yourself at eight years old. Remember what you looked like, what you liked to do. Now consider: Were you loved? Did you feel cared for and adored by the people in your life? With God's help—listening for his voice—write a letter to your eight-year-old self, telling her what is true about her, the things God thinks about her. Then write a letter to God, asking him to help you love a person in your life right now with whom you are having trouble.



PRAY

Father, I don't always know how I need you. While I ask for help with one thing, you point me toward a different struggle—the root of my pain. You invite me into deeper healing. Please help me surrender and accept your love and help. Reveal to me what prevents me from loving others with a full heart. Help me surrender those obstacles to you. Remove them from me. Help me go forward, in freedom, loving others the way you love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



JENNIFER J. CAMP grew up in the middle of an almond orchard in Northern California. She was a small town girl who thought she wasn't good enough but who wanted everyone else to think that she was. The story she now loves to tell? It's the story of a lost girl and an almond tree and a gentle Savior who loves fierce. It's the story of a Savior who goes before us, wanting each of his daughters to know who she is, in Christ, and whose Voice she is made to sing.

The author of *Loop Devotional*—and a former high school English teacher—Jennifer loves to encourage people to seek and live out the truth of their story, their identity in Christ. Jennifer earned a teaching credential from UC Berkeley and a MA degree in English Education from Columbia University, Teacher's College, after graduating with a BA in English at UCLA. Jennifer and her husband, Justin Camp, are the cofounders of Gather Ministries (gatherministries.com), a nonprofit organization committed to bringing the genius of Jesus to the lives of busy women and men—women and men whose lives are filled but not full.

Jennifer spends her days trying to listen close to God's whispers, writing, and encouraging women to remember the truth of their identities, in Christ. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with Justin and their three awesome kids and would love to connect with you.

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