

## Thriving in the Valley

By: Leah Scofield

Thrive.

Not a word I would use when describing my life. If life is made up of peaks and valleys, I'm definitely in a valley. Mine feels very deep and very long and there doesn't seem to be an end in sight. I became very sick in college and haven't recovered. That was over ten years ago and for a long time, I chose to stay in a dark place of resentment and frustration. Recently, God gave me a new thought.

Picture a valley. If one isn't readily coming to mind, head on over to Google images and type the word "valley." What is the first thing you think of or see?

When I did this little exercise, the first word that came to mind was green. Green. Everywhere. When I looked it up, the images I saw were stunning! The deep, dark valley our culture tries to get us to buy into wasn't there. I saw vegetation. I saw life! I saw a valley teeming with plants and trees and beauty. Sure, there were hills on either side and that can definitely symbolize those mountains we climb in life, but I feel like we are supposed to dread these valleys that life has. We are supposed to take that as a mistake we made and get back up that mountain to the top. The top is the goal. The top is success and where we *should want* to be.

Up to this point, my valley was dark and I was angry. I wanted to be back on top again. I wanted to be achieving goals and making an impact, not stuck in this pit of despair. Yet recently, God has whispered truth into that lie by simply encouraging me to do a google search. Valleys have life and so do I. There is so much beauty in my life and in my family. I mean if you've ever seen my labradoodle you'd agree. Literally the cutest puppy around! There is growth in the valley. We don't stop growing just because we've hit a rough patch. I'd argue that we are capable of growing more when we're in our valleys. Allow God to use this time to mold and shape you before you transition into the next big thing God has planned.

I know that's easier said than done. Giving up control is one of the hardest lessons I've had to learn. I like to have a plan and know my next step. It can be hard to put your future in God's hands and trust that His plan is better than yours. When I personally don't catch myself, worry and fear start to creep in because this plan I'm trusting in is a mystery and I don't understand it. However, we need to be careful that our hearts do not become hardened. In Matthew 6:45-52, we see how the apostles react to the miracle of the loaves and fishes. After that big moment, when they are being tossed on the sea, Jesus walks out onto the water to calm them

and Matthew says that they didn't understand about the loaves and "...on the contrary, their hearts were hardened."

When we aren't in charge or aware of what is going to happen, it can be natural to shut down. We close the walls to our heart and hold onto that boat for dear life. We harden our hearts to the one person who is there to bring us out of the valley, to help us walk on the water. I was angry at my situation for a long time. I prayed for miracles, I did all the right things and nothing was happening. Finally, I started praying for God to take away my anger and the resentment of my circumstances.

That was the moment things started happening.

Was I miraculously healed? Nope. But my heart was. The hardening I had built up was softening. I was understanding what COULD happen in my valley. God was showing me how I could still thrive during this season of life. The lie that I was not capable of anything was crushed.

Life will never be perfect, and we will all most likely have many valleys and seasons of life that are hard. We have a choice to harden our hearts and continue to view these valleys as dark and depressing, or we can choose to soften our hearts to the Lord and choose to look at the life that is present in and around us.

Choose to thrive.