

A photograph of a glass of water on a beach at sunset. The glass is in the foreground, filled with water, and is placed on a dark surface. The background shows a blurred beach and ocean under a soft, blue and orange sky. The overall mood is serene and refreshing.

101 cups of water

relief and refreshment for the tired, thirsty soul

c.d. baker

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WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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Tired? Thirsty?

W e l c o m e

Dear Christian,

Has trying harder to succeed in the Christian life made you:

- too intense to be loving?
- too shamed to feel joy?
- too frustrated to be at peace?
- too self-absorbed to be patient?
- too disappointed to be kind?
- too angry to be good?
- too fearful to be faithful?
- too defensive to be meek?
- too worn out to be self-controlled?

If so, you're probably a prisoner of good intentions. Like so many other folks, you've been left thirsting for another way.

God intended his children to live an abundant life of relationship with him, one without self-effort and the inevitable fatigue it brings. Adopted out of the courtroom, we're set free to enjoy the warmth and wonders of our Father's house. Yet most of us have not danced in his gardens or laughed with Jesus for a very long time—in large part because we haven't been shown how. We've not rested in the shade of his kindness nor dined on his bounty because many

in the church have unwittingly encouraged us to try harder at the Christian life. So we find ourselves discouraged, exhausted, and bound to expectations that weigh us down with guilt and shame.

The 101 reflections in this book are designed to bring comfort to weary Christians. They're based on the experiences and insights of struggling believers who have drawn deeply from the well of grace. Therefore, although my name appears as the author, the primary sources of inspiration have been others for whom I speak. A particular contributor has been my good friend and mentor, David McCarty, the founder of a discipling ministry known as Gospel-Friendships Inc.

I hope you'll find each reflection to be an honest look at our Christian walk, one that points you toward the astonishing gospel of Jesus, where the parched souls of God's children are refreshed unconditionally by the cool streams of the Father's love.

Sip slowly.

Enjoy.

And let's help each other remember the promise: "Whoever drinks of the water that I [Jesus] will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

Grace and peace be with you always,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. D. Baker'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with several loops and flourishes.

C. D. Baker



a cup of grace

I can't live the Christian life.

Don't tell anyone, but I've tried and I've tried and I can't. I haven't loved God with all my heart, soul, and mind, and I certainly haven't loved my neighbors as myself. It's that simple.

The Big Lie that's weighed so heavily on me is that I can make my Christian life "work." It's a lie that has stood in the way of my enjoying true communion with God, a lie that's kept me from more fully appreciating the beauty of the creation around me and the community of others.

So, yes, I admit that I can't make my Christian life work.

Praise be to God, who has freed me from the trying.

He's shown me that only Christ can live the Christian life, and he lives that life through me more fully as I get that trying-harder Self out of his way (Galatians 3).

So what do I do? I ask the Holy Spirit to show me my weakness, my sin, my need. I bring it all to the cross. And when the good news of God's love pours over me, it is then I realize, with my heart filled with *gratitude*, that Christ lives through me.

No, I can't live the Christian life on my own—and he loves me anyway.



a cup of significance

I'm tired of being so...ordinary.

All my life I've sought to be extraordinary. I want to be admired by others and also admired by myself so that I don't feel the shame of being just plain ordinary.

I used to think that ambition was an indication of emotional health.

Not so. Extraordinary people feel extraordinary pressure to continue being extraordinary. It's a prison from which one cannot easily escape. The effort to maintain "extraordinary," to be a somebody, even to be a super Christian, takes so much energy and consumes all one's joy and peace. Worse, any of us who are bound to maintaining an extraordinary spiritual reputation eventually find Jesus oddly irrelevant, even an impediment, to one's purpose.

Jesus came to free us from the prison of needing to be extraordinary.

So I am free to be ordinary in him...
but that's not really ordinary at all.



a cup of abundance

I want more out of life.

I'm not proud to admit it, but I want more—more things, more success, more admirers, more influence, a better house, a newer car, a fresh idea, more productivity, more children, more spiritual growth... It's a very long list. *More* is what the world's about: having, doing, being *more* determines my value, and not just in others' eyes. I measure myself by more or less, and *more* is usually better. A man asked a friend how much money his family needed. He answered, "More." The pastor asked me about my commitment to Bible reading. I told him I was doing "more."

But *more* is a heavy load—one that shows me how little I trust God, how little I think I need him. *More's* actually a brilliant strategy of the Enemy.

The truth is, Jesus is not enough for me. I'm often fooled into thinking: Jesus + something more = contentment. What I need to do is pause and pray. Asking the Spirit to show me how much *more* rules my day begins the journey to plenty by taking away my desire for *more* and filling my heart with Jesus.

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly," he said (John 10:10).

Life in Jesus Christ is more than
I could ever need.



a cup of dependence

I'm desperate for God to help me run my life.

Most of us want a helper, someone to lean on, to turn to; we want a boost from a copilot. That makes most of us insane, really, because sane people don't want God as their copilot. Insane people do because that makes them the pilot and they can have the advantages of his help without the disadvantage of giving up the controls.

We like the whole idea of God working for us. Maybe that's why we're generally impotent in our faith, saltless, fruitless with the lost, and dismissed by the watching world. Maybe that's why we're frustrated, grasping, angry, and weary. Maybe that's why others jump out our doors every chance they get!

Sanity really is better. When we're sane—when we let God be our pilot—we're inviting, welcoming to the watching world, relaxed, easy to be around.

What if we were flight attendants instead of copilots?

Imagine how joyful life could be, how safe, even fun, to serve others while God flies the plane across deep seas, above dry lands, over wicked wilderness (Psalm 107:23–43).

Life is so much better with
Jesus in command.



a cup of un-knowing

Suffering in the world makes me wonder about God, even doubt him.

What kind of God allows oppression, slaughter, injustice, floods, and famines? And why does he? Is he helpless? Does he care?

Cynics claim that suffering proves that God doesn't exist or that he's not loving. The truth is, no human has answers for such questions. Suffering is a mystery. And maybe we should learn to accept that.

After all, there is another mystery in all this, a comforting one that cynics cannot dismiss: the fact that love is everywhere suffering is. Watch a firefighter or a police officer or an AIDS volunteer. Watch a nurse hold a child's hand. The list goes on.

Love would not be natural to a random universe. It's intentional. Divine. So, despite all the many things we don't like or understand, there's comfort in seeing how love surrounds us, for if love surrounds us, God surrounds us.

No, I don't have to be able to explain everything; mystery is a reality of life that I'm invited to accept. The old Beatles song says it well.

Especially in the mystery of suffering,
"Love is all we need."



a cup of freedom

I'm afraid of what others think of me.

It's bondage, this dependence on others' opinions, and it affects even my own opinion of myself.

I can tell because when I'm embarrassed, I lose my joy and peace.

How do I feel when I give the wrong answer, regret something I say, or hate the way my kids behave or the way I look when caught by surprise?

Well, if I want to either hide in a corner or tear someone's head off, I'm probably living in bondage to the expectations of others.

Have you been there too?

Probably. Most of us have. But do we have to stay there? One of the many kind things God does for us is to gently remind us that we sometimes forget how much he loves us just the way we are.

He loves me even when
I've said something dumb,
lost control of the kids,
or had a bad hair day.



a cup of comfort

Is my suffering God's punishment for my sin?

A pastor told my friend that her little girl's illness was probably God's judgment on family sin. And then he said that such sins had disqualified the family's prayers.

Imagine if you had been told that. Maybe you have—such condemnation is a common millstone hung around the necks of desperate Christians everywhere.

The truth is, our sins are washed away. All of them. Past. Present. Future. Our sins are out of the equation, put “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12); they are paid for in full by Jesus.

Otherwise Jesus has died in vain. God's “chastening” (or “discipline,” a favorite word among spiritual abusers) is not punishment but rather instruction. Do any of us pray from sinless hearts? Without Jesus, are any of us “qualified” to offer a single word to heaven?

No. But God turns toward sinners on bended knees—not away from them. Sure, God can use suffering to set us free from the chains that bind us. The point is made clear in James 1. And yes, sometimes it takes a hammer to break a chain. But that should never be confused with some ugly notion of penalty.

God is our Father, not our accuser.



a cup of easy

Rules are such a heavy burden.

I struggle with rules. Keeping them is exhausting. And I have trouble keeping them all straight anyway. Now, don't get me wrong. Straying from Jesus's way is not a good thing, but rule keeping is so often just plain legalism—the reliance on external obedience—and that's not the way of the cross.

Actually, legalism is a great way for many of us to duck the truth about ourselves. Keeping busy doing it all “right” keeps us from facing the darkness of our hearts. And focusing on rule keeping also helps us avoid paying any attention to the needs of others.

If we're exhausted by anything, it's because we've been led away from Jesus somewhere on our journey. Jesus offers us a better way; he wants to show us our hearts so that we may abandon ourselves and our obsessions, even the ones that look good. Yes, of course Jesus wants us to live according to his purposes—purposes designed for our welfare and the welfare of others. But his way should not be exhausting at all.

Rules can weigh us down,
but Jesus's yoke is light as a feather.