

Craig K. Sandford

PURSUING

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

— C.S. Lewis
The Problem of Pain

When I first embarked on the pursuit of God as a young man, I was inspired and confident. Trust came easily, and enthusiastic optimism pervaded my outlook. I had answers; I knew what to do and how to live. I aspired to make all the right choices, and I expected to experience the favor of God in response. Hard times—when they came—would meet my unwavering faith and be quickly swallowed up by the understanding that God’s plan was perfect. It was that simple.

Now a few years down the road, I still believe that God’s plan is perfect. It is beautiful and it is good. But the journey has been very different from what I expected, and that perfect plan at times has been far from understandable. It has included brokenness and uncertainty beyond what I ever imagined. God has said “no” to me over and over again. He has written spiritual drought into my story. Vision has been accompanied by blindness, growth by death, success by helplessness. The inspiration and confidence which marked the outset of my walk with him have

at times given way to suffering, pain, and doubt—sometimes for years. I have felt like Jacob, left alone to wrestle with my God through the night, wondering whether I knew the God with whom I was wrestling as well as I thought I did.

I have learned that this is the nature of following God. It is not to always be inspired, confident, and happy. It is to be often uncertain, to experience pain, to fall, to lack answers, to feel faint, to doubt the God you trust—and to continue pursuing him anyway. As Abraham showed, it means to set out, not knowing, but still believing unbelievable promises. As Adam learned, it means to fall completely, utterly, and then, in the face of that failure, to submit to the fullness of God's mercy. As Joseph found, it means to be betrayed, to have hope shattered, to feel your life has been wasted, and then years later to see how God brought salvation from your suffering. As David demonstrated, it means to be broken-hearted and despairing, but to seek God anyway and find

him near. As Joel exemplified, it means to experience devastation and still to embrace the truth of God's promises. The journey is difficult, but it is tempered by hope, marked by grace, and surrounded by extravagant, unconditional love.

And so the story in this album reflects this truth of suffering. The call to pursue God with passionate abandon still fervently resounds here. It remains the all-absorbing purpose of the believer's life. But the road will not be easy. It may break you. It will certainly discourage you. There will be peaks that lift you toward Heaven, and there will be valleys that threaten to crush you. Yet in whatever you experience, know that God is lovingly pursuing you a thousand times more earnestly than you can pursue him. If you are faithless, he remains faithful. He is there, every step of the way. There will be grace in the process and glory despite the pain.

May we press ever on toward that glory, carried by his grace.

— Craig K. Sandford
December 2014

1 INVOCATION

Prayer Before Singing

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD
EXODUS 40:34-35 / 2 CHRONICLES 5:13-14

May these words be your house / Make these songs your dwelling place / Make this music your sanctuary / Fill each note with your glory / We are building you a temple / A tabernacle carved in song / Fall upon it, come and live here / This is your house, these songs, your throne // Come Shekinah / Come Shekinah / Fill this vessel with your fire / Come Shekinah / Come Shekinah / With your presence these songs inspire

2 LET US KNOW

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD
HOSEA 6:1, 3 / PHILIPPIANS 3:7-10

Come, let us return to the LORD / For he has torn us, but he will heal us / Come, let us return to the LORD / For we are wounded, but he will heal // Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD / Let us know his mercy / Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD / Let us know his grace / His going forth is as certain as the dawn / It comes without fail every morning / So he is unchanging, he is faithful every day / Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD // Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD / Let us know his goodness / Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD / Let us know his love / He will come to us as the gently falling rain / That covers the earth in springtime / So he will soften and cause his fruit to grow / Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD // Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD / Let us know his power / Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD / Let us know his might / That I may know him and the power of his risen life / To be found in him, to be like him / To know him like this I count all gain as loss / That I may know, I press on to know the LORD

3 GRACE

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD

WITH REFERENCES TO "COME THOU FOUNT" BY ROBERT ROBINSON AND "AMAZING GRACE" BY JOHN NEWTON

Grace—it lifts my head when the shame and self-blame get too heavy / Grace—it guides my steps halting and wandering though they be / Grace—it is the lamplight shining bright in the night of my need // Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be // Grace—it draws me near, despite my sin it draws me in to the throne room / Grace—it stills the storm of the struggle in my soul / Grace—it keeps me true when the call of the fall seeks to win me // Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be // Grace—it reaches out across each chasm I can't bridge; it seeks me endlessly / "Grace—how sweet the sound, I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see" // Grace—it gives me strength when the load he's bestowed overwhelms me / Grace—it makes me whole each time I know I'm not enough // Grace—it whispers love when all I hear is the fear of my failure / Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be / Amazing grace—unending grace—wondrous grace he gives to me

4 CITY IN THE DISTANCE Song of Abraham

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD

HEBREWS 11:8-19

There's a city in the distance—I can see it from here / Far away from this country I call home / There's a vision of a future that is calling my heart / To abandon the life I have known // So I set out not knowing where this journey will take me / I set out not knowing where this road may lead / But I set out fully knowing who and what I am seeking / It's that city in the distance and its King // Now I'm wandering and sojourning in a land not yet mine / But a stranger in a tent on my own / Grains of promise by the seashore, counting stars overhead / Empty hands welcoming the vision from afar // So I set out not knowing where this journey will take me / I set out not knowing

where this road may lead / But I set out fully knowing who and what I am seeking / It's that city in the distance and its King // Child of promise on an altar, can it really be true? / Is the city above worth the loss? / But I believe even death cannot break the covenant / Through this child all the nations shall be blessed // I set out not knowing where this journey will take me / I set out not knowing where this road may lead / But I set out fully knowing who and what I am seeking/ It's that city in the distance and its King

5 HIGHER GROUND

WORDS BY JOHNSON OATMAN JR. / MUSIC BY CHARLES H. GABRIEL
ARRANGED BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD

I'm pressing on the upward way / New heights I'm gaining every day / Still praying as I'm onward bound / "Lord, plant my feet on higher ground." // Lord, lift me up and let me stand / By faith on Heaven's table land / A higher plane than I have found / Lord, plant my feet on higher ground // My heart has no desire to stay / Where doubts arise and fears dismay / Though some may dwell where these abound / My prayer, my aim, is higher ground // Lord, lift me up and let me stand / By faith on Heaven's table land / A higher plane than I have found / Lord, plant my feet on higher ground // I want to live above the world / Though Satan's darts at me are hurled / For faith has caught the joyful sound / The song of saints on higher ground // I want to scale the utmost height / And catch a gleam of glory bright / But still I'll pray till Heaven I've found / "Lord, lead me on to higher ground." // Lord, lift me up and let me stand / By faith on Heaven's table land / A higher plane than I have found / Lord, plant my feet on higher ground

6 SONG OF JOSEPH

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD
GENESIS 37, 39-45

Ephraim and Manasseh, come / Put aside your games and fun / Abba has so much he wants to tell you / The years are passing quickly on / Soon you'll be grown

and I'll be gone / Before then there's so much you need to know / About the God who always held me in the valleys / About the friend who has never let me down / And whatever you go through you can trust him, too / He's faithful, and he knows better than you do // I was but a carefree lad / My life ahead, what hopes I had / Betrayed by brothers, sold to be a slave / Then doing what I knew was right / When faced with sin I took my flight / False accusation put me in a cell / When I was sold into Egypt he came with me / And in the darkest days of prison he was there / And whatever you go through you can trust him, too / He's faithful, and he knows better than you do // A broken and forgotten man / But all along I was his plan / To rescue our people from destruction / For many years though I couldn't see / I waited for him patiently / Believing he was still a God of love / There came a day when at last I saw his purpose / He showed me every tear and heartache was not in vain // You can trust him when it feels as though he's dropped you / You can trust him though he seems so far away // When the hope in your heart sinks like a stone / When a drought in your soul leaves you broken, blind, alone / You can trust him especially then / Believe me, sons, I know / I know // And whatever you go through you can trust Him, too / He's faithful, and He knows better than you do // Ephraim and Manasseh, see / Sitting on your Abba's knee / The LORD is good, and you can always trust him

7 GRAIN OF WHEAT

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD
JOHN 12:24

Little seed in my hand / Symbol of hope and what is planned / You hold the future in a single grain / Tomorrow's harvest, tomorrow's gain // Unless that seed falls to the earth / Unless it dies to its own worth / It has no life / It bears no fruit / It cannot feed a multitude / It dwells alone with little worth / But if it dies it fills the earth // Just one life I have to live / Teach me to yield, teach me to give / Hopes, desires swirl all around / Only in losing can life be found // So let this life fall to the earth / Let it die to its own worth / That it may grow and bear much fruit / And may it feed a multitude / Beneath your feet deep in the ground / Let this life die

and there be found // The seed may break, the seed may fall / And it may suffer in letting go / But through its breaking some will be healed / And in its suffering new life will be revealed // So let this life fall to the earth / Let it die to its own worth / That it may grow and bear much fruit / And may it feed a multitude / Beneath your feet deep in the ground / Let this life die and there be found

8 FAINT, YET PURSUING

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD

JUDGES 8:4

It seems like I've been in this tunnel far too long / Weary and thirsty I've wondered if I can go on / I've loved you and served you and followed / Now I feel too weak to stand / And you seem distant, oh so distant, in this dry and weary land / But that's not the end of this story / Your grip of grace is too strong to fail / So although this cloud of exhaustion is not lifting / I've put my hand to this plow and I'll not turn back now / I won't let go and I'll always fight / There's a cause and a King worth everything // So though I am faint / I'm pursuing / Pursuing / Though I am weary, forlorn and can't see / My soul follows hard after Thee / I'm faint, yet pursuing / Pursuing // Appearances can be deceiving / Feelings, too, lead me astray / Yours is the only perspective that is true / Though I lack inspiration and vision / And my soul feels cracked and dry / Still I'm clinging, ever clinging / I will do it till I die / You warned me it might be this way / There'd be days when you don't seem real / But you told me to run in this race with endurance / Though I stumble and fall I will still give my all / No matter what I feel or I see / For my heart is set on "only thee" // I am faint, yet pursuing / Pursuing / Though I am weary, forlorn and can't see / My soul follows hard after Thee / I'm faint, yet pursuing // You give strength to the weary / And you give power to the faint / I know that if I wait on you I'll run and not be weary / I'll walk and not be faint / I'll rise up like the eagle on wings / So I'm weary yet waiting / On you // Make me strong and pursuing / In You I'm strong and pursuing / I'm running behind You no matter the cost / To gain You my Jesus I count all things lost / And though I am weary, forlorn and can't see / My soul follows hard after Thee / In your strength by your grace / I'm pursuing / Pursuing

9 SONG IN THE NIGHT

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD

PSALM 34:17, 18 / PSALM 56:8 / PSALM 30:5

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted / The LORD is near, the LORD is near and hears their cry / He saves those who are crushed in spirit / He saves those who are crushed in spirit // So I will sing this song in the night / I will trust till faith is sight / And joy comes in the morning // You know my steps / You have seen my wanderings / You put my tears / You put my tears in your bottle / It's you who daily bears my burden / On you, you said to cast my burden // So I will sing this song in the night / I will trust till faith is sight / And joy comes in the morning // Jesus, you are my song in the night / You're my healing, you're my light / In you will I hope till the morning

10 I WILL RESTORE

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD

JOEL 1:4 / JOEL 2:24-28

I know you're tired of this drought, wearied by suffering / Your homeland is desolate, dry, the plague's all-consuming / Gnawing and swarming and creeping and stripping, the locusts leave nothing behind / But I hear your cry from my throne on high and in the midst of this death you should know // That I will restore the years that the locust has eaten / Give back the years that the plague devoured / I will give grain, wine, and oil and you will be satisfied / What seems wasted to you I will restore // I know it's hard to believe that I could redeem this / The damage is far too advanced, there's no way to heal it / Pastures and rivers and orchards and vineyards dry up as the land itself mourns / But I have a plan to transform this land / If you trust in my promise you'll see // That I will restore the years that the locust has eaten / Give back the years that the plague devoured / I will give grain, wine, and oil and you will be satisfied / What seems wasted to you I will restore // Then I will pour out my Spirit on all mankind / Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy / Your old will dream dreams / Your young will see

visions in that day / So have faith, take heart, and hope in your God / Despite these surroundings, believe // That I will restore the years that the locust has eaten / Give back the years that the plague devoured / I will give grain, wine, and oil and you will be satisfied / What seems wasted to you I will restore / I will restore

11 WHOM HAVE I IN HEAVEN?

MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD

PSALM 73:25-26

Whom have I in heaven but you, O Lord? / Who have I in heaven but you? / And there's nothing on earth I desire / Nothing I desire besides you / My flesh and my heart may fail / But God is the strength of my heart / And my portion forever

12 BACK TO EDEN

Song of Adam

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD

Cast out of the garden to wander alone / Sent forth from the beauty behind / Cut off from perfection by an act of my own will / And to think it's all deserved / Justice has been served / This is how it feels to fall / To think what we wasted what we lost what we chose / And what we're chasing now / The curse we're chasing now / Could there be a chance? / A wistful backward glance... // Take me back to Eden / Back to the garden of life / To walk with my Creator in the cool of the day / Hand in hand as a man walks with his friend / Take me back to Eden / Take me back into fellowship sweet with him / Who formed me in that place / To daily see his face and walk with him // As thorns tear my fingers and sweat fills my eyes / The chasm between us looms wide / No bridge to your presence / No remedy for sin / Will it always be this way? / Is there nothing that can pay to wash our shame away? / The path to the garden / The road back to you is blocked by an angel's sword / The angel's flaming sword / As we stand here in our sin / Outside, looking in // Take me back to Eden / Back

to the garden of life / To walk with my Creator in the cool of the day / Hand in hand as a man walks with his friend / Take me back to Eden / Take me back into fellowship sweet with him / Who formed me in that place / To daily see his face and walk with him // But you are a redeemer / You would not let us fall without doing all to win us back / But blood must be spilled to draw us back to you / Blood alone can wash away the fall / You were the Lamb that came down from your throne and laid aside your glory to atone for us / And you shed your blood to make us near to God / By you the curse is lifted and I'm free / By the giving of your life this death is turned to life / Your mercy sheathes the sword / You are the bridge to God / The ransom has been paid / Blood has sheathed the blade // I am back in Eden / Back in the Garden of Life / I walk with my Creator in the cool of the day / Hand in hand as a man walks with his friend / I am back in Eden / I am basking in fellowship sweet with him / Who formed me in that place / And rescued me by grace to walk with him

13 TASTE AND SEE

MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD

PSALM 34:8 / JEREMIAH 29:13 / ISAIAH 44:3 / PSALM 81:10

Taste and see that the Lord is good / Taste and see only he can satisfy / The cravings of your soul / Your longing to be whole / Savor his grace and beauty / Drink deeply of his knowledge / Honeycomb, bread of life, living water / O taste and see the Lord is good // Seek me, you shall find me if you search with all your heart / I will be found by you / If you seek me with all your heart / I shall pour water on them that are thirsty / So lift your cup to // Taste and see that the Lord is good / Taste and see only he can satisfy / The cravings of your soul / Your longing to be whole / Savor his grace and beauty / Drink deeply of his knowledge / Honeycomb, bread of life, living water / O taste and see the Lord is good // Open your mouth wide and I will fill it / All you seek and ask for I will give / All that you desire of me / I pour out abundantly / Without limit / Without measure / In my hand find endless pleasure // Taste and see that the Lord is good / Taste and see only he can satisfy / The cravings of your

soul / Your longing to be whole / Savor his grace and beauty / Drink deeply of his knowledge / Honeycomb, bread of life, living water / O taste and see the Lord is good

14 PILLAR OF FIRE

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD

THE BOOK OF EXODUS / REVELATION 14:4 / ISAIAH 11:1 / EZEKIEL 34: 11-12

You saw me in bondage in the mire and the mud making bricks for a tyrant / You reached down to deliver, set my feet on a rock / Plagued the tyrant and destroyed him / The death of a lamb and the blood on my doorpost set me free to pursue you // So Pillar of Cloud guide me on this journey / Pillar of Fire light my way / Lead on, O King, to the rest that you promised / I will go wherever you go / I will follow the Lamb // I came to the sea stretching wide before me / Insurmountable wall blocks my way / Behind me the armies of my past are raging / Seeking to bind me again / But then through the water your breath clears a path / The sea is dry land by your power / The way of escape is laid out before me / The darkness behind swept away // Pillar of Cloud guide me on this journey / Pillar of Fire light my way / Lead on, O King, to the rest that you promised / I will go wherever you go / I will follow the Lamb // I came to the spring lying cool in the desert / Knelt to drink but, oh, it was bitter / I questioned your goodness, your kindness, your love to give suffering in my weakness / But a Branch you provided sprung from Jesse's own root when thrown into the spring made it sweet // So Pillar of Cloud guide me on this journey / Pillar of Fire light my way / Lead on, O King, to the rest that you promised / I will go wherever you go / I will follow the Lamb // I've hungered and thirsted my feet have grown sore / So many steps to take in this story / But my shoes are not worn and my soul has been filled with the manna your hand provided / Looking back at the distance I've traveled thus far thinking I was the one who pursued you / In the light of the Pillar the truth is made clear / Your love is pursuing me too / You're seeking me more than I'm seeking you // So Pillar of Cloud guide me on this journey / Pillar of Fire light my way / Lead on, O King, to the rest that you promised / I will go wherever you go / I will follow the Lamb

15 FURTHER UP AND FURTHER IN

WORDS AND MUSIC BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD
INSPIRED BY THE LAST BATTLE, BY C. S. LEWIS

Standing here in sunshine on this fertile plain / Overwhelmed by his goodness,
basking in his love / Gazing back in wonder at what his grace has brought me
through / I know I'm rich / But spreading wide before me far as my eyes can see
/ The limitless expanse of his glory yet to be explored // Further up, and further
in / Press on, my friends, there's more to win / More to fathom, more to taste
/ Endless reaches of his grace / Who he is goes on and on / Peerless beauty,
cloudless dawn / So run swiftly on and plumb his depths / Press further up, and
further in // Roaming through the grandeur of eternal life / Passing fields, streams,
and valleys / All radiant with his light / Even in the shadows when the road is rough
and steep / His mercy shines / And all we've tasted until now is but a tiny drop / Of
a love that fills the sea / This cup so full is pale and cold / Compared to all that lies
in store / So we rise and follow // Further up, and further in / Press on, my friends,
there's more to win / More to fathom, more to taste / Endless reaches of his grace
/ Who he is goes on and on / Peerless beauty, cloudless dawn / So run swiftly
on and plumb his depths / Press further up, and further in // Past a waterfall of
bounty / A glassy pool of peace / A mountain range of faithfulness / Joy's river
flowing free / Golden fields of mercy / Sunlight of his truth / Loving-kindness all
around / More real than this world will ever be // Standing in the brilliance of our
Father's house / Surrounded by his splendor, blinded by his light / Worshiping
forever the Lamb upon his throne / Beyond the sky / But even in that triumph
there's more to seek and know / We've eternity to heed his call / He says, "Come,
my child run // Further up, and further in / Press on, my Love, there's more to win
/ More to fathom, more to taste / Endless reaches of my grace / Who I am goes
on and on / Peerless beauty, cloudless dawn / So run swiftly on and plumb my
depths / Press further up, and further in

THANK YOU to all who supported me on the adventure of producing this second album. Your words—whether said to me, sent to my phone, or spoken to God on my behalf—gave me courage and perspective, and they reminded me of his all-sufficient grace. He is my audience of one. May your hearts be turned in his direction as you listen in.

Special thanks to ...

- ... my parents for managing recording-day details and praying me through.
- ... Andrea for knowing my music almost better than I do, for telling me when it makes her cry, and for singing it how I sing it even when it's not written that way on the page.
- ... the team of fantastic musicians who pulled together to bring this music to life.
- ... Eric, for excellence and patience all along the way.
- ... my wife Kate, for listening, praying, understanding, smiling, and speaking truth to me, day after day, and for feeding me during recording sessions.

Craig K. Sandford	vocals and piano
Andrea Murray	background vocals
Jessica Meyer	violin
Dongmyung Ahn	violin
Stephen Clink	viola
Nancy Matlack	cello
Carl Testa	bass guitar
Colin Meyer	percussion

PRODUCED BY CRAIG K. SANDFORD AND ERIC DAWSON TATE

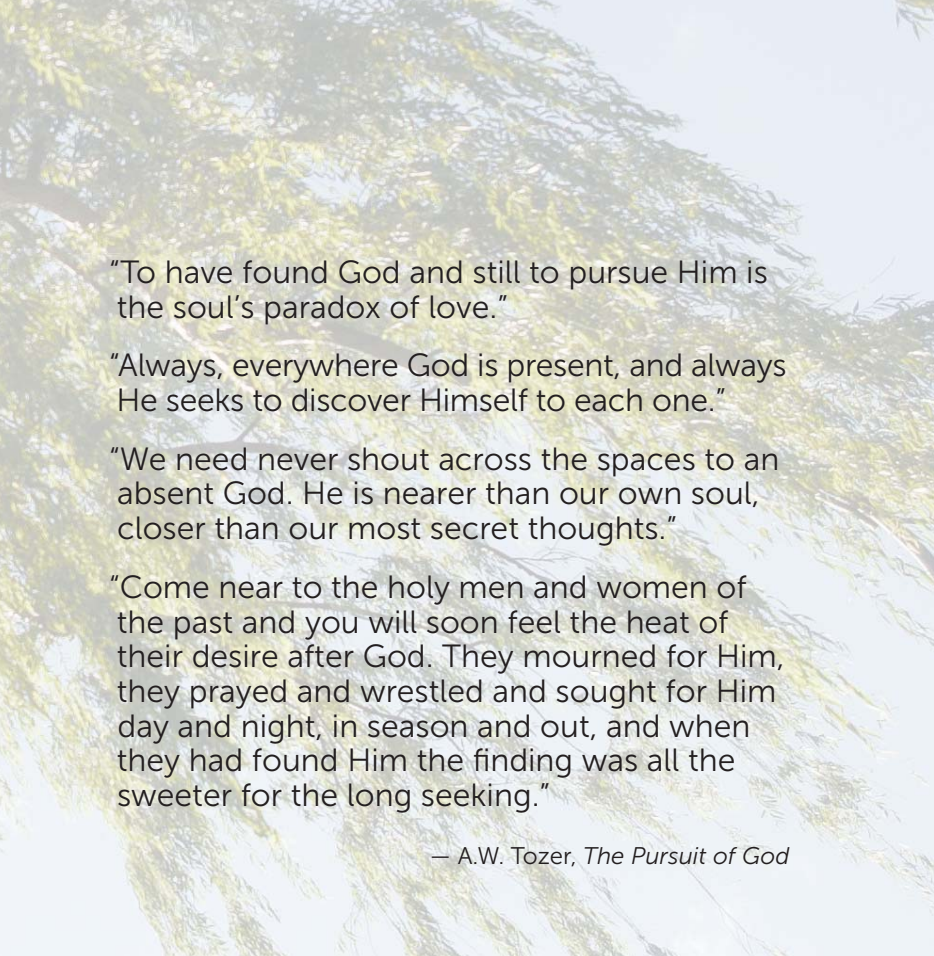
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Engineered and Mixed by Eric Dawson Tate

Mastered by West West Side Music

Design Aaron Sandford
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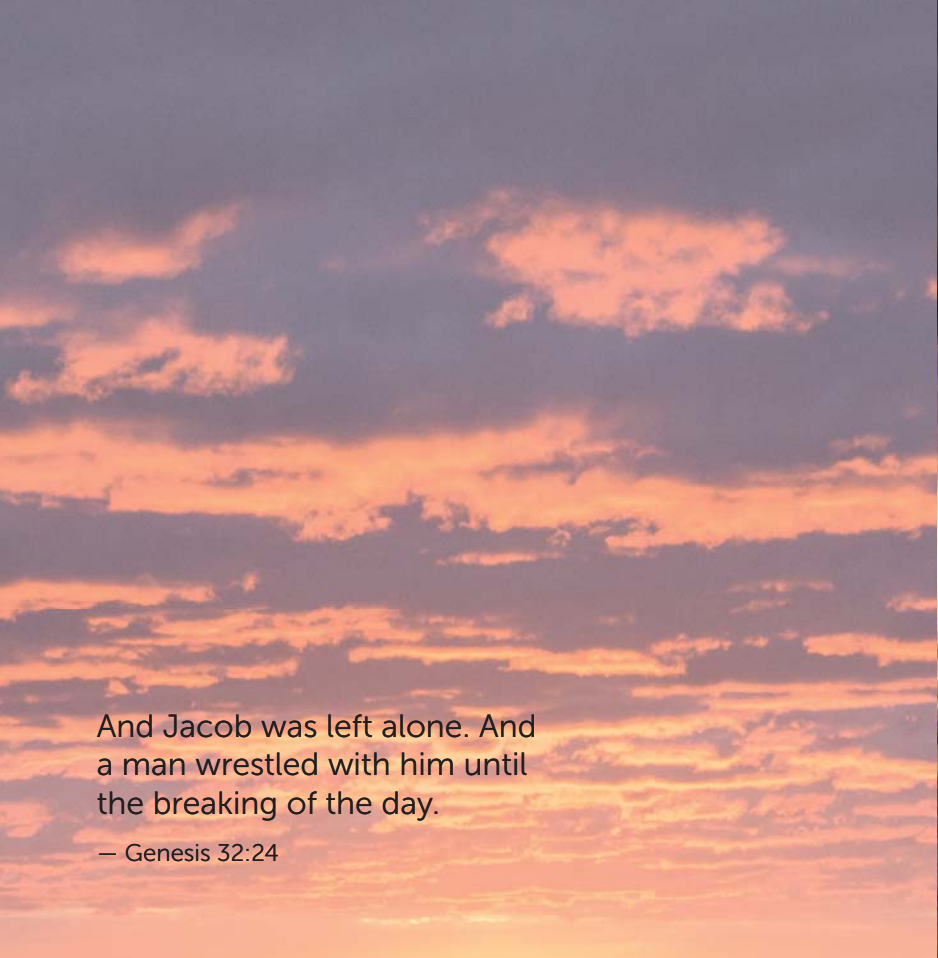
“To have found God and still to pursue Him is the soul’s paradox of love.”

“Always, everywhere God is present, and always He seeks to discover Himself to each one.”

“We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. He is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts.”

“Come near to the holy men and women of the past and you will soon feel the heat of their desire after God. They mourned for Him, they prayed and wrestled and sought for Him day and night, in season and out, and when they had found Him the finding was all the sweeter for the long seeking.”

— A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

A dramatic sky at sunset or sunrise, featuring a mix of dark purple, blue, and orange clouds. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange glow that filters through the clouds.

And Jacob was left alone. And
a man wrestled with him until
the breaking of the day.

— Genesis 32:24