

Out of the Cave

RESOURCES

One of the simplest ways we can begin to extend compassion and acceptance to those struggling with depression is to choose our words with care. However well-meaning we might be, some words do more harm than good, and we need to stop saying them. As a starting point, here's a list of ten things NOT to say. No one wants to hear these responses when they're depressed and anxious. If you've ever had others say something similar when you're struggling, you know how insensitive such words can be. The speakers might mean well, but their words only leave us feeling more isolated, more alone, more detached.

WHAT **WON'T** HELP SOMEONE STRUGGLING WITH **DEPRESSION**

TRYING HARDER

“Come on, now, you can snap out of this! Just try a little harder and I'm sure you'll feel better in no time.”

DISBELIEVING

“You suffer depression? But you're always smiling and seem so positive and upbeat! How can you be depressed?”

OVER-SPIRITUALIZING

“What does your quiet time look like right now?
Maybe you aren't spending enough time reading the Bible.
Maybe you should wake up earlier and pray more.”

DEFLECTING

“But you have so much to be thankful for! Just look at all the blessings in your life.”

MINIMIZING

“Well, I’m sure you feel bad, but honestly, it could be so much worse. Did I ever tell you about the time . . . ?”

CRITICIZING

“If you weren’t so hard on yourself, I bet you would feel a lot better. Just try to relax, okay? Don’t be such a perfectionist all the time.”

COMPARING

“I know it’s hard for you right now, but have you thought about what it must be like for people suffering bigger losses? Maybe you just need to consider helping others instead of focusing on yourself so much.”

DISMISSING

“This too shall pass. You’ll get over it—I know you will! Just give it a little time.”

REDIRECTING

“Wow, I wish I had your problems. That’s nothing compared to what I’ve been going through. Have I ever told you about . . . ?”

REDUCING

“You just need to get out of your head and quit thinking about stuff so much. Lighten up!”

When we're not okay, we need others who are willing to come alongside us. So what should you say to someone experiencing depression? How can you help them see a glimmer of God's light while they're still deep in the darkness of their cave? Basically, the rule is to say the same things you want to hear when you are struggling! Here are ten suggestions for how you can use your words to bring light to someone in the darkness of depression. The Bible tells us, "*Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body*" (Proverbs 16:24 ESV). This is never more evident than when we speak words of life to those in need of deep encouragement.

WHAT **WILL** HELP SOMEONE STRUGGLING WITH **DEPRESSION**

COMMITTING

"I'm here to sit with you
wherever you are right now. I'll listen and be with you
no matter what you're facing."

CONNECTING

"No matter how alone you feel, I care about you.
I want you to know you're not alone."

ACCEPTING

"I care about you and what's going on in your life.
Don't hold back. I'm here for you no matter what."

ENCOURAGING

“God loves you right where you are, and I know he loves you too much to let you stay there. Trust him. He is working in you, even if you don’t see it.”

LISTENING

“If you can, please tell me what it feels like.
I want to listen and understand more of what this is like for you.”

BEING TRUSTWORTHY

“I’d like to know what’s going on, and I promise to keep it confidential. You can trust me if you need someone to confide in.
I’m not here to judge you but to show you I care about you.”

SUPPORTING

“We’re going to get through this, together.”

HELPING

“Can I do something practical for you that might be helpful to you right now—
clean your house or cook some meals?”

GIVING HOPE

“This is not a dead end. I know God has more for you than this. Let’s talk through some options of what might be a helpful next step for you.”

OFFERING A NEW PERSPECTIVE

“Let’s see how we can look at this battle from another angle.”

LIFE IMBALANCE INVENTORY

Along with the psalmist, I pray, “Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be.

Remind me that my days are numbered—how fleeting my life is.

You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand.

My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath.”

PSALM 39:4–5 NLT

One of the most powerful tools I’ve discovered for maintaining balance in my life is a **weekly inventory**. If you’ve never done one, you might be surprised how revealing an inventory can be. I keep my inventory simple and use two steps to discern what’s essential.

I evaluate my life in **TWELVE AREAS**, assessing how I did in each area over the past week by asking these questions:

1. WHAT PATTERNS OR THEMES DO I SEE?
2. WHICH ACTIVITIES ARE AFFECTING MY EMOTIONS POSITIVELY? AND NEGATIVELY?
3. HOW CAN I CHANGE OR REDIRECT THOSE ACTIVITIES THAT COST TOO MUCH ENERGY, TIME, AND FOCUS?

Then I write a sentence expressing what I can change to create more balance in that area in the coming week.

We all have areas that tend to dominate the others and put our lives out of balance. We all have time wasters that can be eliminated, whether it's another work meeting that really doesn't require our presence or surfing online before bedtime. The very act of making new decisions for the coming week can be empowering and help you feel good as it gets started.

KEY MINDSETS:

- 1. STOP TRYING TO DO EVERYTHING AND CONSIDER WHAT GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO.**
- 2. STOP SAYING YES TO EVERYTHING AND LOOK FOR WAYS**
- 3. TO STRENGTHEN BOUNDARIES AROUND YOUR PRIORITIES.**
- 4. IF IT ISN'T A CLEAR YES, IT'S LIKELY A CLEAR NO.**

It might mean allowing margin between appointments or eliminating commitments that drain too much out of you for what they accomplish. Focus on making your greatest contribution to the people and priorities you cherish most. Use your weekly inventory to help you discern what to eliminate and what to implement.

FAITH

MARRIAGE

FAMILY

WORK

COMPUTER

COMMUNITY

SOCIAL

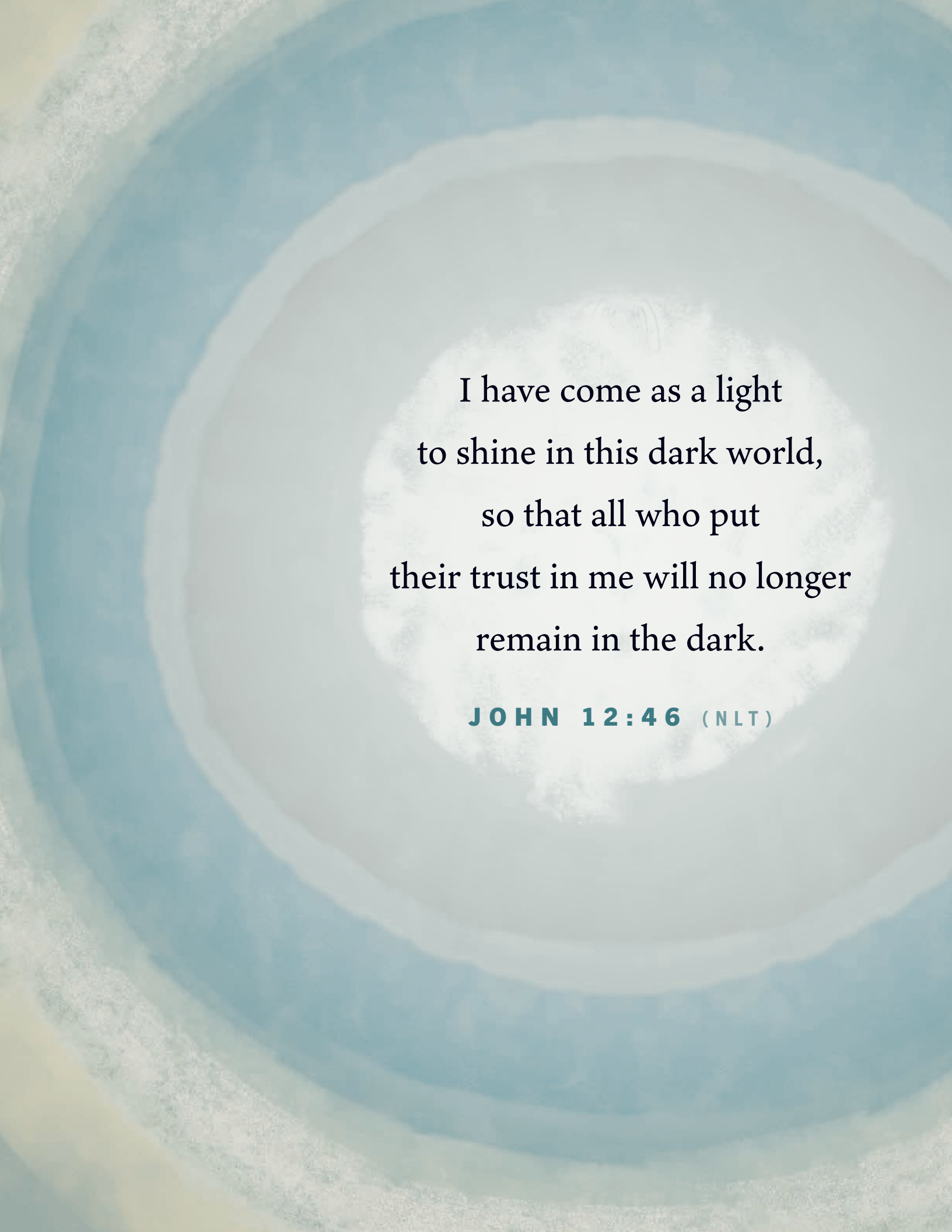
ATTITUDE

FINANCES

CREATIVITY

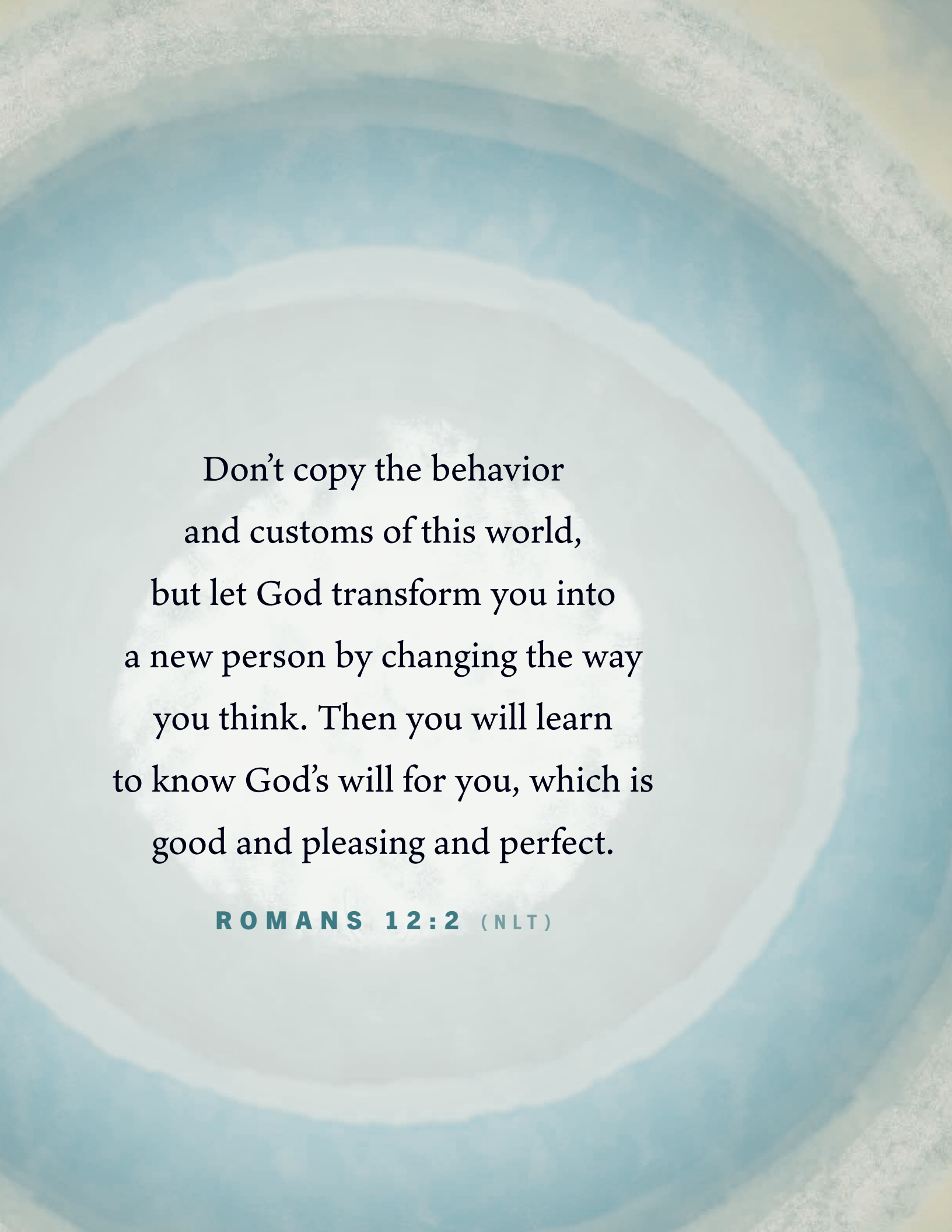
PHYSICAL/HEALTH

TRAVEL



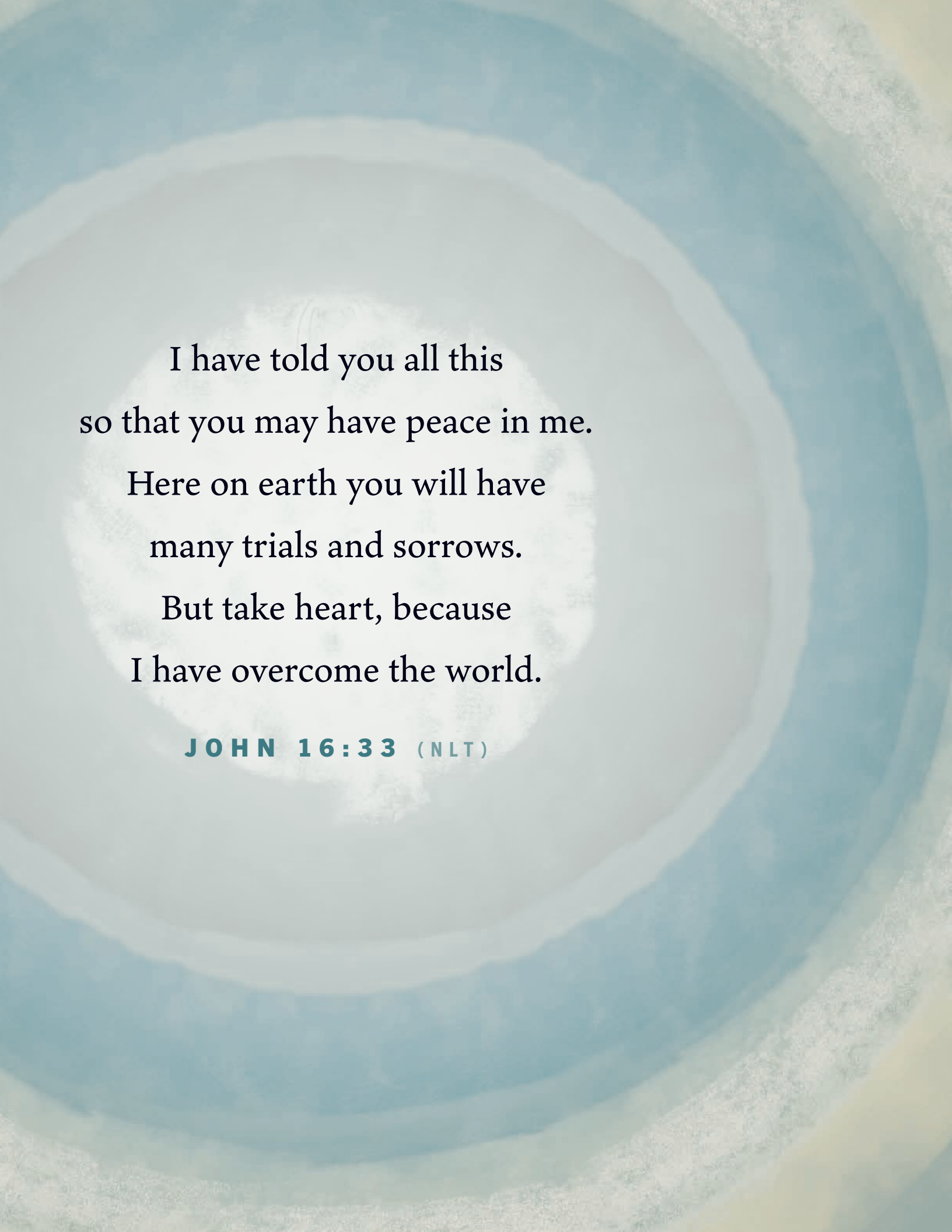
I have come as a light
to shine in this dark world,
so that all who put
their trust in me will no longer
remain in the dark.

JOHN 12:46 (NLT)



Don't copy the behavior
and customs of this world,
but let God transform you into
a new person by changing the way
you think. Then you will learn
to know God's will for you, which is
good and pleasing and perfect.

ROMANS 12:2 (NLT)

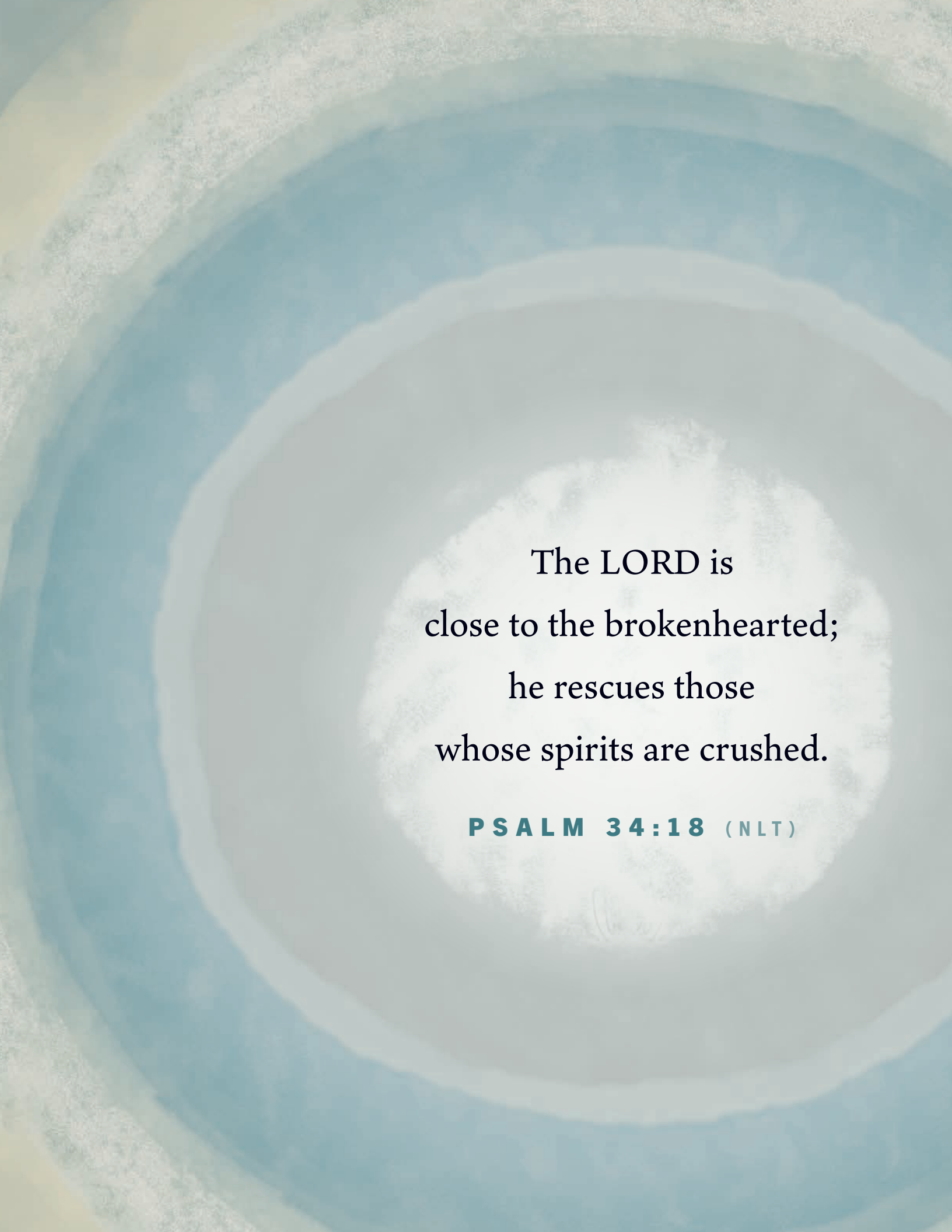


I have told you all this
so that you may have peace in me.

Here on earth you will have
many trials and sorrows.

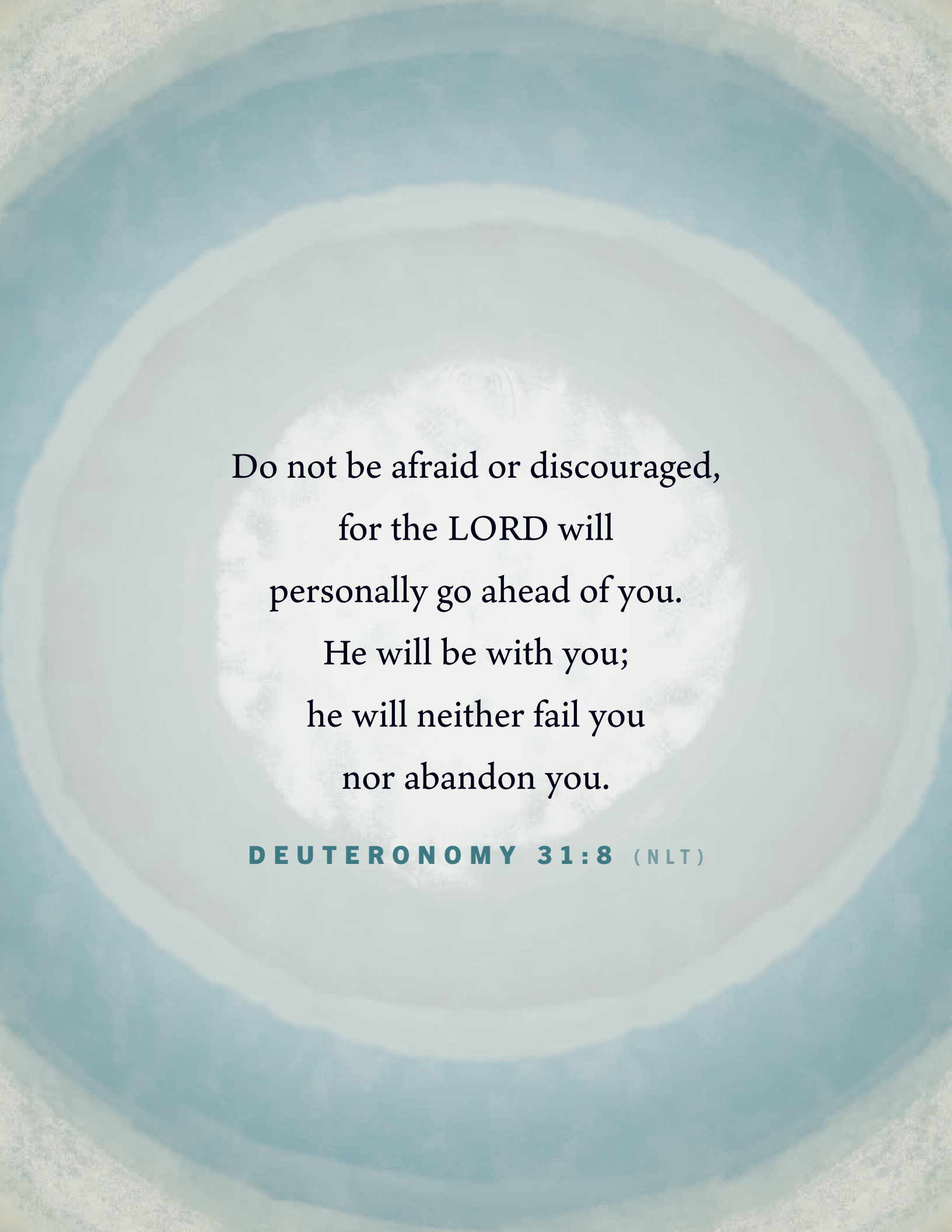
But take heart, because
I have overcome the world.

JOHN 16:33 (NLT)



The LORD is
close to the brokenhearted;
he rescues those
whose spirits are crushed.

PSALM 34:18 (NLT)



Do not be afraid or discouraged,
for the LORD will
personally go ahead of you.

He will be with you;
he will neither fail you
nor abandon you.

DEUTERONOMY 31:8 (NLT)