



TAKE IT TOO FAR

*Abundant Life,
Boundless Love,
Unending Grace*

JESS CONNOLLY

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Take It Too Far

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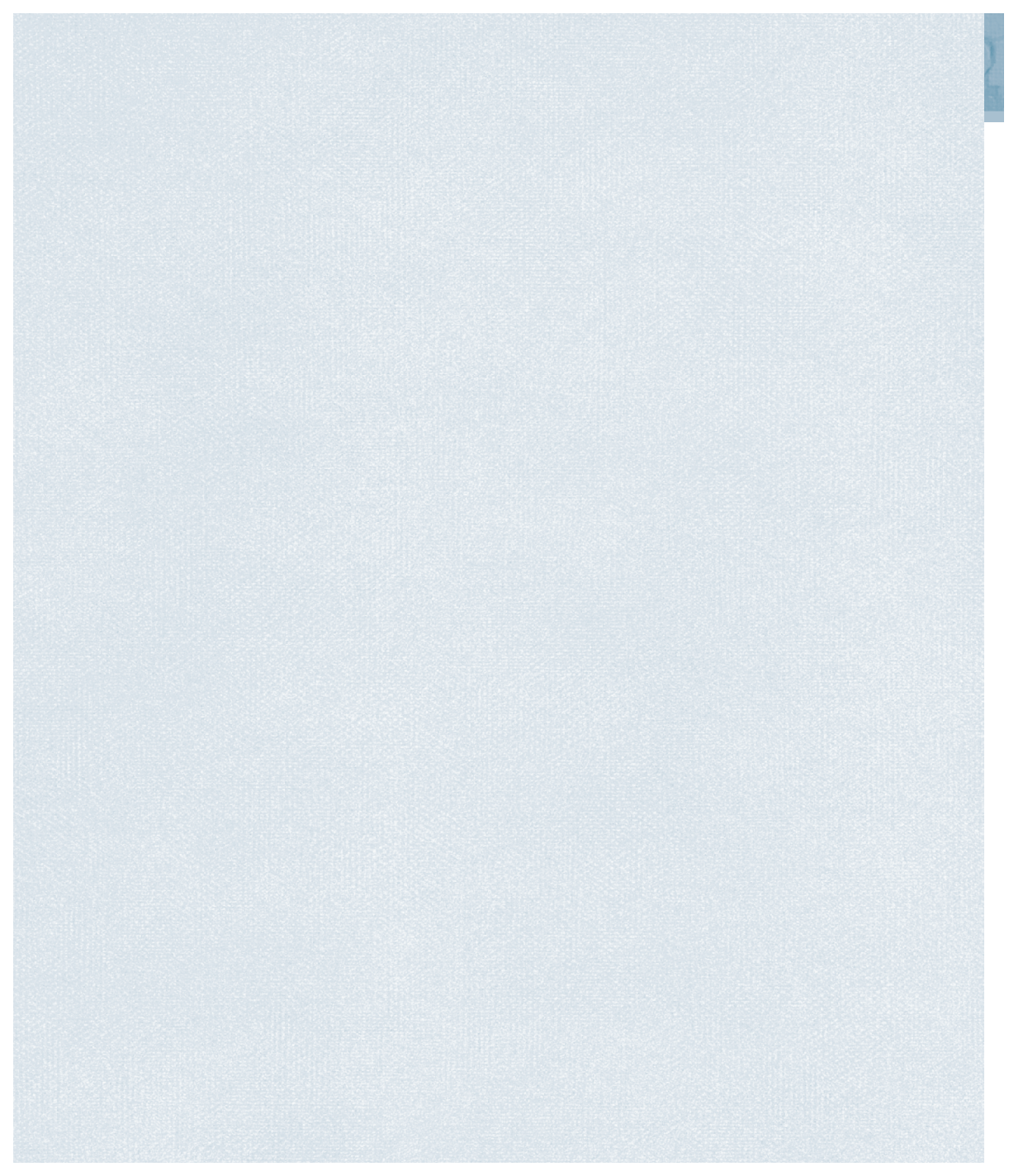
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FOREWORD

I know I have a unique ability. One might even call it a superpower.

I find myself taking things I shouldn't take too far, *very* far. And the things I should take too far in life, not very far at all.

Have you ever noticed this unique superpower in your life?

Coffee drinking, let's take it too far! Water. . . . Isn't coffee basically water?

Sports! Let's watch *all* the football today! (For some, this could be the equivalent of taking Anthropologie's 40-percent-off sale too far.)

How much ice cream is too much ice cream?


But what about the things of God? I find myself obsessing over pretty-natural things yet not obsessing over the supernatural things of God. What about the beautiful and abundant life God has for me in the kingdom? What about the things he has called me to and purposed for me to take too far?

"God what's the minimum I can do today?"

"God, how can I do just enough to ensure that blessing in my life?"

"God what's the appropriate church attendance to make sure my life runs smoothly?"

"How can I love people at a minimum?"



I don't know who you are, and I don't know where you're from, but I know who you belong to. You and I have been created by the God of the universe to take all of His good and wonderful things too far in the life He's given us.


I didn't always view life this way, which is why I'm so grateful God gave me Jess. I love marriage because it has the ability to take who you are and make you more like the beautiful person you've been created to be. My marriage to Jess has accomplished this in all the best ways.

God knew I needed someone to help me take the things of the kingdom too far. He knew I needed someone who would encourage me to run hard after the abundance God purposed for me in and through Jesus. God knew I needed someone kind enough to tell me, "Don't take that too far," and "Here! Take this too far! I see God's hand on your life! Take it and run with it!"

The same gift God gave me, He now gives to you.

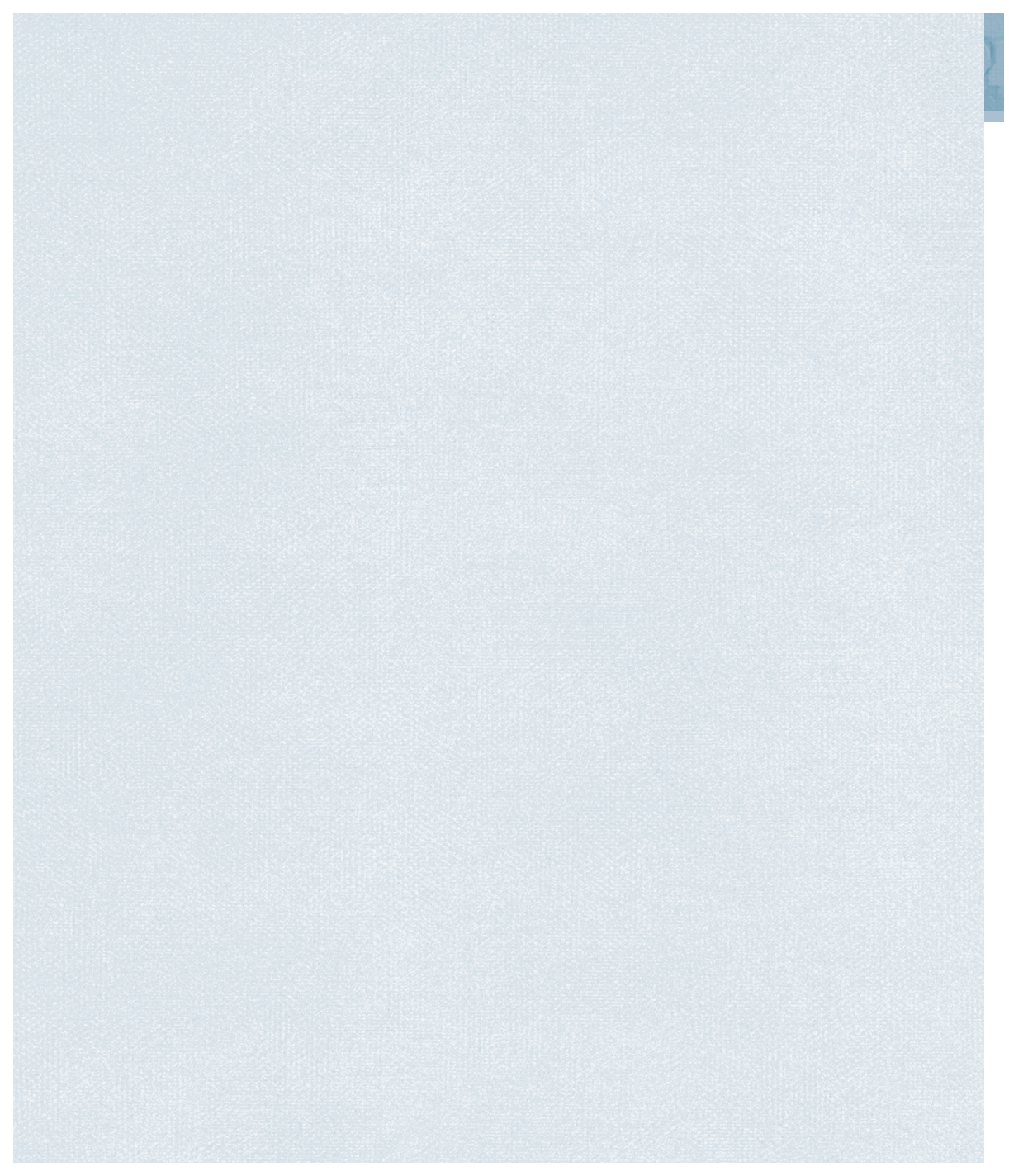
Enclosed in this book, you'll find one hundred encouragements from my best friend to you, proclaiming from the rooftops to take it too far. Whether it's God-given rest, seeing the Father's heart for justice established in your neighborhood, dancing with your friends and family, or even vulnerability, Jess is here to let you know you can never take the amazing and beautiful things of God too far.

And even though her desire to encourage you to take it too far is great, all she wants for you is to fall more in love with the God who fearfully and wonderfully made you.



Friends, because of this, I know this book will be a gift to your life. And as this book becomes a gift to your life, I know God will continue to make you a gift to this world as you join with Him in taking it too far.

Nick





POWER

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.—2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

Do you want to live a powerful life? Man, I do. Power is ability. Power is capacity. Power is the supply we need to do what we want, to do what we need. Power is helpful. The world will tell us some very interesting ways to gain power. Some are logical, some not so much.

Get a good night’s sleep and eat healthy foods.

Visualize what you want.

Step on other people to get where you want.

Be kind.

Trick people into thinking you’re kind.

Earn a lot of money.

Spend a lot of money.


Use your strengths.

Subdue your weaknesses.

Hide your problems.

Fix your problems.

Be special.



Don't be too special.

It's kind of exhausting to keep up with all the ideas of how to gain and wield power according to the world. Yet the Word of God tells us a whole separate way: Be weak. Have weaknesses. Thank God that you have weaknesses, and let Him move in and through you so you can see, access, and be impacted by His power.

It makes sense to me for two reasons: every earthly plan to gain and use power is derived from pretending we're not weak, and that seems to lead to pain and failure for everyone. Jesus is the hero; we're just a part of the rescue plan—ambassadors placed here to help restore what He loves. So we might as well acknowledge our fallible places in the whole scenario.

Second, all earthly plans to gain and use power seem to end in using it for our own good, whereas the kingdom plan allows the power of God to rest on our lives so we can give God glory and work for the good of others. And that sounds like the kind of power that I want to partner with.



Take Power Too Far

Name one weakness that you've been trying to hide, fix, or pretend doesn't exist. Ask God to help you believe in His grace and goodness, and see what happens when His power is made perfect.




WILD

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.—ROMANS 12:2 CSB

God used a documentary about wild horses a few years ago to stir up my affections for women in our generation, and I wrote about it in my first book, *Wild and Free*. I was watching as these beautiful wild horses ran free on the banks of the North Carolina beaches, thinking about how they were so untamed, so uncivilized, and I longed to be like them.

At its worst, Christian culture can be a systematic process to make people just like us, to make them tame and seemingly safe. But Jesus came that we might be free, and He made us uniquely individual and different, so it seems incredibly sad that we'd want to strip any of His kids of the blessing of being who He made them to be. Yet it happens, and often I perceive my own complicity in the system that tries to make others tame.

I noticed it most about six years ago when we began to plant our church, Bright City. I had been working under an incredibly false assumption that the women who came to our church would be like me, would seek God like me, would hear from Him like me, and would respond to Him like me. As women came, bringing their full, vibrant selves to the



table, I sensed the wildness among us, but my flesh responded in fear—thinking that different was dangerous.

God was trying to color my world, trying to paint complexity and beauty and mystery all over the way I interacted with Him. He was trying to bring me freedom and help me see just how wild He could be in the women around me. Thankfully, I saw the wild horses, and I remembered the pain of times that others had tried to contain or stifle Him in me, and I started on a quest to get back to the wild—not held down by cultural expectations or conclusions but freed up to be the wild woman He created me to be.

The world will tell us that wild is bad and dangerous, but God did not make us to fit into the trappings of society or the expectations of others. We can serve Him, follow Him, worship Him, and respond obediently to Him and still look dangerous to others. May we be women who take our wild freedom too far, for His glory and for the contagious catching on of freedom around us.



Take Being Made Wild Too Far

Identify one way you've conformed to the pattern of this world instead of wildly obeying what God has asked you to do. Repent and be free!



VULNERABLE


But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.—2 CORINTHIANS 4:7

A few years ago, I learned about the difference between transparency and vulnerability. They sound similar and may even look alike from the outside, but the motivation and the outcome for the two practices are different.

Transparency says, *I'll let you see through. No hiding; there are no barriers between you and my insides. I'll tell you what I'm thinking. I'll tell you what's in there. I'll show you stuff.* I am pretty good at being transparent; more than that, it comes naturally to me, and I often have to intentionally work at keeping things safe and hidden that need to be.

But vulnerability . . . that's different. Vulnerability is being woundable. It means that not only am I going to let you see me, but I'm going to open myself up to being hurt by you. Vulnerability means that I'll not only allow my weaknesses to be seen; I'll expose myself to potentially being made weaker. Vulnerability, man. I'm not so great at that.

Today's scripture talks about people as jars of clay, which are breakable and therefore vulnerable. They're also not much to look at. They're just vessels for beautiful things to grow in. You don't look at a clay pot



and think, *Wow! So sturdy! Wow! So precious! Wow! So special!* No, they're sweet and simple, and they sell them for two dollars at the local hardware store because they're easy to break. They're woundable.

Transparency is good and beautiful; vulnerability is reserved for select individuals who can be trusted to take care of our fragile and simple selves. If we're not sure who we can be vulnerable with, I've got one really beautiful place I think we should start: our Father. Who can be trusted. Who is careful. Who may allow hardship and pain to enter our life for a purpose but is worthy of making us woundable at all times.

Let's take vulnerability too far in the right places, and if we're not sure what those places are, let's start in the throne room of grace. Let's go vulnerable, not just be transparent.



Take Vulnerability Too Far

Be honest about how you think about yourself before God. Do you imagine yourself as a clay pot or a really special ornamental piece of art that needs to be dressed up and cleaned up to be accepted? What would it look like to be truly vulnerable with God?




PURPOSE

I know that you can do all things; no purpose
of yours can be thwarted.—Job 42:2

If I were the enemy, and I couldn't actually thwart God's plans for anyone's life, I'd use fear, comparison, and insecurity as tools to keep God's people from experiencing abundance. When I think about the really beautiful days of my life that have been shaded with fear, comparison, and insecurity, I'm sick and tired and done. There I was, ready to be used by God, ready to see and seek His purpose for my life, having everything I needed because He'd given it to me . . . but I became riddled with doubt.

I'm ready to experience my days as God made me to: full of love and expectancy, not fear. Declaring the ground He's given me blessed and good, not looking to the left or the right in anxious comparison. I'm ready to spend my days believing in God's capacity in my life instead of partnering with feelings of insecurity and inadequacy—as if it were my power that accomplished anything. I'm ready to stop doubting God's good purpose and how He plans to bring it to fruition.

If I were the enemy, I'd use fear and comparison and insecurity to keep me from seeing that *these are days of abundance*. But too bad, bro. We



know Truth, and He is telling a different story. These *are* the days. This is a God dream. Abundance is here, on earth as it is in heaven.

In today's scripture, Job makes a bold and beautiful statement about God's purpose after a painful period, and we're told that God accepted his prayer and then blessed his face off.

May we be able to say, on the best and most beautiful days, "I trust God's purpose for my life, and I won't miss out on the abundance that's right here." But also, on the horrible and painful days, may we also trust His plan with everything we have, not looking to the left or the right, but firmly holding on for all that He's got for us.



Take Purpose Too Far

Write a purpose statement for today. What do you have on your plate, and how do you think God is going to show up in and through you?




SUBMISSION

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority:
whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to
governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong
and to commend those who do right.—1 PETER 2:13–14

Don't get nervous; we're not going to stay on the subject of submission long. I have heard some really harmful talk and teaching about submission in my day. I've heard disastrous and painful things about what it means to submit in marriage, submit to religious authority, and some advice that's just made me flat out laugh. Once I heard a Bible teacher say that submission in marriage is just learning to duck so God hits your husband and not you. I don't think that's theologically correct, but it is funny to laugh at.

We've probably all heard some flawed teaching about submission, but let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater. In fact, if we reject the entire idea of submission, Satan wins and we miss out. Because the idea of being submitted to authority and leadership in a healthy way is an idea that grows our humility and our understanding and increases order in our lives.

We see submission among the Trinity, the triune Godhead—the Son submitting to the Father and creating anticipation for the Spirit. Submission can be beautiful.



The question really comes down to this: Are we willing to be led? Are we willing to be led by God? By our bosses? By those He's placed in leadership over us? If they're human, we have to remember that they're fallible and need Jesus like we do. They aren't any more loved by Him or equipped by Him, but He places people in leadership roles so we can function and get stuff done and move forward without looking around and trying to figure out who is in charge.

To take submission too far, I vote we find Christlike people who lead in a servant-hearted way and let God lead us through them. We don't need to make them our gods or the prime authority in our lives, but we can learn and move and grow beneath their care.

Let's take submission to God too far by letting Him do what He wants in our life, grow what He wants in our life, take us where He wants to go in our life. Let's trust His power and presence to do the heavy lifting, and let's let Him be in charge.



Take Submission Too Far

Is there any part of your life you've not submitted to God? Is there an area in which you hesitate to give Him power or authority? Give it back to Him with an action today. You know what to do. Take it too far!




ACCESS

The news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.—LUKE 5:15–16

I'm not sure how it worked when Jesus was on earth. He was fully human and fully God, so we can only guess about what His access to His Father was like. In my head, I want to believe that they had some kind of walkie-talkie system worked out, where they could just talk back and forth. But my theology tells me that's a human interpretation, and they're much more closely linked than that. One God, three incarnations. They share the same heart, the same mind, the same will.

What we do know is that Jesus took His access and availability to God seriously, and we've got recorded proof of His prayer time—both private and public. Hebrews 4:16 says to walk boldly to the throne of grace (NKJV). Jesus took the opportunities He had to go and talk to the Father. He took His access to heaven seriously, and so can we.

In Luke 11:1 we're told that the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, which proves to me that sometimes when you're talking to God, you feel like you're doing it wrong. They were *talking to God*, asking God *how to talk to God*. That's pretty cute and sweet and humble, if you ask me.



But we should learn from them and appreciate the access we've been given. Even if we feel intimidated by the idea of talking to the God who made the universe, we get to do it, and that should be enough to get us in the space of being grateful to utilize our access to Him.

Jesus took His earthly access and ability to commune with the Father seriously, so let's follow in His footsteps. Let's not get tripped up about the how and the method; let's just talk to God. Let's take it too far by actually stepping into the eternal conversation that He started when He called us individually by our names.



Take Access Too Far

Spend five minutes talking to God today. Go on a walk or sit in your car or journal your words. The only rule is they have to be real; don't say what you think you should say. Just talk to your Father.



HEALING


Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.—JAMES 5:14–15

What do you want God to say to you when you get to heaven? I mean, what do you *even think* that will be like? I confess I used to read the Left Behind books over and over and over again—because I just love picturing what interacting with Jesus will be like for all eternity.

I know we're all hoping for the "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (See Matthew 25:14–30.) I'm there too. And I know I'm going to be overcome with Jesus' glory in a way that I can't even imagine right now. Scripture informs me that when I really see Him, when I really understand, I'm going to want to worship Him for eternity (read Revelation 5:11–14), and that sounds amazing. Unimaginable, but amazing.

But for the last few years I've had this nagging feeling, and I can kind of picture Him with a gentle smile on His face, saying, "I wish you'd taken My Word, friend. I wish you'd believed all that I said!"

One subject that really makes me feel that way is healing. So much



of Scripture points to the fact that Jesus physically heals, and so little of my life leans on that truth.

A few years ago, I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease, and I can promise you I've spent many, many more hours at the doctor than I have on my knees, begging for healing. I don't feel shame about that, but I do wonder if I'm missing out on all that Jesus has to offer. I don't want to reach eternity to have Him say, "Sister! I had so much more for you on earth!"

We all know that in heaven there will be no pain (hallelujah!), but that means that in heaven, there won't be continued opportunities to experience Jesus' physical healing. Which means . . . now is our chance to take Him at His Word.

Let's take it too far—with our hopes in Him and not in the healing.



Take Healing Too Far

A headache, cancer, a private concern—whatever needs healing in your life, just ask Him today. Take it too far and remind Him that He has given you permission.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jess Connolly is a gal who is in the thick of it herself. She is the author of *Dance, Stand, Run* and *You Are the Girl for the Job*, and coauthor of *Wild and Free* and *Always Enough, Never Too Much*. She is also the co-owner of All Good Things Collective print shop and helped start both She Reads Truth and The Influence Network. She and her husband planted Bright City Church in Charleston, South Carolina, where they live with their four children. She blogs at jessconnolly.com.