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# GOD IS YOUR DEFENDER

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BY ROSIE RIVERA

BOOK CLUB KIT



# HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED



Order a copy of *God Is Your Defender*.  
(Available anywhere books are sold)

Visit [www.facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial](http://www.facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial) to watch the weekly sessions for this Book Club.

Print or save this Book Club Kit to follow along each week.

**#GodIsYourDefender**

# HOSTING YOUR VIRTUAL BOOK CLUB

Tips for your online meetings:

- Create an account with a virtual meeting host (Zoom, Google Hangouts, Facetime, Skype)
- Get everyone to print/save this Book Club Kit
  - Pick a day/time for each week to meet
- Go through the Book Club Kit + videos before your group then discuss during your meetings





# WEEK 1 - THE TRUE BATTLE

## Read:

Introduction, Chapter 1, & Chapter 2 of *God is Your Defender*

## Watch:

This week's live teaching at [facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial](https://facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial)

## Key Verse:

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." - Leviticus 19:18 NIV

## Do Battle:

If we're going to lean into letting God be our Defender, then we've got to come clean on whom the real battle is with when it comes to letting God be God. The real battle is with ourselves. Our sense of right and wrong. Our personalities. The baggage we carry from previous experiences. These all have an impact on our ability and willingness to allow God to defend us instead of jumping into the fray with retribution in our hearts and sharp words on our tongues—or shoving those hurts under the rug for no one to see. We can't control how people around us are going to treat us. We can't control their reactions, their nagging, or their neglect.

The only person in the equation that we get to make behavior choices for is us. Sometimes I want to excuse my response to a hurt by minimizing my reaction. But anytime I take matters into my own hands without first taking them to God, I'm at risk of violating these important words: "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18 niv). Does that mean that I never speak up, never confront? Of course not. What it does mean is that I must first seek God's cleansing of my own heart so that in my anger or my hurt or my confusion or my sense of rejection or violation, I don't respond in sin. Identifying how you commonly respond in hurtful situations will help you frame better responses and healthier perspectives.

Another factor that influences your response is the people you surround yourself with. We often exact our more petty forms of revenge in some of our closest relationships. Although sometimes it's the people we don't know who get the full brunt of our biggest reactions to frustrations and hurts. What is happening in these moments? The guardrails that may keep us safe in closer relationships sometimes come down with people we don't know, and we can find ourselves reacting far outside of what is helpful, what is good, what is of God. There were times Jesus stood up—but he also knew when to stand down.

If we're going to let God be our Defender, we have to understand the difference between someone unfairly hurting us and someone who simply has style issues. Whatever wrong, hurt, or injustice I face, that initial experience marks the start of a journey toward a place where I rest fully in having God as my Defender. It's a journey with lots of ups and downs. It's a journey in which I have to face some uncomfortable truths about myself.

We don't always get to have closure, when all the wrongs and hurts get resolved. But when I was honest with myself and saw that the point of this journey I was on was my relationship with God, something shifted. It became my mission to discover his place as my Defender. So be honest with yourself. Is revenge your highest priority? Or is God?

## Discuss:

- How do you tend to respond to someone's hurtful words or actions?
- What does it mean to take your feelings and circumstances to God before responding to them?
- What does it look like to let God be your Defender rather than take revenge yourself?

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# Fight:

As we learn to let the Lord lead the charge in the battles of our life, let's learn to fight with prayer. Pray this prayer and remember that God is both your refuge and your defender.

*Father God,*

*You know the hurts I have faced in life. You know the secret ones I've never talked about. You know the ones I'm facing today. You know how you knit me together, and you know the way I want to respond to these inequities, as well as the ways I've responded in the past. Father, I ask you to give me fresh eyes to see where I may be operating out of a grudge, out of a spirit of revenge. I ask you to give me fresh eyes to see where I may be operating out of fear. I ask you to give me fresh eyes to see where I may be responding in opposition to your will. Father, remind me that you are with me. Remind me that you are my Rock, my Fortress, and my Shield. Help me fight well the battle that is the most important one: the battle with myself. The battle with my fears, my wounds, my past, my anger. Thank you that you call me beloved. Thank you that you are always moving on my behalf, including moving within my own heart and spirit to make me more like you.*

*In the name of Jesus, amen.*

# Notes:

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# STEP INTO HEALING - IDENTIFY YOUR TRIGGERS

Take some time to do this exercise individually, and if you feel comfortable, share them with your group, close friends, or spouse.

A trigger is anything that takes you back to the abuse, the fear, the pain. For the husband who cheated on you and left, it could be the song that was "your" song. For the boss who was toxic and cut you down at every turn, it could be the verbiage that she used. It could be a location that looks like the place that guy cornered you and made unwanted advances. It could even be a verse that your pastor used to justify being overly controlling.

Whatever it is for you, the first step to healing the hurt is identifying the trigger. Here are some important questions to ask yourself as you begin...

## 1. DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR TRIGGERS ARE?

Pay attention to how they affect you. Journal about it. Bring it forward into your mind and recognize it. Ephesians 5:13 says, "Everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light." So bring those triggers into the light and see them for what they are. Use the space below to list them out.

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## 2. HAVE YOU COMMUNICATED THOSE TRIGGERS TO THE PEOPLE CLOSEST TO YOU?

Remember: you have a responsibility to work with the Lord to begin unraveling the power some of these triggers have over you. It's not your loved ones duty to constantly be on "trigger guard." But it's helpful for those close to you to understand how your past hurts, particularly those that remain unresolved, play into how you experience things and how seemingly harmless comments can lead to big throw-downs.

Make a plan to communicate your triggers with the people closest to you.

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# WEEK 2 - THE SPIRAL OF FAIR

## Read:

Chapters 3 & 4 of *God is Your Defender*

## Watch:

This week's live teaching at [facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial](https://facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial)

## Key Verse:

"Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting." - Psalm 139:23–24 NIV

## Do Battle:

Your personality style plays into your journey when it comes to how you want to see things made right—your idea of what is fair. The idea of what is fair and unfair is as old as Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve (see Genesis 4:1–13). I know that for me it is easy to slip into the kind of tantrum Cain experienced when something seems unfair. In the aftermath of a wrong happening to us, we often journey through the spiral of fair, playing over and over the tangle of fair and unfair. This spin is dizzying and disorienting, and most importantly, it keeps us from moving forward. It's movement, but it's the kind that goes nowhere as we struggle to make our way toward healing and leaning on our Defender God.

One of the toughest parts about being someone wired with a deep sense of fairness is that, in fact, there are things that are deeply unfair and they often don't have neat, clean solutions. Unfairness coming from friends and family seems more personal than hurts and wrongs that occur at the hands of strangers. If a stranger criticizes me rudely online, I don't like how I've been treated, but there's a degree of separation from the offender. I might not like it, but it doesn't feel personal. But it feels more unfair when it comes from someone in my day-to-day world. Because the wrong carries a different weight, I can be at even more risk of forgetting that sin is crouching at the door, waiting to see how I will conduct myself moving forward.

You're not the only follower of God to face an unfair trial or situation. Jesus was accused of all kinds of things. His reputation was maligned, his motives were misunderstood. The same Jesus who so valiantly and dramatically defended the poor and sick, who refused to allow people to be taken advantage of in the temple courts, and who didn't shy away from a debate also didn't speak up to defend himself in front of Pilate. Jesus didn't allow ego to become part of the picture. When he defended, it was for the cause of others. When he reprimanded, it was to uphold God's best. But when people made false claims against him, he was silent.

In my experience with a lawsuit over my sister's estate, I learned to set my ego aside for something more valuable than "winning." I gained time with my family when they needed me most. I gained peace. And I discovered that my ego can get all wrapped up in this spiral of fair and unfair. What about you? What are you fighting for? Out of a desire to set you free, I want to ask you to pray an extremely dangerous prayer. Ask God to search your heart and thoughts and show you a righteous way to settle any issue of fairness you are facing today (see Psalm 139:23-24). It may cost you something, but the price may be worth the blessing of knowing you are following God's lead and being freed from the spin you are caught in.

## Discuss:

- Is there a situation in your life that seems particularly painful and unfair because it involves a personal connection?
- What can you do to discern if God wants you to take a stand on an issue or quietly step back?
- How can prayer help you set your ego aside and give you insight into what matters to God?

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# Fight:

As we learn to let the Lord lead the charge in the battles of our life, let's learn to fight with prayer. Pray this prayer and remember that God is both your refuge and your defender.

*Lord God,*

*Search me and know me, just as your servant David wrote in Psalm 139. Show me where this fight has veered from a fight for what is fair and where my ego has gotten involved. Show me what is a righteous way to settle this issue. Yes, Lord, I know it will cost me some ground, but I know the ground you have for me is blessed. Help me know how to stand as Jesus stood, silent before unfair accusers, his silence ultimately a loud proclamation of power and righteousness and love. Show me, Lord, and give me the courage to see it.*

*In the name of Jesus, amen.*

# Notes:

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# STEP INTO HEALING - PERSONAL REFLECTION

Before you head into next week's content, take some time to respond to these questions. If you feel comfortable, share the answers with the members of your group!

**1. DO YOU HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF FAIR AND UNFAIR? WHERE DO YOU THINK THAT COMES FROM?**

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**2. WHEN YOU HAVE A DISAGREEMENT WITH SOMEONE IN YOUR FRIEND GROUP, FAMILY, OR COMMUNITY, DOES IT SEEM EVEN MORE UNFAIR TO YOU? WHY OR WHY NOT?**

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**3. HOW HARD IS IT FOR YOU TO BE WILLING TO SETTLE? DOES IT FEEL LIKE GIVING UP? WHAT COULD YOU ALSO BE GIVING UP BY NOT COMING TO A SETTLEMENT?**

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# WEEK 3 - THE QUICKSAND OF SELF DESTRUCTION

## Read:

Chapters 5, 6 & 7 of *God is Your Defender*

## Watch:

This week's live teaching at [facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial](https://www.facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial)

## Key Verse:

"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. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV

## Do Battle:

It wasn't long into my childhood that I first stumbled into my own quicksand of sorts. After experiencing sexual abuse beginning at the age of eight, I was filled with resentment and hate. I didn't have anyone to talk to about what had happened to me. I stuffed resentment down into the core of myself, storing it up, and that resentment and fury and anger began to grow. I responded by wearing baggy clothes and gaining weight. At 12 years old this seemed like the answer. I could exact some revenge on my abuser by turning into someone who seemed to disgust him. But it was also self-destructive as I became addicted to eating.

I already felt unworthy and dirty because of the abuse I had suffered. Now I despised the way I looked and my lack of control when it came to eating. Even more important, I was compromising my health. I decided to dramatically lose weight. With the weight gain, I was trying to get back at my abuser, to make him question why he had ever targeted me. With the weight loss, I was trying to get back at him again, to prove that a good guy, that guys in general, would want what he had tried to ruin. But I was hurting myself physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

By the age of 15 I was looking better, and then I was assaulted again by a date. After that night, he considered me his girlfriend and pursued me. At that point, I thought, What does it matter? At least he wants me. When I look back on my thought process, it seems incredibly sad. As the years went by my risky behavior increased. I hated what I was doing. Yet I seemed powerless to stop it. My attempts to get back at my original abuser had led me to the quicksand of self-destructive behavior.

God's mercy is incredible to me. It is sufficient to cover and heal the things we've done in an effort to get back at those who have hurt us. Part of the way we experience God's mercy is to do something that is hard for us: receive it. I finally began making my way back to God. I slowly began digging back into his Word. With baby steps, I started to pray with more consistency and faith. I was able to work with a great counselor. It was a process, it was hard, and it took me a long time to come to a deeper understanding of why I had acted out the way I had.

Now, as an adult, I'm still working on it, catching myself when I tend to isolate and lower the risk of rejection. The good news is we can get better. We can identify the ways that our hurts and our pursuits of revenge have cost us in the past, and we can challenge ourselves to press on. I can walk as a daughter of God. God's grace is sufficient for me and for you (see 2 Corinthians 12:9). It is enough to carry us, enough to let us live better. When God acts as our Defender, it ultimately leads to good for us. When we act as our own defenders, doing it our own way, it can lead to even deeper hurt and destruction in our lives.

## Discuss:

- How have you seen acting as your own defender, doing it your own way, lead to hurt and self-destruction? Who else has been hurt along the way?
- How does God's mercy help you experience healing? What does his mercy tell you about his love for you?
- How does seeing God as your Defender and yourself as a child of God help you move toward emotional, spiritual, and physical health?

# Fight:

As we learn to let the Lord lead the charge in the battles of our life, let's learn to fight with prayer. Pray this prayer and remember that God is both your refuge and your defender.

*Lord God,*

*Forgive me of the ways I have tried to take vengeance into my own hands. Give me the grace to allow you to enact justice however you see fit even when it feels unfair. As I learn to wait on you to fight on my behalf, would you protect me from my own self-sabotaging habits. Remind me that I am safest by your side., and when I stumble remind me that your power is made perfect in my weakness as your word tells us in 2 Corinthians. Lord when I crave revenge, remind me that it has no power to heal me. Only you can, so would you come and heal the wounds and scars that nothing else can. My hope for wholeness and restoration is in you.*

*Amen.*

# Notes:

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# STEP INTO HEALING - PERSONAL REFLECTION

Before you head into next week's content, take some time to respond to these questions. If you feel comfortable, share the answers with the members of your group!

**1. WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU HAVE DONE IN RESPONSE TO THE HURTS YOU'VE EXPERIENCED THAT, IN TURN, HAVE HURT YOU?**

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**2. ARE YOU READY TO EXIT THAT QUICKSAND OF SELF-DESTRUCTION? WHAT WOULD THAT LOOK LIKE?**

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**3. WHO COULD HELP YOU FIND ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESOURCES YOU MIGHT NEED TO MOVE FORWARD?**

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# WEEK 4 - THE TRAP OF AVOIDANCE

## Read:

Chapters 8 & 9 of *God is Your Defender*

## Watch:

This week's live teaching at [facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial](https://facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial)

## Key Verse:

"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible." - Ephesians 5:11–13 NIV

## Do Battle:

When we avoid certain issues in our journey of justice, when we procrastinate in facing the root of a hurt, we risk an even bigger injury down the road. That's the Trap of Avoidance. We can think we're just too busy to deal with something. We don't have time. It's fine, it's fine. But procrastination is avoidance, and the longer we put off dealing with the hurts and wrongs in our lives, the deeper the infection and decay to our sense of peace can go.

This is where our journey takes an interesting turn as we continue learning how to lean into God as our Defender. Many of us need help with not trying to take matters into our own hands. But some of us also have a tendency to let things go for too long. We stay silent when we should speak up. We neglect to call out that which has unrighteously crossed a boundary. It can feel very subtle, the difference between wisely keeping our mouths shut about some things and appropriately exposing others. Let's face it: it can seem more comfortable to simply not say anything than to open up a can of worms. When we're wanting to walk well with God, it can almost feel more righteous or grace-filled not to speak up. But we are also told that we have a responsibility to not allow sinful behaviors to continue (see Ephesians 5:11–13).

There are times when it is essential to call out abuse, illegal acts, and the exploitation of the helpless. To speak up does not replace God as our Defender; it allows us to do battle alongside him—allowing God to determine what happens next. We're not talking about hurt feelings or differences of opinion here, but behaviors and decisions that could harm, defraud, or put others at risk. If we procrastinate in doing what is hard but right, we would be responsible for allowing another human being to potentially be hurt. Love, true love, exposes these kinds of wrongs so they don't happen again.

There are times when the mute button is your best approach. That means removing yourself from the situation, choosing not to comment, and giving yourself a little space. But sometimes, a more dramatic protocol is necessary. If someone has crossed the line, is a danger to others, is compromising the unity of a faith community, or is slandering or extorting others, it's time to unfollow that person. You might think that seems harsh, but that's what Jesus calls us to do when fellow believer's behavior has moved beyond a certain point (see Matthew 18:15–17). I don't claim that it's easy to find the courage to speak up and turn the lights on in the dark. It's hard. It takes a lot of wisdom (see James 1:5).

Look, I would rather err on the side of grace than call someone out in a way that ultimately means I'm judging that person. But for followers of Christ, making righteousness our goal and encouraging others on to righteousness isn't judging. It's judicious. It means that you've used wisdom and good judgment in a situation. Make sure when you're faced with a situation in which you could speak up or remain silent that you think through the options: Would speaking up be judgmental? Or would it be judicious? A judicious heart, empowered by the Holy Spirit, can make the right call. The Holy Spirit longs to comfort and counsel and infuse us with courage to face evil head on.

## Discuss:

- How has avoiding dealing with an issue in your own life affected you? Why does it sometimes feel easier to avoid dealing with problems?
- What are some situations where you might need to speak up and expose a wrong?
- Who can guide you in protecting yourself and others from an evil circumstance, behavior, or person?

# Fight:

As we learn to let the Lord lead the charge in the battles of our life, let's learn to fight with prayer. Pray this prayer and remember that God is both your refuge and your defender.

*Father God,*

*I ask for your wisdom to know when I should raise my voice against those causing harm to myself, others, or my community. Show me where I have procrastinated on bringing up past hurt and pain out of fear. I pray that as I begin to share the most vulnerable parts of my story, you would bring a loving community around me to walk with me and to help me bear the burdens of this journey. When I see others causing harm, I pray that I would respond judiciously, always open to wise counsel and even correction when I am wrong. Strengthen my voice so that I may be a vessel bringing goodness to the world around me. Guard my tongue from vicious gossip, and give me the grace to speak with love even toward those who have done wrong in my life. As you heal my heart, I pray more words would be a reflection of what you've done in me and evidence of your power.*

*Amen.*

## Notes:

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# STEP INTO HEALING - PERSONAL REFLECTION

Before you head into next week's content, take some time to respond to these questions. If you feel comfortable, share the answers with the members of your group!

## 1. WHAT HAVE YOU NOT SPOKEN UP ABOUT THAT NEEDS TO BE BROUGHT INTO THE LIGHT?

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## 2. WHAT HAS KEPT YOU SILENT?

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## 3. WHAT WOULD IT MEAN TO ACT AS THE GOOD SAMARITAN TOWARD YOURSELF?

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**4. WHAT HAS AVOIDANCE COST YOU?**

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**5. WHAT WOULD LEAVING THE TRAP OF  
AVOIDANCE DO FOR YOUR FUTURE?**

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# WEEK 5 - THE ULTIMATE DEFENDER

## Read:

Chapters 10 & 11 of *God is Your Defender*

## Watch:

This week's live teaching at [facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial](https://facebook.com/RosieRiveraOficial)

## Key Verse:

"But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
I will sing the Lord's praise,  
for he has been good to me." Psalm 13:5–6 NIV

## Do Battle:

To invite God to be our Defender, there are truths we must accept. Because I have my own sense of what punishment fits what crime, I have a very specific expectation of what God should do to show himself as my Defender in how he deals with those who have wronged me. But God isn't just the upholder of righteousness and justice; he is righteousness itself. And he is the Judge, which means he gets to make the rules.

God hears us when we tell him of the hurts and wrongs we experience. It matters deeply to him. But when God is our Defender, it also means he is the Judge over the case. He's the God who welcomed into paradise the criminal who hung on the cross next to Jesus, a man guilty of his crimes (see Luke 23:32–43). And he's the God who struck down two early followers of the church, Ananias and Sapphira, for lying about how much profit from a land sale they had actually given to the church (see Acts 5:1–11). He gets to decide what punishment fits which crime—and he has his reasons. To call on God as your Defender is to release your idea of the appropriate penalty and lean into how he is going to deal with it.

Sometimes God's defense of us is swift. Sometimes it is not, according to our perspective. It doesn't mean he isn't working behind the scenes to vindicate us. It was years before the person who abused me as a child was ultimately brought to justice. He was a fugitive for nine years, trying to avoid arrest. But when it did happen, it was swift. The punishment for his crime was more severe at this time, and I was able to testify in a much more powerful way than I would have been able to years earlier. God understands our struggle with his timing and he includes our questions of "How long?" in his Word (see Psalm 13). He is big enough to wrestle with us over this question. And he has shown me something amazing along the way: the answer to this question is, I am here.

God gave me a clear and specific vision that in the midst of some of the most horrible things that have happened to me, he was cradling me in his lap. Christ covered me with his robe, even though the situation around me was appalling. In that moment, he was already planning my vindication. If I want to embrace the righteousness and justice of God, I must at the same time embrace his timing for my defense, which might look far different from mine.

I am also thankful for God's grace and mercy—giving us favor that we don't deserve and withholding punishment that we do deserve. When I consider the years I lived in rebellion to his call to righteousness, and the ways I still fail, I see that his mercy is all that has stood between me and my own self-destructiveness. As a merciful Defender, God is about the business of saving people—even those we feel are in the wrong. I want to show others the kind of mercy I want to be shown.

## Discuss:

- How do you feel when people seem to get away with evil?
- How does your relationship with God affect your trust in his timing and his justice?
- How do God's grace and mercy affect the way you treat other people?

# Fight:

As we learn to let the Lord lead the charge in the battles of our life, let's learn to fight with prayer. Pray this prayer and remember that God is both your refuge and your defender.

*Lord God,*

*Give me the grace to trust in the timing of your justice. As you are righteousness itself, you know when to defend quickly and when to defend slowly. When I'm wrestling with pain, injustices, and the wrongs committed against me, help me to seek your presence before I seek answers from you. Do not let me forget that as your mercy covers me, it covers those who hurt me. When that truth is hard to embrace, remind me of the great love you have for all your children. Lord, you are my defender and my savior. You are just and wise. You are holy and righteous. Whether I see you carry out justice during my time on Earth or not, I trust your love for me and your desire to carry me through any pain that is caused me. You will never forsake me. Thank you for your salvation.*

*Amen.*

# Notes:

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# STEP INTO HEALING - MAKE THE EXCHANGE

**In Chapter 11, you read about leaving the “eye for an eye” mindset behind and trading it for an “I for an I” mentality.**

**Remind yourself of these statements and cling to the truth and freedom in each of them as you continue on your journey of healing. Write them down and put them in places you’ll see them everyday to help remind you that God is your defender!**

Exchange “I am hurt” for **“I am healed.”**

Exchange “I don’t think it’s fair” for **“I can release what’s fair and accept what is.”**

Exchange “I can never let this go” for **“I acknowledge what happened, and I can move on.”**

Exchange “I can never be the same” for **“I have grown and matured from this.”**

Exchange “I will never forgive” for **“I, through Christ, can do all things.”**

**Believing these things most likely won’t come easy for you. It’s okay to take your time getting there and plenty of grace when you need it. So trade your burdens. Trade your broken heart. Trade your loss. And receive fresh eyes, a renewed faith, and an empowered story.**

**He is able. He is so able, and that is true restoration.**

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