

## **Story idea #3: God in her pocket** (*working title*)

### **Blurb**

Mackenzie Holt turns to a new AI-powered app to find purpose in life, as her faith is swept away in the dramas of family life and the distraction of her phone. Despite the protestations of her Grandmother to return to the God she knew in her teens, she loses herself in *Omniscience*, an app the media is trumpeting is like having God in your pocket.

When her Grandmother dies, she hears the voice of God comforting her in her grief. While Mackenzie finds breaking an addictive app is difficult, reconnecting with her faith is even harder. And when her family is threatened, she discovers that the God she thought she knew – and who she has been scared of all these years - isn't even close to who He really is – the God of her Grandmother.

### **Central theme**

“If we would just pause, turn inward, and gaze at His magnificence, we would be enriched, strengthened and at peace. (p36, *The Awe of God*)

“We are promised: For God, who said, “Let there be light in the darkness,” has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)”

Is the God we think we know really the God that says I AM?

The heart of this story draws out the themes of Week 1 of the book: An Awesome God. It follows a theme of the identity of God, and our connection to Him. God is not a genie who grants wishes, who fits into our lives when we feel we need Him. Neither is God a tyrant looking to punish every mistake we make.

### **Subsequent themes**

- “This world’s system is like river rapids forcefully surging, even pounding upon a person’s psyche in an attempt to dismiss the glory of God. The substance of this river is words, thoughts, images, videos, or any other medium that can be used to elevate mortal man at the expense of reducing the greatness of our Creator.” (p59, *The Awe of God*). The pressures of having it all together in modern life pushes Mackenzie to find answers because she thinks she’s expected to have them.

- “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom (Proverbs 1:7) ... What if this fear eradicates all other fears?” (*p xiv, The Awe of God*). Mackenzie is fearful of everything – work, her daughter’s well-being, losing her marriage and her Grandmother. She is distracted by things that promise to empower her and elevate her to be her own God. But God’s intervention in her life outshines these fears.

## Story outline

Mackenzie Holt gets a rejection letter - she hasn't got the promotion. Again. Despite the last nine promotions at her bank being men, and a Director saying he's committed to equality targets. She needs both hers and her husband's income just to help her family stay afloat and keep their heads above their rising standard of living.

Home is not a refuge though. Mackenzie has tried everything with Charlotte, her eldest daughter. She remembers being 14, but she wasn't battered by a flood of influencers and goodness-knows-what on her ever-present phone. She and her husband Tom have run out of ideas and energy. Their joint prayers as parents have devolved into individual prayers and, as her faith and marriage drift away, she wonders why God doesn't answer her questions like He used to. And she herself is lured more and more into her phone just for an escape.

She visits her Grandmother – a Godly woman in her late 70s – who is very concerned about Mackenzie. She's touched, thinking she's supportive of how hard she's working, but instead her Grandma's concern is about her drifting from the strong faith she had growing up and having no purpose.

She confronts her director at work and hears she needs to work harder and more diligently in order to be considered for promotion. As McKenzie pushes back on this the director intimates that if she doesn't want to be a team player, she's welcome to leave. That night she has another run in with Charlotte, and Mackenzie again disappears into her phone for relief. She sees a number of online ads for a new app called *Omniscience*. Powered by AI, it promises to be a guide for your life, helping you make key decisions and – importantly for Mackenzie – helping you discover your purpose. It is taking the world by storm and the media are trumpeting it as like having God in your pocket.

Mackenzie downloads it and tests it with simple questions about what to do at work. *Omniscience* seems to handle it quite simply and in a warm, personable way. She puts the advice into place the next day and it works. Her director changes his tune.

She checks in with a few friends at her church. One uses *Omniscience* religiously while the other one refuses – it could be dangerous, and God wants relationship with us, not to be replaced. And He certainly is not to be carried around in your pocket like a personal assistant. *Omniscience* now helps Mackenzie address the issues with her children and husband. Her family life improves and Mackenzie recovers the spring in her step. But Tom is still annoyed by the fact that she's on her phone all time, and calls her out for expecting something of Charlotte that she doesn't do herself.

Mackenzie's Grandmother's health is declining. She notices Mackenzie looks more positive and wonders if God is revealing Himself to her, which is what she has been praying for. Mackenzie instead excitedly tells her about a new app on her phone which provides direction for her life. Her Grandmother warns her – this not the God she knows. He would never fit in one's pocket. She echoes the conversation with her friend – we are made for relationship with Him, not to replace Him. And this thing on her phone is only telling her what she wants to hear because she is the one telling it what she wants. God demands our obedience, not our shopping list. And Mackenzie leaves, heartbroken that the conversation with her Grandmother ended so badly.

Mackenzie again turns to *Omniscience* seeking deeper direction, asking it to give her purpose in life. The app provides a number of answers, all framed around what Mackenzie wants. She starts to implement them, with the app now sending her notifications as if checking in on her progress.

Her two friends check in on her – one raving about her new direction in life given to her by *Omniscience*. The other friend visits with her pastor, desperately wanting to know why she's turning her back on God. To interrupt this conversation, the app sends her numerous notifications to get her attention. Meanwhile her pastor tells her to delete it as God is all-powerful and will punish her disobedience.

At the hospice, Mackenzie's Grandmother has fallen into a coma and she is called in to say goodbye. She sits next to the bed holding her Grandmother's hand, her children having been taken home by her husband after a final goodbye.

Remembering their last conversation, she squeezes her Grandmother's hand and prays to be given one more chance to speak with her. She opens her eyes and looks beyond Mackenzie - first at the ceiling and then beyond it. Beaming, her final whispered words are "Mackenzie, He is real, and He is not in your pocket. He is there." Her quivering finger points to the ceiling. Mackenzie asks: "where?" "Everywhere." Her Grandmother passes away. Mackenzie is stunned, shocked and convicted in a whirlwind of emotions and thanks God for a final chance to speak with her. The phone buzzes in her pocket, desperate for her attention. her Grandmother's life and her influence over her and her family. The phone buzzes in her pocket, desperate for attention and Mackenzie ignores it while she completes her prayer. She asks God to receive her Grandmother's spirit, and switches off her buzzing phone. She hears a voice as clear as day. "I will. Now what about you?"

Mackenzie now has voices competing for her attention. One gives her direction based on what she wants, the other wants her to be intimate with Him. The app is something tangible that she knows deep down isn't real while God might be intangible but she *knows* He is real. She heard him. She finds breaking an addiction to social media and her phone is difficult but reconnecting with God is proving even harder. It involves realising the habits she has fallen into and stripping them away, from treating God as a genie and cherry-picking how she obeys Him. And reconnecting with God means redirecting time away from her phone, which is more and more insistent about getting her attention.

Charlotte is in trouble. The advice that *OmniScience* provided has backfired. Charlotte has not changed, she interpreted the advice differently and is following the influencers on in her phone. As her mental health spirals, Charlotte threatens to leave – Tom is distraught as he believes she'll run away from home but Mackenzie can't shake the numbing idea of something far more sinister.

Now Mackenzie needs to turn to one of the two voices in her life to give her advice that might save her daughter. She can't fight the urge to turn to *Omniscience*, only to find that *Omniscience* now advises her to let Charlotte be her authentic self, and any outcome for her daughter is the right one if she lets her do this. God, meanwhile, tells Charlotte to trust Him.

In a panic, Mackenzie reveals to Tom the advice *Omniscience* has given to her and reveals why she spends so much time on her phone. She also talks about the words from God asking her to trust Him. Tom is unsure which is more frightening, but this shared experience brings them back together.

Mackenzie comes home after work – the director is now completely offside with the advice given to her by the app which also backfired. Charlotte is missing. She and Tom fear the worst – Tom that his daughter has run away, Mackenzie that she has caused herself harm.

In prayer on her knees with her husband, Mackenzie tells God she will trust Him completely for Charlotte's situation. Her phone goes ballistic in sending her notifications before the AI takes over and starts speaking to her from her pocket. And God joins their conversation.

Mackenzie and Tom are now in complete awe of the power of God. *Omniscience* is now almost screaming at her for attention. They ask God for direction, submitting to His will. Mackenzie takes a look at the charger within arm's reach, and instead switches off the phone.

There is a knock at the door. Charlotte returns home and the three of them embrace.

Mackenzie deletes the app and discovers the God of her grandmother. He's been waiting for her to come back to him since childhood

## **Book idea #3: God in her pocket** *(working title)*

### **Chapter 1 (first draft)**

The words on the email blurred as Mackenzie Holt read them again through welling tears. It didn't matter how deep into the bucket of flowery corporate-speak the Personnel Department reached, by the end of the first line the hard, brutal hammer blow was delivered.

She had been rejected. Again.

Mackenzie's eyes pried open the lines to read between them, trying to uncover some truth behind why she hadn't been promoted. Again. There wasn't any, which wasn't unusual for a bank that trumpeted its undying care for customers while keeping them on hold on the phone for an eternity.

Her cellphone rang. *Voicemail could handle it.* She pushed back from her desk, wheels of her chair squealing as she sighed hard. Despite working for a bank that preached a Gospel of equality, it would appear the Director had favored another of her colleagues who, if she was betting on the outcome, was one of the male ones.

Mackenzie retrieved the voicemail. It was short and to the point. She'd expect nothing less from Tom. *Good luck with the promotion. All three of us know that you're perfect for it. Anyway ... bye!*

Her tears welled again. Her husband was right – she was perfect for it – and she appreciated getting the support of all of them, even though she knew Tom would have written it on his own. She zeroed in on the word 'us'. Her daughters wouldn't have contributed – being teenagers who balked at using a phone as a phone – but it was such a positive message and that made a nice change. Not the fact it was nice but that it arrived.

Her thumbs poised over the phone to respond with her thanks and she resisted the urge to ask how the school counselor meeting had gone with Charlotte. That was a

conversation best left for a face-to-face talk. Perhaps on the weekend. She had Sunday free. Mackenzie flicked a glance at the Director's email. If she was being totally honest, it was a conversation best left for another day anyway.

The email on screen was replaced by a fresh missive. The subject line told her not just who had sent it but why. *Unsuccessful application for promotion*. The Director didn't even have the courage to call and tell her why she missed out to her face.

She needed the promotion even though she didn't necessarily want it. She wasn't a woman who was focused on a career. In fact, in her more honest moments she wished she was around more for teenage daughters who were struggling to cope with a world that she was less prepared for than they were.

With another heavy sigh she dived back into the warm, numbing comfort of her phone. Corporate policy could take a hike – she just needed a few minutes to drop out of life and if that meant matching rows of colored blocks to earn fictitious gold coins, then so be it. It was just a shame those coins weren't real.

The very-familiar sound of jangling bangles announced her friend's arrival. The braid-framed face of Jocelyn, her friend and confidante, snuck around the corner of the divider. "That's okay, you can finish that level. I won't tell anyone you're on corporate time."

Mackenzie smiled as her friend broke the ice with her usual skill and friendly panache. She put down her phone and the tears welled.

Jocelyn rushed forward and placed a hand on Mackenzie's shoulder. "Aw, sweetie. Everything okay?"

Mackenzie responded with the tiniest shake of her head.

"Charlotte?"

Another head shake.

“You didn’t get the promotion, did you?” Jocelyn scanned the prairie of their open office as if checking for predators. “That’s such a shame, I’d been praying for God to bless you with promotion.”

A simple sigh escaped Mackenzie. The reaction surprised her – she wasn’t grateful for the prayer or angry at the lack of blessing. It was nothing ... and getting harder to feel God was in anything.

“I’m sorry sweetie.” Jocelyn again surveyed the prairie. “Change of subject. It looks like we’re both rostered for the morning service this Sunday. That’ll be good. Are you still visiting your Grandma after church?”

Mackenzie almost cursed under her breath. How could she forget her regular visit? Another wave of disappointment crested over her.

Jocelyn studied Mackenzie’s expression and read the room as she mouthed her goodbye. “I’ll leave you to it.” She disappeared from Mackenzie’s cubicle.

Mackenzie returned to her phone. Every time she got knocked back at work, or had another dead-end conversation with Charlotte, she felt like the Grandma who steadfastly prayed for her every night was being let down. What was she doing wrong? She wasn't a career climber. This corporate ladder needed to be climbed not for the view or the power of an office on a higher floor. Each higher rung brought a salary that kept her above their ever-rising cost of living. And the more that Tom ran into similar roadblocks to a higher income, her salary had moved from nice to necessary.

A polite throat cleared behind as another head appeared. Daniel, with his customary wide grin and her partner in sarcastic crime when it came to the bank’s occasionally applied non-negotiable values. Tom hated the phrase ‘work husband’.

“I’ve heard that the Director is announcing the promotion in our 3.00pm meeting. I wish you all the luck!” He theatrically crossed his fingers.

Mackenzie couldn't speak.

Daniel nodded and left her to her thoughts.

If only he knew she was always in a battle with her thoughts, unarmed and losing regularly.

Mackenzie had to get her head back into the game, at least to push down the emotions quickly to give her time to prepare for the 3pm showdown to relive the bad news.

She sighed hard as she rewoke her computer. If they needed the money, then she had better sit down to earn it.

One buzzing thought stayed with her. Daniel was right. Luck was becoming one of the few things that she could rely on.