

The Award-Winning Voice of the Advanced Writers & Speakers Association

2021 Conference Issue | Vol. 8, Issue 2

# LEADINGHEARTS

EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN TO ARISE

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Babbie Mason—Refresh

Janell Rardon  
STRONGER IS ONE STEP AWAY

When  
God Says,  
“Go” Again.

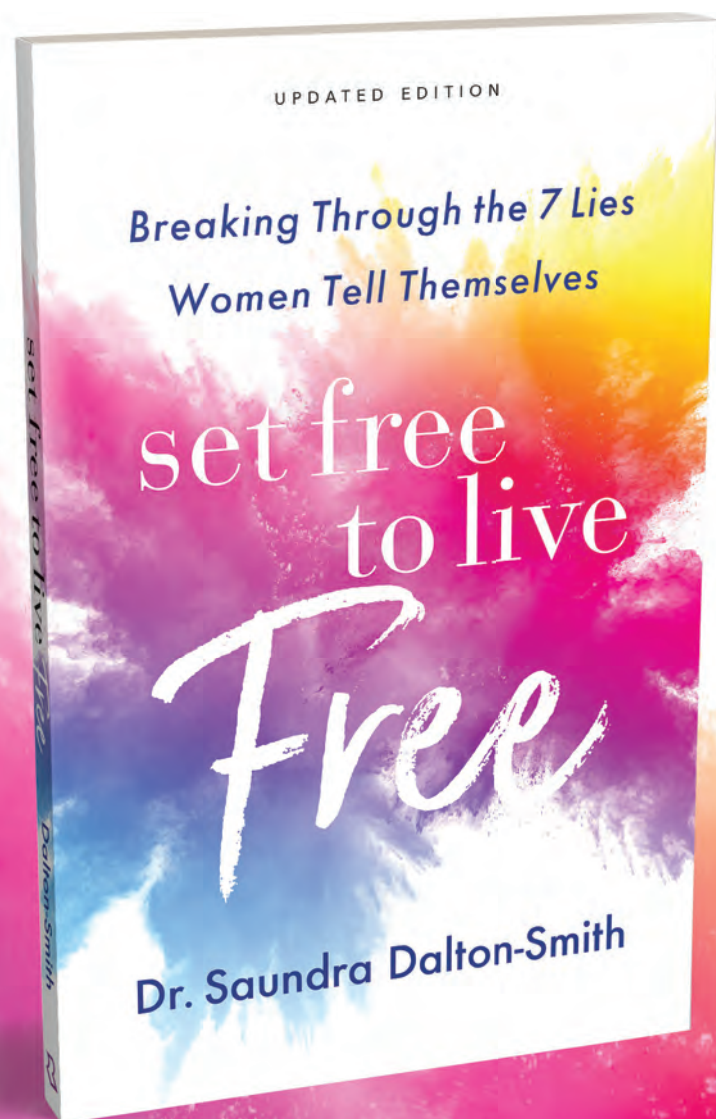
*Has your pre-lockdown call  
changed its game?*

Yes, You Can  
Write a Book!





# Imagine life with unlimited possibility



In *Set Free to Live Free*, Sandra Dalton-Smith shows women how to break free from seven mental ties that hold them back, including striving for perfection, comparing themselves to others, all-or-nothing attitudes, and more. Through case studies and inspirational writing, she encourages women to embrace spontaneity, be transparent, nurture their bodies, and cultivate a balanced life.



**Sandra Dalton-Smith MD** is a board-certified internal medicine physician, work-life integration researcher, popular speaker, and author of the bestselling book *Sacred Rest*. She transparently shares how her past pain has been redeemed through the practical application of God's Word.

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## Called to Write a Book? Now What?

Eleven bestselling  
authors share  
their secrets in the  
"Yes, You Can  
Write a Book"  
course.

*The insider's*  
guide to starting and  
publishing your next book.  
Meet Christian authors,  
publishers and coaches  
who want to help.



Thank you for picking up this special print  
edition of our award-winning magazine brought  
to you by the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association  
(AWSA). This year we are celebrating the 21st anniversary  
of our almost 800-member organization dedicated to moving  
together as we support each other while we share the Great  
Commission.

And even though pandemic struck, we've continued to find  
new ways to carry the mantle of Psalm 68:11: "The women  
who announce the good news are a large army" (GSV).

And many of you carry that same mantle. But let me ask, how  
are you doing in your publishing journey? Did you traverse  
lockdown with a call to write a book, yet only managed to pen  
a couple of paragraphs?

Are you still feeling your first book will never happen? I want  
to encourage you to come to our very first AWSA-sponsored  
writers conference at the Christian Products Expo. This event  
is open to all writers and will equip you in your call.

This past year, our organization actually launched the online  
course, "Yes, You Can Write a Book," which will help you hit  
the refresh button on your book project so you will have the  
tools to get it DONE! You can go to [YesYouCanWriteaBook.com](http://YesYouCanWriteaBook.com)  
for more info.

Also, for those Christian women communicators who have yet  
to learn about AWSA, stop by our booth in the exhibit hall. You  
can not only receive prayer, but also meet with our members,  
some of whom are even featured in this Conference Edition of  
*Leading Hearts*.

These inspiring ladies mentor people across the nation and  
around the world as they connect their love of communication  
with the life-changing power of Jesus Christ!

For more information about AWSA or to recommend it to other  
authors, check out our home site at: [www.AWSA.com](http://www.AWSA.com)

Enjoy the product show. We can't wait to meet you all. ☺

Love,

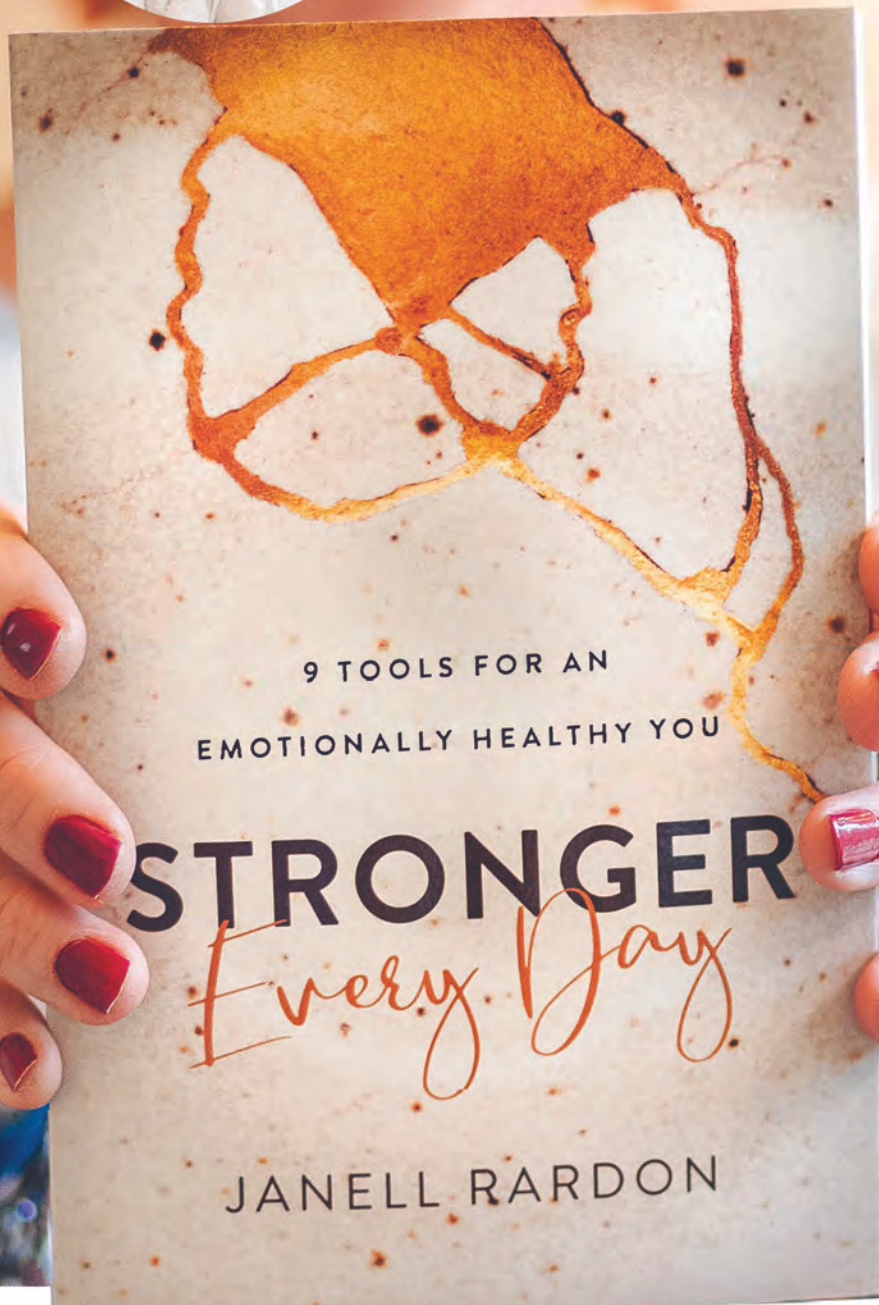
*Linda*

**PUBLISHER, LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE | AWSA, FOUNDER**





# GET STRONGER! WITH JANELL RARDON



*"This is an excellent resource for anyone battling emotional burnout or if you want to protect yourself from experiencing it in the future."*

—SAUNDRA DALTON-SMITH, MD,  
PHYSICIAN, SPEAKER, AND  
AUTHOR OF SACRED REST



## FROM THE GUEST EDITOR **Janell Rardon**



experiencing His presence. But I knew one thing for sure: *I felt as if God had lifted His hand from me and that didn't feel good. I felt very alone and very empty.*

I prayed, "Lord, I'm only two days into a week of competition. What do I do with this? How do I keep going?"

### Transition Launches Us into the Deep

Mirror moments are rare. At least, in my life they have been. I've had maybe three or four, and they usually come right before a major *spiritual* transition.

Transition launches us into the deep waters of spiritual growth.

*What seems like a death is often a mighty portal to an immense expansion of God's purpose, passion, and potential in our lives.*

Author William Bridges writes, "Transition is the difficult process of letting go of an old situation, of suffering the confusing nowhere of in-betweenness, and of launching forth again in a new situation. All transitions are composed of (1) an ending, (2) a neutral zone, and (3) a new beginning."

### Transition Invites Us to Unknown Places

I am sure you have had your own mirror moment. Maybe it came during a *seemingly* shallow experience, but nonetheless, was profound.

I've carried three important life lessons with me through other transitional seasons:

- **Stay closely connected and open to God.** In therapy, this is called "attunement" — living a life of receptivity and awareness. I love St. Ignatius's contemplative practice, *The Daily Examen*, and have found it highly beneficial during uncomfortable "in-between" places.
- **Support your soul's heightened need for spiritual nourishment.** Times when everything feels "up in the air" can be mentally and emotionally exhausting. Save your energy for the journey through the "ending, neutral zone, and new beginning."

- **Sleep well. Eat well. Hydrate.** I think of Elijah's three-and-a-half-year transition season by the Brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:1-6). This highly practical directive prepared Elijah for the subsequent new work God had for him (1 Kings 18:16-35).

Maybe today, you find yourself standing in shallow water, yet it feels strangely deep. Something is stirring inside of you, and it feels scary and scintillating all at the same time. Take a moment. Place your hand over your heart, breathe deeply, and quietly accept the ebb and flow of God's movement. Rest in the changing tides. Something good is on the horizon.☺

*Janell Rardon is a trauma-informed therapist, podcast host author, creator of The Heartlift Method and certified practitioner of Aroma Freedom Technique. Her latest book, Stronger Every Day, is available now. [janellrardon.com](http://janellrardon.com)*

## becoming stronger THROUGH TRANSITION

Shallow water isn't supposed to feel deep. But sometimes, the deepest lessons in our lives come from seemingly shallow experiences.

The year was 1983. I was competing in the Miss Virginia Pageant — a seemingly shallow experience, at least to some. Yet, it was in that shallow-framed week of competition and activities that I learned a very deep lesson about "moving on" and "transitioning to new places."

I was standing in front of a very large wall mirror in my hotel room, preparing an updo for the evening's "Judges Banquet." At this formal meet and greet, all thirty-five contestants are given a moment to make a good first impression on the five judges choosing the next Miss Virginia. It seemed all-important at the time.

As I was unsuccessfully "up-doing" my hair, frustrated beyond frustrated, I heard a whisper. *This is not where you belong anymore, Janell. It's time to move on.*

Dumbfounded by such an extreme directive, I remember putting down my brush and hairpins and gasping for air.

It was as if scales fell from my eyes,  
and I saw a completely different woman  
staring back at me.

*But, Lord, I have wanted to be Miss America for years. I've trained so hard. I must win Miss Virginia. My future depends on it. Shaken to the core, I took a minute.*

Having been an ardent follower of Jesus for only a little over two years, I was new at hearing God's voice and



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If our peace has eroded, we can choose to be resilient. We can't allow all we see and hear to cause us to give up hope!

# GOSPEL GRIT

cynthia cavanaugh | cynthiacavanaugh.com



Overwhelmed. Weary. Exhausted. These are words I penned in my journal as I sat down with my cup of tea, my Bible, and Jesus.

The past several months have called for higher levels of endurance and perseverance. But a four-letter word also circling in my journal reminds me to lean in and persevere. The word is *grit*.

One of the meanings of grit in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* is "unyielding courage in the face of hardship or danger." I discovered this meaning deep in the story of King Asa, who reinstated worship in Judah in 2 Chronicles 15:1-7.

My first reaction was way to go, King Asa! Digging a little deeper, I found Asa didn't sweep in like a superhero cleaning up Judah from idolatry. While he was only one of four kings who reformed Judah's worship, he was up against generations of destruction.

6. leadinghearts.com

Look at what was said about Asa's great-grandfather, King Solomon, at the end of his life. "So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done" (1 Kings 11:6 ESV).

Solomon corrupted the true worship of God by allowing idolatry in the kingdom to please his foreign wives. So God tore the kingdom away after he died, and it remained divided until the exile and destruction of the Israelites by their enemies.

Asa, his father (Abijah), and grandfather (Rehoboam) followed Solomon's practices, and the worship in Israel was full of evil idolatry.

But Asa had godly grit, and that gives me hope that I, too, can be strengthened and persevere with grit. You can, too, by following his example with these steps.

## Be a God Seeker

"The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chronicles 15:2 ESV).

Sounds simple, doesn't it? It isn't enough to say Asa followed God and sought him with his whole heart — he was also obedient. God wasn't so angry with Israel because they were human and made mistakes, but because when they thought Jehovah Lord God wasn't enough, they brought in idols. Their hearts were divided.

Having grit is making sure our passion is in the right place — without a divided heart.

## Be Resilient

God was fully aware of what had been going on in Judah for three generations. "For a long time, Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law. But when in their distress they turned to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them (2 Chronicles 15:3-4 ESV).

If our peace has eroded, we can choose to be resilient. We can't allow all we see and hear to cause us to give up hope! Turning to the Lord in our distress gives us the courage to become resilient.

## Be *In*couraged

Yes, I know encourage is spelled with an "e," but I am saying let's be *in*couraged. In other words, we can put on our godly grit *inside* by choosing to take courage.

"But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded" (2 Chronicles 15:7 ESV).

Did you catch this? But you! Yes, *you!*

You who are tired and weary and pressed from every side, take courage and don't let your hands fall limp at your side; summon your grit and stand tall with courage in Jesus.

Asa not only took courage, but he acted on his courage. A good reminder of this is in 2 Corinthians 4:8 (ESV): "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair." The prior verse tells us that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. In other words, we gain our courage from God and not ourselves.

## Be Wholly True

Asa wasn't perfect; he made mistakes. At the end of his life, he was pretty foolish and made a colossal blunder. It didn't end well, but God still said, "Nevertheless, the heart of Asa was wholly true all of his days" (2 Chronicles 15:17 ESV).

The story of Asa boosts my confidence. I can persevere and develop grit as I determine to be a God seeker, be resilient, be encouraged in Him, and be wholly true. Life can be hard, but it doesn't have to be joyless or entirely exhausting when we have the mighty Lion of Judah in our corner. Let's bury ourselves in His strength, knowing that even when we may be feeling a bit worn around the edges, God is right by our side, and He will infuse us with His courage and strength. ☺

*Cynthia Cavanaugh, award-winning author, speaker and the host of The Soul Anchor Podcast (available on iTunes) is a certified life coach and adjunct professor at Trinity Western University in the Leadership Degree Program. She is also the managing editor for the She Writes for Him book series.*



RELEASING APRIL 2022 FROM AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR & BIBLE TEACHER CYNTHIA CAVANAUGH

# What will your legacy be?



In *The Godly Kings of Judah*, you'll embark on an 8-week Bible study that leads you through a process of repentance, renewal, and revival. The Old Testament kings will be your companions as you fight the Lord's battles, topple the idols that claw at our hearts, and bring reformation to the holy people of God. Don't miss out on this exciting adventure! Because when all is said and done, you want the legacy of the godly kings to be your own as well: "She did what was right in the Lord's eyes."



From the Word to Life



FROM AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR ERICA WIGGENHORN

Everyone thinks you've got it together. But inside, you're asking, "Am I enough?"



No matter how good we look to others, the nagging voice of self-doubt is hard to shake.

WE ASK QUESTIONS LIKE:

- If people really knew me would they still accept me?
- Will I be rejected when I can't perform?
- Can I pull this off?
- What if I end up alone?
- Am I missing out on what life should be because I can't shake this fear?

If you find yourself having thoughts like these, Erica Wiggernhorn wants to lead you to freedom. Drawing from the story of Moses—the greatest self-doubter in the Bible—Erica shows how self-doubt is tied closely to self-reliance.

It's only when you cast yourself on God that you find the true source of strength.



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THE FREEDOM CHALLENGE

FROM DAWN

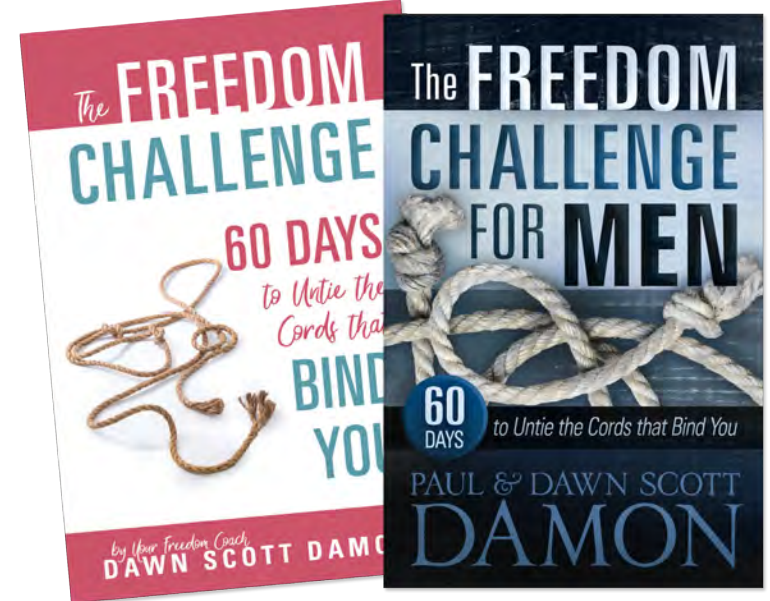
The truth behind seven little words changed my life when I heard a man from a small country church sing "I am who He says I am!" My life was transformed as I began to believe what God's Word says about who I am in Christ, and I started my journey out of betrayal, abandonment, and abuse.

After months and years of applying God's truth to my mind and heart, I felt it was time to share this freedom process with others. I suppose it was the anonymous email that confirmed my decision to write the book, "The Freedom Challenge." I didn't recognize the name of the sender of the email, but the subject line captured my interest: "Do we ever experience freedom? Really?" As I read further, I grew sympathetic, then sad.

*I'm a survivor of sexual abuse. My father abused me when I was eleven. When I was twenty-six, I was raped. I pray a lot, but nothing changes. I'm filled with fear, pain, and depression. Is there ever freedom? Really?*

I couldn't help but read between the lines, imagining words that hadn't been written and tears that had been wept. Self-destructive thinking, emotions, and behaviors bound this woman. I understood her bondage because I'd lived it. The "abundant life" the Bible speaks about was a fairy tale to her. She believed that her happily-ever-after would never come.

Perhaps you have felt this way and searched for the answer to the question this woman asked: Can I ever be free – really free? If you're certain the answer is no, but you long to believe that freedom can be possible, you are the one I've written this for.



Books Available Through Amazon.com

FROM PAUL

After Dawn finished her manuscript for *The Freedom Challenge*, we awaited the delivery of this promising book. As I always do, I read it to be supportive, but I was also curious. The title intrigued me, and I'm usually up for a "challenge."

The idea of freedom captured my attention – I wanted to learn more. After reading the first chapter, I was convinced that I needed this book, and not only me, but every man, as well as woman.

So together, Dawn and I have made this powerful resource available for men. Now I am leading "Freedom Challenge Bible Studies" for men everywhere and watching the powerful results.

I'm excited to play a part in this revised version of *The Freedom Challenge For Men*.

TAKE THE CHALLENGE

Paul and Dawn Damon share compelling truths in this #1 Amazon Best Seller. A sixty-day interactive Bible study that identifies and confronts eight cords that keep believers bound. These practical and powerful biblical tools are designed to give you a new mindset, a fresh beginning, and a clear direction for a positive future.

Take the Freedom Challenge and become an active participant in your own emotional and spiritual transformation.



*Can a lone and unarmed ending  
stop the most ruthless family of all?*

“

Dive into a world of enchanting characters from the small Virginia mountain town of Colony Row. You'll fall in love with Emerson Grace as she unravels the last secret her grandfather left for her to solve.

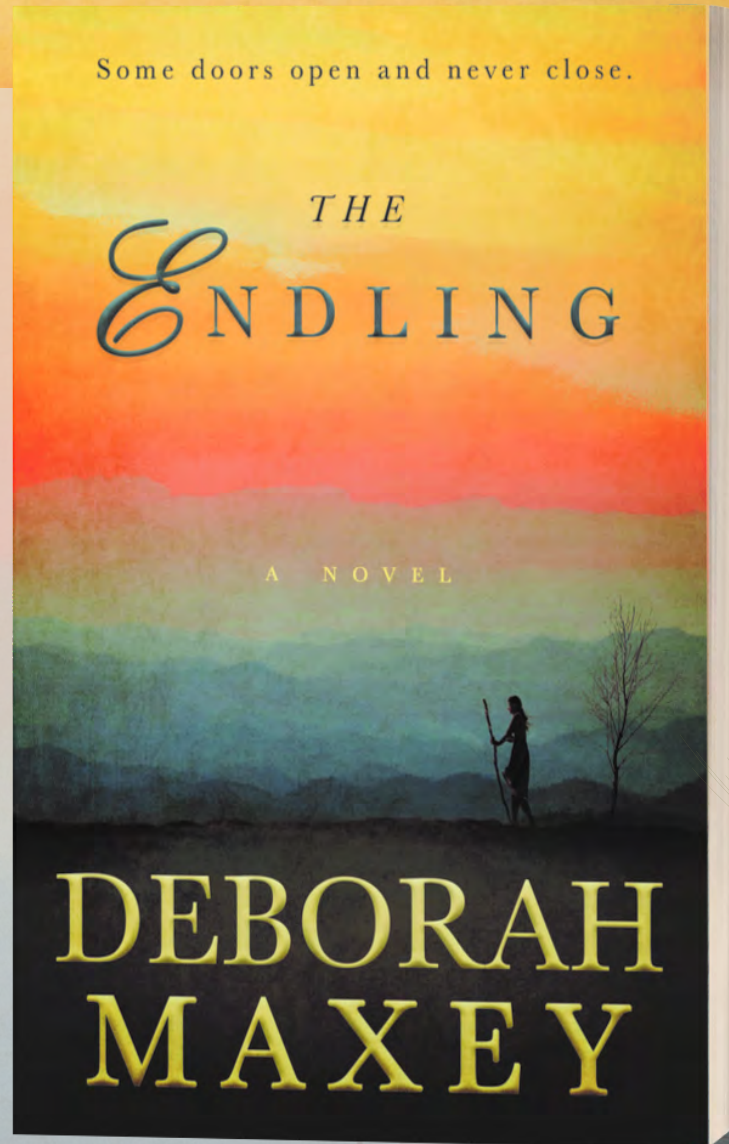
The mystery twists into powerful suspense that leads Emerson back to herself and gives her the wit and strength to stop the sinister plot to her own murder. Powerful.

—LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD—  
BESTSELLING AUTHOR & SPEAKER  
*THE POTLUCK CLUB*



DEBORAH MAXEY is an Appalachian writer with deep ancestral roots. All things Appalachian: the topography, people, faith, dialect, traditions, values, recipes, and culture fuel her imagination, propelling her to share her inner world through well-crafted words. Find out more about her and her books at [www.deborahmaxey.com](http://www.deborahmaxey.com).

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**imperfect  
TIMING**  
cynthia l. simmons | [clsimmons.com](http://clsimmons.com)

Mary Todd, the future wife of Abraham Lincoln, had a flair for fashion.

As a young lady, she lived with her sister in Springfield, Illinois, and everyone admired her clothing. Even as a child, she loved to dress up and put flowers in her hair.

As a maturing girl, she gazed longingly at the hooped skirts adult ladies wore and begged her stepmother for one. To her dismay, her stepmother refused.

Mary shared a bedroom with a girl related to her stepmother, and the two girls enjoyed a close friendship. One day she suggested they might make their own hooped skirts. She had observed the weeping willow tree on her father's property and imagined how she might use the limbs.

One Saturday afternoon, the two girls chopped numerous branches and hid them in Mary's bedroom. After supper they begged to go to bed early, but they didn't sleep. Instead, they stayed up and sewed the limbs on the inside of their skirts.

The next morning, the girls slipped out of the house in their grown-up dresses. Mary wanted walk to church before her family. However, Mary's stepmother found them and scolded them.

If the girls had appeared in their contrived outfits, they might have been teased. The skirts did flair in the front, but the sides drooped miserably.

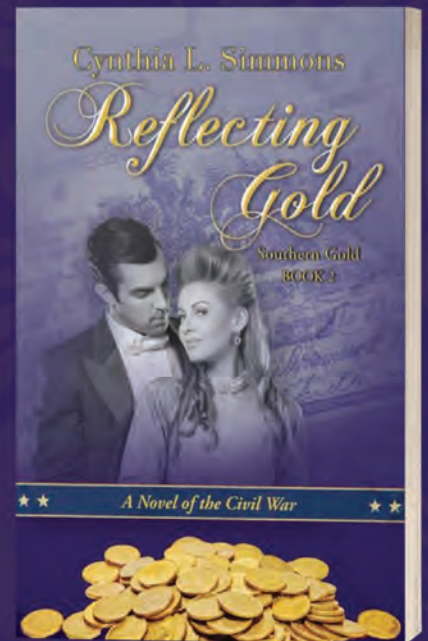
Mary didn't want to wait until she was grown to dress like a lady. She longed for something good, but she needed to wait. In the same way, I often rush ahead without considering God's timing. I'm learning to wait for God. Will you join me?

“I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, And in His word do I hope” (Psalm 130:5 NASB 1995). ☉

*Cynthia L. Simmons is an award-winning author, speaker, Bible teacher and former homeschool mother. She writes a column for Leading Hearts magazine, homeschool curriculum, conducts writing workshops, is a certified writing coach and the former president of Christian Authors Guild.*



THE THIRD NOVEL IN THE  
AWARD-WINNING GOLD SERIES  
FROM  
*Cynthia L. Simmons*



“Cynthia Simmons' historical fiction and curriculum are a winning educational combination. Brimming with interesting historical facts, the merges engaging details with hands on activities that will keep tweens and teens engrossed while encouraging them to think critically.”

—Julie K. Gillies, former homeschool mom and author of *Prayers for a Woman's Soul* and *From Hot Mess to Blessed*





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# ARE YOU FRUSTRATED *by a time of waiting?*



Life pauses seem negative, and we chafe at having our plans and pre-arranged schedules brought to a halt. But what if waiting is beneficial? What if pausing can ensure protection, provide time for preparation, or develop patience?

Get the perspective you need to learn to wait well from author Candy Arrington — *Life on Pause*.



CANDYARRINGTON.COM

## REFRESH AND RESET BABBIE MASON

lisa burns | profile contributor



A little over 15 months ago, life was moving along at what most of us consider a normal

pace. At the same time Babbie Mason, two-time Dove award-winning singer-songwriter and author, was closing in on 35 years of full-time ministry. As with most people at the time, her life was full. She was living by her calendar and juggling it all with great finesse — family, engagements, concerts, ministry assignments, squeezing in a few down days before the next event, and then doing it all over again! The calendar dictated just about every moment in her life.

And then COVID-19 happened, and life as we all knew it came to a screeching halt.

Babbie admits, “It wasn’t until then that I realized how exhausted I was. I had gotten into the habit of becoming acclimated to the fast-lane pace of my life. I had become a spinning top, and when COVID hit and the world stopped, I toppled over.”

As the pandemic began to settle in, the author continued teaching a few online college courses. During those first months, she realized that there might be an actual purpose in being home, living at a reduced pace. Babbie shares, “I think we can all agree that COVID has been a horrific situation for so many of us, but God somehow allows things to continue to work for good in many situations at the very same time. I’ve realized that during COVID I came home to rest for the first time in 36 years. I slept and began to rest. I believe the shutdown taught me to catch my breath.”

By the time summer was in full swing, Babbie found herself doing things she had not been home to do before. Gardening, picking blueberries, making jam and homemade pickles! Now, on the other side of this season, she is holding tightly to lessons newly learned.

“I’ve realized that I don’t want to go back to where I was prior to COVID, because in all honesty, life was crazy.”

With the nation striving for pre-COVID normalcy, Babbie is also experiencing the tension of picking up where she left off. As the phone begins to ring with many opportunities to jump

back into life as it was, Babbie is filtering each request with a refreshed mindset.

“The Lord is a good booking agent, but we have to participate by asking Him if we should say yes or no. My desire is NOT to be driven but to be drawn. My heart’s prayer is: help me be drawn to you, God, and not driven by external things.”

In learning to rest and breathe, Babbie has encountered new energy and excitement for what the Lord will do next. God has done something similar for many of us as He has taken our life experience during this unprecedented time and used it to pivot us into a new season with Him.

Babbie declares, “You know, when you live in His presence, you realize it’s not just a Sunday-to-Sunday thing; this relationship with Him is moment-by-moment. You are able to recognize that He has your back and your best interest at heart. You can live in anticipation of what He’s going to do in your life next. It’s not so much about the calendar these days as it is about the state of my heart. I want to live for Him moment by moment.”

As Babbie continues to move into this newest season of normal, she encourages us to do the same. “This time of reset has taught me to listen to the voice of the Lord. I’m learning I can enjoy ministry with the assignments God has given me AND enjoy my home. Whatever lane God has placed you in, flourish in that lane! For me, I use stories. Stories through song, stories in the books I write and stories that I tell when I speak! We need your voice! Share your own stories with us!

*Fully Qualified: Maximizing Your God-Given Potential* is the author’s most recent book. In it, Babbie speaks to the creative about the ultimate purpose in their giftings. She shares that, in writing the book, “I wanted to help creatives know that their gifts are not for their consumption, but to use for the glory of God. It’s like any gift; whether it’s a small trinket or something greater, a gift is not just about the recipient! It is also about the giver. A giver thinks so much about the recipient that they choose to bless them! I find three things happen when we use our gifts for God:

- (1) It brings glory to God. He always gets the glory. Always!
- (2) we find immense joy in using our gifts, because...
- (3) the gifts are a blessing to others! ☺

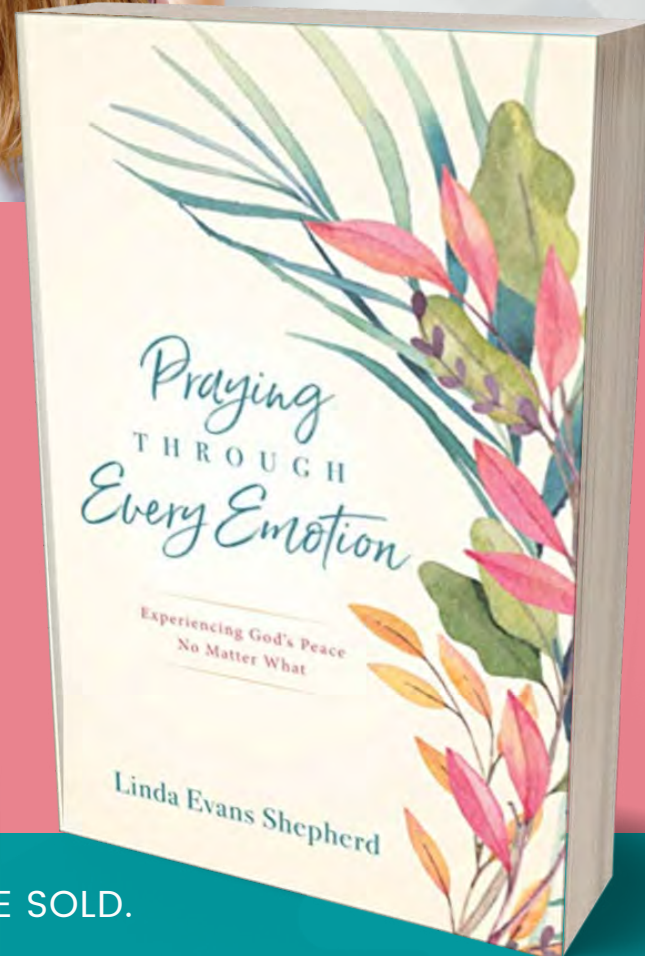


NEW FROM BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD



"Linda shows the way as she guides us right into those needed 'ick-freeing' prayers. This book goes on my keep-it-handy shelf!"

—RHONDA RHEA, TV PERSONALITY,  
AWARD-WINNING HUMOR COLUMNIST  
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## pushing past the PANDEMIC TO HOPE

linda evans shepherd | lindashepherd.com



It's hard to let go of the past, even when the past gave us a pandemic.

After all, the voice of 2020 still rings in our ears: "Cover your face, dose yourself in hand sanitizer and, for goodness' sake, hoard the toilet paper!"

I've noticed something strange; now that the long shadows of COVID-19 are fading, many of us survivors are still clinging to fear.

This makes sense to anyone who has hidden in their basement as a tornado rummaged through their living room. Once the howling winds crashed to a stop, it took courage to shoulder the door open to survey the damage.

It's hard to comprehend the aftermath of any storm, and in the aftermath of 2020, it may be impossible to reenter normal as we knew it. Now is a time to assess how to kickstart our new beginning.

It's a time to pray in the harvest, for even if the Bridegroom is not ready to find His bride, there is a lost generation ready to find the Bridegroom.

But whether we are preparing to attend the wedding feast or we are still waiting in the long, dark night, our light must become a beacon to the lost. We must refill and trim our lamps with the oil of the Spirit. For when we flow in His presence, our light cannot be hidden from the masses searching for a glimmer of hope.

Let's throw open the basement door, cast our fear aside, and reassess our lives and ministries. Let's turn from fear and find refreshment for our souls. For when we are refreshed, we can better serve to refresh others.

**Pray this paraphrased Scripture prayer of refreshment now**

*Dear Lord,*

*Did the world stop spinning as I hid in my home? Is it now safe to venture out to pick up the pieces of my life? How weary I feel when I see the huge piles of debris left from the destructive storms of COVID. Yet, I'm glad You refresh my soul and show me the way into the future, for Your name's sake.*

*As I wait on You, You will make me strong so I can fly into the future with eagle's wings. You will help me walk, even run, toward the goals You have given me. Because of You, I will not grow weary or faint.*

*Even as the storm passes, I do not need to be afraid or bewildered, for You are my God. You strengthen me. You take hold of my hand and help me to my feet.*

*For the storms of life have not canceled Your purpose for me. Your plans are good, filled with a future and a hope.*

*In Jesus' name,*

*Amen*

**Based on Psalm 23:3, Isaiah 40:31, Isaiah 41:10, and Jeremiah 29:11. ©**

*Linda Evans Shepherd is the bestseller author of 37 books including Praying Through Every Emotion and the founder of the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association.*





I have become an expert at finding joy when life doesn't go as planned, and it starts every day with brewing my coffee.

# FINDING JOY IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

carole leathem | carolesjourney.com/



“I take time to brew my coffee” is my go-to answer when I’m asked the question, “How do you find so much joy when your life is such a mess?”

I admit that there are days when knowing a good cup of coffee is waiting for me in the kitchen is the only thing that gets me out of bed. I have become an expert at finding joy when life doesn't go as planned, and it starts every day with brewing my coffee.

In our I-want-it-now society, we have created all kinds of methods for getting to that first cup of coffee in the morning fast. A selling point for most coffeemakers is how quickly they will get your cup filled. The process of brewing my coffee every morning is a reset for me, and I have become a pour-over girl.

I boil the water to the optimal temperature, grind the beans to the perfect consistency, place them in the pour-over funnel, slowly add the water—swirling around the edges—and then I wait. It takes time and patience to get to that first delicious sip. You're probably asking yourself this question right about now, “How does brewing your morning coffee lead to finding joy in the presence of God?” I'm glad you asked!

In 2016, my life fell apart. My husband, a pastor for over thirty years, had a breakdown. He began to struggle with anxiety and depression. When suicidal thoughts joined in, he had to retire early, and our lives changed completely. We sold the house we loved, downsized, and moved into a small apartment attached to my daughter's house. I lost my identity as a wife and as a pastor's wife, and my relationship with friends and my children changed.

It took me two years, but in 2018, at 4 a.m., standing at my kitchen counter, putting a pod into my coffeepot, I finally said the words out loud, “My husband struggles with mental illness.”

When the words left my lips, I heard God say to me, “I know, my sweet girl. Come out into the garden and sit with Me.” Yes, God talks to me. Not in an audible voice anyone else can hear, but I hear it all the time. I grabbed my cup and my Bible and walked out into my garden.

As I sat sipping my coffee and listening as the world woke up, I asked God, “What happened to my life?” His answer,

“You stopped asking for My help and started taking control!” God's words surprised me because I felt like it was my job to find answers for everything related to my husband's survival. I had to keep him safe, figure out his medications, and most of all, protect him. I began listing out loud all the things I was now responsible for, asking God, “How can You say that I stopped asking for Your help?” I went on to tell God that morning all the things I now did for Him. I read my Bible every morning, I taught Bible studies and life groups every week, and I told everyone how He kept showing up in miraculous ways to take care of us.

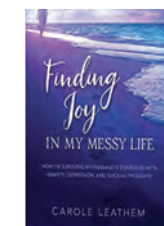
God's answer was, “You're so busy doing, trying to fix everything. My sweet girl, you have started telling Me all that you're doing or going to do for Me and stopped asking Me what I want you to do. What I want is for you to have coffee and sit with Me, focus on Me, and listen.”

I told God, “I'm going to need another cup of coffee to process this new information.” God's response, “Start with the coffee! I want you to dig out of the cabinet your electric kettle, pour-over funnel, and coffee beans. Slow down and take the time to brew your coffee.”

As I stood waiting for the water to boil, my conversation with God continued. He gently reminded me that if I am too busy to brew my coffee, then I'm probably just going through the motions in every other way, including my daily time with Him. As I picked up the steaming cup and walked back outside, I felt relaxed as I anticipated spending the next few moments with God.

I have come to cherish my morning ritual of brewing the coffee and talking to God. As my schedule has gotten busier, I now have a travel setup complete with a foldable electric kettle and pour-over funnel that goes with me everywhere. Why? As I brew my coffee each morning, no matter where in the world I happen to be, I am preparing my heart for my daily coffee date with God.☺

*Carole Leathem (carolesjoy.com) was a Hollywood commercial actress and pastor's wife. When her husband developed anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts, Carole began sharing the chaos and messiness that comes when caring for someone with a mental illness.*



*Her memoir, Finding Joy in My Messy Life (Redemption Press 2021) is already making a huge impact in the lives of men and women across the globe.*



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Lee Ann Mancini is an adjunct professor at South Florida Bible College & Theological Seminary holding a BA and three master's in religious studies.

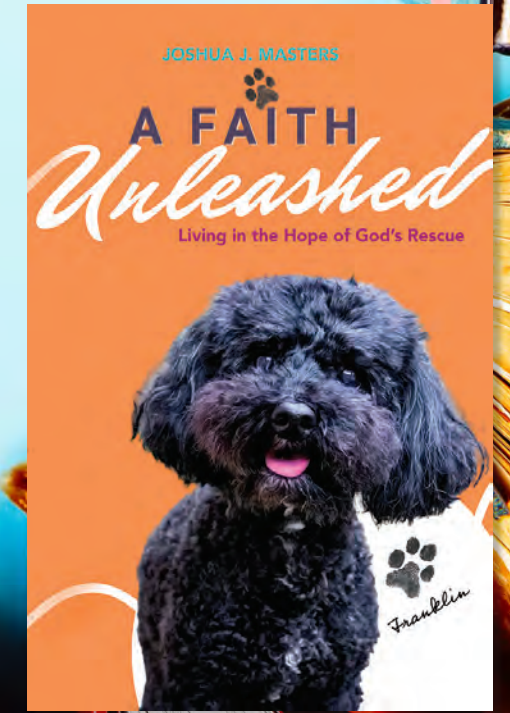
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**BOOKSTOREAD**



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*right to the heart*  
& *julie coleman, general editor*

**A FAITH UNLEASHED**  
*living in the hope of God's rescue*  
*joshua j. masters*

Rising anxiety, pandemic concerns, financial instability, political unrest, and environmental issues have robbed our peace. Yet God offers peace that transcends any situation, because He is above all circumstances.

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—Lee Ann Mancini, award-winning author

Life tries to convince us we're alone and unwanted and without hope for the future. Daily trials challenge our faith as our souls beg for renewal, but rescue is coming.

Abused and neglected, Franklin spent his first Christmas huddled in a lonely puppy mill. In this true story, his path from isolated brokenness to joyful belonging mirrors our own journey toward the promise of Christ.

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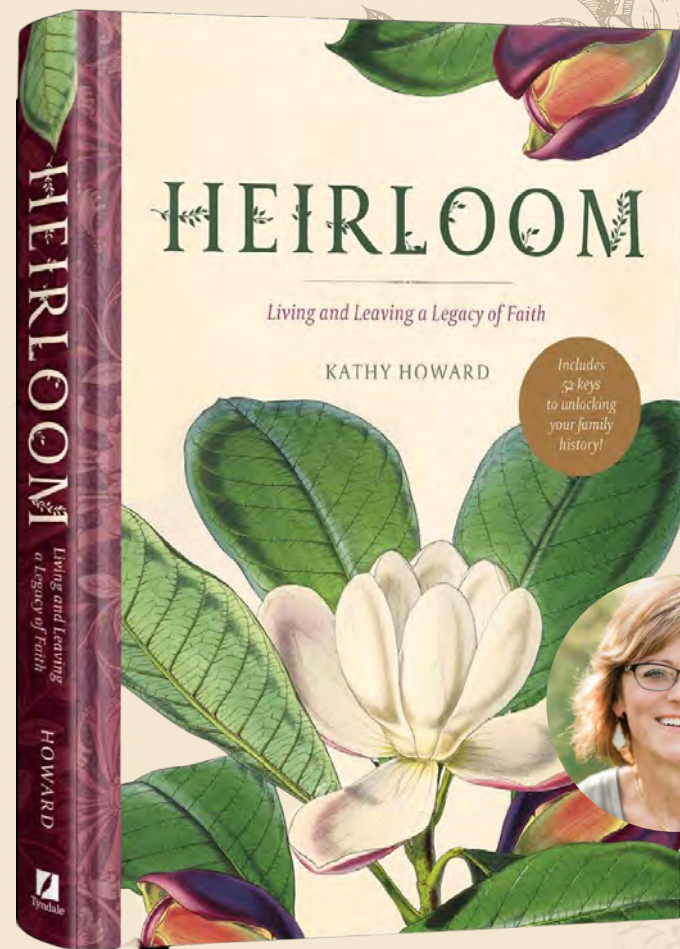
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## when ministry takes AN UNEXPECTED DETOUR

kathy howard | kathyhoward.org

Just before the outbreak of WWI, Peter Zine fled what had been Ukraine with nothing but the clothes on his back. Eventually making his way to Connecticut, Peter met a young Ukrainian woman named Julia. They fell in love, married, and settled into a humble home in a small Ukrainian neighborhood in East Hartford. Their life was simple, but happy.

Then the stock market crashed in 1929, ushering in the most severe economic downturn the industrialized world has ever experienced. During America's Great Depression, millions lost jobs, homes, and farms. In desperation, able-bodied men took to the roads, rails, and rivers, moving from one town to the next in search of work.

Many of these traveling, hard-working hoboes passed by the Zines' home. The Zines didn't have much, but when individuals knocked on the door begging for food, they were never turned away. Peter gave them a bowl of oatmeal and sat with them on the porch.

The oatmeal temporarily satisfied the hoboes' hunger, but Peter knew their spiritual hunger was far greater. While they ate, Peter read Scripture about Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross. Though Peter was not a preacher, nor eloquent, he knew the saving power of God's Word (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Circumstances had changed for Peter Zine. But he used what God provided to minister to those God brought. He served hoboes with oatmeal and the gospel.

Like the Great Depression, the pandemic has changed our world, lives, and ministries in significant ways. But COVID did not surprise God. He didn't throw up His hands and say, "Well, I guess I'll have to change my plans." God's will for the world and His eternal purposes for you have not changed.

"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in

Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (Ephesians 2:10 NLT).

### 4 Tips for Finding & Walking God's "Unexpected" Path

Life rarely turns out just as we expect. But God's "unexpected" way is always better. We can learn to embrace God's path by following the apostle Paul's example. After meeting Jesus, his life took off on a totally different trajectory.

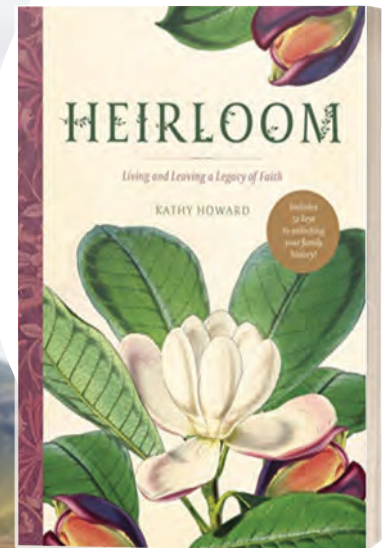
**1. Spend Extra Time with God** — After his salvation, Paul spent an extended time in Arabia (Galatians 1:11-18). Many scholars believe Paul spent time alone with God, studying and praying. Paul returned fully aligned with God's plan.

**2. Find Contentment in Your Present Circumstances** — God doesn't promise a trouble-free life. But, as Paul experienced, God promises to provide contentment through Jesus' strength no matter our circumstances (Philippians 4:13).

**3. Follow the Holy Spirit's Direction** — Paul held his plans loosely. During his second missionary journey, Paul planned to go a specific direction, but quickly followed the Spirit's mid-journey redirection (Acts 16:6-10). God wants us to know His will. He will guide us if we wait, ask, and listen.

**4. Embrace God's New Opportunities** — Paul longed to share Jesus in the synagogues and marketplaces of Rome. But God sent him as a prisoner, confined to house arrest. Instead of going to the people, God brought great numbers of people to Paul (Acts 28:16-25, 30-31). Yes, COVID closed many doors. But God has opened many new doors of opportunity. Embrace the new opportunities God has made available because of COVID. ☺

*A former "cultural Christian," Kathy Howard now has a contagious passion for God's Word. Kathy is a Bible teacher, author, and women's event speaker. Find free resources at: [www.KathyHoward.org](http://www.KathyHoward.org). The Zines' story is told in Kathy's new devotional, *Heirloom* (Tyndale, September 2021).*





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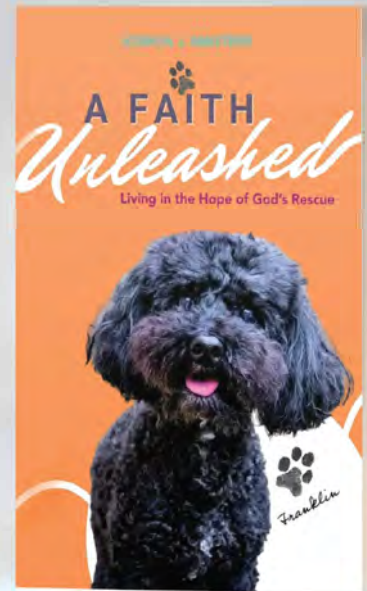
*Deep Rooted: Growing through the Gospel of Mark* by Kathy Howard

This best-selling transformative 40-day devotional journey through the life and ministry of Jesus takes us deeper in interacting with and applying Scripture, not just reading it.



*Fix-Her-Upper Christmas* by Beth Duewel and Rhonda Rhea

It's the most wonderful time...most of the time. For all who are neck-deep in all the Christmas lists and need some therapeutic laughs.



*A Faith Unleashed: Living in the Hope of God's Rescue* by Joshua J. Masters

This heartwarming true story takes us on Franklin the pup's journey from isolated brokenness to joyful belonging, all while biblically taking us there too—all through our ultimate source of life.



*Linked: Maximizing Life Connections One Link at a Time* by Linda Gilden and Linda Goldfarb

A Golden Scrolls Book of the Year, *Linked* continues to offer life-changing tools for breaking down communication barriers in great books for **educators, parents, and couples.**

*Messy to Meaningful* by Monica Schmelter, Rhonda Rhea, and Kaley Rhea

This trio takes us on life-sorting, off-hilarious journeys as we learn to stop holding on to what we don't need and learn to start fighting for what we do.



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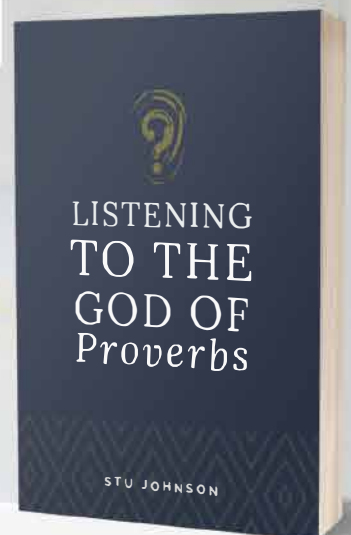
*Listening to the God of Proverbs* by Stu Johnson

Have a conversation with God about the wisdom in Proverbs. Hear Him speak and respond with your prayer and commitment in this unique daily devotional.



*Life on Pause: Learning to Wait Well* by Candy Arrington

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# ANXIETY

WITH DR. MICHELLE BENGTON



There's no question, we have a lot to worry about.

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—Saundra Dalton-Smith, MD



"Breaking Anxiety's Grip" is available wherever books are sold. To find out more or request Michelle to speak to your group or at your event go to [DrMichelleB.com](http://DrMichelleB.com).



2020 Golden Scroll Awards Book of the Year



## H.U.G.S. FROM A MOTHER'S HEART

karen whiting | [karenwhiting.com](http://karenwhiting.com)

Families grow stronger with faith woven into daily life. As a mom, you can be a huge influence in your family's spiritual walk. Be sure to take care of yourself and be prepared to bring out your best.



### Grow Your Mom Heart Intentionally

Choose to observe your child and show your love daily. Pray for wisdom as well as for God to calm your anxieties. Take time to listen to your children and understand their hearts (Proverbs 2:2).

You can more easily inspire a child when you discover what motivates and interests them and help them overcome what holds them back when you understand what discourages them. Use the H-U-G-S method to teach them.

- H** represents **hope** in God who will always guide you.
- U** is for **understanding** through asking questions and sometimes re-enacting a scene to discover what happened.
- G** is for **guidance** where you share how to make a better choice or reveal what caused a problem.
- S** is for **security** that no matter what your love is unconditional.

### Pray Together

Equip children for life by praying as a family and exploring prayer. Keep a family prayer journal to see how God responds to prayer. Do experiments to understand how prayer can be quick (like microwaving a snack) or



take time (like baking bread or building a birdhouse). Vary the way you pray. Sometimes it can be reflective, with pauses to listen to God; other times it can be active, like taking a hike and giving thanks as you see wonders and prayer for healing the land as you find damaged areas.

### Provide Kid Resources

Equip children with devotions they will enjoy. Consider your child's interest and what grabs their attention. Find a devotional for each child's age that taps into the interests. Chat about the devotions at meals or bedtime to praise them for reading, and listen to their thoughts and how they plan to apply what they read.

### Build Bonds with Hands-on Fun

Interacting with children and doing activities together build bonds. The flops become treasured laughs, and the successes become great memories and inspiration for future success.

Craft fun that connects with Scriptures lets you share your faith while having fun. Paper, scissors, and glue can go a long way in creating cards, toys, games, gifts, and also adding words to express love.

Backyard fun, science experiments, and cooking, as well as trips, game nights, and day outings all provide opportunities to spend time together having fun. ☺

Karen Whiting ([www.karenwhiting.com](http://www.karenwhiting.com)) creates resources to help the whole family interact, pray, and grow stronger. **HER LATEST BOOKS, SHOWN ABOVE, ARE AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE OR PREORDER.**







from Author Christine Trimpe

# Seeking JOY through the Gospel of Luke

## A CHRISTMAS TO CALVARY ADVENT COUNTDOWN

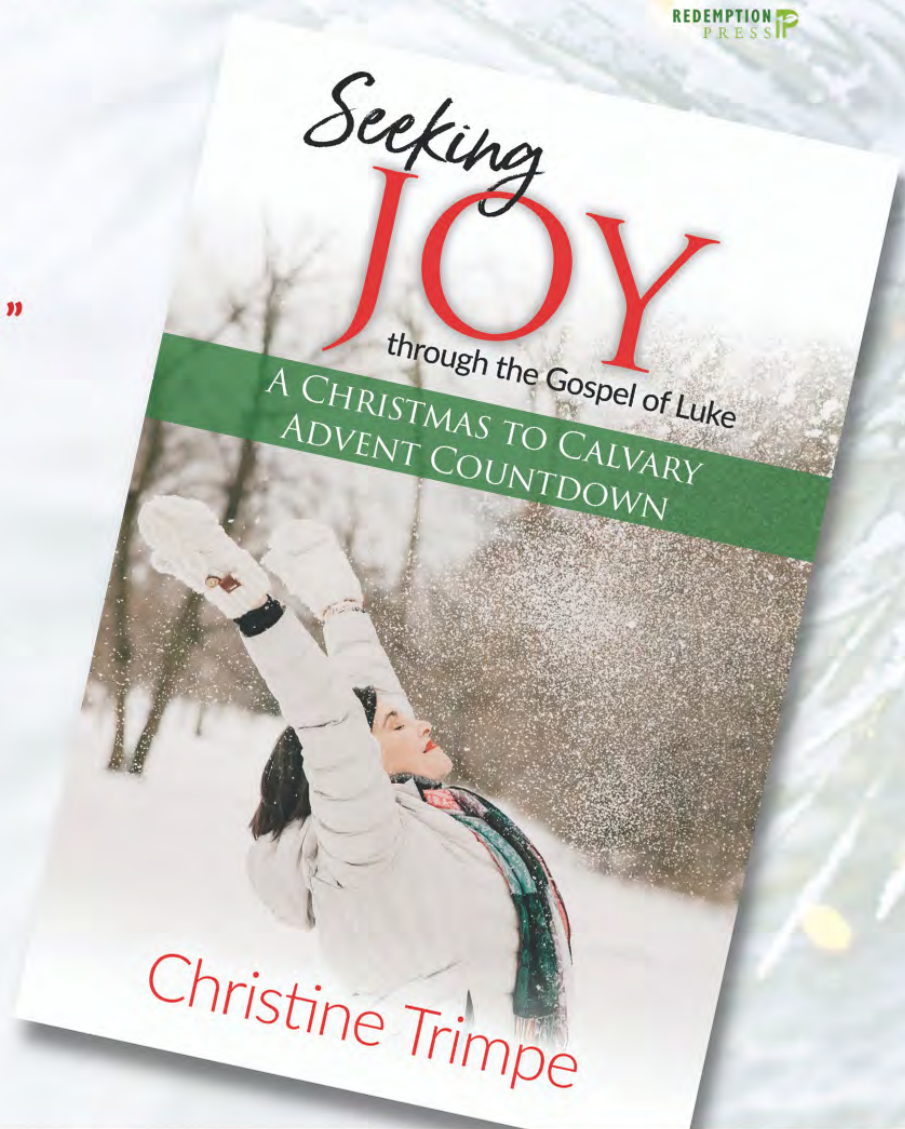
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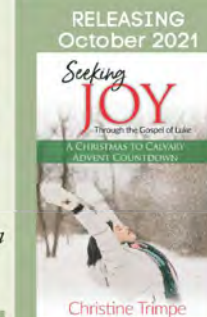
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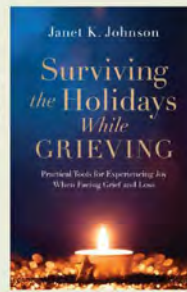
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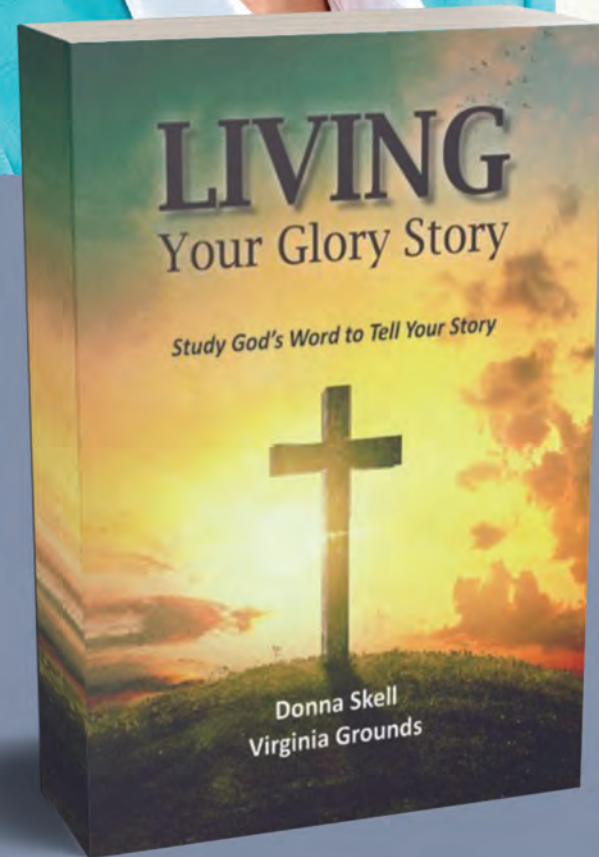
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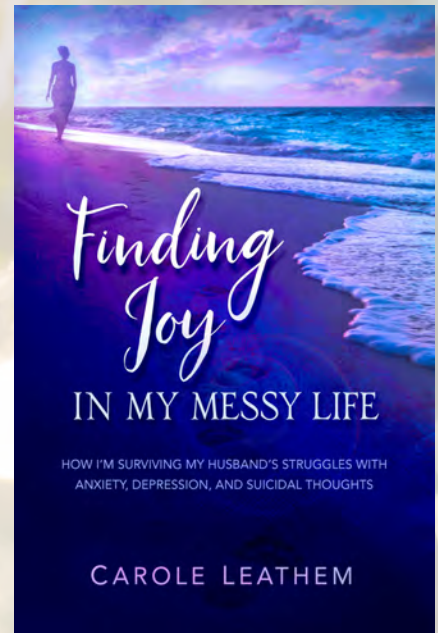
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CAROLE LEATHEM



When Carole Leathem's husband, Bill, first began the battle with anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts, little did she know her years of rejection and identity issues would come to a head. After all, when you're the wife of a senior pastor, there are certain expectations that come with it, and imperfection and mental illness are not among them. The pain, uncertainty, and rejection were nearly unbearable at times, but whenever Carole surrendered to God, he showed up time and time again.

Through beautiful storytelling and raw transparency, Carole chronicles her journey of overcoming abuse, addiction, and chaos that had plagued her family for generations, along with the new adventure of caring for a spouse who struggles with mental illness. Full of heartache, hope, and new beginnings, *Finding Joy in My Messy Life* shows how to experience joy no matter your circumstances. Carole's story testifies that God is a personal God, who loves our imperfect selves perfectly and without conditions and sees our trials as gifts. Life may be messy, but as Carole reveals, the joy of Christ can still reign.

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