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SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2017 • VOL. 4, ISSUE 4

LEADING HEARTS

FOR CHRISTIAN WOMEN

2017 Evangelical Press Association Award of Merit

WHAT CAN SEPARATE US?

5 BREAKTHROUGHS THAT WILL TRANSFORM YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

MY ESCAPE FROM DECEPTION

ATHENA DEAN HOLTZ

3 disciplines to help you OVERCOME REJECTION

BETH DUEWEL & RHONDA RHEA RESTORE YOUR LIFE POTENTIAL

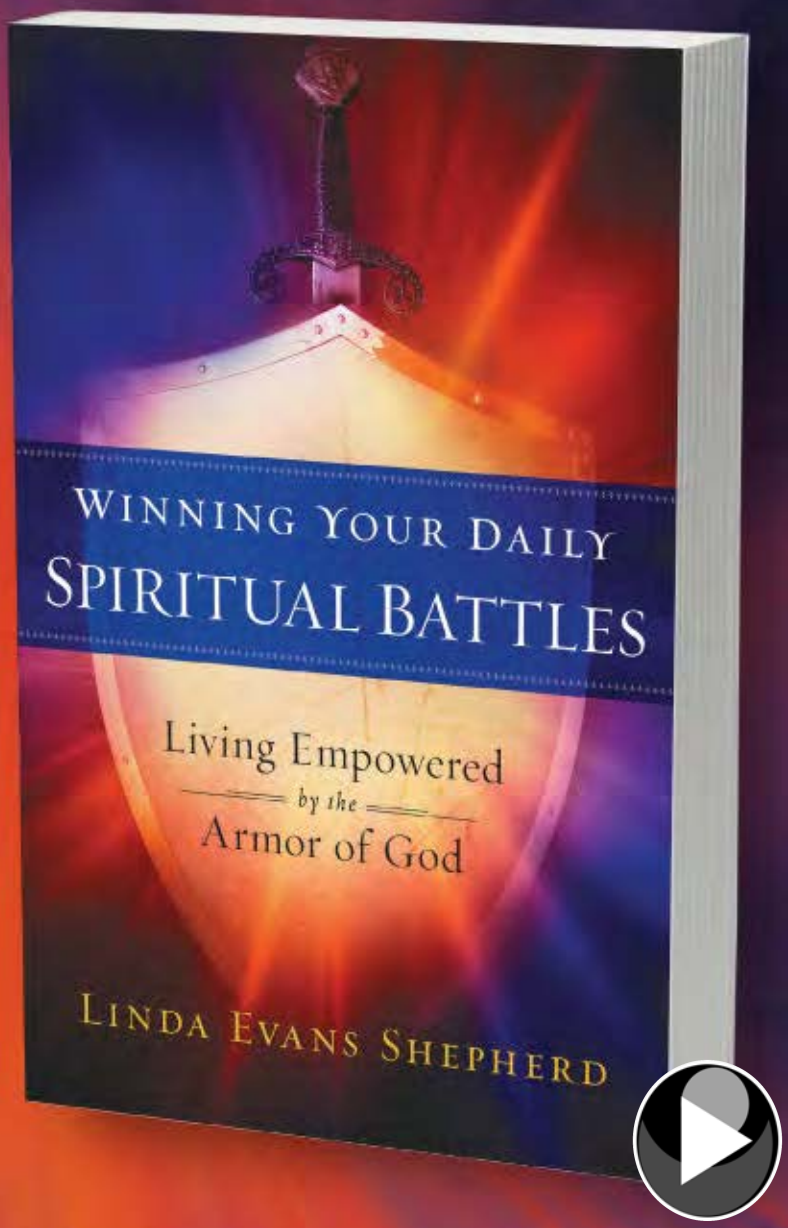
ONE HEART DETERMINED TO FULFILL GOD'S VISION

THE STORY BEHIND THE SAME KIND OF DIFFERENT AS ME

Don't keep losing the same battles.

God has provided the full armor.

It's time to learn how to use it.



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FROM THE PUBLISHER

GOT LIVING WATER?

F YOU WATCHED THE DESTRUCTIVE PATH OF OUR RECENT HURRICANES, INCLUDING HURRICANE HARVEY you thought a lot about the power of wind and water—especially water.

Harvey blew into Rockport, Texas with sustained winds of 130 miles per hour, flattening homes and flipping big rigs. Still, the strength of its destructive power was not revealed until it parked over the cities of South East Texas and western Louisiana, releasing more than 24.5 trillion gallons of water. That's enough water to fill a cube 3 miles wide and 3 miles deep.

In my hometown of Beaumont, it will take weeks to dry out from the water that invaded homes and turned streets into rivers. And curiously, even with an abundance of floodwater, the residents were left parched for drinking water. I wrote one Beaumont friend, "So are you under water, out of water, or both?"

It hurts my heart to think of loved ones trapped in floodwaters desperate with thirst. It reminds me of this descriptive prayer David sang to God describing his own spiritual thirst,

"O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water." (Psalm 63:1 NIV)

But Jesus made a way to quench our spiritual thirst. It was to a woman he first explained this mission when he sat at the town well.

"Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again. Whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty. The water that I will give him will become in him a well of life that lasts forever." (John 4:13-14 NLV)

Even though there is enough living water to quench the spiritual thirst of every person living on the planet, many will go thirsty. Some will go thirsty by choice, and others because they never knew this water existed. But knowing Jesus can turn us into people filled with a river of his Holy Spirit.

If you need someone to hope in, if you need to quench your spiritual thirst, look to Jesus. He loves you and opens his arms wide to you, no matter your past. Let Jesus quench your thirst. All you have to do is to say YES to Him.

I hope this issue of ***Leading Hearts*** will give you the desire to pull down anything that separates you from filling up with Living Water —taking in the fullness of all Jesus has for YOU!

Love,

LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD
PUBLISHER, LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE

EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN FOR LEADERSHIP

LEADING HEARTS?

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2017
VOL. 4, ISSUE 4

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FROM THE EDITOR

GOING BAREFACED

WHEN IT HAPPENED, I DIDN'T EVEN REALIZE I WAS HAVING A BREAKDOWN.

I was 38, an editor for a Christian teen magazine that went out to 160,000, and a quirky, flower-child creative. I remember a six-month period when words wouldn't stop invading my sleep. I would spend my nights writing and my afternoons writing. I would pull into parking lots and write and was exhausting my toilet-time writing.

I saw something quite beautiful in those moments. It was a time of stripping off my makeup to deal with the real dirt of my humanity. God's grace and love shed light on who I really was ---a barefaced girl.

Some of those moments seemed euphoric and beautiful, but some of those moments were the darkest feelings I'd ever had. Those feelings took me to the edge of a Colorado cliff—and God's voice called me to step back.

A few months later, in a span of just 24 hours it was like an electrical circuit misfired in my brain and my family knew I was sick—very sick. So, under a counselor's advisement I admitted myself to the hospital. I exited a week later with a big RED WARNING label to describe how this @barefacedgirl's brain was firing—I had officially become "bipolar disorder" girl.

When my brain broke, I thought that was the end. My life as a writer was over. It was hard to speak. I barely had the presence of mind to drive. I had a massive head injury. I'd never thought I'd ever be able to put a sentence together again.

However God knew, what I know now: He wasn't finished with the story I was writing. In my weakness, He continues to reveal an even greater work. But to accomplish this, I had to relinquish my cone of shame.

I had to become "barefaced" about my condition. Moreover, I had to use my voice to be @barefacedgirl — the person I was divinely created to be — and dissolve the stigma in the b-word. (You can read my **7 Billion Ones** story by clicking on the picture above.)

I found that there are a lot of things in life that keep us from stepping into the fullness of our call. Two of the biggest tricks the enemy uses are feelings of INADEQUACY and SHAME—of who we are called as daughters of the King. So, I say this to ask you a question: **What is the devil "playing in your brain" as he attempts to short-circuit God's call for you?**

As you read this issue of ***Leading Hearts***, ask God to reveal anything that is keeping you from walking barefaced, embracing the fullness of who He is and all He has for YOU! S

Blessings,

AMBER WEIGAND-BUCKLEY
EDITOR, LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE

A Woman Overwhelmed

Find Rest in the Mess

3 ways to stop the insanity
of too much to do and too little time to do it

"Control is one of the biggest sources of overwhelmedness for women. When we aren't in control of ourselves, and even others, we can experience stress, worry, doubt, frustration, anger, bitterness and the list goes on."

HAYLEY DIMARCO
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IF YOU ARE A WOMAN, YOU ARE OVERWHELMED, AND YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

And for the woman overwhelmed, rest is a fantasy we imagine would be amazing, but never a possibility. Before I began to seek God for my overwhelmed life, I didn't even believe in rest. Maybe that's because I didn't seem to have enough time for it, but frankly I wouldn't even have known what to do if I had.

It has happened before. There have been times when I have found myself with no deadlines, no pressing responsibilities and a thought of wanting to take a little R and R. Then I remembered something else that needed to be done, so I abandoned the silly notion I could sit still for a while and do nothing "constructive" and got back to work.

Truthfully, sometimes I even resented people who rested, especially while I was working. I mean, shouldn't they have been doing as much work as me?

"Do I have to do all the work around here?" I would complain as they played.

Yeah, I've always seemed to have too much to do and not enough time to do it. Welcome to my world — now let's get to work! Seriously, though, it has always been hard for me to allow myself to rest — which isn't helped by the fact I actually like to work.

I like writing. I like teaching. I like cleaning. I like running errands. I even like doing laundry. It's just when there is more to do than there is of me to do it, I get overwhelmed. That's when I start to think, "Man, I could use a little rest." But instead of resting, often I just determine to move a little faster, because if I hurry, maybe then I can get it all done.

Rest doesn't come naturally to the busy woman, and I'm a busy woman. I'm going to bet that you are too. But you and I both know not resting isn't healthy or faithful, so we have to remind ourselves rest isn't giving up and it isn't slacking. It's taking the time to reprioritize and to ponder the deeper things of God.

When the world overwhelms us, our thoughts on God get shrouded in to-do lists and activities, and the only way out of that constant state of overwhelmedness is to consider what it means to rest in the knowledge and love of God: cause of judgment she feared would come.

1. Love always —

God's number one priority in your life isn't that you get everything done; it is that you love (see Matthew 22:36-40). Love is the opposite or hurry, busyness and stress because in love we are patient and kind, gentle and self-controlled (see Galatians 5:22-23). Love is the fruit of the Spirit

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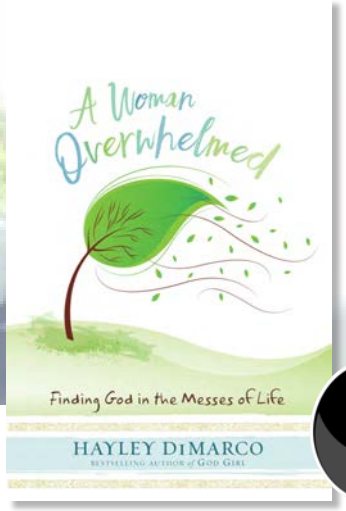

-continued from p. 9-

working in our lives, and the more we rely on His Spirit to animate us, the more we are able to rest in the knowledge that God's will is better than ours and that being is better than doing. When life gets hectic, consider what love would do.

2. Lose control —

Control is one of the biggest sources of overwhelmedness for women. When we aren't in control of ourselves, and even others, we can experience stress, worry, doubt, frustration, anger, bitterness and the list goes on. God never intended His children to live with these emotions, but to be free from them. We lose these emotions when we lose the control we constantly crave in favor of trusting the sovereignty, power, presence and wisdom of God. That means every interruption, change or failure is pointing us to the hand of God who is working all things for our good. We don't have to wrestle control away from those who seem to be messing with our schedule because we trust God is in control of it all, and in that we can lose control.

3. Make memories —

The past has much to teach us, even the past 24 hours. Tonight, consider all God is actively doing in and through you. Think about what He revealed to you today and changed in you. As you make a list of the things He is busy doing in you, these memories will become indelibly drawn into your heart, and with that you will be able to rest in His constant presence and work in your life.

Watch the first video of the ***A Woman Overwhelmed*** Bible Study series by clicking on the play button above.

HAYLEY DIMARCO is the best-selling author of more than 40 books, including her latest release is ***A Woman Overwhelmed: Finding God in the Messes of Life*** (Abingdon Press) and its companion Bible study. Read an overview of this book on page 41.

3 disciplines to help you OVERCOME REJECTION

Do you have what it takes to be told "You don't have what it takes?"

REJECTION IS LIKE A LITTLE MOUSE THAT HIDES IN THE CREVICE OF YOUR MIND

and then someone says a word or some event brings out the little creature. And the moment he comes out, he grows into an elephant of emotions. And the pain of those emotions is as if the elephant sat on your chest.

Why do we feel rejection? God built us with a fundamental need to belong. Being ignored or left out sends messages to the same part of our brain that feels physical pain. The result is anger, depression and loss of self-worth. Rejection is the most common emotional wound of daily life. We experience minor rejections when some-

one on social media rejects us. We are also vulnerable to serious and more devastating rejections, such as a spouse leaving, job loss, or being cut off from family or community.

In the past few months I've experienced rejection and the pain that accompanies it. As I've analyzed my situation, I discovered these factors as part of my downward spiral. It began with an annoying infection that lasted for several months before the doctors found a solution. So my body was tired and weak and vulnerable to attack.

In addition to my physical situation, I was overwhelmed with work and responsibilities — people counting on me, too much to do, too little time. Add financial strain to the mix and you can begin to follow my decent downhill. Then a friend wounded me. Her words made me feel duped and talked about and the loss of her loyalty stung. With all of those events, I multiplied my pain with harmful self-talk. No one cares about you; you missed your chance; you always fail.

Psychologist Guy Winch says, "The greatest damage rejection causes is usually self-inflicted. Just when our self-esteem is hurting most, we go and damage it even further."

The world (internet, psychologists, self-help gurus) offers solutions to the pain of rejection. Their advice is always pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps:

1. Acknowledge the pain.
2. Slow down.
3. Go easy on yourself.
4. Repeat the words "I will survive."
5. Learn from the experience.

But when you are beating yourself up with negative self-talk, these solutions seem hollow.

As Christian leaders, we don't rely on ourselves. We have the power and strength of God and the compassion of the Holy Spirit to pull us out of rejection's deep pit. Here are three ways He will help you beat rejection.

1. Recognize that the feeling of rejection is a spiritual attack. No spiritual battle is won with human weapons. Pray. Ask Jesus to fight your battle. I attended a prayer meeting during the worst of my depression over rejection and all I could pray was the name "Jesus." I prayed His name aloud and over and over. In what I can only describe as a miracle, He lifted the pain of rejection during that prayer. He is faithful and powerful that no attack can prevail in my mind or emotions. "You are entirely faithful … Powerful is your arm! Strong is your hand!" (Psalm 89:8,13, NLT).

2. Listen only to the advice of believers who love you. I listened to my husband's protective advice. I spent time with a counselor who is a brilliant therapist and who knows my heart and my work. He helped me put it all in perspective and gave me some practical tips: (1) Take a multi-vitamin with B complex, and (2) pray the Lord's Prayer with deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling each phrase. He also insisted that I set up boundaries that will give me protection from external pain — limiting time with the people who caused me pain and leaving my desk at six in the evening.

3. Consider God's perspective. Mark Batterson said, "Quit talking to God about your problem and start talking to your problem about God." Nothing is too big for him. I wrote prayers that I read every day, prayers that help me see from God's eyes. Lord, help me honestly pray deep prayers for those who rejected me. Change my fear to loving unconditionally. Change my mind and heart attitudes from human to divine.

When rejection fills your heart like the elephant in the room, turn to Jesus. This loss or situation may lead to the best new ministry opportunities. He is able to rescue from the pit of rejection. SP

BY KAREN PORTER
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Fix Her Upper

BY BETH DUEWEL
&
RHONDA RHEA
www.fixherupper.com

RENOVATING you!

WE HEARD A STORY NOT LONG AGO ABOUT A WOMAN WHO HAD WORN HERSELF TO A FRAZZLE WORKING ON HER HOME RENOVATION.

It had been a long, hard process, but Dinah (not her real name) was finally finished! She was getting ready to do some serious woot-wooting. Some of the paint on her new baseboards had gotten scuffed up in the last few reno tasks, though, so she was giving it all its final touchups. She was on the phone with a girlfriend as she painted that last little spot on that last piece of trim. Woot-woot! Dinah raised her glass of iced tea for a pseudo toast to herself and took a big, celebratory drink.

Except it wasn't her iced tea. She had taken a giant swig from her jar of touchup paint. Yuh oh.

While “Chantilly White Number 987” doesn’t sound at all tasty, it seems it’s not even as tasty as it sounds. Dinah’s friend on the other end of the line got to hear her colossal spit-take. It was one impressive pa-too-ey!

It’s a shame no one keeps records of such things, because Dinah’s certainly might’ve been an award-winning spew. It was solid gold in both distance and density. Great coverage. Ironically, doing her “finish painting” meant she was suddenly not at all finished.

Our faith finishing and refinishing is ongoing too. It doesn’t always have to be that frustrating, of course, and even though it’s ongoing, it doesn’t have to feel quite so unfinished. Mostly because of Jesus’ finished work of salvation for us on the cross.

Our goal in this life, though, is to become more and more like Christ. In that sense, we never entirely put the lid back on that touchup paint and walk away “finished.” We’re redeemed gloriously and immediately when we give Jesus our hearts, yes. Our future is forever changed from hell and eternal separation from Him, to living forever in His presence in a place where there will be no sin, no sadness, no suffering.

But even after that most magnificent transformation, the continuing renovation is a lifelong process here on Earth. Although we no longer have to live under the penalty of sin, our fleshly nature is still part of our makeup and must be battled. We’ve also been reminded that the Holy Spirit empowers the battle. He inspires and enables this continuing renovation.

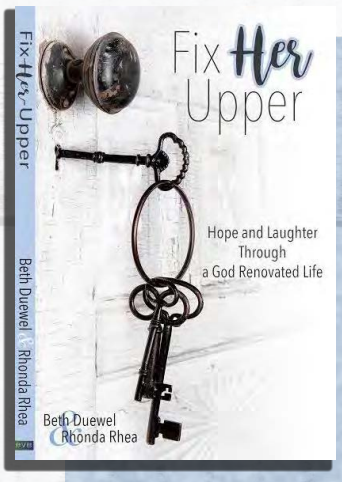
It’s never about becoming a fix-yourself-upper. It’s all about allowing the Lord, who renovates so perfectly, to do a makeover from the inside out. It’s important for us to be reminded regularly that we have a choice. We can choose to lean on Him, trust Him, and invite those inner renovations. Or we can choose to hinder and thwart, squirm, and balk. Some days we choose well. Some days we make a spewy mess. But there is grace for every pa-too-ey. And the goal remains to continually move toward becoming more like Jesus.

Romans 12:1-2 holds a key for persisting in the glorious renovation process the Lord longs for us to experience. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (ESV).

Will we give Him all? Will we allow our minds to be transformed—renovated, restored, refreshed, refurbished, revived, renewed, and reclaimed—feeding our minds God’s truth? Sometimes renovation is hard. It’s dirty and dusty. Sometimes we spew a little paint. There are blisters and sore muscles and sometimes a hammer to a thumb.

Sometimes it smarts when God does a renovation work in us. Leaving behind our old ways and our fleshly wants can be difficult and painful and messy. But it’s the path to life the way it’s meant to be lived. With joy and peace and purpose built right in. In a home redo, we all long to see the “before and after,” right? It’s incredibly gratifying to see the old “ick” become the new “ah.” Spiritually, we’ve encountered the “before,” for sure.

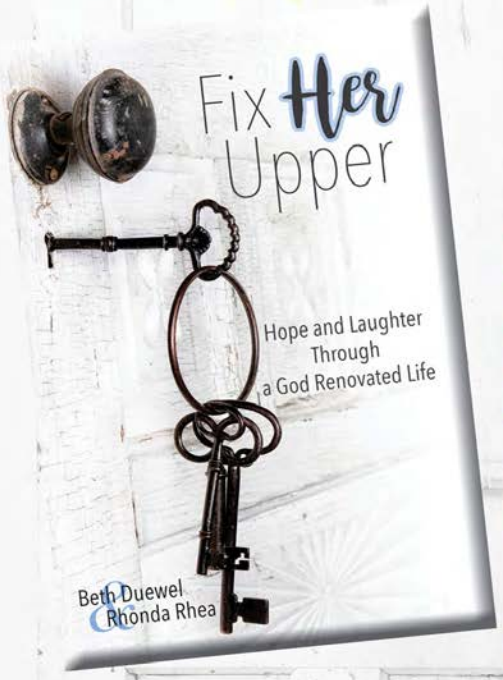
We were hopeless in sin and ick. How infinitely more gratifying it is to be completely dazzled at the spiritual “after”— when we see our heavenly Father do a transforming work in our spirit. It’s beautiful! Mindboggling! It’s over-the-top “ah”! And as glorious as every “after” might be, there’s always another. His work in us is ongoing. We get a before and after, and after, and after, ever-after. Woot-wooting evermore! SQ



This excerpt adapted with permission from Fix-Her-Upper: Hope and Laughter through a God-Renovated Life by Beth Duewel and Rhonda Rhea (Bold Vision Books, 2017). Read an overview of this book on page 41.

Who doesn't love to see a glorious before and after?
A Grand Transformation?

Get ready to strip off some layers and that old way of existing....**Let's Get Renovated!**



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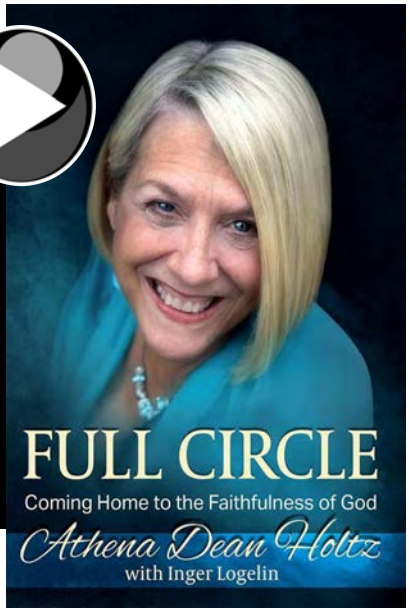
MY Road to REDEMPTION

ATHENA DEAN HOLTZ



I'VE ALWAYS FELT DRAWN BY GOD. AS A YOUNG GIRL, OUR FAMILY WOULD VISIT COUSINS AT CHRISTMASTIME AND GO TO MIDNIGHT MASS. The priest, the mystical chants, incense and icons — that was the extent of my exposure to anything close to Christianity as a child.

At one point, I was filled with an esoteric longing to find out more about God, but I was closing in on my teenage years and assumed knowing God meant becoming a nun … uhhhhhh, no. That did not sound appealing, so out the window went that desire.

Any thoughts of spirituality would lie dormant until I decided at age 19 that I would move to Santa Monica to follow in my grandmother's footsteps as a Unity

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minister. As I interned at her celebrity-filled congregation, I grew restless to be around people more my age, boys especially, so I followed some musicians to Desert Hot Springs to party and "find myself." That trip ended up moving me one step closer to my encounter with the "church" of Scientology in Hollywood.

I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar! I was working in the music industry as an assistant to Helen Reddy's husband and thrived on the thrill of being around famous people and jet-setters. It made me feel important in a strange way, which temporarily filled a need in my empty soul.

An actor friend and his wife invited me out to their estate in Santa Barbara and introduced me to Scientology as the "cool" spiritual experience. Looking back, I can see that it appealed to my pride. It didn't take long before I had taken the bait … hook, line, and sinker. Little did I know the enemy would use this strategy on me again nearly 25 years later.

I ended up connecting with more "opinion leaders" at the Celebrity Centre in Hollywood. I joined staff to be part of something larger than myself, the goal of "clearing the planet" and bringing goodwill on earth through the truths discovered by L. Ron Hubbard.

During this journey of finding myself and supposedly gaining control over my future, I married a Scientology "ethics officer." Those who were drawn to this position functioned much like cops, so the job attracted guys who liked the idea of being in control and using force, those who were attracted by the power of the position.

Inside of a week after saying "I do" I made a snarky comment only to receive a whopping shiner. Over the next four years, I became his punching bag. The final straw came when he broke my arm as I was nursing our six-month-old. I escaped with my life, my two kids, and a suitcase full of clothes.

Out of the frying pan and into the flame, 12 months later I married another Scientologist whose main job was to sell Scientology services. He was a Vietnam veteran with a healthy case of PTSD; I had no idea what I was getting myself into. About three years into that marriage, we found our way out of Scientology, receiving death threats as we left. Because we employed many Scientologists, our leaving was considered quite a threat.
Fast forward two years later to the brink of divorce. My veteran husband had rallied around the Freeman Constitutional movement and was operating a fund-raising business outside state and county rules.

He came under question by the Charities Division of the State of Washington and was indicted for fraud. This encounter threatened my Senior Vice President position with a large insurance and securities company, so I'd had

Moving out of the victim posture, discovering how I'd become vulnerable and owning my part of the destruction was the healthiest thing I could do. —Athena to LH

enough. We were done!

After a few weeks in the pit of despair, he turned to Christ and I saw a new man. This drew me in and softened my heart, opening me up to a recognition of my need for forgiveness. After reading *Mere Christianity*, Christ drew me to himself and I prayed with one of my managers to receive Jesus.

What a transformation! My foul mouth laced with continuous F-bombs, cursing and taking the Lord's name in vain was washed out with the cleansing soap of the Holy Spirit. I was a new person! It wasn't long before we were swept into full-time ministry working with Vietnam veterans and their family members.

Our next five years were spent non-stop building an international network of small groups led by veterans who'd experienced the Father's love. While it was an amazing experience with lots of fruitful ministry, it left us both vulnerable to deception, which ended up coming down the road when we least expected.

Eight years into a highly successful publishing ministry, we ended up working on a book for a "pastor" who turned out to be a wolf. This one person was used by the enemy to deceive, divide, destroy and demolish my marriage, family, relationships with friends and colleagues, career in publishing and my understanding of who God was. Twelve years later I woke up and found that I'd believed that a lie from the pit of hell was the truth and had given up everything for it.

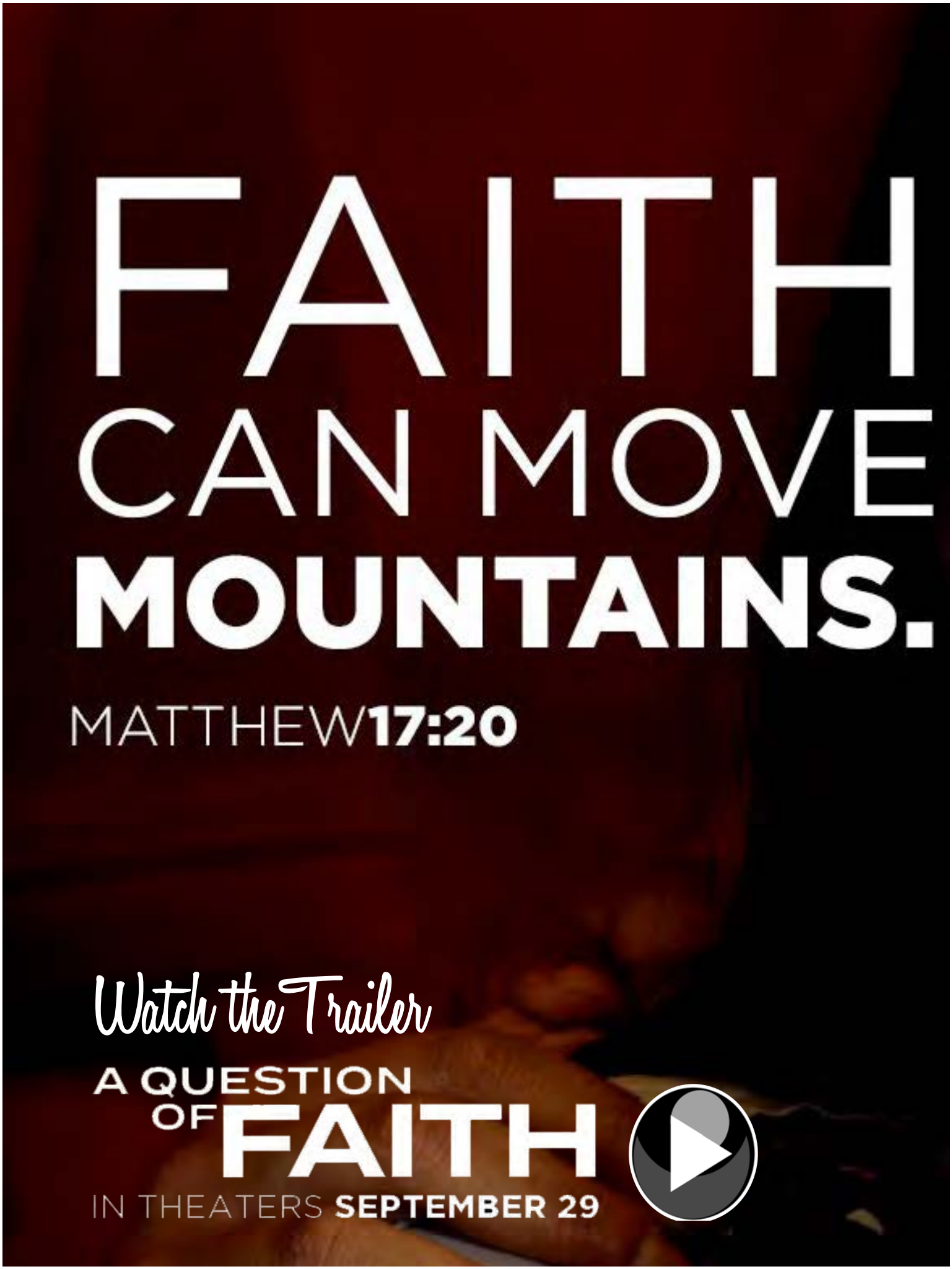
I'd been duped by someone who claimed to be a man of God, but appealed, again, to my pride with a message of "spiritual insider information." He used Scriptures out of context to control and manipulate me and steal my company, my house, my car and my reputation in Christian publishing. A case of severe spiritual abuse and manipulation left me emotionally, mentally, relationally, financially and spiritually destitute.

What God has done in the last 6 years to restore all that the locusts had eaten is truly a wonder to behold. The tremendous healing journey hinged on a critical question I felt compelled to ask God. "What was wrong with me? What did I do to open the door to the kind of deception I'd encountered?"

Moving out of the victim posture, discovering how I'd become vulnerable and owning my part of the destruction was the healthiest thing I could do. My healing accelerated exponentially and God worked overtime to redeem what the enemy meant for evil.

He rebuilt every broken relationship, placed me back into publishing, establishing Redemption Press, and worked a breath-taking, modern-day Cinderella story as I became a pastor's wife to a man whose late wife of 49 years suggested me as her successor.

God's faithfulness rings with redemption as my journey spotlights Him as a Romans 8:28 God. He truly has used all things together for good! SQ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MATTHEW17:20
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A QUESTION OF FAITH
IN THEATERS SEPTEMBER 29

Keep your HOPE on a ROPE

"LET US NOT BECOME WEARY IN DOING GOOD, FOR AT THE PROPER TIME WE WILL REAP A HARVEST IF WE DO NOT GIVE UP."

—Galatians 6:9, NIV

BY PAM FARREL
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www.Love-Wise.com

I WAS WEARY—TIRED TO THE BONE, DROP-DEAD FATIGUED, COMPLETELY EXHAUSTED, "can't take even one more step", "leave it all on the field" beat. It seemed we were caught in the perfect storm and the ship of our life was being tossed about on a tumultuous sea of unending responsibilities. It was a year of up and down swells.

He was commuting to care for his aging parents, one frail of mind, the other frail of body. His folks were fiercely desiring to maintain the independence of living in their own home—which put an ever-growing weight on the shoulders of my compassionate husband. The ripple of my husband's compassionate care of his parents impacted me as I tried my best to hold up our life and ministry as Bill held up his parents. We were both at the end of our proverbial rope.

I know that the Word has some prescriptions for handling weariness.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30, NIV).

Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him" (Psalms 62:5, NIV).

…"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mark 6:31, NIV).

"The LORD replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'" (Exodus 33:14, NIV).

"Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work…" (Exodus 23:12, NIV).

I knew I needed a day off for rest, renewal, revival, rejuvenation—and recovery! I am a part of a wonderful networking group called Professional Women's Fellowship, and they were hosting a one-day retreat at a lovely private estate. I knew that I needed to get myself there (despite a looming book deadline) I went begging God to speak to me and give me some HOPE!

I love this getaway because they minister to a person body, soul, mind and spirit. During the hour long quiet time, I stretched out under the shade of a large tree near the pond. As I laid down on my stomach, spreading my journaling Bible open before me.

I couldn't help but notice that I was already seeing God be the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23. He was making me lie down in a green "pasture" that was "beside still waters." So, I continued to pray through Psalm 23:2-3:
Lord,"refresh my soul….Guide me along the right paths for Your name's sake" (NIV).

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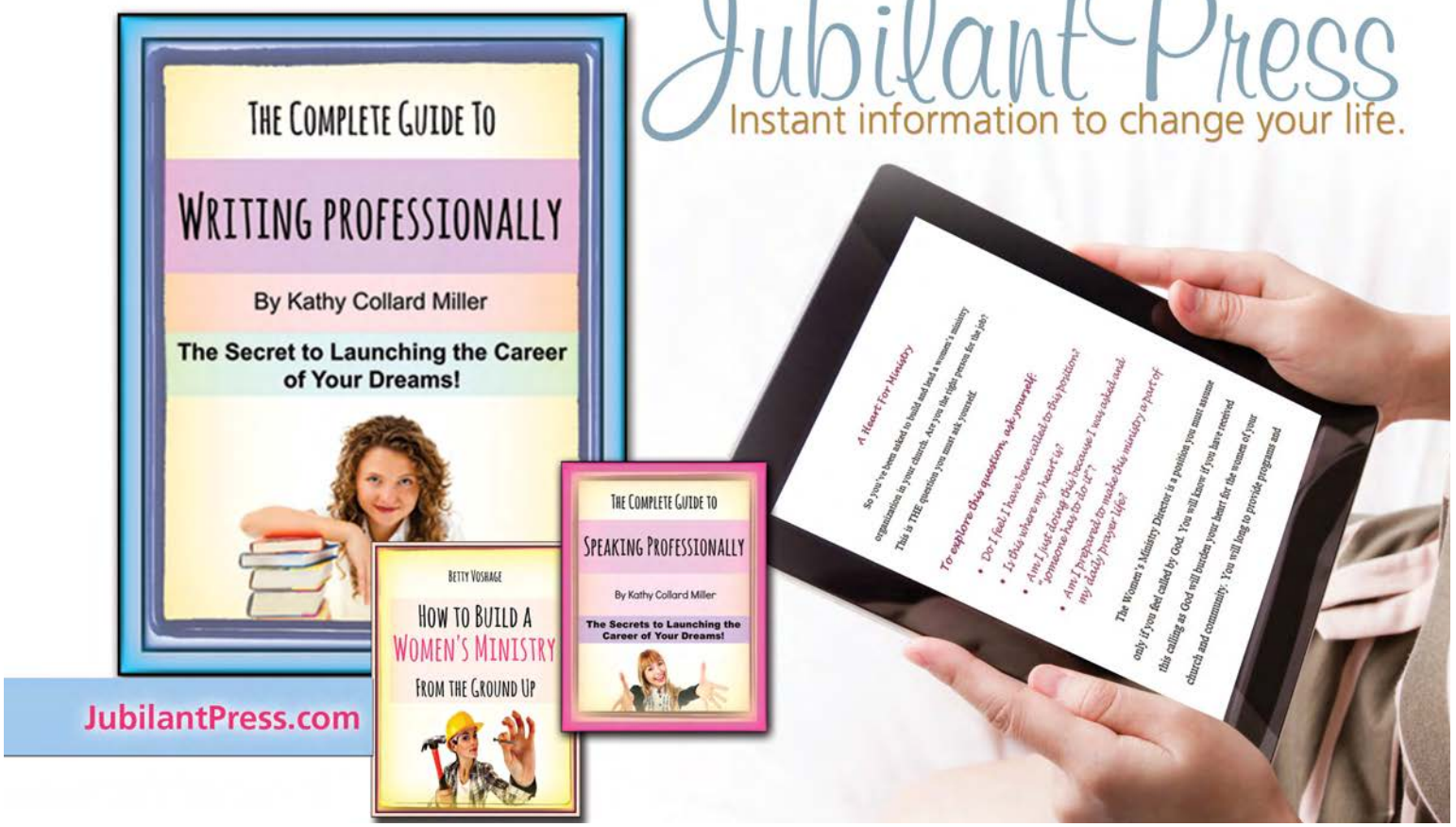

How Well Do You KNOW God?

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GodTest.com

-continued from p. 23-

I flipped open my Bible to the Psalms, as I nearly always gain a measure of refreshing hope there. My Bible landed at Psalm 55:22: "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken" (NIV).

Immediate I thought, "Wow Lord, that was fast! This seems the perfect verse for me, but exactly what does it mean to 'cast my cares' on You? How can I get better at doing it? And what does it mean that you will 'sustain' me? —because I REALLY need some sustaining power! I know that my heart's desire is to be 'righteous,' and right now living 'unshaken' is what I need because I can't see the circumstances changing all that quickly. Lord, I am open to Your message to me from Your Word."

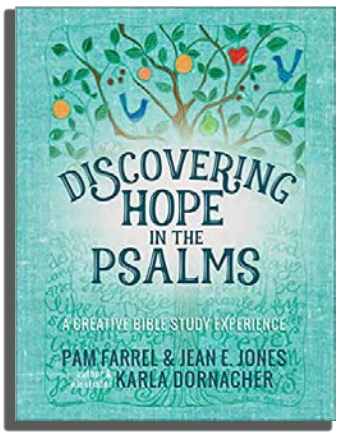
I had a smartphone with me, so I connect to my Logos Bible Software to help me dig a little deeper into the context, the word meaning and historical frame around this verse.

I prayed out my weariness, then looked up what it meant to "cast" my burden. I was to hurl my net out like a fisherman. God was inviting me to catapult my burdens on to His net. (And I was happy to hurl them!)

As I continued to study, what surprised me is the word used for burden can also be translated 'assignment' or 'gift.' I remember thinking, "A gift? Really?" (It was interesting that this word 'gift' can also be translated 'lot' or 'allotment,' and is the same word as many of us pray from The Prayer of Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:10: "Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border"(ESV). That means to pray the equivalent of "God bless me by giving me the full allotment You have planned for me").I was beginning to see that what I perceived as a "burden" was actually the "blessing" of the responsibility — the allotment — God had for me. If I were to survive, I needed a paradigm shift to a more heavenly viewpoint.

But as I surveyed my "gift" (my assignment) from God, it seemed too big for one ever to carry alone, so I kept digging, doing more word studies through the verse. I read that God would "sustain" me — He would nourish strengthen, and support me and make me sufficient enough to handle this assigned "gift." To me, God was whispering hope to my soul, that whatever my assignment was depleting, God would pour back into me — and more!

I was washed over with peace, relief and a rejuvenating hope. As a praise response, and to lock this refreshing word picture securely and vividly in my mind, I sketched out two hands, representing God's caring hands. In one palm was my "gift" of cares and I placed myself in the other palm. Both I and my assignment, both you and your calling, are held up by the Good Shepherd. We are in His sustaining, caring hands. God's got us!



You too can find hope from ***God in the Psalms: Discovering Hope in the Psalms: A Creative Biblical Experience*** by Pam Farrel, Jean E Jones, and Karla Dornacher, from Harvest House. www.discoveringhopeinthepsalms.com

BY JENN TAYLOR
@JENNTAYLOR417

PROFILE CONTRIBUTOR

- - - - - - - -

Natasha OWENS

finding my lifeline

"I DIDN'T EXPECT TO HAVE ANOTHER CAREER SO LATE IN LIFE. BUT THERE'S A LOT OF THINGS IN LIFE THAT YOU DON'T EXPECT," says singer-songwriter Natasha Owens.

Natasha was set in a career. She and her husband owned two businesses and were raising their two boys. However seven years ago, one bullet changed Natasha's life forever.

""My dad was cleaning his guns and got interrupted on the last gun. He missed a step somewhere. There was a bullet in the chamber and it hit him in the heart. He died within 60 seconds. So, being the strong one in the family, I had to pick up the pieces, organize everything and be there for everybody. So I delayed my grieving a little too long," she remembers.

Around the one-year mark of his passing, Natasha fell into a season of deep grief. "I grew up in church, but I'm from a very strict religion that was anchored through religion and not necessarily Christ," she says. "So, I wasn't anchored very well. I down-spiraled very quickly and went into a deep depression."

The turning point came six months into Natasha's depression. She was leading her church's praise singers when her pastor began asking her to take over the vacated music minister position.

"My dad was everything to me. He was like both parents, and it was more than just the loss of one parent to me," she says. "The pastor said, 'I feel like you need to step up and be our music minister.' But I was so angry at God."

Natasha was honest and told him she couldn't get out of bed, and if she had energy, she would give it her family.

"I can't get up, motivate people and tell them how great God is when He's not great to me," she told him. He persisted until she finally said, "I can't even pray or read my Bible. Is that the type of music minister that you want?'

Surprisingly, her pastor challenged her. "That's what God wants right now. I believe that as you minister God will give you that unending flow to minister, and in return you're going to get your healing."

She surrendered and allowed God to help. When she didn't have the will to get out of bed, she concentrated on restoration songs and found herself out of bed and getting ready. "I

-continued on p. 28-

-continued from p. 27-

realized I could use that as a tool," she said. "It is a battlefield of the mind. If we can conquer that, we can conquer anything. We have to control our speech, too, because the things we say affect the things we think. I talked myself into a depression by the anger that I spoke."

To cope with her anxiety, depression and fear she would search out Scriptures and write them down (on paper or on her arm). "Every time I felt that negative emotion or thought I would just start reading those Scriptures. I was training my mind as I trained my speech to speak life. That got me on the road to recovery more than anything else."

Deuteronomy 31:6 was a verse she clung to and claims as her favorite. "He will never leave you nor forsake you," she recites. "It meant so much to me because I felt like I was so alone."

To help others in their struggle, she includes temporary Scripture tattoos on her merchandise table. "People want a quick fix when you live in a drive-thru society," Natasha says. "Faith-shaking things like depression, grief and so forth you just can't quick fix them." She wears them on her forearm to encourage her and wishes she could have had them through her recovery.

But she does remember the turning point in her grief like it was yesterday. "Several years ago, my kids were in the backyard playing. I remember God speaking to me. 'You can't die looking back at what you've lost. You have to live for what you have left, and those boys are what you have left.' It seemed sassy to me. I remember laughing and smiling for the first time in years. I felt joy back in my soul. I knew I had made it through."

"I made God a promise that day because many people do not make it through. I wanted them to feel that feeling again. That was the beginning of all the music."

Two of the songs that Natasha had on repeat during her recovery were "How Great Is Our God" and "Whom Shall I Fear," co-written and produced by the legendary Ed Cash, who happened to produce Natasha's latest project, ***We Will Rise***.

"It was a whole God thing how the whole Ed Cash collaboration came about," Natasha says. "As I told him my story from beginning to end, and God gave him the song "We Will Rise." That day, Ed felt God leading him to baby the project. Natasha and Ed co-wrote most of the songs on the album."

She has multiple favorites on the album, including "We Will Rise." "We as songwriters can try to put words together," she said, "but when God breathes into a song like He did and gave it instantly, there's something special about that song. It's the core of the entire album."

"'Legacy' also has a special place in my heart." Natasha continued, "It's based on a Sunday School lesson my dad wrote the year died, a lesson based on 'The Dash' poem." Natasha and Ed wrote the song based on how he viewed life — God wants what is left behind to be remembered and make an impact.

Every song ties back to the restoration message of "We Will Rise." She wants to encourage those go through a trial to know that surviving is moment by moment, day by day. Don't question why or look too far into the future, because it can be overwhelming. "Ask God, 'What do I need to learn and who do I need to help?'"

"I think God has a very specific plan. One way you heal is when you take the spotlight off your particular circumstance and reach out by being a servant or helping someone else, especially someone who is going down the same road." S

Find out more about Natasha's album, news and tour dates at www.natashaowensmusic.com

BY PENELOPE CARLEVATO
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www.PenelopeCarlevato.com

food for thought—

LIFE BYTES?

a GYPSY TEA TIME

I NEVER GREW TIRED OF THE STORY MY MOTHER TOLD ABOUT BEING KIDNAPPED BY GYPSIES.

She may have been three or four years old when she was whisked away by a Gypsy caravan that was camped on the outskirts of her hometown in England. She regaled memories of bright colors in the wagons and the women's clothing, lots of gold hoop earrings and bangles. I think she was given sweets and kept occupied until my grandfather paid a ransom for her release. She assured us she was never afraid, so I believe they treated her kindly.

I hadn't thought of that story in years, until last month when I was sitting in my doctor's office. I was intrigued by a colorful and entertaining magazine. The cover promised BOHO styled clothing and decorating. As I read through the magazine, the fun and flamboyant styles jumped off the pages. Bold patterns and fearless decorating reminded me of the Gypsy story my mother experienced.

The last few pages featured an article on Gypsy wagons.These wagons or caravans are being repurposed and adapted for backyard getaways or "she-sheds". This may just be what my back garden needs! Would this not be the perfect place to write or have a Gypsy tea?

In fact, during a visit to England my cousin Margaret, granddaughter Kate and I came across such a tea room. We were having a delightful time traipsing through meadows strewn with beautiful wildflowers when we found a brightly colored Gypsy caravan wagon converted to a little outdoor tea room.

The wagon was painted with brilliant reds, purples, greens and oranges. As we stopped to take our tea and dine on warm apple turnovers, we talked about how fun it would be to travel or even live in a Gypsy wagon. And of course, we laughed, reminiscing about my mother's kidnapping story.

The renewed interest in Gypsy wagons made me wonder if I really could put a vintage re-purposed Gypsy caravan in my garden to use as a writing studio or an overflow sleeping quarters for guests. This could add charm and function to our garden.

Then, sure enough, a few weeks ago I read another story about a man who is making Gypsy Wagons. Immediately, I made an appointment to view his custom-made wagons.

Who knows if one day I will have a Gypsy wagon in my garden, but I do know there is something about those wagons remind me that I need to slow down. I often long to return to a place of rest. I want to be more flexible and truly allow God to reset the pace of my life. To do that I need to give Him control. I don't want to miss His leading because I am running so fast in my agenda, I fail to listen to His voice.

It's in this place I can refocus my thoughts on Matthew 6:34: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (NIV).

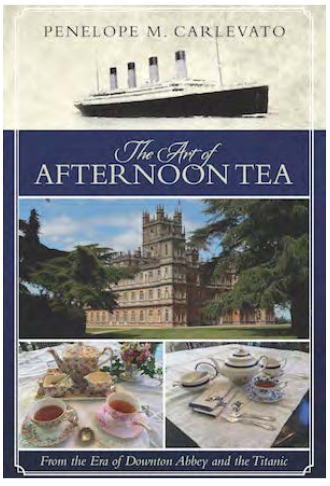
As fall is a great time of year to find a variety of apples in your store's produce section, I decided to include one of my favorite Gypsy Apple Turnover recipes. These turnovers travel well and are scrumptious when paired with a cup of hot tea.

Gypsy Apple Turnovers

6 green or granny smith apples – peeled, cored and cut into small chunks
1 cup of packed brown sugar
2 tablespoons lemon juice
3 teaspoons cinnamon, divided
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
2 tablespoons sugar
1 package frozen puff pastry for turnovers, thawed
1 egg, beaten

Combine apples, brown sugar, lemon juice, 2 teaspoons cinnamon and cloves in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally until the sugar dissolves. Continue cooking until most of the liquid is gone and the apples are tender, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and refrigerate until chilled. Heat oven to 400ºF. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper. Mix 1 teaspoon cinnamon with 2 tablespoons sugar and set aside.

Roll out pastry on a lightly floured surface about 1 inch larger than the original. Place 2 Tablespoons of the cool apple mixture onto the pastry slight off center. Fold the pastry in half, moisten the edges with the egg mixture, then seal the edges with a fork or your fingers. Place the filled pastry on the parchment-lined cookie sheet. Brush the tops with the egg mixture, then sprinkle with the cinnamon sugar. Make two small slits with a sharp knife on the tops of each turnover. Bake until puffed and golden brown, about 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer to a cooling rack. Enjoy warm or room temperature. Makes 10 to 12.



Find great recipes like this in Penelope's book:
The Art of Afternoon Tea: From the Era of Downton Abbey and the Titanic.
Available autographed from PenelopeCarlevato.com

BY KAREN WHITING
@KARENHWHITING

www.KarenWhiting.com

about time—

LIFE BYTES

TAKE charge of YOUR TIME

IMPLEMENT A FEW GREAT HABITS TO GET BACK IN CONTROL OF YOUR TIME AND WORK SMARTER.

Organized to-do list. A long list can be daunting and hide important tasks or appointments. Use a quadrant instead. Divide a paper into four sections by drawing a large cross.

- Use the upper left for your business of speaking and writing.
- In the lower left, list contacts you need to make or follow up on, with the numbers or emails.
- On the top right quarter, list your personal tasks including appointments, rest, and exercise.
- On the remaining lower right quarter, list activities with family and loved ones.

You can then set aside parts of the week or day to focus on those different areas

Store Needed Information. When you right down an appointment or task, include the needed information, such as address, phone number, and time. Store this information on your phone's calendar. Hopefully you sync that calendar with your computer or other devices. When you are ready to drive off or call someone, you can easily retrieve the address and details.

Set boundaries and time limits. Let people know what times you work and the best times to call. Limit your breaks. When you stop to stretch you might want to check email, but limit the minutes so you will return to the task at hand quickly.

Avoid distractions. Note what distracts you, such as a social network or friends who call during work hours and limit those. Set a time to call back, or schedule limited time on favorite networks.

Plan time for loved ones. Make sure to sprinkle fun into your days and invest time in the people you love. Schedule time to relax and get together with loved ones. Be in the moment and pay attention to those special people.

Focus on one task at a time. Avoid letting your mind wonder as you work. At the end of your work time choose what you'll focus on the next day and put a sticky note in place with a reminder of the task. You'll start right away instead of wondering where to begin.

Stop guessing and track your timing. Many people think it only takes twenty minutes to do their hair when it might actually take thirty. The same thing might apply to how long it takes to prepare a talk or write a short article. Start timing your routine tasks so you can allow enough time for each activity.

Be Kind to Yourself Add time cushions in your day and travel to allow space for things that pop up or go wrong. Evaluate your time regularly.

Keep a time diary and start noticing what is productive and what I actually a time waster. Eliminate some of the things that bog you down.

Streamlining your time helps you be more productive and also eases your mind so you can focus better.

THE BIG QUESTION

WITH

Cynthia

Q: Recently I heard a scholar say the Book of Daniel should be dated 400 years later than I was taught in Sunday school. Can we trust the Bible if it confuses history?

CYNTHIA L. SIMMONS
@CYNTHIALSIMMONS

www.clsimmons.com

THE BOOK OF DANIEL HAS SUFFERED MORE ATTACKS FROM SKEPTICS THAN ANY BOOK in the Bible because his recorded prophecies came true with remarkable precision. The first criticism came from Porphyry in the third century.

He believed the author penned the book in A.D.165. Porphyry believed the events described had already happened and the author pretended to prophesy. Let me relate a story that demonstrates the accuracy of the Old Testament.

Critics took issue with the story of King Belshazzar who gave a feast for his nobles in Daniel chapter five. The king called for his servants to use the golden goblets and chalices which his forefather Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Jewish temple. When a huge hand wrote a message on the wall, everyone was terrified and officials called Daniel to interpret.

With God's guidance, Daniel explained the message: the Persians would kill the king and seize his throne that very night. Belshazzar immediately granted Daniel the third place in the kingdom. However, Darius the Mede invaded that night, and Belshazzar died as Daniel predicted.

While historians recorded the Persians defeated Babylon in 539 B.C., they found no one named Belshazzar. They proclaimed him a fictional character that demonstrated the inaccuracy of the Bible. Instead, their sources reported Nabonidus to be King of Babylon. However, an archeologist discovered a cuneiform cylinder in 1854 which Nabonidus spoke of his eldest son, Belshazzar.

After that find, historians admitted Belshazzar existed, but they said the Book of Daniel was in error because no one granted Belshazzar the status of king. However, when signing legal papers at the time, citizens swore by the gods and their king.

Documents exist from the reign of Nabonidus in which people took an oath by both Nabonidus and his son, Belshazzar. That indicated Belshazzar occupied a place of power. Also, we know Nabonidus reigned from 555 to 539 B.C., but he lived at an oasis called Tayma in northern Arabia during much of that time.

In one cuneiform tablet, Nabonidus stated he allowed Belshazzar to rule while he was absent. We can conclude Belshazzar held the second place in the kingdom after his father, so he offered Daniel the third place for deciphering the message on the wall.

While skeptical scholars have accepted the archeological evidence regarding Belshazzar, they seldom applaud the accuracy of Scripture. However, we Christians can rejoice in the inspired Word of God.

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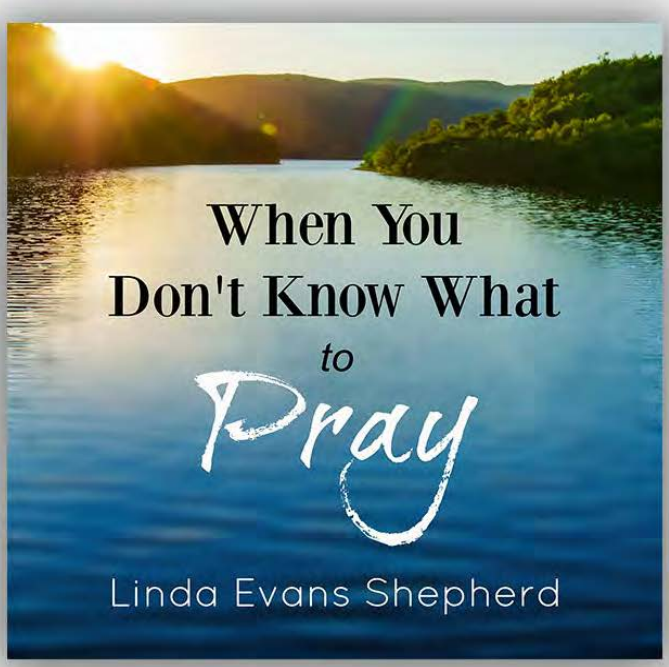

★★★★★

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—Thelma Wells, author & president
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SO, YOU WANT TO WRITE WITH YOUR SPOUSE … WOOHOO

BUCKLE IN! You are in for the ride of your life; one that will challenge and stretch you, while taking you further than you ever imagined. Our greatest seasons of growth occur when we write together. Each project stretches us, solidifies our beliefs, and further unites us. We don't always think alike. Many times, we differ. But that's where we find the gold.

So, what causes so much growth and how can you build unity and collaborate effectively? Here are five best practices my husband and I have discovered to write and powerfully collaborate:

1. Define your roles. The strongest partnerships understand that their secret sauce resides in the diversity of their strengths. Resist the urge to compare or compete. Instead, play to your strengths, yield to one another's strengths, and masterfully combine the best of your strengths together. For example, one may be better at capturing themes, titles and maximizing concepts, while the other creates memorable one liners, stories or parallels homiletic takeaways. Understand you and your partner's strengths. Then, leverage them by providing one another permission to speak into each area in order to produce the optimal outcome.

2. Determine the rhythm that optimizes your outcome. Typically, the following writing process works best for most couples.

- **Conceptualize out loud to capture notes** concerning the big picture and key takeaways.
- **Then, write independently.** Let one person expound first and then the other.
- **Send files back and forth to edit** and strengthen one another's thoughts, tracking comments and changes along the way.
- **Continue to work independently,** applying feedback, adding layers, and repeating the process until the writing project is in the best shape possible.
- **At that point, come together to tighten** and complete a line by line edit to tighten even more.

3. Know your whys and whats. Answer questions like: Why are we writing this project; what do we hope to accomplish? Why is it important; what value does it provide? Why us; what do we gain by collaborating? Truly understanding your whys, shapes your overall message and what you write about. It helps you to better highlight your unique combined voice and contribution as a couple.

4. Value one another above the project. Honor one another above the fanfare. Remember to make room for margin and time for connection; after all you can't give what you don't have. Be sure to replenish as a couple to sustain your longevity.

5. Celebrate accomplishments, together. Practice praise for one another's contribution privately and publicly, frequently. Whether a completed chapter, a finished proposal, or a signed book contract, find reasons to celebrate along the journey, as much as possible. Remember, you are stronger together!

As Ecclesiastes 4:9 reminds us, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor" NIV).

IMAGINE WALKING INTO A ROOM FULL OF PEOPLE YOU DON'T KNOW. You look around, debating where to sit. You spot an open seat at two tables. At one table sits a group who look like you and have a similar social background. At the other table sits a diverse group, many with a cultural background different from yours. Your mind and your emotions quickly make a judgment call on which seat you would prefer. It looks like a split-second decision, but that decision is comprised of years of social conditioning.

a world of difference

Social conditioning starts when you're a baby. Your parents pick your playdates and make sure they approve of the family's lifestyle and values. Throughout your life this conditioning continues. It is influenced directly by your friends, peers, acquaintances and relatives; each relationship is rewarded or challenged by your social circle. It is also influenced indirectly by the movies your watch, the books your read, and what you see in the news and on social media.

Social prejudices bombard us every day through these channels. These thoughts deposit their infectious debris deep into our minds, often without our even realizing it. During these interactions stereotypes emerge.

Stereotypes are generalizations that are made about the characteristics of members of a group. These assumptions may or may not accurately represent most of the group, but have become accepted as mostly true. Often we are not aware of the unconscious negative stereotypes lingering behind our decision regarding which table we choose. Even the most well-intentioned of us is not immune.

As you attempt to simplify the decision-making process, you inherently apply labels and prejudge people based on limited information. All prejudice is rooted in this tendency to prejudge with insufficient knowledge about a culture, racial group, or personal situation. These prejudgments are made based on superficial things like complexion, clothing, religious preferences, customs and habits. It is void of depth or any attempt to understand.

The lack of facts creates opportunities for wrong

assumptions about a particular group and can impede your desire for interaction and relationship. This is what separates us and keeps us leaning toward the familiar when God's heart is for us to fellowship with the unfamiliar.

the great divide

We must bridge the familiar and the unfamiliar. When confronted with cultures, values and beliefs that are different from our own, the response should not be fear but an openness to learn. The familiar is only familiar because of repeat exposure. It is not better or worse than the unfamiliar; it is just known. To be known is one of the deepest desires of the soul. When that desire is blighted because of stereotypes or prejudice, it results in discrimination.

Discrimination puts our feelings into action and moves us either closer to the familiar and further away from the unfamiliar. Ageism, sexism and racism are just a few of the resulting outcomes. Each separates us, divides us and pulls us further apart from each other.

Consciously or unconsciously, these feelings affect the way you see and interact with others daily.

finding breakthrough

Jesus' prayer for believers in John 17:20-23 is that we be one, just as He and the Father are one, so that we can be brought to complete unity. This unity is accomplished when we are no longer separated by our biases, prejudgments and stereotypes. It is accomplished through God's Spirit at work in our hearts.

Consider which table you would have chosen when you walked into the room. There is no condemnation if you would have sat with the group of ladies who most closely resemble you.

However, these five points of breakthrough will help you practice letting go of judgment and stereotypes, both intentional and unintentional, to become one who welcomes others to your table.

1. Repent of your prejudices towards others.

Acknowledge your personal prejudices about different groups of people. Allow God to reveal to you times you have participated in stereotyping or discrimination. Repent of your part in adding to the fear of different cultures, ethnic groups and social situations. Ask God to give you His eyes to see people the way He does, and ask Him to open your heart to love like He does.

2. Challenge your biases.

Get honest with yourself about what biases you have learned. One way to identify your biases is to revisit the two table example. What if one table had all women and another all men? What if different races were at each table? What if different religious groups? List what your assumptions would be if you choose to sit at each of these tables. Would conversation be easy or hard? Why or why not? Challenge what you think the outcomes would be and see what is rooted in truth and what is not.

3. Diversify your social network.

Make friends across racial and cultural lines. A bad experience with one member of an ethnic group does not mean you will have bad experiences with everyone of that ethnicity. Allow people to individually reveal themselves to you. Refuse to let one person or a small percentage define the entire group.

4. Remove barriers through knowledge.

We fear what we don't understand. Make a conscious effort to learn about cultures different from your own. Research the unfamiliar until it becomes less unknown. Read historical books, look at art and watch educational videos. Decrease the influx of negative input and increase the amount of positive information you consume.

5. Broaden your worldview.

Expand your real-life exposure. Get outside of the familiar. Look for opportunities to visit other countries and experience different cultures. Acknowledge the differences but also look for what we have in common. When you look closely, underneath the variations in clothing, food preferences, skin color, eye color and language, you'll find we have more similarities than differences.

BY SAUNDRA DALTON SMITH
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MAMA bear on the LOOSE

BY MICHELLE S. COX
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I'D EXPECTED SOME ADJUSTMENTS AS OUR SONS STARTED NEW SCHOOLS.

I'd prayed extensively for God to prepare them for the change, to give them teachers who wouldn't steer them from their faith, and to make it a good experience.

But I never expected what would happen to my oldest son on that first day. He was quiet when he got in the car that afternoon. When I asked how his day went, he just shrugged. He remained subdued for the rest of the day. I knew something was wrong, and I finally got him to talk to me.

He had to change buildings for classes during the day, and as he walked from the first building, several bullies got in his way and wouldn't let him pass them. They stood there making condescending comments.

I asked my son what he did and he said he just sat down and looked at them. After they didn't get a reaction from him, they went on their way.

I was livid. Mess with me and it's one thing, but mess with my children or my husband and you've got Mama Bear on the loose. I wanted to call the principal, but my son begged me not to and said it would just cause more trouble for him.

So we did the only thing I knew to do: We prayed together and let God take charge. He says it best in Deuteronomy 3:22, "Do not be afraid of them; the LORD your God himself will fight for you" (NIV).

That's exactly what God did, and for the three years my son was there, he never had a problem like that again.

Is your child encountering problems at school? You can never go wrong putting God in charge. S

HOW WOULD YOUR LIFE CHANGE IF YOU WERE ABLE TO PUT POWER INTO YOUR PRAYER LIFE? What if you could pray for provision and see God provide or pray for healing and see God heal? What if you could pray for circumstances and see your circumstances change?

These things are possible when you understand a couple of prayer keys:

Key 1: The Victory of Jesus
When you understand that even though God's Son, Jesus, was executed, He rose from the dead, defeating both sin and death. Jesus is not only victorious; He is our victor. When we pray to, with and through Him, He grants us victory. So look at your circumstances through Jesus to see His victory. For example, despite the terrible devastation that Hurricane Harvey spread though southeast, Texas, many of the believers interviewed by the media said, "I may have lost my home, but I have my life; I have my family! I am so blessed!"

These folks were not looking at their situation from the perspective of what they'd lost, but the value of what they'd kept. They know that even despite their continued hardships, they are trusting Jesus to provide.

Key 2: The Might of Jesus
We sometimes forget how mighty Jesus is. The other day, I lifted all my many responsibilities before the Lord. In my mind's eye, it was if I were straining to hold up a million-pound free-way. "Do You really think I can carry this?" I asked.

Suddenly, it was as if I could hear Jesus laugh-ing. I turned and saw He was holding my load with one finger.

Surprised, I asked, "You mean I'm not the one holding this up?"

Jesus continued to laugh and shook His head. I stooped and walked out from under the load. I felt so free! "Thank You, Jesus, for carrying this load for me!"
Jesus is already carrying the load you are straining beneath. Relax. He's got it.

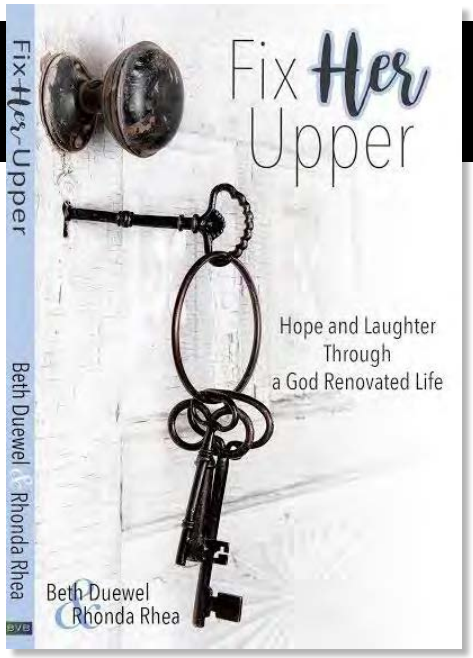
Time to Pray
Try praying with these two power keys in mind:

Dear Lord, not only are You the victor, You are the victory. So, when I pray to and through You, I am praying in and from Your victory because I am praying, not in my might, but in Your might. So now, I come to You regarding: (fill in the blank).

I pray for victory in Your might and in the mighty name of JESUS, because Your name is just that powerful. SQ

— LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD—GOTTOPRAY.COM

BOOKS TO READ

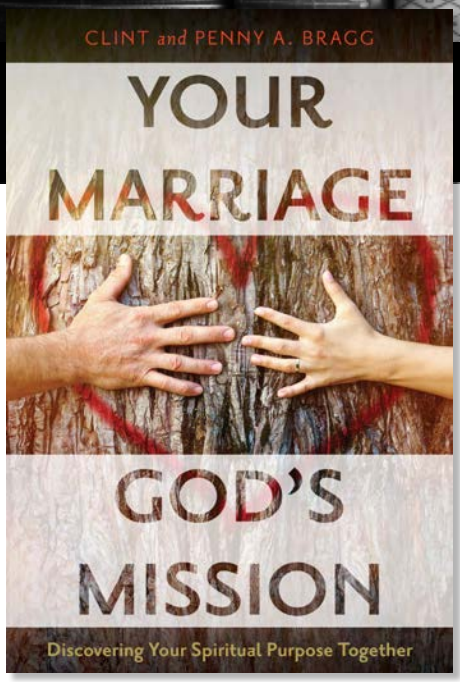


FIX-HER-UPPER
by Beth Duewel & Rhonda Rhea

Right now, I'm in the middle of my own home renovation project, and I can tell you, it feels like it would be so much easier to do a complete tear down than to try to salvage anything from this falling down, what I'll generously call, home. And I've been there in my own life — wondering if there is anything even worth hanging on to. What you need in the middle of any restoration is an eye for what to keep and what to get rid of.

In their book, ***Fix-Her-Upper—Hope and Laughter Through a God-Renovated Life***, Beth Duewel and Rhonda Rhea guide you through your own DIY project with the tools you need: hope with a giant bucket of grace. It's messy, but the results are worth it. --Kathi Lipp, Best-selling author of The Husband Project and Clutter Free

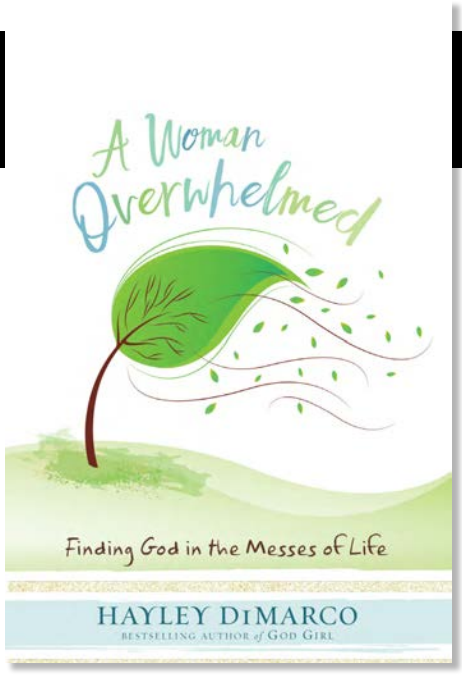
Read a book excerpt on page 14.



YOUR MARRIAGE GOD'S MISSION
by Clint and Penny A. Bragg

Clint and Penny Bragg have an amazing story of how God's faithfulness to them has inspired an ongoing mission to minister to marriages, giving their own lives and marriage an incredible depth of direction and purpose.

Their new book, ***Your Marriage, God's Mission***, is a call to all of us to find not only God's design for marriage in general, but also the unique plan for our marriage. This book is wonderfully hands-on and inspiring, giving great insights and ideas of how to discover, engage, prepare and succeed in fulfilling the rich divine mission and adventure God has in store for every couple willing to walk with Him. — Robert S. Paul, vice president of Focus on the Family's National Institute of Marriage



A WOMAN OVERWHELMED
by Hayley DiMarco

Many of us freak out and then address the problem, but with God's help and His strength we can avoid freak-out mode. In her new book***, A Woman Overwhelmed: Finding God in the Messes of Life***, Haley DiMarco has given us a gold nugget of truth: examine yourself so you can see the areas that need God the most. Then maybe — just maybe — you will start to see why you need to lose control sometimes.

If we let God save us when we know for a fact we can't save ourselves, we might actually get some things done. — Jalynn Patterson

Check out Haley's article on page 8.

HEATHER VAN ALLEN
@HEATHERVANALLEN

LEADING HEARTS
MUSIC REVIEWER

MUSIC REVIEWS

LESLIE MCKEE
Another Mile

Music lovers who are drawn to positive pop melodies with occasional hints of contemporary country sounds might want to give Leslie McKee's most recent release and first full-length album, ***Another Mile***, a try.

Leslie's smooth, full voice, wrapped in a mix of upbeat, fast-paced instrumentals and mellow, soothing ballads, delivers real-life, relevant lyrics to encourage her listeners. "In those hard times, it may take all we have to get up in the morning and will ourselves to breathe," she says.

"We need something or someone to hold on to, and that something is hope and it is found in the person of Jesus Christ. There have been many times when I've felt like giving up, but I've come out on the other side alive and full of hope. I want to be able to encourage others to hold on!"

Need a dose of optimism? Crank up Leslie McKee's ***Another Mile***.

ALISA TURNER
Self-Titled

The music of Alisa Turner, found on her recently released self-titled EP, is fueled by her desire to worship God and find hope even in the midst of deep pain and grief.

"I've always written songs about what I'm going through," Alisa says, having lived through the death of her father when she was 20, suffering with Lyme Disease and losing her first child shortly after his birth.

Each hope-filled track on the EP is a strong testimony to Alisa's faith in God and her determination to lift songs of worship to Him no matter what. The opening track, "Lift My Eyes," carries, through Alisa's deep, soulful vocals, a reminder of who we should look to in all circumstances. Capping off this collection is "My Prayer for You," which plays as an encouragement to listeners.

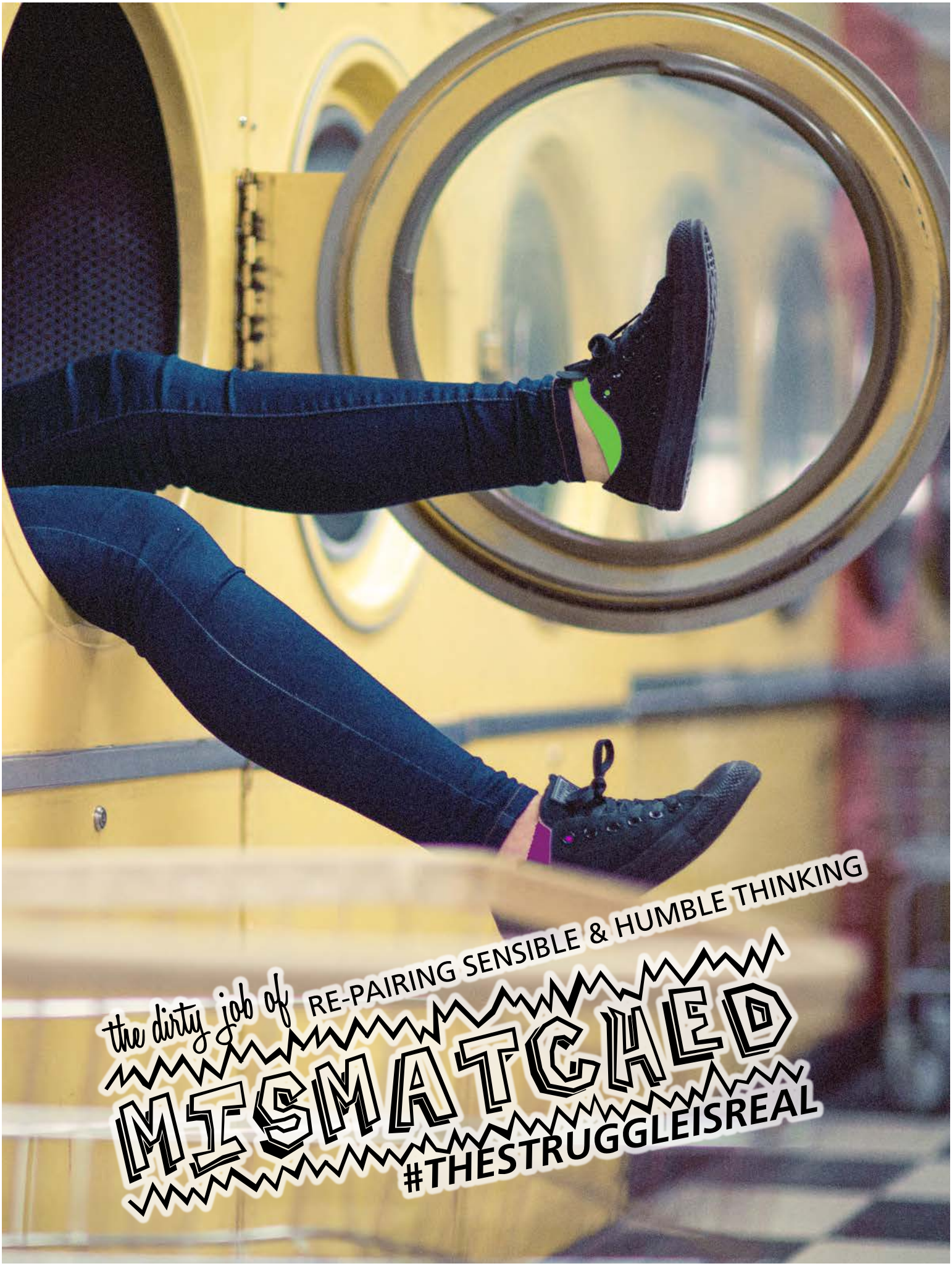
For those moments when all you know to do is worship, consider having Alisa Turner's self-titled EP help lead you.

CODY CARNES
The Darker the Night / The Brighter the Morning

Worship leader and songwriter Cody Carnes has released his debut solo album ***The Darker the Night / The Brighter the Morning***, and while you may read "worship leader" and expect the album to be just another compilation of congregational church music, it goes beyond that.

Cody wanted to create a collection of music that would connect people to God. "This album's message is about declaring the hope of Jesus into a hopeless situation," he says.

Some of the tracks are in the worship vein, such as "The Cross Has the Final Word," "Banner" and "Nothing More to Say." Several, however, including "Resurrection Blood," "What Freedom Feels Like," "Til the End of Time" (which features Cody's wife Kari Jobe), and others, engage the listener with a mix of edgy rock, upbeat pop and positive lyrics declaring and celebrating the goodness of God.


the dirty job of
RE-PAIRING SENSIBLE & HUMBLE THINKING
MISMATCHED
#THESTRUGGLEISREAL

BY RHONDA RHEA
@RHONDARHEA

www.RhondaRhea.com

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IF HAPPINESS IS HAVING ALL THE LAUNDRY DONE, I'M PRETTY SURE NO ONE HAS EVER BEEN HAPPY.

Laundry success is too often defined as digging through a basket of clean clothes for two socks that match (as opposed to digging through the heap of the dirty laundry you're composting on the floor). Of course, you still may end up wearing socks that don't match. But hey, maybe it's just an elaborate plan to keep us laundry-humble.

Yesterday it took me all day to put away my smallest load of laundry. Why? Scoop-neck top. Small hanger. I was about one re-hang away from completely losing my mind.

I do like it that in the bigger-than-laundry scheme of things, God has a plan to help me not lose my mind. To actually save it. In Romans 12:2 just after Paul has urged us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God (verse 1), he says,

"Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God" (HCSB).

Our minds are not meant to be lost. They're meant to be renewed. In the very next verse, Paul says,

"I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly," (verse 3, HCSB).

"Think sensibly" is translated from the Greek word sōphroneō (from sōzō, which means "to save" and phrēn, which means "mind"). So what we have here is, literally, a "saved mind."

Our minds are to be so renewed they're not puffed up with pride. Every time we get hung up on thinking of ourselves too much, too big and too often, we can be brought back around to the sensible place of not conforming to our culture, but being transformed through a renewed mind.

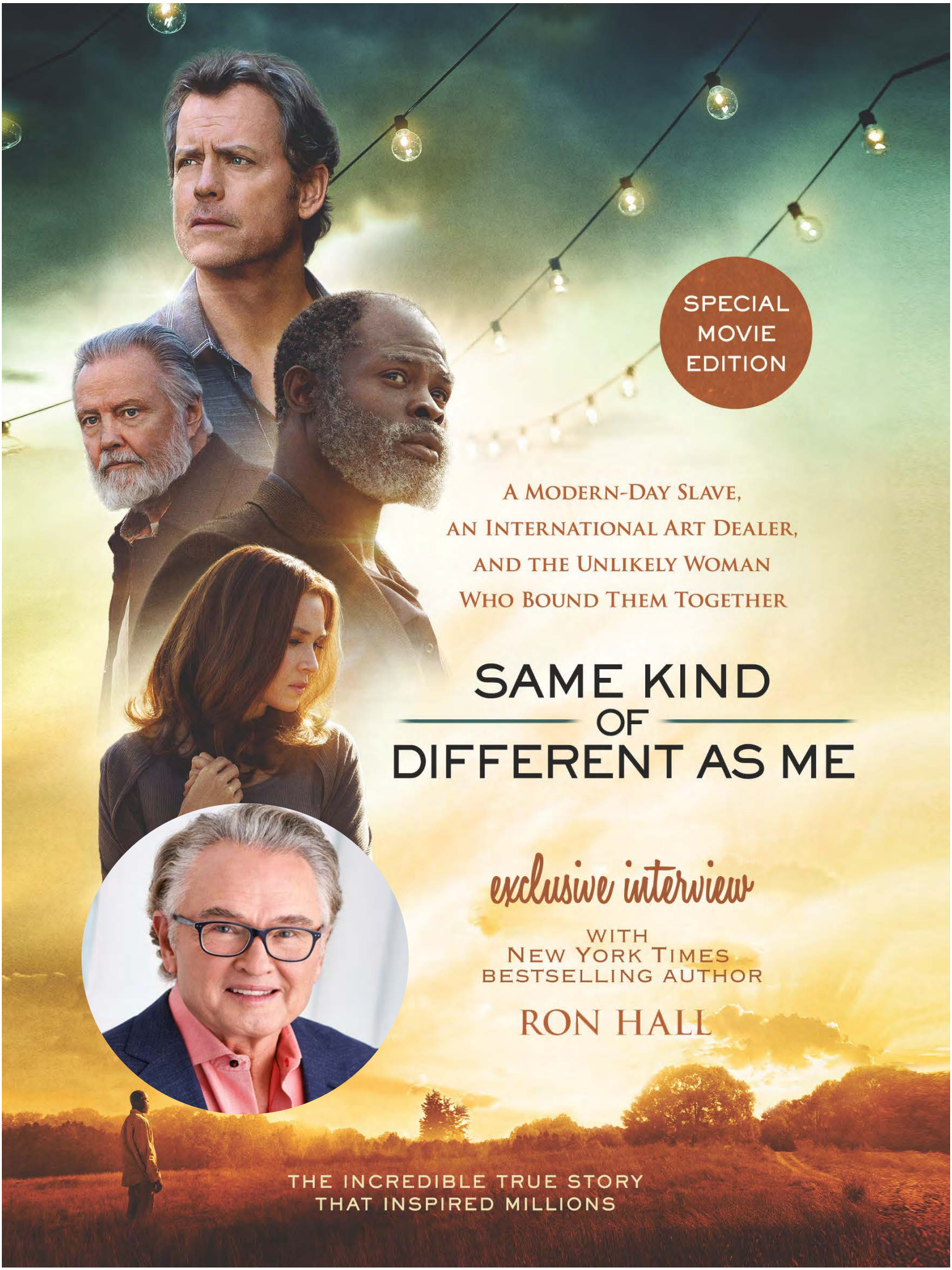
We don't define success by what we're digging through or how we're hanging, but by how we're stooping or bending or kneeling or serving — by how we're humbly loving.

It starts with surrendering our lives to Him on the altar. This leads us to a renewed mind in which pride isn't allowed to reign. This then takes us to knowing and doing the will of God — serving Him.

That elaborate plan to keep us humble? It can almost be summed up in "don't lose your mind." Keep that mind surrendered to and focused on Christ, instead of letting it sort of compost on "self."

Our happiness doesn't hang on laundry. We're the most fulfilled and content when we're thinking and operating outside ourselves and engaged in the kingdom of Christ — doing His will, thinking His way, loving Him, His people and His truth.

We're told to have "minds ready for action" in 1 Peter 1:13 (HCSB). It's matching up good, right and true thinking with humility and letting that launch us into service. It's hanging onto His love and truth, hanging on His every word. Re-hanging whenever necessary. Because that's really not a bad thing to do. S


SPECIAL MOVIE EDITION
A Modern-Day Slave, an International Art Dealer, and the Unlikely Woman Who Bound Them Together
SAME KIND OF DIFFERENT AS ME
exclusive interview
WITH NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
RON HALL
THE INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY THAT INSPIRED MILLIONS

AS WE EXITED THE MAIN ROAD ON OUR WAY TO LAX, IT WAS HARD TO IGNORE. THERE, WITHIN OUR EYESIGHT, SPROUTING UP ALONG THE EXIT WERE ASSORTED TENTS, PATIO UMBRELLAS, PIECES OF SIDING AND CARDBOARD BOXES IN WHAT APPEARED TO BE BLOCKS OF MAKESHIFT SHELTERS.

My teenage son quickly noticed and said sadly, “I think people are living down there. I think those are their homes.”

It was true. On an old section of closed outer road, with only frayed canvas pieces to separate themselves from the quickly rising summer heat index, was a neighborhood of sorts.

We pulled directly into a gas station, and my husband jumped out to fill up our vacation rental car. Within a few short seconds, I heard a somewhat muffled female voice. As I glanced over my shoulder, I saw her. She was older, with ebony skin. One side of her face was swollen, affecting her speech and making it difficult to hear clearly the exchange she was having with my husband. Within minutes our gas tank was filled, my husband was back in the car and we were pulling away.

“Who was she, Dad?” the teen in the back asked.

“I’m not sure, but she asked if she could have her two gas cans filled. She needs the gas to run a generator. She lives in one of the tents just down the road.”

Drive thru Anytown, USA, and you will no doubt see the homeless struggle. And yet, for most of us the topic of homelessness is not something that affects us directly. We maintain our everyday lives with little to no worry of where we will lay our heads at night, what we will eat tomorrow, or if we will have the ability to stay comfortably dry and warm.

-continued on p. 48-

-continued from p. 47-

For Ron Hall, sharing awareness about the homeless condition is a huge part of his purpose. It all began with a second-hand dream, a dream that he came to embrace as his own. In 1998 Ron's wife Deborah told him she had dreamed of a homeless man. She likened the man to King Solomon's description: "Now there lived in that city a poor man but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom" (Ecclesiastes 9:15, NIV).

Deborah believed the dream to be from God, and in this dream she had seen a man's face clearly. She was convinced that they were to go into the city and find him. Not only were they to search this man out, but Ron was to be his friend. The impression that this man could change lives, and even bring a revival of sorts, was profound in motivating her. And at this point, she was tasked with also convincing Ron to partner with her.

Ultimately, Ron knew his wife wasn't crazy. In fact, in the 30 years of their marriage this was not the first dream Deborah had spoken of, and the reality of those previous dreams had proved true. Ron soon found out that this dream and the man in it were exactly the life changers his wife had envisioned. Through an amazing series of God events, the man was found. His name was Denver Moore.

Denver's life began in the Red River Parish of rural Louisiana in a three-room shack with cracks in the floor. The year was 1937, and the family lived as sharecroppers picking cotton. Actually, the life of a sharecropper was far from the freedom that people believe the Civil War had brought. Living in this post-Civil War "freedom" meant that for a small store credit you worked land that your ancestors had been enslaved upon. Usually that store was owned by the very family you worked for. Education was nearly nonexistent, and the hope of breaking out of the cycle of sharecropping was slim. But Denver did find his way out, into the inner-city streets of Fort Worth, Texas.

The two men were unlikely candidates for friendship, yet their lives became bound together in a way no one could have foreseen. With time the men found friendship and a combined purpose: to make a difference by shining a light on the face of homelessness.

Fast forward to 2008, when Ron and Denver published their story, ***A Same Kind of Different as Me.*** The book was a hit, remaining on The New York Times Best Seller list for 3 ½ years. It has continued to pop back on the list

for a few weeks every year since then, now having sold over 2 million copies.

Ron attributes the book's success to the fact that it is a great God story. Thru the book, over $100 million has been raised to aid in building and remodeling missions for the homeless populations across the country.

And now, even more of an impact will be made when "A Same Kind of Different as Me" opens in movie theatres! Paramount Pictures and Pure Flix will release the film October 20, 2017. The cast includes Academy Award winners and nominees Greg Kinnear, Renée Zellweger, Djimon HounSou and Jon Voigt. Coinciding with the film's release, Thomas Nelson will publish a movie edition of the book on September 20, 2017. This special movie edition will include a new epilogue, the amazing story of how the movie is being brought to the big screen, and a 16-page color photo insert.

Ron believes the movie and the movie edition book are "a call to action" and a chance to change the way we look at the homeless people in our own cities. Ron compares most of our responses to characters in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. "Often we are worried about what might happen to US if we respond rather than thinking of the person in need and what will happen to THEM if we don't respond."

When asked about the special needs of the homeless, and how can we rise to make a difference in those with mental illness, addictions and disability, Ron said, "The church is equipped with many resources and called to compassion. There are doctors and social workers within our congregation. We can be a part of helping people get another chance." Ron recalls Denver saying that "you can't judge a man until you take the time to get to know him. You don't know these people on the streets or what happened to them to make them jump track."

For many years Ron has been the main force in carrying the message of ***A Same Kind of Different as Me***. His wife Deborah was diagnosed with cancer that eventually took her life. Over the course of 3 1/2 years, Denver and Ron authored their story, using it to fund housing for many in need. After 11 years, Ron remarried. He and his wife Beth Walker Hall continue to live out the legacy of God's work, when he took an an international art dealer, a modern day slave and God used an unlikely woman to bond them together.

BY LISA BURNS
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PROFILE CONTRIBUTOR

practice makes perfect

BY SHARON NORRIS ELLIOTT
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I TOOK CLASSICAL PIANO LESSONS FOR 11 YEARS. By the time I stopped taking lessons, I was playing the compositions of the masters: Beethoven, Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Schubert – all those guys. Trust me; I didn't start out that way.

Mrs. Dolly Perry, my teacher, grew my playing through the John Thompson series. The first book was entitled ***Teaching Little Fingers To Play***. Each lesson taught me one new thing. I would practice each new simplistic lesson all week long and then return to Mrs. Perry's studio the next Thursday after school to play it for her. She'd congratulate me, write a star and the date on the page, and then move me along to the next lesson.

I enjoyed the affirmation and the progress I was making. As I practiced and mastered each lesson, I could see myself becoming more and more skilled on the keyboard. It was rewarding to be able to play well.

The principle of practicing for accomplishment holds true for faith. When David faced Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath who had defied the living God, he didn't do so without any fighting experience at all. David had previous practice with destroyers.

We read in 1 Samuel 17: "Then David said to Saul, 'Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.' … Moreover David said, 'The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine'" (verses 32, 37, NKJV).

Because David had killed a lion and a bear before, he was confident about his ability to kill Goliath. In David's eyes, Goliath was nothing but an uncircumcised Philistine who needed to be taught a lesson about who God really was. The end of the story? David won.

Hebrews 5:14 says, "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (NKJV).

And Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (NIV).

We can't sit around waiting for big problems to come along before we exercise our faith. Believe God for the little things. Start with Teaching Little Pray-ers To Pray, or Teaching Little Believers To Believe, or Teaching Little Trusters To Trust.

As we practice having faith in God, we will be more and more skilled. The more difficult challenges won't even seem like giants because we will have mastered the lessons that came before. And it will be rewarding when we realize we are able to stand our ground or fight our fight so well. S?

For more devotionals from Sharon go to from www.lifethatmatters.net.

features

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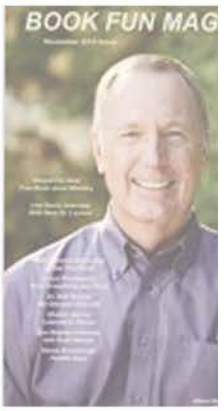
ORS?

columns

BOOK FUN MAGAZINE

Where Book Fun Begins

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