

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

EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN TO ARISE

2023 Fall Conference Edition | Vol. 9, Issue 4

LEADINGHEARTS

LEADINGHEARTS.COM



The Heart of Story
with Lynette Eason

Outshine
Your Circumstance

Braveheart Mentor Dawn Damon

You're Not a
Nobody

Lee Ann Mancini

Instilling a Lifelong
Love of God



LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD
FOUNDER & CEO OF AWSA

Are you a Christian Woman Called to Write & Speak?



Join Us!



FIND OUT IF YOU ARE
ELIGIBLE FOR
MEMBERSHIP @
APPLYAWSA.COM



"One of the best investments I made in my speaking and writing ministry was membership in AWSA.

I connected with fellow Christian women authors and speakers. These sisters have contributed to my books and recommended me for speaking engagements. Most of all, I made lifetime friends who continue to inspire me."

Carol Kent

Founder and Executive Director of
SpeakUpConference.com
Speaker and Author of *Speak Up with Confidence*
1990—AWSA Founding Member



AS FEATURED ON
crosswalk.com



2014-2022
MERIT AWARD
2023
AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Member's-Only

AWSA membership benefits include publishing and promotion opportunities in our multi-award-winning *Leading Hearts* magazine and *ARISE Daily Devotionals* as featured on Crosswalk, plus eligibility to enter our Annual Golden Scroll Awards.

ARISEDAILY.COM | LEADINGHEARTS.COM



contents

FROM THE PUBLISHER **linda evans shepherd**



i'm giving away millions!

- 3 **LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD**
From the Publisher: I'm Giving Away Millions!
- 5 **AMBER WEIGAND-BUCKLEY**
From the Editor: There's Just Something in the Air
- 6 **LORI WILDENBURG**
Unconditional
- 9 **LEE ANN MANICINI**
Instilling a Lifelong Love of God
- 10 **DR. SHARON NORRIS ELLIOTT**
Loving God When He Says "No"
- 12 **PAM FARREL & KAREN WHITING**
L.O.V.E. Them
- 14 **DAWN DAMON**
You're Not a Nobody
- 17 **CYNTHIA L. SIMMONS**
How can I love that impossible person?
- 18 **DORIS SWIFT**
Outshine Your Circumstance
- 20 **LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD**
When Prayer Takes Flight
- 23 **LYNETTE EASON**
For the Love of Writing
- 28 **RHONDA RHEA**
Build Each Other Up: One Taco at a Time

I always keep a few million-dollar bills in my wallet as a surprise for waiters and airport shuttle drivers. I like to ask them, "Have you ever gotten a million-dollar tip?"

"Nope," they say.

"Now you have!" I say handing them a crisp bill.

Their jaws drop; their eyes go wide.

"Just don't try to take it to the bank," I say laughing.

They laugh, turn the bill over to see text on the back.

"Just a reminder that God loves you."

You guessed it, my million-dollar bills are from Ray Comfort's Living Water Ministries and are gospel tracts, designed to point people to Jesus.

I've had so much fun giving my millions away, and only once did I have to make sure my waiter knew the bill was only in fun and had no IRS claims on it.

I recently gave one to my airport shuttle driver. He told me, "I'm going to read this message very carefully."

I'm guessing he prayed and received Jesus because now he's filled with joy and plays Christian radio whenever I ride his shuttle.

"Keep on worshiping," I told him the last time I saw him.

God's love broke through, and that's worth more than a million dollars.

Enjoy our Summer CPE issue! We made sure to fill it with the love of God! And that's priceless.

With Love, 

Editorial Staff

PUBLISHER/ADVERTISING.....Linda Evans Shepherd
EDITOR/ART DIRECTOR.....Amber Weigand-Buckley
COPY/LAYOUT EDITOR.....Joy Dunlap, Rebecca White & Tom Young
PROMOTIONS.....Rebecca White
AWSA ADMINISTRATIVE ASST.....Carla Wicks

Right to the Heart Media Network

ARISE ESTHER PODCAST.....Dawn Damon, Host
ARISE DAILY.....Julie Coleman, Editor

Right to the Heart Board

Linda Evans Shepherd (President), Dianne Butts, Edie Melson, Karen Porter, Linda Goldfarb, Sharon Norris Elliott, Karen Whiting, and Joy A. Schneider

Information

Leading Hearts magazine for Christian Women is published bimonthly by Right to the Heart Ministries 2023.
ISSN 2380-5455

ADVERTISING | Display rates are available at leadinghearts.com. By accepting an advertisement, *Leading Hearts* does not endorse any advertiser or product. We reserve the right to reject advertisements not consistent with the magazines objectives.

MANUSCRIPTS | Writers guidelines are available at leadinghearts.com.

Leading Hearts | PO Box 6421, Longmont, CO 80501
email: lindareply@gmail.com fax inquiries: (303) 678-0260
MEMBER | 2014-2022 Evangelical Press Association Award of Merit Winner — Christian Ministry Digital Publication, Evangelical Press Association Best in Class 2022

Cover Photo Courtesy of: Crystal Corrine of Crystal Corrine Photography

Photos courtesy of: Canva, Crystal Corrine Photography

Copyright ©2023 Right to the Heart Ministries. All rights reserved. Copyrighted material reprinted with permission.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Now available
in print!

Print issue orders
available for both
US and overseas
delivery!



SEND THIS NEW ISSUE
to a friend!

ORDER NOW AT LEADINGHEARTS.COM

powered by



peecho



Unconditional



"Mom, you wouldn't love me anymore if I went to jail, would you?"

The question came from my six-year-old son. A smart mom would have followed up with, "Hmmm, why do you ask?"

Being more sensitive than smart, I realized my son concluded my love was conditional. He thought my love was based on his behavior. If he was good, he'd receive my love. If he was bad, my love would be withheld.

I assumed my kids knew I loved them, no matter what. That inquiry caused a huge shift in my parenting. In fact, it was a wake-up call in all my relationships.

After hearing my boy's question, I began to articulate my unconditional love more regularly to my kids, family members, and friends.

Little did I know, this was a season of preparation for some challenging times to come.

Years after that conversation with my son, my eldest daughter chose to be estranged from the family. She was in an abusive relationship. Her partner tried to prevent her from connecting with family members.

But I knew where she worked. She was a cashier at a retail store. Behind that register, she was a captive audience. So, I chose to visit her there.

"Your dad and I love you. We miss you. You can come home anytime."

Thankfully this time in our lives only lasted a few months. Later my daughter told me, "I always knew you and dad loved me and that I could always come home. That helped me."

Our kids need to know without a shadow of a doubt that we love them unconditionally.

Just as we all need to know God loves us unconditionally. The Lord does not want us to wonder about His love, even when we make bad decisions or poor choices. He wants us to understand He loves us, no matter what.

Scripture describes God's unconditional and unwavering love for us. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

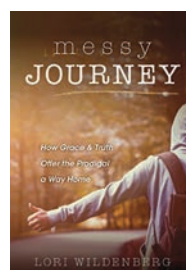
Just in case we missed that verse, a few chapters later, in Romans 8:38-39, Paul confirms God's love when he writes, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God loves us, even when we walk away from Him.

- He loves us, even in our sin.
- He loves us fully and eternally.
- His love endures forever!

Reading about God's complete and unconditional love, I am encouraged. His love moves me to speak about my love for my family members and friends more often. I want them to know that I love them, no matter what.

My loved ones need to know they are loved by me and more importantly loved by God, even if they go to jail. ☹



Helping families build connections that last a lifetime is Lori Wildenberg's passion. She is a licensed parent and family educator, national speaker, and award-winning author of six books, including Messy Journey: How Grace and Truth Offer the Prodigal a Way Home. Lori would love to partner with you at your next event or retreat. To find out more go to loriwildenberg.com



Lee Ann Mancini
Raising Christian Kids
INSTILLING A LIFELONG LOVE
of God



This is a journey
I never thought I
would take, and I am
reminded that God
tells us not to despise small

beginnings (Zechariah 4:10) because we will
see great accomplishments for the Kingdom!

It was only a decade ago that I sat at my desk, looking at the words I had written on a yellow legal pad. They were the stories I'd shared with my children when they were four and six. In those days, we'd load up our travel van with snacks, toys, and storybooks, and as my husband drove, the kids would beg, "Please, Momma, read *Fast Freddy* again!"

My mission was simple. I wanted to use the power of storytelling to help my children understand how God values us and how we should value others. That's why I created fun teaching moments in an underwater world filled with sea families. My Sea Kids "swim" through the same life issues all children experience.

The books won numerous awards and were produced into an animated series now seen on Answers.tv, Pure Flix, RightNow Media, and GoMinno.com. All from the small beginning of a handwritten story from a mother's heart to her

children.

When I landed in the world of children's books and animation, I had no idea God would open my eyes to the needs of both children and parents. In creating the Raising Christian Kids Podcast, I could give parents free access to experts, authors, counselors, pastors, and great Christian leaders who were willing to share their wisdom about raising the next generation for Christ. It's beyond exciting that my podcast is ranked in the top 2% of all podcasts. I give thanks and all the credit to the Lord!

One of the main reasons I am inspired to serve families is because our children need to be nurtured into an unshakeable faith in God.

They are the next generation of government, media, and academia leaders, the three most influential institutions that can change our country's trajectory and the world.

According to the experts, from the preborn in the womb to the busy three-year-old, we need to prepare the soil well so we can then plant seeds into rich soil to grow deep roots. The foundation of faith is established early and hopefully strong before the age of seven. It just makes it easier to raise our children to stand strong against the current anti-Christian culture.

Jeremiah, David, and Timothy all were taught from infancy.

The Psalmist calls on the people to pass the Lord's teachings from generation to generation, "even the children yet to be born" (Psalm 78:6).

If, as research shows, a faith foundation is laid by age seven, we must be purposeful in teaching the youngest of children. George Barna says: "Every respectable military strategist, educator, business manager, leader, and effective parent will agree that achieving positive outcomes rarely happens by chance. It is almost always the result of good planning and diligent implementation."

Importantly, we must always remember that it is never too early, and it is never too late to instill biblical principles and directives.

I'm excited to announce that my new book, *Raising Kids to Follow Christ, Instilling a Lifelong Trust in God* (Whitaker House), is filled with expert advice for parents of children of all ages, releasing in spring 2024. I have also created a 6-week parenting curriculum and leader guide for small groups and individuals currently used in church ministries.

Many parents are reaching out for help and guidance to effectively raise their children to be strong in faith and to stop the trend of 65 to

75% of children walking away from their faith in high school and college.

Pew Research Center says 66% of families who believe in God with absolute certainty have a household annual income of less than \$30,000. So, I realized God had a new mission for me to accomplish. That's why I founded Raising Christian Kids, Inc., a nonprofit which provides free and affordable resources for parents who desire to become effective spiritual leaders for their children.

We're thrilled to work with churches and parachurch organizations to provide free and affordable resources for all parents who desire to become effective spiritual leaders for their children.

Let's all work together as the body of Christ and tell the devil, "Hands off our children!" It is about the salvation of our children and the preservation of Christianity! ♥

Lee Ann Mancini is the founder and CEO of the 501(c)(3) nonprofit Raising Christian Kids, Inc. Lee Ann is an adjunct professor and board member at South Florida Bible College. She has three master's degrees in biblical theological and Christian classical studies. She speaks on numerous topics about Christian parenting and was the 2022 recipient of the Jennifer Kennedy Dean Award, which recognizes "those who carry the light with excellence to a hurting world." Find out more at RaisingChristianKids.com

Raising Christian Kids

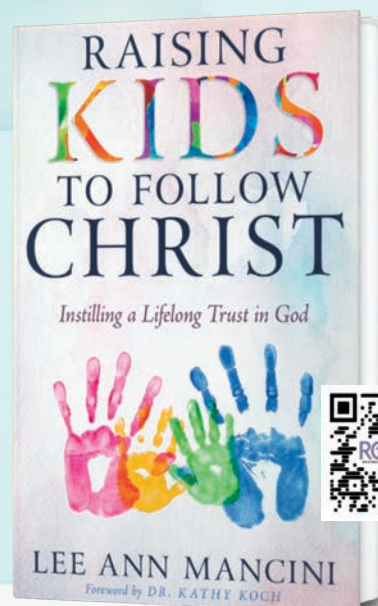
Equipping families with free and affordable parenting resources.

SCRIPTURE BEAR teaches little ones the Word of God.



A rich parenting resource to inspire readers to unleash their God-given potential. This comprehensive guide is full of expert teaching sourced by the brightest minds in children's spirituality. Filled with strategies and techniques based upon God's Word, this book covers a multitude of topics such as disciplining, apologetics, modeling biblical truth, and fun ways to connect your children's hearts to Christ.

AVAILABLE IN 2024
FROM WHITAKER HOUSE



RCK is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

RaisingChristianKids.com is filled with ONLINE RESOURCES, DIGITAL CURRICULUM and MEDIA to support, equip and resource both parents and ministry leaders as they help to instill Christlike characteristics and virtues to their kids.

RAISINGCHRISTIANKIDS.COM



Write that book OF YOUR DREAMS

**Without Making Costly
Mistakes, Even If You
Don't Know Where to Start...**

FROM

Linda Evans Shepherd

**AND THE ADVANCED WRITERS & SPEAKERS
ASSOCIATION**



FREEBOOKCLASS.COM

Loving God When He Says “No”



Let's just be honest: it's easy to love God when everything is going our way—the husband/gentleman friend is treating us well; the kids are doing well in school or prospering in their occupations; our position at our job is respected; our loved ones and our bodies are healthy; and people generally love us.

We glibly quote 2 Corinthians 9:8, “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work (NKJV italics added).”

But let a few of those “all things” begin to go south and our bright, trusting attitude toward God can continue to slip as well. I recently received one of the biggest “no’s” that exists when my dear husband, James Elliott, died.

We'd only been married 21 years and frankly, we still had plans to travel and experience much more of life together. We had finally worked through most of our idiosyncrasies by either learning to live with them or adjusting to make the other person comfortable. People from every area of our lives had earnestly prayed for James's healing and we believed God could and would do just that.

But God said, “No.”

How can we be expected to continue to love God when He allows pain or loss to be a part of our experience?

Recognize God is sovereign.

The first thing to realize is God is sovereign. He is running everything. In other words, God is totally free and right to do whatever He chooses to do. Not only that, but God can be completely trusted to make the decision that is best. We may not understand it at the time, and like Job, we may never find out why God chose to do what He did. But God is completely

trustworthy, so we can rest in His choices.

Recognize that “no” is an answer to prayer.

The second thing to realize is when we pray, we're not bossing God around. Prayer is a conversation with God. Many of us spend a lot of that conversational time asking God for things and for what we want Him to do. There's nothing wrong with placing our requests before God; however, we must remember that four answers are possible—yes, no, maybe, and wait. Any one of these answers is a fair and just one.

Recognize God's attribute of love does not change with our circumstances.

The third thing to realize is God does not become evil if He doesn't answer our prayers in the positive. God is still Love. First John 4:7–8 clearly states, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (NKJV, emphasis added).

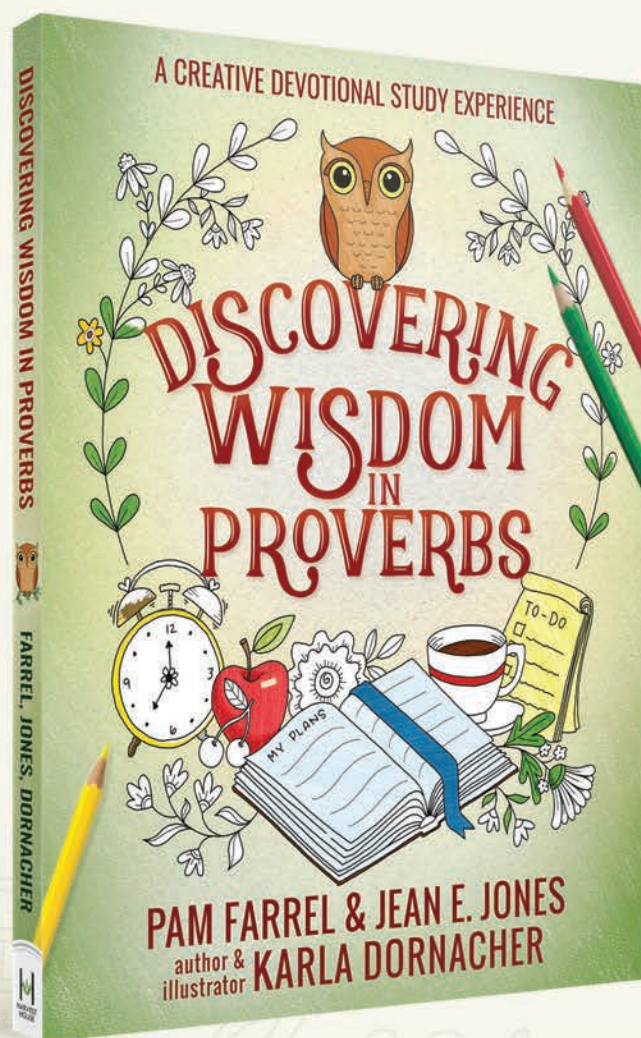
Even though I didn't want James to die and leave me alone, his death didn't change the fact that God was still the God who is pure love. God still madly loves me, and lets me know that He loves James too because “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15, NKJV).

My James is in heaven and I'm still here, but I continue to have a passionate love relationship with God because I know He's in control, His answers are always the right ones, and His love for me does not ever change.

We can completely trust Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose,” so we can even love God when He says “No.”

Dr. Sharon Elliott is author of Didn't See That Coming: When How They're Living's Not How You Raised Them. Her passion lies in encouraging the people of God to live significant, authentic lives that clearly mirror the love and life of God to the world thanks to the life of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

WALK WITH *the Wise*



Embark on an **INTERACTIVE JOURNEY** that will lead you to delight in God's counsel like never before!

Authors and illustrator Pam Farrel, Jean E. Jones, and Karla Dornacher have dedicated years to helping women understand and apply biblical truth. In their new study, *Discovering Wisdom in Proverbs*, they invite you to heed the call of wisdom and pursue the path to God-honoring character. Each daily lesson is accompanied by creative prompts for poetry, art, reflection, and more, encouraging you to connect with God in a unique and thoughtful way.

Engage your whole self—mind, body, and soul—as you study God's Word, and start walking in wisdom today!

PERFECT FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY



**PAM
FARREL**



**JEAN E.
JONES**



**KARLA
DORNACHER**



[HarvestHousePublishers.com](https://www.HarvestHousePublishers.com)

**AVAILABLE NOW WHEREVER
BOOKS ARE SOLD.**





Love T.H.E.M. A Joyful Relationship Boost

pam farrel | love-wise.com &
karen whiting | karenwhiting.com

The one who gets wisdom loves life; the one who cherishes understanding will soon prosper (Proverbs 19:8 NIV).

When we bring joy into the relationship realm, it blesses and builds those we love. Negative attitudes and actions erode a relationship, but joy, gratefulness, and appreciation strengthen relationships. Allowing God to infuse our hearts with these positive emotions aids us in bringing our best selves to T.H.E.M.—to all those we love and value. Let's look at four key ideas featured in the *Growing a Joyful Heart* devotional, which can help us take our eyes off ourselves and on to T.H.E.M.:

Thank God for Them: Philippians 1:3 models this: I thank my God in all my remembrance of you... People can tell when you appreciate them. We want to live in such a way that when people think of us, they light up with delight. Also, thanking God for someone, with this “attitude of gratitude,” builds a sense of deep respect, honor, and gratefulness toward the person. In short, we like people more and are willing to stay in their life with steadfast love when we are also praising God for them.

Hold Them in Your Heart: Philippians 1:7 explains: It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace... Our goal is to be “partakers of grace,” as we hold others in our hearts. This means we choose to NOT make a relationship about a list of behaviors. Instead, we carry others with constant love, giving the benefit of the doubt to another's intentions or motives. When a relationship is based only on behaviors, no one can stay good enough, long enough to succeed. Love's grace always trumps human imperfection.

Express Joy to Them: Philippians 1: 4 challenges us to love with joy and prayer: always in every prayer of mine for

you all making my prayer with joy... We are drawn to people who express joy when they see us. Knowing someone is praying for you, with JOY, can build and bond a relationship. That's why praying for someone—and letting them know you are praying—is one of the greatest gifts you can give.

Multiply Love by Applying God's Love: Philippians 1: 9 encourages us to love more like God: And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment... We can deepen our understanding of a verse by reading it in a few translations or paraphrased versions. I find joy in seeing the HOW to love in these verses in The Message:

So, this is my prayer: that your love will flourish and that you will not only love much but well. Learn to love appropriately. You need to use your head and test your feelings so that your love is sincere and intelligent, not sentimental gush. Live a lover's life, circumspect and exemplary, a life Jesus will be proud of.

As you love like Jesus, your relationships will become healthier and more enjoyable. And as we bring our happy, hopeful, positive attitude of JOY to each relationship, we will be easier to love too! ☺



Pam Farrel is an international speaker, a relationship expert, and author of 60 books. Bill and Pam Farrel are co-directors of Love-Wise helping people apply God's love and wisdom to their vital relationships. Love-Wise.com



*Karen Whiting is the author of 34 books and international speaker, certified writing coach, former TV host, and co-author of *Growing a Joyful Heart: Devotions of Accepting God's Gifts for Abundant Living from Joy Givers Past, Present and Future* (AMG). karenwhiting.com*



Braveheart Mentor Dawn Damon— “You’re Not a Nobody”

Sometimes we confuse what feels true with what is true. For example, what if I told you that your worth was priceless? That you are a rare masterpiece, valuable beyond comprehension? And what if I told you that you were distinctively gifted and assigned for a grand purpose?

You may accept those statements as true or some inner insecurity may rise, nervously bristle, and reject the notion. Fear will challenge the thought that your contribution to the world is unique, priceless, and great. If the fact that God created you as a part of his most valuable crowning achievement, doesn’t feel true or even look true, you may disregard it.

“But I’m nobody special,” you counter.

“I’m just a mom, a school aide, a sales clerk, an office manager.” Compared to other women who are on the frontlines of leading and experiencing amazing success, it’s tempting to minimize your significance. “I don’t have much to offer. Others are better than me, so let them do it.

Wait!

First, don’t compare yourself to anyone else.

You’re a one-of-a-kind creation. The only comparison you

should ever make is with yourself. Make sure you’re better this year than you were last year. Be the best version of yourself possible.

Second, don’t diminish your place in this world.

You have influence. You have a voice. You are a leader. Trust me; someone is always watching. You have opportunities everywhere to shine and impact your home, community, city, state, and this planet!

As Marianne Williamson wrote: “Your playing small does not serve the world.”

It’s true. You’re wonderfully and remarkably made. Once you get that truth down on the inside of you and accept it as fact, your mindset will transform. Fears and insecurities move aside as your inner genius is unleashed to step up. Your new outlook will inform your actions and behaviors.

“With no goals, no priorities, no life strategy of our own, we drift with the herd through an endless meadow of mediocrity, unable to break loose, to achieve even a small part of the dreams we once cherished.”

—Og Mandino

In Need of a Fresh Perspective? 5 reasons you might be ready for a life coach

Here are five benefits of enlisting the help of a life coach no matter what occupation you are in:

1. Clarifying goals and creating a roadmap to achieve them. Without goals and a blueprint or roadmap to achieve them, you're going to squander your most valuable commodity—time!

“The tragedy in life doesn't lie in NOT reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach!” —Benjamin Mays.

Contentment and fulfillment are found in productive people achieving God's goals in God's time. I accomplished more with my coach than I had in years by myself.

2. Breaking through limiting beliefs and self-doubt

A life coach can help you unearth the false beliefs that rumble in the depths of your mind, convincing you to play it safe and avoid risk. Through coaching, you will awaken to mindsets, actions, levels of motivation, attitudes and beliefs that, left unchecked, will sabotage you. A coach will help you challenge, question and reframe those beliefs and ideas, consciously replacing negative and restrictive beliefs with more empowering ones.

You'll learn how to shift your mindset and open up to new possibilities for personal growth and achievement, thus expanding the boundaries and enlarging your life.

3. Developing a growth mindset

Embracing a growth mindset allows individuals to see challenges as opportunities for growth and view failures as valuable lessons rather than permanent setbacks. To cultivate a growth mindset, it's important to embrace a love for learning, cultivate resilience in the face of obstacles, and embrace the power of effort and perseverance. By adopting a growth mindset, women can continuously expand their potential, take on new challenges, and achieve higher levels of personal and professional success.

4. Accountability and motivation to stay on track

Without accountability, we will lack the necessary pressure to stick with our plan. We give in to instant gratification, and when things get difficult, we create stories giving ourselves permission to cast off our goals.

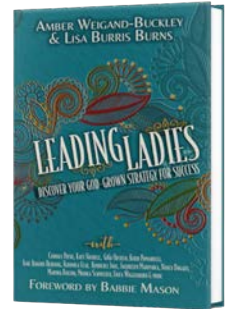
A coach will provide support and encouragement and remind you of why you want your goal and hold you accountable for your progress.

5. Building confidence and self-esteem

When you work with a coach you'll start to see results! You'll set small, achievable goals that align with your best life and your potential. As you take action and make progress toward these goals, you will begin to accumulate evidence that contradicts your old limiting beliefs. This evidence acts as a powerful reinforcement, boosting your confidence and further dismantling the old belief system.

A life coach helps you celebrate your successes along the way, no matter how small, and use them as fuel to keep moving forward. —**DAWN DAMON** 🍷

Watch Dawn's Video and access her free gifts, including her free masterclass, “The 7 Lies Women Believe,” by scanning the QR code below. You'll break free from limiting beliefs, find your true vision and live BRAVE, even when you think it's too late. Find out more at www.Braveheartedwoman.com. *A portion of this article was included in the bestselling book: *Leading Ladies: Discover Your God-Grown Strategy for Success* by Amber Weigand Buckley and Lisa Burris Burns from Bold Vision Books. Used with permission.

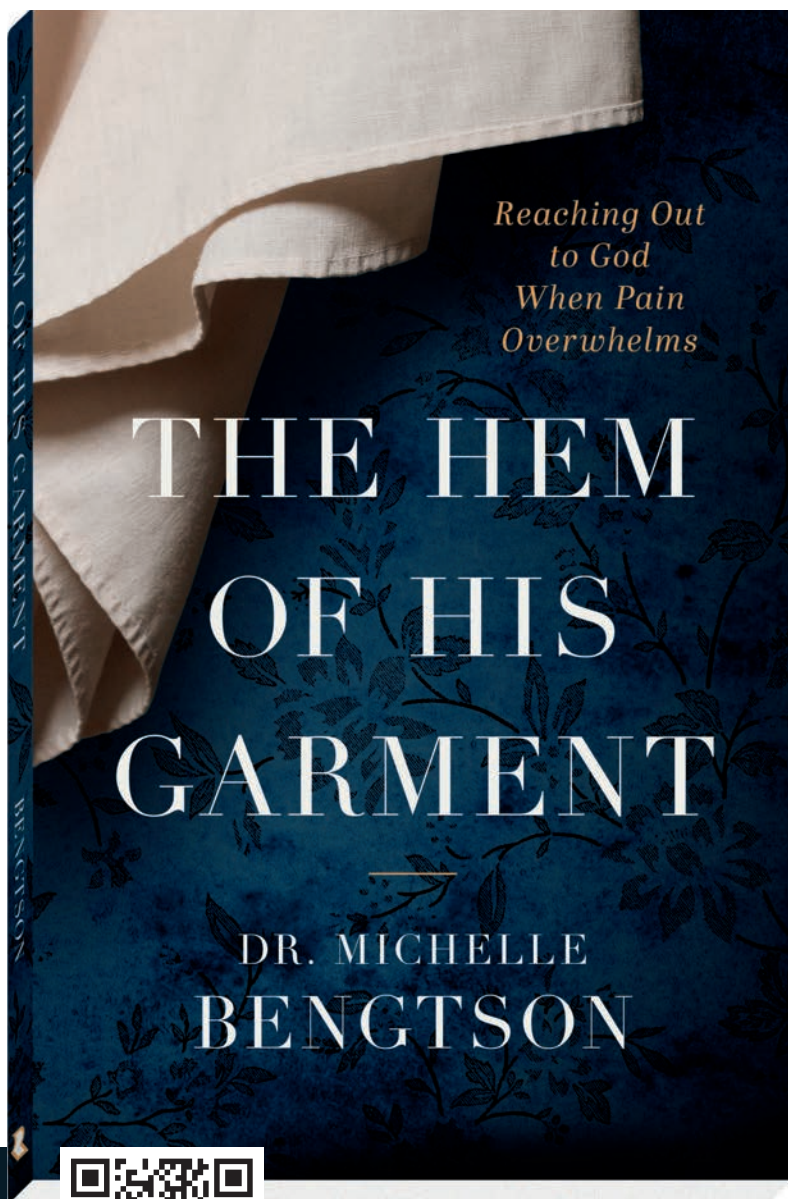




NEW FROM AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR
DR. MICHELLE BENGTSON & BAKER PUBLISHING GROUP

Pain is inevitable, but how you respond to it is a choice.

Dr. Michelle Bengtson provides a countercultural perspective on physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual pain. Offering hope without false promises or empty platitudes, she unwraps the complex emotional aspects of dealing with pain. She gives you permission to question God, helps you identify the lies you've believed about your pain, and reorients your perception based on the truth of God's Word.



DRMICHELLEB.COM
FACEBOOK | INSTAGRAM @DRMICHELLEBENGTSON
YOUTUBE: YOUTUBE.COM/MICHELLEBENGTSON
YOUR HOPE-FILLED PERSPECTIVE PODCAST: BIT.LY/3EF2FVS



THEBIGQ

with cynthia L. simmons | clsimmons.com

Q: How can I love that impossible person?

What a tough assignment. Yet all of us must interact with someone we find unpleasant, and how distressing if he or she is a family member.

I remind myself Jesus died for that individual too, and therefore he or she has infinite value. The Lord points us to key ways to show love. Here are a few tactics to put ministering, praying and listening into tools to deal with difficult people.

First, realize we associate love with warm feelings. On the other hand, the Bible uses several words for love. Scripture dubs our affectionate love as *philia* which means the love of a friend. Can you squeeze that kind of amiable emotion from your heart? Unlikely. However, there's hope. Notice the love mentioned in John 3:16 is *agape*, a love that seeks the best for the person loved, even to the point of personal sacrifice, which Jesus did for us. Look at what Jesus said in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you ..." (ESV). He used the word *agape* there.

In order to love someone as God does, minister to a need. For instance, the neighbor next door traveled a lot. He annoyed everyone on our street because he didn't keep up his lawn while he was gone. Rather than gripe, we decided to have compassion. My husband cut his grass several times when the yard became messy. We were amazed at how cordial we felt toward him when we helped him out. Besides, people always welcome thoughtful action. Learn his or her favorites and find ways to gift those items from time to time.

Second, add that person to your prayer list. I have been amazed at how the Lord will give me a different perspective

when I intercede for someone. The Holy Spirit enables me to see the places where that person hurts, which makes me able to forgive those glaring foibles. Let's say you must work with an irritating aunt for a family event. Pray extra hard prior to that day and see how the Lord gives you extra wisdom and sensitivity.

Third, listen when that person talks. How often I am busy choosing my next statement and miss what the individual says. Or rather than pay attention, I might even wish my sister didn't talk so much. Ask questions. You may discover your grumpy coworker really needs a true friend, and you might learn she has deep scars or insecurities you can pray about.

Fourth, recognize your limitations and set boundaries. You'll be more confident about loving if you aren't afraid to say no. Years ago, I read one of Edith Schaeffer's books on hospitality. She said your front door can welcome people inside, but also safeguard your family. If your difficult stepmother insists on a shopping trip when you feel a migraine coming, you can refuse. Protect yourself when you are vulnerable, so you can show kindness later.

In summary, I like what the apostle John wrote. "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18 ESV). That includes praying, listening, and remembering our limitations. I challenge you to love like Jesus did. ☺

Cynthia L. Simmons and her husband have five grown children and reside in Atlanta. As a Bible teacher, historian, and former homeschool mother, Cynthia has written homeschool curriculum, articles, Bible studies, a series of historical fiction novels, and co-authored a novel for middle school-aged children. She hosts Heart of the Matter Radio Podcast and produces Momlife chats, which offers women God's timeless wisdom.

Doris Swift—

Outshine Your Circumstance



Fourteen years ago, Brian and I went house hunting. We didn't have to move, but after living in our home for twenty-five years, we were ready for a new adventure. Who doesn't love

new? A new home, new neighborhood, new beginning—yes, it was time for a change. Except we had no idea what changes were coming.

We toured several homes and finally found the one we loved—a spacious tri-level with a lush, green yard perfect for summer barbeques. We put in an offer. Then we waited.

When the answer finally came, it wasn't the one we had hoped for. Our offer was rejected. They countered. We countered. Again, rejected. The rejection felt personal.

Not only did I have to let go of my dream house, but I had to let go of the dream of what could be. We decided to stop house hunting and just wait and see.

Less than a year later, the housing bubble burst and hit the nation like the splatter of sticky pink bubble gum. Home values crashed to the floor while interest rates shot through the roof. Then a few months later, my banking career of almost thirty years ended. Banks were failing left and right, and a new company swooped in to take over ours. Unexpectedly, we went from a two-income household to one.

God knew. In his perfect love and care, he knew what the future held when we had no clue. That rejected house offer? A gift from a loving God. Finances were tight, and that house offer “no” we received months earlier was God’s best “yes” for us.

We didn’t see it at the time, but I haven’t stopped talking about it since. His gift of love often includes his gift of protection. I tell that story to tell you this—God loves us through our unexpected circumstances and our unplanned hardships. Through all our hard seasons, God loves us through it all.

James 1:17 tells us the Father gives good gifts and every good gift is from above. So, when circumstances do not feel like gifts, and we’re not feeling the love, we can trust that even amidst difficult seasons, we have a love that never fails. Unconditional, perfect, and everlasting love from “our Father who art in heaven.” His love satisfies the deepest places no dream home or career could ever hope to fill.

When seasons of rejection and hardship come, we can remember this: God sent us the greatest gift. His Son. Jesus, put on flesh, got His feet dirty, then washed the dirty feet of others to show us how it’s done. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19 ESV). He never rejects us, and by His grace and through His love, we can share that truth and hope with others.

Jesus taught us how to live, how to love, how to serve, and if that’s not wild enough, He’s prepared a place for us in His Father’s house. Our mansions in heaven are ready—and

they’re exceedingly better than any tri-level here on earth. We need not worry about house hunting or rejected offers. The sold sign is already posted. We are signed, sealed, and delivered—we are his.

But first, we have work to do ...

Those good gifts God gives us include our spiritual gifts. The world needs our gifts. These are the gifts we love to share, and the gifts we share in love. They’re the only kind of gifts we can both keep and give away. When we’re in Christ, we all have them and can use them in unison to further the Kingdom.

It’s time to act where our passions, compassions, and convictions intersect. Using our gifts to impact the world means impacting the world through loving our neighbors well. We are called to make God’s love tangible to a world in need of a breath of fresh hope.

When the world says we are left out and rejected, God says we are chosen and accepted. God’s love shines through our circumstances, and He can use those circumstances for His glory. When we’ve walked through the fire, we can shine His light into the lives of others. ☺

Doris Swift is an author, speaker, and host of the award-winning Fierce Calling Podcast. She is passionate about equipping women to take action where their passion, compassion, and conviction intersect. dorisswift.com



AVAILABLE FROM DORIS SWIFT & ELK LAKE PUBLISHING

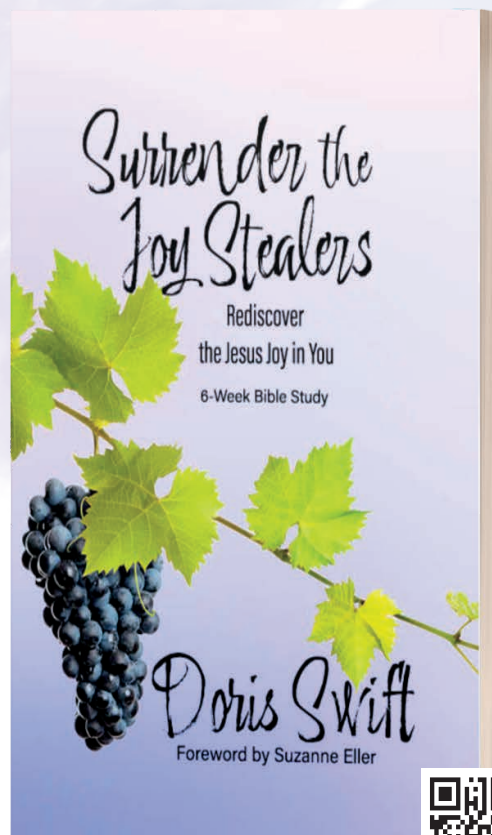
Rediscover the Jesus Joy in You!

"In *Surrender the Joy Stealers*, Ms. Swift offers a fresh, scriptural perspective that enables us to seek out and overcome the many things that can steal our joy. Her excellent teaching and wisdom will be such a help to readers—worthy of both individual or group studies."

— **Julie Zine Coleman**, managing editor of *AriseDaily.com*, author of *On Purpose: Understanding God's Freedom for Women through Scripture*

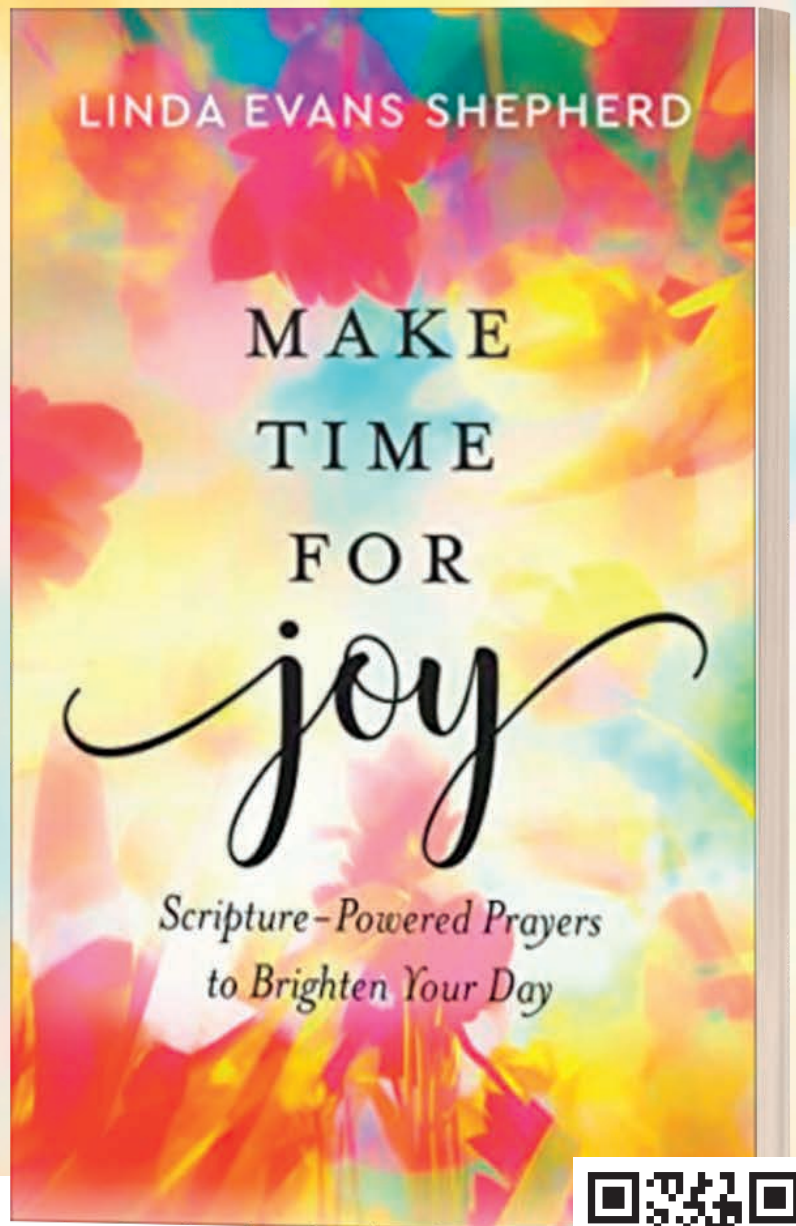


www.dorisswift.com



NEW FROM BESTSELLING PRAYER AUTHOR
LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD & BAKER REVELL

You can
LIVE a
Joy-filled
life!



The perfect gift for yourself or someone else, MAKE TIME FOR JOY will help you transform sadness into gladness as you rest on the love, joy, and provision that comes from God.



amazon.com

BAM!
BOOKS-A-MILLION

LifeWay
CHRISTIAN STORES
Biblical Solutions for Life


TARGET

 **Christianbook.com**
1-800-CHRISTIAN

 **BAKER BOOK HOUSE**

AVAILABLE WHEREVER
BOOKS ARE SOLD.

When Prayer Takes Flight



The lady behind the airline counter looked as if she couldn't have cared less. I was at the airline's special help desk, holding my airline confirmation email for a flight now leaving in forty minutes.

"We have no record of your confirmation number in the system."

I showed her my printed email. "Here's the confirmation."

The lady shrugged. "Not in our system. You must have booked it through an outside booking service."

"I booked through the airline, see my email says it's from United."

"Can't help you."

"Can't you rebook the flight for me?"

"You are only allowed to book a flight by phone so I can't help you and you now only have a 20-minute window to rebook."

The blood rushed to my head as I thought about missing my ministry event and I stammered, "I feel dizzy." In the flattest monotone I've ever heard, the clerk said, "Do you want me to call the paramedics?"

I suddenly felt like a character in a sitcom. I laughed. "No, I'm fine, just shocked that you all lost me."

I shot off a prayer, Help me, Lord. I give You this dilemma.

I tugged my luggage to a bench and pulled out my phone to call the airlines, even though I was sitting in front of their own help desk. Once I had the flight, I returned to the counter, dropped off my suitcase, and dashed for the slow-moving security line.

Lord, it doesn't look like I'm going to make it, my panicked

heart whispered. I heard the Spirit whisper back. You will make it.

Were those quiet words from the Lord or from me?

I looked at my watch. I was stuck in security and my flight was already boarding and I still had to manage the train system, crowded escalators, and of course the Denver concourse.

You will make it, the peaceful voice said again.

Could this be true? I knew if I'd really heard from the Lord, the words were true for "God is ever true to His promises" (1 Corinthians 1:9 WNT).

And even though I had to run the airport gauntlet, I made it! The plane was still at the gate in its final moments of boarding.

Unbelievable! I was excited, not only was I going to make my ministry event, but had heard from the Lord and kept my joy.

Hearing from God can simply be a matter of prayer. We can ask of Him, then we can listen for His voice. But listening with the Bible in our laps may be the best way to hear God speak to our hearts.

Just make sure you're not confusing your own voice, or the voice of our enemy, for God. And remember that checking your "word from God" against God's written Word is another failsafe. ☺

Let's pray to hear God's voice: Dear Lord, help me to hear and recognize Your voice as I compare what You say through Your Word. I'm listening now. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Linda Evans Shepherd is the founder and CEO of Right to the Heart Ministries and the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association and Arise Esther Evenings. She is publisher of Leading Hearts Magazine and the author of 38 books.



“A love for God, a love for story, and a love for my readers are the things that motivate me to write. This love keeps me going even when I’m frustrated with my characters or storylines.”

—Lynette Eason

Lynette Eason— The Heart of Fiction

with rebecca white | LH staff



When newly married Lynette Eason found herself a lonely bride due to her husband's business travel, she decided to fill her time by dreaming up stories. She soon discovered the joy of creating characters helped her create a friendship that eased her loneliness and brought her closer to God. Her new hobby helped her fill empty evenings.

Eventually, it turned into an amazing journey to author over sixty Christian romance and suspense novels enjoyed by millions.

Today, as a *USA Today* and *Publisher's Weekly* bestselling author, Lynette continues to love the creativity of writing fiction. Her secret sauce is that she prays over each book she writes. Everytime Lynette completes a novel she still sits in awe of the process.

"I never could have written any of my books without God guiding me through the entire process."

Lynette's main goal is to write stories that honor and glorify God and make readers realize their need for Jesus. Just as Jesus used parables to teach important lessons, Lynette turns to God for guidance as she weaves the concepts of His Word through each work of fiction.

Utilizing her characters as messengers, Lynette reveals a powerful truth that applies to everyone: we've all messed up and fallen short of God's glory. She beautifully weaves a universal theme into her stories, reminding us of our imperfections and the need for God's grace.

"God created us to crave stories and entertainment, but He also created us with a desire to learn," she says.

Lynette's biggest blessing comes when God uses her words to reach those who might need healing and resolution in a specific area of their lives. She is always surprised when one of her novels, even though it is fiction, profoundly impacts a reader and promotes a life-transforming shift in their thinking.

One reader sent Lynette an email sharing how her book *No One to Trust* reflected her confrontation with an online scammer. The reader told Lynette that the book helped her heal from her woundedness, especially as the character had the same name as the person who had scammed her. This reader relayed that novel's resolution brought her a newfound sense of peace and forgiveness.

Even though the plot-coincidence of the book appeared crazy, Lynette knew it was God-designed to bring healing and closure in this chapter of the reader's life and to this day the two continue to correspond,

"Only God can use a novel to speak truth to the heart of someone who doesn't expect the plot of a book to reflect her own life. That's because only God knows what a reader will need," Lynette shares.

Another reader shared that she stumbled across Lynette's book *Too Close to Home* in her own online library. Though this reader selected a different read, Lynette's book popped open. The reader thought it strange but after she browsed Lynette's book, she could see why God had put it in front of her. The reader fell in love with the characters and grieved at a character's death.

Once the reader began to read Lynette's book, she couldn't put it down. Next, she read the complete series. After that, this fan set out to read everything Lynette wrote. One reason this reader finds Lynette's novels so refreshing is because the books are well written and contain no explicit content.

Lynette strives to write characters that honor God, even if it is in the character's transformation. Lynette hopes that by the end of the book, readers can see how change is possible even in their own lives.

The veteran novelist of more than 60 books, always has bigger purpose in mind through her storytelling. To create life-changing characters, she digs deep into godly leadership traits and shows how they take root in the characters' lives. She prays that these moments of growth and learning take root to become valuable principles her readers can use themselves.

Lynette, who also enjoys photography and spending time with family, considers herself blessed to have the opportunity to share her stories and messages with the world. She recognizes that her words have the power to touch lives and bring the incredible message of Jesus to a hurting world. It's a mission she cherishes deeply.☺

Lynette Eason is the award-winning and best-selling author of over 60 books. Her book "Her Stolen Past" was made into a movie by the Lifetime Movie Network. Her new release, Countdown: Extreme Measure 4, releases this August. She loves connecting with readers on social media and www.lynetteeason.com.



Building Each Other

One Taco at a Time



One little word can change the course of a day. Sometimes that word is: taco. Especially if it's a Tuesday."

I don't know who came up with the concept of Taco Tuesday, but that person holds a special place in my heartburn. I mean heart.

Never mind any heartburn, and never mind that some may whine about the way a taco shell explodes a bite or two in. First, I say, Tums. And then I mention that if a taco crumbles onto a plate, we can always just rebrand it. Taco salad. Then again, why haven't we tried gluing broken tacos back together with melted cheese? Also I should probably buy extra cheese. Just in queso.

Relatedly, did I mention I want my next car to be a taco truck? Then not only is every day Tuesday, but every hour is pretty much taco o'clock.

Some days are made for that special, taco kind of encouragement. We have opportunities most every day to build a positive change in someone's life word by word, layer by layer—like building the tastiest taco. Paul teaches in Ephesians 4:29 that "No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear" (CSB). "Building up," he says, and then he reminds us we do that with grace.

We see it again in Romans 15:2. "Each one of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to build him up" (CSB). Again in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, we're instructed to "encourage one another and build each other up" (CSB). So many passages remind us to build love with specially seasoned grace-words and with our grace-actions.

Though it's our calling to live as gracious encouragers,

I admit it can be challenging. Because people can be challenging. The secret-salsa-sauce for success is found in the God who empowers. If we look a little further into that Romans 15 passage, we find this: "Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, according to Christ Jesus, so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one mind and one voice" (verses 5-6 CSB).

If allowing others to hold those special places in our hearts with "one mind and one voice" were easy-peasy-cheesy, we wouldn't really need to rely on Jesus to make it happen, right?

So much of Scripture is dedicated to inspiring us to lean into Him, and to live and love this way.

As Jesus is teaching us to stay connected to Him like the branch to the vine in John 15, and to receive strength, nourishment, power, and enabling from Him, He reminds us again and again to love each other.

"This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you" (verse 12 CSB). "This is what I command you: Love one another" (verse 17 CSB).

Whatever the love language of others, whatever our own love language, it's His desire that we show grace-seasoned love. We can do it—with, by, and through the Savior who is the source of all grace.

And if I could wrap up, burrito-style, with one more little taco thought. People sometimes ask about my love language. Others want to know my Taco Bueno order. They're probably related. ... Potato/tostado.☺

Rhonda Rhea is an author, humor columnist, and TV personality. Her newest release with co-authors Monica Schmelter and Kaley Rhea, Messy to Meaningful—My Purse Runneth Over is available now.



NEW FROM ELK LAKE PUBLISHING & AUTHOR LINDA ROOKS

An Exciting Thriller that Shines Hope into a Dark and Confusing Culture



"A moving tribute to the power of faith."

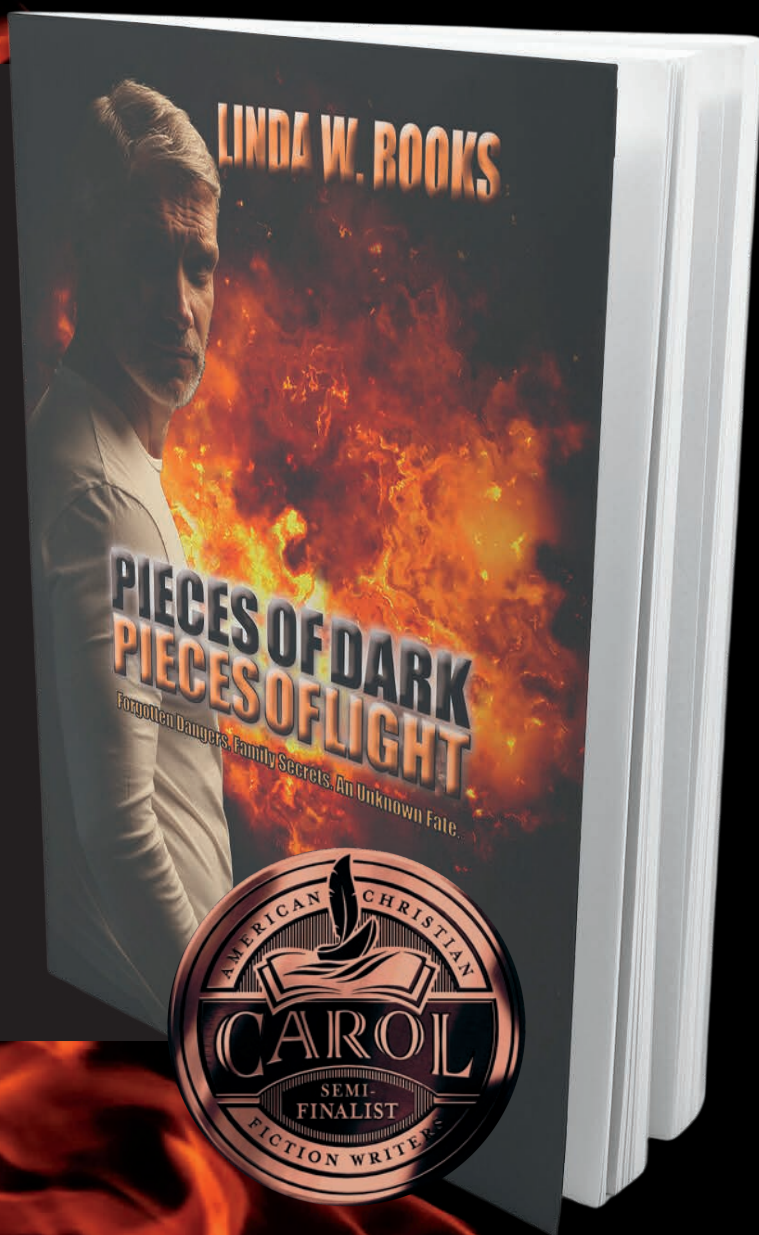
-Tom Feeney, Former U.S. Congressman and
Florida House Speaker

"A timeless tale of good and evil where God
tests man and faith and values prevail."

-Bill McCollum, former Florida Attorney
General and U.S. Congressman.

"Wonderfully written, it clearly reminds us
with faith and hope there is light."

-Former U.S. Congressman John L Mica



AVAILABLE WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD.

LINDAROOKS.COM

THE SOUTHERN GOLD HISTORICAL FICTION & CURRICULUM SERIES

FROM AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

Cynthia L. Simmons



THE SOUTHERN
GOLD SERIES



CLSIMMONS.COM
FOLLOW @CLSIMMONS ON

