

SOCIAL DISTANCING TIPS FOR SHARING HOPE ONLINE

2015-2019 Evangelical Press Association Award of Merit

APRIL 2020 ISSUE | VOL. 7, ISSUE 1

LEADING HEARTS

EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN FOR LEADERSHIP

Guard Your Heart—
**ARE YOU BEING
MANIPULATED?**

Sheila Walsh
A BRAVE NEW DAY

REBUILDING WHAT WAS
DESTROYED

a mother's bold faith changed everything

ROBIN LUFTIG

"I had 10 days
to Live."

I realized that, too, was God's gift."



Arise Daily e-devotionals and our multi- award-winning e-magazine Leading Hearts are FREE publication ministries of the Advanced Writers & Speakers Association—our GIFT TO YOU as you pursue God’s call in your home, church, workplace or community. We want you to know, wherever you find your feet, your sisters in ministry are cheering you on and giving you the insight and tools to help you succeed!



GET YOUR FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS AT ARISEDAILY.COM AND LEADINGHEARTS.COM

Text LEADINGHEARTS 64600 to get each issue delivered FREE to your Mobile Device.



FROM THE PUBLISHER
LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD



THE WORST OF TIMES?

IF THE EARTH WERE HIT WITH A WORLD-WIDE PANDEMIC, WHAT’S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN?

You know these answers by heart: sickness, death, losing a loved one, job loss, not being able to pay bills or rent, having to work from home while homeschooling kids, or horrors — not being able to buy toilet paper!

All of this sounds pretty drastic, and yet, suddenly, very familiar. Yes, these are hard, unexpected times, and we never saw it coming. But God’s not shocked, nor is He in a panic. He’s not even hurrying to get a loan so he can stay afloat. And He certainly hasn’t run low on His supply of compassion, love, peace, kindness, gentleness, healing or provision.

The one thing we haven’t run out of during these worst-of-times is God’s presence. Oh sure, we may have a few questions that we’d like to ask Him like, *Why have You allowed this world-wide heartbreak?*

I’d like to challenge you to ask a different question: *What would this pandemic be like without God; if God suddenly left us stranded in the middle of this mess?*

Be of good hope, for God is here. He is with us. He is with you. He will supply your needs, if you ask. He will sit next to your bedside or the bedside of your loved one with healing in His wing. He will provide and will show you mercy and compassion, with or without toilet paper.

And what does God want from us during this worst-of-times? One thing is clear: He wants to speak to you, to teach you how to trust in Him like never before. Let’s change our perspective and see what is really happening. For starters, God has blessed us, the whole world, with a time when our most cherished idols have been removed. The games are canceled. The concert halls and movie theaters are quiet. Our places of employment have shuttered. Even church has been canceled.

But maybe, in God’s great mercy, these are also the best of times; a time when our idols have toppled so we can focus on who He is.

What if this were the only way He could get the world to stop and consider Him? What if He’s given one of the most stubborn generations a time to repent? What if it’s up to us, His people, to open our hearts wider, seek Him on a deeper level, live more in tune with His presence, push past our fears and share our faith, open the door to our purpose so we can live for Jesus?

Yes, these worst of times, through God, can be the best of times. They can be our defining moment, our finest hour. And don’t worry. God’s got all of it. After all, your precious life, as well as the whole world, is in His loving hands.

You can be your best in the worst of times. 🕊

LOVE, —Linda

PUBLISHER, *LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE* | AWSA, FOUNDER

Text **LEADINGHEARTS**
to **64600** for **FREE**
Mobile Sisterhood Support!

APRIL/MAY 2020 | VOL. 7, ISSUE 1

LEADING HEARTS

EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN FOR LEADERSHIP

Editorial Staff

PUBLISHER Linda Evans Shepherd

EDITOR/ART DIRECTOR Amber Weigand-Buckley

LAYOUT EDITOR..... Tom Young

COPY EDITORS Breanna Berry & Tom Young

ADVERTISING..... Linda Evans Shepherd

CONTRIBUTORS Breanna Berry, Penelope Carlevato, Michelle S. Cox, Sandra Dalton-Smith, Pam Farrel, Edie Melson, Karen Porter, Rhonda Rhea, Cynthia L. Simmons, Jennifer Taylor, Heather Van Allen, Karen Whiting, Debbie W. Wilson.

Right to the Heart Board Members

Linda Evans Shepherd (President), Dianne Butts, Linda Goldfarb, Edie Melson, Karen Porter, Rhonda Rhea, Carole Whang Schutter and Joy A. Schneider

Information

Leading Hearts magazine for Christian Women is published bimonthly by Right to the Heart Ministries 2020.

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

MEMBER | 2015-2016-2017-2018-2019 Evangelical Press Association Award of Merit Winner — Christian Ministry Digital Publication

Photos courtesy of: Hartman Benzon Media; Pexels (Suzana Duljic); Unsplash (Johathan Borba, James Coleman, Disruptivo, Sincerely-Media, Chermiti Mohamed, Kayla Otto, Carles Rabada, Kevin Schmid, Kelly Sikkema, Tonik, Carolyn V, Helen Williams).

Copyright ©2020 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.™



CONTENTS

FEATURES

- 8 BREANNABERRY**
Real Church Ladies: Robin Luftig
- 14 DEBBIEWILSON**
How Do I Protect Myself From Manipulation?
- 18 PAMFARREL**
Psalm 23 Good Shepherd
- 22 JENNTAYLOR**
Jen Ledger: Resting in His Arms
- 32 SHEILAWALSH**
A Brave New Day
- 43 KARENWHITING**
God's Time Principles
- 46 RHONDARHEA**
All That Glitters

COLUMNS

- 12 KARENPORTER**
In the Lead: Leaders Are Followers Too
- 26 PENELOPECARLEVATO**
From Fear to Freedom
- 28 EDIEMELSON**
Social Media for Social Distancing
- 30 BOOKSTOREAD**
- 31 CYNTHIALSIMMONS**
The Big Question
- 36 MICHELLESCOX**
When God Calls the Heart Back to Him
- 38 SAUNDRADALTON-SMITH**
Health Tracks: Could This Be Your Time of Preparation?
- 41 LINDAEVANS SHEPHERD**
Prayer Circle: Time to Send Up a Panic Prayer
- 42 MUSICREVIEWS**
- 44 BREANNABERRY**
Sioni Rodriguez & Scheila Singley:
Giving Second Chances

LEADINGHEARTS.COM



Yes,
We're
Bragging!

FIVE
WINS
IN A
ROW!



EVANGELICAL PRESS
AWARD
OF MERIT

2015
2016
2017
2018
2019



FROM THE EDITOR
AMBER WEIGAND-BUCKLEY



TRUTH FROM 20 SECONDS OF HANDWASHING

IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THE MORNING, I turned to the side table, as usual, to take a drink from my water bottle. My mouth was so dry, I knew I needed a drink. So, I took a long sip, then naturally, I had to go to the bathroom. I then proceeded with the up to the elbows 20 seconds of doxology hand sanitation. (Hopefully, we've all gotten that part down.)

However, instead of focusing on the doxology, this time I was thinking about the water. I was focused on the significance of our body's makeup. We are 80 percent water. It's the 80 percent that runs through the 20 percent of these skin and bones.

In fact, in Genesis 1, the Spirit of God moving across the water was the first stirring of life on the earth in Creation. Think about it. It's mostly about the water — and allowing the Holy Spirit to stir life in it.

The Holy Spirit is the essential part — the 80 percent water — of who we are. The other 20 percent of our being is just this skin and these frail bones that are ripe for sickness and breaking.

Sometimes it's hard to acknowledge our need for the fresh, purest water of the Spirit. We try to replace the 80 percent with the non-essential. It's like trying to satisfy our thirst with something that actually makes us more dehydrated and thirstier than if we simply drink the water we need.

Revelation 22:1 depicts the life-giving source of the purest water. "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb."

So, as you are washing your hands for 20 seconds to keep sickness from affecting your bones, remember the 80 percent that is water — and the Spirit of God that brings life-giving movement to the water. So even when the rain falls in this life, let us focus on being moved in the eternal.

And that only comes when we daily acknowledge His life-giving movement in OUR 80 and pursue Him in our thirst for more.

It's a good thing to think about while taking that extra care and attention to washing those hands. 💙

LOVE, —Amber

EDITOR, *Leading Hearts Magazine*

God knows, and
He is with you
right now, this
present moment.



BY BREANNA BERRY | INTERN



Robin Luftig HEALING YOUR HEART

AFTER EXPERIENCING LIFE IN MANY DIFFERENT AND CHALLENGING WAYS, ROBIN LUFTIG WAS ABLE TO HEAL and solidify her faith by following a path she had never expected. Robin maneuvered her way through life, facing sharp turns and what seemed to have been dead-end roads. But, with God as her guide, she was able to simply “be still.” By using her journey as a venue to reach people, *God’s Best During Your Worst* has not only solidified her faith, but has also given her the opportunity to help others heal during their worst.

Q: Robin, as an author who has written many books and a speaker who captures minds with such powerful truth, what messages do you hope others can receive from your words?

Robin: You know, it’s funny, because a lot of people have different gifts. One of the gifts that I have is that I like to talk to people about brokenness and share that no one is beyond God’s repair. No one is outside of God’s reach. In my talks, I give examples where I messed up life, you know, time and time again and how God was still incredibly

faithful. My most important message is redemption is for anyone who seeks it.

Q: You’re also the founder of Renew Ministries. Do you think Renew Ministries helps solidify those messages as well?

Robin: That’s the beauty of it all; A personal relationship with Christ can renew that. Whether we call it that or not, I think that’s what most of us do. We’re always trying to rebuild and reclaim that relationship that our sin continually breaks us away from Christ.

Q: How would you say God has had a hand in this journey for you? Are there any messages you were able to receive from Him?

Robin: There have been several messages. Ever since I got back on track — and it took me a long time to get there — but once I did a swan dive into my relationship with Jesus, He has been always close.

I can remember continually listening and hearing Him guide me. There was a time where I was

-continued on p. 11-

NEW FROM ROBIN LUFTIG |
& BOLD VISION BOOKS

"Robin's story is brutally honest and transparent about the reality of pain and brokenness.

But as you take this journey with her, one thing is unmistakable—the love, mercy, and companionship of Christ."

—**SHEILA WALSH**, International Speaker,
Author & Television Personality



God's Best During Your Worst is available wherever books are sold. To find out more, share your God's Best story, or request Robin to speak to your group or at your event, go to robinluftig.com.

-continued from p. 9-

a single mother and purchased a house. I was probably in over my head. I wanted it for my son. It was just going to be me and my boy and my Lord.

Somehow, I paid ahead on some bills and then didn't have enough for my mortgage. It was like, "Oh no. We're going to be in the streets! I'm a terrible mother!" So, I went for a walk. It was Sunday night, and I was crying out to God. Instead of consoling me, He admonished me. "Be still and know that I'm God."

I got to a point where I said, "Fine. I'm not going to worry about it anymore. This is on your plate, not mine. You take care of it."

Well, I needed my money by Thursday. Monday came and went, no money. Tuesday came and went, no money. Wednesday came and before youth group, we had the youth pastor over for dinner. We all left in a hurry, and I didn't realize I left a stove burner on. When I came back, the house was filled with smoke. It was awful; we couldn't stay there.

The insurance people came over the next day, Thursday, which was when I needed the money. They said, "You're going to need money to live," and they wrote me a check. They said to take it and put it toward our living arrangements, meals, cellphone. Wouldn't you know, it was what I needed to make my mortgage. It was stuff like that where He was always there. He told me He would take care of it and He did.

Q: Your new book, God's Best During Your Worst, released on March 12, is full of so much heart and truth. What was your overall purpose for releasing your story?

Robin: Because it took me over nine years to finish it, the purpose changed. It started out as a memoir, sharing how I discovered that God really was who He said He was. I needed to know. A person can say that they know, but I needed no doubt in my mind.

So, I used those 10 days to seek wisdom through books and speakers. I wrote emails to friends, thanking them for breathing positivity and grace into my life. I looked for God's provision, and every

time I looked, I found it. It was an incredibly close time with Jesus. I had pushed through so far, and He was right there with me the whole time. That challenged me to turn it into a Christian Living book.

Q: What has writing this done for you personally?

Robin: It solidified my faith. Carrying around your faith in your brain is one thing, but when you put it down on paper, you can look at it. You can pull it apart. You can move it around and challenge it, and I'm big on challenging your faith — in a good way, of course. It helps you know what you know. It confirms that this is right and real. Oh, yes, God's love and mercy are real, and that's just wonderful.

Q: Overall, what would you like your readers to get from your book?

Robin: There is homework in this story. At the end of every chapter, I ask the reader questions and challenge them to journal their answers. A companion journal to go with this book is coming soon if they want to do more writing. My brain tumor was my worst. God used it for the venue to reach others about their worst and where God was during that time. Their worst could be a physical issue, a broken marriage or relationship, financial problems or even the pandemic we're currently experiencing; there are all sorts of different worsts. If they want to read the book, that's fine, but if they want to heal through, they have to do the work.

Q: Robin, I see you as more than just a speaker or just an author. You are an inspiration to many people in this world. For those out there who are scared, worried, feeling alone and going through their worst, what message could you give to ease their hearts?

Robin: God knows, and He is with them right now, this present moment. There's nothing that they could do to be too ashamed, too guilty, too ugly or too disgusting because we all feel those ways at times. He gets that. All He asks is for a relationship with us, for us to love Him. That's awesome when you think about that. The Creator of the universe, who placed the stars in the sky, wants to know me and wants to know you. I'm not a very nice person at times. I've come through some dark, dark valleys. So, if He wants me, He will want anybody. 🕊️


Robin Luftig
God's Best During Your Worst

FOLLOW @ROBINLUFTIG





It is important for each of us to be followers of the Good Shepherd because who we follow will determine how we lead.

LEADERS ARE FOLLOWERS TOO

KAREN PORTER | KARENPORTER.COM

WHEN I WAS TOURING ISRAEL, THE GUIDE STOPPED NEAR A FIELD OF GRAZING SHEEP. HE SAID, "I WANT TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING THAT WILL MAKE A SECTION OF YOUR BIBLE COME ALIVE."

Hundreds of sheep foraged in the field while a group of shepherds stood nearby. After the guide spoke to the shepherds, each one began making a noise with his tongue. One shepherd's sound was, "click, click," and one sounded like "quack, quack." Another's was a whistle. Another shepherd

repeated a certain word. Each shepherd had a unique way to call his sheep.

The sheep gathered — each animal next to its shepherd. They distinguished the call and the voice of their master.

As promised by the guide, the tour saw a remarkable illustration of what Jesus said in John 10, "The gatekeeper opens the gate for him [the shepherd], and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice" (John 10:3-4).

INTHELEAD

When we follow our Shepherd, we will hear His voice and gather ourselves to Him. Where He leads, we will follow.

He is the Good Shepherd who:

Cares for Us in Times of Pain

Notice that we can cast our all. Nothing is too heavy for Him.

Cast all your anxiety on him
because he cares for you.
(1 Peter 5:7)

He sees our weaknesses and pain and has empathy.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
(Matthew 9:36)

Protects Us From Harm

Listen to what Jesus said about how He shepherds us.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.
(John 10:11-15)

Rescues Us From Danger

Even if we feel insignificant or unimportant, God rescues us.

What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.
(Matthew 18:12-13).

Leads Us to Peace and Rest

Scientists say that rest is life-giving. Our shepherd offers the sweetest rest.

"He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young"
(Isaiah 40:11).

As leaders, it is important for each of us to be followers of the Good Shepherd because who we follow will determine how we lead.

Do we care for the people we lead? Caring means we recognize the unique difficulties of each team member. What issues does he or she face at home, in family life, in finances, in physical and mental health? If we know them well, we will care for them well.

Do we protect the people we lead? Protection means keeping our organizations strong and solvent and viable so that our team members will have a place to work and serve. What creative innovations have you implemented in your organization?

Do we rescue the people we lead? Rescue means finding ways to rehabilitate and salvage lives that have gone astray. If a team member gets involved in addictive behaviors, what is your plan to help them and bring them back to the fold? If a team member loses focus and productivity, what can you do to restore their enthusiasm and concentration?

Do we know the place of rest and peace? As a leader, rest and peace are central to your success. What will you do to rest in the Lord this week? How will you bring peace and calm to your organization?

Listen for your Shepherd's voice. It will be a unique and sweet sound that calls you into the leadership success you crave.

"Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if only you would hear his voice"
(Psalm 95:6-7). 🕊

The closer we walk with Jesus the better we recognize His voice and tune out competing influences.



Debbie W. Wilson

HOW DO I PROTECT MYSELF FROM MANIPULATION?

DEBBIE W. WILSON | DEBBIEWWILSON.COM

“YOUR TEARS DON’T MOVE ME,” A PROFESSOR TOLD A WOMAN IN MY HUSBAND’S COUNSELING LAB. His words stunned the group, but the woman stopped crying. “Those were tears of frustration,” he said. “They weren’t tears of brokenness.”

I’ve thought of that when someone’s tears haven’t moved me and wondered what was behind them. Crocodiles shed tears when they eat their prey, but not from regret or sorrow. Some people use tears to manipulate. Others use flattery. If that doesn’t work, they pout or explode to get us to follow their script.

I joined the staff of an outreach ministry after college to work with high school students. I felt duty bound to any student who reached out to me. My inexperienced faith confused my role with

God’s. I allowed a student to manipulate me out of time and sleep. Her urgent calls at all hours and unwillingness to acknowledge my efforts to terminate calls left me exhausted. When my director found out he offered some sound advice.

He said the time I gave this girl took away from spiritually receptive students and from God’s best. My time belonged to God, and I was accountable to Him for how I spent it.

His words resonated with me. I’d begun to dread hearing from this gal, and his counsel gave me permission to limit my one-on-one time with her. Even though hate letters replaced the flowery notes of appreciation that formerly graced my car windshield, I was free.

-continued on p. 17-

Let the ordinary people from Hebrews 11 show you how to live strong & finish well.



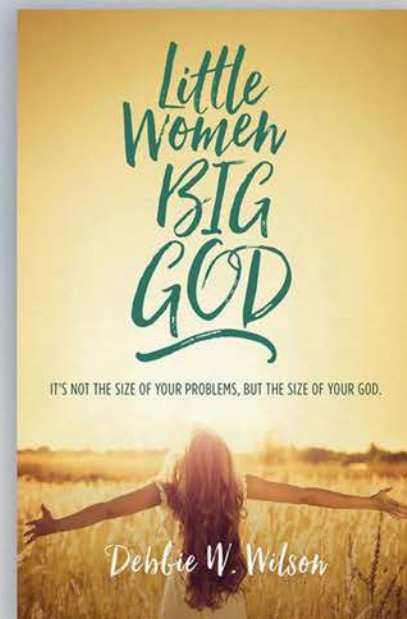
New Release—

*"A delightful work ... I highly recommend
LITTLE FAITH, BIG GOD for both individuals
and families."*

—JOSH McDOWELL, CHRISTIAN APOLOGIST,
EVANGELIST, AND BESTSELLING AUTHOR.

*"Women in the Church today are hungry for
excellent Bible study material and
LITTLE WOMEN, BIG GOD will be a blessing to
those who use it."*

—DIANE PASSNO, BIBLE TEACHER, SENIOR
VICE PRESIDENT (RETIRED), FOCUS ON THE FAMILY



Available wherever books are sold.

 **LEAFWOOD**
PUBLISHERS
an imprint of Abilene Christian University Press

DEBBIEWILSON.COM

-continued from p. 15-

How Do We Protect Ourselves from Manipulation?

Giving into manipulation is destructive, not just unpleasant. I wanted to please this student and God. But Jesus said no one can serve two masters. Submitting to manipulation makes the wrong person lord over our lives. Jesus needs to direct how we invest our time and talents. If we accept tasks not meant for us, our family, work and joy suffer, not to mention we rob others from exercising their gifts or relying on Jesus.

Recognizing manipulation is essential to standing against it. The controllers in our lives may be blind to their tactics, but we don't have to be. The closer we walk with Jesus the better we recognize His voice and tune out competing influences. Discernment grows through practice (Hebrews 5:14).

Consider the following if you suspect you are being manipulated:

- **How do I feel after I leave this person or group?**

Feeling selfish, angry and guilty may indicate someone is trying to control you. I remember when a woman pulled aside a friend of mine, complaining that she had no friends. My friend prayed for the woman but left feeling guilty. On the way home, she recognized the woman's manipulative tactics. Her guilty feelings evaporated with understanding.

- **What's my motivation to comply?**

Am I choosing what I believe is the best — or avoiding disappointing or angering someone? In other words, am I avoiding pain or pursuing faith and love?

We want to be kind and generous, but when someone takes more than we want to give we feel resentful. God loves a cheerful giver. If I'm feeling resentful, I may need a clearer understanding of where my responsibilities end and theirs begin.

Giving into controlling people won't protect us from emotional pain. We despise our spineless compliance and resent them and any reminder of them. This isn't love. People who habitually let others control them tend toward self-destructive habits. They mindlessly eat, shop, drink or gamble to numb the pain of feeling used.

- **Have I counted the cost of complying?**

I counseled a girl who couldn't shake her regret over giving her virginity to a young man she pitied. She gave in because he said nobody liked him, and she obviously didn't either since she wouldn't sleep with him.

- **Do I automatically avoid conflict?**

When some religious people tried to control a group of believers in the Early Church, Paul wrote,

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be
burdened again by a yoke of slavery.
(Galatians 5:1)

Standing firm in our God-given freedom may upset those who want control. But that isn't bad. Paul said,

No doubt there have to be differences among
you to show which of you have God's approval.
(1 Corinthians 11:19)

Conflict exposes hearts. If it arises because we won't cave to pressure, take heart; we're in good company.

Will I Trust My Big God?

When my faith feels small against another's pressure to control, I remember people with religious-sounding arguments tried to manipulate Jesus and the apostles too. Because they understood God's will for their lives, they escaped those nets. By serving our big God, we can too. 🕊️

Adapted from *Little Faith, Big God*.





THE GOOD SHEPHERD

PAM FARREL | LOVE-WISE.COM

God nourishes and nurtures us through His Word. If we open the Bible daily, our Good Shepherd will hand feed us verses personalized to our daily circumstances.

I AM A TRUE BO PEEP. I GREW UP ON A SUFFOLK SHEEP FARM IN IDAHO.

I was a fourth-generation shepherd. If there is something I am familiar with, it is sheep! So, when I wrote on Psalm 23 for my book *Discovering Hope in the Psalms*, it was a very personal, very encouraging and very comforting review of the first verses I memorized — and lived — as a child. And for all of us, in today's world of uncertainties and unfathomable tribulations, our heart longs to be protected and provided for by a Good Shepherd.

Our Shepherd is Near

The phrase, “the Lord is my shepherd” became more precious when I became a shepherdess. It can be a very close, affectionate relationship.

My first lamb I named “Bunny” because when she wasn’t in my arms, she would delight herself jumping from rock to rock in our pasture. We were inseparable, in part because she was a “bummer lamb” which meant she had been rejected by her mother at birth and she had to be held and bottle fed.

I had an “everywhere-Pammy-went-her-lamb-was-sure-to-go” kind of relationship.

-continued on p. 21-

How Well Do You **KNOW** God?

To take the full
quiz, click [HERE](#).

Put this gospel presentation on your own
webpage. Details on site.



GodTest.com

Get The Bestseller now available on audio book!



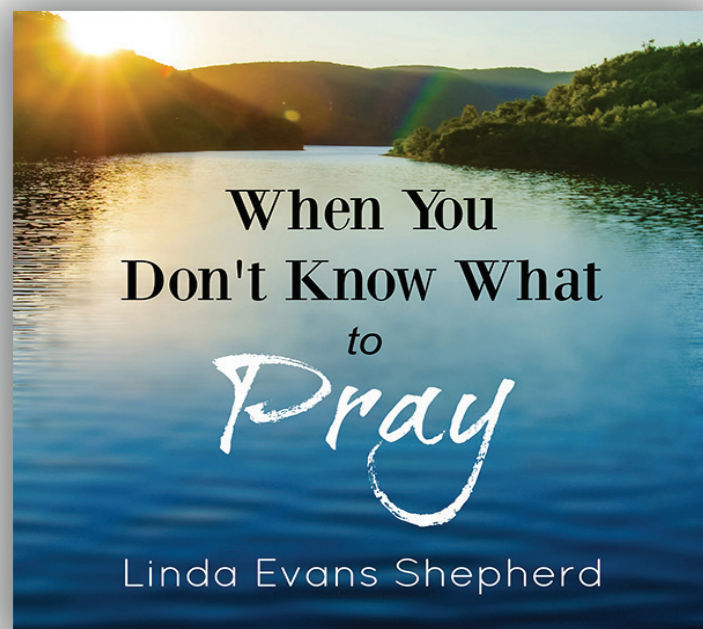
"Linda teaches us the keys to prayer,
demonstrating through practical prayer
examples how to pray, what to pray, and
when to pray. You will be encouraged."
—Thelma Wells, author & president
A Woman of God Ministries



-follow linda on-



GOTTOPRAY.COM



-continued from p. 19-

God nourishes and nurtures us through His Word. If we open the Bible daily, our Good Shepherd will hand feed us verses personalized to our daily circumstances. In times of stress, I create a notebook to record and personalize verses that lift my heart and soul.

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you"
(James 4:8 ESV).

Our Shepherd Defends

I carry a picture in my mind of my grandfather, father and brother and how they demonstrated what a truly valiant shepherd is like. Ravenous coyotes, wolves and wild dogs roamed the vast expanse of high desert in the area our family farm was located. These savage dogs would attack and kill whole flocks of sheep in a single night.

To help us keep our sheep safe, we placed collars with bells on them. If we heard an occasional gentle chime, we knew our sheep were simply grazing calmly but if we heard a cacophony of loud jingling, we knew the wild dogs were nearby threatening an attack.

To protect the sheep, the men in my family would post themselves in the pasture with the sheep. They would wrap themselves in a down sleeping bag with their "rod and staff" within arm's reach. It was a cold, uncomfortable, thankless job, but it saved the lives of all our sheep and their lambs.

To this day, when I picture my God as my Good Shepherd, I see him as my strong, powerful, attentive protector. When worry grows in monstrous size in your mind, picture the God who has ALL power as your vigilant protector and defender. Turn on praise music and sing out the truths of our mighty God.

"The LORD your God is with you, a mighty one who will save" (Zephaniah 3:17 ESV).

Our Shepherd Restores

When I read, "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul," that is exactly the experience of my upbringing (Psalm 23:2-3).

I would often walk barefoot through the deep, lush, green grass of the pasture as the sheep serenely

grazed. I would take a blanket and a Bible and lie down and spend quiet hours communing with God. I might walk over to the creek and sit on the simple wooden plank that created a bridge and sit and rest quietly dipping my toes into the cool stream.

This was my place of solace and restoration, far away from the chaos my alcoholic, raging, violent earthly father might be creating in our small farmhouse. To this day, resting in the backyard or the sound of gently tinkling chimes reminds me of the restorative rest the Good Shepherd can create during chaos.

Even now, if I look at a majestic mountain or stand with my feet in ocean waves, I am reminded God is the Sovereign Creator, He is still in control, and great is His faithfulness. Take your Bible — or this magazine— OUTSIDE. Our soul calms in the beauty of creation.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1).


Our Shepherd Rewards

As I have followed my Good Shepherd, I have seen how "goodness and mercy" have surely followed me "all the days of my life." When you dig into the synonyms of the original word meanings, one could phrase this as "certainly what is good, pleasant, agreeable, beneficial, desirable, beautiful and best as well as God's faithful, loyal, loving-kindness will pursue you."

Wow! Our Good Shepherd chases us down to give his faithful love and all things beautiful and beneficial. That is why we can walk THROUGH the darkest valley and not tremble because the Good Shepherd will console and carry us even through nightmarish days.

Which name of the Good Shepherd do you need to hang your heart on to hold on to hope? Remember, Isaiah 9:6 clearly speaks the character of Christ even BEFORE His birth. He was called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Select a name or character trait of God, look up verses that reflect this and post them on sticky notes around your home, on your desk or on your mirror. Our Good Shepherd is WITH us, Immanuel.



What's
awesome
about our
faith is that
He didn't pick
us because
we were
strong or
had our stuff
together.

BY JENN TAYLOR | MUSIC CONTRIBUTOR

Jen Ledger RESTING IN HIS ARMS

SINGER/SONGWRITER JEN LEDGER KEEPS A BUSY MUSIC SCHEDULE MOST DAYS as the drummer of Skillet and the lead singer of Ledger. She will tell you that the Ledger catalog mirrors the bold music of Skillet. Her latest release, however, is definitely a more slowed down, intimate ballad. "My Arms" seems to have been released at the most perfect time. During these uncertain times, it encourages us to be real and run to the arms of our Jesus.

"This is a special song. It's not that I'm overcoming and I'm choosing to be bold and be brave," Jen said. "It's like an invitation into that quiet place with the Lord. It's actually okay that you're not enough. It's okay that you have no idea how you are going to face what you are going through right now. It's okay if this burden feels way too heavy. The truth is that God says, 'I'm the one who makes the burden light. I'm the one who displays my strength through your weakness. I'm the one who like gives you the ability to walk on water.'"

"We're not actually supposed to handle some of the things that God gives us. They are often opportunities for Him to display himself in our lives in a way that's really real, really trustworthy and really memorable. So, 'My Arms' is a song that can reach people in their most heavy moments.

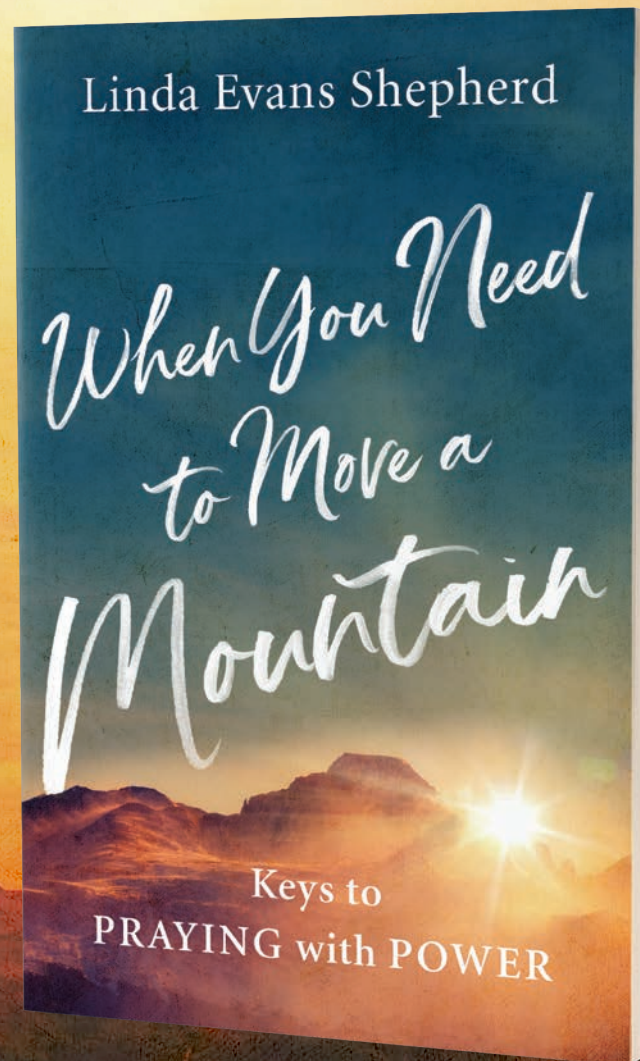
Perhaps when they feel quite confused and they don't know where to turn. Maybe they feel like they're at a dead end, but God would say, 'I'm still here with you. It's okay that you don't know where to turn. It's okay that you don't know how to get through this. I'm going to help you. I'm going to carry you through this.' So, I really want the music to reflect that. Those moments where I feel broken. I feel confused. I feel like I don't know how to do this. Kind of like the song almost represents those moments when you're breaking or you're falling apart. That's where God would whisper, 'Here I am. You're never on your own. Yeah, maybe this is too much for you, but it's not too much for Me.'"

"My Arms" is her latest single, and she's currently writing and working on a full-length album that she hopes to release in early 2021. Before performances and tours were halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Jen was out full-time with Skillet on The Victorious Tour. Ledger opened the show and she finished the show drumming with Skillet. "It's exciting to see where I'm running hard, running fast, and I'm just hoping and praying that the Lord will make that path clear. We're writing like mad. Hoping to have the full-length project out in January. I imagine 'My Arms' would be on it."

-continued on p. 25-

A Spectacular Guide to Intercessory Prayer

LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD, an award-winning author, successful speaker, and media personality, guides you on how to bring your burdens to God—and expect answers.



AVAILABLE NOW


Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
www.RevellBooks.com



-continued from p. 23-

Jen continues to feel humbled that God allows her to do music. She enjoys meeting the fans who have followed Skillet for 10 years now. “Sometimes Skillet is a little too heavy for Christian radio. And a little too Christian for rock radio. In many ways, it’s like we don’t necessarily belong, but then we see the fans that keep coming out. They don’t belong either. They’ve found community together in the Skilletland. It’s an honor to be out on tour to see these fans and hear their stories. We are humbled to have such a long career.”

Hoping to have similar success, Jen modeled Ledger after Skillet’s template. “I love great music and reaching people that feel lost, that feel alone. If I can be a part of music that’s reaching people like that, I will do it any way that I can,” she said. “So, I am just going to keep writing music for Ledger. Keep playing music for Skillet. Be a part of something that God is using to help those people that just feel alone.”

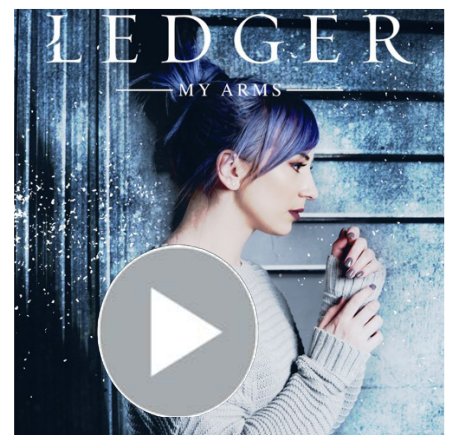
Jen thinks it’s important to be real and honest about our struggles. “What’s awesome about our faith is that He didn’t pick us because we were strong or because we had our stuff together. We could never earn our salvation. We could never earn His love. He makes us a new creation. He loves us though we are broken. He loves us even though He knows we are not strong. He loves us in the righteousness of Christ. He’s done the complete work. So, why do we feel the need to always have our stuff together basically? Why would I not be real with the One who already knows the depths of my heart?”

Jen has been open about sharing her struggles with anxiety and fear. She says this is exactly what “My Arms” is about. It doesn’t mean that she struggles all the time, but she recalls dealing with anxiety as she auditioned for Skillet and started Ledger. “But the beautiful thing is instead of looking at all my limitations and weaknesses, I put my eyes on Him. He sees all your weaknesses and limitations, but with Him they are completely changed,” Jen said.

“If people really knew me, behind the scenes, the stuff I was struggling with a few years ago, they might have said, ‘She looks so weak. She’s struggling with anxiety.’ I look back and I see clearly that the hand of God was in my life. Look how He takes someone like me and does impossible things. That’s what ‘My Arms’ is all about. It’s God saying, ‘It’s okay to be completely broken before Me. Come and lay your burdens before Me. I am the One who makes them light. I am the One who has the strength you don’t have right now.’”

The verse that has helped Jen the most came to her during her nervous audition for Skillet. “I was praying and right before the audition I really felt that God spoke to me from Isaiah 41:10 — “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will hold you with my righteous right hand.” I felt like God spoke to me so clearly that He was going to be my help. I even got that verse tattooed on my wrist, and it’s been the thing I cling to 12 years later.”

Jen hopes everyone who listens to “My Arms” feels the relief to be completely themselves in front of God. “He sees you, and there’s nothing that you could say to Him that would shock Him. There’s nothing that you could say to Him that would make Him turn away. Even in a time of faithlessness, He is still faithful,” she said. “He is the source of all strength. The source of all life. The hope we need when we feel completely hopeless. Please be encouraged and see this as an invitation from God to come to Him and know Him in a new way.”





FROM FEAR TO FREEDOM

PENELOPE CARLEVATO, RN | PENELOPECARLEVATO.COM

WATCHING THE NEWS FLASHES OF MEDICAL PERSONNEL (AND MY NURSE FRIENDS) DRESSED IN BUBBLE HELMETS AND PROTECTIVE GEAR, I remember many times in my nursing career when I had to gown, glove and mask before entering a patient's room. A little chill ran down my back as I thought, *Am I protected enough? Am I safe? Even though I have carefully followed all the protocols to prevent the transmission of disease, am I still at risk?*

As we travel this time of uncharted waters, I think back to those days when I worked in a large inner-city hospital in Los Angeles. They were troubled times. They expected us to show up and work our shifts. Frequently I wanted to stay home and play it safe.

May we find God to be our strength for the days to come. Only our Father in heaven can relieve us of our fears.

I spent most of my nursing career in Southern California, where earthquakes, mudslides, riots and 911 were part of the early '90s. Many days driving to work took me past buildings on fire or traffic lights swaying back and forth over intersections during an earthquake or aftershock. Freeways and significant roadways were blocked, and I had to find alternate routes to my home. The outrage and protests of the trials of O.J. Simpson and Rodney King turned to violence and looting. Twice in a very short span, I encountered long drives home because of these riots.

Yes, I had many times of fear of the unknown, but I also knew I had a Heavenly Father who was with me and would guide me home safely. Looking back on those scary times gives me peace and security for today. God will see us through this coronavirus crisis. Knowing His provision for times in the past is comforting and gives us hope for tomorrow.

Each of those situations was totally out of my control. Just as today, nothing is the same as it was several weeks ago. Our grocery store shelves are bare, the economy tanked, the virus is gaining in numbers of cases and death and it's getting closer to home. Yet, there is one constant hope.

"The Sovereign LORD is my strength;" Habakuk 3:19

When will this end? In our finite minds, we want to have control over our timetables and predict if our summer plans are going to work out or not. But God is calling us to patience. With this time of slow-moving uncertainty, I pray we replace the fear of the unknown with praise. May we find God to be our strength for the days to come. Only our Father in heaven can relieve us of our fears. His perfect love will envelop our fear.

First John 4:18 — "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear."

I believe all of us are praying for a spiritual awakening in our country. This time of pandemic will be over one day. Until then, reach out to others with love and grace. Let's not waste this crisis.

"Comfort and prosperity have never enriched the world as much as adversity has." —Billy Graham

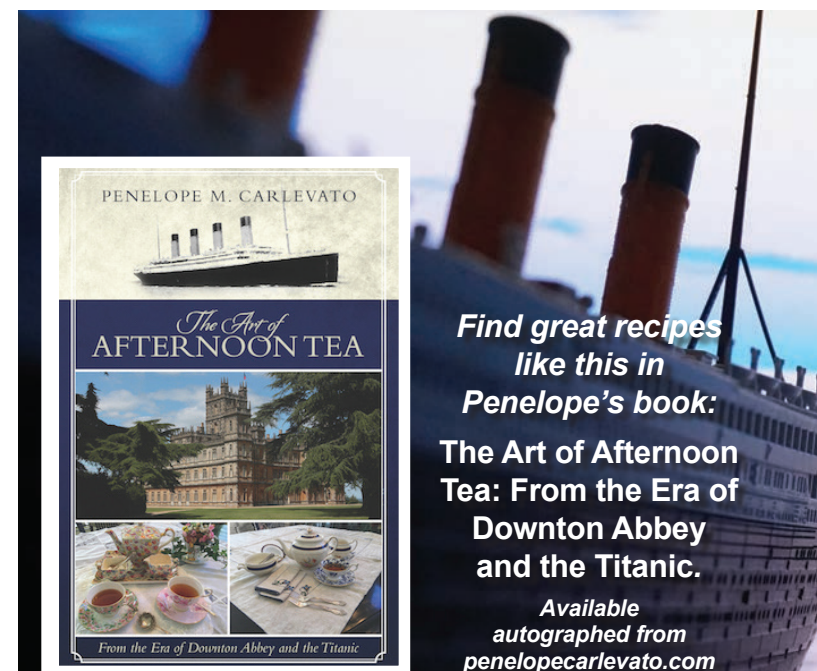
My friend Robin dropped off a gift of cookies on our front porch this week. It was such a treat, and I felt her love and care. We kept our social distance and waved at each other from the porch. The cookies were so enjoyable. Maybe this could be a family project.

Banana Oatmeal Cookies

- 1 ½ cup sifted flour
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- ¾ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¾ cup shortening or butter
- 1 egg
- 1 cup mashed banana
- 1 ¾ cup quick oats
- ½ cup chopped nuts

Sift flour, sugar, soda, salt, nutmeg and cinnamon into a mixing bowl. Cut in the shortening, then add eggs, bananas, oats and nuts. Beat thoroughly until blended well. Drop by teaspoon 1½ inches apart onto an ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 400 F for 15 minutes. Remove from the pan immediately and cool on wire rack. Enjoy!

Thank you, Robin. 🍪





SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING

EDIE MELSON | EDIEMELSON.COM



WE WERE CREATED FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS. I don't know of anyone who could have predicted we'd be in this place and time — except of course, God. The COVID-19 pandemic did not catch Him off guard, and I believe He hand-picked each of us for this time and place.

Fear is rampant in the world right now — and a lot of people searching for Hope. And you, ministry leader, are in place to let God speak powerfully through you. The tools I'm sharing should help you focus the message God has put on your heart and help you be effective in your delivery.

Basic Terminology for Sharing Online

- **Hashtag:** A hashtag is a # followed by a series of letters and/or numbers. It ends with a space. A common Christian hashtag is #Faith. When you write a tweet with #Faith in it, then anyone searching for #Faith will see your tweet. Same thing with #Hope, or #GodsLove, or . . . well you get the idea.

Hashtags cannot be registered or reserved. But it is important to research a hashtag before using it. You can search for it on Twitter (or whichever network you're on) and see what kinds of tweets are being shared with that hashtag.

- **Meme:** A meme is an image with the words embedded in it. Two good places to find free/copyright free images is www.pixabay.com and www.unsplash.com. NEVER search for images to use through Google images. Those are copyright protected and illegal to use without written permission.

Where do I Share?

Social media is the obvious answer, but let's be more specific.

Facebook is a good place to start because so many of your audience are already there. You can use your personal profile, your ministry or professional page, or a group as you post about hope.

Twitter is another great place to share. Many overlook this platform because the tweets are short. But the use of hashtags enables those short snippets of information to be seen by many more.

Instagram is another good place to share hope-filled updates and use hashtags. Many of the updates on this network are memes or short devotions.

Pinterest is an unexpected place to share. Consider beginning a Hope board or something that encourages others.

Beyond these basics, also consider **LinkedIn** and **YouTube**.

Tips for Creating Videos

Many people are sharing Facebook Live videos to encourage others. Build real-time connections through social media. Here are some tips to make your videos the very best.

1. Pay attention to your lighting. It's frustrating when the person speaking is in shadow or lit by an ugly yellow-tinged light. Natural light is excellent if it's in front of the speaker. There are also many low-priced LED light options to be purchased online.

2. Don't neglect your sound. Do a sound check by running some test videos. Make sure your microphone works well.

3. Stay focused on the camera. When we're speaking to a group, we normally let our eyes wander around the venue. We try to make eye contact with people in different parts of the room. We cannot do that with a camera. We need to remain naturally focused on the camera. Every person we're speaking to is at the other end of that focus point.

4. Notice your background. Keep it uncluttered and make certain there aren't any odd things behind you. I was watching a video once where it looked like a pair of wall sconces were antlers on the head of the person speaking. Background items can be very distracting.

5. Use a script. I always use a script when I'm delivering a talk online. It keeps me focused and helps me pay attention to the last point:

6. Keep it Short. Three minutes is a good short video, but try to keep what you're going to say to no longer than 30 minutes.

God is issuing the call to His church to bring hope to a scared world. Take a step of faith and venture online to tell the world the life-saving Truth. 🕊

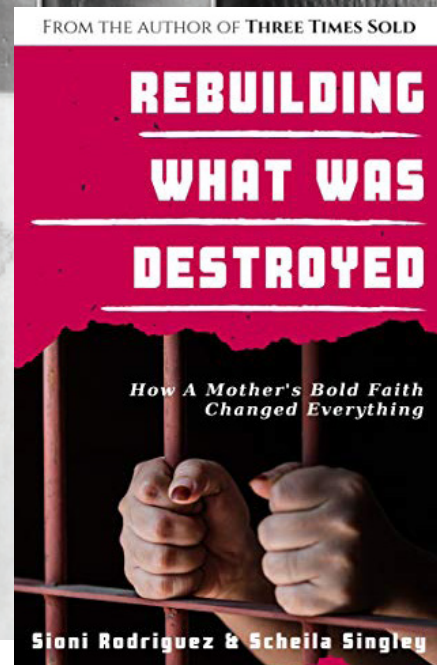
BOOKSTOREAD



**LITTLE FAITH
BIG GOD**
BY DEBBIE W. WILSON



**GOD'S BEST
DURING YOUR WORST**
BY ROBIN LUFTIG



**REBUILDING WHAT
WAS DESTROYED**
BY SIONI RODRIGUEZ & SCHEILA SINGLEY

I thought I'd just scan through the book upon its arrival, but instead, found myself deeply involved reading the introduction and on to chapter 1. The reader is taken on a journey with Debbie Wilson's very relatable thoughts and questions. To think that Jesus had people just like you and me carry out his works! It is so encouraging. Everyone of us has fears, anxieties, joys, and sorrows and we also have great hope through Jesus. The thought-provoking questions will have the reader relate to Jesus and those people who carried out his message and realize that we can also accomplish anything through him! It is a book to be savored.

—Marilyn L. Butler

God gives us stories to tell. Some have to pay a greater price than others. Robin paid a huge price when a sudden seizure led to the discovery of a brain tumor. She was given ten days to set her affairs right.

The words written in this book carry more weight since conceived in trial. I've paid more attention to the last words of biblical characters, like Moses, Israel, and David. That said, this book pressed deeper into my soul. The message brought hope and comfort. The stories of others in the end of the book also brought encouragement. I recommend this read.

—Randy Tramp

In *Rebuilding What Was Destroyed*, mother-daughter team Sioni Rodriguez and Scheila Singley provide insight into what it's like to be incarcerated, and what it takes to find hope beyond prison walls. This book chronicles Scheila's experience in prison and the chain of events that she encountered as she was brought to true freedom.

Stories of women that Sioni reaches through her prison ministry are braided with Scheila's story. *Rebuilding What Was Destroyed* is for women who are incarcerated and are in need of hope. It's for their families to show how valuable their support is. This book is for anyone who needs to be reminded that it's never too late for a second chance!



THE BIG QUESTION

Q: Does the Bible call the Ten Commandments the "law of liberty"? How could the Law liberate someone?




I have interviewed many people who say Scripture turned their lives around. One of them was apologist Josh McDowell. After he put his trust in the Lord, he said studying the Bible helped him overcome sexual abuse he suffered at the hands of his father. I have also seen the Word change my heart, so I could forgive serious hurts. Awesome!

The second word James used to define the law is "liberty," which means "the state of being free." We think of a law as keeping us from doing what we want, the opposite of freedom. However, look at what Jesus said:

And you will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.
(John 8:32 ESV)

Let me give you an example. Imagine a woman who thinks she's worthless. However, we can tell her the Bible offers her a different message, one that's true. I like that picture I've seen on t-shirts where Jesus has thrown open his arms in love, and you can see the cross in the background. He suffered all that agony for that lady who feels useless. Wow! Instead of holding us back, Jesus grants us life.

Remember what He said to Mary outside the tomb of Lazarus. "I am the resurrection and the life." Before you place your faith in Him, sin controls you, but He sets you free so you can live the way He designed you. Mind boggling!

Now let's go back to the passage in James where we started. The author commends the person who looks — intently peers — into the perfect Law that sets you free. If that individual obeys, James tells us God blesses that person. Praise God! 

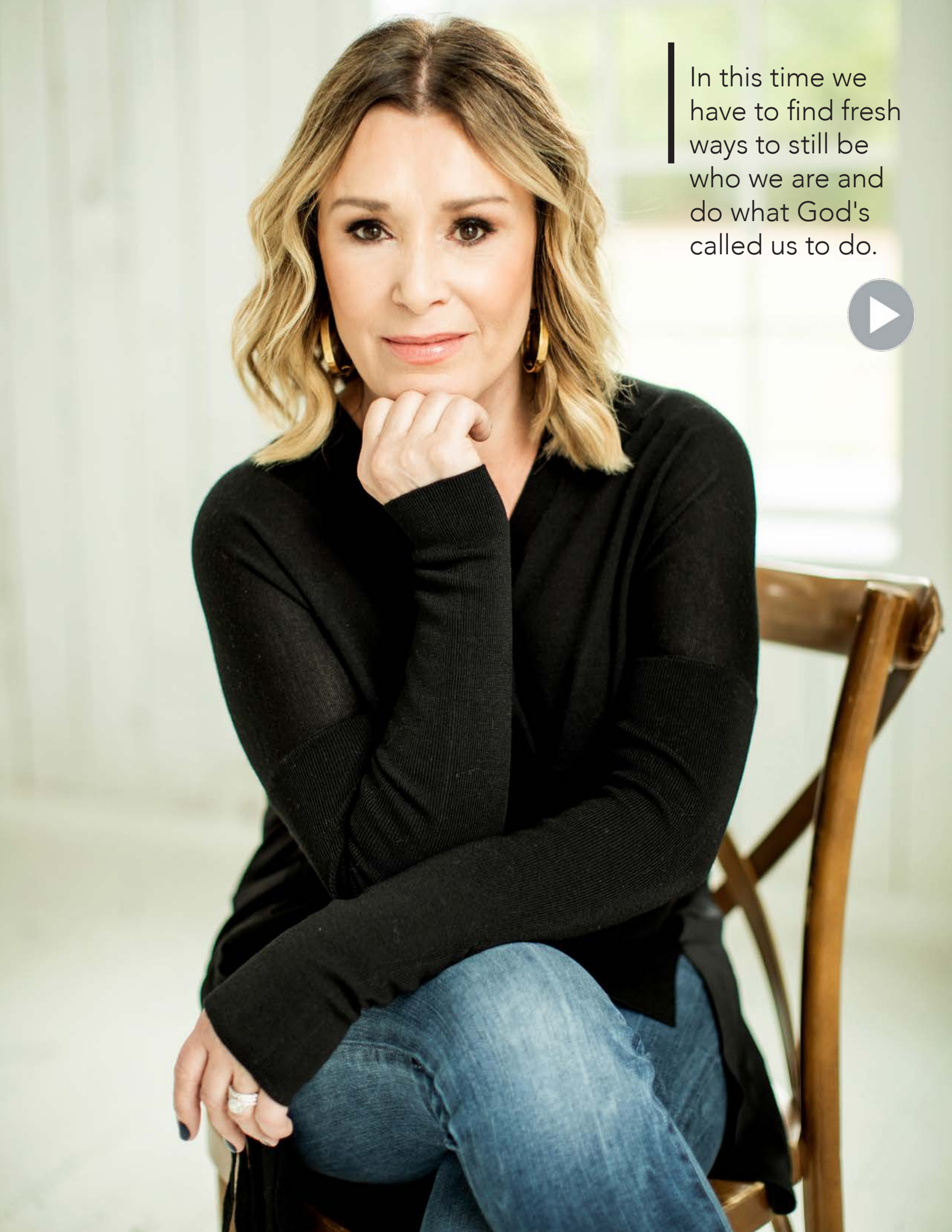
with Cynthia L. Simmons
WWW.CLSIMMONS.COM

YOU ARE CORRECT ABOUT THE PHRASE. JAMES 1:25 (ESV) SAYS:

But the one who looks into the perfect law,
the law of liberty, and perseveres,
being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts,
he will be blessed in his doing.

This verse makes us take a closer look at the Law, which from the context includes the whole Bible.

Notice James offers two words to describe the Law. The first is "perfect," which means "lacking nothing," and we would agree God's Word doesn't leave anything out. If you read Psalm 19, the Psalmist also refers to the Law as perfect and adds that the Law restores the soul. We've all heard of restoring old paintings or historic buildings, but imagine the Bible repairing damage done to your inner person. Amazing!



In this time we have to find fresh ways to still be who we are and do what God's called us to do.



Sheila Walsh

A BRAVE NEW DAY

SHEILA WALSH IS AN AMAZING INDIVIDUAL WHO IS ALL ABOUT SHARING THE WORD OF GOD *through worship with everyone around her. She does so through her many different callings as an author, speaker, television host and musician. In this interview, Sheila opens up to LH editor, Amber Weigand-Buckley, about the power of prayer, the meaning of bravery and how she was able to plant her feet on the ground to overcome an overwhelming darkness.*

Q: I was thinking about the whole idea of *Braveheart Worship* being such a subpoena right now in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic. We can “do church” online, but many of us are used to corporate worship. Tell me about how you worship in this time.

Sheila: Well, on my iPhone I have a worship playlist of just some of the songs that the Lord has used to just speak to my life. I'll be honest with you, Amber. Some days I don't want to listen.

Yesterday, for whatever reason, was just a really hard day. All my engagements had been canceled for the next two or three months, and there are some things that felt overwhelming, but I've learned.

I gave my life to Christ when I was 11 and I'm now 63. That's 52 years of the goodness and faithfulness of God. The psalmist David would speak to his own soul: “Come on, bless the Lord, O my soul.” It's almost like he was instructing himself.

So, I went out and I turned on my playlist. It took me until song number three before I could feel the weight lifting. Jesus told us in John 16 that in this world, we

will have trials and we will have troubles. Each one of us will walk through something. This pandemic is unprecedented, but Jesus told us to take heart. No matter what's happening, no matter what we hear each morning on the news, God is still on the throne. God is still sovereign. This did not surprise Him, and He has a plan in the middle of everything.

Q: You said that a lot has been canceled on you. What things have been revived for you in this time of cancellation?

Sheila: That's a great question, actually. No one's asked me that. It's finding fresh ways to still be who we are and do what God's called us to do.

On a Sunday night in our kitchen, my husband, Barry, and I started this thing we call “kitchen worship.” We put it on my Facebook page, Sheila Walsh Connect, just for 30 minutes. Last Sunday we played a couple of songs, read some Scripture and then took Communion together.

We had like 20 thousand people in America, the UK, Italy, South Africa and Australia join us. Reading all the comments from families saying, “We all took Communion together with you” made me realize that even though we are isolated, we're not isolated. The Holy Spirit is with us.

There are still ways we can connect. I encourage your listeners and readers, Amber, to find ways to connect even if it's just picking up a phone and checking on someone. I love the fact that we have FaceTime and Facebook and Zoom where you can actually look in the eyes of someone.

-continued on p. 35-

INTERNATIONAL SPEAKER & BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF OVER 30 books -Linda Evans Shepherd-

*I'd love the opportunity
to share the life-changing
power of prayer with you!"*
-Linda



"Thank you for speaking at our conference,
Linda. My heart is forever changed."
—Conferee, Warner Robins, GA

"Linda's book was the absolute best
book I have read about prayer!"
—Reader, Gayle Radavich,

EMAIL BOOKING INQUIRIES TO:
LINDABRINGSJAY@GMAIL.COM

gottoprayer.com

-follow linda on-



-continued from p. 33-

Q: What has God been reminding you of what "brave" means in this time?

Sheila: I think that "brave" is an interesting word. We associate it with all sorts of things. I remember when my son was a little boy and he fell off the swing and scraped his knee. He said, "I'm not going to cry. I'm going to be brave." I think that's the kind of thing we have to somehow muster up in ourselves.

I think that particularly in the Easter season, we see what brave really looks like. To me, it's telling the truth and then longing for the will of God.

Look at how Christ modeled brave. He didn't pretend this was going to be easy. He poured out His heart. "Father, if there is any way, let this cup of suffering pass from me." He was able to tell the truth and empty out the agony, and that makes space for grace.

That's what brave looks like in these days: telling the truth to our Father, but then, having poured out all of the pain and the questions and the anguish, being able to say, "Not my will, but Your will be done."

Q: We're carrying a lot of weight right now, but nothing compared to the heaviness of what Christ carried. He sweat blood. How do you feel like you're identifying with Christ as we approach the Easter season?

Sheila: Luke, because he was a physician, gave us that detail. Christ was in such agony that He sweat drops of blood. It's called hematidrosis. Later, on the cross, He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" At that moment, for the only time in eternity, Christ was separated from His Father as the sin of the world was laid upon Him.

As we were at my church rehearsing for our Good Friday service, I found myself weeping. I had been asked to speak just for five or six minutes on the Cross and what it means. I tried to imagine what it would be like to be there on that day. Standing there, having been touched, maybe even healed, by Christ. It would have looked as if all hope were gone.

Nothing in the world would make sense at that point, but they didn't understand that they were in the middle of a miracle. They wouldn't understand until Easter morning when Christ rose. And I think that's true for us, Amber. We hold on, knowing there are things in the moment that don't make sense, but believing we're in the middle of a miracle. Believing because of the power of the risen Christ, knowing that God is on the throne.

Q: I remember, like you, contemplating suicide and being in the middle of ministry and trusting God with all my heart and knowing inside I was breaking. There are many, even some Christians, who contemplate suicide. What would you speak to those people?

Sheila: I think back to 1992 when I spent a month in a psychiatric hospital. I even prayed that first night in the hospital, "God, if You have one ounce of mercy left for me, please take me home because I can't do this." I was just overwhelmed, feeling like I didn't have the energy to fight through all that was ahead.

I hadn't gone straight to the hospital that night. I had driven to the beach in Virginia Beach where I was living. I parked my car and took my shoes off. The beach was empty, and I walked into the water until it was up to my chest. I didn't intend to come back out.

Only one thing stopped me. My father had committed suicide by drowning when I was five. I thought, *I can't do that to my mom again. I can't have her get one more phone call that somebody else she loved disappeared under the waves.*

That month in the psychiatric hospital was a time of reshaping my whole life. I had spent so much of my life trying to be good enough to win or keep the love of God. In that hospital, with nothing good left to say about myself, I discovered the love of God based on nothing I brought to the table.

Many nights, I would drag myself out of bed, plant my feet on the floor and open my Bible to Psalm 27. I would read the last verse: "I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." I didn't feel it, but it was almost like I was declaring it over my life. Some of you may struggle with that, but the spotless, sinless lamb of God was willing to give His life. That's the value He places on every single one of us. 🙏



WHEN GOD CALLS THE HEART BACK TO HIM

MICHELLE S. COX | WHENGODCALLSTHEHEART.COM

WHENEVER I VISIT HOPE VALLEY (the set of Hallmark's "When Calls the Heart" television show), I'm always struck by how different things were back in 1915 and in the years following (which is when the show is set).

The antique cook-stove in Elizabeth's house, the stagecoach pulling into town, the lack of telephones and cars in the early seasons, and the absence of so many other modern conveniences are stark reminders of how things have changed through the years.

But even without all the must-have things we take for granted now, there were important life-lessons from back then, things that many of us have forgotten or ignored as we've rushed through our busy days.

The sense of community was one of Hope Valley's riches. Whenever tough times arrived, the townspeople came together. They supported each other, gave hands-on help, shared what they had and gave of their time for their friends and neighbors. Best of all, whenever sickness or other hardships came, they prayed for each other.

I've been thinking about that these past few weeks as much of our nation has been under stay-at-home orders due to the coronavirus. We've had to keep away from our co-workers and those we love. Even hugs and services at our churches have been taken from our lives. Businesses, schools and restaurants are shut down. Streets and parking lots are barren landscapes of asphalt.

We're back to the basics. We're all spending much more time together under our roofs. Families are gathering around the table to eat home-cooked meals, to play games and to put puzzles together. We're walking together, talking and laughing. When's the last time our families have spent that much time together?


During these past weeks we've dealt with moments of fear. We've wondered what the future holds and worried about how we're going to survive financially. We've wiped tears away upon learning about family and friends who are waging literal life and death battles against this virus. All this has drawn us more and more to the only One who can help us during this time.

God knows how to get our attention, and as the pace of our days has changed, He's given us time to spend with Him. To hear His heart and His soft whispers to our soul. To remember sweet promises we learned as children — verses of Scripture that bring comfort and hope during these troubled days.

He's used these weeks to teach us about what's really important. Church — and how precious it is for us to go to services each Sunday. Something we've often taken for granted, but never will again. Our health — and the reminder that each breath we take is a gift from God. Our families — and the blessing of moments together, of love and the hugs that we never realized were such priceless treasures ... until we couldn't give or receive them.

And God's given us the opportunity to turn back to Him. To not just use Him for a shopping list of what we want, but to dwell in His presence. To draw close to Him. To feel His heartbeat. And to remember that there are people all around us who also need to meet our Jesus or to turn back to the God who loves them — and we're the ones who can share that message with them.

Because wouldn't it be amazing when future generations reminisce about this pandemic, that what they remember most was that our faith became contagious and spread throughout the world?

Michelle Cox is the co-author of the When God Calls the Heart devotional book series. To learn more, visit www.whenGodcallstheheart.com. 



COULD THIS BE YOUR TIME OF **PREPARATION?**

DR. SAUNDRA DALTON-SMITH | ICHOOSEMYBESTLIFE.COM

I PRAY YOU AND YOUR FAMILY ARE STAYING SAFE during these unprecedented times by practicing physical distancing from others, extreme hygiene measures and doing the needed self-care to keep your immune system healthy.

This past week has been one of the longest periods of "down-time" I've had in months. After having six speaking events postponed in March/April, I find myself looking for ways to best use this time. The two types of R.E.S.T I have needed most are social rest and spiritual rest.

SOCIAL REST

I have come to dislike the term social distancing. During times of chaos, we need those people who are calming and life-giving in our lives. Social rest isn't about getting away from people, rather it's about being restored and renewed by the energy and presence of positive individuals. You may not be able to physically meet up for a coffee date, but you can do a virtual date with a friend. Find creative ways to stay connected with others during this challenging time.

How about a virtual dinner party, play date, or small group gatherings? Invite the introverts in your life who would never feel comfortable going to a similar gathering in person. This is a great opportunity for them to meet new people while in the comfort of their own homes.

As a board-certified internal medicine physician, I do ask that you honor the need for physical distancing to get control of this pandemic. As your rest guide, I also ask that you honor your need to stay socially connected in a healthy and restorative way.

Invite a few friends for a virtual dinner party. Schedule a weekly video meeting with your co-workers. FaceTime with elderly parents. There is power in presence so prioritize virtual interaction which allows you to experience someone's facial expression and body language over texting and email.

SPIRITUAL REST

The COVID-19 outbreak peaked in the US during the Jewish time of Purim, a season specifically related to the Book of Esther. While revisiting this portion of Scripture I was deeply moved by the following passage.

For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this.
(Esther 4:14 ESV)

Many people are afraid and anxious right now. People are going to bed only to toss and turn due to the fear gripping their hearts. There is an incredible opportunity for believers to share their testimonies and stories of redemption, courage, valor and perseverance. We can't keep quiet about the good news.

I believe there are many who, like Esther, Isaac and Joseph will find that this time of difficulty is a time God will use to prepare them for the greater calling on their life.

Maybe you feel like you don't deserve it. Perhaps you even feel unworthy or disqualified. If that's you, I get it. I used to feel the same way. But now I'm here to tell you those feelings have been lying to you.

You have found favor with the King.

Consider this set-apart time as your part of the beautification process Holy Spirit is using to make you ready for what's to come. Esther underwent a similar process prior to her great reveal.

Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women—when the young woman went in to the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. She would not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.
(Esther 2:12-14 ESV)

The oil of myrrh was commonly used during those times for antiseptic purposes. During those first six months of her preparation, Esther's process was focused on purification, cleansing, and healing any places that need mending. Are their places in your life that need healing? What heart wounds need to be cleansed of shame, guilt and disappointment. Spend some time allowing the oil of God's presence to purify and bring wholeness.

Once Esther completed the purification process, they spent the next 6 months optimizing her beauty. The purification process preceded the beautification process. Once the inside is healed the outside begins to reflect more of the beauty of God.

I pray you use this time as a gift. Allow it to prepare your heart and your mind for the new thing God wants to do in your life. 📌



Sign Up at **ARISEDAILY.COM** to get fresh-brewed inspiration delivered direct to your inbox. **ARISE DAILY DIRECT** e-devos are designed to bring you the hope and encouragement of biblical truth written within the context of real life.

Arise each morning to words that will refresh your soul as you see God reveal pictures of His love for you.

follow us



arisedaily.com

PRAYERCIRCLE



TIME TO SEND UP A PANIC PRAYER?

LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD | LINDASHEPHERD.COM

CONSIDERING THAT THE WORLD IS IN THE PANIC OF A PANDEMIC, I want to share a prayer initially intended for my book, *Praying Through Your Every Emotion*, soon to released from Baker Revell. This book will be a dictionary of emotions, complete with a mini-Bible study and a paraphrased prayer to correspond with each of the 64 emotions I cover.

Here's one I can share with you now, a prayer about the emotion "PANIC."

We'll start by reading my Bible study:

For God will never give you the spirit of fear, but the Holy Spirit who gives you mighty power, love, and self-control. (2 Timothy 1:7 TPT)

I will never leave you alone, never! And I will not loosen my grip on your life! (Hebrews 13:5 TPT)

When you pass through the deep, stormy sea, you can count on me to be there with you.

When you pass through raging rivers, You will not drown.

When you walk through persecution like fiery flames, you will not be burned; the flames will not harm you.

(Isaiah 43:2 TPT)

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22–23 NIV)

Now I'm sure of this: the sufferings we endure now are not even worth comparing to the glory that is coming and will be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18 VOICE)

Now for my prayer based on these Scriptures:

Dear Lord,

Panic never comes from You because You are gentle, and You know how to give me peace. Your Holy Spirit gives me peace of mind and self-control and touches my troubled heart. I receive Your mighty power so I can experience Your peace.

You have promised that I am never alone; that means I don't have to face my fears without You by my side.

So instead of letting my mind spin, searching for solutions that won't come, I ask You to bring the solutions I need. I trust that You will. Knowing I can trust You for answers makes it easier for me to calm down.

Think of it! You've got my problems and issues covered!

You are always with me. You will never loosen Your grip on my life. When I pass through stormy seas, I can count on You to be there with me. When I pass through raging rivers, You will not let me drown. When I walk through persecution like fiery flames, You will not let the flames burn or harm me.

Because of Your great love, I am not destroyed. Your compassion for me never ends. It's fresh every morning because You are so faithful.

The sufferings I endure are not even worth comparing to Your coming glory, which You will soon reveal.

In the name of Jesus, amen. 🙏



MUSICREVIEWS

BY HEATHER VAN ALLEN | LH —MUSIC CONTRIBUTOR



BRAVEHEART WORSHIP SHEILA WALSH

Sheila Walsh, well-known author, speaker, television host and music artist, has released (March 20, 2020) her first full-length album in eight years, *Braveheart Worship*.

Exhibiting a tone of Celtic flair from the first notes, the album is a selection of tracks perfect for corporate praise and worship. Whatever the setting — even for the individual at home — these songs will awaken the soul to lift up God in response to the greatness of His love and grace.

“*Braveheart Worship* is a journey of praise and worship to my Savior,” Sheila says. “The songs celebrate the life that can be found in loving and worshipping the one true King!”

The capacity to create worship sessions in our own homes and individual prayer spaces is as valuable as the experience of congregational worship (and needed now more than ever). Perhaps Sheila Walsh’s *Braveheart Worship* can help.



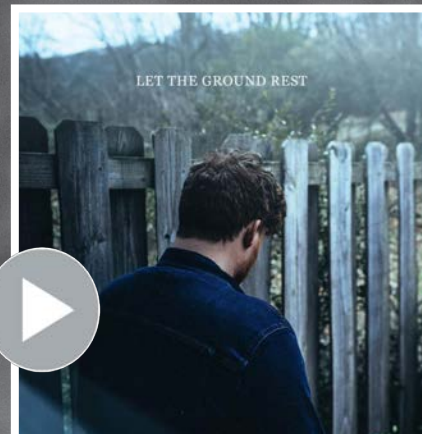
EXALT EP MARTIN SMITH

Martin Smith’s (delirious? fame) newest EP, *Exalt*, is a compilation of the four most popular songs from *Iron Lung* and *Love Song for a City (Live)*. Recorded in an intimate worship setting, the EP also features artist Steffany Gretzinger, on “Come Holy Spirit.”

When we exalt God, we raise Him high where He belongs, and each track on this EP positions us to do just that in our worship. *Exalt* acknowledges and reminds us of His great, unmatched worthiness — that no one is higher. The songs, genuine in gratefulness, are perfect for leaning in with full, undivided focus on God.

“Worship always lifts your head to who is God,” Martin says. “There is no one else. No one compares to Jesus; it’s always only Him. The bottom-line message I want to communicate through my music is hope, passion, healing. That God is not dead, but alive.”

The power in worship is undeniable — and *Exalt* reminds us of that.



LET THE GROUND REST CHRIS RENZEMA

Let the Ground Rest (April 24, 2020) is vocalist and songwriter Chris Renzema’s second full-length album, but his debut through Centricity Music. The timely release of the album fits the season (and Easter), as the opening track, “Springtime,” reminds us of the Resurrection and the redeeming shift from death to life.

“The heartbeat of the whole album is the idea that growth comes from periods of rest, of barrenness. It’s a process to see winter move to spring,” Chris says. “While [God’s] love is not seasonal, we go through seasons as we understand and experience it. Spring is not spring without winter, and that process is a good thing.”

Chris’s voice, with its slightly gritty edge, is soulful and easy on the ears. He carries one track to the next in what seems to be a Spirit-led session of raw, honest expression. *Let the Ground Rest* is music for those low-key, but still powerful, moments we all need in life.



GOD'S TIME PRINCIPLES

KAREN WHITING | KARENWHITING.COM

OVERSCHEDULING AND SLEEP DEPRIVATION LEAD TO TROUBLE.

One double booking had me scrambling and unfocused. That’s also when my oldest son put out all the garbage including silver bags of important craft supplies. I ended up at the local dump to retrieve those bags and stood in muck surrounded by garbage and pine trees while the men slowly dumped the load around me. I grabbed my bags once I spotted them, although the men laughed because they ripped and revealed huge pinecones for children’s crafts. Psalm 23 seemed a far-off dream. I prayed for help. I discovered God, from the very beginning, had the best time management principles to guide my choices.

God’s basic time principles from the days of creation in Genesis 1:

- 1. Start with light and get enlightened.** That means start with prayer and ask for wisdom. Seek information. Highlight how the choice will bless people and fit with your calling.
- 2. Separate the heavenly from the mundane.** Know your motives. Earning money is necessary, but also know how the choice will give God glory.
- 3. God filled the earth with plants and trees that grow and produce fruit and seeds.** We need to fill our life with what will grow relationships and ministry. Choose to do what will be fruitful. Avoid trying to do it all; focus instead on the type of fruit you are called to grow.
- 4. God created the heavenly bodies and divided time into seasons, years, and days.** We are called

to dream big and yet to realize that each activity has its season. Choose what is best for the current day and season. Keep a list of ideas for other seasons.

5. God created creatures that move and adapt. We must be adaptable, flexible and willing to move forward when God beckons us. Do not let obstacles hold you back. Adapt and go forth.

6. God created people. They were not meant to be alone, but to work together. God gave man purpose and responsibility. We need to commit to what God calls us to do, to team up within our Christian family and to fulfill our responsibilities. Look for helpers for projects or groups where you can fit in. Know that publishers, readers, audiences and supporters are also team members.

On this day, God also blessed people in Genesis 1:28. “Be fruitful, and multiply” (KJV). Choose what can be reproduced and multiplied.

7. God rested. He set the example and wants us to rest too. Avoid overcrowding a calendar; leave time for rest.

The Hebrew word *barak* for “blessed” in Genesis 1:28 is used 330 times in the Old Testament. It uses Hebrew letters that depict bowing down or kneeling. God bends toward us to bless us. We kneel with humility to bless God and to receive blessings. One meaning is to cause to be prospered by God. We long for God’s blessings. God’s words to Abraham in Genesis 12 shared that Abraham would be a blessing to all nations. That’s for us too.

Choose to bless others in God’s timing and let God guide your path. Then you’ll be living Psalm 23. 🕊

IMAGINE YOURSELF IN A POSITION YOU NEVER WOULD HAVE THOUGHT TO BE IN.

Had you known the ultimate outcome, you would have never allowed it to become an option. While feeling stuck in this position, you are going through feelings of grief: rejection, anger, hopelessness and loneliness. A sense of being forgotten overwhelms your mind. The grief inside you grows to the point where it could burst. But who or what is it that has been taken from you? The answer is hope.

This is where Scheila Singley found herself when she was incarcerated. However, even though Scheila felt alone, her mother, Sioni Rodriguez, was doing everything in her power to restore hope in her daughter.

In their book, *Rebuilding What Was Destroyed*, the story of Scheila's experience behind prison walls is revealed to its fullest as her mother uses all her resources on the outside to restore her daughter's hope on the inside. It even tells stories of women Sioni has reached through her church's prison ministry and how they connect with Scheila's story.

When learning about the position Scheila was in, Sioni was devastated. "The pain she went through, I went through," Sioni said. Although Sioni was across the country from her daughter, she was able to find a local pastor who could restore hope in Scheila's heart.

The restoration was so big that Sioni now does the same for others. She visits women who are incarcerated and offers them the hope that can breathe life into them once more.

As she sits down with each woman, she asks them to rate their day on a scale from one to 10; one being the worst day and 10 being the best.

"The reason I ask them is because I want to find out what they are feeling that day. My goal in the prison is to speak life into them, to give them hope and say, 'You know what? God has a purpose in your life,'" she explained. "We have to see people through the eyes of God and know that people can change. We cannot give up on people because God doesn't give up on people."

Throughout the entire experience and authoring the book together, Sioni and Scheila's relationship has grown stronger. "As her mother, I am so proud of her and feel much closer to her now," Sioni said. Scheila expressed her deep appreciation for her mother because of the spiritual battle that she faced to help her regain hope. "I realized she was stronger than me," Scheila said. "Christianity is not for the faint of heart, and she beat that devil down."

Overall, the message of *Rebuilding What Was Destroyed* is meant to bring hope to the women who are incarcerated and experiencing the grief of losing hope. *Rebuilding What Was Destroyed* is for anyone who needs the reminder that it is never too late for a second chance. "We can be sanctified, redeemed," Scheila said. "We are His daughters. We are His princesses. We are future queens. There is no reason we shouldn't keep fighting and never give up."

FROM THE AUTHOR OF THREE TIMES SOLD

REBUILDING WHAT WAS DESTROYED

How A Mother's Bold Faith
Changed Everything



Sioni Rodriguez & Scheila Singley

READ a review of *Rebuilding What Was Destroyed* on p.30. For more information follow *Rebuilding What Was Destroyed* on Facebook.

Sioni Rodriguez & Scheila Singley THE GIFT OF SECOND CHANCES





ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NEVER GOING AWAY

RHONDA RHEA | RHONDARHEA.COM



HAS IT HAPPENED TO YOU? YOU GET THAT ONE GREETING CARD WITH GLITTER ON IT — that one card — and next thing you know, your entire living room is a sparkle-palooza.

Granted, I'm the kind of person who enjoys a good sparkle. Shiny makes me happy. But when I got one of those sparkly cards the other day, there was a sudden, panicked realization that there was more glitter in my living room than was ever on that card. I tried to brush it off, but it refused to be brushed. I vacuumed it. Then vacuumed some more. Still ... glitter.

There's a fear when dealing with glitter — the fear that you will never escape it. Ever. If it's on your face? Accept that it's a part of you now. Learn to live this way. Oh, and pass out sunshades to all your friends. They must learn to live with it too.

You'll also need those shades as protective eyewear. A friend of mine went to her ophthalmologist when her eye felt persistently scratchy for a week. What's that gleam in your eye? You guessed it. Greeting card glitter. She had to have a little glitterectomy. I asked her if instead of seeing her eye doctor, she should've gone to a cardiologist. Get it? Card-i-ologist?

Really though, how is it that what starts as one sparkly greeting card seems to produce enough glitter to cover that card and eleventy-dozen others? It's just about more than I can handle.

Then again, what can I really handle? The popular Christian maxim, "God won't give us more than we can handle" is one we tend to mail out like the trustiest proverb in the prettiest greeting card. But let's think that one through. Because really, friends, everything is more than we can handle. In our own strength, we have nothing to shine.

First Corinthians 10:13 is often the backup text for thinking we won't face more than we can bear.

"But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide a way out so that you may be able to bear it" (CSB).

The passage's context here, however, is not adversity. It's temptation. It's not about the Father delivering from tough challenges. It's about the Father giving us strength to say no to sin.

There is strength for resisting temptation as we depend on Him. And Paul tells us as well that there is grace for every difficulty.

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.' Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 CSB).

Embracing His all-sufficient strength and grace when we're struggling is a way for us to shine. Shining when shining doesn't seem possible.

Our God is able to take the weakest sparkle and illuminate it with the glory-brilliance of Christ — all across our home, our neighborhood, our city. Sometimes our world. We're talking about a shine that never fades. Never goes away. Sparkle-palooza, indeed.

Oh, that we may ever learn to live this way.

Still though, a little side note to new first grade Sunday School teachers: there is glitter in your future. All over your Sunday School future. All over your Sunday School classroom. All over you. And it will never leave. I say, lean into it and shine! ♥



CONTRIBUTORS



meet the publisher

LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD @LINDASHEPHERD is publisher of *Leading Hearts* magazine. She is also a best-selling author, an in-demand speaker, and president of Right to the Heart ministries. She is founder of the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association (AWSA). She lives in Colorado with husband, Paul, and son, Jimmy. www.Sheppro.com

meet the editor

AMBER WEIGAND-BUCKLEY @BAREFACEDGIRL is managing editor and art director for *Leading Hearts* magazine and brand manager for AWSA. She is a writer, speaker, and multi-award-winning editor, having spent 23 years in the magazine industry. Amber is the owner of #barefacedcreative and provides branding, graphic design and communications and support for authors, nonprofits and missionaries. She and her Brit-native husband, Philip, live in Missouri with their three daughters: Saffron, Imogen and Penelope. www.barefacedgirl.com



features v

BREANNA BERRY is a senior and aspiring writer at Evangel University in Springfield, MO. She is pursuing a bachelor's degree in multimedia journalism.

PAM FARREL is the author of 48 books, including bestselling *Men Are Like Waffles*, *Women Are Like Spaghetti*, and her newest collaborative Bible study: *Discovering Joy in Philippians* (Harvest House). Pam and Bill Farrel are relationship experts and co-directors of www.love-wise.com.

DEBBIE W. WILSON helps women give themselves a break so they can enjoy the fruitful and satisfying life found only in God's grace. She and her husband founded and run Lighthouse Ministries, a nonprofit counseling, coaching and Bible study ministry. Free resources are available at www.debbieWwilson.com

RHONDA RHEA is an author, humor columnist, and TV personality. Her newest release with co-author Kaley Rhea, *Off-Script & Over-Caffeinated* is available on Amazon. www.rhondarhea.com

JENNIFER TAYLOR is a reviewer and profile contributor for *Leading Hearts* magazine.

KAREN WHITING, international speaker and author of 25 books, writes to help families thrive and desires to help families put God center in their lives. Check out her family book, *52 Weekly Devotions for Busy Families*. www.karenwhiting.com

PENELOPE CARLEVATO is the author of *The Art of Afternoon Tea: From the Era of Downton Abbey and the Titanic* as well as *Tea on the Titanic*, *First Class Etiquette*. and her latest, *The Tea Lover's Journal*. www.penelopecarlevato.com

MICHELLE S. COX is an author, speaker, and the creator of the Just 18 Summers parenting resources and products. Visit her parenting blog www.just18summers.com. Also find her at www.whenGodcallstheheart.com and on Facebook www.facebook.com/just18summers.

SAUNDRA DALTON-SMITH is an internal medicine physician, author and speaker. She is the founder of the I Choose My Best Life ministry. www.ichoosemybestlife.com

EDIE MELSON—author, editor and blogger—is a leading professional within the writing industry, as well as a popular instructor and mentor. www.ediemelson.com

KAREN PORTER is an international speaker, the author of six books, and a successful business woman. She is president of Advanced Writers and Speakers Association, serves on several boards, and coaches aspiring writers and speakers. She and her husband, George, own Bold Vision Books, a Christian publishing company. www.karenporter.com

CYNTHIA L. SIMMONS is an author and speaker as well as radio host and producer of Heart of the Matter Radio. She and her husband have five grown children. www.clsimmons.com

HEATHER VAN ALLEN is a music reviewer and profile contributor for *Leading Hearts* magazine.



columns

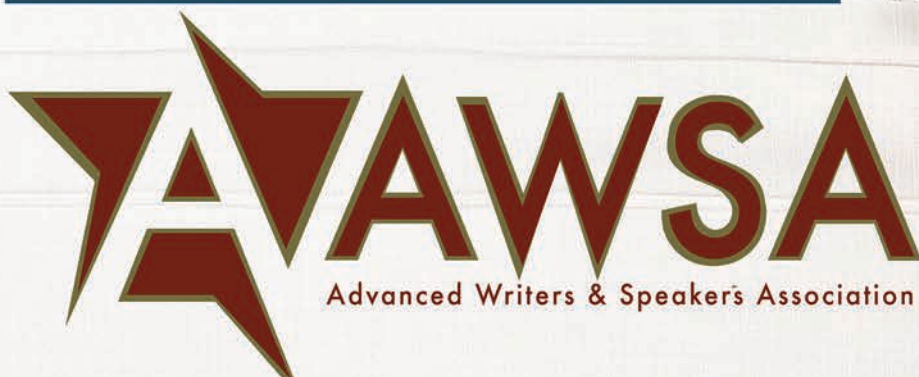
Advanced Writers & Speakers Association

Join us!

Are you a Christian woman author, speaker, life coach or media professional? Get the mentoring, training, and connection with over 500 sisters who know what your life is like.

Not eligible for professional membership, yet? Protégé memberships are also available.

apply for membership today—
APPLYAWSA.COM



Advanced Writers & Speakers Association

like us on

facebook