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This Is Your Moment!

DAWN SCOTT DAMON
p. 18

embracing the diversity
OF HEAVEN
p. 7

NICOLE C. MULLEN
OUR REDEEMER LIVES
p. 21

VLOGGING 101
for leaders *p. 34*

socially-distanced
HOSPITALITY HACKS *p. 24*

DR. MICHELLE BENGTON

It's a good day to

ARISE!

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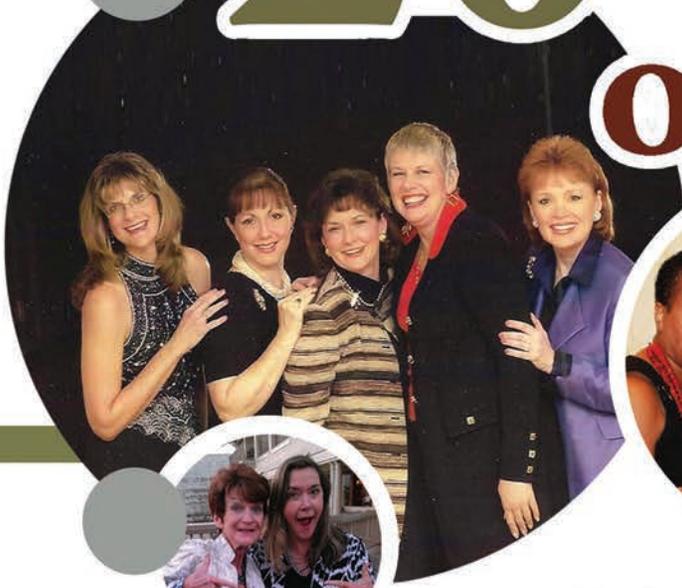
"The women who announce the good news are a large army." —Psalm 68:11 (GW)

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FROM THE PUBLISHER **linda evans shepherd**



You have arrived at a time you wish you could forget; fires, riots, hurricanes, cities burning, face masks and isolation. Never mind canceled paychecks with the rent due or trying to teach the kids at home or watching our world screech to a halt.

But what if God is trying to get our attention and setting the stage for our big moment?

Let's look to the story of Esther, an orphan girl, who rose to power in an unusual way. Esther won a beauty contest to replace Queen Veshti because Veshti took offense to her husband, King Ahasuerus. But Esther won the king's heart, not only because she was beautiful, but because she was humble.

When Esther's uncle, Mordecai, warned Esther of a plot to kill her people, he pressed Esther to appeal the king to stop the slaughter. But Esther knew that arriving to the king's court uninvited could put her very life in danger. Mordecai warned Esther that if she did not act, she might also be murdered. Mordecai said, "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).

Esther called her people to pray, then entered the king's court without an invitation. The king could have executed her, but instead, he invited her to have her say.

Perhaps God has also given you a message to deliver, but maybe, like Esther, you are afraid; afraid of the consequences.

Me too. I am afraid to deliver this message, to say what God has put on my heart, because I don't like to ruffle feathers, disagree with friends or get canceled. But if I don't use my platform to say what God has put on my heart, then why did God put me into this position? I'm hoping you will extend grace toward me, but even if you don't, I'm going to tell you the truth.

Yes, I believe we need to stand up against racism, and I also believe that not only do black lives matter, I believe ALL black lives matter; including the blood of babies killed in abortion clinics purposely placed in black neighborhoods, a practice originated to eliminate African American generations. As the blood of George Floyd calls to us, so should the blood of millions of African American babies who have been aborted since 1973.

If you agree with me, then I believe you have a message to deliver, a message best delivered through your vote. Sure, I get it, our president has rough edges, but let go of your offenses and vote in love for the babies who cannot speak. Maybe you will save an entire generation and maybe even save our nation from the wrath of God.

"They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters. By sacrificing them to the idols of Canaan, they polluted the land with murder" (Psalm 106:38 NLT). ●

love, *Linda*

Linda Evans Shepherd is a Revell author and the founder of the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association.

inspired to live.
equipped to lead.

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FEATURES

- 8 DR. MICHELLE BENGTSON
Today is a Good Time to Arise!
- 12 KAREN PORTER
Reinventing After the Pandemic
- 14 PAM FARREL
Have A Marriage Meet-Up
- 18 DAWN SCOTT DAMON
This Is Your Moment, Esther!
- 21 NICOLE C. MULLEN
Seeking Hope and Redemption at the Source
- 24 PENELOPE CARLEVATO
Socially Distanced Hospitality Hacks
- 26 DR. SAUNDRA DALTON-SMITH
Essential Faith in a Health Crisis
- 28 EDIE MELSON
Healthy Boundaries for Your Digital Life
- 34 CHRISTINE TRIMPE
Vlogging 101 for Leaders
- 36 RHONDA RHEA
Rise Up and Reverberate

PAGES

- 7 GUEST EDITOR: MABEL NINAN
Embracing the Diversity of Heaven
- 17 CYNTHIA L. SIMMONS
The Big Question
- 20 MUSIC REVIEWS
- 21 NICOLE C. MULLEN
Seeking Hope and Redemption at the Source
- 30 BOOKS TO READ
- 31 LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD
Prayer Circle: The Power of One Pin It Prayer
- 32 MICHELLE S. COX
What Will Define You?
- 33 KAREN WHITING
Make the Most of the Call Now
- 38 AWSA MEMBERSHIP
- 41 CONTRIBUTORS

contents



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FROM THE GUEST EDITOR **mabel ninan**



embracing the diversity of heaven

What would it be like to sign my name with a fancy pen on my first book contract?

I've been dreaming of writing and publishing a book for years. I've spent hours revising book proposals and even more countless hours waiting for responses to my submissions. While the dream remains elusive, I've come to realize that publishing a book is not the end goal.

I am an immigrant with a story to tell. Born in India, I moved to America more than a decade ago. As I struggled to fit in and longed for rootedness and belonging, God opened my eyes to the fact that I am a spiritual immigrant too, a foreigner on earth who does not belong in this world. I am a citizen of heaven, my identity inextricably linked to Christ and His church. My mission is to encourage believers to embrace their immigrant journey on earth and live out their calling with boldness and passion.

Published books can serve as milestones on my writing path, but they do not imply a destination. The journey continues until I'm welcomed into heaven and hear my Father say to me, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Till then, I must stay true to my calling and write the message God has entrusted to me.

As Christian communicators, we are called to use every opportunity, pathway and forum to share our God-given story with the world. Rejections from publishers and publications might discourage us, but our message motivates us to press on.

The pandemic compelled me to ramp up my efforts. Imbued with a sense of urgency, I wrote more articles. I also launched a YouTube channel — Immigrant Faith Stories — where I interview first-generation immigrants whose powerful testimonies bring to life truths about finding identity and belonging in Jesus. The stories of immigrants showcase God's faithfulness to His children, regardless of their ethnic identities or their countries of residence. I'm amazed to see how God uses me, a flawed woman and an obscure writer, to give a voice to others.

The chaos of 2020 revealed to us that God has appointed and positioned us at this significant moment in history to make an impact on an ailing world. So what if everything has suddenly gone online? Let's use technology to bombard the world with our message. Let's broadcast through every air and sound wave, through every social media platform, the steadfast love and saving grace of our Almighty God.

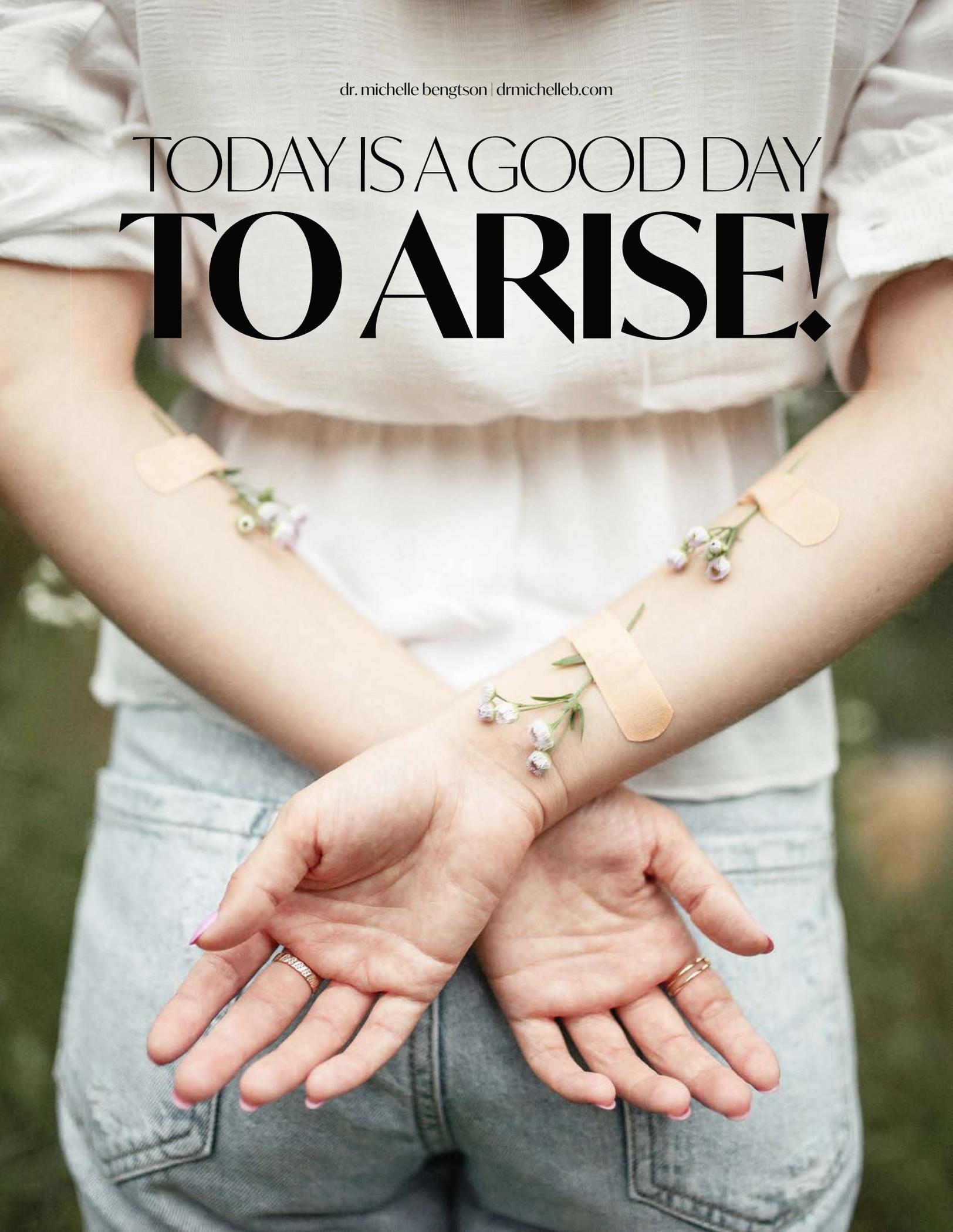
Book contracts can wait.

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others,
as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

1 Peter 4:10 NIV ◉

dr. michelle bengtson | drmichelleb.com

TODAY IS A GOOD DAY
TO ARISE!





The bed had become my sick bed, and the guest bedroom, my place to rest, heal and recover.

A life-threatening illness not only stole my physical health, but also led me into the valley of depression, ushering in questions about my identity, purpose and worth. On medically induced bed rest for five months, tethered to life-sustaining IV-hydration and nutrition, having dwindled from 113 pounds to a skeletal 74, I was unable to be the doctor who cared for patients, much less a wife or mother. I had succumbed to the enemy's lies, believing my worth was based on what I did.

I could do nothing but sleep, pray, listen to praise music or watch sermons online. I clung to God in the deepest pit and shared with Him my pain.

“God, if this is all my life is going to amount to, I’m not sure I want to keep living.”

Yet the time I lay in that sickbed served a greater purpose.

Healing took time, two surgeries, cooperation with a healthcare team, and a willingness to do hard work in my mind and heart.

Earlier in my career as a neuropsychologist, I always pondered the biblical account of the lame man. When Jesus asked him if he wanted to get well, I always countered in my mind, “What a silly question, Jesus. Of course, he does. He’s just lying by the side of the pool waiting for someone to push him in.” Yet the longer I treated patients, the more I realized not everyone “comes to the pool” to be healed; many are comfortable in their suffering. And many just want a quick fix without much work on their part.

As I convalesced, my spirit was stirred.

“Jesus says to him, ‘Arise, take up your mat, and walk’” (John 5:8 Berean Literal Bible).

Jesus wanted the lame man to do the hard work and participate in his healing. He called me to do the same.

**“My beloved spoke and said to me, ‘Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me’”
(Song of Songs 2:10 NIV).**

Many days seemed dark, and I needed a reason to fight and arise. I needed to counter the feeling that it wasn’t a good day because of pain, sickness, depression, etc. with God’s truth that as long as He is still on His throne, it IS a good day.

My focus shifted in my thoughts and my words away from my problems and onto the Problem Solver.

**“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things”
(Philippians 4:8 NIV).**

Yet, each day required work: not just to cooperate with my medical team, but to examine my heart and mind, to identify Satan’s lies, to arise above them, rebuke them and refute them with God’s truth.

—continued on page 11—

GET A GRIP ON LIFE-CONTROLLING

ANXIETY

WITH DR. MICHELLE BENGTON



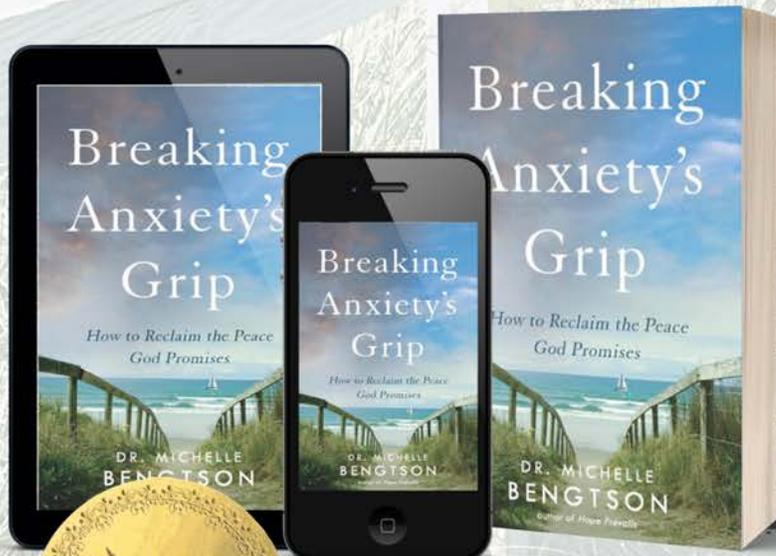
There's no question,
we have a lot to worry about.

Children, jobs, homes, health, finances, and more. The solution isn't to rid ourselves of the sources of anxiety—as if we could. Instead, we need to recognize that anxiety originates from a spiritual influence.

Learn to **fight back**
using **God-given weapons**.

"If you struggle with trusting God in the middle of
challenging times, this book is for you."

—Saundra Dalton-Smith, MD



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



2020 Golden Scroll Awards
Book of the Year





—continued from page 9—

Slowly over weeks and months, life began to return to some semblance of normal. Patients were thrilled I returned to the private practice, and family life brought with it a greater appreciation for the simple joys.

As I wrote about my experience in *Hope Prevails: Insights from a Doctor's Personal Journey Through Depression* I cried out to the Lord,

“I don't want to be the poster child for depression. That isn't what I want to be known for. I want my life to count for more than that.”

He sweetly reminded me of His promises every time I needed to not only hear them, but stand on them.

“Your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous will your future be”
(Job 8:7 NIV).

What began as a single social media post to remind myself “Today is a good day because...” unintentionally ended up becoming a 5-year-plus daily devotional ministry sharing the truth of God's promises to encourage others to look beyond their trials and see His good in each day.

Rarely a week goes by that I don't hear something along the lines of “I don't know how you go through all you have and continue to stay so positive and encourage others despite your circumstances.”

It isn't me. It's what God has done in me. It's a choice to rise above our problems and focus on THE Problem Solver and all His promises.

Because of Him, today is a good day for a good day regardless of our trials.

Friend, I don't know what difficulties you are facing right now. But I know our focus can make all the difference. He sees you, He knows you, He loves you.

What the enemy intended for evil, God will use for good especially when we determine in our hearts to





REINVENTING
after the pandemic

karen porter | karenporter.com

RISE & COFFEE



The ancient prophet Isaiah said, “Arise, awake, put on your strength” (Isaiah 52:1 ESV). He also added at the end of that sentence, “put on your beautiful garments.”

I would like to put on some beautiful garments and go somewhere, wouldn't you? The year 2020 surprised us with twists and turns we never expected.

My word for the year for 2020 was vision. Yes, I know — a little obvious. In the first days of January when I chose the word, I thought of seeing my goals with clarity, and I believed my renewed vision for the year would bring success in business and in ministry. I hummed the line from the old song, I can see clearly now....The year ahead had a different vision as we faced the shutdowns caused by COVID-19.

No one could have visualized millions of us sitting in our homes because going out among other people could bring disaster to our health. Millions lost their jobs and businesses shut down.

At our house, we watched the news continuously where every hour the threat grew. We became anxious and allowed the risks to overpower us. One morning we turned the news off and took control of those fearful emotions by spending time together as a family and by reading the Bible. Instead of dread, we felt peace without the constant sounds of doom.

In February and March, we didn't expect the restrictions of closed businesses and churches and lifestyle to last long,

but it has lingered. Now we have zoom fatigue, and we have added extra pounds.

The jokes about the COVID-19 pounds were funny at first, but now they hit a little too close to home. Some feel depressed and angry. We are hurting financially. We want to see our friends and family and go to the gym and return to church. We long for normal.

The world is slowly coming out of hibernation. How will you respond? To ARISE out of COVID stress, leaders must reinvent the future.

Whether you are in ministry or in business, this is your chance to create new opportunities. Refuse to go back to normal. Instead, go forward. (I started each tip below with the letter f — for future and forward.)

Forgive yourself for any mistakes you made during the pandemic lockdowns.

It's time to rise up out of the “if only” state of mind. You cannot start a new chapter if you keep rereading the last one. Don't look back; you are not going that way.

Figure out what your people need.

If you are in business, collect new information about your customers. If you are in ministry, survey the people you serve. Discover what new needs and desires are in their hearts and minds after the pandemic. Many have new habits and unique ideals. You know you are on the right track when you become uninterested in the “way it used to be.”

Form an innovative plan to meet those new needs.

Your old ways of leading may not work now. What new technologies or skills do you need to move forward?

Focus on your health.

The restrictions of the pandemic interrupted our health routines. What new ways will you plan your eating? How will you exercise now? You will never lead your business or group well until you take care of your personal health. Lose weight. Move your body. Challenge your mind.

Faith will show the way.

Trust God for your future. Listen for His whisper each day. Remember the ancient prophet Isaiah? He also said, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10 ESV).

For the future, let's make our vision so clear our fears become irrelevant or as Warren Bennis said, “Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.” ☉

EAT
DRINK
and be

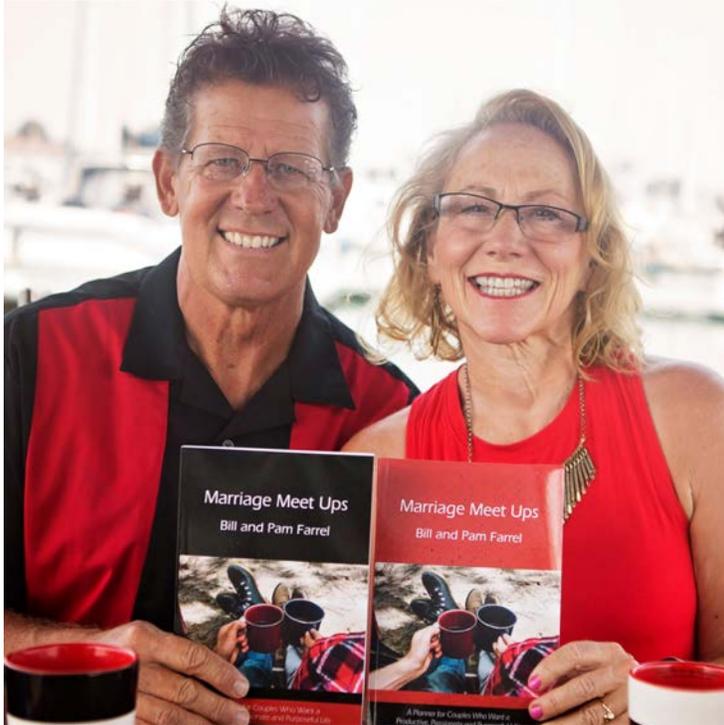
Married

pam farrel | love-wise.com

Groom

Bride

It's time for a Marriage Meet Up!



“Let’s meet up for coffee and conversation.”

We offer this invitation to friends, to work colleagues, to those we want to network with or mentor us — why not invite your mate to a Marriage Meet Up? Perhaps you are a couple that prioritizes your relationship and you do have a regular “date night” in your weekly schedule — but how about adding a business meeting for your marriage?

We have seen the power of being proactive in marriage. In celebration of our 40-year wedding anniversary, we wrote and released a book, Marriage Meet Ups, that answers a few questions we often get asked, “How do you two get along so well? How do you get so much done as a couple? How do you work with your spouse and still like him or her? How did you create a lasting love? How do you decide who does what in your home and workplace?

You two carry so much responsibility in the church, community, ministry and family — how did you do it all and still find time for each other and your children?”

Why Do a Marriage Meet Up?

We have been meeting weekly to try to get and stay on the same page nearly all those 40 years! We have a few key reasons we meet for these weekly strategy sessions — and why we recommend all couples have a weekly marriage meet up:

- ✓To gain insights into how your spouse likes to live — and love

- ✓To have productive conversations that minimize conflict, lower stress and raise enjoyment level of your love and life
- ✓To make decisions together that maximize emotional, spiritual and physical connection
- ✓To improve conversations about money and financial choices
- ✓To boost productivity so you each get more done at work, home or ministry
- ✓To delegate well so things do not fall through the cracks of a busy life
- ✓To nurture your relationship and create more time for the happy side of marriage, romance and intimacy
- ✓To get and stay on the same page so you can move forward TOGETHER in unity
- ✓To strengthen your spiritual life together and draw you closer to God and your partner
- ✓To create a focused conversation and decision-making time each week so the work side of life doesn’t bleed and interrupt the fun side of marriage and family life.
- ✓To avoid burying issues or neglecting vital (but sometimes boring or more volatile) issues
- ✓To replace negative dysfunctional patterns of interpersonal relationships with more healthy, positive and affirming ways of interacting with one another
- ✓To navigate family, parenting, marriage responsibilities in a way that each person know what is expected of him or her and is thanked and appreciated for his or her contributions
- ✓To have a set-aside time for problem solving together
- ✓To have a positive weekly date in a way we can have something to look forward to — even on those difficult or hectic weeks.
- ✓To achieve goals and bolster ability to succeed in living out values and chosen priorities in both personal and public lives
- ✓To protect the ability to have a long-lasting lifetime of love

Are those a few of the desires on your hearts, too?

Because our weekly biz meeting for our marriage helped us so much, and because we have honed the process down so we can strengthen our marriage, family and productivity with just a one hour a week focused meet up, we decided to create Marriage Meet Ups his and her planners so other couples can enjoy seeing these commands and promises of God come to fruition in their own marriage:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of

—continued on page 16—



—continued from page 15—

every opportunity, because the days are evil.
—Ephesians 5:15-16

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way
you will fulfill the law of Christ. —
Galatians 6:2

Blessed is the one...whose delight is in the law of the Lord...
That person [couple] is like a tree planted by streams of
water, which yields fruit in season and whose leaf does not
wither — whatever they do prospers. (Read Psalm 1:1-6.)

Two are better than one, because they have
a good return for their labor: If either of
them falls down, one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls and has no one to
help them up. Also, if two lie down together,
they will keep warm. But how can one keep
warm alone? —Ecclesiastes 4:9-11

We have seen these weekly marriage meet ups WORK
WELL to move couples -- including ourselves — forward,
upward and onward toward creating the marriage you have
hoped and dreamed of having.

How to Do a Marriage Meet Up

In a nutshell, we meet once a week, in a comfortable private
setting, usually with coffee or tea and sometimes after a meal
or sharing a snack. We come prepared with questions we
each want to discuss, people that need an appointment(s) on
our calendars, tasks that need scheduled and accomplished,
purchases we would like to budget in, family and work
responsibilities, decisions that need made, and a prayed up

heart.

We each also bring in our personal planner or digital calendar
updated and our cell phones so we have at our fingertips the
answers to questions that might come up as we meet up.

However, we do not come with a game day face of
competition; rather, we bring in a heart of compassion, care
and cooperation.

Our goal is to live out Romans 12:10: “Be
devoted to one another in love. Honor one
another above yourselves.”

We look forward to our meetups because they provide
valuable clarity and confidence to live out the calling God has
planned for us, but we also anticipate the kindness we have
woven into the “get it done” meeting. We pray for each other
and our marriage.

We spend a little time talking about the deeper truths of life
and how God's Word has positively impacted our life in the
last week.

We also give words of encouragement and
affirmation during our meet up, and we
reward all that hard work by planning in our
romance and red-hot monogamy.

We highly value the fruit that is a natural outcome of teaming
up for success, but we equally value making the experience
itself a powerful hour of building into each other and our
marriage in a loving atmosphere. We often tell others the why
of our marriage meet up: To pull together so this stressful
world doesn't pull us apart.

We think Antoine de Saint-Exupery summarizes it best:
“Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking
outward together in the same direction.” ☺



THE BIG QUESTION

Q: Our Bible study ladies are very fearful in this crazy time. How can I help them?



cynthia l. simmons | cksimmons.com

What a good question. This situation depicts the difference between knowing truth and allowing God's Word to impact your emotions. Let me give an example.

You might recall the story of the disciples and the storm on the Sea of Galilee. According to the Mark account, this happened late in the day after Jesus had been teaching, and He was probably tired. He asked the disciples to take Him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

Four of the disciples, Andrew Peter, James and John had worked as fishermen. They spent their lives on the Sea of Galilee and knew how to handle the storms that often sprang up. However, the severity of this storm frightened them as water filled the boat. Mark records they woke Jesus up saying, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

Think about that question. They assumed Jesus knew about the storm and didn't care. Wow. By this time, they had seen plenty of miracles. Jesus had already healed the leper. Doubtless, the disciples wanted to avoid this man because he was contagious. Yet Jesus had so much compassion, He touched the leper as He made him well.

In addition, I love the story of the wedding feast where the bride's parents ran out of wine. Jesus' mother came

to Him and asked for a miracle to prevent the family from embarrassment. Even though He wasn't ready to perform miracles in public, He did this for His mom. Amazing! Clearly Jesus didn't lack warmth.

What happened to the disciples? I think they were terrified because they were in danger rather than someone else. We don't exert much effort to trust God with a stranger's illness. However, if we have a serious ailment, the situation reverses. I believe that's why we have Hebrews 11, which lists God's faithful heroes who kept their faith in hardship.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.
Hebrews 10:23 NKJV

"Hold fast" can be translated "hang on, don't give up!" What are some ways we can hold fast? First, that same passage offers an answer.

Let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another.
Hebrews 10:25 NLT

We gain strength from each other as the church meets and we use our gifts.

Second, Ephesians 5:19 says we should be "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (NKJV). Remember how David used to sing to King Saul when he was depressed? Music has a way of soothing our emotions and guiding our thoughts in the right direction.

Third, your thoughts influence how you feel, so memorize verses or listen to the Bible.

I will meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.
Psalm 119:15 NIV

Finally, I encourage you to imitate Esther who was willing to die to save her people. Arise like she did and hang on! ☺

THIS IS YOUR MOMENT, *Esther!*



*We're equipped and we are ready
We're the people of God
We're anointed, we are willing
To respond to His call
We will stand up and move!*

"Arise" lyrics ©Sharon Tedford





Every now and then opportunity knocks at the door of our soul, inviting us to leave behind our familiar stories and enter into a wild, brave, bold adventure. Possibility beckons us out of our comfort zone and offers us the fulfillment of dreams above and beyond our imagination. The question is, will we arise and answer the call?

Esther did.

Now before you say, “Oh here we go, another story about Esther,” let me say I understand. Most of us have read multiple articles about this heroine of faith. But consider with me for a moment her story from another angle — trauma. Read her story in the Book of Esther.

Before she was Esther, her birth name was Hadassah. Some scholars suspect that her father was killed in war before she was born and her mother died while giving her birth. Orphaned. Raised by her cousin. She lived among the Jewish outcasts in a city whose people rejected her based on her race. Ostracized. Lonely. A child crying at night with no mother to comfort her. How fragile she must have felt at times.

As a pastor and Freedom Coach, I’ve ministered to numerous women with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and I can attest to the devastating impact survivors experience due to childhood tragedies and traumas. Victims feel the anguish of abandonment and rejection; deep physical and emotional pain overwhelms them, lasting long into their adulthood. Psychological disruptions, including depression and anxiety, torments them. Did Hadassah know her mother died while giving her life? What guilt did this young girl battle with believing it was her fault? Was she angry with God, asking “Where were You, God?” Hadassah carried an immense weight upon her shoulders. How would she ever overcome her birth trauma and certain identity loss and live successfully? Could this victim ever find victory?

Unequivocally, yes. As we read the Book of Esther — a book of the Bible in which God is never mentioned — we see God at work behind the scenes. His activity is everywhere. Ironic reversals, coincidences and divine plot twists, all working together for good. God proves that His purpose for our life

stands irrevocable. At no time does He say, “Oh, you’re too much of a mess for me to do anything with.” (Though we sometimes say it of ourselves.) God doesn’t disqualify us from His redemption, healing or Kingdom opportunities and promotions because we feel inadequate, weak, ill-fit or mis-fitted. Instead, He shows us that He can work through our weaknesses just as much as He can work through our strengths.

Hadassah, now Esther, answered the call to “Arise,” stating, “If I perish, I perish.” In other words, I’m going for broke! I’ll risk everything in an all-out effort to fulfill God’s plan.

So, what qualities did Esther cultivate that brought her from victim to victor?

Willingness

We celebrate NO. We run too hard and live lives of frenzied chaos. Our focus is scattered, we multi-task — and not very well — in ways that keep us diluted and ineffective. I get it. But sometimes the right answer is yes. Yes to a leap of faith. When it doesn’t make sense, when it’s out of our comfort zone, when we feel inadequate and fear is nipping at our toes or gripping at our throats. Say Yes. Yes, I will go. Yes, I will serve. Yes, I will step out, create waves, do something different, take an adventure, color outside the lines. Yes, I will live in abundance. I will dive into the deep end of the waters and swim. Yes, I will face my fears. Esther’s willing spirit said yes to the opportunity in front of her. What about you, modern-day Esther? Is God asking you to say, “yes?”

Creative Innovation.

Esther, smack dab in the middle of a crisis, used her noggin to noodle out a plan. She got creative. Even though she may have felt the assignment was over her head and she didn’t possess the ability, wisdom or skill to accomplish her task, God was faithful to download all. Can you relate? Have you said yes to opportunities only to discover that you’re way over your head? Good. Tough stuff can call out the best in you. Only through the intense challenges do dormant gifts and talents surface. You’ll be introduced to the wealth of creativity and innovation living on the inside of you. Take the risk. Unleash your creative spirit.

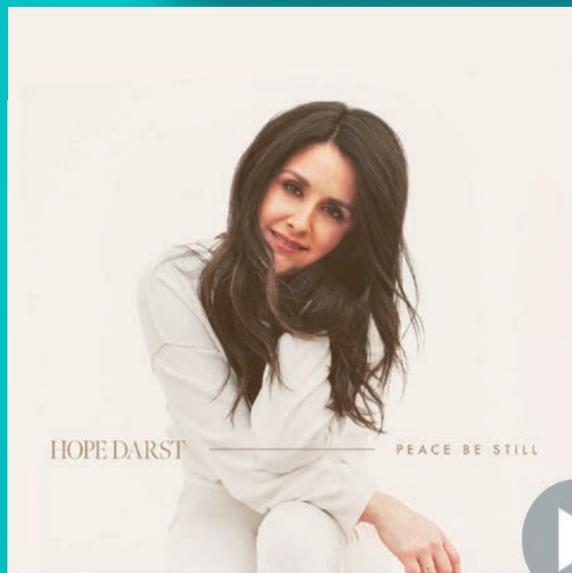
Fierce Execution

Creating a plan is one thing. Fierce execution of that plan is another. Many people finesse a plan but fail to follow through. They cite reasons, rationale, and excuses for their failure to deliver. Esther’s follow-through and self-sacrificing courage compelled her to implement the strategy. This is the kind of courage we need — to boldly engage our plan and take the necessary steps.

So, on the day that opportunity knocks and beckons you to arise, be confident. God’s continuous activity in your life has prepared you “for such a time as this.” It’s your moment to go for broke. ☉

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MUSICREVIEWS



HOPE DARST peace be still

Artist/songwriter Hope Darst's debut album, *Peace Be Still* (released August 21) has been a long time coming, as she laid aside her lifelong dream of becoming a recording artist to follow her calling to raise a family and serve the local church. The 12-track album, titled for its first single, is considered a hit amongst the selection of worship albums of 2020.

The beauty of *Peace Be Still* is in the authenticity of the stories behind the songs.

"The songs that I feel are the most honest and that people have really resonated with have all been birthed out of actual things I've walked through in my own life," Hope says. "As a worship leader...I'm telling my story through the lens of the redemption of Jesus in every single one of those moments. ...I just want these songs to lead people back to Jesus, or to Jesus for the first time."

These faith-filled anthems expressing adoration to God are the sort of fear-stomping declarations of hope 2020 needs.

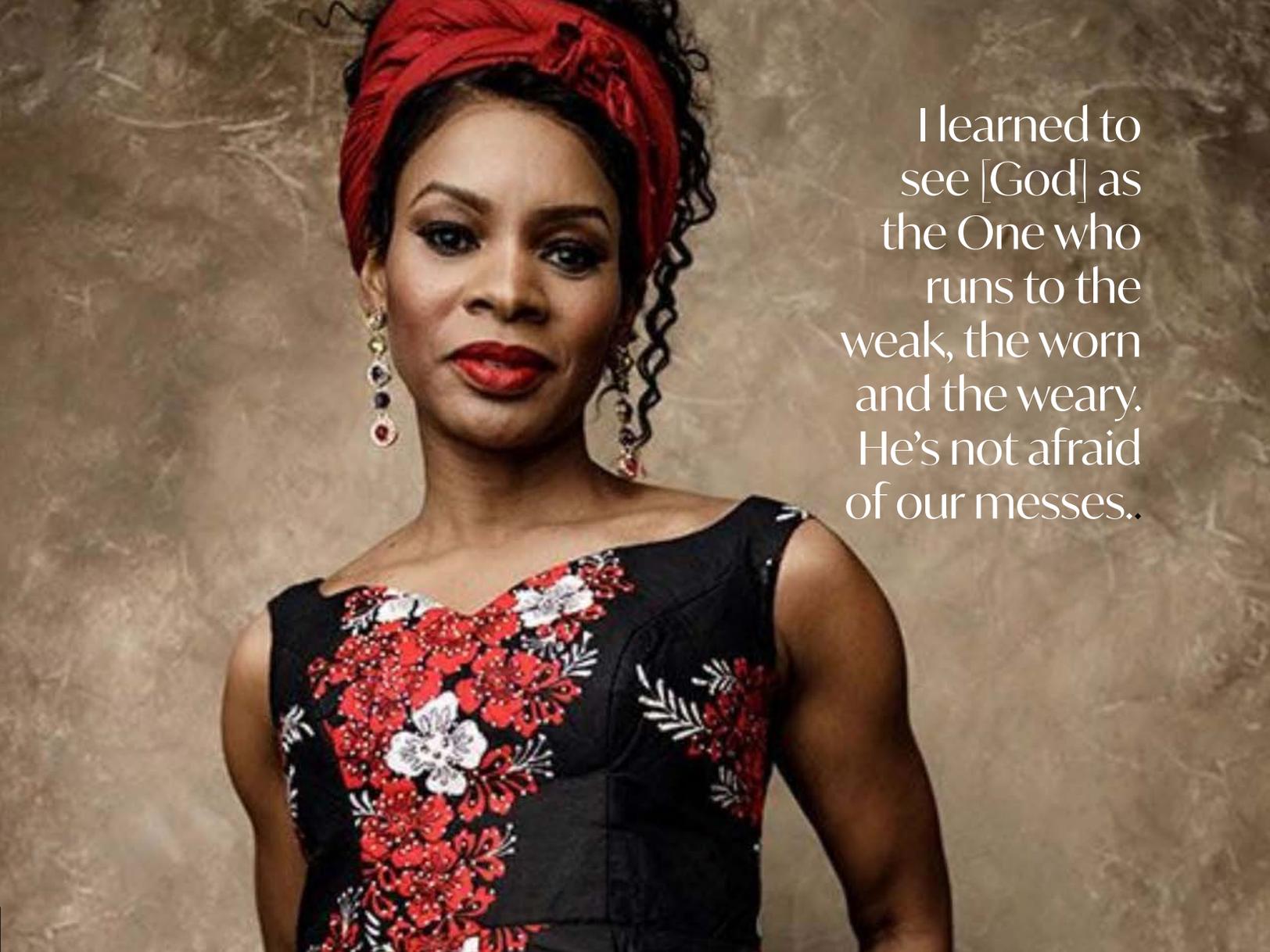


GATEWAY WORSHIP see you move (*acoustic sessions 2*)

Gateway Worship has released *See You Move: Acoustic Sessions, Vol. 2* (August 28) in follow-up to their 2018 offering, *Acoustic Sessions, Vol. 1*. Recorded live in a closed small-group setting, without an audience, the album is seven tracks featuring worship leaders including Leeland Mooring, Mark Harris (formerly of 4Him), Lauren Mwonga, Levi Smith, Cole Novak, Michael Bethany and Jamie Whisenhunt.

The chosen setting for the recording created for the project a desired simplicity people seem to be seeking in the midst the unprecedented circumstances of 2020. Each worshipful track pulls the listener into a refreshing space of trust and hope in God's presence. They remind us of the confidence that He is always with us and we can trust Him to move in our lives, as the title track declares.

Demonstrating the perfection of His timing, God has given the world *See You Move: Acoustic Sessions, Vol. 2*, right when it so desperately needs the hope found in the simplicity of worship.



I learned to
see [God] as
the One who
runs to the
weak, the worn
and the weary.
He's not afraid
of our messes..

JENN TAYLOR | MUSIC CONTRIBUTOR

Nicole C Muller
finding hope & healing
REDEMPTION



—continued on page 22—



—continued from page 21—

Amid the uncertainty of our times, there's nothing our world needs more than hope and redemption.

Contemporary Christian Music singer, songwriter, speaker and teacher Nicole C. Mullen just happens to know something about that hope and redemption and The Source where you can find it. As the songwriter of her anthem "Redeemer," Nicole has won numerous awards, including the honor of becoming the first African-American female to win Songwriter of the Year for "Redeemer." In her new book, *My Redeemer Lives: It's Personal*, Nicole sheds light on how we can have hope in our time.

The book, *My Redeemer Lives*, released on April 20 while the United States and the world faced the uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic and shutdowns.

But the uncertainty did not waiver Nicole's faith in the Redeemer. "God's grace is sufficient," she said. "It's definitely a change but determined to come of this thing better than I started. He's taking care of us."

Nicole knows the timing of the release was completely the Lord's doing and she refuses to take any credit for it. "I've been deliberate and it's taking me about five years to complete the book to where I feel like it needs to land at this point in history. None of us manufactured the season we're in, we didn't foresee it, but God foreknew it," Nicole said.

"Even in the midst of my setbacks and stumbles, I can see the hand of God in it because it's finally coming out during such a time as this. I could not have planned that."

It's the Lord working in our mundane. He still does a divine work. I pray that He really does use it and it starts to cultivate people's hearts and lives. That is my heart and my prayer."



In the book, Nicole reveals her personal stories of triumphs and trials, including her experiences with domestic violence, divorce and becoming a single mom.

“I remember having dark nights and dark seasons and feeling hopeless. Wondering if there’s deliverance at hand or if God was saying basically, ‘You got yourself in it. Now get yourself out of it,’” she said. “But it was actually in those times that I got to see God at my lowest points in His most brilliant ways. I learned to see Him as the One who runs to the weak, the worn and the weary. He’s not afraid of our messes.”

Nicole remembers the nights that He showed up for her and carried her through. “He doesn’t promise us a life without (sufferings), but He promised us that we will be able to overcome it because He has already overcome it first. So, that’s really the hope we all carry,” she said.

“We don’t even know the season that we’re in now. None of us know how long it is going to last, but I promise you that the faithfulness of God will outlast this season. It will go on even past it. It does not have an expiration date. He lets us know that He will carry you through if you love Him.

Whether you’re single, married, separated or widowed, He’s promised to be faithful to those that are His. So far, so great, He is keeping His word.”

Always working on new projects, Nicole said her greatest focus now is the book and doing music that’s congruent with the stories told, the ideas conveyed and the message delivered in the book. “The book does span a good bit of my life and songs that were written over that time,” she said.

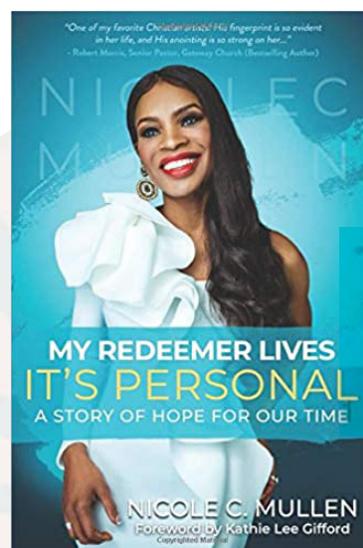
“There were so many stories that I could not put in because life is longer than 38 chapters. In the meantime, I want to be found faithful in whatever areas God calls me to do and by whatever means whether it be music, storytelling or speaking. Whatever that might be, I want to be found faithful in doing that.”

Nicole acknowledges that is not always very easy. “Sometimes it’s a balancing game because the same voice that I use to sing is the same voice that I use to speak. So, if I wear it out by speaking, it doesn’t have the same finesse when I sing. It’s one of those balancing games because you’re using the same instrument in different ways.”

No matter what comes our way in this uncertainty, Nicole wants to remind us all that we have hope.

“Hope is not sitting around and grudging and complaining about the current circumstances. It says that it might be hard right now, but I believe a better day is coming,” she said.

“I just want to encourage people that we can choose, even if the circumstances don’t change as rapidly as we would like them to change. Even if they don’t, we have a choice to make. I pray that people will be inspired by what they read, by books that are written like mine or other people’s, by songs that they are listening to, by the Scriptures that they read. In the midst of it, He will still be with us and walk with us until the end.” ☉



Find out more about Nicole’s new book and music at nicolecmullen.com



socially distanced HOSPITALITY HACKS

penelope carlevato | penelopecarlevato.com

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” —1 Peter 4:8-9

It’s been a long and lonely few months, and I really miss seeing friends, but I also miss dinner parties and tea parties. What’s a girl to do when we are under some pretty strict guidelines for living? We have to be innovative and just do it!

Even when we aren’t experiencing a pandemic, some of us find it hard to open our homes for fellowship. Still, because hospitality is so vital to healthy relationships, I know we need to be reconnecting, and not just on Zoom. We need one another but still need to be safe for all those who join us. It’s an opportunity for all of us to show love and care to those around us. Hospitality is a duty and a gift for every Christian. Some say it’s not their thing, but all of us in our comfort zone can reach out to those God brings to our hearts and mind.

With the pandemic affecting every single person worldwide, we have been more isolated, insulated and afraid than at any other time in our lives — all the more reason to ask Christ to help you share with those around you. Sharing our home is an extension of the love of Christ and His kindness. It’s not a suggestion, but something God expects of us. The possibilities are many, and Jesus will guide you in reaching out to others to share His love and care.

When you plan a party or dining invitation, invite ten or fewer. This will help us to safely pull off a party during the pandemic.

The main thing to remember is to keep the party fun! We are starved for friendship and someone else’s cooking.

More than ever, it’s essential to let your guests know what to expect: who’s coming, how many are attending, what are the hours of the event, and how you will serve the food and drinks. Then those attending will have some degree of comfort, especially if they are worried about the virus. AND, a reminder to all invited, if you don’t feel well, stay home.

Depending on where in the country you live, the ability to remain outdoors is still the safest way to get together with friends and family. As the weather prevents outdoor dining, keeping a social distance will depend on your kitchen or dining area size. I have a large dining room table to safely seat six people around the table — no casseroles or chips and dip from a common bowl. Even for a formal dinner in the dining room, it is perfectly OK to use pretty paper plates and napkins.

With fall approaching, the evenings can get a little chilly, so light up the firepit and set chairs around it. Invite some friends over, tell them to bring their jackets and blankets, and enjoy America’s favorite campfire snack — S’ mores. Hershey’s report a 40% increase in their six-pack of chocolate bars, so let’s join in the fun and the ongoing debate of whether the marshmallow should be lightly toasted or burnt! Ensure everyone has their own s’mores kit that includes the chocolate bar, graham crackers, marshmallows and roasting sticks. Telling stories or singing around the fire pit or campfire is a great way to spend an evening with neighbors and friends.

I meet with a group of British ladies once a month. When the pandemic first hit, we immediately met on Zoom, and each of us drank a cup of tea. We continued until late summer and then decided we missed seeing each other in person. So, we had a BYOT (Bring Your Own Tea) party in our back gardens. The hostess served tea in her pretty china cups on a patio table covered with a lovely tablecloth and some fresh flowers for ambiance. We sit in the garden in lawn chairs and individually get our tea, poured by the hostess. It's been a special time for me as it connects me to my English roots, plus we are following the rules and keeping our social distance.

My husband and I love to have barbeques on the patio. He loves doing the grilling and I do the table setting and other foods. We have changed the way we do things, but it has allowed us to see friends and relatives and enjoy a meal together.

Instead of a bowl of chips and dips, we have something in mason jars or plastic cups. It's fun to get creative, and our guests enjoy my new recipes. Serving soups in bread bowls or ramekins already dished up keeps handling to a minimum. Chicken wings, taquitos, mini quiches, meat and veggie skewers, or seafood skewers give me more time to enjoy our guests instead of doing hamburgers and hot dogs.

Drinks are best served in bottles or cans in open coolers with spacing, so no one has to dig through the ice to find their favorite beverage. Individual ice cream bars or ice cream cups are great for a simple dessert. We find undemanding dining is just fine for this time in our way of living.

Most of our social gatherings have been on the patio. But, keep your bathroom ready for guests with disposable towels, wipes, and pump soaps (no bar soaps).

**“Love does no harm to a neighbor.
Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.”
Romans 13:10**

This article would not be complete without reminding everyone to keep their social distance, wash and sanitize hands often, and, if necessary, wear your mask when not eating. Life must go on. We still need each other; we still need to gather together. When we can gather in groups again, we can go back to our old tried and true entertaining way. But until then, let's be gracious and sensitive to those we invite to share our home.

Tips for COVID Hospitality

- Have individual servings and not a big bowl — single-serve packages of chips, nuts, pretzels.
- Keep the guest list small; usually under ten is best, and six for indoor dining.
- Outdoor dining is preferable, especially around a fire pit.
- Mason Jars for each guest — cold food, potato salad, coleslaw, hummus with veggie sticks.
- Creative containers for single-use — skins of avocados, bread bowls or lettuce leaves.
- Laptrays or TV trays for everyone to have their own space.

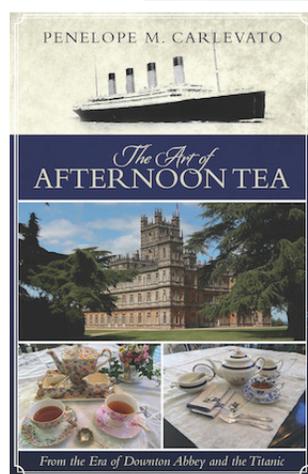


- A bottle of hand sanitizer nearby for easy use.
- Check with your local health department for COVID rules and regulations.
- Keep a trash bin handy to keep traffic in and out of your house to a minimum.
- Use paper plates and plastic glasses.
- Set up multiple tables on the lawn or use folding tables inside.
- Do not serve big casseroles or chips and dip.
- Plan a picnic...everyone brings their blanket or quilt.
- Provide some easy games such as cornhole or croquet.

Individual Hummus Dip with Veggies

- 1 can of chickpeas or cannellini beans
- ½ avocado
- ⅓ cup basil leaves
- ⅓ cup mint leaves
- Zest of one lemon
- Juice of one lemon
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 Tbsp honey
- 1 Tbsp of Dijon mustard
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Veggie Sticks — carrots, celery, bell peppers, cucumbers, zucchini, asparagus

Place all ingredients in a food processor and puree until smooth and creamy. Place an inch or more of the dip into a small mason jar or plastic cup. Place the veggie sticks inside each cup. Serve with a sprig of parsley for garnish. 🍷



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

Available autographed from penelopecarlevato.com or by emailing penelopesteatime@gmail.com.

dr. saundra dalton-smith | ichoosemybestlife.com

ESSENTIAL FAITH IN A HEALTH CRISIS





COVID-19 has negatively impacted people around the globe in various ways. Job losses, income cuts, homelessness, illness and death are just some of the many challenges the pandemic has yielded.

There is also a corresponding rise in depression, anxiety, stress and fatigue which can lead to various health conditions, including stroke, high blood pressure and chronic pain. The one aspect that remains steady throughout the chaos and uncertainty is God.

Maintaining your faith and relying on the truth of God's Word is vital for your overall mind, body and spirit well-being. Let's take a look at five reasons why faith is essential during a health crisis.

1. Possibility of Miracles

People have experienced miracles in their lives in different ways. Miracles can occur in the form of an unexpected turnaround of events, a word of encouragement, a sudden realization or a manifestation. Miracles can only manifest when you have faith that you are blessed to experience and receive these miracles. Miracles require you to believe in what you cannot yet see. They encourage you to trust God's Word even when you do not see the evidence of it at work in your life. Miracles require faith.

In a time such as this health pandemic, it is important to stay connected with your church family. Being with other believers can help you create and live in a space where miracles can happen. Being able to pray with people whose faith is strong and steadfast only raises the possibility of receiving miracles. You might experience a miracle that will turn around your feelings of anxiety, replace depression with joy, bring healing to your body, or restore whatever you have lost because of the pandemic.

2. Worship

Worshiping God is an expression of faith that is expressed in

different ways. A form of worship is through uplifting music. Communicating with God in the form of praise music creates a hopeful space where you feel closer to God. The meanings of the songs and the carefully selected words can speak volumes to someone who is going through a difficult situation. It can make you feel it is worthwhile to continue striving towards hopefulness, rather than get stuck in the feeling of helplessness.

Worshiping through music also helps you express yourself. Bottled up emotions eventually erupt in different ways such as anger, depression or anxiety. Expressing yourself through worship is a form of therapy. Worshiping can help you better navigate your thoughts and emotions. It releases your feeling in a healthy form to allow you to process them freely.

3. Togetherness

When groups of people congregate for a common reason, individuals benefit from this fellowship. If you ever feel lonely, having faith and being with your church can help you feel you are not the only one who has experienced the uphill battle you are in. You can receive encouragement, support and mentorship from those who have conquered life's many battles. Your personal battle can also encourage a person who is going through a similar path, and together you can form a positive connection to help pull each other higher.

Even if your current church is not meeting in-person, virtual togetherness can have similar benefits. Turn your camera on whenever you are participating with video gatherings. Your body movements, facial expressions, and vocal tones are all part of the togetherness experience.

4. Hope

Faith keeps you looking forward to a brighter day. If you are sick, your faith can help get you on the road to healing. If you are facing financial difficulties, your faith keeps you searching for the next best opportunity. If you are lonely, faith will keep you believing that when the time is right, you will meet the people who can bring about a positive change in your life. Without hope, it may seem as if the difficult times will continue without an end in sight. Faith, however, keeps you going through the difficult times with your head held high, knowing that this too shall pass.

5. Finding Solutions

Faith can help you find solutions even in a seemingly helpless scenario. Your faith will help you find a way to navigate the adverse situation you may find yourself in because of the health crisis. This kind of faith is important to keep you from falling into a downward spiral which may then be difficult to climb out of. The determination that comes with faith will push you to go beyond your comfort zone and focus on finding solutions to your struggles. It will cause you to seek after God and make time for divine guidance. Faith causes you to resist the temptation to accept defeat and pushes you to find a way to overcome. Your faith can help you to navigate these struggles successfully during a health crisis. ●

edie melson | ediemelson.com

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES FOR YOUR DIGITAL LIFE





These days it seems like a lot more of life happens online. In some ways that's good, in other ways, not so much.

As ministry leaders, it's important to stay connected with those we're serving — and that means being active online. But it's easy to get overwhelmed and burned out.

Here are 11 tips to help you stay sane in the days of over-connectedness.

1. Decide on boundaries, write them down and STICK with them. These are some of mine:

- My time is no longer driven my phone. I set a time to return text messages, emails and phone calls — and it's not during lunch or after working hours.
- I have set office time. And my phone is NOT my office.
- I don't work during family time.
- I am specific with clients on what type of correspondence I expect. For example, while I will answer emergency text messages, all other correspondence should be in email.

2. Quit trying to be everywhere — all the time. Choose a couple of places to hang out online, like Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, and keep your website up to date. Set a timer if you need to, but limit the time you spend online.

3. Make weekends off the rule, NOT the exception. God

designed us for a rhythm of work and rest. We're more effective and efficient when we take time to recharge.

4. Learn to limit digital meetings. Zoom fatigue is a real thing. Online meetings can be even more exhausting than the in-person kind. The added stress of lighting, technology and lack of physical connection really does take a toll.

5. Remember that family comes first. A lot of us are working at home and that means we can fall into the trap of always being at work. Instead we need to learn to “leave” the office and keeps family time a priority.

6. Reach out to someone when you're down. Life is very different today than it was this time last year. We're all adjusting to the changes, and part of that is grieving some of the things we've lost. It's natural to feel down, but don't let it overwhelm you.

7. Quit judging how you're doing by what you're accomplishing. I'm a list person, and if I'm not careful I will judge my day by what I've done. We are much more than what we do.

8. Keep moving. All this online time is wreaking havoc with our health. Don't spend so much time sitting down that your health suffers. You'll be better by taking time for a walk and some healthy exercise.

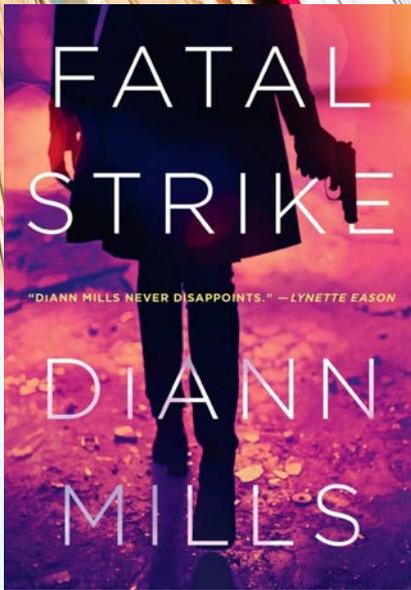
9. Be gentle with yourself and with others. Change is hard — even good change. Emotions are very close to the surface, and it's not uncommon to feel overwhelmed at the slightest shift in circumstances. Cut yourself some slack and remember others are struggling too.

10. Acknowledge the pressure coming at you right now. Everything feels more urgent these days. That means a lot of extra pressure. There are so many issues and needs but no one can answer them all. Take time to pray before you add anything to your plate. Don't let others influence you.

11. Seek regular time apart with God. We cannot pour out to others when we're empty. Serving others means we must be diligent to stay connected to the source of all strength and inspiration.

Ministry has moved online and that has opened up great opportunities. We can reach those we've never had the ability to serve before. But with that comes the danger of overwork and ultimate burnout. Take time now to set healthy boundaries and ensure your digital life remains in tip-top shape. ☺

BOOKSTOREAD



FATAL STRIKE
diann mills
novel of the year

Fatal Strike was recognized as the Novel of the Year at the 2020 Golden Scroll Awards.

This story brings the two FBI agents together at the point in their lives when they needed a partner to anchor their lives and to encourage each other to face their demons. The cascading consequences of sin are clearly shown in the actions of all the characters. The themes of forgiveness and redemption are expressed from the opening to the closing pages. I also enjoyed the double entendre of the title. There is the obvious reference to stopping the killer. But, after finishing the book, I realized it is also pointing to specific events in the story. Those are still haunting me.

Fatal Strike is a fast paced story, with intriguing characters. While the crimes were complex, it is the subtle way they had been inserted into the lives of the victims which are the most disturbing. It makes you wonder about the people around you, even those you sit by in church. And the romantic tension between the main characters brings tender and hopeful emotions to a devastating adventure.

—Lynda L. Blevins



VEILED IN SMOKE
jocelyn green
historical novel of the year

Veiled in Smoke was recognized as the Historical Novel of the Year at the 2020 Golden Scroll Awards.

The details of the 1872 Chicago Fire that pervade *Veiled in Smoke* are truly gripping, as is the wrenching depiction of Stephen Townsend, a Civil War veteran suffering from “Soldier’s Heart,” a condition we know today as PTSD. The “treatment” prescribed for those who suffered from it back then was well nigh as horrifying as the war experiences that caused it.

Stephen’s daughters, Meg and Sylvie, truly shine in the story, but Green breathes life into every character, endowing them with different goals, understandings, flaws, and strengths so that each comes alive as a flesh-and-blood person. As they learn daily to trust in God, each perseveres in the face of failure and almost overwhelming odds. Losses that seem at first impossible to overcome become in time the very source of strengthening, growth, and finally triumph as they fight for their unique place in a very changed world.

—J. M. Hochstetler



prayercircle



Follow @lindaevansshepherd on pinterest.

the power of one **PIN IT** **PRAYER**

linda evans shepherd | lindashepherd.com



I love to send prayers into my multiple social media accounts so that my friends can pray along with me. My prayers have covered topics such as social unrest, isolation, politics, truth, our country, loneliness, the pandemic, racial tensions, the lost, the hurting and more. Recently I logged into my Pinterest account to check my analytics so I could see which of the prayer topics resonated most with my Pinterest followers. I was surprised by what I found.

My third most popular prayer on Pinterest these last few weeks, coming in at 3.1 thousand impressions, reads:

Dear Lord, I need more of Your Holy Spirit in my life. Refill my emptiness with more of Your presence.

Yes! How are we going to get through this difficult season without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit?

Jesus once told a parable about the bridesmaids who waited one long, dark night for the bridegroom to lead them to the wedding feast. Five wise bridesmaids were prepared with extra oil for their lamps, while five foolish women allowed their lamps to run empty causing them to miss both the groom's arrival and wedding celebration. We cannot be like the foolish women; we must all replenish our souls with the oil of the Spirit.

My second most popular Pinterest prayer, coming in at 3.6 thousand impressions reads:

Dear Lord, I hurt for those who suffer. I hurt for those who grieve. I hurt for those who experience loss. Please comfort us all in Your love.

We are all in need of God's comfort. Second Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV) says,

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

How wonderful that through prayer, we can receive and share the comfort of God.

Can you guess which prayer topic hit number one with 8.2 thousand impressions? Nope; it wasn't prayers on politics, the pandemic, our country or isolation. It was simply:

Dear Lord, When I feel powerless against hurricanes, riots and unrest, I remember that when I look to You, I can walk through any storm.

That prayer certainly resonates with me, especially as I once drove my car through a powerful wedge tornado on the freeway. I sang worship songs with the radio as I punctured the tornado's violent wall to find the monster's peaceful, hollow center. I exited the whirlwind without a scratch, protected by worship and a loving God who saw me through.

John 16:33 (ESV) says,

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Remember, answered prayer only comes to those who are willing to pray. Now is the time to pray like never before. ☉



what will DEFINE YOU?

michelle s. cox | whengodcallstheheart.com

All of us who know Jesus will eventually encounter some moments in our lives that will define us. When God calls our hearts to those big moments He has planned for us, it's important for us to be ready. For our souls to be filled with His Word. For our knees to be sore from our prayers. And for the desires of our hearts to be that we will serve Him fully wherever He places us.

For some, it's giving their lives on the battlefield as they fight to protect our nation and for freedom. For someone else, it might be defeating cancer and then ministering to others by sharing about their faithful God and what they learned through the experience.

For Sareptia Cox, our great-great-great-grandmother, her defining moment was donating the land and starting a church.

Her husband, James Cox, had died from his wounds in the Civil War, but before he died, he was able to write her a letter telling her he'd been hit by a musket ball and he wouldn't live to see her again. Then he asked her to raise the children for the Lord and told her he'd meet her in heaven.

I know she was faithful to do that, because my genealogical research let me to the church where she is buried. Further research revealed that she and her daughter had donated the land, and her son and other men built the log cabin that served as their first church. The women covered that place in prayer, praying for their families, their community and future generations.

A brick building stands on that land now with the old cemetery beside it. I took my sons to that church one day to share about their spiritual heritage, and on that summer afternoon while we stood by Sareptia's gravesite, Vacation Bible School

was in progress inside the building. We heard the sweet sound of children singing "Jesus Loves Me" as we stood there that day. James and Sareptia Cox's spiritual legacy still lived on many generations later.

Oh, and those prayers she and the other women prayed? God surely answered them. That church is still active today, still reaching hearts and lives for Jesus. Her children left stories behind of them living for God. And those future generations she prayed for so long ago?

Well, today, her great-great-grandson—my husband—has lived a godly life, raising his own children for the Lord. Our three sons are faithfully serving God as well. Two of them are in ministry preaching the gospel, and one is active in music ministry, setting the tone for worship before the pastor begins to preach.

And her great-great-great-great-grandchildren have all asked Jesus into their hearts and are telling others about Him. You see, when it's your moment to shine for Him — when God calls your heart to a task — you aren't the only one who will be affected. What you accomplish for God can impact others and your family for generations to come.

I want to be just as faithful as Sareptia and James Cox were so many years ago. And when I share the stories of faithfulness from those who came before us, I hope it inspires my loved ones and other people to live just like that for Jesus.

Someday, I hope my children, grandchildren, and future generations will remember me as a woman who loved them and loved God with all her heart.

I hope they'll see moments that defined me as a woman who diligently served Him and left visible proof behind. Don't you? ☺



make the most of THE CALL NOW!

karenwhiting | karenwhiting.com

Each time God called me to do something, I took action. I started with prayer, connected with people who could equip me, took training, and found or earned the funding. I did this with a puppet ministry I directed for 13 years, and then with writing.

I trained teens who won many puppetry awards. We performed at churches, hospitals and many other places, and I ended up hosting a television series on puppetry. To obtain puppets and equipment, I wrote for puppet magazines, found groups to fund supplies, plus received backing from my church.

When I believed God called me to write, I went on a retreat and prayed. He confirmed the call, and I committed to work hard for 5 years and then evaluate the results.

At the end of those years, I had contracts for five books.

I am still writing books and will continue until the Lord tells me to stop. Once I made that commitment, I started planning and working hard.

If you feel called to move out in a specific ministry, consider taking these steps:

- **Pray.** Ask for wisdom, including with whom you should share the vision. I shared my call with my husband, who prayed, and from then on, introduced me as a Christian writer because he believed God's call for me.
- **Seek advice and learn.** As I started to write, I heard about a writer's conference and signed up. I spent an hour a day writing, and God connected me with a writer who became a walking partner and mentor.
- **Budget for success.** I worked on finances to build a kitty and listed desired writing books on my Christmas

wish list. I had a computer. I trusted God that if I attended other conferences, I would earn money needed to attend. That also applied to upgrading my computer or buying software.

- **Take advantage of opportunities.** At my first writer's conference, I picked up free sample magazines, submission guidelines and bought books on writing. I submitted to those publications where I felt I had something to share.
- **Set specific, attainable goals.** These goals might include training, writing a set number of words a week, submitting a query monthly, or contacting one place to speak every week. I scheduled time to read about writing daily and submitted one piece a month. Within months I started to receive acceptances along with rejections. I made a long-range plan of books to write and how to build expertise in those areas.
- **Proclaim the ministry.** That means to market. I joined an organization for writers and speakers and applied the marketing ideas. At first, this included mailing postcards to contacts in every state, pitching to radio stations (started with the local one), and speaking for free.
- **Persist as long as you believe God wants you to follow that call.** When I felt the sting of rejection, I read about Paul's struggles and then continued writing. If I did not sell something one way, I rewrote it another way as an article, drama, sidebar or book.

Consider the call sacred. That means to commit certain hours every week to it. Let others know about your call and that it's a priority. That often means saying no to other activities. Trust in Psalm 37:5 (NASB):

Commit your way to the Lord,
Trust also in Him, and He will do it. ☉



christine trimpe | christinetrimpe.com

VLOGGING 101 for leaders



“Mom, you should start a YouTube channel to share your transformation story. You could help so many people who don’t read,” my twenty-something daughter nagged.

Again, and again I replied, “I am not starting a YouTube channel. I’m too old!”

The more she nagged, the more God pricked my heart to launch a vlog-style platform.

A vlog (video blog) takes content you might write about in written form (blog), and instead of writing, you create a video. Then you upload on a platform like YouTube in a popular vlog style described here:

- **Talking Head:** Recorded experiences shared by a subject authority (examples: how-to, instructional, devotion).
- **Follow Me:** Captured day-to-day snapshots (examples: day in a life, celebrity, and reality shows).

Intrigued? Is God prompting you to: practice your speaking skills, reach your auditory audience (those people who will never land on your blog or read your book)?

Yes? Here’s a few points of interest as you pray and consider this platform:

- YouTube is a growing source of entertainment with 50 million YouTube channels.
- YouTube is the number two search engine, owned by the largest search engine, Google.
- YouTube offers a channel monetization program if you reach 1,000 subscribers and over 4,000 hours of viewing hours in a twelve-month period. That’s potential income to benefit your ministry.

Launching my YouTube channel required a leap of faith, along with many hours of education and research. Here are four tips to help you launch.

1. Before You Begin:

- Pray for and know your audience to niche and choose the overarching topic of your channel.
- Learn the basics: filming, editing, uploading. Find free content on YouTube to educate yourself.
- Watch trends on YouTube.
- Commit to consistency.

2. Content Creation:

- Stick with your niche. Example: I share low-carb lifestyle tips with joy and hope in a healing journey. I don’t share gardening tips on a whim.
- Keep track of the questions your audience asks. Answer these questions and explain an ideal solution to their pain point.
- Define at the beginning what the viewer will take away from spending time with you. Engage the audience with a call to action.
- Promote your channel on social media.

3. Equipment and Investment:

- Start with what you have: smart phone, laptop, a large picture window for recording.
- Utilize the free video recording and editing software on your devices.
- Invest in lighting and sound. Inexpensive ring lights and microphones are available on Amazon.

4. Search Engine and Keywords:

- Target your audience. Use search engines to help you title, tag, and tighten your content. Examples: Keywords Everywhere, YouTube, Google Ads, and TubeBuddy.
- Determine a keyword and test searchable phrases. Focus on searchable content related to popular trends or how-to. Look for search terms with high search volume and low competition. Avoid searches of over 100,000 per month. Play around with phrasing to discover the least competitive with your content.
- Include the keyword in your title, add relatable tags in your video description.
- Create a binge-worthy vlog series. My example playlist: “I Was Sick and Morbidly Obese” six-part vlog series.

Before you know it, your first video will be uploaded; your content used to minister to the one or many viewers God intended to find the answer to a question He can answer.

Vlogging is an adventurous medium, and don’t forget our current mode of communication is video in this global pandemic. The practice helps, so join me if He calls. I’ll let my daughter know she was right!

Finally, when you leap, never lose sight of our main goal in building an audience — your story for His glory. ☺



rhonda rhea | rhondarhea.com

RISE UP & reverberate



I was born in Texas. Maybe I shouldn't call this out, but we're mostly big sneezers there. It's widely accepted that Texans do everything bigger. No wimpy little "achoo." No, that's simply not "Texas" enough.

My sneeze, for instance, comes out in sort of a "Yah-hoo!" Heavy on the "yah" and extra, extra heavy on the "hoo." It could hardly get more Texan than that — unless maybe I roped and branded something in the middle of the sneezing. Somebody, mask this thing up, please.

Even sufficiently masked, though, my Texas sneeze also has a heaping helping of reverberation in it. It can cause ringing ears in everyone within an eighth-of-a-mile radius for a good ten minutes. My husband says my sneeze registers 8.7 on the Richter scale. He's exaggerating, of course. It's probably barely a 4.

But to top it all off, my husband also tells me I always sneeze in nines. Not to the nines. It's probably already clear that I'm not a fancy sneezer. But times nine. I rarely fail to sneeze nine times, straight in a row.

I think it's interesting that he accounts for all of them. But then maybe it's a little like counting down a missile launch. Except that it's more like a missile launch ... times nine. He's

asked that I start yelling "Incoming!" before the first sneeze launches. I hate to say it, but reverberation is not always a good thing.

It is a good thing, though, when we're launching the grandest of all proclamations. Here's hoping we can add even more decibels in proclaiming the message of Christ to a hopeless world. We have the message they need. That's hope that's worth yahooping about. Hope not just times nine. Hope times infinity.

Hold back my sneeze? I'm pretty sure I'd explode. We can't hold back the message either. Peter and John got that.

For we are unable to stop speaking about
what we have seen and heard.

Acts 4:20 HCSB

How can we not share it? Jesus Christ went to the cross and suffered that cruel, humiliating death on the cross to make it possible for us to have a right, tight relationship with our holy Heavenly Father. Astounding. The sinless Christ on a cross, hated and shamed, bearing our sin. All for our redemption.

God didn't keep secret His plan for getting the word out about that redemption. He chose us for the job. It's our calling.

You were chosen to tell about
the wonderful acts of God,
who called you out of darkness
into his wonderful light"

1 Peter 2:9 NCV

The Father could've blasted the good news over the most reverberating heavenly tweeters and woofers. He could've put it on YouTube. He could've beamed it over every satellite — or written in the stars, for that matter. He could've had the rocks cry out or used some sort of earthquake-attention-grabber. And He does so often use innovative ways to get His word out to those who need it. But the bottom line in His plan is for us to tell.

Let's keep on rising up to our calling. What an honor it is to be included in that plan! That's nothing to sneeze at, for sure.

And speaking of sneezes, you're going to think I'm making this part up, but I started sneezing while I was writing this. Totally true. Mid first paragraph even. I haven't seen the cat for over an hour. ☹



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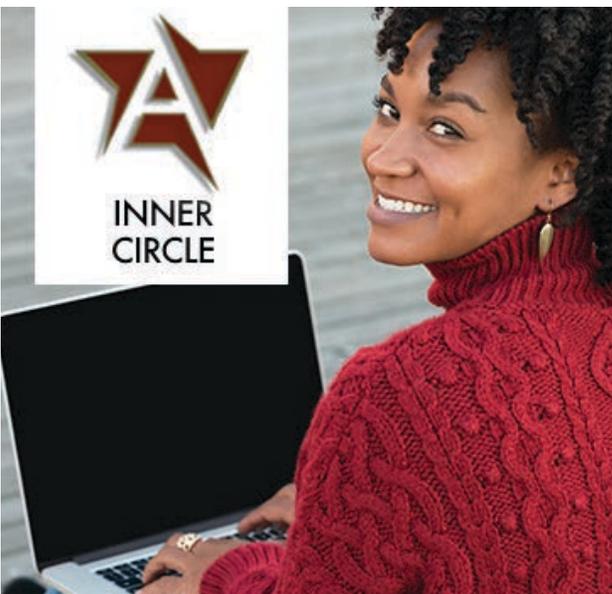
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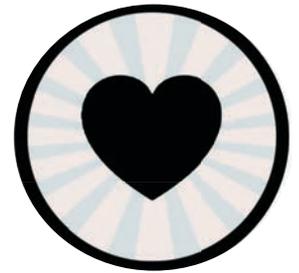


“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

—Galatians 6:9 NIV



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