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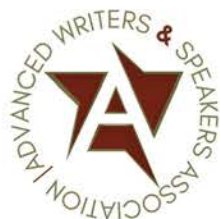
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REIGNITE THE TORCH

Eva Marie Everson

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I've asked God...

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Leading Hearts magazine for Christian Women is published bimonthly by Right to the Heart Ministries 2022.
ISSN 2380-5455

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MEMBER | 2014-2022 Evangelical Press Association Award of Merit Winner — Christian Ministry Digital Publication

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Reignite Our Souls

The bone-dry conditions were right for fire as winds howled at 185 miles per hour.

All it took was a spark from an underground coal fire to spread flames like soft butter on hot toast, blackening the grasslands of Boulder County Colorado. In mere hours, one thousand homes evaporated into ash.

Today, I think conditions are right for a new fire to burst inside our souls, but this time I'm speaking of the fire of revival.

This past season has caused souls to shrivel and inner peace to crackle dry. Hopelessness lives not only under bridges, but also inside our families and homes. No one has a solution. Except God.

All we need is a breeze from the Holy Spirit to spark our dry souls with the love of God and WOOSH — this fire of revival will reignite and spread.

Have faith and pray:

Lord, I say yes to the fire of revival starting in my heart! Rekindle Your flame in me so that my faith will catch fire and spread to my loved ones, my neighbors, and my community! ☺

Blessings,

Linda Evans Shepherd, bestselling author
Publisher of Leading Hearts Magazine

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FROM GUEST EDITOR tracy hester



Healing at the Source

Often, we go to external sources to try and heal ourselves instead of running straight into the arms of Jesus.

Others are limited and don't have the solution or the power to offer us total and sustainable healing; only Jesus has this power and authority.

After my 24-year marriage ended, I didn't want to waste more time, money, and resources on self-help solutions that were not sustainable. I desperately needed a God help solution. He created me. He has the blueprint for my life, which means He has a customized solution for my needs, wants, and desires. My healing and help came when I became desperate to see God heal me emotionally.

If we are not spending time with God, we can get stuck in our thinking and miss God's plan on how He might want to heal, restore, or answer our prayers. This stuckness can dim our faith, block out God's voice, and delay us from freely walking into all He has called us to be.

Here are three Get Unstuck strategies from Psalm 84 to remind us of the benefits of spending time with God and how to rely on His help for what we need every day:

1. Get Away

We must get away in God's presence to get and remain inspired. Unfortunately, I can quickly get stuck in writing to meet a deadline instead of writing to transform. I noticed this happens when I'm trying to produce content from my head, not my heart. Head writing is hard and results when I haven't spent quality time with God.

2. Get Strengthened

Possibly, your life is like mine — busy giving to family, projects, ministry priorities, and juggling life — all things I love, but also where I can get depleted.

Martha in the Bible was busy planning a seven-course meal for Jesus when He only wanted a sandwich. Was I Martha? Yes, Jesus wants me to keep things simple and enjoy His presence. Rest, stay a little while in His company — where He can strengthen my weary soul.

It's impossible to move and grow when we get depleted mentally or physically.

I understand how King David rose to a position of God-ordained authority. He knew the solution to a busy and depleted life. David met with God as often as possible, and he felt refreshed and revived.

3. Get God's Strategy

What's God's strategy? First, for us to walk boldly in our callings in the unique and creative ways God has gifted us.

We must have a clear focus on where God wants us to GO. This strategy will keep us from wandering ahead of God to the next new thing that catches our eye. And we must not sit back and get discouraged because things are not happening as fast as we desire. Instead, allow God's ability to be combined with our mobility and a spirit of flexibility to accomplish the task.

How do we stay on task? We continue to go back and revisit the strategy, pray about it, and listen for His voice, His Spirit.

God wants us to enjoy our best life here and now. He wants us to get reignited so that we may walk in faith, inspire others to trust in Him, help them get unstuck from their past, and move forward to share in His Commission to advance His Kingdom.

God is calling you out: It's time you walked into new freedom and purpose in your life by understanding your value as God sees you. Trust that God's plan is still being birthed in you, God has a beautiful redemptive plan for your life. There is more to add to your story.

Take time to declare Haggi 2:9, speaking it aloud over your life and standing in its promises:

"The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. "And in this place I will bring peace. I, the LORD of Heaven's Armies, have spoken!" (NIV)

Let's stay in God's presence continually and let Him open doors so we can live freely. ☺



Love, Tracy

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Walking the Path

—eva marie everson—

with amber weigand-buckley

When award-winning novelist Eva Marie Everson arrived home from a writers conference in Alabama, she didn't know a piece of folded paper would take her on a journey that would reframe her idea of what intimacy with God looked like.

As Eva Marie studied the paper, a map of a labyrinth, she could see it depicted winding pathways that wove in a circular pattern around a center point. Labyrinths, she learned, were often embedded in the floors of ancient churches across Europe and America; they were a place where one could walk and pray.

The labyrinth at the conference site consisted of four paths: the path of silence, the path of memory, the path of prayer, and the path of questioning.

As Eva Marie plotted her prayer journey through the paper-map labyrinth, she decided she would journal all four paths. As she contemplated her questions before God, she realized she'd found a powerful way to deepen her walk with Christ.

And because she couldn't build her own prayer labyrinth in her yard, she reinvented the meditative walk by daily putting pen to paper as she journaled through the paths.

Looking for Answers

"So, each day I would sit down with my coffee, pen in hand, the dog settled in by my side, and journal through the paths as a part of my devotional time," she says.

When Eva Marie got to the Path of Questioning, she laid out the three questions she wanted to ask God.

Two on her list:

"Why did the Crucifixion have to be so brutal? The beatings. The thorns. The nails."

Another question was, Why me? "I asked God, 'Why did You love me so much that You pursued me relentlessly, even as I ran from You? Why did You love the mess I had become?'"

As Eva Marie was thinking and praying for the answers, she was met with silence, because these were questions she knew she'd never receive the answers to this side of heaven.

Following the Question Marks

"I suddenly sensed His answer inside my heart: 'Not your questions; My questions.' And then I wrote: What questions could You possibly have? Lord, you're omniscient; You know everything." For Eva Marie, the answer came from Genesis 3.

"I looked for the question marks in the Bible, and found the first question God asked man: 'Where are you?'"

"I answered that question the way most of us believe it is posed — Where are you spiritually? Then: Where are you right now? What have you done that has separated you from Me and Me from you? And of course, 'What is this thing you have done?'"

"I ended up spending days and sometimes weeks on a single question."

This journey took Eva Marie from researching, to walking, to teaching, and finally to writing the book, *The Third Path — Intimacy with God on the Path of Questioning*.

"In my many years of following God's call on my life, this prayer labyrinth experience has changed me; it's made me more contemplative and centered as a person.

"One of the most profound results was that I began recognizing God's voice in ways I never had before."

A New Understanding

"As a novelist, I need to know the psychology of a character. I have to go down to the third dimension of that character and make them as real to the reader as they are to me. The questions help me bring my characters to life.

"The same is true for us, as we go deeper into our God questions, we get to the heart of who we are. This practice also leads to building our personal character so that our own stories illustrate the depth of God's grace."

Journeying Together

Even though Eva Marie has over 40 books under her belt, following God's call to writing ministry still comes with many of the same internal challenges she experienced in the early days of her writing career as she struggled to find the "what-ifs" in the stories she was creating.

"Pretty much every novel that I've written begins with a what-if question. 'What if...?' Then, when I toss a fresh novel idea out to an editor, and the editor says, 'Sign on

the dotted line.' I'm left looking at a blank page in a Word document going, 'Oh no, I have to turn this what-if into a story.'"

Presently, Eva Marie is releasing her first children's book, called *Our God Is Bigger Than That*, co-written with Michelle Medlock Adams. "I've never written a children's book before," she says. "But God sparked the idea when Michelle called me one night. I have a nursing background, so she was concerned about her sick daughter and grandson. It's incredible how God can use a simple interaction to birth something greater that you could imagine on your own."

In 1997 Eva Marie formed Word Weavers International (wordweavers.com) and was a founding member of the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association (awsa.com). These two organizations are built on the same godly principles. Eva Marie realizes the importance of iron-sharpens-iron relationships.

"I have been blessed with friendships and many opportunities to collaborate on projects and grow professionally and spiritually," she says.

Eva Marie knows the ministry call for creatives requires discernment. "Some of the best ideas you have may be meant for someone else to breathe life into. Listen to His voice, and be obedient to His leading, doing only what He's called you to do."

"In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:6 ESV) ●

Find out more about Eva Marie, including her latest book at EvaMarieEversonAuthor.com.

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mary ann bickerdyke Building HIStory



Born in 1817 to Hiram and Annie Ball, Mary Ann Ball Bickerdyke possessed a strong faith in God and chose a life of service.

She studied herbal medicine at Oberlin College and later took nurse's training in a Cincinnati hospital. In 1847, she married Robert Bickerdyke. After his death, she supported her young family by nursing.

Once the Civil War broke out, Mary Ann's pastor read a letter about terrible circumstances in military hospitals. Members raised money for medical care, and Mary Ann volunteered to deliver the cash to the Union hospital in Illinois. The condition of the hospital there horrified her, so she cleaned and reorganized it.

Her work caught the attention of the Sanitary Commission, and they gave her a small salary to continue her work. She established or upgraded about three hundred military hospitals throughout the war and raised extra money speaking.

General William T. Sherman and General Ulysses S. Grant admired her grit and dedication. They gave Mary Ann and her nurses permission to follow the Union forces in the West and oversee care for the wounded. After a battle ended, she risked her life searching for the wounded remaining on the battlefield.

She wanted the best care for each soldier and referred to them as her "boys." Soldiers adored her and called her "Mother Bickerdyke."

Doctors who managed medical care found Mary Ann annoying. In one hospital, she discovered doctors swiped liquor and food designated for wounded men, and she challenged the head surgeon. He asked for her resignation, which she refused. Instead, she spiked canned peaches meant for the wounded with ipecac syrup. The next day she knew which personnel had stolen food. The culprits had upset stomachs and cramps.

When doctors attempted to pull rank, she shut them down by saying her authority came from God. Hospital regulations failed to impress her. She cared for the men and would find ways to accomplish her work by going around endless red tape.

Once a surgeon complained about her to Grant. He replied, "Mother Bickerdyke outranks everybody, even Lincoln. If you have run amok of her, I advise you to get out quickly before she has you under arrest." [1]

After the war ended, she turned her attention to those who served. She assisted hundreds of female nurses in obtaining pensions for their work during the war. Undeterred by obstacles, she moved to Kansas, where she found a banker to donate money for veterans to acquire land and return to farming.

In addition, she convinced Burlington and Quincy Railroad to give veterans free transportation to Kansas. Mary Ann also persuaded Sherman to use government wagons and horses to settle veterans in their new homes. She died in 1901 and rested in Galesburg, Illinois, a hero of war and herald of faith because of her love for others. ●

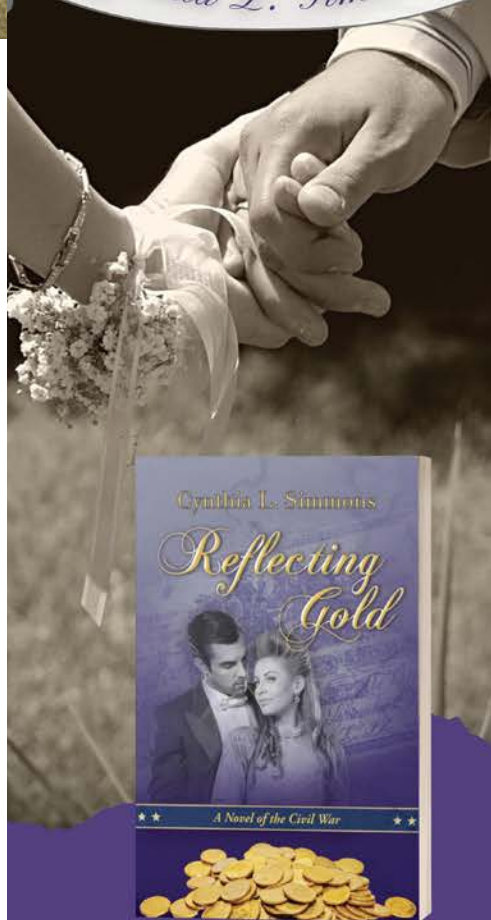
Cynthia L. Simmons is the award-winning historical fiction author of *The Southern Gold Series*, set during the Civil War. Find out more at clsimmons.com.

1. Monson, Marianne, *Women of the Blue and Gray*, Shadow Mountain Press, 2018

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Christ SHOWED himself to be love:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 ESV).

“God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him” (1 John 4:9 HCSB).

Christ Calls Us to Love

You might wonder, “What can I do to bring hope, help, and healing? I am just one person; we are just one family.” In the NIV, love is mentioned 551 times! First John 4:7 says, “love is from God,” and 1 John 4:16 proclaims, “God is love.” Receive God’s love and become a conduit of love:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34).

What Does Love Look Like?

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

In the *Devotional Study Guide for Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti*, we explain “The way to a more loving relationship is to be more loving yourself! Let’s take a glimpse of the word meaning from its original Greek:

Patience: Long passion, willing to wait

Kindness: Gentle

Does not envy: Does not boil over

Isn’t boastful: Not a bragger

Not proud: Does not puff oneself up

Not rude: Not indecent

Not self-seeking: Doesn’t seek their own interests

Not easily angered: Is not easily irritated and avoids sharpness

Doesn’t keep track of wrongs: Does not record in a ledger a list of offenses

Does not rejoice in evil: Finds no joy in the triumph of vile

Rejoices in the truth: Finds joy in all things honest

Protects: Covers like a roof

Trusts: Has faith without being gullible

Hopes: Sees the bright side

Perseveres: A stout-hearted soldier

Love Never Fails: Love survives

Wouldn’t the world be a much better place if each of us loved more like this?

What Does Toxic Anti-Love Look Like?

If each of us does not deliberately choose to take the high road of love, we can easily slip into toxic behaviors in relationships. When I was writing *7 Simple Skills for Every Woman*, I was looking for a way to capture what toxic looked like. I thought, *Satan loves to twist God’s Word (like the half truths he fed Adam and Eve and the trickery of the temptation of Jesus)*. I paraphrased 1 Corinthians 13 inside-out to better identify toxic behaviors:

Toxic is impatient and unkind. Toxic is always envious and jealous. Toxic boasts and is self-glorifying. Toxic is arrogant and proud, self-centered, and rude. Toxic easily loses its temper and keeps track of all offenses and holds a grudge. Toxic is thrilled when people look and feel stupid. Toxic loves a mistake because she can tell everyone of the error and replay it over and over.

Toxic runs to evil, never protects others, and gives up on people and life easily.

Jesus said, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12 NIV). A toxic mindset poisons the Golden Rule, turning it into “Do unto others before they do it to you. Exploit others before they exploit you.” And the toxic person would scoff at Jesus’ example of sacrificing for others. Instead, toxic people tend to sacrifice others for their own benefit.

Will You Love Like Jesus?

Since you cannot control circumstances or others, but you CAN control your own thoughts, choices, and behaviors, will you choose to love more like Jesus?

“And walk in love, as the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God” (Ephesians 5:2 HCSB). ●

Pam Farrel is the author of 56 books including her newest, Discovering Good News in John: A Creative Bible Devotional Experience (co-authored with Jean E Jones and Karla Dornacher).



MINISTRY MINDSET *reset*

Seeing Ministry through Christ's Eyes

denise pass & michelle nietert

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” (Romans 8:5 ESV)

Paul's plea to walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh is not just for those being ministered to, but for those who are in ministry as well. Ministry is not about us, but the attacks that come against leaders can feel very personal and cause us to respond in the flesh rather than in the Spirit. So, how do we respond to the struggles of those we shepherd without getting overwhelmed by the demands of those we serve?

We need a ministry mindset reset to be the hands and feet of Jesus to His people. Approaching ministry with Christ's eyes helps us to rise above attacks and remember that our battle is not in the flesh. When Joe Shmo congregant complains Sunday after Sunday about nonspiritual matters, we understand that Joe is not a spiritual guy. But an even greater understanding is to see Joe in light of the gospel and realize that everyone in church still struggles with their old habits and human nature.

See People Through Christ's Humility

Through both Moses and Jesus, we see how humility impacted their ministries. We can feel Moses' pain, can't we, when we consider how the Israelites complained and did not follow God's ways. How was Moses supposed to lead such a people? Moses was a humble guy, and it was his humility that caused him to put God's people above himself. When Moses discovered the idolatry of God's people with a golden calf, he did not sugarcoat their sin, but he earnestly prayed for them.

“So Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written’” (Exodus 32:31-32 ESV).

The response in the flesh would have been to cut these people off, but the response in the Spirit ached for them to know God.

The humility of Christ, too, points us to dying to self so we can see the offender as Christ sees them. Even while He was being crucified, Jesus spoke these words: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Humility leads us to care more for people's souls than their offense against us.

See People Through Christ's Compassion

Humility is the foundation for compassion. When ministry is not about us, but about doing God's work, we stay on mission and don't get distracted by the crisis du jour.

The response in the flesh is to judge and condemn the sinful behavior of people, but the response in the Spirit is to compassionately love these difficult people into the faith. This does not mean sugarcoating their sin, but being redemptive in our correction, seeking to restore them. Jesus wept and prayed for His people so they could see and understand. (See Luke 19:41-42.) Do we do the same?

See People Through Christ's Purposes

Christ was not about His success, though His disciples hoped He would be a political hero. Perhaps we have the same

struggle. We want to be liked by those we minister to, but Christ taught us how to disregard shame and to keep our eyes on the prize: winning the souls of mankind eternally.

“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2, ESV).

We will encounter shame and offenses as we seek to minister. But Christ showed us how to stay on purpose, keeping the glory of God, not the glory of man, central to His mission.

See God's People Through Christ's Grace

When we expect resistance more than ease in ministry, we rise above the flesh and respond in the Spirit. We are able to extend grace when we remember it was first extended to us. “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36 ESV).

A ministry mindset fixed on Christ's humility, compassion, purpose, and grace is a mindset that seeks to do God's will, not ours. In this perspective, we biblically wage battles and no longer fight our ministry conflicts in the flesh. What began as an offense can become a moment of redemption as we shepherd others to a more biblical worldview and Kingdom mindset of grace.

—Denise Pass, biblical mindset coach, author, speaker, worship leader, and podcaster. For more info visit denisepass.com

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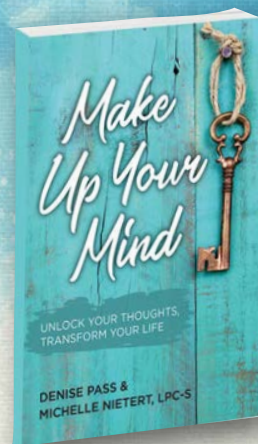
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Counselor's Corner

Having served over two decades in ministry, I recognize struggles that come even with hearts dedicated to serve and minister to others. As I counsel and coach ministry leaders, I hear phrases such as:

“I want to make a difference, but every time I feel momentum building, I’m faced with huge obstacles.”
“I want to be a good leader, but honestly, I’m overwhelmed by what I’m expected to accomplish. Sometimes I just want to quit and get a regular job.” “I see so many needs and work hard but accomplish very little.”

“When I focus fully on ministry, I feel like I’m not a very good spouse or parent. My spouse thinks I always put them last, and I can see why he/she feels that way.”

The battle in our heads is real even for those of us who know God's Word and teach it to others. We struggle to experience His promises as we minister in a season of continuous change and growing demands for our time and attention that the pandemic has created. If you were a client, we would join together to help you build a toolbox for managing your thoughts and feelings as you help others to do the same. Below are three tools you might find helpful:

Normalize thoughts and feelings that don't align with God's Word: We live in the world but are called not to conform to it (Romans 12:1-2) and bring with us our own insecurities formed by lifelong thought patterns. It's okay for you to be human. Just like the disciples, those of us

in ministry will get off track, feel alone, and feel like we are stumbling to lead others as we ourselves battle our own weaknesses.

Those you minister to need to know they are not alone in their weaknesses.

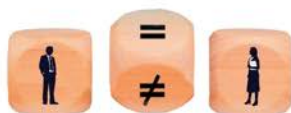
And while we have some vulnerabilities we'll want to share only with our closest support circle, the church needs to hear from us that we are right there with them, trusting God, absorbing His Word, and tapping into His power through prayer when we feel overwhelmed and helpless.

Create life rhythms and practices that include: downtime protected by boundaries, a relationship with God separate from public ministry. This means quality time with healthy people who care about us, dedicated focus to care for our physical bodies, and mindset resets focusing on what we can control that occurs throughout our days. I use times when I'm alone in my car or when I walk through a doorway as cues to evaluate my thoughts, analyze my feelings, breathe, and reconnect with God.

Finally, check in regularly with a few godly people you trust. Counseling, coaching, and being mentored provide space in life to receive support and accountability. In these times we have the opportunity to slow down, examine our thoughts and motives, and realign our calendars with our life priorities. In doing so, we can train our brains to run the very real race we experience daily and keep our focus on the true prize of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Michelle Nietert, licensed counselor, author, speaker, and podcaster. For more info visit michelleniertert.com.

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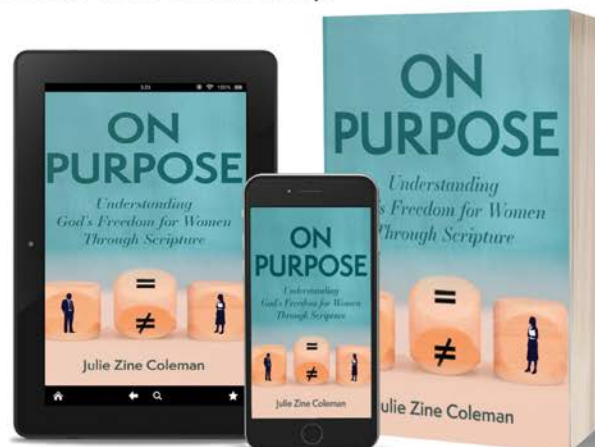
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Did Paul Command All Women to Be Silent in Church?

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The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says.

If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.

(1 Corinthians 14:34-35 NASB)

In her youth, my friend, also named Julie, had a strong desire to someday preach, but never mentioned it to anyone, knowing a woman would not be allowed in the pulpit. But one day after a service, an elder came up to her and said, "You would make a great preacher. It's a shame you are a girl." Smiling, he moved on, thinking he had paid her a high compliment. But for Julie, it felt more like a punch in the stomach.

It's likely that elder had two passages of Scripture in mind when he made his statement: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:12. These two passages, commanding women to be silent, are often lumped together without consideration of their contexts. Never a good idea.

Paul was writing to a church which was in trouble.

Many members reflected the honor-seeking persona prevalent in the world around them. Some claimed a higher spiritual status than others. Certain spiritual gifts were valued above the rest.

But Paul quickly addressed this. "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7 NASB, emphasis mine). Their Holy Spirit-chosen gifts were given to build up the church, not the gifted individual. Every gift was as important as the next.

In chapter 14, Paul mentioned three groups that were more about self-promotion than the edification of the body: (1) those speaking in tongues, (2) prophets, and (3) women disrupting church meetings with questions.

Every one of the groups shared a common fault; they were seeking recognition to the detriment of the body. The church gatherings should have been an opportunity for

all to contribute. "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification" (1 Corinthians 14:26 NASB).

1. Those who were speaking in tongues were doing so without an interpreter. If the speaker was the only one who would benefit, they should keep silent.

2. Prophets were monopolizing the spotlight and not ceding the platform to others who had a prophecy to share. "But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one is to keep silent" (1 Corinthians 14:30 NASB).

3. Some women, who lacked the most basic spiritual knowledge, were shouting out uninformed questions and disrupting the meetings. Paul told them to keep silent and ask their questions at home.

Did you note a common word for each of the groups? Silence!

Paul tells the tongue speakers to be silent in 14:28, the prophets to keep silent in 14:30, and the women with questions to remain silent in 14:34. In each example, silence is required for a time, until they can appropriately share what they have for the meeting. Both men and women.

We find the same command in Paul's instruction to Timothy: "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Timothy 2:12 NIV). From its context, Paul seems to be speaking of a woman who was teaching heresy, so Paul tells her to quietly submit to instruction as well.

Are women to keep silent in the church for all time? Not according to context. The silence Paul commanded was situational and for a time, not permanent. They were to remain quiet until such a time they could add to the edification of the body. They must understand that the good of the whole overrode their personal need for significance. Only then could they minister to others effectively. ☺

Julie Zine Coleman, M.A. in biblical studies, is the author of the newly released On Purpose: Understanding God's Freedom for Women through Scripture (Kregel 2022). You can learn more about her teaching at her site listed above or NewHopeChapel.org.

THE FLASHLIGHT *revival*





It was a hot June day when I pushed open the glass door of the Christian bookstore and felt the rush of cold air.

I was a sophomore in college and days away from leaving for my summer mission trip to serve as the youth director at a church in a tiny West Texas town near Uvalde. I soon selected a hundred-pack of Bill Bright's "Four Spiritual Laws" and rushed home to pack.

As I dropped the booklets into my camera case, I prayed God would put them to good use. But once I got to LaPryor, Texas, my booklets stayed hidden away. Every time I'd reach for my camera, I'd see my booklets and feel disappointed that I hadn't found a chance to share them with anyone. I'd pray, "Lord, give me the opportunity to share these with those who need to know You."

Near the end of my summer, I was in charge of taking a group of girls to the Alto Frio Baptist Camp along with a child who'd been my biggest challenge, a rebel disguised as a sweet blue-eyed twelve-year-old named Kathy.

Camp turned out to be fun. The facilities were a bit primitive, but the camp itself was filled with open-air worship, teaching, crafts, and games.

But it was the time in our screened-in air bunkhouse that my girls and I enjoyed the most. We'd jump into our pj's and climb into our bunk beds, only feet away from the other bunkhouses filled with mostly sleeping girls and their mother chaperones. My group would whisper until the moms would shine their flashlights through our screen door.

"You girls are making too much noise. We can't sleep."

"Sorry," I'd answer before trying to get my giggling pack to quiet down. But one night, my girls couldn't stop giggling, and soon the mothers surrounded our bunk house demanding, "Quiet down!"

We whispered our goodnights, and just as the girls drifted to sleep, Kathy whispered into the darkness, "What does it mean to be saved?"

I grabbed my camera case, pulled out one of my gospel booklets, and as my sleepy girls huddled together, I led Kathy through the steps that would introduce her to a saving relationship with Jesus.

By flashlight, we read John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

I whispered how Jesus died on the cross for our sins and was resurrected from the dead so we could know God.

When I talked about how Kathy could place her faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of her sins, I led her in a simple prayer:

"Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the doors of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be."

Kathy gushed, "Oh, I didn't know I could have God's Spirit inside of me. This is wonderful!"

The girls and I quietly cheered and suddenly we were surrounded by flashlights attached to angry moms.

"You girls must pipe down or face demerits," the women in pink sponge curlers demanded.

"One of our girls just got born again," I stammered.

"That's nice. Now, time to go to sleep."

The next day, when the girls gathered for the morning assembly, Kathy stood up and strode to the front of the room. "I have something to say."

The stunned worship leader stopped singing, and Kathy addressed the audience of two hundred girls. She said, "Last night I got Jesus in my heart, and it changed my life. If you don't have Jesus in your heart, you need to get Him now."

One little girl raised her hand. "How did you get Him in your heart?" she asked.

Kathy pointed at me. "Linda had a little booklet in her camera case that explained it. I prayed the prayer and asked Jesus to come into my heart."

Suddenly, the entire assembly of girls began to weep while the pianist softly played the hymn "I Surrender All." The worship leader stood and announced, "It's time to get Jesus into your heart. Talk to your counselors to find out how."

One of the formerly angry moms knelt next to me and asked, "Do you have any more of those booklets? I need five."

I opened my camera case and handed the woman five booklets, and she hurried back to her girls and began to read it to them.

I looked back and realized a line had formed. "I need ten," the next mom told me. Another said, "Can you spare eight more?"

And so it went, as mom after mom made her request for booklets. When I handed out the last booklet, I was worried that I had run out, then I realized, there was no one else in line.

The room was filled with weeping, as all around me, the mothers led approximately 100 girls to Jesus with the booklets. I could only sit back and take the moment in, knowing full well that God had answered my prayers.

He had made sure I had exactly enough booklets to ignite a revival.

As I read the reports of the devastating news from Uvalde, I can't help but think of those little girls, now moms and grandmothers. I hope they still have their booklets and the faith to share the love of God with the hurting.

May God ignite another revival of salvation and comfort.

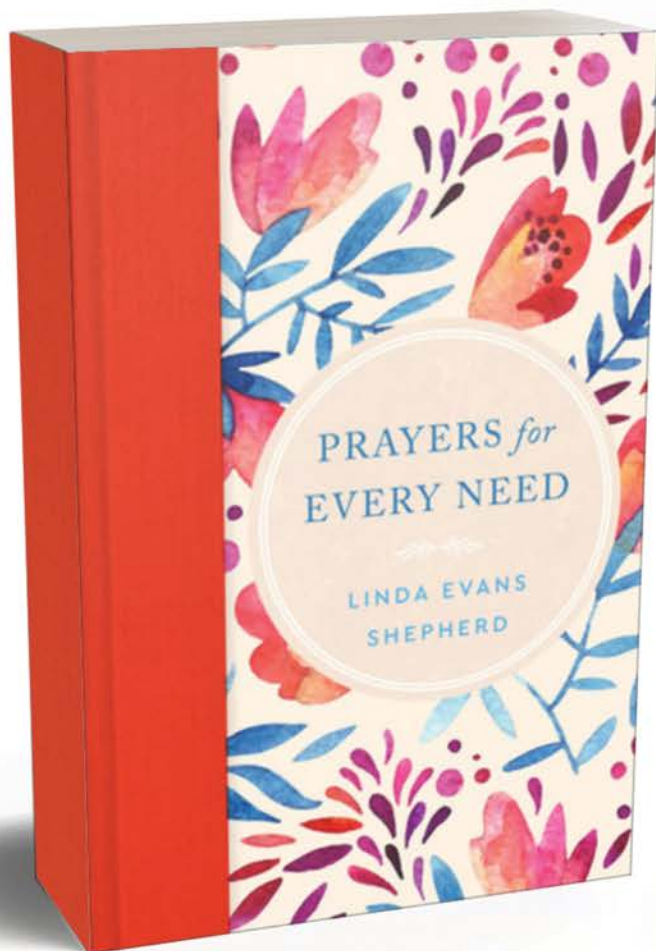
And if you've never found a personal relationship with God through Jesus, pray the prayer above to start your journey. ☺

Salvation prayer from Bill Bright's Four Spiritual Laws Classic Evangelism Tract © 1964, 1994 Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc.

Linda Evans Shepherd is the founder and CEO of AWSA (Advanced Writers & Speakers Association—awsa.com). Her latest book is Prayers for Every Need, from Baker Revell.

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LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD is a bestselling author of 37 books, an international speaker, and a media personality. She is the founder of Right to the Heart Ministries and publisher of **LEADING HEARTS** magazine and **ARISE DAILY** devotionals. For more, visit LINDASHEPHERD.COM.



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ministry less perfection

with sharon tedford



I talk to my dog — a lot! The days before an event find me hidden away in my room with my guitar slung around my body, my setlist in front of me, and my trusty four-legged friend at my feet.

Going over the content about to be delivered is a vital part of how I honor God in the preparation of the message. As my furry solo audience, my pup gets the full concert. Front row seats and a backstage pass, and I don't even charge him.

He's heard the truth of the gospel so many times as I speak out what I'm about to share, I'm sure he's saved by now.

He always responds with a weary wag of approval when I ask him how it sounds. He doesn't have a favorite song or story, and he doesn't care if I play a wrong chord; he just loves to be in my presence.

Performing in front of my canine comrade has helped me learn how to minister well, without the pressure of perfection.

I don't know about you, but I sometimes hunt for words or facial expressions of confirmation from the audience. Of course, I want to know what I'm offering is hitting the target of the heart, but it's all too easy to think that's my job — and I've come to learn it's not.

There's no way my words, songs, or artwork will hit the bullseye with every audience member. And that's become okay with me! My deepest desire is for the King of my words, the Composer of my songs, and the Creator of my artwork, to have His name lifted high in all I do.

The scowl or snooze of an audience member doesn't bother me anymore. It used to disturb me because it felt like I was falling short and failing them. The bright grin of a hearer is admittedly rather lovely, but it's no longer what I search for in a desperate attempt to find affirmation amongst the sea of faces before me.

Do you remember what my dog wants as I perform his private

concert? He just wants to be with me. He loves to sit right beside me. And now this is my stance as I park myself on the stage and look into the faces of people who've come to hear from Jesus, not me.

Although I stand to perform, my heart is seated. Quietly settled at the feet of Jesus.

We touch the lives of others as we introduce them to the impactful, immutable, and important truth of Christ. It is time we all imitate this settled posture in our innermost beings. We must choose to look to God as the one we want to delight in.

In Galatians 1:10 Paul reminds us, "If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ" (NIV).

Our calling is real. The need to speak up, share truth, and generally exclaim God's eternal freedom is evermore necessary. And the wonderful reality is we can do this from a position of servanthood with our great God.

We choose to set aside all our own rights in order to serve Christ in the fullness of who He made us to be. We decide to permit the Holy Spirit to guide and lead us into the daily mission He sets before us.

Will we fall short? Of course! But falling short must never become falling off or falling away. In those difficult moments of failure, we must resist the temptation to run into mental malfunction.

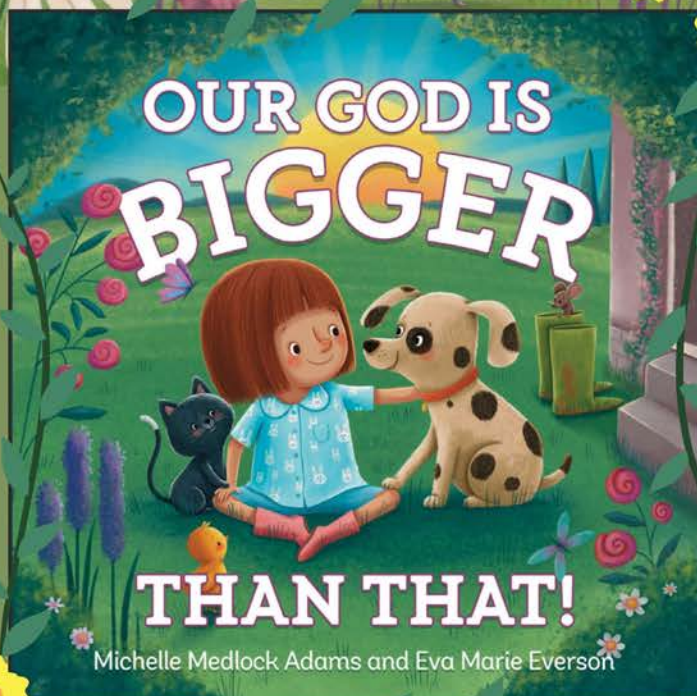
Instead, we must choose to sit down at the feet of our Heavenly Master, looking to Him. We must realign our priorities and remember our assignment to deliver the truth.

Ought we to spend time thinking about our performance? Yes, but our highest aim must be to please our worthy God, for it is Him we are ultimately serving.☺

Sharon Tedford is a popular international music artist and award-winning podcast host. She uses her gifts as a worship leader, singer songwriter, author, and speaker to inspire weary Believers. Find her at www.61-things.com



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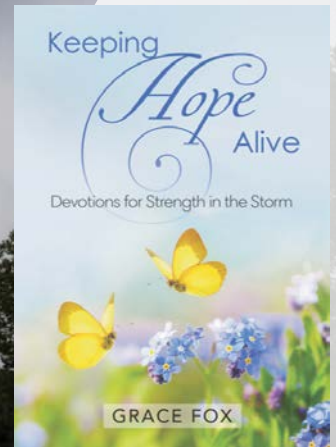
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Keeping Hope Alive: finding strength in life's storms



The day dawned with the promise of smooth sailing.

Literally. It was late August, and my husband, Gene, and I were heading home after three days exploring the Strait of Georgia off British Columbia's coast. Six uneventful hours passed, but bliss turned to bluster when our engine died as we entered a notoriously shallow area.

One thing led to another. By day's end we'd experienced a storm of epic proportions: Rough seas. Three engine failures. The electric anchor winch had stopped working, the dinghy we towed had been punctured and its oars lost at sea, and we had to motor up the Fraser River in the dark.

Just when we thought things couldn't get worse, Canadian Border Patrol guards stopped us and searched our vessel for drugs.

Because we'd anchored in American waters to fix our engine (the only safe place along the shoreline) and then crossed back into Canadian waters, they said we'd have to quarantine for two weeks. Failure to comply would result in a fine of \$750,000 or six months in prison.

"I don't know whether to laugh or cry," I said. The in-charge guard replied, "Lady, this is no laughing matter." My knees knocked, my heart pounded, and I imagined headlines screaming, "Christian Author Behind Bars."

Sometimes life's like that, right? The day dawns with promise, but everything changes in a nanosecond. A storm of epic proportion strikes and sends us on a journey we didn't choose.

Things go from bad to worse. Circumstances leave us weak-kneed and winded, and our imagination takes us to places we don't want to go.

I sometimes feel as though life since the pandemic is like a storm that won't stop. Global gusts blow hard, ease momentarily, and then regain force. Wars explode. Refugees run for safety. Gas and food prices soar. Evil claims innocent lives over and over again.

Literal storms — hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods — strike and affect people already hurting. As though those challenges combined weren't enough, it seems everyone's dealing with personal storms of one type or other: Cancer. COVID. Betrayal. Job loss. Rejection. Loss of possessions and dreams. Loss of loved ones. I've lost eight friends since 2022 began. Several had school-aged children.

The wind and waves rise, and so does fear. But in the midst of it all, God is with us.

Sometimes, when we call on Him for help, He calms the storm around us. Other times, He calms the storm within.

Hope comes when we hold onto His promises like a life ring. Here are three promises that I've found especially meaningful.

Psalm 46:1 (NLT) — "God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble." No matter what our storm looks like, He is ready to help us get through it. He will give us the strength needed.

1 Chronicles 16:11 (NIV) — "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always." Focusing on Jesus rather than the wind and waves keeps our perspective in a place of peace rather than panic.

Psalm 118:14 (NLT) — "The Lord is my strength and my song; he has given me victory." Victory is ours because God said so. Amen? Meditating on His promises turns our terrified cries into songs of comfort and praise that drown the sound of howling wind. The waves cannot sink us because He is near.

Memorize these promises and meditate on them as you fall asleep at night. Recite them aloud when you wake in the morning. Repeat as needed throughout your day. Let them buoy your soul.

Storms happen, but we can face them with hope for a good outcome because God hasn't left us to fend for ourselves. He is with us and offers to come to our rescue.

We need only ask: "God, help! I can't do this on my own. Please be my strength and give me victory. Amen." ●

Adapted from Grace Fox's book Keeping Hope Alive: Devotions for Strength in the Storm. Find out more about Grace's ministry and receive free hope-building articles and resources at gracefox.com.

WHOSE LEAD ARE YOU

following?



Do we ever take our cues from people instead of God? When we observe the successes of others, it can be tempting to repeat their steps. Yet God uniquely equips us to do the work He prepared for us in advance (Ephesians 2:10).

As we seek God's will through His Word and prayer, He makes our paths clear.

Then we must take the first step, choosing whether to do things His way or our way.

Obedience Over Sacrifice

God wants our obedience more than our sacrifices (1 Samuel 15:22). Like King Saul, we may think our ideas are so good God can't help but bless our efforts. However, we must obey God even when obeying doesn't make sense.

In the children's book I wrote with my daughter, *Annabella's Crown*, Princess Annabella works hard to earn jewels for her crown by outdoing her sisters, especially Christina, who cooks, scrubs, helps the poor, and cares for shoeless children.

Annabella copies everything Christina does, working from morning till night, even ignoring her father's request to sing for him. She's so busy trying to impress her father she fails to spend time with him.

No Room for Comparison

Like Annabella, who compares her accomplishments with those of her sisters, we're often guilty of the same thing. Our friends may become speakers, authors, missionaries, or leaders in business or the church. Or we may see them as supermoms with seemingly perfect children.

Even worse, we may see others soaring in areas where we believe we should excel. This comparison trap can be discouraging, especially when we sincerely desire to do great things for God.

The work God assigns us may not seem important to us or others, but we must remember that we don't share God's perspective. The most significant work in His eyes may be as simple as giving a child a cup of cold water to drink (Matthew 10:42).

Correct Motivation

Our actions matter, but so do our attitudes. As we align our will with God's and walk in obedience to His sovereign plan, we need to check our motivations. Ask yourself: Am I trying to impress someone? Am I reluctant to obey because I like my way better? Am I serving with all my heart for the Lord (Colossians 3:23)?

Princess Annabella focuses on earning jewels for her crown until she recognizes her jealous actions are a result of wrong motives.

Keeping our focus on our Heavenly Father brings us treasure much greater than jewels. When we obey out of love for God, our attention turns away from ourselves to others, and we can find joy in serving.

Uniquely Equipped

Sometimes we're reluctant to obey because God asks us to do hard things. When obedience is difficult, we need to remember God uses tests to mature our faith. He's already gifted us with unique personalities, spiritual gifts, and skills to carry out His plan for His glory. We need to walk with Him and follow His lead.

Although God may give us the same work as someone else, He may want us to do that work distinctly, for a different purpose, or even for an obscure audience. We must follow God's will, whether the task seems great or small, even if other people don't understand.

When we serve God out of love and in our unique ways, we do not need to focus on how our accomplishments look to others, even when other believers don't comprehend our version of success. We will know our success is grounded in pleasing our Father in Heaven.

Let's take our cues from God. Then, as Annabella learns, we can look forward to hearing our Father say, "Well done."

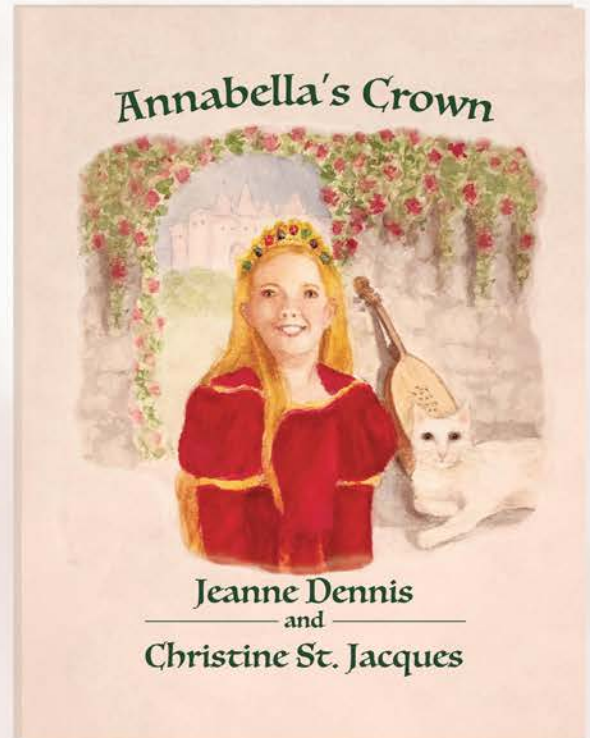
For in God's economy, obedience equals success. ☛

Jeanne Dennis is an award-winning author and singer/songwriter, a Colson Center Fellow and Centurion, and an online TV host. She is passionate about helping others grow in intimacy with our Creator while equipping them to pass on biblical truth to others.

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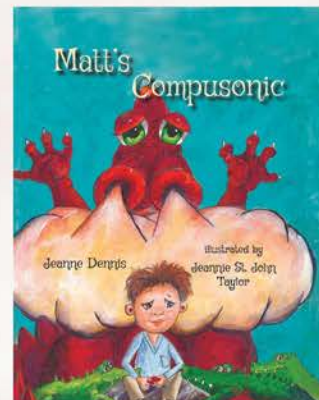


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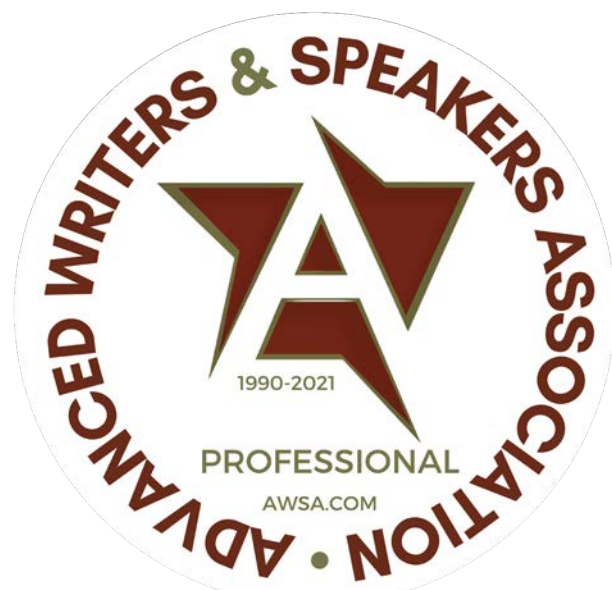
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When How They're Living's Not How You Raised Them



"Mom and Dad, would you still love me no matter what I told you?"

And so begins conversations leading to next sentences we never saw coming. We brace ourselves. Angst that has flowed as a damaging undertow, sometimes for years, bubbles to the surface through our child's words. The confessions reveal news we don't want to hear.

Our blood pressure soars; our heartbeat seems audible. Please stop, our brains cry. But keep talking, our hearts counter. We struggle to stay calm, conceal the frown, and blink back the tears. All at once, the questions and thoughts crash through like lightning bolts:

Are you serious? How could this be when you were raised in church? Our family doesn't have this problem. Don't you know what the Bible says about this? We've failed as parents.

What could we have done differently? Why?

Fear. Confusion. Shame. Embarrassment. Isolation. Disbelief. Helplessness. The knot in the pit of our stomachs tightens and won't go away. We realize we're not perfect, but we did everything we knew to do to raise this child right. Now this adult child is saying the unthinkable.

"I'm pregnant."

"I'm leaving the church."

"I'm dropping out of school."

"Can you come pick me up? I'm at the downtown jail about to be locked up."

"I need some money. I thought my win at the card table was a sure bet."

"I'm getting divorced."

"I'm gay."

Throughout time, parents have watched from the sidelines as their adult children entered into troubling circumstances. Even after the Father God supplied His first children, Adam and Eve, with absolutely everything they needed, they disobeyed, insisting upon going after the one thing they didn't need.

If God had trouble with His very first children, what chance do we think we have of avoiding a similar fate with ours?

The second set of biblical children didn't learn from their

parents' mistake either. Son A ended up murdering Son B, and then Son A got ostracized by society, leaving the parents bereft of both sons. (See Genesis chapters 3 and 4 for details on those accounts.)

Today's distinct problems may be different, but the desperate circumstances are exactly the same. We parents ache over the mistakes, misjudgments, shocking decisions, and shameful deeds of our kids. When they were small and got themselves into trouble, we sent them to their room with the command that they simply "cut that out." But now that they're grown, neither their issues nor our solutions are that simple.

God is ultimately in control of all outcomes. As parents, we are no more to blame for the outcome of our adult children's poor decisions than we are to claim credit for their great ones. However, the responsibility does lie in our laps to present the case to God.

Our children don't always consider that their decisions — bad or good — affect others in the community, church and family. So, when they make a disquieting decision or behave in an unseemly fashion, we ache for the fallout we know will follow, the pain they will inevitably face, and the situation into which everyone involved is now placed.

So where do we start at getting help for our children? Realize that Jesus is the answer to our children's problems, no matter their issue and no matter their age. Armed with that realization, determine to take that child to Jesus. Second, believe. Have faith that Jesus can bring about the necessary change. Ignore the naysayers. Ignore the wind of culture and buck yourself up to walk directly into the gale.

How will we know God has moved in our children's lives?

The mute will speak; the deaf will hear; the possessed will be sane; and the dead and dying will live again. Our faith in the Trinity's ability is like our turning on the faucet to let the power flow into our children's lives.

Someone has rightly said that we need to stop telling God how big our problems are and start telling our problems how big our God is. Be encouraged. Take your children — with their adult problems — to Jesus, and don't stop until they are healed. ☉

*Dr. Sharon Norris Elliott's passion lies in encouraging the people of God to live significant, authentic lives that clearly mirror the love and life of God to the world thanks to the life of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. *Article excerpted from Didn't See That Coming: When How They're Living's Not How You Raised Them due from Elk Lake Publishing, August 2022.*

When God Leads You but Your Child Needs You



Do you have a child with special needs? Maybe your son or daughter has a syndrome, a mental illness, or a learning disability?

Our son, Ashton, was diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder called Noonan Syndrome when he was seven, and we have been living out the new normal for the last five years.

As you juggle health challenges and squeeze in doctors, therapists, and tutors amongst homework, housework, and activities, where do you find time to answer His call to lead?

How do you do it as a woman called to lead in ministry or business while simultaneously being a caretaker for your child with special needs?

I don't believe there is a one-size-fits-all plan or magic formula. Just as God created each of us uniquely, the path He has for you will be tailor-made too.

The good news is your special needs child does not negate the call on your life nor disqualify you from your ability to lead. The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

Your child's special needs diagnosis does not define him or her, and it does not define you.

Your identity and your calling are firm in God; and He will work all things together for good and bring it to pass in His perfect way and His perfect time. So keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and let Him lead you step by step.

God's Word says our steps are ordered by the Lord (Psalm 37:23). He is ordering your steps and your child's too. Following His lead will not cause your child to suffer as you are faithful to His call; your child will flourish because God's blessing will follow your obedience.

God has taught me quite a few things on this journey. It took our family two years to figure out our son's diagnosis because Ashton is affected in many different ways. We are thankful for positive reports from doctors and improvements in Ashton.

Two years ago, I stepped out into writing, speaking, and ministry full time as the pandemic forced a career change. I quickly realized I cannot compare myself to others or even do all the same things other authors and speakers do. God has

shown me he has a unique set of blueprints for me to follow based on our family's situation, and that brings such hope and freedom.

I want to share with you three principles I have implemented in my life which have helped me follow God's call to lead while taking care of my family and my son's needs too.

Surrender

This is a daily practice for me. I come to God in prayer and give Him everything — the challenges, weariness, unanswered questions, and frustration over not being able to do or fix it all. I give God my hopes, dreams, son, daughter, marriage, finances, ministry, and future. I lay it all down, in His hands. I ask Him to have His way and do the impossible. I ask Him for strength, grace, favor, and the ability to walk out the call on my life.

Be Spirit-Led

As I pray and lay it all at His feet, I quiet my heart and listen for His still, small voice. I ask God to speak and show me His priorities for the day. I ask God for His strategies and the power of His Holy Spirit so I can accomplish these things and lead others effectively too.

Seek Support

While I am being led by His Spirit, I ask God for wisdom on what I can delegate and to whom. I pray for God to surround me, my husband, and my children with the helpers we need. I am open to receiving help from others, whether it is a tutor for Ashton, a virtual assistant for me, or a landscaper for our lawn. I ask my husband and kids to help with housework.

I established a group online to share concerns about Ashton and a prayer team where I seek support for my family and

ministry. I also have friends I text for emotional and prayer support.

I received wonderful advice from my friend Jessica when Ashton first received his diagnosis. She said, “

Amy, you are the perfect mom for Ashton, and he is perfect in God's sight.”

I'm thankful God does not make mistakes, Ashton's diagnosis with Noonan Syndrome is part of God's perfect plan, and it fits in perfectly with my call to lead.

I trust that He will show you how your call also fits in perfectly with your caretaking responsibilities. I believe as you step out into your God-given purpose, you will succeed, and your child with special needs will flourish too. ☺



Amy Joob is an award-winning author, motivational speaker, and former model. She hopes to empower and inspire women, men, and families to pray for, support, and advocate for one another and those in need, locally and around the globe. Amy and her family partner with charities, foundations, and ministries throughout the Chicagoland area.

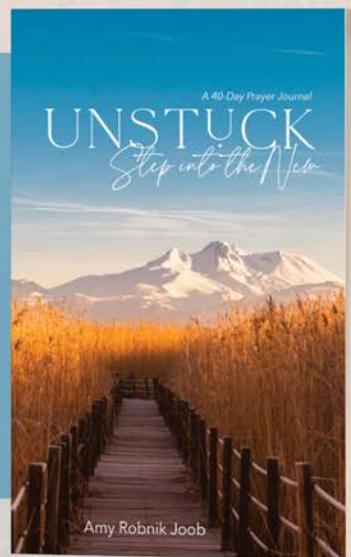
FROM AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR AMY JOOB

ARE YOU READY FOR YOUR FAITH TO BE IGNITED AND YOUR HOPE RESTORED?

Then this is the prayer devotional for you!

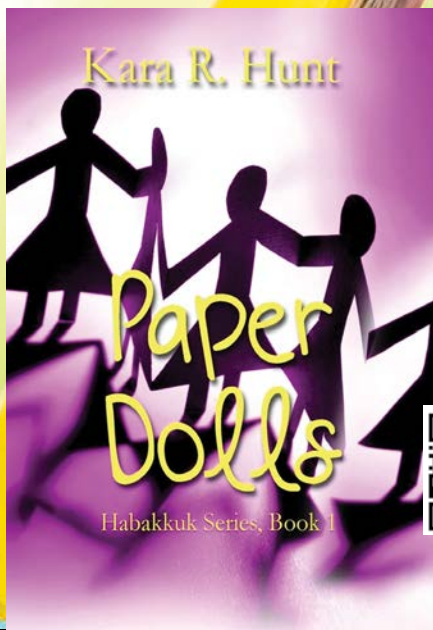
"Have you ever felt stuck? You're not alone. Amy Joob has been there and she's ready to share with you the steps she's discovered to getting unstuck. This engaging 40-day devotional will help you break free and find biblical courage to step into the new God has for you."

- RHONDA STOPPE, NO REGRETS WOMAN



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BOOKSPOTLIGHT

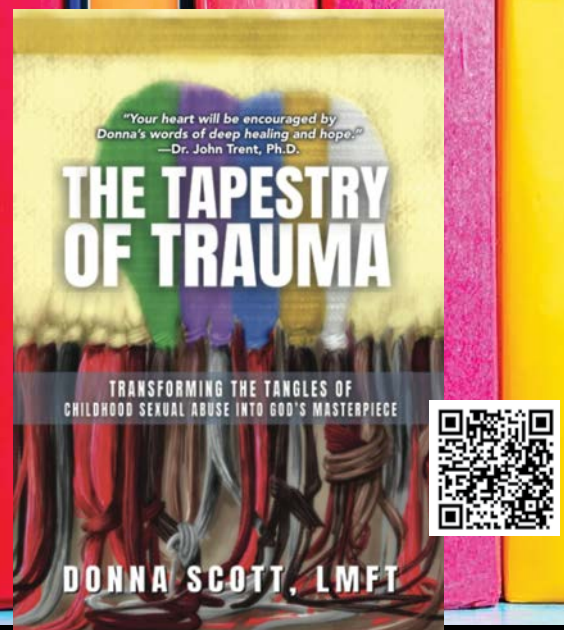


PAPER DOLLS
kara r. hunt

Paper can be torn and dolls can break. So can humans. Kite Tanner, Priscilla Martin, Lydia Dooley, Eve Stanton, and Mary Rabin are five women with very different stories that test the bonds of family and friendship. Will the women's faith in God and each other stand the test of time? Or will it crumple like paper?

"Finding a woman who couldn't relate to any of the themes in Kara R. Hunt's expertly crafted novel, *Paper Dolls*, would be difficult. Wife, mother, daughter, sibling, friend, females struggling with identity, hope, hopelessness, dreams, and dreaded decisions. Based on the Book of Habbakuk, the intricate plot is a layer-upon-layer of deep emotional entwinement paired with strong Christian values.

"Hunt's writing is superb. These characters portray the author's attention to emotion, motivation, repressing and expressing old trauma, broken dreams, and the deepest, most horrifying fears, making them anything but paper cutouts of people. They are flesh and blood come to life in a memorable, extremely gifted, beautifully crafted story." —*Dr. Deborah Maxey, multi-award-winning author of The Endling, A Novel, Licensed Counselor and Marriage and Family Therapist.* ●



THE TAPESTRY OF TRAUMA
donna s. scott, lmft

Beautiful tapestries are woven with threads of amazing colors that have skillfully been combined by the master craftsperson. However, the picture we see on the front of the tapestry looks much different from the knotted mess we'd witness if we turned the masterpiece over.

This powerful visual is the central illustration used by author Donna Scott in her book, *The Tapestry of Trauma: Transforming the Tangles of Childhood Sexual Abuse into God's Masterpiece*. The book speaks compassionately to those who have lived through the horrors of childhood sexual abuse and have grown into adulthood suffering with the knotted mess of the emotional scars.

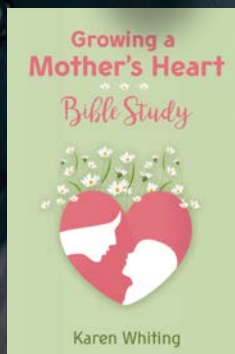
She takes her readers all the way from developing the ability to discover a new view — from God's view — to being able to picture their own healing. In between, her readers learn how to understand each thread of what they've been through and how to escape the grasp of the past.

Every reader is sure to emerge understanding herself or himself as God's masterpiece. —*Sharon Norris Elliott* ●



karen whiting | karenwhiting.com

MOM mentors



“Why won’t Jamie answer? Is his mouth taped closed or is he not here?” I asked.

Michael responded, “He’s not here.”

“What do you mean he’s not here?” I yelled as I slammed on the brakes and pulled to the shoulder of the road.” I looked under the seats and counted feet. “What happened to him?”

“Mom, he got out when you went back in to get his costume.”

I drove the last block to school, dropped off the two in the car and raced home. Jamie got in the car, but before I yelled, I asked, “Weren’t you scared when you saw I had left?”

“No, you came back for my costume, so I knew you’d come back for me.”

His words melted my heart, and I could not yell. I simply hugged him and drove him to school. That night I prayed and said, “Jesus, I failed again. What mom forgets her child?”

I heard a whisper in my mind, “My mom left me behind too, in Jerusalem, for three days.”

We’re not perfect as moms, and we need to trust God, including to keep our children safe. I confessed to friends when we gathered and discovered that other moms also felt like failures for various situations that happened and things they forgot to do. I even talked to another who forgot a child.

Gathering together gives us the opportunity to support one another, share the failures, and rejoice at the joys.

Over the years when young moms admitted they felt like colossal failures, I shared a few of my bloopers and we laughed. Then we shared tips that helped us succeed.

I love mentoring moms, but always know I need to actively listen much more than talk.

It’s good to ask a mom to share what a child did lately to make them smile or laugh. Also ask to see photos. Be enthusiastic about what the mom shares.

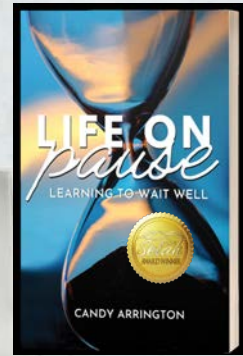
Avoid judging, as each mom’s journey is unique and has its own challenges. Wait for the mom to open up about a problem, and ask what she thinks will help or what she can change before you offer advice. You might have a story to share about a similar problem and weave in what helped you. It might be the mom has a problem eater, and you can share how once when you let your problem eater help mash potatoes or scramble eggs, they gobbled up what they helped cook.

As we mentor a new mom or lead a mom Bible study, we can rejoice with one another, comfort one another, or empathize when a mom feels she missed the mark.

That’s a time to feel safe to share, find guidance, and know we’re good enough as we trust God and love our children. ●

Karen Whiting, a mom of five, grandma, and author of more than thirty books, encourages moms with her newest book, Growing a Mother’s Heart Bible Study. The book includes tips on personalities, meal and bedtimes, rest, finances, and organization, all with godly Scriptures and relatable passages.

The Benefits of *waiting*



When sidelined in a season of waiting, trusting that rewards lie ahead is difficult.

In our fast-paced, make-it-happen-right-now world, everything about waiting feels uncomfortable, uncontrollable, and unwieldy.

However, with focused attention we can find positives in our present situations and

train ourselves to wait rather than dash forward with decisions that may prove disastrous or other than God's best plan.

COVID pushed the pause button on the way we normally conduct our lives. Many were uncomfortable with the slowdown and ill at ease with the new normal as they struggled to quash fears and waited for the situation to change.

Other life circumstances do the same, forcing us to wait while others move forward. Although we're conditioned to see waiting in a negative light, it provides opportunity for rest, reflection, and renewal, while allowing us to refocus for even greater perspective.

Rest

For twenty-five years, I participated in a 5:30 a.m. cycling class, three mornings a week. When the fitness center suddenly closed its doors, and the cycling class disbanded, I felt displaced. But the change to my schedule resulted in added rest that enhanced my mental capabilities and energy level throughout the day. I didn't stop exercising, just changed to a later time.

Although many people view a time of waiting negatively, one benefit is the opportunity to slow down from life's frantic pace and rest. Yet, we often find it difficult to let go of our plans and schedules and take advantage of a life pause.

Sometimes we equate rest with laziness. Instead, view rest as an opportunity for physical recuperation, mental stimulation, and emotional rejuvenation.

Reflection

Many of us avoid quietness and stillness. We're a blur of constant motion, moving from one activity to the next, listening to music or TV, checking social media, reading online articles, or playing games on our phones. When we

fill up our days moving, talking, or engaging in mindless pursuits, we may leave little or no time to reflect, ponder, process emotions, or connect spiritually.

Waiting allows time for contemplation, an opportunity to process feelings and hear God's voice. For those unaccustomed to stillness, it may require adjustment to the cessation of motion that reflection requires. But once you begin to experience the peace and personal revelations, you will look forward to times of reflection with anticipation.

Renewal

After my mother's death, my family home needed renovation and renewal. My father died almost twenty years before my mother. Without him there, maintenance in many areas of the house was left undone. Some rooms needed a total gut; others required deep cleaning and a coat of paint. The work was projected to last three months. In reality, the job required much more time. When the renovation was complete, I felt my father's approval even though he wasn't present.

Renewal in times of waiting is similar. It may appear to involve minimal effort, but once you begin, you discover there is more work required than you realized. You may need to take some habits, actions, reactions, and attitudes down to the studs and start over.

Spiritual renewal may mean in-depth study of God's Word. Physical renewal could start with cultivating an exercise routine or shifting to a plan of healthier eating. Each step you take toward renewal provides refreshment, helps you cope with your current circumstances, prepares you for the next turn in your journey, and more closely aligns you to God's plans and purposes for your life.

Renovating and renewing areas of your life is tough, but you will experience the Father's pleasure for your hard work.

Rewards

While living through a life pause, it's difficult to imagine a positive outcome, but persevering through waiting brings rewards.

When you trust God's time frame in waiting and look for benefits, the Father is pleased and rewards your patience and obedience with peace, protection, perspective, and purpose. So, the next time you find yourself in a season of waiting, trust God is at work in your life, and anticipate rewards instead of bemoaning your situation. ☺

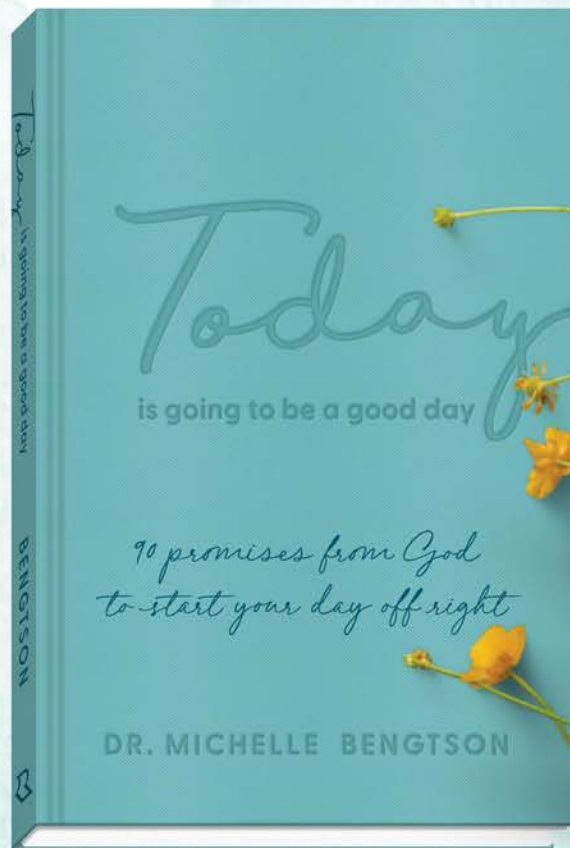
Learn more about Candy's award-winning book, Life on Pause, and her blog, Forward Motion, at candyarrington.com.



AVAILABLE NOW FROM AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR DR. MICHELLE BENGTSON

EVERY DAY CAN BE A GOOD DAY

when you trust God's promises



Job frustrations, difficult relationships, fluctuating health, emotional upheaval. When life conspires to drag us down with all of its troubles, it can be hard to keep our spirits up. Dr. Michelle Bengtson knows. Severely ill and mired in depression, she desperately needed something to cling to. That is when she decided to stand on God's promises that, despite her circumstances, every day was a good day

for a good day.

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