

EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN TO ARISE

FEB. / MARCH 2021 | VOL. 7, ISSUE 5

LEADING HEARTS



5 WAYS TO SQUELCH
EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD

SHARON TEDFORD
step into your anointing

Are Your Spiritual Gifts Shelved?
Use Your Weapons

DAWN LYNN MANN
celebrating my recovery

SOUL STRETCH
your faith needs a workout

KERRI POMAROLLI

ARISE to Laughter



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FROM THE PUBLISHER linda evans shepherd



arise & join us!

When the Lord called me to plan the Arise Esther Movement back in 2018, I was reminded of Esther 4:14, which reads in part, “For such a time as this.”

That phrase ignited a passion within me. I knew God wanted to call the Esthers of the Church to arise to reach their families, communities, and this generation for Him.

As I prayed and worked to create this new movement, I often thought of the Esther of the Bible. She was a young orphan who won a beauty pageant to marry the King and become the Queen of Persia.

All was well in her life until an evil nobleman set a plan in motion to massacre her people with her husband’s approval. But what could be done?

It turned out that Esther was one of the few people who even had access to the King, but if she entered his court unsummoned, it would be at the risk of death.

The idea of confronting the King terrified Esther, but her uncle’s words encouraged her to face her fears.

He told her, “If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?”

This scene so often played in my mind as my team and I continued to press forward with creating a brand-new virtual conference.

After years of praying and planning, we are finally ready to kick off the Arise Esther Movement with the first Arise Esther virtual conference this February 24-26, just in time for the traditional Feast of Purim, the celebration of Esther saving her people 2,500 years ago.

After this past year of sorrow and the hardships of a

world-wide pandemic, churches are still shuttering and people continue suffering. “For such a time as this” has a meaning we never imagined. And it is more urgent than that we respond more than ever before.

One thing is sure in the chaos of financial loss, cancellations, church closures, suicides, death and illness — God is still with us.

God was the one calling me to be ready for this future. He is the one calling you to join us so that we can all make a difference together.

And that’s what the Arise Esther Movement and this conference are designed to do. It’s designed to equip you to rise up and reach your family, church, and community with the good news that God is with us! And this Good News changes everything.

What was the original Esther’s response to her uncle’s warning?

She asked her uncle to call the people to pray.

So, I’m asking you to pray. Please pray for our event and pray for those attending. Also, ask if God is releasing you to join us.

Learn more at www.AriseEstherConference.com ☉

love,

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



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LEADINGHEARTS

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sometimes i struggle

Some days I struggle. I have self-doubt, and I ask myself: Am I qualified? Will anyone listen? Am I making a difference? Am I doing the will of God?

The devil loves when we question our purpose and when we question God's directives. This is how he deceived Eve — "Surely you will not die...." But God's will and promises are based upon His love and His truth!

When I find myself doubting, I will try to remember the actions of the great women in the Bible when they faced loss, doubt, questions, and even failure to be obedient. Below is a list of biblical women who have inspired me.

When God requires something from me that I think is totally impossible or I think may cause me harm, I will sacrifice like Esther. (Esther 4:12-14.)

- *When I feel my prayers are not being answered or heard, I will pray like Hannah. (1 Samuel 1:10-15).*
- *When I have doubts, I will continue in faith like Tamar (Genesis 38:1-30).*
- *When I find it is hard to believe something to be true, I will believe like Mary (Luke 1:26-38).*
- *When I think something could cause me harm but still needs to be done, I will be brave like Rahab (Joshua 2:3-6).*
- *When I feel I am not being heard, even though I believe God has called me to speak, I will be courageous and stand up and speak like Deborah (Judges 4:4-9).*
- *When I feel I should "do" instead of just "be," I will act like Mary did, which pleased Jesus (Luke 10:38-42).*
- *When I am faced with my sins and don't feel worthy, I will look up to Christ like Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2; John 20:17-19).*

Whenever the devil tries to steal what the Lord has promised me, I will cling on to the hope Jesus promises. Jesus' hope is based on things we cannot see. It is not hope in what we already have. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Our future is to live with Him for all eternity. This is God's perfect plan for us.

James says we are a mist: here today, gone tomorrow (see James 4:14). So, soon, you will have the promise of your hope and your future. But for today, recall the great women who faced all you are facing. Remember their actions, beliefs, and attitudes, and be an example for those you know now, and for those who will come after you.



love, *Lee Ann*

Lee Ann Mancini (leeannmancini.com) is an award-winning children's author, speaker, and member of the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association. She will be co-teaching a workshop on Spiritual Parenting at the Arise Esther Virtual Conference, February 24-26. Read more Arise Esther Conference Blogs and register for the conference, February 24-26, at ariseestherconference.com.



Kerri Pomarolli

ARISE TO LAUGHTER



“Like a sitcom, my life is like a sitcom,” the Detroit-girl turned SoCal Clean Comedian Kerri Pomarolli said. So much so that she’s made it part of her schtick.

“I actually bought a house in February 2020. Talk about crazy. I think we closed in escrow on February 28, and then COVID-19 happened. So, it went insane for me,” she said. “Their dad, my children’s father, was going to quote, ‘just stay with us for a week,’ when COVID started, and he’s still on my couch. So, my life is hilarious. My roommate is here, and my kids; it’s like it’s one big village all the time.”

On March 13, when the State of California was shut down, Kerri had to cancel a sold-out 1,500-seat show and start to get creative with her usually-on-the-go life. “I’ve particularly adapted to it well, except for one tiny detail. No one is paying

me to stay home with my kids. Besides the financials, I am a workaholic. Even after I gave birth, I think I was back on stage 3 minutes later, breast pump in hand,” she said. “So, I’ve found a lot of different ways. I’ve found a lot of Zoom ministry people. I’m actually doing a Zoom virtual comedy show, virtual conferences and virtual game nights. When people want me to come and do something live, on the rare occasion, then I am happy to do that. I have a new appreciation for it.”

Not the typical stay-at-home-for-the-weekend person, nowadays Kerri finds joy in the simple things.

She has learned to find joy in cleaning her house, watching the Disney Channel, or doing something she loves like cooking a meal and hanging out with neighbors.

“I just need to find a way to monetize it,” she said.

Kerri also stays connected through Zoom prayer meetings, texting, and calling on prayer warriors. She credits daily devotions, declarations and keeping a prayer board with her kids to keep her on task.

“Seriously, our children can come in handy when it comes to routine. They need that routine, so it’s really helped me,” she said. “My kids don’t have any problem putting big prayer requests up there. We’re believing and we’re leaving them up there until they are done. Kids are a great tool.

“My faith can be weak and lame, but my 10-year-old is like ‘Mommy, we gotta pray,’ so we pray.”

—continued on page 11—

This Is Not A Good Idea Podcast



Kerri

Lucy



Check out Kerri Pomarolli's new Podcast **"This Is Not A Good Idea"** which she co-hosts with her 13 year old daughter Lucy!

New episodes every Wednesday. Listen wherever podcasts are streamed!

KERRIPOM.COM



—continued from page 9—

She believes another positive is the renewed interest in family time. “I think one thing COVID-19 has done is give us time to think about things like our heritage — where we come from, traditions, and what they were doing back in their generations that we can learn,” she said. “And, obviously, the art of sitting down with your family at the kitchen table has come back, which is really exciting for me.”

In fact, it was funny dinner conversation that launched Kerri’s latest adventure, the “This Is Not a Good Idea” podcast with her 13-year-old daughter.

“Lucy wants to be a lawyer and a Supreme Court Justice, and I think she’s going to do that because she can lie with such conviction that I believe her. She doesn’t think she’s lying. It’s just when you’re 13, you know everything about the whole universe and you probably figured it out,” Kerri said. “So, we were sparring over dinner, and she’s just so funny.”

“Her dad is like this has got to go in your act, and I said this would make a great podcast. These arguments I have with her are like Princess Diana died in her apartment and she would argue exactly to the point with me that I’m checking with Siri.”

Kerri noted the mother-daughter duo is having fun. She hopes the podcast will bring laughter and open the door to more family conversations.

It’s a little bit edgy. Not in a bad way. But there’s really no topic that I won’t discuss with her because these days these kids know way more than we did. If we’re not on top of our game to be able to participate in these conversations, then we are going to lose them. So, I think it’s going to be fun,” she said. “They’re short, like 15 minutes, which is great because most kids don’t have a good attention span.” They can be found on her YouTube channel and podcast streams.

“I showed her the movie, ‘Grease,’ a beautiful movie, and she’s like ‘Oh, I get it. I have to wear tight leather pants and smoke to get a boy to like me.’”

“Seeing the world through a 13-year-old’s eyes is a really entertaining experience compared to my 40-year-old eyes.”

But those family conversations didn’t stop with just one new YouTube creation for Kerri. “I’m thinking about doing a new cooking series because I found my grandmother’s old recipes — you know, the handwritten ones. I want to do something where I cook through the recipes,” she said.

“I’m not a good cook, but I’m going to give it my best shot. I always love to cook, but I’m not gourmet. I want to call it ‘Cooking through My Roots,’ and I was joking that the subtitle was going to be ‘A Year in the Kitchen with My Dead Grandmothers.’ I want to do it on my YouTube channel, and I’ve already started my first episode.”

And, as if her life wasn’t interesting enough, this funny girl is also the author of many books and manuscripts. In fact, her first book, *Guys Like Girls Named Jennie*, recently signed a contract with Candace Cameron Bure and Candy Rock Entertainment to make it into a movie.

“We’re still in pre-production fundraising and partnering with studios. But with Candace attached, I’m just thrilled that she would want to partner with us.”

Kerri also works as a writer with the Hallmark Channel and is a co-author of multiple clean comedy scripts with Claire Lee. The writing duo has worked together for more than a decade and are currently shopping scripts to Netflix. To keep up on all things Kerri, be sure to follow her on her socials @kerripom.

Kerri will also be bringing “A Night of Laughter” to the **Arise Esther Virtual Conference**. “I really want to encourage those women who feel hopeless in light of what’s going in the world, and their own world, that they can do something great.

“I want them to know that God can use them right where they are; they don’t have to wait to take that next step in their journey,” she said.

“They’re going to think their life is a lot better when they hear about mine. They’ll be thinking that I’m really not that bad. I’m not feeding my kids Coke Zero for dinner. I want to encourage women they are good wherever they are today.”



karen porter | karenporter.com

GIANTS IN MY BACKYARD

“Unless we have God’s
weapons, we WILL fail.”





I haven't seen any giants loitering in my backyard lately, but I know about giants who mock while I cringe in discouragement, fear and defeat. You know them, too.

When we've made a bills-due list compared to expected income, the giant laughs, "You'll never catch up. Why don't you give up?"

When a boss fails to invite us to a meeting, the giant mocks, "You don't matter."

When a girlfriend forgets our birthday, the giant taunts, "No one cares." And when we forget her birthday, the giant snarls, "You are so selfish."

At each turn, the giants spew venom, "You are worthless. You failed again. Your God isn't real."

Maybe your giant is your job — that success you fought to reach. The hours at graduate school, the résumés and the headhunter's fees. Finally, you landed the dream job only to discover that the work isn't interesting — much less glamorous. You feel used. Irrelevant.

Perhaps you selected the teacher route. The monotonous paperwork and binding restrictions are so severe you rarely see one of those magical moments when a child's eyes light up with understanding.

Maybe you decided on the professional arena or you learned a craft only to feel stuck and bound as you struggle to follow the regulations and expectations.

Suppose you elected the sales route. You're a natural. You can convince anyone to buy what he or she doesn't even need. You expected to saturate your territory and reap those sweet bonus checks, but the quotas are set too high, and your competitors undercut every gain.

Maybe your company sold out to a huge conglomerate. Once you were a valued employee on a first-name basis with the owner; now you're a computer number at headquarters two thousand miles away.

What if your giant is a mountain of laundry and endless chores? You chose to be a stay-at-home mom, but you feel like a slave.

When you awoke this morning, achy stiffness reminded that you are over 50 and your dreams are vaporized by reality. You wonder, Is it too late?

You long for another child, but your husband says, "no way." The subject grows like a giant wall between the two of you.

You've spent thousands to cure infertility only to face disappointment when the newest treatment fails — again.

You dreamed you might do something great for God. When you were a teen, you even told Him you'd go to the mission field, but now you have a family, a house and a job.

You feel under-utilized at church too.

Something gnaws at you. Why am I here? What is life about? Is this all there is? You have a hole in your innermost being that feels empty, dark and cold. You long for something or someone to fill it.

When we hear about David and Goliath, we are amazed to see the miracle and the young boy's victory, but one question always gnaws at me. Why did David pick up five stones? He only needed one.

I believe David picked up the other four stones because he thought that he might have to fight Goliath's four brothers.

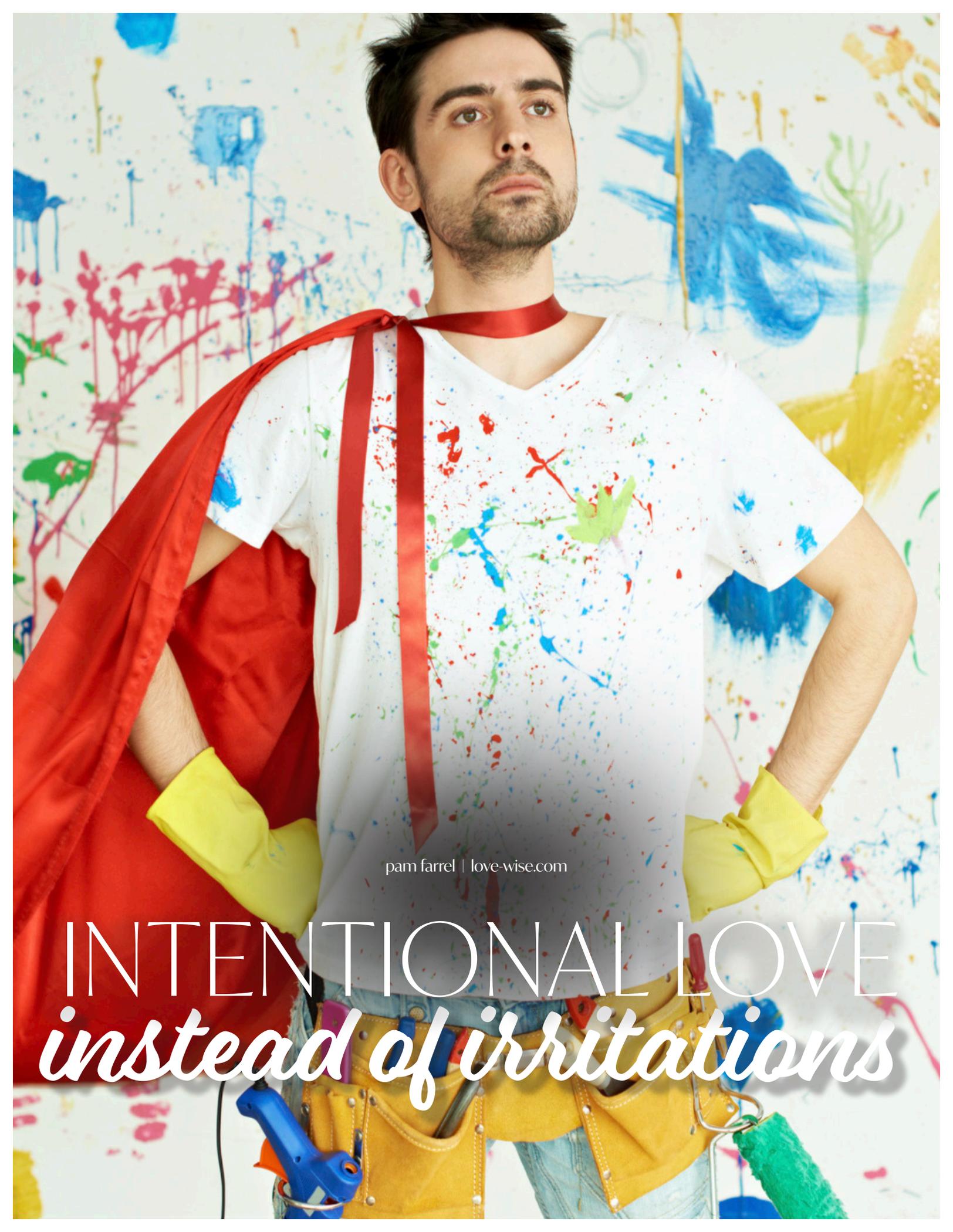
Goliath was the son of a man named Rapha, a descendant of Anak. Rapha fathered at least five sons — each one fiercer than the other.

After David killed Goliath, the Philistines ran away. But the battles with the Philistines continued for years. In a few obscure verses in 2 Samuel 21, Goliath's brothers attacked — four giants and four mighty warriors are named. The surprise is in the meanings of their names. Each giant is familiar to your life, and each warrior represents the weapon God has provided. I want you to discover these secrets so you can slay giants.

Make no mistake, the giants want to destroy you and me.

These sassy giants strut and sting our souls. We are not equipped to fight the battle. But God's weapons outsmart each giant who dares to raise its ugly head. Unless we have God's weapons, we will fail.

Don't fight the giants alone. Join me at Arise Esther Conference. With His help, we will fight for our lives. ☉



pam farrel | love-wise.com

INTENTIONAL LOVE *instead of irritations*



Sometimes idiosyncrasies which used to be irritating become endearing, part of the complexity of a partner who has become woven deep into our own selves.

How about your honey? Which of his idiosyncrasies drive you nuts? One of my friend's husband loved fixing up old cars, so car parts packed their garage and yard. It was his only vice. He was a great community leader, father, church leader and husband—all except those crazy car parts!

She decided a good man with unwelcome car part collectibles was better than no man or a bad man. Good choice. She dug in and learned about antique cars, how to find deals on car parts, went on dates with him to car shows — and you know what? Eventually, those parts became a real car — one they can date in!

Wow Assignment

Now it is your turn. Make a list of some of the small irritations, annoying habits and quirks of your man. In the opposite column, write out the upside or why you can choose to love that part of who he is. A few examples are below.

IT DRIVES ME CRAZY WHEN | BUT I CAN LOVE THAT BECAUSE

He runs late all the time	he is a good listener and cares for people
He spends money on tools	he is handy around the house
He is such a sports fanatic	his enthusiasm and loyalty are admirable

Wow Wisdom

Turn that irritation inside out. The Bible puts it this way:

“Be gentle and forbearing with one another and, if one has a difference (a grievance or complaint) against another, readily pardoning each other...” Col 3:13 AMPC

For example, my husband is a gifted shepherd and counselor, so when he was a pastor, the line was always long after church, with people waiting for his godly wisdom. I expected that it was church! However, I soon I found myself sharing him with others — everywhere we went.

Little League practice, standing in the grocery line, and even when we would go out on a dinner date, many a waiter or waitress wound up sitting in our booth, pouring out their broken-hearted woes to Bill. Early in our marriage and ministry, I too often would feel anger rising. I began to pray that God would change me and my heart because the world is hurting and needs God's wisdom. God often chooses my husband as a vessel to carry that Living Water of hope and help.

One day, after Bill apologized for yet another interruption to our romantic plans, I answered him, “You are being yourself. You are my Superman, and people sense you have the answers to their problems. I have always called you my Superman because you seem to fix most anything from leaky faucets to fractured lives. I need to get used to the fact that often your Superman cape is showing!”

From that moment on, I regularly gift Bill items with the Superman icon or logo and add a thank you note of encouragement thanking him for being my Superman.

Pray, “Lord, help me turn those small annoyances into big ways to love my man creatively. Amen”

—continued on page 17—

Bring your friends!

Register Now!
ariseestherconference.com



—continued from page 15—

Make Plans for Your Wow Date

If he is a sports super fan, buy a jersey of his favorite team and turn it into your pj's.

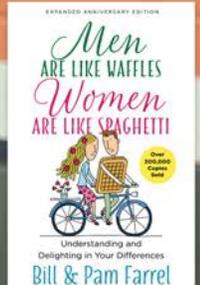
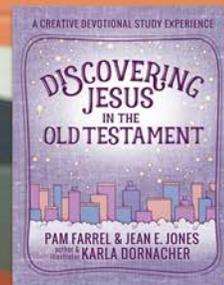
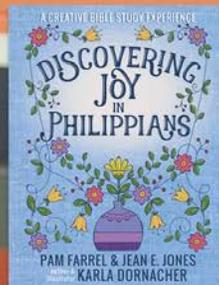
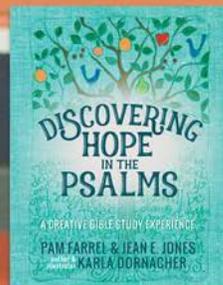
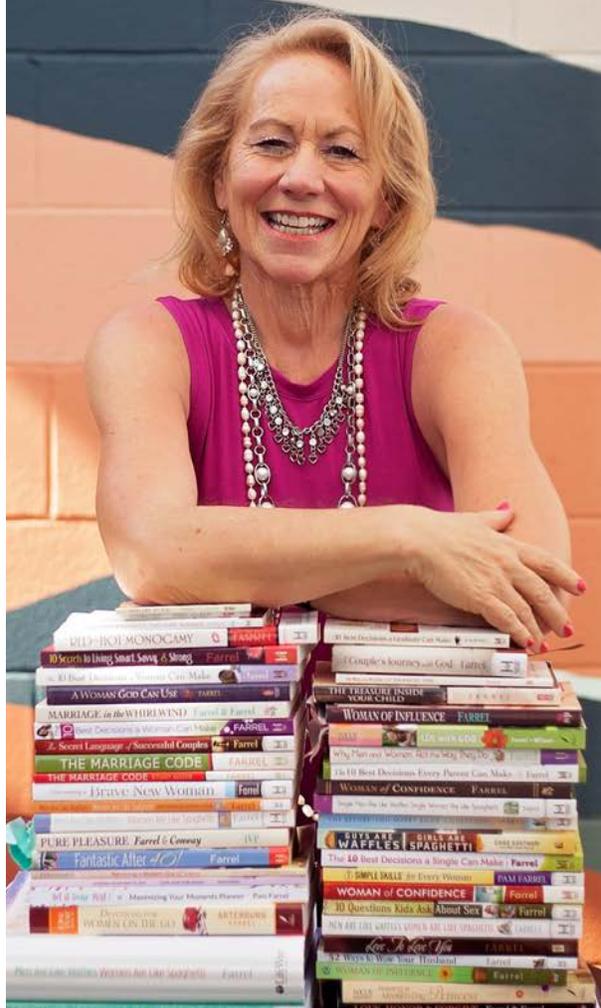
- If he is a fishing nut, grab a rod and reel and take him to a little cabin in the backwoods.
- If he is a car enthusiast, rent a sports car and head down a scenic highway or attend that car show.
- If he is a home makeover man, stroll the aisles of his favorite home supply store, or buy a set of tools and tool belt for yourself and join him in the next project.
- If he is a computer geek, camp out in line with him at midnight for that next new edition of techie whatever — but bring comfy chairs, food and music to pass the time.
- If he is a boater, buy matching shirts or mugs proclaiming he is your “Captain,” and you love being his “First Mate”

Surprise him with a little taste of what he loves, and maybe, just maybe, you'll start loving it too. ☺



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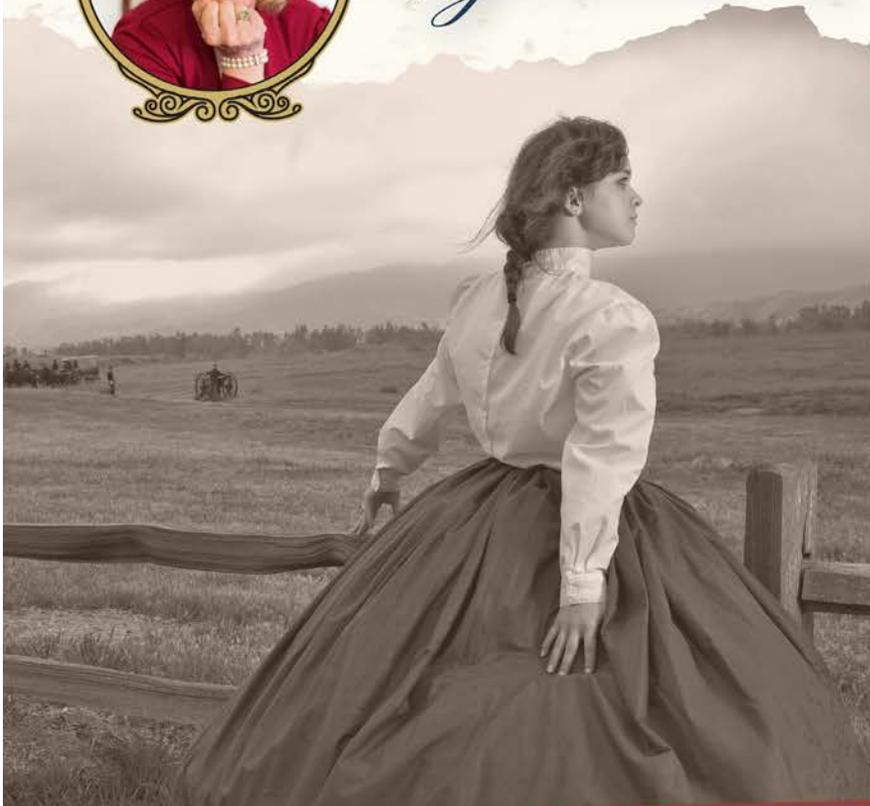


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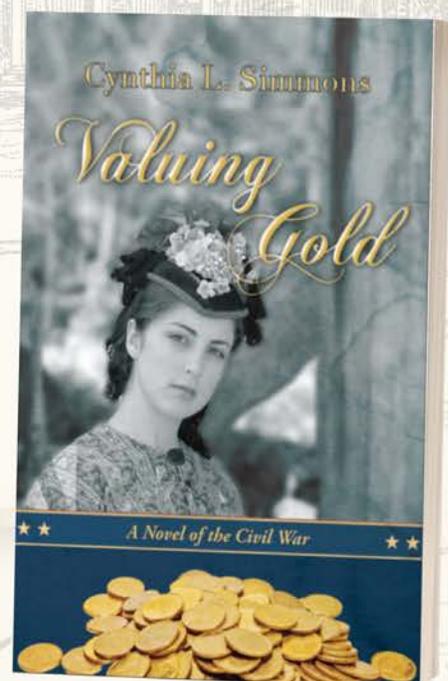
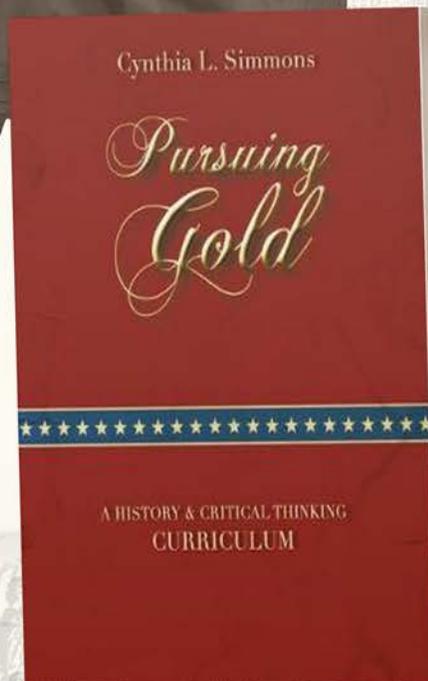
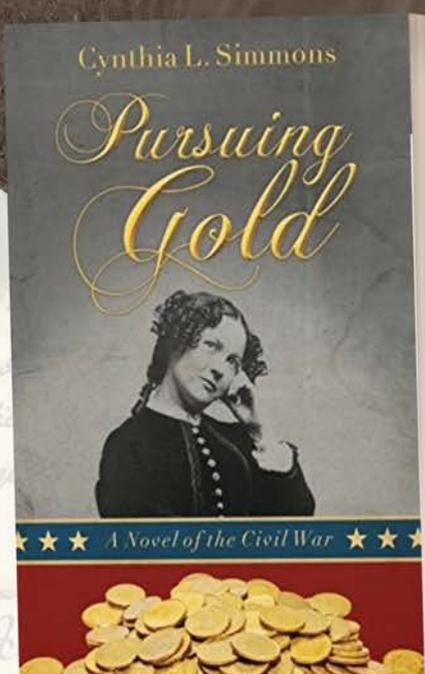
FROM AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

Cynthia L. Simmons



"WAR. THE WORD
MADE MARY
BETH'S CHEST
TIGHTEN. SHE
WANTED THE
COMFORT OF
HOME AND PAPA."

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THE BIG QUESTION

Q: I feel like God wants me to write, but a friend told me getting published is almost impossible. What should I do?



cynthia l. simmons | cksimmons.com

I want to answer with a story. When I discovered I carried my fifth child, terror gripped me.

As a homeschool mom, I didn't know how I'd manage another baby. My sweet Caleb was born three days after Christmas. He never cried because his four older siblings hovered over him, offering anything he might want.

However, Caleb wasn't maturing. When he was four, he seldom spoke and couldn't do simple tasks. The doctor who tested him delivered a two-paragraph diagnosis, which broke my heart. Later, the same doctor put him on the autism spectrum.

Since I had a big family, I chose to teach him while working with therapists, but he struggled with everything. For instance, while teaching him to speak, I gently held his face and moved until I was an inch from his nose. In that position, Caleb could listen for three seconds before he pulled away, screaming.

At six, I introduced counting and asked him to pick up a block and say a number. However, he couldn't hold the block and verbalize at the same time. Blood-curdling screams came whenever I attempted teaching.

He would announce, "I am stupid, stupid, stupid." Those words ripped at my heart.

My husband and I told him he was named for Caleb in the Bible. The Caleb in Genesis climbed a mountain in his old age and conquered an enemy. That story comforted my dear son.

After much prayer and consulting with my husband, I took a master's degree in special education and attended yearly conferences to glean more. Armed with special techniques, I begged for grace each morning before I started teaching.

My new skills helped, but I learned patience. After working on one task for months, Caleb might wake up one morning and get it perfect. He inched forward, climbing his mountain, and we rejoiced with each baby step.

Today, Caleb is an adult. He can read, write, do laundry, cook simple meals, and works part-time for a local plumber. He still needs help balancing a checkbook, but he overcame many obstacles.

In summary, I prayed for guidance, talked with my husband, and sought education. With a lot of hard work and God's grace, I helped Caleb learn.

You can tackle anything God wants you to do.

Joining our upcoming online Arise Esther Conference (ariseestherconference.com), which has classes for writers and speakers, can be the first step, but know that God will guide you the way — as He did me. ☺



EVERY SOUL NEEDS *a good stretch*



janellrardon | janellrardon.com

Every soul needs a good stretching now and then. At least that is what I tried to tell myself on the steps of a Kenyan home. When Ruth, the Joy Village Program Coordinator, gathered us all into the main foyer of the Joy Village living room, you could hear a pin drop. Six American women and four Kenyan mamas stood in a semicircle, waiting and wondering what was about to take place.

“You will be spending the night with one of the mamas and her children,” Ruth said. “This way you can immerse yourself in their lives. See their ministry and spend time with their family before going on our weekend retreat together. I think this time will benefit each one of us greatly.”

One of our greatest missions on this long journey to Kenya was to spend time with these remarkable Kenyan mamas and treat them with their first “women’s retreat,” where they could rest and receive strong, restorative teaching that would strengthen them for the incredibly hard job they face every single day.

Ruth’s idea seemed like a good one. Our highest priority and deepest desire was to connect and cultivate long-lasting relationships. I was so in, or at least I thought I was.

One by one, she introduced us to our mama.

“Janell, you will be with Mama Elizabeth,” Ruth said. “She’s up in her apartment — the Love House.” Each separate family apartment within the Joy Village complex bears the name of one of the fruits of the Spirit — a beautiful handmade inscription hangs over the frame of the front door.

When My Soul Was Stirred

Ruth’s plan took me by surprise. I wasn’t prepared to spend



the entire afternoon and night in the apartment with the mama and her 12 children. I thought we would be visiting the families and then sleep together, as a mission team, i.e., with the women I was “comfortable” with, in the rooms of the main building.

As I made my way up the stairs, something strange happened. My emotions escalated and I began to panic. One by one, my friends left me to be with their mamas, until I was all alone on those steps — me, myself and I. I tried to move forward, but just couldn't. Feeling a bit off, I braced myself on the wooden stair railing.

- Oh, dear, seriously, what am I going to eat?
- Can I drink the water?
- Where will I sleep?
- How will I use the bathroom?
- How will I communicate?

My mind raced. My heart raced faster. One dominant, out-of-control mantra rang like incessant church bells: I can't do this. I can't do this. I can't do this. With each step, those four words got louder and louder.

They seemed to be stuck on repeat.

I seemed to be stuck on the steps.

The chaotic conversation inside my head continued, making me a bit nauseous. My internal anxiety escalated, and I was reeling from the effects.

I was literally emotionally frozen. Stuck in the limbic center of my brain. Incapacitated and unable at that moment to retrieve information stored in the highly necessary rational thinking

center of my brain known as the prefrontal cortex. Hence, my heart and mind disconnected at a time when I desperately needed them to connect.

“Breathe, Janell, breathe,” I whispered to myself. “Pray your brave three-word prayer, ‘God, help me.’”

I repeated this simple practice over and over again until I felt the stirring in my soul quiet down. It felt like hours, but probably was only minutes. And then, I welcomed God into the whys, continued my deep breathing in order to gain a sense of composure and continued up the next flight of stairs.

When My Soul Was Silent

When I walked into Mama Elizabeth's “House of Love,” she smiled, cupping her hands over her heart.

“Oh, it's you!”

Unsure of whether or not that was a good “Oh, it's you,” we shared a Kenyan welcome that was a bit reticent, at first.

Two women. Two completely different cultures. A Kenyan and a Mzungu (white woman), as they say in Swahili. As we looked deep into each other's eyes, something inside of me relaxed. Peace settled in, and I settled down.

She offered me delicious chai and made me feel as though her home was my home.

God Is a Soul Stretcher

God is in the soul-stretching business. He specializes in enlarging the souls of man so that we can taste and see the world through His eyes. The process may be painful, as tears typically accompany soul expansion, but if we can somehow open our hearts and stay with and pray through the threshold of discomfort (and often, disorientation), we cross a beautiful threshold into our God-breathed destiny. ☉



USE YOUR
Weapons

why you need to move in your spiritual gifts



evelyn johnson-taylor ph.d. | evelynjtaylor.org

Would a military commander send his soldiers into a battle without properly functioning weapons?

No.

We are warriors in God's army, and the Holy Spirit gives us weapons. As a women's ministry leader and former pastor, I've employed my battle gear more than a few times, and I'm guessing you have too.

We will face opposition as we spread the light of Jesus Christ in a dark world.

Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (NKJV).

The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to the body of Christ as weapons of warfare. We need to utilize these weapons to reign victorious over the evil of the enemy. If we are to use

the gifts of the Spirit appropriately, we must know what the gifts are, where they are from and how they operate.

In 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul writes, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however, you were led" (NKJV).

His message is intended to persuade the Corinthian Church to acknowledge their commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and be aware of how their decision to live for Christ changed their lives.

Paul's audience was familiar with pagan rites, and some may have experienced the emotionalism from demonic powers. It was important for the Church at Corinth to understand that the power witnessed in using spiritual gifts was from the Holy Spirit and not pagan practices.

In this passage of Scripture, Paul likely was responding to questions he received concerning spiritual gifts. He opens with "now concerning." To bring further precision, he writes in 1 Corinthians 12:3, "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (NKJV).

The apostle clarifies how to distinguish Christian from pagan inspiration. Paul explained that a commitment to Jesus is only possible by the working of the Holy Spirit. Such understanding would help avoid confusion among the Corinthians, as well as in the Church today.

In 1 Corinthians 12: 7, Paul explains, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*" (NKJV).

The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts, and they remain under His control. Operating in these gifts is important to winning the battle that rages around us.

—continued on page 25—

inspired to live.
equipped to lead.

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—continued from page 23—

Surrender to the Holy Spirit.

These gifts should never be used to promote one's self. They are for service.—not status. Spiritual gifts are for the common benefit of the entire body of Christ.

1 Peter 4:10, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (NKJV).

Believers are entrusted with spiritual gifts. They must remember they are His gifts, given for His purpose and to use for His glory. When using the spiritual gifts correctly, they will always point to Jesus and cause others to want to know Him. In Ephesians 4:12-13, Paul addresses these leadership gifts:

“for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (NKJV).

It is the will of God that believers grow and mature in their walk with Him. Gifted people have a responsibility to equip others to minister, building the body of Christ.

Do we need spiritual gifts today? The gifts are necessary to continue the Lord's work on earth. Jesus functioned in the gifts in His public ministry. He had to know things that generally could not be known in the natural. To be effective in ministry today, believers need to rely on the Holy Spirit to reveal God's plan and purpose.

In this season, it is more crucial than ever to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Our prayer should be: Lord, help us understand these gifts and cause them to manifest themselves within our local church and in the universal body of Christ.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts operating, we can overcome any insult of the enemy. ☉

See additional Scriptures for spiritual gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, 28 and Romans 12:6-8.

All Scripture references from NKJV.

MUSICREVIEWS



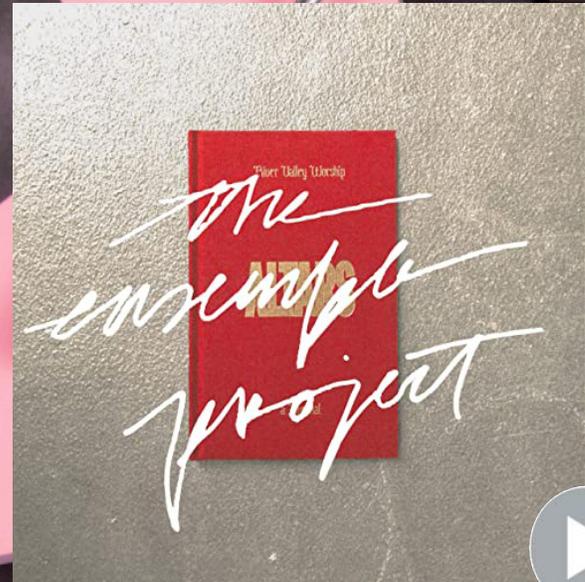
APOLLO LTD nothing is ordinary, everything is beautiful

If you listen to Christian radio, you've probably heard an upbeat, encouraging tune called "Patient" more than a few times. This hit track is part of alternative-pop duo Apollo LTD's second album, *Nothing Is Ordinary, Everything Is Beautiful*, released February 5.

This 14-track record represents resilience and the determination to move forward in less-than-ideal circumstances, as Jordan Phillips and Adam Stark used Zoom to put together this project from their homes.

"Life is a matter of perspective, which is what we wanted to convey with the album's title," says Stark. "There are silver linings all around if you're willing to shift your perspective to find them. ... Keep your eyes open, be present, and look for the good — because it's there if you choose to see it."

Nothing Is Ordinary, Everything Is Beautiful is the kind of music that feels like it has the power to get your blood pumping faster in that invigorating way that boosts the mood, even on the coldest of days. 🎧



RIVER VALLEY WORSHIP the ensemble project

The Ensemble Project EP, the fifth project by River Valley Worship (released February 12, 2021), presents new versions of five tracks from their 2020 album *Altars*. This revamp pulls a classic style reminiscent of traditional services into a contemporary praise and worship session. Unfettered by excess instrumentation, the beauty of the vocals and lyrics come to the forefront and the subject of the worship takes definite priority — and the result is powerful.

"This project is stripped back in instrumentation and production but filled with passion and energy!" The group says. "... We wanted to bring a new sound, a new perspective, a new reflection of our church to this project while keeping the powerful message of these songs. In many ways, the truth of these songs is clearer than ever."

The Ensemble Project is a simple worship experience that will help you practice the presence of our loving God — and that's all any of us need. 🎧

heather van allen | music reviewer



SHARON TEDFORD

anointed appointed

“The Spirit of the sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me...” Isaiah 61:1 NIV.

Songwriting has been my creative outlet for many years. As an 11-year-old, I embodied the brave naivety of youth and sang my first self-penned song (written with my friend, Kate), in front of the whole secondary school. I was struck by the impact a song could make, and as I entered my teenage years, my passion found its release in a contemporary Christian rock band called “Crystal Kishon.”

We wrote our own songs and took the stage in our white stilettos and contact-sport-worthy shoulder pads to perform some “hip” 1980s style choreography. (Social media didn’t exist back then, and boy am I grateful!)

Although I have led worship for many years, I laid aside the joy of creating songs for 15 years before finally grabbing my dust-wrapped guitar to begin the process all over again.

As it does for so many of us, life got in the way and I forgot what God had put inside me. I am not sorry for the detour, though. The relaunch of my passion has led my love for Jesus in much deeper and more profound ways.

—continued on page 28—



Listen to an episode of “God in the Ordinary” by clicking on the play button.

—continued from page 27—

In 2015, at a popular women’s conference in Texas, a stranger handed me a word of prophecy, written on a note card. The prophecy was based on Isaiah 61:1-4.

In order to honor Jesus and weigh up the words given to me, I spent a long time in careful study of the passage. I wondered what I could uncover, but the truth is, God uncovered a lot of unknowns hidden inside me.

Isaiah 61 is a power-packed chapter and begins with a foundational fact — I am not alone. The Spirit of the sovereign Lord can’t be on me without also being with me. I began to realize my songwriting craft was never to be a skill practiced on my own. God wants me, through the Holy Spirit, to create with Him.

I started to see how anointing leads to action.

The whole of Isaiah 61 is filled with “doing words.” I was struck by the way the Scripture called me out of being someone who felt content to pray for and financially support missionaries. I saw that I too was meant to be a missionary.

This change of perspective didn’t require a move to China or a shift in my regular routine.

Instead, I realized that Jesus has called me to do all the verbs found in Isaiah 61 and to behave as a missionary right where He’s put me.

ANOINTED ACTION

What does anointed action look like? Continue on through Isaiah 61 and we’ll find a fabulous list of achievable and inspired deeds. God calls His anointed to preach the good news. Those words became vibrantly alive to me.

As a musician, I fell in love with the way lyrics can tell how God rebuilds, renews and restores our broken lives. Songs can be filled with the good news of Jesus, with hope and comfort. Break open your Bible and find all of the verbs in Isaiah 61. I want you to see the actions you are created and anointed for.

I’d been confused by the way I’d heard the phrase, “anointed” bandied around in church circles. People have often said, “Your voice is so anointed,” or, “You’re such an anointed worship leader,” but I just couldn’t believe them because I’m not perfect. I know the “ugly” that goes on in my head.

Through the grace of God, I learned that He doesn’t anoint the perfect. He anoints those with whom He dwells. If you love Jesus and He lives in you, then you are anointed. Yes, say it aloud: “I am anointed!”

I have experienced assurance about what I do in the name of God because my work is bathed in the anointing of God. My songs, books, art and speaking events are never faultless.

But I have learned to arise with the certain assurance that the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me and goes with me. And the same is true for you.

As I continue faithfully in music ministry, God has added a new string to my guitar and led me to start a podcast with the goal of helping other believers recognize and walk in their anointing.

“God in the Ordinary” is my new podcast where weary believers can be revitalized by hearing the stories of other Christians who are using their anointings to reveal God in their everyday lives.

A business coach, a mother of eight, an artist, a retired naval officer — all of them are great examples of how to recognize and implement the anointing and presence of God in their normal rhythms. They demonstrate anointed action.

Walk in the truth and power of your holy anointing. Live an action-filled life, as you draw people to our beloved Jesus.

Because you, my friend, are anointed. ☉



“He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes...”

Isaiah 61: 1-3 NIV

Listen to Sharon Tedford’s music by clicking the button below. Find out more about Sharon’s music and ministry at 61-things.com.





moving forth in HOPE AND LOVE

penelope carlevato | penelopecarlevato.com

As the world's stressors become more weary and tiresome, many of us find our circle of friends becoming smaller because we don't agree on some issues.

On social media, we see our close friend posting an opposing view from ours. We may feel very strongly about a situation, and our friend sees it from a different viewpoint. So do I drop my friend and move on, or do I stick it out and try to maintain our friendship? How do we remain friends yet still stand firm in our position?

Can we agree to disagree?

One of the first things we need to ask in any situation that causes division is, "How important is this issue?" At the time of the disagreement, we may feel 100% correct. It's part of our DNA. How could our friend see this issue any differently? Does it matter? Can we remain friends if we disagree about this specific issue?

Perspective is vital in moving forward on this aspect of our disagreement. Many years ago, in a Sunday school class, our teacher posed the question regarding scoring at a football game. He encouraged us to look at others' points of view in the same way we see the extra-point scoring at a football game. The seat we occupy in the stadium influences our perspective. If sitting in the end zone, we could see the ball

go through the goalposts, but we might not be sure if we are on the 50-yard line. If we sit behind the goal post, it's much easier to see that ball fly right through the standards. Even in the nosebleed section, we see a different view. This analogy works when we don't agree with someone. Due to our family traditions, religious and church upbringings, social and economic backgrounds, and many other factors, we all see life differently. When you are in a disagreement with a friend, first ask, "What perspective are they coming from? How has their way of life influenced their perception?"

Is my winning in this situation the most important aspect?

Because our friends have different spiritual gifts than we have, we look at things in a different mindset. Our past experiences are part of our decision-making and give each of us a different perspective on issues. Because of our spiritual gifts, if we stay silent on specific issues, we can run the risk of depriving our friend of the insight God intends for them. A real friend is more important than an argument. We care for one another, and we value their ideas, even if different from ours. We don't have to compromise our beliefs or accept or reject their views. True friendship doesn't hinge on our agreement with one another.

Is my friendship more important than our disagreement?

Are we able to still be friends considering the division? It's easy to be friends with those we agree with on almost everything, but can I always respect the other person who doesn't share my viewpoint? Are we keeping the "main thing the main thing?" If we genuinely love one another, we will try to edify each other and not tear each other apart. Do we disagree on something essential to biblical doctrine or a personal conviction?

Many years ago, when my boys were in grade school, a mother of one of their friends didn't like how I had handled a problem with the boys. I wrestled with the disagreement we found ourselves in, and after much prayer and repentance, I knew I needed to call the mother and apologize. I had acted in haste and didn't have all the facts. Proverbs 18:13, "To answer before listening — that is folly and shame," gave me excellent instruction on my part in this problem.

Can I be humble in this situation, or do I have to be right?

It's so easy to get caught up in the differences we all have in this divisive age. Many of us immediately nudge the person next to us (usually our husbands) when we know we are right about a situation. We forget to consider that there might be another answer or a better way. While we need to stand for biblical and essential beliefs, there are other ways to express our faith. Views other than ours can lead us into some very unfavorable situations.

I find myself praying more for what comes out of my mouth than ever before. I am not the Holy Spirit to my friends. As we look for opportunities to serve one another in Christian love, can we be humble enough to live with integrity and encourage others? We may never arrive at a full understanding of one another, but we can appreciate one another and love one another. Romans 12:18 reminds us — "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

Staying friends through thick and thin is possible, but sometimes not easy. Friends have a heart for one another that can supersede disagreements. Setting aside our differences, we can still come together in thoughtfulness, love and mutual respect for one another.

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" Ephesians 4:29 ESV.

One of my favorite ways to entertain is to have an afternoon tea consisting of savories and sweets. This recipe was given to me by one of my British friends. I loved it when she served it at her home. It should be served with the sandwiches during the first course. It's a welcome addition to the traditional tea sandwiches, such as cucumber and chicken salad.

Asparagus Rolls

1 bunch of fresh asparagus. Snap off the lower part of the



stem and cut the top part into 5" lengths
Microwave 1 ½ minutes, then cool
1 loaf of white bread

- Cut off crusts of bread and flatten each slice with a rolling pin until thin.
- Stack the slices on each other to prevent drying.
- Cover each slice with dijon mustard
- Depending on the asparagus' size, place one or two spears on one end of the bread and roll up into a tight roll.
- Trim any asparagus sticking out of the bread.
- Place each roll seam side down on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet.
- Brush rolls with melted butter and sprinkle with grated parmesan cheese.

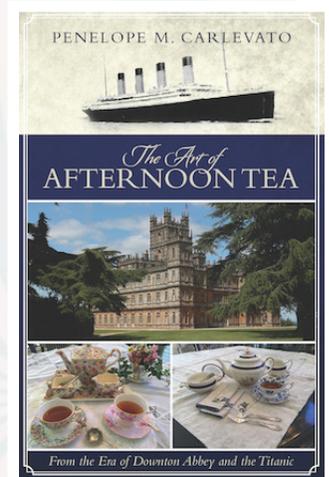
Note: The rolls can be made ahead to this point, then covered and refrigerated.

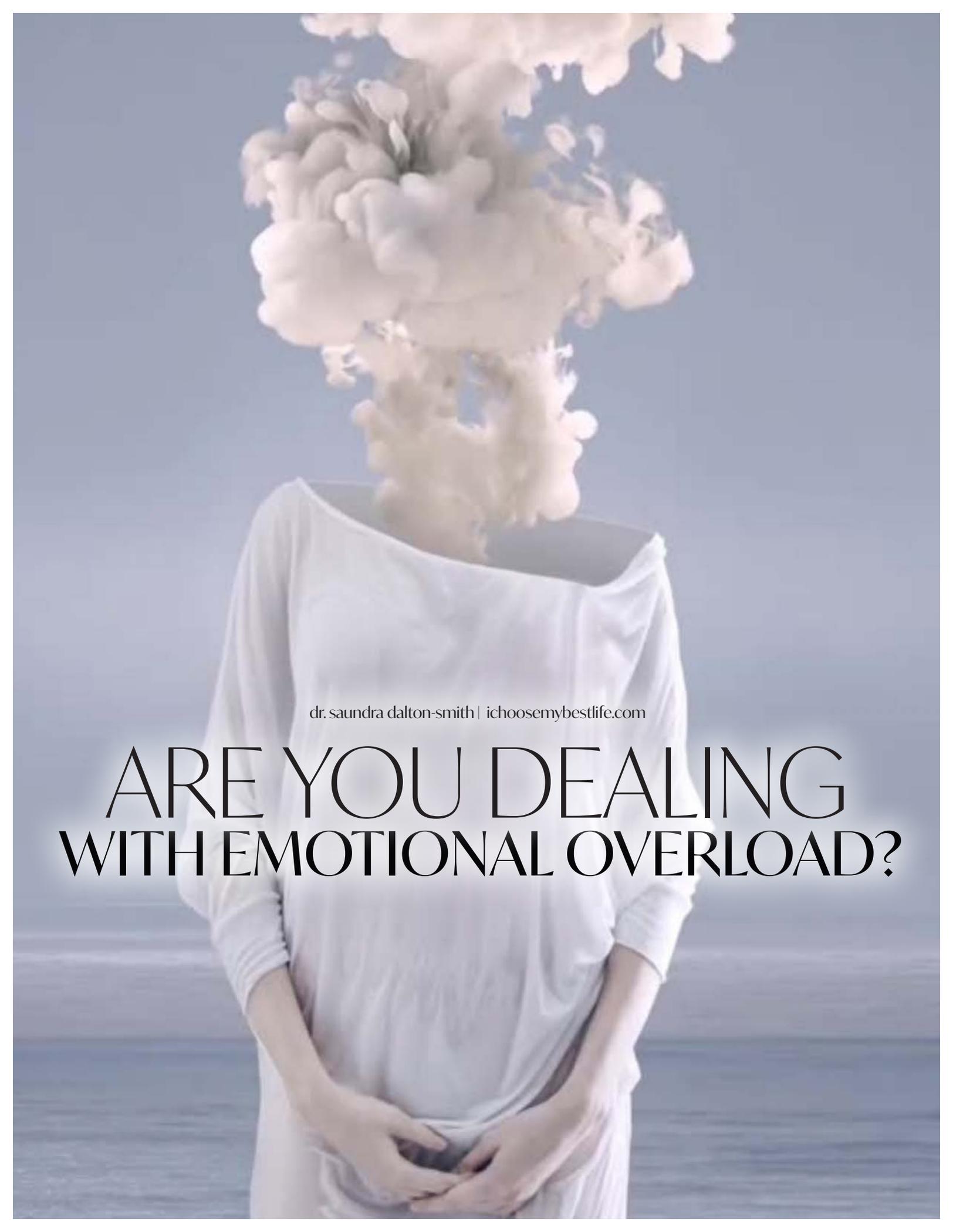
Bake at 375° F until golden and slightly crisp. ☉

Serve warm.

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.



A woman in a white, long-sleeved, off-the-shoulder dress stands on a beach. Instead of a head, she has a large, overflowing bouquet of light-colored flowers. The background is a soft-focus view of the ocean and sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

dr. saundra dalton-smith | ichoosemybestlife.com

ARE YOU DEALING WITH EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD?



Emotional fatigue can really take a toll

on your ability to enjoy life. The difficulties and disappointments can leave you feeling drained and take time to process before you feel restored. It can also feel like hope is a million miles away.

Even though it is healthy and normal to experience a range of emotions, it's unhealthy to keep negative ones bottled to consume your thoughts. Healing requires working through the hurt and authentically sharing your emotions with a trusted friend, counselor or therapist. This process allows your emotions to find a safe place for release.

Emotional rest is possible when you are willing to uncover the source of the hurt and allow the healing process to begin. Thankfully, there are some steps you can take to help your weary heart heal and experience the emotional rest it needs.

1. Remove negative self-talk from your vocabulary. Since you are the only person who has 24/7 access to you, it can be a challenge to stay mentally positive. Your emotional health is not a matter of forced positivity, but rather an exercise of redirection when negativity emerges.

- **Are you prone to criticizing yourself?** Can you identify times when you have talked yourself out of an opportunity? Do you say things to yourself that would offend you if others said the same thing to you?

- **We are often very quick to be hurt when others say negative things to us or about us.** The same rules apply to self-talk. Avoid allowing the wounded part of your emotions to dictate the conversation and adversely impact your actions.

2. Accept your role in your healing. Often it is the actions of others or circumstances beyond our control that lead to the emotional hurt we feel. Thankfully, your healing is not dependent upon those people or events. You have an active role in your own emotional rest.

- **Forgiveness is a process by which you take back control of your emotions by claiming your power to move forward.** It takes courage to forgive someone who

has hurt you. In forgiving them, you are not releasing them from responsibility for their actions or accepting what they did to you. Instead, you are removing the hold the pain they inflicted has on you.

- **In the same token, be willing to forgive yourself.** Mistakes and missteps are a part of every journey, but they do not need to become permanent detours.

3. Live according to your beliefs. As one who believes the Word of God is true, let your life reflect your beliefs. Do not allow your current heartache to become more real than the promises of God. Abandoning your beliefs is the fastest way to slip into a pit of despair. Frame your actions and responses around what you know about God and who He is in your life.

- **Go back to your Bible.** Start to embrace the Word of God and make it a regular part of your day. Surround yourself with encouraging Scriptures.

- **Regain control over wandering emotions.** If your mind starts to head down a negative path, redirect your thoughts back to what the Scriptures say about that situation. Find a life verse you will use to keep you emotionally grounded — as an anchor for your soul.

4. Eliminate unnecessary negative emotional input. There are many opportunities in a day to be overwhelmed by the emotional baggage of others. Avoid excessive exposure to potentially toxic environments like the news and online platforms.

- **Evaluate your response to social media.** If your time online leaves you feeling upset, anxious or fearful, consider taking a break from your social media feeds.

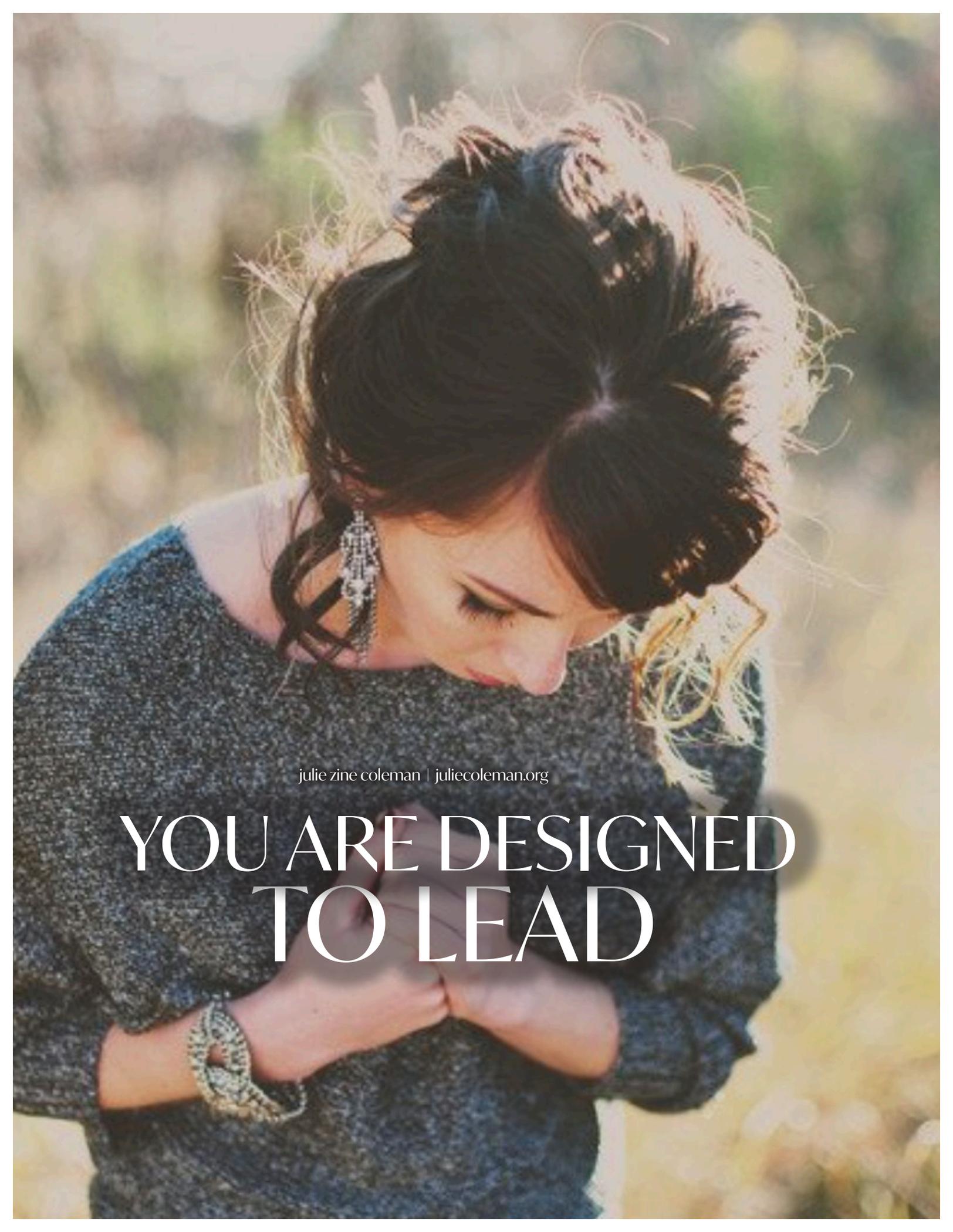
- **Be selective in what you read and watch for entertainment.** Some movies and books can trigger your emotions. Reserve the right to not finish any novel or show that causes you to feel uneasy.

5. Commit to daily renewal. Enjoying emotional rest requires regular assessments of your mental space. This is something that takes some practice. Daily evaluate your attitude — are you optimistic or feeling hopeless. Don't judge your feelings; just acknowledge them. This will help determine what you need most to feel emotionally rested.

- **Turn your healing into part of your routine self-care.** When you go for days without that renewal, it's easy to slip back into weariness. Remember to be compassionate to yourself.

- **At the end of each day, celebrate your progress.** Congratulate yourself for being attentive to your emotional well-being. You'll rest more soundly at night when your mind is clear and your heart is settled.

Enjoying emotional rest isn't an automatic process. It takes intentional action to bring hurt to God for healing. It takes courage to share emotions you may not even understand. During this season of constant changes, it take care of your emotional well-being. Focus on what you need to feel refreshed during your day, block out the noise around you, and spend some time renewing your mind. ☺



julie zine coleman | juliecoleman.org

YOU ARE DESIGNED TO LEAD



He was beet red in the face when he cornered me in the snack shop after chapel.

I had just led the singing at Boys' Camp, a woman directing a totally male audience. And this preacher was not having it. "Women are never to lead men," he informed me, flinging a few Bible verses at me to prove his point. Reduced to tears, I saw that I had inadvertently overstepped a line. The camp resumed without a competent song leader for the rest of the two weeks.

Does God want women to lead? I have since found many indications in Scripture that He does. In the four different lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament, not once are any of the gifts limited by gender. Women are commended by Paul for their leadership in several of his letters. Even in the Old Testament, women like Deborah, Huldah and Miriam led males and females alike.

Leadership is a spiritual gift (Romans 12:7). We don't get to choose our gifts. Paul writes that "one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing [spiritual gifts] to each one individually just as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:7 NASB). It is the Holy Spirit who imparts the gifts, including leadership.

What does it mean to be a leader in the kingdom of God?

A kingdom leader is foremost humble. In God's economy, being a leader does not mean being more important than others. Jesus described the religious leaders of His day: "They do all their deeds to be noticed by men ... They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places" (Matthew 23:5-7 NASB 1995).

In contrast with those proud leaders, He then commanded the future leaders in God's kingdom: "Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader; *that* is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:10-12 NASB 1995).

Jesus Christ was the greatest leader of all time. He gave up the glory that was His in heaven, and "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant ... He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a

cross" (Philippians 2:7-8 NASB 1995). God in the flesh gave us a perfect example of a humble leader.

In Philippians, Paul specifically addresses two women leaders: Euodia and Syntyche. He calls them co-workers and urges them to put aside their differences to adopt the humble mindset of Christ for the sake of the gospel.

A kingdom leader leads by example. She does not flaunt authority or seek to control. Peter qualified what leadership should look like in his first epistle.

"Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2-3, NASB 1995).

Jesus led by example: "For you have been called for this purpose, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you would follow in His steps" (1 Peter 2:21 NASB).

Junia is mentioned by Paul to be exemplary in leadership (Romans 16:7), calling her "outstanding among the apostles." Her reputation was well-known.

A kingdom leader works for the benefit of others. Paul clarifies that spiritual gifts are not for our own benefit. They are given to build up the church. "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good..." (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Leading should give us a sense of responsibility to work toward the good of those under our influence. We earn the right to lead by investing in the people God places in our path.

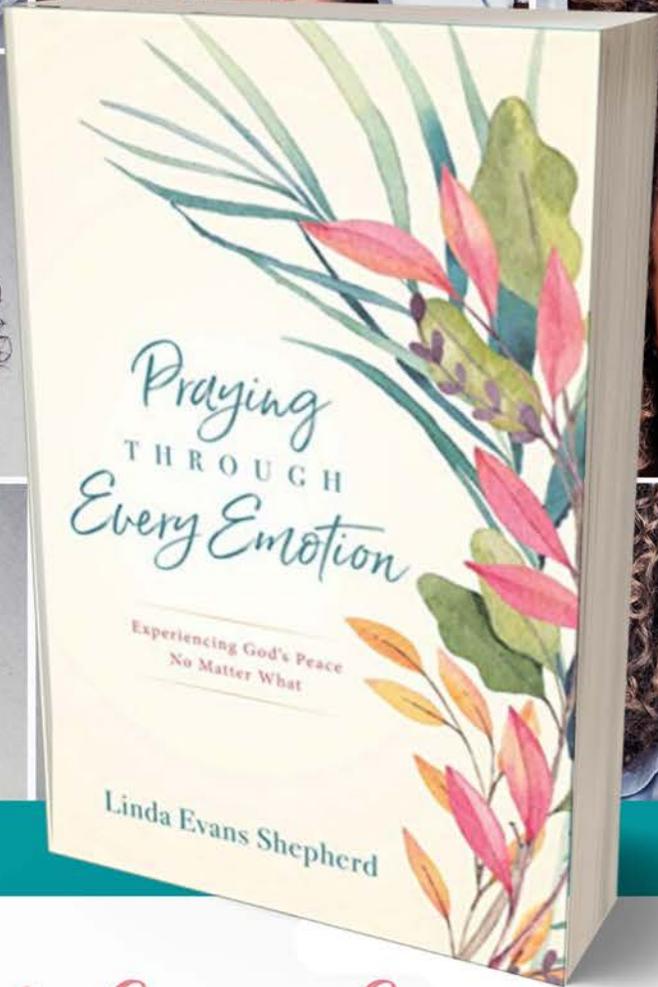
Again, Jesus demonstrates this kind of leadership: "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her" (Ephesians 5:25-27 NASB). Priscilla worked for the benefit of others. Paul wrote that she risked her life for his sake and faithfully ministered to bring others into maturity in their faith (Romans 16:3-5).

Is God calling you to kingdom leadership? Are you naturally a person of influence? As with every spiritual gift, leadership may come naturally, but it will also require further development. "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6 NASB 1995). God is at work in us always, slowly conforming us to the image of His Son, the perfect leader (Romans 8:29).

Being a leader in the kingdom of God may look different from you might have imagined, but when we lead God's way, with humility, by example and investing in others, God will use us and our gift for His glory. There's no greater honor than that. ©



NEW FROM BESTSELLING AUTHOR LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD



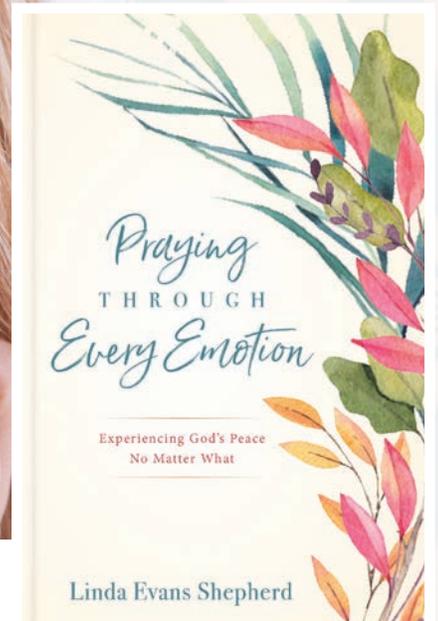
Praying Through Every Emotion

Experiencing God's Peace No Matter What

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new release\



rise above your EMOTIONS

linda evans shepherd | gottoprayer.com

Is it possible to rise above circumstances you can't change?

It is when you serve a God whose Kingdom is not subject to the cares of this world.

In Mark, chapter 4, Jesus told a parable about thorns choking sprouting seedlings. It illustrates how the cares of this world can choke us, preventing us from having a fruitful life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

I understand thorny cares. Years ago, my toddler was injured in a devastating car crash and lived in a coma for over a year. When she finally woke up, she was left with severe disabilities. These thorns could have crushed my spirit, but God helped me to find joy through my tears and peace through my heartache, especially as I studied the Word, prayed and yielded to more to God's presence in my life.

In my new book, *Praying Through Your Emotions, Finding Peace No Matter What*, I show how to weed out the enemy's thorns with Scripture prayers.

Give it a try and pray this powerful prayer about ANXIETY:

Dear Lord,

The trouble in this world has made me anxious. But You want me to turn my anxieties over to You.

You remind me not to fear or be dismayed

because You are my God.

You promise to strengthen and help me as You hold my hand. Okay, I'll take Your anxiety challenge and give You all my anxieties.

I turn over my life, my food, my clothes, my body, my fears and my worries to You.

After all, the birds never worry or stress out about their lives, and You take wonderful care of them. And You've said that I'm more important to You than the birds.

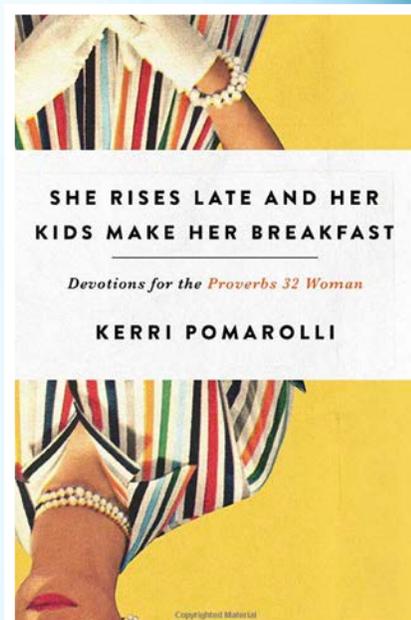
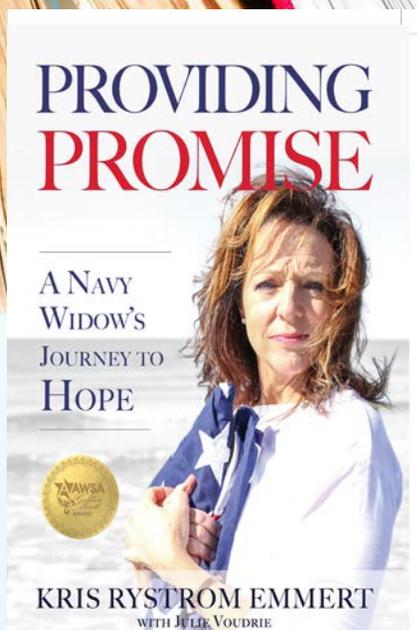
My anxiety has been unproductive, causing my head to spin as I search for impossible solutions instead of trusting You.

But the solutions are not up to me. The solutions to my problems belong to You.

You can figure everything out so much better than I can even imagine. All I have to say is, "Thank You!" ☺

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CHRISTIANBOOKBUZZO



PROVIDING PROMISE A Navy Widow's Journey to Hope kris rystrom emmert

SHE RISES LATE AND HER KIDS MAKE HER BREAKFAST kerri pomarolli

Providing Promise was recognized as the Golden Scroll Awards Honorable Mention for Memoir of the Year at the 2020 Golden Scroll Awards.

Embark on a life-changing encounter as you journey through the remarkable life and death of an accomplished naval flight officer and his grieving widow's path from unimaginable heartache to unstoppable hope.

With captivating novel-like and highly accurate military scenes, excerpts of touching long-distance love letters, and raw, unfiltered emotions, *Providing Promise* isn't just another memoir — it is a lifeline.

Experience your own inner healing and uncover your God-given destiny as you walk alongside one who has seen firsthand how God can turn tragedy into triumph and peace of purpose."

"I pray that my story of heartache to hope will inspire people to find answers to the hard questions in the midst of their suffering." —Kris Rystrom Emmert 

Want a deeper relationship with God, but with the clock constantly ticking down the rounds, you can't seem to find the time? Kerri Pomarolli, a comedian and mom living life in LA, knows all about the never-ending search for more time.]

For time-crunched women longing for God, Kerri offers *Devotions for the Proverbs 32 Woman*. You will laugh and, perhaps cry, your way closer to the Savior through these 90 meditations. In her down-to-earth style, Kerri will teach you how to face mean girls, navigate social media and stress eat ice cream with a fork — all while learning to put the Lord at the center of all you do.

You know those times when you are pretty sure you have got this adulting thing all wrong, and you are sure everyone else read a handbook you were never given? Kerri encourages us to embrace the hot mess in all of us. Her words will not only make you laugh but will remind you that you are not alone."

—Melissa d'Arabian, author of *Tasting Grace* 



the church must JOIN THE FIGHT

sioni rodriguez | bit.ly/rebuildingwhatwasdestroyed

My name is Sioni Rodriguez.

I am an activist exposing the evil of human trafficking and human rights violations. I am also a human trafficking survivor.

In my biography, *Three Times Sold*, I share my story of overcoming the odds and my heart as an advocate to reach and rescue the countless faces, who like me, know the dark world of sexual slavery.

My story starts in Mumbai, India, the place of my birth. And my trafficker was my own mother. However, this atrocity is not something that is happening “over there.” It is all around you — even in the smallest and wealthiest places in America. It does not discriminate.

January was National Human Trafficking Awareness Month.

And, while the coronavirus has halted a vast number of activities around the world, one thing has not stopped — human trafficking.

Now, more than ever, because of COVID-19 lockdowns, victims are suffering behind closed doors. And now, more than ever, we are called to Arise.

We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus to help the suffering and erase the practice!

Globally, human trafficking is a \$150 billion industry, with more than 40 million victims. But this is not just a crime of third world nations.

The crime of human trafficking is a \$32 billion-a-year industry in the United States, and it is on the rise in all 50 states.

Estimates put the number of victims in the U.S. between 15,000 to 50,000 women and children forced into sexual slavery. My own home state of Pennsylvania ranks seventh in the nation!

These are the states with the highest numbers of child sex trafficking in the US:

1. California (San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego)
2. New York
3. Texas

These victims are not only forced into sex slavery, but also into forced labor and debt bondage. They are 21st-century slaves! Psalm 82:3 is God’s mandate to us:

“Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.”

And so, we must ARISE against the darkness of human trafficking and put an end to this scourge against humanity.

The first way to do that is to do the research. Start with humantraffickinghotline.org. The second is to keep your eyes open to the signs that someone might be a victim. Don’t turn a blind eye to someone who looks like they may be in a trafficking situation or suspicious activity, like frequent visitors to a home, even in suburban and rural residential areas. A lot of very young girls that look like the girl-next-door might be suffering in silence. You might just be the person God is calling to be her voice. ☉

dawn lynn mann | dawnlynnmann.com

CELEBRATING MY RECOVERY

“[The Church] must be a safe place where we can overcome the fear of revealing what is really going on in our hearts so we can share our struggles.”



Listen to Dawn's testimony on the Arise, Esther! podcast by clicking on the play button.



I grew up believing in God but didn't seek Him until I was arrested for a DUI and sent to jail.

After my arrest, I was on the brink of suicide. I was afraid and hurting from the pain of my sexual brokenness, relationships, and addictions born from the trauma of abuse. To make matters worse, most of my friends deserted me, and I felt so very alone.

After I cried out to God for help, I soon read a story about a woman who'd been convicted of a DUI and came out the other side. I reached out to the woman and she reached back to pour God's love into me. She prayed for me and told me about Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered, 12-step recovery program for those struggling with hurt, pain or addiction.

Because God healed me from the inside out, today I serve as a Celebrate Recovery leader who helps others overcome.

How thankful I am that God healed me, a former addict, victim of abuse, and person who formerly identified as a gay woman, to become an overcomer in Christ.

He touched my heart and now I live for Him daily.

My church was a big part of my transformation. It is a loving

place with a mission to help people become disciples of Christ.

The pastors and leaders greet me with loving-kindness and compassion. They've supported me on my journey of God's radical transformation as well as my advocacy work as a Justice Ambassador through Prison Fellowship. My church has shown me the genuine love of God through their support and prayers.

Finding Christian friends has had its own healing effect. I've discovered that you become more like those with whom you surround yourself.

It makes such a difference to be in a healthy community: to edify, encourage and to pray for one other. My friendships have enabled me to be more effective in my calling and service to God.

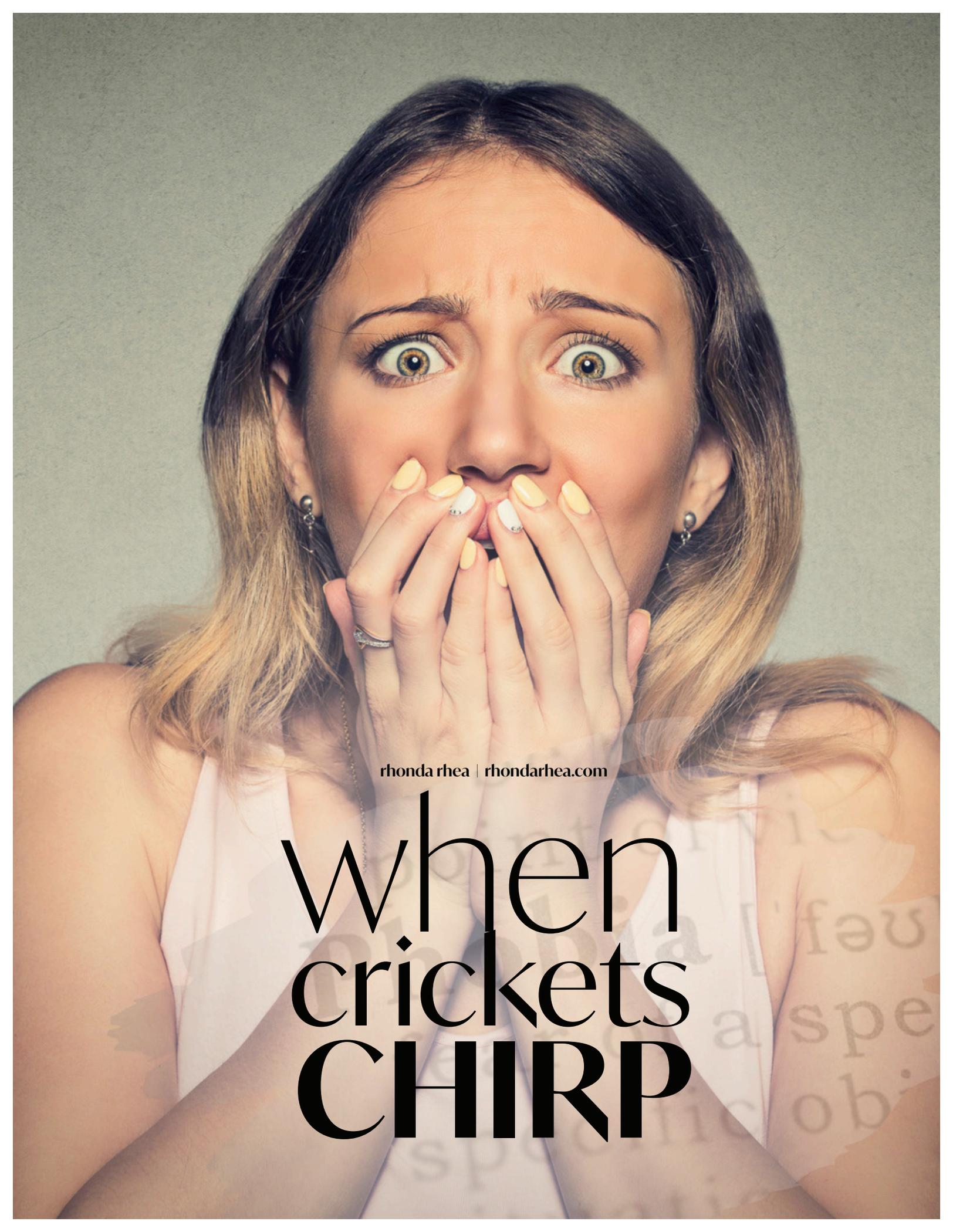
If you are interested in helping your church become a place where others can heal, the first thing you must do is to allow the presence of the Holy Spirit. Second, the church must give members the opportunity to share what God has done in their lives.

We must be a safe place where we can overcome the fear of revealing what is really going on in our hearts so we can share our struggles with issues like sexual identity, addictions and abuse.

We should be a place where we can bare our burdens, heart and soul and have those difficult conversations in love, truth and grace.

We must remember that Christ first loved us despite who we once were. Jesus came to live and die for everyone, welcoming all to purchase their freedom through His blood. He did not come for the righteous, but for those who are sick, lost, hurting and broken. He came for the outcast and sinners in need of a Savior. He told them to "come follow Me."

We need to let God's love shine in us even brighter than what the world thinks love should look like. Jesus called us to be disciples who make disciples who are radically committed to His unconventional ways. We need to present the gospel in a way that reflects God's heart so that others will be drawn to the good news of His love and forgiveness. ☺

A close-up portrait of a woman with long, wavy brown hair and light-colored eyes. She has a shocked or surprised expression, with wide eyes and a furrowed brow. Her hands are pressed against her mouth, covering it completely. She is wearing a white halter-neck top, a silver ring on her left hand, and small hoop earrings. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

rhonda rhea | rhondarhea.com

when
crickets
CHIRP



For everything you can name, I'm pretty sure there's an official phobia listed for it.

If you're afraid of phobias, would you be considered a phob-a-phobe? I'm not sure how true it is. Still, surveys show the fear of public speaking (glossophobia) and the fear of dying (necrophobia) are at the top of people's lists. In that order, even.

As a public speaker — and one who is often billed as a humorist — I think tops on my list would be “necro-glossophobia.” Fear of death while speaking. Okay, yes, I made that one up. But I've experienced it on a figurative level once or twice. Frightening.

One of those events, particularly sticks in my mind. I was delivering what I considered some of my most rip-roaring material when ... it happened: nothing. A whole big lot of nothing. Hardly a snicker. I think I heard crickets chirping — kind of a slow death, speaker-wise.

The Bible says that laughter is like medicine. I'm telling you, this had to be the control group. Placebos for everyone!

After I spoke, a lady came up to me with a completely lifeless

face. Truly lifeless. Without an ounce of expression, she monotoned, “I have never laughed so hard in all my life.” She didn't crack a smile even then. It was so hilariously strange.

Here's hoping we always look “alive” to the world. Know what “alive” looks like? It looks like love. First John 3:14 says, “We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers” (HCSB).

We have passed from death into life — heavy on the life! We need to pass it on. Others can't see our redemption unless we live it out. And love it out.

It's not a new message, but it's one we need to hear often. We read in the same passage, “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another” (1 John 3:11 NIV). So how do we know exactly what that kind of love looks like? The same chapter gives us that, too: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (verse 16).

Real love sacrifices. The Jesus kind of love is a love that surrenders in humility. It's a love that endures beyond the very worst offenses.

When Jesus was asked which commandment in the law was greatest, He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’” (Matthew 22:37-39).

A right-to-the-heart-and-soul kind of love. Being a follower of Christ means we love Him with everything we've got, and we love others in His name with the same enthusiastic love. It's our focus. Because it's God's focus.

Here's hoping that if I'm asked to lay aside my rights, fears, possessions, pride and even my very life for another, I'll give the right response. No silence. No crickets chirping. Just love.

Giving sacrificial love to a heartsick world that doesn't know the love and joy of Jesus is the best medicine we can offer. And that, my friends, is no placebo. ☺



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The Advanced Writers and Speakers Association (AWSA) has two levels of membership including:

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contributors



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