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LEADINGHEARTS



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LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD FOUNDER & CEO OF AWSA

Are you a Christian Woman Called to Write & Speak?







"One of the best investments I made in my speaking and writing ministry was membership in AWSA. I connected with fellow Christian women authors and speakers. These sisters have contributed to my books and recommended me for speaking engagements. Most of all, I made lifetime friends who continue to inspire me. "



Carol Kent

Founder and Executive Director of SpeakUpConference.com Speaker and Author of Speak Up with Confidence 2000—AWSA Founding Member





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The Miracle of God's "No"

Welcome to our spring issue of *Leading*Hearts. Before you flip through our pages, I'd like to tell you a story about my friend Joy Brown, a woman who understands many of the mysteries of prayer.

Joy and her friends collect used eyeglasses to be given at free eye clinics in Ukraine. But one trip, the customs officers were demanding a huge sum to allow the box into the country. Joy received an emergency call from her friend during the argument. Her friend said, "Please pray that God will provide a way we can get these glasses in."

But the officers wouldn't relent, and the box was sent back to the US.

It was hard to understand. The clinic needed those glasses, and Joy had been on her knees praying the glasses would make it through.

She didn't get the report until her friend returned home. The story was that a woman from Sweden unexpectedly dropped by the clinic to deliver a box of used eyeglasses, just in case they were needed. The team was overjoyed. But as they were sorting the glasses, they came across a pair with coke-bottle thick lenses. Too thick for the average need, and the glasses went on a shelf untouched.

But on the last day of the clinic, a gentleman arrived with extremely bad eyesight. There really wasn't much the doctor could do for him, until he remembered the pair of coke-bottle glasses.

When the gentleman put the eyeglasses on, he cried tears of joy. He could see again!

Joy said, "Just think, if our box of eyeglasses had made it,

that gentleman wouldn't have received the pair he needed. So God's answer of 'No!' to our prayers was an answer of 'Yes!' to the man who needed the eyeglasses."

Not only that, their team had no trouble getting the rejected box of eyeglasses through customs on their very next trip.

This is a good reminder. When we get a "no" from God, we are prone to take it personally. What if we instead thanked God for the answer, trusting Him for the greater miracle. Because God's "no's" are only a disguise for His YES!

A prayed-for healing may still be found, in death, when the believer is suddenly in the presence of Jesus.

When one direction is blocked, we can finally see the direction that God wants us to go.

When the struggle continues, we finally learn how to walk with God, which may be the miracle we need.

Plus, we find many of God's "no's" are a set up for His perfect timing, the perfect moment when He says, "Yes!"

What a great insight. There are many more wonderful insights hidden in the pages of this issue. We hope you'll take a break and enjoy the treasure to be found on every page.

Joy's story and many other stories can be found on my new show, The Prayer Investigator, found at YouTube.com/@ gottopray. Stop by so we can continue the discussion. ●

Love, Juida

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When the temperature is above 30 degrees outside, you'll usually find me driving with

the windows down. You see, I've recently become an adoptive dog-mom to not one, but two, 1-year-old, 100-pound-plus Great Pyrenees—Stuart and Stanley.

My human kids will tell you that the dogs get away with more than they ever did. Every time I jump in the van, my fluffy boys wait patiently for the side doors to open. Even though the back seat comes equipped with stow-and-go seats, folded down to accommodate their comfy car cushions, they choose to take their positions on opposite sides of the vehicle for personal and maximum window viewing.

I can't help but laugh when I look into my side mirrors to see their billowing jowls as white tufts of fur typhoon through the car. When stopping by Starbucks for a morning coffee, I naturally request pup cups—and the barista gives them a double shot of whipped cream. As a side note, I've learned to always have a coffee cup with a stopper to avoid choking on the potential tufts of dog hair that make it into my brew.

No matter how much hair I clean up, how many holes the dogs dig in the backyard or times they drag my coffee, random socks, and even one of our Alexas into the yard, my response is laughter.

What do I most love about taking them around? Watching the joy they give others. I don't want to keep it to myself, so I've added "Minister of Floof" to my title. I love to witness stressed-out faces transform to smiles when they drive up next to us. This amazingly fluffy, messy, slobbery, scenario draws young and old to come closer and share in the joy. We've even taken the dogs to hubby's work during the holiday rush to give his co-workers a stress-reducing cuddle.

Are you aware that you might possibly have something you tend to keep to yourself that could help minister absolute joy to others? The ability to bake pies? The ability to paint a picture, write poetry, change the oil in a car? Yes, I'm the

Minister of Floof, and my mother—she was the Reverend of Clean Laundry. Her love for washing, folding and putting away clothes brought love, joy and friendship to her senior living community—that's ministry.

First Peter 4:10–11 says, "Each of you should use WHATEVER GIFT you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its VARIOUS FORMS ... If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that IN ALL THINGS God may be praised through Jesus Christ" (NIV, emphasis added).

I want you to take note here: WHATEVER GIFT = there is no prerequisite to what the gift is, and VARIOUS FORMS + IN ALL THINGS = there is no prerequisite for how specifically you can use it for God's glory. Do what you love in whatever creative way you want for the benefit of others so God may be glorified. Whatever you have that might seem mundane can transport the fresh wind of God's goodness into new places.

It's time to take your place, Minister of DIY. You don't need credentials to confirm what God has already given you. His Love + Your Gifts = Shines His Glory.

I pray this issue of *Leading Hearts* will help you walk in renewed creativity, activating all you have as you fulfill His Commission—no matter what that looks like.

And I want to take this time to give a special shout out to all you Ministers of Floof. I know the harvest from your ministry will be multiplied abundantly beyond the amount of dog hair in your vehicle.

●

Get a free download of project single "Lead Me On" by Michaelah Weaver of The Keepers Co. from Amber and Lisa Burris Burns. Their latest book, Leading Ladies: Discover Your God-Grown Strategy for Success is available May 30. Find out more at leadingladies.life.





In elementary school, I took
all the art classes offered.
I am not good at art or at drawing,
but I loved the feel of a new sheet
of art paper or a blank canvas. I
was in love with the idea of creating
something on that bare space. In my
mind and in my dreams, I could create

a masterpiece with flow, movement and brilliant use of color.

Unfortunately, my hands never got the messages from my brain and heart, and I usually produced a twisted mess. My shapes were malformed; my perspective was skewed; and my tints turned into a strange shade of mud.

That immediate failure was hard for me to accept and overcome until the teacher reached into her cabinet and handed me a new page of art paper—a new canvas.

Starting over offers optimism, hope and joy—and beginning again promises another chance to get it right.

Perhaps you have experienced some failures during the past year. You wish you could erase the memory of some meetings or encounters. Participation in your organization has dwindled, and now you are feeling like my school-girl paintings—disorganized, overwhelmed and bored.

Let's consider a Spring Restart we can implement now because, as T. S. Eliot said, "Every moment is a fresh beginning."

Repeat after me: "This year I will implement some of these clean-slate ideas as I lead my organization."

Pray

Study the craft and art of personal and corporate prayer. Commit to praying together as a team—that corporate communication with the Father is fresh and powerful. Memorize prayers from Scripture, such as the prayer of Jabez (2 Chronicles 4:10), the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), David's prayer for deliverance (Psalm 3), or Hannah's prayer of praise (1 Samuel 2:1-10).

Build prayer lists that focus on the growth and development of your organization, saving those lists of sick relatives and world peace for a different agenda. Instead, name individuals and goals and desires for the ministry.

Brainstorm the Benefits

Call your leadership team together with one specific goal

for the meeting: to discover the benefits of your ministry. As the team discusses, guide them to stay focused on the individuals you serve. What do they need? Avoid talking about the preferences and passions of the team or what is easiest for the team.

What is most needed for the people you serve? Fellowship? Laughter? Connection or networking?

Activities such as crafts or games? Service projects? In-depth Bible study? Inspiring speakers? Consider sending a survey to the members of your organization asking about their desires. You may find gems of wisdom and fresh ideas. Write goals based on the benefits you can offer. After you've had time to contemplate these goals and benefits, call another meeting to write the plans for the coming year.

I have talked to many women's ministry directors who have built thriving organizations by thinking creatively in planning events. Here's a sampling of some of those success stories.

Ideas for Benefit-Driven Events:

- **1. A Share-Your-Passion Event.** Find those women who are creative and industrious and give them the opportunity to teach others in the group. A demonstration on quilting. Another on scrapbooking. A plan for getting exercise in busy lifestyles. Cooking lessons, perhaps with a specialty like "crock pot meals" or "baking" or "healthy foods."
- **2. Lunch Time for Working Women.** Pick a location that is convenient for most women. (In large cities, you may need to pick two locations.) Let everyone "brown-bag" it and come together for fellowship and a short encouraging presentation.
- **3. Community service.** Call local service organizations to discover ways your members can reach out to the community. One group filled inexpensive nylon backpacks with nonperishables so each woman could carry some in her car to give to homeless people or someone on the corner with a sign asking for help.
- **4. Sports Events.** Would some in your group enjoy an adult softball, soccer or pickleball team? Find those athletic gals and help them join or form a league. I know of two people who came to know Jesus because they joined a sports team and discovered how genuine and kind Christians can be.
- **5. Book Club.** The discussions that take place because of reading the same book are deep, rich, and fun. Contact the author who might be willing to send signed book-plates for each member or might send you a video of encouragement.

In this season of new beginnings, what will you and your team create? \odot



Michelle Wedlock Alams michellemedlockadams.com A Children's Author's Perspective:

As I closed my latest holiday picture book and said the words, "the end," the library full of enthusiastic first graders applauded.

I then proceeded to ask the same questions I always ask after reading my story about the littlest dachshund in all of Diggityville who is bullied about his tiny stature but ends up saving Christmas anyway.

"It wasn't nice when Bo Wolverine made fun of Crosby, was it?"

"No!" the students responded.

"Have any of you ever been bullied?"

Lots of hands shot up.

"I'm sorry to see so many hands go up," I said, looking around the room. "But know this—you are very special. And, even if others bully you, their words can't change who you are. You are amazing!"

As the students scrambled to get in line and head back to their classroom, one little girl stayed behind.

"I was bullied bad," she whispered to me. "They made fun of me because I don't have a mom."

I knelt down so I could look into her tear-filled eyes.

"I'm so sorry that happened to you."

And I was.

I was even sorrier that I couldn't fix the situation for her. As I headed home from that school visit, I couldn't guit thinking about that little girl and all of those like her, and that made me wonder ... what could I do to make her life better, easier, less stressful.

Or better yet, what can we—as authors and speakers, as ministry leaders, as Christians—do to better love and serve this little girl and her family? And all the others.

Maybe you've wondered the same thing.

Well, I have good news. I have asked someone who can answer this question from several different perspectives. Meet Genevieve Traversy, a former foster child and now a foster and adoptive mother, as well as a full-time foster care worker. Her answers follow:

How can churches better minister to foster families/single-parent families/nontraditional families?

"The best way to minister? SUPPORT. I know that's a broad answer, but most foster (non-traditional) families burn out quickly. Sometimes just a listening ear and words of encouragement and prayer can help strengthen weary families.

"Support can be physical and financial. Offering to paint a room, move furniture, purchase diapers or a car seat, buy gift cards, etc. Sometimes support can just be showing up on their doorstep, asking: 'How can I help?'"

What is one tangible way our churches can better serve foster families?

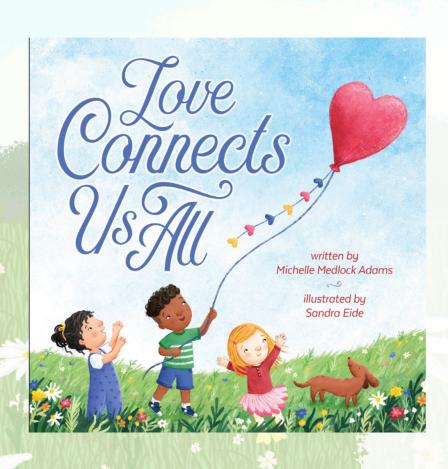
"Prepare meals. When one of our foster sons was placed with us, we received meals for five days from a local organization. That was one of the most amazing gifts we could have ever received. Just like when a baby is born, most churches will prepare a meal train for that family. What people don't realize is how many appointments go into the first two months after a child is placed. Saving time from cooking meals is such a gift."

How can we be the hands and feet of Jesus to single-parent families, foster and otherwise?

continued on p. 13

AVAILABLE APRIL 18TH FROM MICHELLE MEDLOCK ADAMS

Families come in all shapes and sizes...



"It's my hope that children everywhere will find themselves in this text and realize that a family can be any group of people who love each other, and that God is all about family. After all, He is our heavenly Father,"



Themes:

- Meaning of a Family
- Non-biological Families
- God's Love for Family
- Importance of Love in Relationships
- Adoption and Fostering





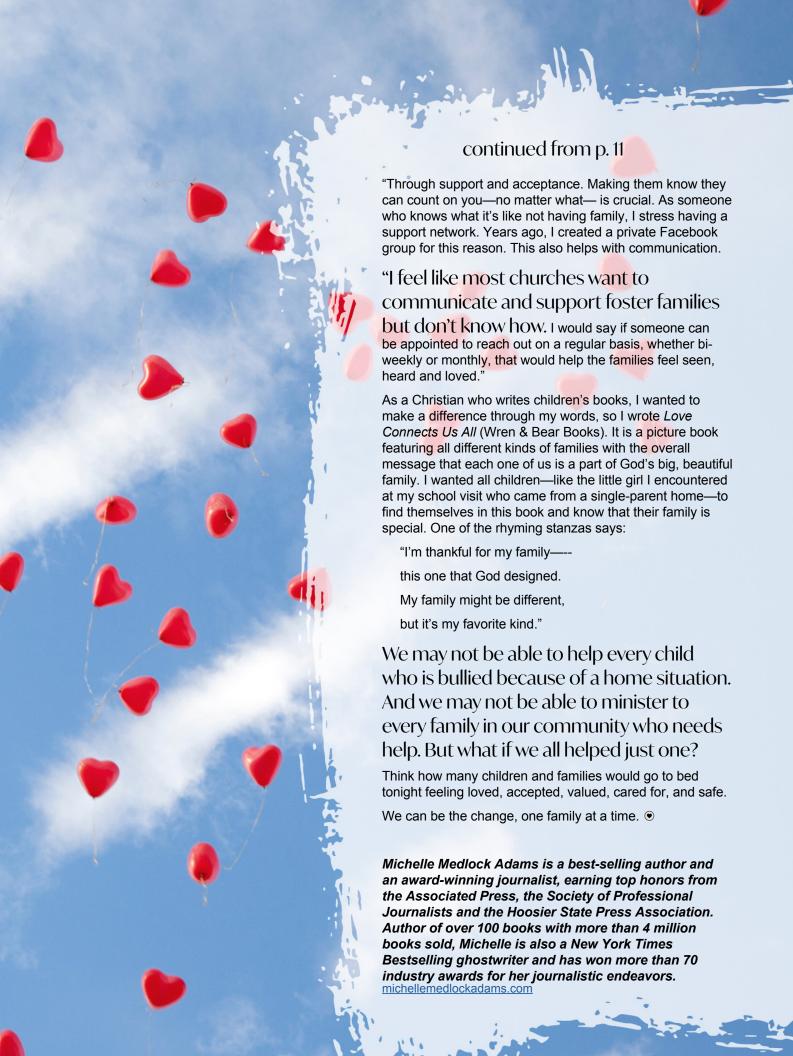
















God the Father planted Christ's identity as the Son of God (John 10:36) through a memorable moment:

"At that time Jesus came from
Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized
by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was
coming up out of the water, he saw heaven

being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased'" (Mark 1:9-11).

Jesus embodied the divine DNA—and Christ walked out His heavenly identity! On a recent prayer walk with my husband, we recalled precious days in our lives parenting three sons. The highlights all connected to watching our sons grasp their identity in Christ, then walk it out.

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." (3 John 1:4)

When our son Brock was a baby, Bill was a youth pastor. One day, I was praying for our son, "Lord, it seems that some kids at 18 soar and succeed. And others stumble and fall. What's the difference?" I began to list the traits, qualities and skills of successful kids. Many of our own family traditions began from that prayer. Let me share it through the lens of an important day in our family:

For our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, we gave our sons a tie tack with our family moniker (a crest or coat of arms) we had designed when they were babies. It is an heirloom that can be passed down from generation to generation symbolizing the values of the Farrel family. (In our 10 Best Decisions a Parent Can Make book, we describe and show a picture of our crest and how to design your own.)

Our moniker is a circle and inside are three L's that stand for Learner, Leader, Love God. These are the three core values we prayed that our kids hold on to.

Learners: Competitors willing to do the hard work to learn and become excellent.

Leaders: In their sphere of influence using their own unique leadership style, we pray they be difference-makers that lead rather than follow the crowd.

Love God: We want them to own their own faith and walk out their own personal relationship with God.

Each year from the time our oldest was four, we hosted a Learner and Leader Who Love God Day where we negotiate privileges and responsibilities and select one leadership trait to focus on for each son each year. We give a gift that applauds the uniqueness (passion, calling, platform) we see God building in each of their lives.

Also, in the crest is a cross with the star rising from it representing our desire to see them seek God's vision for their life. We want the source of all their hopes, dreams, and desires to come from God's heart. We believe if a child, tween, or teen develops a vibrant relationship with God, it will be easier for him or her to discern the life path God created for them.

The two interlocking hearts represent integrity and commitment. When a Farrel speaks, we want it to be truth and we want to be known as a family that keeps all of our commitments, especially the marriage covenant. The verse inscribed with the crest is the motto by which we raised our sons: "Those who honor God, God honors." (1 Samuel 2:30 paraphrased)

Each fall for over 20 years, on Learner and Leader Who Love God Day, we have a fun family activity, (a day at an amusement park, lake, beach, favorite place to eat, etc.)

On that day we'd also complete the Learner and Leader contract for each child, choose one verse to pray over his life for the year, and one leadership trait to focus on and equip that child to live out. Because one of the traits is a love for God's Word, we teach each child how to select their verse for the year by using internet Bible study tools.

We also select a Learner and Leader Who Loves God gift for each child each year. The gift is three things:

Personal: We thought of each child's needs and unique strengths.

Practical: Something that child would need and is part of the family budget.

Prophetic: The gift encourages the promise and potential of that child's giftedness and calling.

Now, decades later, our three sons are all adults, and they all walk with Jesus and serve God. Our sons and their wives have their own family memorable moments. Our grandchildren have their own version of Learner and Leader Who Love God Days.

If you are raising children, set your own family fun day to celebrate and equip YOUR children. If you are grandparents, take your grown kids to coffee and ask, "How can we walk alongside you well as you raise our wonderful grandkids?"

Create memorable moments to imprint Heaven's view on the hearts of those you love. lacktriangle



Q: The Apostle Paul was not part of the original twelve disciples, yet he claims to be an apostle as if he was commissioned by Jesus. Isn't that a contradiction that invalidates the Bible?

You are correct in two areas. First, the word "Apostle" means "one sent."

When we speak of apostles, we mean those Christ sent out to minister. Secondly, Paul was not part of the original Twelve who followed Jesus during His early ministry. However, Paul claimed his calling came "not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Galatians 1:1, NKJV).

He also made it clear that he heard the gospel from the risen Savior so he could reach the Gentiles.

Rather than contradict the Bible, Paul's writings confirm the testimony of the New Testament. First, Paul, then called Saul, took the garments of the men who stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

At the time, he devoted himself to his Jewish heritage, so the rise of Christianity alarmed him. In response, he persecuted what he believed to be an aberration from his religion.

The Book of Acts records him "ravaging the church, entering house after house" to find and imprison followers of Christ. When early Christians fled to Damascus, Saul asked permission to go there to bring the new heretics back for punishment.

However, on his way to Damascus, Saul saw a vision of the Lord and changed to become a follower instead of a destroyer. Amazing! When an enemy converts, you have a good recommendation. Furthermore, in A.D. 48 Paul gives details about his actions right after his conversion: "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days" (Galatians 1:18, NET).

If Paul did this somewhere between A.D. 35 and 37, that means we have a testimony dating back to less than 10 years after the Resurrection.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul comments he gave them what he received, which was an early creed, "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."

That means the disciples would have established this creed right after the Resurrection, not years later.

You might ask, what significance does the timing have? The further the written record of the event, the more tendency toward error. Scholars believe it takes 200 years or more for a story to become distorted and lean toward legend.

However, look how closely we can place the early testimony of the formation of the Church.

Saul, the persecutor, saw the Church form, and he attempted to stop the movement. However, he joined the Church instead. Based on this information, we can be more certain that God protected His Word for us so we can know His revelation.



continued from p. 17



For nearly three decades, Point of Grace has inspired audiences around the world with their faith-filled award-winning melodies and

VOICES. This month a new generation of fans will have opportunity to experience their music as they release Turn Your Eyes (Songs We Love, Songs You Know) Volume II.

A Legacy of Music

"Now that we're getting older, and we have children that are grown, we're really into the whole idea of legacy, what we passed down, and what really matters. I think one of the things that we want to pass down to our children, down to everyone, and those that will come after us, are just some of the songs that shaped us," Point of Grace's Shelley Breen says. "We're looking back through our lives and going which of these songs still need to have a voice and need to be heard by newer and younger generations? That's how we chose a lot of the songs."

The album features their versions of Contemporary Christian Music favorites like "Awesome God" and "I Believe," as well as some new ones they've written and enjoyed sharing during their live shows. "At the Table" was inspired by a conversation about the challenges and frustrations found in having

conversations with differing viewpoints today. "It just seems like people can't even have a conversation anymore, two people that have differing views without getting a huge fight. Everything is so divided. We want to lovingly speak the truth and not compromise on our own values, but still be in the lives and in relationship with people who don't believe the same as we do," Breen says.

Welcome to the Table

"I've got several friends that we definitely don't see eye to eye on things like politics or some things that I would consider ethical questions, but I'm still really good friends with them. I think that when this was written, we were talking about there's room for everybody because if there's not, we're in big trouble. The gospel is not bound by politics. We really can do this. It's not that hard.

We just want to say, can we be Jesus to everybody? Move a chair over. Let everybody come to the table. We can all get along. We really can do we can do this. It's not that hard."

However, Breen notes that the title track of "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" is her favorite of them all. "If there was one song or even one part of a song that was my life mantra, that has put things in perspective for me, it would just be a line that says, 'Turn your eyes Jesus and the things of the world will grow strangely dim.' There's never been a truer lyric written," she says.

"When we start to focus our eyes on eternal things and what really matters, all the things in life just fade away. It's a really great perspective lyric. And I love the added line that Cindy Morgan put into that song, 'Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.' It says, 'for the hope that will heal, that will free us and help us to live.' The Bible was given to us as instructions for living, you know, and the freedom that we find in Christ and in the Word of God. It helps us to live our daily lives and helps us to live peacefully and feeling like we're fulfilled and we're not striving and chasing. I really, really love that song."

Keep the Candle Burning

In light of the recent revivals occurring across the country and around the world, the "Keep the Candle Burning" artist encourages believers to create a routine of being in the Word of God, growing in relationship with the Father, praying, and

continuing to trust Jesus even in the hard and mundane times. "Whether it's five verses or 55 verses, continually put that in. The Word is alive and active, so continue to put that in and make that a habit every day. The Word is probably the biggest thing because it moves you to do things," she says.

"What keeps you going is learning to not give up on the process of learning to trust, just knowing even when these things are happening, I'm gonna trust, I'm gonna trust, I'm gonna trust, and I know this is gonna be reclaimed for good at some point. Staying close to God and keeping Him at the forefront of your days. Acting in faith even when you don't feel like it."

Sharing What Matters Most

Breen wants to remind mothers and influencers of the next generation that the most important job is to pass on the story of Jesus. "Talk about Jesus in your house. Whenever you can, bring Him into everyday things. Bring Him into the fight with your kids. Once you start helping your kids to look at life through that sort of biblical worldview, the minute that you

realize that that is your most important job, nothing else really matters, and it will set you free," she says.

"It will get you off the hamster wheel trying to keep up with the Joneses. It will get you off the exhausting hamster wheel of chasing after and striving for other things. Let it go. If your children have a good understanding of who Jesus is, what Jesus did, and see the world through that biblical lens that you tried to instill that in them the best you can, then you as a mom are a success.

"It doesn't matter what else happens. That doesn't take any extra. You don't have to create new hours to do that. It's in every single thing that you're doing with your kids all day long. And that's the mark of a great mom, in my opinion."

Cooking Up Something New

In addition to new music, Point of Grace fans will be excited to know that another cookbook is in the works. "Speaking of happy dancing, we loved making our cookbook. Our fans really loved it, and we have had requests for another one." Breen said it's truly a labor of love and notes fans can look for more news about its release as well as more exciting events that are still in the works. So, if you're in the Nashville area this summer, be watching for opportunities to join Point of Grace for a fun night of worship.

For the latest POG news, visit pointofgrace.net



Watch Point of Grace "I Believe" featuring Wes King



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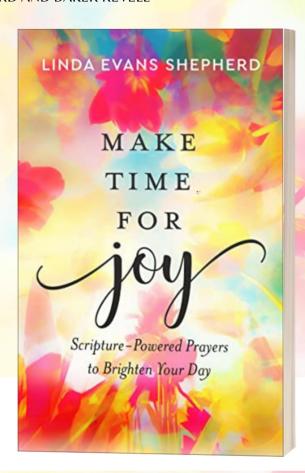
















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A DAILY DEVOTIONAL MINISTRY OF THE ADVANCED WRITERS & SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION



It was late Saturday
evening when I stood
to get my luggage
from the jet's overhead
compartment. The tipsy

woman from across the aisle told me, "You have a beautiful daughter."

At first, I was stunned because my daughter is now in Heaven. Then the lightbulb blinked on. I smiled back at the young college girl who'd been sitting next to me on the flight. Earlier that evening, young Kylie and I talked about the blizzard approaching Denver because she was worried. She was about to hop in her car and drive the 900 miles to Houston, hoping to arrive in time for her Monday morning class. I'd felt such love for Kylie as I asked if I could pray for a safe trip.

Her eyes widened, "Would you? I would love that!"

I bowed my head, not realizing that across the aisle, the tipsy woman was watching our every move.

I now turned to the woman standing near me, "I would be honored to be this beautiful girl's mother. But we just met."

The woman stared back, then said, "I know what you are. I know what you believe in. I do too, it's just I'm full of '@*#BLEEP!!!'

I suddenly saw into the soul of the woman. Her sad eyes said, "I wish my mother was kind to me the way you expressed kindness to this girl." By now, the woman and I were standing face to face. I put my hand on her shoulder and bowed my head. "Well, then I ask the good Lord to take the 'B. L. E. E. P.' out of you and fill you with His joy!"

My prayer stunned the woman who suddenly seemed sober. And to tell you the truth, my prayer stunned me too. Even so, I know my prayer was exactly what my new friend needed.

There are hurting people everywhere who need prayer. Have you ever considered using your prayer gift to love your neighbor?

Maybe it's time to start praying for strangers.

It's a little scary, but hand God your fear with a quick, "Lord, I give You my fear, please give me the courage and the words to pray for the stranger in front of me."

Then say something like, "I love to pray; may I pray for you, right now?"

I find that 99 percent of the time, the stranger before me will say, "Yes!"

I ask for their name, and if I'm led, I ask, "May I touch you?" If they agree, I gently touch their arm.

I pray and keep my eyes open to assess the situation, and pray something like, Dear Lord, I know how much your love (NAME), and I'm asking You to help/heal their problem of (FILL IN BLANK.) In Jesus' name.

How simple is that? Of course you can do it!

Not only is this prayer challenge an exciting way to love your neighbor and share your faith, don't be surprised if God answers your prayer with a miracle or two or opens the door for the strangers you meet to find Jesus. Happy praying!

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Do y W

Do you ever have days when you experience

anything but peace, when life seems disjointed and aimless?

Many days I feel overwhelmed by all the things on my to-do list. I want peace and joy, but instead, I feel anxious and worried. What's a girl to do?

Immediately my thoughts go to Matthew 6:33 — "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you" (MEV).

He is the answer, as we will never entirely elude this world's turbulence, but we can be safe with Him. It's like joy. We won't have a place where there is no trouble or heartache, but we can obtain peace and joy amid life's journey.

"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you" (Isaiah 26:3 NIV).

Our pastor's first message of the year was on peace; that was also my "word" for the year. I guess I'm not the only one seeking peace. Anxiety is rampant in our society. The National Institute of Mental Health reports occasional anxiety is part of life, but when it doesn't go away, it can interfere with our daily activities, work, and social interactions.

Barnes and Noble announced a massive surge in the sale of books about anxiety. It becomes a problem when it goes beyond worry and begins to take away our power to reason and cope with stressful situations.

With over 7 million people affected by anxiety in the U.S., it made our pastor's sermon more relevant than I thought. I pray that many in the congregation have new hope.

One of his main bullet points was that peace is a practice, focusing our reliance on God.

Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Jesus has already promised us peace vastly different from what the world offers. It is not fleeting or superficial; it's real and can transform the everyday activities of our lives. It's a choice to habitually look to the Lord for our peace and practice seeking Him and the peace He offers.

Here are three daily practices I am implementing to create and cultivate a life of peace and joy:

1. Spend time with Jesus.

As believers in Christ, we already have the promise of peace in our lives. He is the Prince of Peace. Our peace doesn't

depend on what we do or what happens. We decide every morning to have peace because of what Jesus did on the cross.

2. Stop over-committing.

We think we can do more than we really can. We rush around doing the urgent but miss the best and most important things. Stop trying to do what God has never called you to do. Keep this saying in mind before saying yes: "If the devil can't make you sin, he will make you busy."

3. Set goals and prioritize time.

Our lives probably aren't getting less busy, but we can choose what we do and keep a healthy schedule. There will be some busy times in our calendar, but make sure it's doing what God has called you to do. Ask God for guidance as you invest in what is most important and not urgent.

Breaking old patterns is hard. I need to heed the call Christ has on my life daily. Only then will I have the life I always wanted—Peace and Joy.

One of the many things we do each day is prepare meals for our family. I make out a meal plan for the week and make sure I have all the ingredients on hand. It's a simple task that I can do on Saturdays and avoid those last-minute trips to the grocery store. Meal planning helps manage my time better and also makes meal preparation easier. It also answers the nagging question, "What's for dinner?" There is a lot of peace in knowing the answer!

My daughter shared this idea of having a mini meatloaf for dinner. This recipe is perfect for a weeknight dinner as it cooks quickly and is excellent for leftovers.

Muffin Tin Mini Meatloaf

Preheat oven to 350° F. Grease muffin tins.

1 pound ground beef or turkey

1/₃ cup oatmeal

1 egg, beaten

1/4 cup milk

1/₃ cup ketchup

1 garlic clove, minced

½ cup onion, chopped

½ cup green pepper, chopped

½ cup chopped celery

1/3 cup shredded carrots

1 tablespoon A.1.® Sauce

Salt and pepper to taste

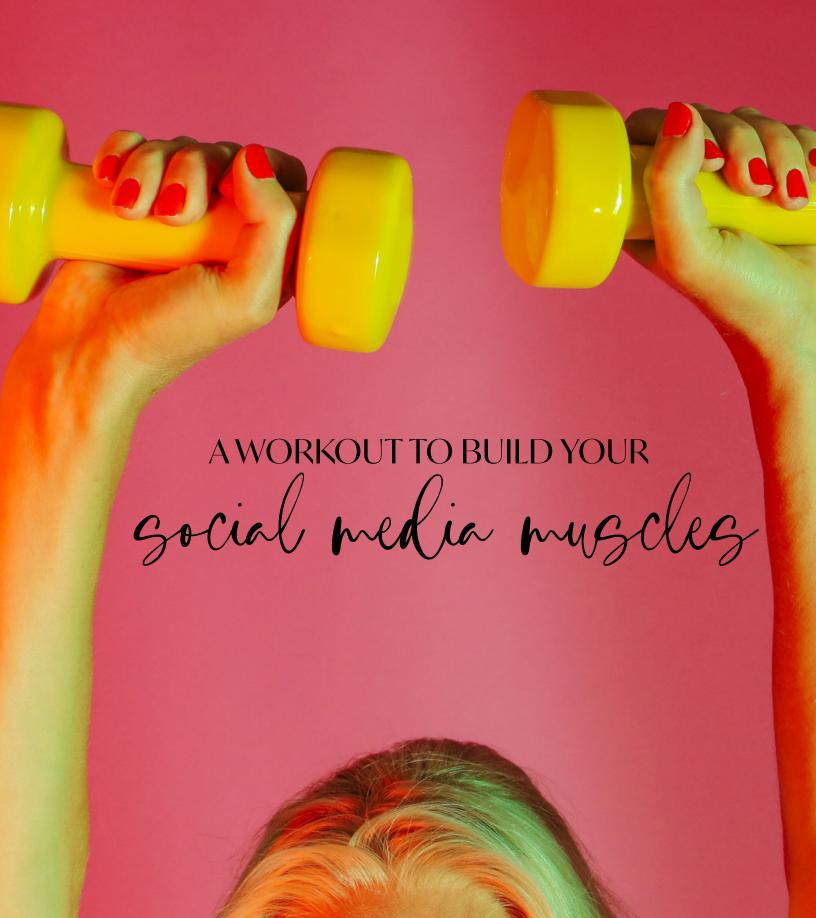
Directions:

Mix all the ingredients well. Press the meat mixture into muffin tin.

Top each one with a small amount of ketchup or barbecue sauce.

Bake for 25 to 30 minutes. Makes 12 mini meatloaves.

Serve with a starch of your choice and a tossed green salad. Leftovers are great for lunches. ●





As ministry leaders, we all want to give our best.

But so often our best is a little ragged around the edges because we're pulled in so many different directions.

YOUR PERSONALIZED FITNESS PLAN INCLUDES:

Sit Ups

This is the one where you sit up and take notice of what's going on around your digital neighborhood. How is the news today affecting those you serve? What ways can you be a conduit for God to speak hope, peace, and truth?

Strength Training

Where do you have the most followers and friends for ministry? That's where you need to invest the majority of your time. For me, that's Twitter. I have over 20,000 Twitter followers, so I make sure my interactions on that platform stay fresh and current. I also spend time on other networks, but not as much because I don't have as strong a presence there. One of the biggest mistakes I see with online interactions is trying to be fair and spend equal amounts of time on all our online platforms. Instead, work where God has opened doors.

Push Ups

Make it a practice to push up your numbers. Spend a short time each day adding new friends and followers on social media. The best way to do this and actually the only way I recommend is to manage every online interaction with a servant's heart. After all, must be a friend to have a friend.

Hurdles

Look at the obstacles ahead of you. If you're struggling with something, don't avoid it. Instead, take a run at it. Learn a new skill to keep your online interactions on track and moving forward.

One thing to note, however: make sure the hurdle isn't there because God wants to change your path. Some hurdles are there for purposes other than going over them!

Sprints

Keep watch on the amount of time you spend on social media. I recommend we limit our social media time to thirty minutes a day. Longer than that and I've found I've drifted from ministry into mindless scrolling. I actually use a stop watch throughout my day to monitor my social media time. Every time I go on social media, I start the stopwatch on my phone. When I get off, I pause it. I restart it when I get back on again. When I reach the thirty-minute mark, I'm done for the day.

Endurance Training

Remember this thing called ministry takes time—even when we're doing it online. It's very similar to a marathon. Training for a marathon involves consistency. Marathon runners don't run a marathon distance daily, instead they build their endurance. We need to do the same thing. With online interactions it's easy to think a quick tweet sharing an encouraging Bible verse won't make a difference, but it does. Do the small things and the big ones will take care of themselves.

Cardio

Make sure you follow God's heart and the passion He's put there. When we follow our own hearts we can get into serious trouble. But God's heart will never lead us astray.

These are things we can do to make our online interactions come from a place of strength and spiritual fitness.

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Growing up in California, I would attend my church's family camp each summer.

We would travel to the mountains for a week and participate in twice-a-day meetings listening to out-of-town preachers inspiring us to renew our commitment to Jesus.

I never wanted to leave the mountain because it seemed my relationship with God always transcended to a deeper level. I didn't realize it then, but I was experiencing a revival—a fresh infilling of power from the Holy Spirit to walk out my faith with a new level of commitment and boldness.

In the Bible, the term "revival" is not used explicitly. However, the concept of revival can be found throughout the Bible, and there are many reasons why revival is needed, according to the Scriptures:

1. To Return to God

Revival is needed when people have strayed from God. Second Chronicles 7:14 says, "Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways. I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land" (TPT).

Revival involves turning back to God and seeking Him with all our hearts.

2. To Restore Spiritual Passion

Revival is needed to ignite a new passion for God and His purposes. Revelation 2:4–5 says, "Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" (TPT). Revival involves repenting of our spiritual dryness and pursuing God with new zeal.

3. To Bring Transformation

Revival might start as a personal renewal but can also transform churches and communities and spread nationwide. In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, it resulted in the conversion of thousands of people and the birth of the Early Church. Revivals have been a significant part of church history. Revival is needed because it brings us back to God and restores our spiritual passion.

Over the past 300 years, we have heard about famous revivals such as the Great Awakening revivals, the Azusa Street revival, the Jesus Movement revival, and the most

recent 2023 Asbury revival. As I watched a video of the Asbury revival—the humbled faces praying, outstretched arms surrendered to God—I thought, "I want a revival ignited in me, my community, or better yet, God; how about another Great Awakening revival worldwide."

Revival on the Move

The timing of the revival on the Asbury campus and the release of the new Jesus Revolution movie is not a coincidence. After watching the movie, I wanted to go to a higher level in sharing my faith with non-believers. I believe God is sending a wake-up call to everyone.

"Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14 NLT)

Revival starts when we humble ourselves, pray, and repent.

Why Do We Need Revival?

Our spiritual walks sometimes need a powerful jolt to help us fulfill the Great Commission that Jesus asked the disciples and us to do in Matthew 28. Before the disciples could move forward in their callings, they needed an upgrade from the Holy Spirit—a new surge of power to run and tell others about the benefits of salvation and serving Jesus. The disciples needed to be revived by the power of the Holy Spirit to become the first church builders and catalysts of the first church revival.

The pattern of the world promotes ungodly lifestyles, redefines the biblical definition of marriage, and accepts children's disrespect for their parents. Media subtly convinces us to receive the world's patterns as normal behavior. The underlying message is you don't need to commit to a lifestyle pleasing to God. You are your own God.

Yes, we need a spiritual revival. The voices of Christians proclaiming Jesus Christ as the answer to discovering true love, hope, and satisfaction should be louder than any other voice promising fulfillment and a solution to life's problems.

Our Call to Wake Up

In Revelations 3:1–6, Sardis was one of the seven churches that Jesus addressed. The Church of Sardis were Christians but denied God's power in their lives (2 Timothy 3:5). Jesus had an issue with the Church of Sardis. He called them a dead church. He told them to "Wake up." They needed a revival to bring them back to life and to serve God with the right motives.

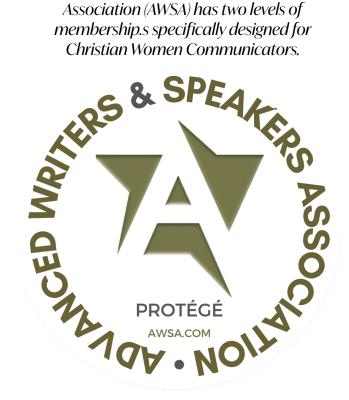
I believe the clarion call to all blessed to be God's scribes and speakers is to boldly share the good news of the gospel. So, let's commit to using our books, speaking opportunities, and social media platforms like the disciples—a catalyst to build God's Kingdom by igniting a new spiritual passion so that others are compelled to return to God.

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5 Pric Roughts
to eliminate today

Misunderstood

Rejected

Lonely...

Worthless

Ignored

Underestimated



Toxic thoughts can stop you from finding joy and peace in your life. Negative thoughts and emotions are draining. They can affect your relationships and your experiences.

Beware of these toxic thoughts and use these strategies to increase your emotional rest.

Toxic Thought #1: I'll always be alone.

Periods of loneliness and feelings of isolation are normal human emotions. However, they become toxic when you think things will always be this way.

This toxic thought can make you feel you're the only single person on the planet. It can make you believe you'll never find love or a partner. And it can stop you from being open to new relationships.

Instead of thinking you'll always be alone, focus on building the relationships around you. Do you have loving parents or siblings? Do you have amazing friends or coworkers? If you look carefully, you'll see you're never truly alone.

Toxic Thought #2: I hate my body.

Hating your body can be one of the most toxic thoughts in your mind. It can lead to eating disorders, self-esteem issues, and other challenges. Everyone can find an imperfection, but it's important to avoid dwelling on them.

Understand that your body is a gift. It's the vehicle you use to enjoy the world around you. Notice the things you do like about your body. Accentuate those characteristics, focus on the good things your body can do, and you'll find it easier to start loving the body you have.

Toxic Thought #3: I'm not happy with my career.

Your job may be challenging, but it's another toxic thought when you spend time dwelling on everything you dislike.

Of course, you may pursue a different career path but consider why you chose your current job. Determine if you are in a new season of your life or if you just need to awaken the passion in your current job.

Toxic Thought #4: I'm not worthy.

This toxic thought can take many forms. You may feel unworthy of love, success, money, or other things. You may believe that you always have to suffer and struggle. You may decide that you're not meant for greater things.

This toxic thought can stop you from enjoying life and finding happiness. These feelings of worthlessness are only in your mind. You're a unique person who has value.

Often, this toxic thought comes from what you think others are thinking about you. You falsely assume that others don't see any value in you, so your self-esteem drops.

Consider starting a new pattern. Let your thoughts dwell on your intrinsic value, the value that is based on who you are and separate from anything you do. The value that comes from being fearfully and wonderfully made by God, created in His image. You are a unique individual who is irreplaceable and valuable to God.

Toxic Thought #5: I don't have enough.

This toxic thought can manifest itself in multiple ways, such as thinking you don't have enough money, skills, talents, or abilities. You may also think you don't have enough connections, friends, or things.

Scarcity thoughts stop you from appreciating what you already have around you. They prevent you from finding joy in being thankful. With these thoughts, you may never have enough material possessions or people to love, regardless of how many you have. It keeps you in a place of wanting and never being satisfied.

You can certainly be open to receiving more, but it's important to be grateful for what you have.

Toxic thoughts are easy to create and often hard to eliminate. They can overwhelm you if you aren't careful.

If toxic thoughts have gotten ahold of you, you must take action to eject them from your mind.

Notice when these toxic thoughts arise. Immediately switch that thought to one that's more positive and uplifting. Meditate on Scripture, repeat affirmations, and try the ideas above to loosen their grip.

Do you need focused time to get well-rested in your mind, body, and spirit? ●



Between Some Math

and a Stuck Place



When I was in junior high, anytime I felt like I needed a good cry, I'd just ask my dad to help me with my math.

I'd like to say something about the "sums of the fathers" right here, but any

way you pun it, it was actually all me. Even in high school, I remember going up to my algebra teacher's desk saying, "Mr. Showalter, I'm stuck on number 5." At which point he would do the problem for me with a smile. Mind you, I was also stuck on numbers one through four, but I didn't want to overwhelm the man with my math.

From early on, I understood there was a reason they were called math problems. The stages of grief over math ineptitude went something like this: 1) Denial. 2) Trying to bargain—but let's face it, bargaining can require math, so ... 4) Realizing there was probably a missing step. What number are we on again? and 7) I really want a sandwich.

There was always something I would rather do than math problems. And those somethings were big-time distractions.

I wish I'd thought to call them "weapons of math disruption" but I was probably too distracted. Sometimes I had a choice between picking up that math book and finding myself stuck on number 5, or instead ... sandwich.

Ever feel a little stuck? Sometimes it's about studying a problem long enough to decipher what to do next.

It seems it's even more often we're stuck because we know what we're supposed to do next, but we've lost count and let someone or something whisk away our attention and energies. Stuck.

God's chosen people have a recorded history of more than a few instances of that stuck-ness. Many of their rock-anda-hard-place kinds of experiences were a result of not being obedient to what the Lord had commanded them to do.

One little distraction, then one little compromise that turned into another, that turned into another, and—well, you get the math. One compromise after another turns into ... stuck.

Compromise is trading God's will for us for something our selfish flesh wants instead. Our sin nature often loves to adjust the equation, trying to force God's plan to fit our own self-centered desires. Talk about not adding up.

Our call is to follow Him. When we choose to follow distractions of compromise, we're denying His grace. Paul said,

"For the grace of God has appeared with salvation for all people, instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for Himself a people for His own possession, eager to do good works" (Titus 2:11-14 HCSB).

To deny His grace is to compromise. To compromise is to deny His grace. The same grace that saved us? That's the very grace that's training us to say no to compromise. No to sin. Yes to cleansing. Yes to obedience. Yes to following. Yes to good works.

Training in refusing to compromise is an integral part of living well. Even though "integral" sounds a little math-ey.

Maybe this is all a good reminder that the infinite God who created numbers and who fits them together in all kinds of creative ways uses math to show us himself. Even me. •



Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.











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