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I first felt revival one evening last August when a group of my friends and I prayed in Asbury Seminary's Hughes auditorium in Wilmore, Kentucky. We were a small band of authors from the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association (AWSA) meeting for an exclusive training before the start of our conference in Lexington.

Even before I packed my bags for Kentucky, I'd watched a couple of YouTubes about the 1970 revival at Asbury that came through the Holy Spirit's response to the students as they confessed their sin and shame, then praised and worshiped God.

I wondered what would happen if we authors followed their example.

So that summer evening, a dozen or so of my friends and I slipped into the empty auditorium for a season of quiet prayer and worship. We could already feel the sweetness of God. Then, we each took the stage and shared our hearts, struggles, and life events that had slimed us. It was like a veil fell.

We loved each other even more because of the courage it took to share and the compassion God gave us for one another. The result was the sweet presence of Jesus and the glow of the Holy Spirit.

We'd been revived and we took this same Spirit to the larger AWSA conference the following day. There we saw an outpouring of God's love and joy! That opening night, the women confessed the hidden dreams of their hearts and pledged to follow God every step of the way. It was amazing! So much love! So much joy!

I'm telling you this to let you know that the members of AWSA are the women behind *Leading Hearts* magazine. We published this issue with you in mind.

Though this is our first time at NRB as an association, we are not new to Christian trade shows. Our first trade show was the Christian Bookseller's International Trade Show in 2001.

To tell you the truth, it seemed like a cold marketplace. That's why we made the decision to be an influence for Jesus.

After our own conference ended, we walked onto the floor of the CBA Show filled with the love of Jesus. The love spread. People noticed. One day, a gentleman I'd never met stopped me on the trade floor show. "You're the head of AWSA? I just want to thank you for being here. Your group has brought the love of Jesus to the floor."

Now we're here at NRB, and we hope to flow in the love of God. We also hope you'll drop by our booth, and maybe interview a few of our authors. You can find out who's here and how to reach them, at NRBInterviewLink.com.

But we are here with revived hearts, filled with the love of God. We are praying for you and for this event. Let revival come to us!  $\odot$ 

Love,

Linda Evans Shepherd, Publisher Founder and CEO of AWSA



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I love nostalgia. I'm easily caught up in photo albums and listening to family members talk about days gone by.

There is such comfort thinking about a time that didn't require locking the front door for safety. That level of "trusting your neighbor" seems pretty attractive. And yet I do realize it wasn't a completely idyllic time period. It is difficult for me to think about living during government-mandated segregation or without the right to vote.

There was a day many decades ago when my Christian father was told the mental health meds he needed weren't necessary, and he should just pray through. Our entire family suffered because he, like many, struggled silently. Life is tough enough without feeling like you have to "keep up appearances."

I certainly don't diminish anything happening now, either. Even today, I can look back at a younger and thinner Amber, who had a whole life ahead of herself. However, even in those times, I still walked through some pretty dark and scary things that I NEVER want to go back through.

Those look-back moments remind me of Lot's wife, taking one last glimpse of the city and things she left behind. That fleeting and final glance ended her life. She couldn't trust that what was ahead of her was better.

And we do the same thing.

Our lack of trust in God can really get us into trouble. It becomes problematic when we look back and wish we could return to it. When we reminisce about the past, both good and bad, it's important to remember God's faithfulness through every moment that is yet to come.

God has reminded me of Habakkuk 1:5 over and over again through the past few years. As I breathe it in, He uses it to strengthen, challenge and stretch me:

"Be astounded! For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if I told you" ESV.

God wants us to be astounded. To live astounded. He is doing something new. HE IS the "new-every-morning-l'll-do-itagain-and-even-better-than-you-expected-just-trust-me" God!

Friends, we don't have to lament the final service of a revival, because God says, "What I've done, I'll do again—and even more significantly."

Moreover, we must remain in a posture that says, "God, I'm looking forward to today and every step beyond because you're going to lavishly pour out Your Spirit in bigger, beyond-revival ways."

I don't want to put limits on how He can astound me.

I pray that this issue of *Leading Hearts* will get you excited about moving forward to embrace His bigger and better. He's just that good. ●

Love,

Get a free download of project single "Lead Me On" from 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 wherever books are sold. Find out more on page 28 and at leadingladies.life.





I once received a note from a reader who'd been feeling rather blue. His solution? He turned a video camera on himself and preached a sermon.

He watched the replay and remarked, "That was the best sermon I ever did hear."

We can laugh, but the truth is that at some point in our lives, we all need a message that will help us recover our joy. We need joy because as the prophet Nehemiah said, "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

Some say that a believer without joy is a self-made weakling. That may be true, but as a mom who's lost a child, I understand that seasons of grief slip into every life. But even hurricane seasons have an expiration date as the winds calm and the sun appears. But what can we do to combat our own storms of grief, discouragement, or the blues?

What if, in many cases—maybe even your case—the answer is simple: you simply choose joy? Too easy?

### Consider this:

My husband and I were visiting family in Beaumont, Texas, when we decided to hop in a small Cessna and fly to Corpus Christi, a 300-mile flight down the Texas coastline.

My problem was I was terrified of small planes, and this Cessna had already given us trouble. The engine would stall, and we'd have to make one emergency landing after the other.

Even so, we took off into a blue November sky and headed for the Texas coast. I decided it was my job to play lookout. I would watch for flat places stable enough to make an emergency landing just in case the engine conked out.

What I didn't know was how wild the Texas coast is. It's mostly devoid of towns because they wash away in the occasional hurricane. Not only is the Texas coast wild, it's swampy, free of roads, runways, and shopping mall parking lots. As for the sandy beach, it's covered with debris and scattered cows.

My imagination played a continuous loop of an episode of my rendition of The Worst Case Scenario; the engine sputters, we dive down for a landing on the beach but the nose of the

plane sticks into the sand, hits a cow, and we flip end over end. SPLAT. Game over.

My second choice was to land in the green waves of the Gulf. Sure, our wings would float, but the plane's cab would be submerged beneath the surface. BLUB!

I wasn't keen on breathing water, so I continued my search until I felt exhausted. When we finally landed in Corpus Christi, I was a knee-knocking nervous wreck. When I turned my wild eyes to my husband, he smiled and said, "Wasn't that a beautiful flight on a beautiful day?"

That was a shock. I'd been too fearful to notice.

The following year, we decided to take the same flight from Beaumont to Corpus in the same plane. But this time, I made the choice to fly with joy.

When I looked down from the sky to watch the waves roll onto the sandy beach, I felt the same old fear. So, I prayed, "Lord, I give You my fear. I choose to trust You. I choose joy."

I felt peace but my panic kicked in. There was nothing else to do but to repeat my prayer. Soon I realized I was enjoying the afternoon. Did you know that there are wild longhorns on the Texas beach, and a couple of old boat wrecks? And how the waves sparkle. They look like sequins, glistening in the setting sun. Funny, I hadn't noticed that before.

When we landed in Corpus, I was the first one to hop out of the plane. I turned to my hubby and surprised him with, "Wasn't that a beautiful flight on a beautiful day?!"

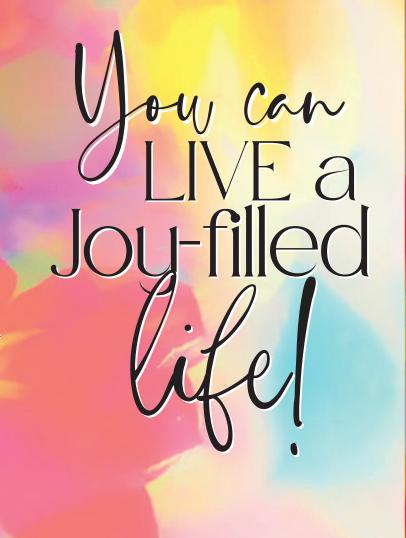
Joy is always a choice because even though we can't control our circumstances, we can choose to trust God and believe He's working out everything for our good.

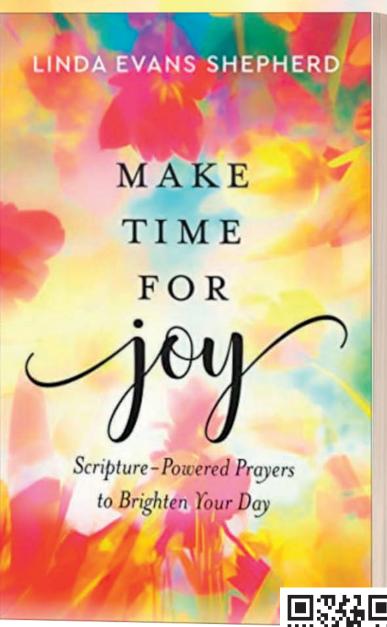
We can choose to refresh our minds with the Word of God and pray our way back to the state we all wish to live in, the state of joy. This is the reason I wrote my latest book, *Make Time for Joy, Scripture Powered Prayers to Brighten Your Day.* 

I hope you will make a choice for joy, read a good word from the Word, and pray a prayer of trust. If you do, you'll discover joy will transform not only your face, but your life. ●

Linda Evans Shepherd is the founder and CEO of Right to the Heart Ministries and the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association and Arise Esther Evenings. She is publisher of Leading Hearts Magazine and the author of 38 books. You can connect with Linda for an interview at: NRBInterviewLink.com.

### **NEW FROM BESTSELLING PRAYER AUTHOR** LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD & BAKER REVELL





The perfect gift for yourself or someone else, MAKE TIME FOR JOY will help you transform sadness into gladness as you rest on the love, joy, and provision that comes from God.













**AVAILABLE WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD.** 

### THE BRAVEHEARTED WOMAN

Hi, I'm Dawn Damon, known as the BraveHeart Mentor. I inspire women to become brave and rise to their divine design. I firmly believe that every woman, including you, has within her the potential to live an extraordinary life.

If you're a woman in the second half of your life, you may be in a crisis. You've lost your way and cannot envision or trust that a thrilling, fulfilling "next" chapter exists for you. A lack of confidence and purpose may cause you to surrender to the belief that your best days are behind you.

No! Refuse to become a hostage of "possibility blindness." It's time to dream again, to imagine an irresistible future.

No one will fight for your dreams like you.

So, the crisis begins ... if you don't believe abundance and fulfillment are waiting up ahead, you will succumb to, dare I say it, an average, lackluster life.

God forbid.

# Life is an adventure to live, not a prison sentence to serve.

#### THE RESEARCH IS IN

According to recent studies, women today will live 81.4 years, and many will go beyond that. Yet, women often stop living before their time on earth is done. As Ben Franklin said, "Many die at 25 but don't get buried until they are 75."

Another study illustrates my point; "Women start feeling comfortable in their skin at about age 32. But they then experience a significant plummet in confidence at age 51 and describe themselves as "invisible."

That thought makes me shiver! Out of all 81 years of life, a woman only feels happy about herself for 19 years. The rest of the time, she grapples for a solid identity, striving to be "something" enough to feel accepted by others and find fulfillment.

As a BraveHearted Woman, however, I refuse to become that statistic, and I pray you will refuse too! That's what my podcast, "The BraveHearted Woman," is all about. I help women find their brave, bolstered mid-life confidence and live with purpose.

I talk candidly about the internal struggle women feel about their significance and purpose. We expose confusion and self-doubt. Because I get it. In mid-life, we encounter rapid changes and disruptions. We have empty nests, menopause,

hormonal imbalance, and aging (complete with wrinkles and body changes. Oh, the joys.) Some experience divorce, job loss, and the death of loved ones. At one time, our life was filled with multiple responsibilities; we were leaders, executives, and pioneers of important causes, but in mid-life, we find ourselves lost, feeling replaced. Many women over 50 report that for the first time in their life, they lost their purpose and can't imagine or dream about their future.

### It's the crisis of mid-life vision void.

But it doesn't have to be this way! Imagine how much stronger our homes, churches, communities and organizations would be if more women over 50 got rid of 'self-doubting timidity' and rediscovered confidence and courage.

How much better would we feel if we said "No" to letting insecurity rule our lives, "Goodbye" to intimidation, and kicked indecision and faintheartedness away?

# WHAT IF WE LOOKED IN THE MIRROR AND LOVED WHAT WE SEE BECAUSE GOD CREATED US UNIQUELY?

 Because of our divine design, we can live BRAVE, have more CONFIDENCE\*, and LOVE life!

### Can't you feel the faith rise in your heart?

Midlife doesn't need to mean a crisis of visionless existence. Instead, make this new chapter of your life a rebirth, an awakening—a fragrant blooming of dormant dreams and desires. Why not bravely soar into the life God is calling you? Believe that you are nowhere near the end of your unique contribution to the world. Believe you are just getting started with the most meaningful, creative, and significant part of your life.

The BraveHearted Woman podcast celebrates this mindset makeover and guides women to re-invention.

LISTEN NOW







What do we even call it? Traffic circle? Roundabout? Rotary? Road circle? Rotunda? Roadtunda? OK yeah, I made up that last one.

The other day I got a little trapped in one of those whatchamacallits. While I say

"one," it was really more like a dozen. One traffic circle took me straight into another traffic circle, then smack-dab into another. Circles on circles on circles. When I finally made it out, I forgot where I was going. Plus I was dizzy. And slightly out of merry.

Have you ever lost your direction inside one of those roundabouts? Three years later, still circling.

Please don't even get me started on entering one of those things. There's an awkward moment of "Do I gun it and rush ahead of the car already circling, or do I stop and make everyone behind me angry?" Either feels wrong.

I was chatting about this with Anita Renfroe the other day. So, yes, comedy great Anita, who has performed at the Grand Ole Opry, been a regular on "Good Morning America," appeared on all the big shows, movies, mega-venues, and such. Yet she's still almost as deficient at roundabouts as I am. I was inappropriately merry about that. I know that's not very mature of me. That's another one of my deficiencies.

When Anita told me entering a traffic circle reminds her of elementary school and her very arhythmic, very terrible tries at running into an already-moving jump rope—well first, I laughed. Then second, I laughed. Then THE Anita Renfroe told me traffic circles make her—in her words—"so insecure," and I laughed again. Kind of darkly. Deficiency mine.

Do you ever feel sort of "decision deficient"? You have a decision to make, but feel like you're going in circles? What do you do when you don't know what to do?

From the smallest minutia to the biggest details in life,

sometimes we feel we have way too many choices. Or not enough.

Either way, which exit do we take and how can we get in and out of these circles-on-circles-on-circles?

There's a reason those passages we've heard a zillion times keep circling around. We need them. Proverbs 3:5-6 is one.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight" (CSB).

Straight paths? Like, no roundabouts?

Twists and turns will always be part of life living in a world that suffers the effects of sin. But everything changes as we trust the Lord with everything we've got, making our life passion all about knowing Him more and better and bigger.

This Proverbs 3:5–6 way of life is not a part-time deal. We're told to know Him in all our ways. "Ways" here is the Hebrew word "derek." It can be translated as "road." It represents the entire journey, the full distance—all the way around. Even around again.

The good news is that there's no need to secondguess every decision. We don't have to worry so much about every insecurity—or even our awkwardnesses or deficiencies.

Anytime you're worried about making a wrong decision, remember that when you're trusting Him with everything you've got, He will ultimately straighten it out.

It doesn't mean it's always easy, but when you know Him well, you know well that He is with you at every turn. He's leading you, loving you, teaching you, comforting you.

There's plenty of wisdom, peace, strength, and grace for you ... to go around. And around. ●

Rhonda Rhea is an author, humor columnist, and TV personality. Her newest release with co-authors Monica Schmelter and Kaley Rhea, Messy to Meaningful—My Purse Runneth Over is available on Amazon.





pam farrel | love-wise.com



The one who gets wisdom loves life; the one who cherishes understanding will soon prosper (Proverbs 19:8 NIV).

Bill and I have teamed for ministry for our entire married life of 43 years. Our ministry is Love-Wise, and we like to say we park ourselves at the corner of God's love and God's wisdom. Proverbs 19:8 is our theme verse, and if you look it up in Hebrew (and add in the definitions of key words), it would read something like: "He who acquires (procures to own) wisdom loves (has affection for) himself (own soul, life, and desires). The one who safeguards (puts a hedge around, a guard of protection) understanding (intelligence, caprice, or the impulsive change of mind or action) will find (attain, acquire, meet up with) success (the pleasant, agreeable, and good)."

So how do we improve our decision-making?

#### God's Wisdom Is Good

Now this word "good" seen in Proverbs 19:8 is first seen in Genesis when God created everything. Then He pronounced it was "tov." After studying tov throughout the Old Testament, I like to summarize its meaning as good: beautiful, best, bountiful, and blessed. Isn't that the kind of life we long for?

Wisdom in this verse is the center of a person, the place where heart, feelings, and intellect are stored. In Psalm 111:10, we are reminded that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (NIV). So, when we plant an awe of the Creator in our center, like a seed, wisdom can grow and blossom.

### God's Wisdom Is Sweet

In James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it

will be given to you" (NIV). I call this verse "cupcake theology" because when we lack (fall behind or fall short) in our wisdom (skill, insight, or intelligence) we can ask, request, or petition wisdom from God, and He gives it GENEROUSLY, BOUNTIFULLY, LIBERALLY, GRACIOUSLY in a simple, understandable, uncomplicated way—holding nothing back!

So, the way God gives wisdom reminds me of a cupcake: God's wisdom (even if a blunt truth) is sweet, or the outcome is sweet. Like the thick, sweet, delicious frosting on top of our favorite cupcake,

God's voice is sweet, even when speaking truth, and He gives wisdom without reproach, meaning He doesn't curse, insult, mock, blame, or punish us—even if we didn't apply or handle His wisdom well the times we asked before!

### God's Wisdom Is Simple

While doing research for my book 7 Simple Skills for Every Woman: Success in Keeping It All Together, I learned that the average person has to make 5,000–25,000 decisions PER DAY! Bill and I have spent most of our ministry life helping others learn how to apply the Bible to our daily lives.

Elisabeth Elliot was a young woman when her husband, Jim, was murdered as a martyr in the jungles, leaving her with an infant daughter. Elisabeth made an "obvious" statement of "Do the next thing." Love the next person; care for the next need; answer the next call. She moved from a life that was unraveling to a strong, vibrant ministry by simply doing the next thing. I often remind myself, "Just do the next right thing!"

This week, enjoy a cupcake and thank God for His wisdom! 

•

Pam Farrel is author of 58 books including the newest, Discovering Wisdom in Proverbs: A Creative Bible Study Experience (Harvest House Publishers), coauthored with Jean E Jones and Karla Dornacher. When the Farrels are not traveling for speaking, they reside on a liveaboard boat docked in Southern California.



Everywhere I turn, people are dealing with stress. As the world has become more technologically advanced, life has gotten busier.

We have become a society that honors busyness and disdains play. The world around us is continuing to spiral out of control.

The margin we have available for recovery and peace is shrinking. As we struggle to cope and search for answers, we've neglected the legacy of creativity that's been passed to us from our Heavenly Father. This legacy isn't frivolous. It's foundational to the deep relationship with God we all need.

Busyness isn't the way God designed us to operate. We function best when we embrace the rhythm of rest. But these times are supposed to be much more than just taking naps or getting eight hours of sleep every night. They're times when we connect with our Heavenly Father without distractions. For me, that connection often comes through creativity.

### Playtime with God

No, not hide and seek—we all know how that turned out with Adam and Eve. Instead, I've found the healing power of joy when I reconnect with the creativity God instilled inside me.

God is the ultimate Creator. He's an artist, writer, composer, and story-crafter with infinite ideas. But He doesn't just invite us to view His artwork. His invitation is to join Him. And we can join Him. Our Heavenly Father's creative genes reach deep inside us all. We see it in those who cook, find mathematical answers, or delve beyond what's known in the fields of science and medicine. There is creativity in everything we do.

We've ignored His prompting to explore this creativity for far too long. We've labeled play as wasted time, forgetting that God himself ordained one day every week for rest and refreshing. If God sees the need, how can we be so bold as to disagree?

### What Does Playtime with God Look Like?

Playing with God looks different for each of us—because we're each unique. For me it may mean grabbing my camera and taking a hike in the nearby Blue Ridge Mountains. Or pulling out my colored pens and pencils, along with a journal to doodle words and Bible verses.

For a long time I resisted the artistic side of play because I know I'm not an artist. How? Because I grew up in a family of creatives and was exposed to art from the time I was born. My mother was an internationally known watercolorist and my father a classically trained musician who spent years as a woodwind professor and member of the Dallas symphony. After he retired, he pursued his second career as a landscape photographer. My sister and I spent our 1960s childhood traveling across the USA in the back of a VW bus.

I've always loved to write, but doing art terrified me. I knew I'd

never be good enough so I avoided it—completely missing the point of creativity. We spend creative time with God not to become the next DiVinci or Brahms. The purpose is to explore God's character as we stretch and grow, becoming more like Him.

Once I discovered that, I began to have some wonderful times with God. The creativity I let loose in the presence of God feeds my soul and has become an intimate and precious time. Often I've heard Him whisper new truths and how to apply them as I carve out space in my busy life to play.

But it wasn't easy to develop this habit.

The erroneous belief that recreation is pointless was deeply ingrained. I love crossing things off my to-do list and somehow, 1 pm: Doodling, with a check beside it didn't seem the least bit productive.

But God didn't give up on me. His Spirit called to mine as the busyness threatened to overwhelm my already over-full life. Once I began practicing fun time with God, it grew into a habit that I now keep high on my priority list.

You can play too.

Creativity can be daunting to some, especially, if like me, you think you won't live up to expectations. But start small. Begin exploring your creativity and I know you'll be hooked as you experience the priceless joy of hanging out with God. Below is an exercise to help you get started.

### Here is a list of possible supplies you might need:

- Crayons
- · Colored pencils
- Stickers
- · Journals or sketch book
- · Cell phone camera (or regular camera)
- · Bible or devotional book

An Exercise to Encourage Creativity

**Begin by removing expectations.** It's the process of play, not the end result that matters. Give yourself permission to be messy and imperfect.

**Invite God to join you** and ask Him to bring to mind a word or phrase or Bible verse.

Write what comes to mind on a blank sheet of paper.

**Pick the colors you love** and use them with abandon. Don't let expectations of how something should look derail your experience with God.

When related thoughts come to mind, write those down.

Just like any new endeavor, even learning to have fun takes practice. Keep playing. If doodling or coloring isn't for you, try something else. Take a walk, grab a camera, sing a song—follow the path to your creative inheritance as you see where playtime with God can take you. 

•

Edie Melson—author, blogger and speaker—loves to empower those who are struggling to find the God-given strength they need to triumph through challenging circumstances.

# WORN, USELESS, AND TOO BROKEN TO BELONG ANYWHERE BUT THE LANDFILL?

Just as chippy cast-offs gain worth as vintage décor, the imperfect pieces of our lives hold incredible potential.

Upcycled: Crafted for a
Purpose will take you on an interactive journey to discover how God reinvents rusty and flawed folks like us into cherished masterpieces who glorify him daily.

Each chapter includes a gift or décor project which illustrates one of the ways the Great Artist remakes us to serve a beautiful purpose.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Award-winning author, speaker, and life coach, Tina Yeager hosts the Flourish-Meant podcast and publishes Inkspirations Online, a weekly writers' devotional. She has been a licensed counselor since 2005. For life coaching tips, booking or media requests go to TINAYEAGER.COM.

CRAFTED FOR A PURPOSE

-JINA YEAGER-



My phone pinged moments after the airplane's wheels touched the runway at Toronto's Pearson International Airport.

A text message stated that my connecting flight to Baltimore was canceled, and I'd been rescheduled to fly out the next morning.

The revision meant a sixteen-hour delay. Waiting would be the easy part. The challenge would be to stay awake all night, complete my trip to Maryland the next day, and then address—in a coherent manner—190 women at a conference where I'd been scheduled to speak. The fact that I'd fractured my foot a few days prior and was now limping along in an air boot added to the challenge.

"God, I need Your help," I whispered.

Our life's journey often leads to unexpected detours or delays, both literally and figuratively. My recent overnighter in the airport is one example of many I've experienced, and it reinforced to me an important lesson:

Navigating the unexpected in a positive manner means choosing a positive response.

My first response that day was disbelief: "You've got to be kidding! How can an airline do this when I'm traveling for work?" After a customer service rep told me the airline would provide neither a hotel room nor meal vouchers, I felt abandoned and slightly annoyed. Then I began to imagine the possibility of the airline canceling my flight the next day, and I felt a bit panicked.

I sought comfort in sushi and Starbucks coffee. Then I sought a quiet space to settle my thoughts. That's when I determined to guard my mind against negativity and its harmful effects.

Science proves that continually focusing on negatives causes the amygdala in our brain to sound an alarm to danger.

Our bodies then release stress hormones through our bloodstream. Feelings of anger, fear, and anxiety rise.

In contrast, science proves expressing gratitude, even when we don't feel it, silences the amygdala's alarm.

The body flushes out stress hormones and releases serotonin and dopamine, chemicals associated with pleasure and contentment. Catherine Hart Weber, PhD, says, "Hard times tend to override the brain to focus on fear, losses, and anxieties. That is why in the darkest times you need to be the most grateful."

As afternoon rolled into evening, I chose gratitude. Here are the things for which I gave thanks:

The changed plans did not catch God off guard.

Circumstances were beyond my control, but He had them under control. I could trust Him with the details.

The airport was a safe place to spend the night.

An airline rep printed my boarding passes for my next day's flights.

A working outlet kept my phone and laptop fully charged.

An all-night coffee shop kept me fully charged.

A comfortable seat allowed me to elevate my fractured foot.

Meeting a young immigrant couple from Bangladesh who'd just arrived gave me the opportunity to welcome them to their new homeland.

Spending the night in the terminal enabled me to be first in line at the Customs area when it opened at 3:30 AM. Early entry helped me bypass delays that might have resulted in missing my early-morning flight.

Choosing to give thanks set my mind in a healthy place that night. Rather than feeling angry at the airline or sorry for my circumstances, I felt peaceful, contented, and supernaturally energized (more than from the caffeine I'd consumed). When the text message arrived bearing news of the delay, I whispered a prayer asking God to help me, and He did.

He didn't change my situation, but He changed me through the attitude of gratitude.  $\ensuremath{ullet}$ 

Grace Fox is an author and Bible teacher and co-hosts the podcast "Your Daily Bible Verse." Find out more about Grace's ministry and receive free hope-building articles and resources at gracefox.com.



While social media platforms appear to connect people more than ever, relying on technology as a substitute for face-to-face interaction is detrimental to bur health, and does nothing to enhance our

our health, and does nothing to enhance our relationships.

We are made for connected, biblical friendships that aren't afraid to dig deep.

Growing up, I wasn't as exposed to those types of friendships as much as I would've liked. As I would begin to dip my foot in friendship, my family would transplant to a new state, where I was forced to start over. By the time I realized how much I craved female friendships, I didn't know where to begin.

When I reached adulthood and finally "grew roots" through marriage, my hunger for the type of intimacy found through female friendships couldn't be ignored.

I asked God to bring me a close friend, a "Sister in Christ," even though I really didn't know what I was asking.

It took several years, but God answered my heartfelt prayer and invited me into a friendship with an amazing woman. It was then I began to see what "Sisters in Christ," put into action, truly meant.

This introduction occurred when I worked from home for a Christian organization where I ran a live chat once a month. We gave away prizes, and I got to pick the winners. When the two people I chose failed to answer, I turned to my daughter and asked if she wanted a turn. She looked over the names and gave me her choice.

I put the phone on speaker, dialed, and the conversation went something like this:

"Hello? Is Annie there?"

"Hi, Cheri."

"How did you know it was me?" (I laughed because I figured this woman had caller ID. I hadn't introduced myself and we had never talked before.)

"During my quiet time today, the Holy Spirit told me I was going to win. When you called, I was to ask you to pray with me."

I was speechless as I felt the presence of God settle over me. After a few seconds of silence, I replied, "I have to be honest. I didn't pick your name. My daughter chose you." While my shock kept me from remembering much, I do remember asking her what God wanted me to pray with her about, and she opened up.

Her story was similar to my own journey; only I was about seven years ahead of her. I had never shared my struggles via the live chat, so she didn't know how familiar I was with her pain. As she spoke, the similarities were amazing.

Despite our extraordinary phone meeting, our friendship appeared ordinary at first. As God invited us into a deeper relationship with Him, our friendship accelerated as well. Over the years, God has shown us repeatedly we share not only common interests, but a bloodline of rich ancestry. We are more than friends. We are sisters, relatives in the royal family.

It was then when I began to see that "Sisters in Christ" was a well-known phrase which popped up everywhere.

I heard it in casual converation at church, and even on a TV game show when a contestant introduced one of her supporters as her "Sister in Christ."

This world we live in is increasingly hostile and less than supportive of people who make a stand for Christ. However, for all believers, our common mission is to love our Heavenly Father with all our heart and to love others the way Jesus himself loved. We are called to encourage and support each

other as we stand up for the truth of the Bible, to introduce the world to the only Savior who has all the answers. There isn't a better time than now to shine Jesus' light to those who need Him most.

My prayer is that God will develop relationships between individuals, who will then expand those connections to embrace others, forming communities of fellowship, support, encouragement, and prayer across the country, across the globe.

What if, like me, you don't really know how to be a "Sister in Christ"? First and foremost, trust God. He'll bring the best "sister" in His perfect timing if you simply ask.

Life as we know it is difficult. What better way to navigate and shine brightly for God's truths to a hurting world than with a fellow believer by your side to support, encourage, and help you grow the next generation of believers?

Once you've experienced the power of godly friendship, your prayer life will forever be changed.

This amazing community starts by asking God to bring that special connection into your life. The only question left is, "Who do You want to be my sister, God? I'm ready!" ●

Cheri Swalwell is a Christ follower wife, mother, writer, podcaster, and speaker who loves to encourage people in many ways.

"If you do not have a close Sister in Christ friend, this book will put the desire in your heart for one plus explain steps in establishing such a relationship. This would make a wonderful small group or reading group selection." ~ N. Wilkerson

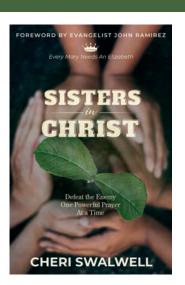
Sisters in Christ don't just share common interests; they share a bloodline of rich ancestry. They aren't just friends. They are sisters, relatives in the royal family.

SISTERS IN CHRIST: DEFEAT THE ENEMY ONE POWERFUL PRAYER AT A TIME will help you follow biblical guidelines to develop a solid sisterhood through the power of prayer, which will positively impact your family and friends.

There isn't a better time to shine God's light to those who need Him most.



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Don't you love gifts? I know I do! I believe the greatest one we can ever receive is our children—created in the image of God, the ultimate gift-giver.

### Yet something with such immeasurable value comes with great responsibility.

We are commanded to train our children in the way they should go, rooted in the Word of God, day by day, moment by moment, with the best of our God-given abilities and talents. Not a simple task, but one worthy of our efforts.

One of the most important things we can do is prepare them for the battles they will ultimately face against the anti-Christian sentiment that increasingly permeates our culture. This requires us to instill a deep and abiding love for God and His Word so the children we love can stand firm in their faith even when it is unpopular. Instilling godly values requires us to model what it means to live our beliefs boldly and consistently.

As the body of Christ, we are called to support, encourage, and participate with one another as we strive to instill in our kids a lifelong love for God, His Word, and His principles. We must pray for our children to remain strong in their faith so they can one day impact the world for Christ.

"Through the praise of children and infants, you have established a stronghold against your enemies."

-Psalm 8:2, NIV

A child's spiritual journey begins in the womb. Unborn babies can hear sounds at 18 weeks, so we should sing songs that praise the Lord and pray out loud over our yet-to-beborn infants, claiming their paths for Jesus and asking God to protect and guide them.

Another study reveals that these precious babies can see in the womb! A fetus will turn its head towards shapes that resemble faces while ignoring other objects. And we all know that toddlers are amazing learners—sponges for love, attention, and information.



Research shows that a child's brain has developed to 90 percent of its potential by age five. We must be vigilant at every stage of development.

Andy Stanley once said, "Your greatest contribution to the kingdom of God may not be something you do but someone you raise." Children love to watch what their parents are doing. Young ones correlate their view of God by what they see modeled to them.

We must saturate our little ones in the love and knowledge of God. We are called to help them celebrate God's goodness as we demonstrate what it means to "love one another," putting our trust in the one true God. Words of encouragement, love, truth, and hope are critical for us to speak to our children throughout their lives.

Parents and grandparents are a child's first and most impactful teachers. Our lives and words instill respect, honor, honesty, truth, obedience, wisdom, discernment, repentance, forgiveness, trust, and peace.

We are all born into sin, yet we can change the heart of a child if we are consistent in our prayer life and in studying the Bible so that what we say and do align with what we desire to instill in our little ones. If what we teach does not match how we live, our children will find us untrustworthy and easily fall prey to a destructive belief system.

Sadly today, relativism reigns over absolute truth. Now more than ever, children desperately need to understand the reality of absolute truth—God's truth. Humanism works hard to convince our kids that there is no such thing: only your truth and my truth; no absolutes, no God; religion is a crutch; your parents were wrong. We must help our children understand, with no uncertainty, that there is absolute truth, what it is, and how to defend it. Not easy, but when has parenting been easy, right?

We are blessed today with myriad resources to help us raise our children according to God's Word: books, podcasts, blogs, movies, church, curriculum, and more. My passion is helping you on your parenting journey to raise a strong, Christ-honoring child. After all, it is all about the salvation of our children and the preservation of Christianity!

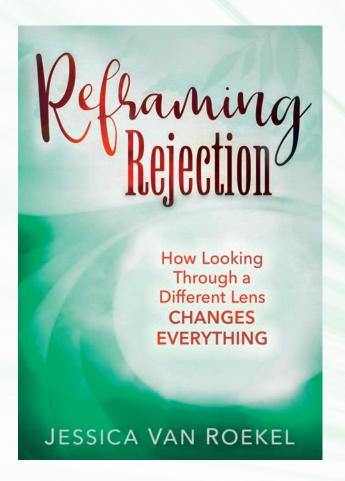
Lee Ann Mancini is a podcast host, Bible professor, author, speaker, and executive producer for the nonprofit organization Raising Christian Kids. Raising Christian Kids offers resources so that you can effectively mold your child's heart. Find out more at RaisingChristianKids.com.



## "a life line of hope and healing."

—Pam Farrel, author of 56 books including bestselling Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti and Discovering Good News in John: A Creative Bible Study Experience

# Are you ready for unhindered freedom?



We long to escape the relentless pursuit of acceptance and the unrelenting fear of rejection. Yet we end up striving to please people, holding on to the burden of perfectionism and grappling for control rather than finding the freedom God promises.

Reframing Rejection offers a path through the pain rejection causes to the exhilarating freedom that comes when you're released from the yoke of living for other people's approval.

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Each chapter includes questions for selfreflection to guide you to a new perspective of rejection.

### REFRAMINGREJECTIONBOOK.COM | WELCOMEGRACE.COM



Jessica Van Roekel loves the upside-down life of following Jesus as she journeys to wholeness through brokenness. As an author, speaker, and worship leader, she uses her gifts and experiences to share God's transformative power to rescue, restore, and renew.

FIND JESSICA VAN ROEKEL ON





"I am going to kill myself." Six words no parent wants to hear.

A youth pastor shared with me how one of his students told her mom she planned to take her life. According to the pastor, the mother, in an attempt to call her daughter's

bluff, drove her child to the store to get the things needed to accomplish the goal.

Her daughter completed her plan while her mom was at work.

This is a horrific story. Sadly, there are many other tragic stories like this. According to the CDC, suicide is the second leading cause of death in young people. In some states, like my state of Colorado, suicide takes first place.

Untreated depression is the most common reason for suicide. Some experts say mental health struggles with anxiety and depression in children is the new normal. As parents, pastors, and mental health professionals we cannot accept this. We must arm our kids with more than resiliency; our kids need hope, hope for a future.

My daughter wrestled with depression her senior year of college. Her sadness was so overwhelming she attempted to take her life. Thankfully, God spared her. But not everyone has the same outcome.

The battle of the mind is literally life and death. Yet God can use us on the battlefield. This fight is one we must win.

The good news is there are approaches we can implement that may prevent anxiety or depression. There are also ways we can help our kids during the struggles to overcome their despair.

### Here are four ways we can foster hope:

**H Help:** When we give and receive help from each other, we build hope and remove the shame of the struggle and the

embarrassment of asking for help. After all, we are created to need one another.

O Out-of-the-Box Perspective: To look at life through the lens of gratitude alters the problem perspective. Thankfulness practiced creates a hope-filled attitude. However, caution must be exercised here. It is unwise to toss out a platitude to another who is struggling. When someone is hurting it is not helpful to say, "Things could be worse." Or "When God closes a door, He opens a window." The out-of-the-box perspective must be personally embraced.

**P Prayer:** When we bring our concerns to the Lord, knowing that God is with us shifts our mindset from helpless to hopeful. We cannot manage all life throws at us, but God can, and we can trust Him with our hard times.

**E Expect the Unexpected:** Kids think life should go smoothly. They observe their peers' social media posts displaying the appearance of happy lives, filled with adventure and success.

Realism is needed. Life is full of happy, sad, scary, and aggravating times. Our kids need to be ready to live a full life, a life filled with unexpected times.

In John 16:33 Jesus tells it like it is: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (NIV). Jesus brings hope to a world where we will experience trouble.

We cannot accept depression and anxiety as the new normal. There are many ways God can use us when our kids experience trouble. With God, we can help our kids fight this battle and be overcomers—giving them the source of true hope for their future. 

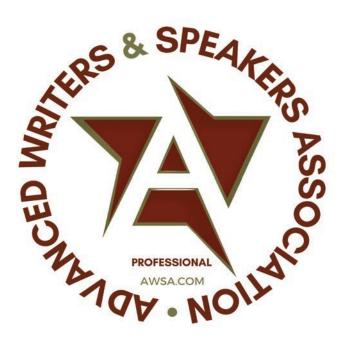
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Lori Wildenberg, award winning author of six parenting books, is a national speaker and a licensed parent-family educator. She is passionate about helping parents help their kids. Messy Hope: Help Your Child Overcome Anxiety, Depression, or Suicidal Ideation offers over 120 ways to increase hope and resiliency. www.loriwildenberg.com



The Advanced Writers & Speakers Association (AWSA) has two levels of membership.s specifically designed for Christian Women Communicators.





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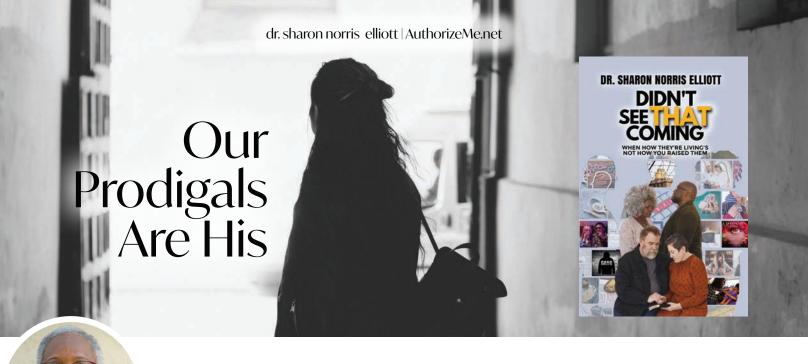
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- Invitation to submit to AWSA's Leading Hearts magazine and Arise Daily e-devotionals. (\$100 value)
- Fast Acting Bonus: "How to Get More Speaking Engagements" course. (\$500 value)
- Fast Acting Bonus: Writing and Speaking Guides by Kathy Collard Miller. (\$200 value)
- Exclusive access to Golden Scroll Awards Contest. (Priceless)

Annual package worth: \$4000; Yours: \$50 per year.\*



The account recorded in Mark chapter 9 details an incident concerning a man, his young adult son, Jesus' disciples, and the Master himself. We enter the scene in the midst of a dispute because the disciples were not able to handle the man's problem. This father's

predicament mirrors what many parents today encounter when dealing with their adult children's choices, problems, and dilemmas. And the narrative holds answers for distraught contemporary parents when their adult children decide to live in a way the parents—especially Christian parents—simply didn't see coming.

### The Case

"I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not" (verse 18 NKJV). You see, the case in front of us had to do with a problem this father never saw coming. This son was often so affected by a demonic spirit that "it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid" (verse 18).

The issues that seize our adult children take us by surprise, not only because they're troublesome, but also because as our kids deal with life, they sometimes veer from the Christian standards of morality we hold dear.

### What to Face

"How long has this been happening to him?" (verse 21). Instead of eliminating the son's problem, Jesus sends the father through an interview of sorts. He asks the man about the length of time his son has been plagued by this spirit. The father's answer? "From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him" (verses 21–22).

Both this biblical dad and we parents today mustn't allow embarrassment, denial, anger, disbelief, or minimization to deter us from facing the seriousness of our adult children's hurts or departures from the faith. Face the issues head on. Be honest as this father was about exactly what his son was going through. We cannot fix what we refuse to face.

### Make Haste

The father of Mark chapter 9 hastened to the One who held the answer he needed for his child. "If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us ... help my unbelief" (verses 22, 24). This father cried out to Jesus through tears. Watching his son being tortured was torturing him.

We must recognize the spiritual battles we are up against and make haste to engage the enemy. There can be a controlled urgency about our attack. Depending on the crisis, our children either do not realize they have been duped, do not recognize they are being deceived, or are powerless to react against that which has overpowered them. No matter the problem or the cause, like the father in the biblical account, it's the parents' responsibility to take those adult children to Jesus—they will not or cannot go on their own.

#### Grace

Even though the man realized his own shortcomings, the Master granted his request. "He [Jesus] rebuked the unclean spirit ... [and] Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up" (verses 25, 27).

Our personal shortcomings and lack of faith do not prevent Jesus from healing, delivering, and changing our adult children.

Jesus goes straight to the core of the problem by rebuking the spirit and commanding it to leave permanently. The young adult son did not have to clean up his act, and the father did not have to turn into some super-spiritual perfect specimen. Trust in God's ability and dependence upon God's grace were enough for that dad to see his son freed. And God's grace is enough for us and our adult kids too.

No matter the case you didn't see coming in the lives of you and your adult children, bravely face it head on, make haste to turn the problem over to Jesus, and then wait patiently for God's grace to make a difference. 

•

Dr. Sharon Elliott is author of Didn't See That Coming: When How They're Living's Not How You Raised Them. Her passion lies in encouraging the people of God to live significant, authentic lives that clearly mirror the love and life of God to the world thanks to the life of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

# A GOOD DAY

when you trust Gods promises





Friends" holds a lot of truth.

Friends" holds a lot of truth.

A study from UCLA suggests that friends can help our brains reframe problems to view a brighter side. The study showed when friends reinterpret as it lessened stress and helped them chooses it lessened stress and helped them chooses.

negative images, it lessened stress and helped them choose a different perspective. We can be emotionally supportive by helping others process their emotions and regain hope.

When loved ones face trauma and pain, we want to reach out in the best ways possible, even when we feel clueless. Helping starts when we observe behavior changes, signs of stress, closed off body language, and changes in their tone and attitude.

Some may share their feelings freely while others cover up problems. We can ask questions and really listen. Give support, but remember you are not a professional and your field might need encouragement to get professional therapy.

- ke lize that someone stressed or in crisis hears less of your words, and reacts more to nonverbal communication.
- Look at the person, listen with your eyes, and use open body language to communicate caring. Speak softly to bring a sense of calmness. Lend support by empathetic statements that affirm emotions such as "That sounds so scary" or "That must hurt deeply."
- Validating the person's feelings expresses empathy. Some traumas like violent crime, natural disasters, and sudden loss are hard to imagine, but you can respond authentically. State that you cannot imagine their pain, but you are sorry, and just sit with the person.

When a loved one faced one of the most unthinkable tragedies, I brought over her favorite bread and just sat. She spoke only a little, but grasped my hand tightly. She wanted someone understanding with her.

- Ask questions using the golden rule (ask yourself if that is what you want to be asked). "What are your (emotions) about?" "What fear or worry do you have?" "How can I help?" We cannot change permanent loss, but we can encourage peace with our presence and actions. It's more helpful to praise the person or remind the person of the qualities you admire in him or her. Those responses can sustain them and tap into good memories.
- For loss with a death, reaffirm the importance of the person lost, listen, and share memories. For situations that do not involve death, there's hope of God's redirection and intervention. That's when you can ask what they want to do next or what will help them as they move forward. When there's conflict, ask about their side. Ask what hurt they feel or what is the hardest thing for them. That can open up to thoughts of forgiveness and letting go.

When a person lets go and forgives, they start on the path to God's redirection and move toward acceptance. That takes time, so acknowledge that your friend is dealing with something difficult.

• Offer little acts of kindness such as dropping off a favorite meal, taking in a movie or a walk, running errands, or even watching their children or walking a pet so they have time to process.

For one friend who faced a tragic loss and had to care for a grandchild, I made little gift packages for the child. That distracted them both with moments of joy. She later spoke about how much it helped them both, but at the time just hugged me when I gave her a new packet. Kind acts cover them with an umbrella of love.

• Be available and check back in as they move toward acceptance and peace. Having supportive friends helps them know they are not alone. 

●

Karen Whiting writes to help women and their families thrive. Her books Growing a Peaceful Heart and Growing a Joyful Heart share stories that show how to support loved ones and promote emotional well-being.



Stepping into your calling sounds exciting and fulfilling. Yet, it can hold equal moments of self-doubt and confusion. Many don't recognize their giftings as part of the reason they exist or see viable opportunities to utilize those gifts in a way that "matters".

Perhaps you feel like the labels you carry in life outweigh His ability to use you in leadership. Truthfully, it can be easier to let others lead the way and not acknowledge the role we were designed to step into ourselves.

We're here to shed some light on Big Lies that keep us from walking in our even BIGGER God-grown potential.



Big Lie #1: Some "Disqualifiers" Can't Be Overcome

Human trafficking survivor Sioni Rodriguez endured many unspeakable abuses and deep betrayals at the hands of her mother. "God uses the things that have brought me shame to help others." says Sioni, "This wasn't easy. But when God promotes, He gives a new level of confidence. When you feel disqualified

by your past, you don't need to be overwhelmed with selfdoubt."

Bigger Truth: "God can utilize all the bits and pieces of our experience to free others. Authentically sharing helps us to be relatable and effective in leadership." (See Psalm 34:4–6.)



Big Lie #2: You Have to "Fit Somewhere" to Be Marketable as a Leader

Gospel Music Hall of Fame Inductee Babbie Mason struggled for many years to be at peace with who she was. particularly related to her musical style.

"People often would hear my music on the radio and assume I was a white woman," shares Babbie. "If I can be

honest, that used to mess with my head. I convinced myself that my music sounded too black for white people and too white for black people.

Over time, though, I saw something uniquely beautiful in my concerts. I'd look out over the audience and see a gathering of the body of Christ represented consistently by those who attended my concerts. It is beautiful to see a blend of different races, denominations, and cultures coming together to worship the Lord."

Bigger Truth: "Don't ever apologize to others for your uniqueness. Being different means, you have finally found the courage to be yourself." (See Ephesians

2:10.)



Big Lie #3: You Need to Claw Your Way to the Top

PR & Media trailblazer Jacquelyn Maruska didn't succeed by "being the ruthless businesswoman" who walked over others to get where she wanted

to go. Simple values gleaned from her family took her from cleaning gym floors to walking the red carpet at the Grammys with some of the most legendary artists of our time. Jackie shares, "God used my family to teach me the foundations of integrity and that adversity can strengthen you if you let it. One candle doesn't dim by lighting another. If you use your candle to light someone else's, the first candle doesn't dim, but multiple candles brighten the darkness together." (See Matthew 5:14–16.)

### Bigger Truth:

"Choosing to lift up others by shining light on what they have to offer does not diminish you, your calling or your gifts."



Big Lie #4: Go Big or Go Home

Psychotherapist, award-winning fine artist, and author Deborah Maxey had no choice but to learn how to start over when her family moved 21 times within 12 years. In spite of all disruption and what could be perceived as unanchored foundational lack, Deborah established an ability to jump in and get things started in very small ways.

Deborah says, "What if, in a world of people knocking their projects out of the park, you aren't even sure how to hold a bat? Even worse, you're wondering what you are doing on the team! You don't know what to do, but you're willing to try ... because ... the coach is calling on you."

Bigger Truth: "Many of us walk in similar moments, feeling we have little to offer or not exactly what is needed. The answer is to embrace that small beginning and take that first step." (See Zechariah 4:10.)



Big Lie: #5: Weakness Cancels Out Your Ability to Lead

Nonprofit executive director Lisa McIntire was flooded with fear concerning her ability to lead while undergoing more than 5 months of cancer treatments and two surgeries. She fully expected her board of directors to concur.

Lisa shares: "The board graciously assured me they had confidence in my ability to discern the Lord's leading and direct the organization through this crisis. I had to decide when all the externalities—my health, appearance, social connections, and day-to-day leadership

Bigger Truth: "Being a child of God is truly enough even through our physical challenges and weakness. With this realization we can lead from a place of humble confidence, generosity, and wisdom." (See 2 Corinthians 12:9–10.)

duties—were all stripped away, I was still enough."

Taking hold of the Bigger Truths in leadership, can drown out the lies. We can walk freely beyond stigma and labels, because God is the true author of our identity. With the exchange of our weakness for His strength, we can walk boldly in all the giftings He has grown within us! ●





# Write that book OF YOUR DREAMS

Without Making Costly
Mistakes, Even If You
Don't Know Where to Start...

FROM

Linda Evans Shepherd

AND THE ADVANCED WRITERS & SPEAKERS
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That incredulous response shot out of my mouth when God prompted me to write. Four trustworthy people over 15 years told me God showed them I was called to write. I couldn't see or believe it. So, I "shelved" it in the

closet of my mind because I had no author pictures in my life achievement album.

### What about you?

Like me, you may have had God speak to you about doing something unbelievable for Him. Maybe the challenge is to start a business, a supportive prayer group for moms with wayward, rebellious kids, or minister to the homeless. Whatever the calling, the transforming journey starts with believing despite your list of shortcomings and insurmountable obstacles. Destiny is always beyond our comfort zone.

God calling me to write wasn't plausible. I lacked writing skills; my gifts and talents were evident for other things. Nothing about writing fit my paradigm. Can you relate? Has God asked you to step out to do something and you can't see the way? Let me encourage you: "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23 NKJV). God's specialty is creating from nothing. We just need to say yes and work with Him.

### I finally gave up trying to convince God

Authoring wasn't a part of my identity. But one day the Holy Spirit highlighted a Scripture (Proverbs 3:5–6), like a flashing neon light. For days He impressed that Scripture to me, hammering at my unbelief. Fearful I would grieve Him with my avoidance, I finally listened and let Him speak—"Trust Me and not your own thoughts or understanding."

In response, I saw three clear steps to follow. They seemed simple, but walking them took Holy Spirit guidance:

- 1) Trust in the Lord with all your heart.
- 2) Lean not on your own understanding.
- 3) In all your ways acknowledge Him.

This brought direction to my author path. Let me share how the Holy Spirit led in walking these steps out.

### Trust in the Lord with all your heart

I began believing that the God of creation could create something through me. This was difficult. I had to become secure, confident, and bold in my belief that God wanted to use me and that He was powerful enough to make it happen despite all my insufficiencies. This took heart examination and deliverance from fears, insecurities, and pride.

### Lean not on your own understanding

Then I joined and strengthened my transforming journey. Giving up control of outcomes was necessary while realizing that my understanding was partially based on my natural perceptions. Having my spiritual eyes of understanding enlightened took time to envision supernatural possibilities. Daily prayer and Scripture reading assisted in focusing my eyes on Him alone rather than what my mind and well-meaning friends said.

### In all your ways acknowledge Him

When I didn't know what to do, when options were set before me, I had to learn how to see His hand at work. Step 3 was a growing process. I asked for advice from mature Christian authors who heard from God. How did they perceive His direction with multiple options? What happens when God seems silent? How and what do you pray when turmoil threatens peace?

Slowly, step by step, I began my writing journey. I asked trusted friends to pray for me. As months went by, taking baby steps, a novel began to be birthed.

### Your Personal Decision

Is there something God is calling you to believe? Does your mind want to say, "Really, God? You want me to do what?"

I encourage you to choose as Mary did and say, "Let it be to me according to Your word."

Push back disbelief; follow Proverbs 3:5–6; and let God direct you on your unbelievable path to your new transformed journey. Let your mind be renewed, trust God, and your path will be directed towards destiny. ●

Betty Kulich is a pastor, international speaker, and an award-winning author. AWSA/AWSA P.O.W.E.R. Speaker, CIPA, ACFW, WW. Info at: Transformed-image.com





A DAILY DEVOTIONAL MINISTRY OF THE ADVANCED WRITERS & SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION

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a good influence there is no impact for making a difference. Being a leader does not necessarily mean we are in the physical presence of those we lead.

Leaders lead, but without

Writers are leaders. What we write can influence readers for good or lead them from God's intended purpose. As we write, are we seeking a good outcome for the reader?

1. Leaders Write. Think of the Apostle Paul and the influence he had through writing letters to the churches. He was not present with them. In fact, he was often in prison, but that did not stop him from making an impact on those who read his letters. Writers are influencers.

- 2. Leaders Teach. Through his writings, Paul taught others to teach the gospel of Christ. In his letter to Titus, the instructions for a teacher were made clear. Titus was to be an example of self-control. He was to teach with integrity, dignity, humility, and sound speech so the Word of God could not be disputed. Writers are teachers.
- 3. Leaders Suffer. Yes, it is true. Leaders suffer. In baseball, a curveball causes the ball to veer to the side as it approaches home plate. The batter swings but misses the mark. When life throws us a curveball and we swing and miss time after time, it is frustrating. But as we practice and pursue, we will eventually knock it out of the ballpark.

However, in the pursuit, we suffer rejections, hardships, disappointments, exhaustion, and persecution. We feel we have failed. But in the suffering, there is always a lesson to be learned. As we share the lesson through writing or teaching, we make a difference in the lives of others. We are leading them through example to stand strong in adversity. Writers suffer but can learn from it to impact others for good.

4. Leaders Prevail. A great leader does not quit when discouraged or when writing doesn't seem to influence,

teach, or impact readers through lessons learned. A great leader and writer will prevail.

"So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily" (Acts 19:20 ESV). Prevailing is more than being strong. It is a more forceful strength. It is an empowered strength to stand strong in our faith for whatever comes our way. This prevailing power is ours by the Holy Spirit. We can strive to accomplish what is before us in our own strength, but unless we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will not influence others for God's purpose.

We can make our plans, but unless they follow God's plan and purpose for our lives, we are setting ourselves up for failure. (See Proverbs 19:21.)

God uses obstacles to make us stronger and better so we can accomplish each assignment He gives us. Writers prevail.

Hard things are going to happen. The key is prayer, trusting God in His sovereignty and continuing to do what is before us. God doesn't give us the option to give up. Sometimes we need a reminder of why we do what we do, and He finds a way to revive us through difficulties. God makes a way to build our endurance, to strengthen our faith and trust, to identify with the sufferings of Jesus for transformation, and for us to impact others for good.

We learn as we go for the purpose of influencing our readers for the good of God's purpose. As writers, it is our calling. It is our responsibility to follow the example of Jesus in what we write, how we teach, our attitude in suffering, and the choice to quit or prevail.

Through our suffering we learn. We don't like it, but what if we began to think of it as good for healing, learning, and building up our endurance. I think that is what James meant when he said, "Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (James 1:2–3 NASB).

Virginia Grounds is an author, speaker, Bible teacher, and podcaster. Find her Quick Studies podcast at www.quickstudies.org.



If you're a mom, then you know. It's hard to find quality family time in the midst of crazy schedules.

Our children are busier than ever.
From youth group activities to sports practices to school events, it seems every single minute of the day is scheduled.

And when you add in our equally jam packed planners with women's ministry responsibilities, work, and mom duties (not to mention, we'd like to see our husbands once in a while), finding ways to keep the family connected can be challenging.

But not impossible.

It will take some planning on your part, but you can do this, and here are six ideas to get you started:

Family Game Night: Schedule a family game night twice a month and post the "Game Nights" on the fridge so everyone is aware of the upcoming family fun. Yes, even the teens in the family will enjoy this night if you let them have a say. So, let each family member plan a game night throughout the year, and continue rotating the responsibility. Your teens may choose an exciting night of laser tag or cosmic bowling while your younger children may opt for a rousing game of Twister or Monopoly at home. Whatever the game of choice, just enjoy your time together, and let the games begin!

Family Fitness Fun: Organize a family fitness fun time several times a week—even if it's just for 30 minutes. Take a neighborhood walk together—walking dogs, pushing strollers, etc. Try pairing up with a family member and using that time to share prayer requests and concerns. Then, pound the pavement and pray for each other's needs. Or head to the nearest park and play Frisbee with the fam. Or go for a family bike or hike, trying out new trails in your area. It will be great exercise and lots of fun! That's a win/win!

**Family Secrets & Traditions:** There's nothing like an "inside joke," a family secret, or a special tradition to bring a family closer together, so come up with some in your household. For instance, any time a clock (or your smartphone) has the same numbers such as "3:33" or "5:55," tell your family

members that's code for "Time to remember how much I love you." You'll be surprised how much your kids will get into this kind of thing—even the ones who act "too cool" to participate.

Family Dream Jar: When a family has a common goal, it brings everyone together in a new way. So, why not come up with a family dream that you can work toward such as: a fantastic family vacation or a big screen TV or season tickets to a local professional sports team? Once you agree on a family goal, place a "dream jar" in a common area such as the kitchen, and encourage everyone to begin plunking change into it. With every family member participating, that jar will fill up over and over again until that dream is finally realized, and what a celebration that will be!

Family Date Nights: While it's great to spend time together as a family unit, it's also important to spend one-on-one time with each other. So, get out your family planner and start scheduling date nights with your kids and spouse. For example, on the first Friday night of the month, maybe Dad and daughter go to dinner and a movie while Mom and son go grab a hot dog and take in a baseball game. Mix it up, letting each child spend quality time with each parent over the course of a few months. Remember, these date nights don't have to be expensive outings. You can take in a free concert in the park with your teen daughter or enjoy a picnic lunch under the stars with your spouse—just make sure you give these dates priority.

**Movies & Munchies:** Everyone will look forward to this one because who doesn't love watching movies while munching on your favorite snack? Choose a free weekend night to "couch potato it" together. It's even more fun when you have themed movie nights. For example, do a princess-themed night, and watch several family friendly movies involving royalty while feasting on princess popcorn balls and cookies shaped like tiaras.

Bottomline, it's important to make family time a priority. Time really is our most precious commodity, so spending it with the ones you love the most, just makes sense. Sure it will take some extra planning and schedule maneuvering, and you may encounter some bellyaching and eyerolling in the beginning, but plan those family fun nights anyway ... it'll be so worth it.  $\odot$ 

Michelle Medlock Adams is a multi-award-winning author of over 100 books, as well as a NY Times Bestselling ghostwriter.



Have you ever wondered about the DNA in every food you eat?

DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) is within every living organism in God's creation. It is in the body, plants, animals, and, yes,

the food served on the table. I mean, REAL food like your fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, and bread. So what is the importance of understanding food's DNA?

God designed DNA to self-replicate. With this genetic code, humans reproduce humans, animals reproduce animals, and plants reproduce plants. What's fascinating is that DNA was once thought to be a spiral ladder of Junk DNA (yes, that is the scientific term), but it's now realized to be far more complex.

### DNA reveals God's masterpiece.

Disbelieving scientists today are having a harder time denying the perfect design by an intelligent creator. Within Scriptures, we know that God had a master plan for His perfect creation. God created, and it was good. Today, though, I want to focus on food DNA, which helps us to see just how perfect God's design really is.

For years, decades really, humans have been working studiously to understand microscopically the DNA of food. You see, there's a whole process that comes with understanding the DNA: decipher the DNA, alter the DNA, control the crops, control the food, control the people. Deciphering the DNA leads to genetically modifying the organism (GMO).

In 2002, scientists decoded the genome (genetic material— DNA) of rice. In 2008 they completed the genome of soybeans. In 2009, they mapped the maize (corn) genome. This led to GMO foods being introduced to the public without their knowledge of possible health consequences. Then it was time for wheat. Wheat studies were complicated and the answers evasive. Wheat is an important crop, both biblically and politically. Politically, scientists will say that wheat is arguably the most critical crop in the world.

Wheat provides humanity with a fifth of our calories. It is in bread, pastry, cereals, candy, oils, and pasta.

Jesus used the symbolism of bread (created by wheat) as a correlation of our fulfillment in Him. Biblically, wheat is the very essence of who Jesus is.

"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh" (John 6:51 NASB1995).

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst" (John 6:35 NASB1995).

"I am the bread of life" (John 6:48 NASB1995).

Why did our Lord say He is the Bread of Life? Most importantly, what exactly does this statement mean? A beautiful message is found in the DNA.

While the genome of Arabidopsis—the first plant to be sequenced—contains 135 million DNA letters, and the human genome contains 3 billion, wheat has 16 billion.

Yes, you read that correctly, 16 billion. There is more genome in wheat than in people. Just one of wheat's chromosomes-3B—is bigger than the entire soybean genome. Scientists have wanted control over wheat since DNA and GMO first surfaced.

To make things more incredible as a Bible believer, the wheat genome is really three completely different genomes in one. In science lingo, that's a hexaploid genome. In simpler terms, it's a revelation of the One who creates.

Jesus is the Bread of Life, and in Him we see the Father and the Holy Spirit. The complexity of this discovery is why wheat has not been able to be modified until recently. Praise the Lord! God reveals to us His intricacies in the bread of life. 

Output

Description:

Now, that should delight your taste for delicious bread.

To read more about the intricacies of God's design in His foods, check out Annette's book, 7 Foods of the Promised Land, published by Bold Vision Books.



The Molly Brown House
Museum in Denver was
celebrating Margaret (Molly)
Brown's 150th birthday. I was
excited to attend as I was going to meet

her great-granddaughter. The Museum sold my books, and each time I was there for a book signing or talk, the museum staff would always say, "You must meet Helen." This sentiment was shared when I did book signings at the Titanic Museums. So this hot July afternoon, I had the privilege of meeting Helen and spending time with some very gracious people as we shared our lives around a tea table.

This unexpected and delightful afternoon seemed designed by God to remind me that Christian hospitality is not dead but dying. Meeting in homes is rare, and dinner at a restaurant is easier. That didn't happen in Jesus's day as His followers hosted him in their homes. Hospitality has been part of God's plan from the Garden of Eden. So why shouldn't it still be part of his plan? It is, and we can be part of a simple and very effective way of sharing the Kingdom with those God puts in our path.

### Open Doors Open Hearts

As I have studied Victorian and Edwardian manners and etiquette for my writing, I am intrigued by God's numerous ways to encourage hospitality. I am inspired to open my front door more often. Hospitality is not entertaining or even meeting basic human needs, but the ability to show God's love to those around us.

Hospitality is a much-needed commodity in our lives, just as it was in earlier years. Hospitality opens others to the heart of God and allows us to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Kingdom living meshes love and kindness with hospitality. We can not only share Christ but also draw nearer to the heart of God ourselves. As we open our front door and welcome others into our homes, we may give many their first taste of the gospel displayed in real time.

We are commanded to practice hospitality. Titus and 1 Timothy name hospitality as a requirement for a pastor. We,

as the Church, are to share our homes with the body of Christ and strangers. It is a fundamental element to serve others. "Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Romans 12:13).

### No Perfection Needed

I love spontaneous get-togethers as they usually lead into one of the sweetest parts of hospitality—sharing our testimonies of the grace of Jesus in our lives. For many years on Sunday mornings, we would put a meal in the crockpot and then ask the Lord for direction on who to bring home from church. It was such a wonderful experience, but somehow we gradually quit. I didn't worry about having a perfect table or even if the house was clean. We just enjoyed the freedom of those Sundays.

Meeting Helen has been such a joy as we have found ourselves involved in events that honor Titanic passengers and those who lived in the era of the Titanic and Downton Abbey. Helen shares that her great-grandmother, Margaret Brown, was an unusual woman and very different from many of her neighbors. The Brown dining room table was open to anyone. Even before her voyage on the Titanic, survivor Margaret Brown was known for her gracious hospitality in her Denver home. Many times she invited her servants to join the family for meals and holidays.

### Reclaiming Togetherness

Traditions are important and need to be kept alive as we share the joy of our homes and lives with this post-Christian generation. Hospitality is becoming a lost art, and I pray that we can ask the Lord to help us show the love of Christ to others through Christian hospitality. It is a huge part of Kingdom living ... from the Titanic to today.

"Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2). •

Penelope Carlevato was born in England and her writing and speaking include her passion for tea, hospitality, history, travel, and etiquette. She is a member of the Titanic Speakers Bureau and author of many books and articles including Tea on the Titanic, First Class Etiquette, The Art of Afternoon Tea, and Tea Lover's Journal.



"He's gone." Those words launched my life as a single mom. Returning from church, as I steered our fifteen-passenger van onto our gravel lane, I could see our home was strangely

dark.

Sitting forward, my daughter peered out the window and searched the empty driveway. "Where's Dad's car?"

On the bench seats in the back, the chatter of the other six children abruptly quieted. Once inside the house, the children quickly discovered their father's clothes were gone and his toothbrush was not in the bathroom cabinet. He had left.

Pam Farrel's mother became a single mom when Pam's two younger siblings were teens. Pam's father struggled with alcohol. With each passing year, his anger and depression grew, leading to increased episodes of domestic violence and physical abuse until Pam's mom took the children to safety.

Today, 15 million moms are solo parenting 22 million children. While some single mothers have been widowed because their husband took an early journey home, and some singles adopted, the majority of single parents began in committed

relationships and never anticipated, expected, or intended to raise children alone.

### The Reality of Single Moms

While misconceptions or assumptions exist, the reality for single moms is we:

- · represent a wide range of ages and seasons of life
- · wonder where we fit in society and the church
- often feel isolated, judged, and alone

Yet, we are far from alone.

- One in four homes is solo mom led.
- 50% of children in the U.S. are expected to live in a single-parent home before age 18.
- The majority of solo moms have full-time careers.
- Fewer than half receive child support.
- The average yearly child support is \$6,000.
- 85% of solo parent families do not attend church.

The single mom works hard, loves her children, and wonders, *Is my life ruined? Will my children be permanently damaged?* 

Do children need more love than I'm able to give? Can I provide all that my family needs?

### Trauma Impacts

When the vital family structure unravels, moms and children experience trauma. Triggered by trauma, the thinking part of the brain goes offline and the flight, fight, freeze, or please mechanism takes over. Decision-making is critical in the best of circumstances, and the process becomes daunting for a solo parent who often feels too overwhelmed in a season when they need to be decisive.

Trauma in children often shows up as behavior issues. Bad behavior is not an indication of a bad kid or inadequate parenting. Bad behavior is symptomatic of a child with a broken heart.

### Hope and Help

Hope and healing come from a relationship with Jesus. At church, the single mom and her children can find that the door is open, there is a place for them, and someone will introduce them to the Source of hope, salvation, and unconditional love.

A church can offer these tangible helps:

- Regular childcare
- Excellent children's programs
- Welcome and inclusion in church life (Many single moms prefer not to be relegated to the singles group.)
- · Support, mentors, and friends
- · Hope more than advice
- Success Net, a handful of people to serve as her advisory board

Like others in the congregation, single moms want

- Genuine friendship
- People to do life with
- Someone to sit with
- A place to serve with her unique ability
- The occasional hand with household projects
- Fun and laughter
- Voices other than her own to sort through decisions
- · A small group

### The Word of God

What does the child from a solo parent home need? Like all children, the child of a solo parent wants to be recognized as an individual and not as that kid from a single-parent home.

The church can:

- · Invite and welcome the child into church activities
- Ask about the child's interests and school
- If helpful, pair the child with a senior who can listen to the child read aloud and help with school work
- Perhaps be a place the child can do homework between when school lets out and mom gets home from work

Participating in a faith community provides the single mom and her child with resources to tap and people to ask when questions arise.

Here are some things that you can communicate in word and deed to the single mom in your church community:

For a single parent, even in the most challenging circumstances, God assures:

- You are cherished, exactly where and as you are, by Jesus. "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17–19).
- When you feel weak, He is strong. "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:2).
- He gives gentle guidance to single parents. "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young" (Isaiah 40:11).
- God is at work, even in this. You may be navigating family life on your own, but you are not alone. Connection and belonging, help and hope are available. 

  ●

Founder of SingleMomCircle.com, PeggySue Wells is the bestselling author of 32 books, including The Ten Best Decisions A Single Mom Can Make. She is also the solo mom of seven children.



## Finally, how to manage the mess 2 madness of modern motherhood!

The MomsLikeUs Academy is a trusted, nurturing online space where MomsLikeUs learn skills, strategies, and systems that help us crush it at motherhood instead of motherhood crushing us! All from a Christian point of view!

### IN THE ACADEMY YOU WILL RECEIVE:

- Monthly Masterclasses from Experts on Faith, Marriage, Parenting, Relationships, and much more!
- Practical Resources each month that Help You to Make It Happen!
   Live Online Coaching from Mona, Your Mom Mentor
- An Engaging Community of fellow moms who want to make Christ the center of their lives, families, marriage, and relationships!]
- Four Bonus Courses covering Self-Care, Running Family Meetings,
   Creating a Magnificent Marriage, and our Signature Course: No Regrets
   Motherhood, valued at \$299! JOIN US TODAY!

Mona CORWIN

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This is especially true for Christian moms who are on the front lines because of the way the culture affects our kids. That's why I created MomsLikeUs.

For example, "Amanda," a hurting mom, came to one of our Mom Pop Up days at my house. She was struggling, feeling like everyone was getting this motherhood thing except her. She feared she was one mistake away from being exposed as the worst mom ever.

That day, we were teaching the moms how to study God's Word with their children. But all Amanda could worry about was why she should bother learning how to study the Bible when what she really needed to know was how to be a good mom.

By the end of the afternoon, I had the opportunity to explain God's Word would help her formulate the ability to be a good mom and she'd find grace when she fell short. After we prayed, she was in a puddle of tears. She told me, "I was ready to walk away from God, but today I got the answers I've prayed for. I now know His will and that He hears me."

Amanda is not alone in her struggles. In fact, a primary fear plaguing today's mom is that not only is her marriage going to fail, but that she's also going to screw up her kids. But her worst fear is she's afraid she won't know that she's failed until her kids are grown and her husband's left her for another woman.

So we at MomsLikeUs come alongside these women and talk to them about their fears. Little by little, issue by issue, we give them the insights and help they need.

Consider that there's no school on how to be a mom or even how to be married. Yet people spend decades and thousands of dollars learning a profession, but nobody thinks that they should spend time learning about motherhood or marriage. But these are the areas that some of us spend a majority of time doing.

Being good in these areas of our lives is not about having natural talent, but developing learned skills that will help us succeed for a lifetime.

We teach women they can get through their challenges together, starting with God's Word. We help them to stop freaking out over things like their toddler is still using a pacifier when the other kids have given it up. We tell them, "It's just really simple; he's not going to have that pacifier when he's nine. It's going to be okay."

I started MomsLikeUs during my quiet time when I would turn my camera on and talk to the girls about what I was studying. Then I graduated to hanging out in Panera a couple of days a week, meeting with women one-on-one. Then we moved to the Internet and soon started our podcasts and our MomsLikeUs Academy with our monthly masterclasses.

We also have Q&As, study the Bible, and discuss implementing the Word in everyday life. When we host Mom Pop Ups, and Mom Scapes, we invite women in the Dallas area to come for massages, therapy sessions, and alone time with God. We even tell them to bring two pounds of chicken for a cooking class, so they can bring dinner home to their families.

Yes, it's difficult to be a mom today, but God's Word is the perfect place to get on track, and prayer is the key.

We are all struggling with the craziness. But we don't have to walk in fear. It's like I tell my moms, "You can crush it at motherhood, but motherhood does not have to crush you or your marriage." 

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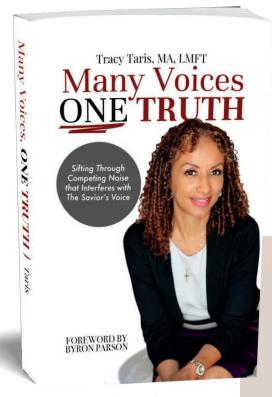
Mona Corwin is an author, podcaster and founder of MomsLikeUs Academy which provides Christian moms support and training. She lives in Dallas with her husband, Warren.

### Have you ever found yourself stuck in your head because swarming thoughts won't leave you alone?

Thoughts that sound like "you aren't worthy of good things," "you're incompetent," or "you're unlovable because of your past," to name a few? You may never have consciously agreed to take on these beliefs, but now they rule your life. Where do they come from? **Can we really change the way we think?** 

In *Many Voices*, *One Truth*, Tracy Taris trains people to identify the voices that fight for our attention. The voices of Self, Satan, Society & the Savior constantly battle to be the main broadcasting network that feeds our minds. Many Voices, One Truth is filled with tools to equip people to turn down the volume of the old, harmful, and unwanted beliefs to bring Jesus' "still small voice" to the forefront.

Tracy is available to teach in-person or virtual group courses on the transformative practices outlined in her book. Please e-mail booking inquiries or media requests to tracy@tracytaris.com.



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**TRACY TARIS, MA, LMFT** provides her clients with the insights displayed in this book daily. As a therapist and owner of a private practice, she and her team of therapists offer counseling to move people towards healing and life meaning. Through her work, Tracy teaches souls that they are valued, loved, part of a holy nation, and able to take hold of the truth.

For more information, go to tracytaris.com.



Pickleball just might be one of the biggest opportunities for evangelism the Church has ever seen. Pickleball is not just a simple game with a funny name, but a powerful way to share the gospel with a hurting world.

### What is Pickleball?

Pickleball is a super fun, accessible to all, easy-to-pickup, hard-to-put-down game. And did I already mention it's incredibly fun to play?

A cross between tennis, badminton, and table tennis, pickleball hosts players on a court around one-third the size of a tennis court. Using paddles, players hit a Wiffle-type ball back and forth over a net, following the rules of the game.

The latest studies confirm what many of us who play instinctively knew.

### Pickleball is here to stay.

Let me ask you, when was the last time a stranger came racing into your parking lot, clamoring for you to open the doors of your church?

This could be your story if you were one of the many churches in the US that are using their spaces for pickleball and its growing fan base.

That's because over the past few years, pickleball has gone from something most of us didn't know about, to the fastest-growing sport in America.

### Pickleball "Scores":

- A 39.3% growth rate over the past two years
- Over 36.5 million participants between August 2021 and August 2022, with
- More than 8.5 million playing more than eight times during that period

As you can imagine, the biggest problem with pickleball is finding a place to play. And that is where the churches of America come in.

According to some estimates, there are more than 300,000 church buildings in the United States. Many of those buildings have fellowship halls, recreation centers, and gymnasiums that sit unused for much of the week.

Why not open your church to your community and offer a place to play pickleball?

What makes pickleball different from other activities can be found in the nature of the game.

Unlike basketball or softball, both of which are primarily limited to the young and fit, players of all ages and fitness levels are drawn to—and able to play—pickleball.

Additionally, the atmosphere of almost every pickleball game is fun, encouraging, and overwhelmingly positive.

Where else can your youth group and seniors play together, and fun and laughter are guaranteed to be had by all?

### How to Start:

Start with your current congregation. Let them know you are opening your gym for some open play pickleball and ask for volunteers to help. If you need additional help, you can also reach out to your local USA Pickleball Ambassador. You can find their contact information on the USA Pickleball website.

It's no secret we are living in an overwhelmingly sad, anxious, and lonely world. A world where sin and darkness seem to abound and man's solutions are empty and void of hope. We know Jesus is the ultimate answer to the world's problems.

Pickleball brings people together and provides connection.

Pickleball preacher Rich Lively opened his Florida church to pickleball at the height of the pandemic in 2020. Using their carpeted fellowship hall, he taped down some lines, purchased some nets and paddles, and invited the community in.

"The relationships that grew between our church members and the community, especially during such a difficult time, was just awesome," he shared. "Some church members came and hung out during open play, and the conversations that developed about deeper things were a natural outflow of the growing relationships."

Right now is the perfect time to use pickleball to connect your church with your community.

And when you do, you too will experience the thrill of watching your neighbors race into your parking lot. Not just for pickleball, but for the fellowship and to ultimately FIND, KNOW, and WORSHIP the Lord. 

●

Christy Largent is a professional speaker, founder of The Christian Pickleball Collective, and creator of The Pickleball Evangelism System. Connect with Christy on social at @christylargent.





Betrayal. It's not fair.

I wasn't the one who did anything wrong, so why am I the one who must forgive? I know what the Bible says, and I get all that.

But some days ... some days I'm like whatever. I don't want to forgive because it doesn't seem like there's anything in it for me. Do you have days like that?

Betrayal is Betrayal.

Betrayal in friendship. Betrayal in family. Betrayal in church. Betrayal in marriage.

For me, it was that last one.

I'm going to give you the answers to the lessons up front. I figure, let me spare you the trainwreck of not listening to God in every area of your life and leaning on your own understanding when it comes to forgiveness after betrayal. If I say something that triggers a thought or a not so pleasant reminder of an event in your life, pray for yourself as you read. Don't be like me and learn the hard way that not listening to or obeying God is a trainwreck waiting to happen.

In our 19th year of marriage (we're now in year 30) my husband had an affair. You know, the kind you divorce a person over.

It took a lot out of me to make "Forgiveness" a chapter in my book *Did She Say That Out Loud*?

Listen, friends, Hove God. I trust God. But some days I'm mad at God.

Yes, I said that out loud. It is not easy for me to say that, but it is necessary for you to know. Maybe you're in a place like me. I love my marriage now, but I was quite irritated that I had to go this route to get it. That feeling is not a pleasant one. Still.

How does one listen to and obey God during the rough seasons of marriage? Especially if you don't want to forgive the wayward spouse.

First, you've got to pray and pray and pray some more. Then you've got to stay in your Bible. Finally, you will need to have the hard conversations with the significant other and yourself.

But let's be honest: most of the hard conversations you're going to have will be between you and God.

Once I took a long, hard look at myself, God asked me a few questions and told me a few truths to ponder. Number one, I had placed my husband and the marriage ahead of God. Number two, I had started relying on myself, leaning on my own understanding, and making decisions without consulting or trusting God. Basically, I wrecked the train by taking matters of the heart into my own hands.

It didn't work. Although God told me to forgive my husband, don't take the kids, and stay while He handled everything, I decided to do it myyyyy way. Do you know that song? Have you also done it your way when it comes to the F word,

Forgiveness? How did it work out for you? LOL. I'll wait.

The answer to all the above is this—Matthew 17:1–5. We often act like Peter when it comes to working in, and for, the Kingdom. And that also goes for our relationships. I acted like Peter because I prayed, but jumped ahead of God when it came to decision making about should I stay or should I go? Should I forgive my husband, or stay and make him pay for his mistake for the rest of life? I was leaning toward the latter, but I digress. What I learned from the Matthew 17 text transformed my marriage and helped me take a good look at all my relationships.

On the mountaintop God told Peter to be quiet and listen to His Son Jesus.

Peter had started to make plans, and suggestions, and wasn't listening at all. In his excitement he just wanted to do what he wanted to do. But God said this, and I'm taking a few liberties to drill my point home: shut up, listen, obey.

Forgiveness takes a lot, and don't let anyone tell you it doesn't. Or that it's easy. It's not. Forgiveness is for you, not the other person. True again, but very difficult.

When we pray about forgiveness, or anything in life that gives you concern or pause, I want to share what set me free.

While you're praying, don't just tell God what you want or how you want Him to handle the situation. Instead, get still, get quiet before Him. No words. Just silence. And listen. Really listen. And hear Him.

Then act, move forward, and obey our Father. Do whatever He has told you to do, even if you think it's ridiculous.

I didn't want to forgive my husband, but I wanted God to forgive me. ●

Laura Simon is an award-winning author, mother, mentor, speaker, and pastor's wife. Her talks and teachings have received praise and recognition from numerous men and women from around the globe.







Joy Dunlap WRITER | SPEAKER

- Experienced Communicator broadcast, print and podium
- Award-winning Blogger Speaking Joyfully
- Certified P.O.W.E.R. Speaker Advanced Writers and Speakers Association (AWSA)
- Worked as VP, Radio Operations National Association of Broadcasters (NAB)

### WHAT'S BEING SAID...

Joy Dunlap's "Speaking Joyfully" messages always encourage and uplift, bringing hope and truth in each one. She takes everyday things we often overlook or count as "that's just the way it is" and turns them into opportunities for her readers to experience more fulfilled lives.

Practical, thoughtful, and always applicable, Joy has a remarkable way of bringing biblical truth to light by sharing the observations she makes in daily life.

I marvel at how (Joy) has taken personal experiences and turned them into teaching moments...and, most importantly kept it interesting and funny, albeit at (her) own expense in some cases.

("Speaking Joyfully") is thoughtful and fun, and always a reminder of our Loving God and His presence in both the simple and the miraculous.



speakingjoyfully.com joydunlap.com



"Maybe it's just me. Maybe I'm not good enough to get to know. Maybe I'm not the most fun or outgoing. Maybe I'm not

likable. No matter what I do, I'm just tired of feeling invisible."—Cheyenne

"Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16 ESV).

Liberating my loneliness required a God-sized transformation from the inside out. Today, loneliness is an unprecedented foe.

It seems most of the people in America feel moderately or severely lonely. Even worse, most feel this way their whole life. The next time you're in a room full of women, look around. Almost half of the women you are looking at feel, *I don't belong. Nobody really knows me. Nobody cares.* 

For the first time in American history, a majority of the population feels moderate-to-severe loneliness (Columbia University), and it remains a pervasive feeling throughout someone's lifespan (Scott LaFee). In any room filled with a variety of women, nearly half feel they don't belong and as if no one knows them well (The Cigna Group).

Such a sense of insignificance can permeate the mind and heart, communicating the person is irrelevant, even replaceable. It can cause a person to shrink back, taking on a wallflower mentality, and accepting the isolation as indicative of who she is—unknown, irrelevant, and invisible.

That was my experience from childhood to early adulthood. Over time, I realized that unknown, irrelevant, and invisible are not what God intended me to be. In fact, quite the opposite is true.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before a person. She cannot live out what she does not possess."

Here are four strategies for overcoming loneliness that help answer these dilemmas:

### 1. Don't Stop Seeking

The temptation for a woman conditioned to feelings of insignificance is cynicism. Why pray or read the Bible? God won't come through for her, anyway? This reasoning is prevalent, but not consistent with the character of God. He is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9). God hears (1 Peter 3:12). He sees (Genesis 16:13), and He knows (John 10:3). When the desire to quit runs deep, don't do it. Keep reading, trusting, and finding avenues by which to know God better.

### 2. Ask God to Fill the Emptiness

More than a mindset, feelings of isolation can result from thoughtless and cruel treatment of others. The chasm loneliness creates in the heart and soul longs to be filled. Only the One who designed her can satisfy such longing. Asking God to fill every crevice with His love, hope, and faith in His promises (Romans 15:13) is sound advice. Only He is able to satisfy.

### 3. Be Willing to Fail Forward

Change is possible. Failure somewhere along the journey is probable. Even in the lives of outstanding achievers like Thomas Edison, Steve Jobs, or Walt Disney, failure preceded the ultimate success they realized. The unifying characteristic of each of these individuals is their willingness to fail forward. Instead of quitting, they used their failures to push toward future successes.

We can use the same strategy for becoming seen. When, not if, failure to believe God and to trust in His promises occurs, don't quit. Use the failures as stepping stones toward future successes. Failure is often necessary but effective when it's a failing forward.

### 4. Recognize You are Not Alone in Your Loneliness

When half the population is lonely, just about any setting will bring good company. Chances are, the woman sitting in the next seat, standing in the same line, or the one across the table, is familiar with the ailments of isolation. It's not just you.

Go ahead. Embrace the journey toward becoming seen. This culture can use some more light. ●

Cheri Strange, PhD, author of Can You See Me, Now? has helped 700,000 women redefine their worth through her writing.



Have you ever listened to a speaker and said to yourself, "I wonder what that person is like in real

life"?

It's easy to avoid divulging details in our lives if we think people might reject us. As a result, we may unconsciously build defenses against rejection. Unfortunately, our defenses prevent us from becoming an authentic person, who is open and honest and unafraid to reveal who we are inside.

### 4 Defenses We Think Will Prevent Rejection

### 1. Seeking affirmation

We can easily convince ourselves that we must continually evaluate our performance to make sure we measure up to what we think other people expect. Our goal becomes pleasing others and receiving their approval. Our happiness floats up and down, depending on the outcome.

### 2. Building a wall

Sometimes we try to cover up who we are because we're afraid people won't like what they see inside. We fight against

vulnerability. Whether speaking at a conference, leading a seminar, or telling our team about our new idea, we interact from the surface of our lives to keep from revealing personal details that may diminish their opinion of us.

### Creating a false identity

There's nothing wrong with wanting to succeed or becoming the best in our field. However, if we doubt our ability to reach the top, we gradually construct a false persona that exudes confidence, dependability, and strong leadership—and conceals our insecurities.

### 4. Striving for perfection

Some of us may have a compulsion to reach perfection. Whatever we are trying to achieve—an award, a presentation that will attain a promotion, an applause from our boss on the book he commissioned us to write—we believe it must be accomplished with perfection. Only then will we feel we received the recognition we desire.

### 5 Ways to Live Unmasked

### 1. Look for internal affirmation

Instead of concentrating on our outward achievement of looking good and speaking well, seek God's affirmation of who we are. He knows all we have to offer. Let's celebrate

our marketable skills, the innovative mind He's given us, and our ability to accomplish whatever project we're given.

### 2. Let the bricks in your wall crumble

Why hide behind a self-built fortification where people cannot see us? This decision prevents us from living a vibrant life where we are free to lead authentically and live authentically.

As we allow our barricade to fall away, we can step forward and engage freely with others. Finally, our audience will be able to see and hear the real us.

### 3. Risk being visible

Sometimes we don't want people to know about our problems and struggles. However, when we reveal what is happening in our lives, others often feel closer to us. Whether we're involved in a private conversation or standing in front of an audience, when we show our personal vulnerability, others relax and become more honest and real with us.

### 4. Tear up your false resume

God designed us beautifully, so don't cover up what God wants others to see. As we let our true personality shine, we'll be amazed at the opportunities that come our way.

We need to let go of our fear of revealing our inner self. Then we can create a true resume and say yes to new experiences that will expand our world.

### 5. Aim for progress, not perfection

We don't have to waste time and energy creating a perfect presentation. Rather, we can intentionally choose to do our best. As we give up our unattainable goal of perfection, we will experience new confidence in speaking, writing, teaching, or taking charge of a campaign or project we would never have said yes to before. Celebrate the progress in each endeavor.

It's not unusual to want to cover up what you think others won't accept in you. However, this Bible verse explains how God views you. He commissioned the prophet Samuel to choose a king, and these were His instructions:

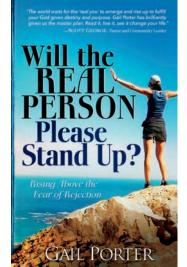
"Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7 NLT)

God wants you to let other people see your heart. You will see changes when you live an authentic life and lead others with authenticity.

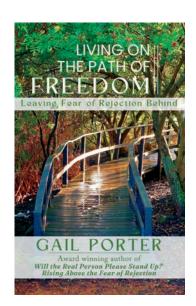
When you remove your defenses, you have an opportunity to become 100% authentic. Ask God to show you His path of freedom where you can become your real self. ●

Gail Porter, author and international speaker, served for 50 years with the Cru ministry both in the States and abroad.

# Want to be free Of fear of rejection?



WILL THE REAL PERSON PLEASE STAND UP?
RISING ABOVE THE FEAR OF REJECTION
TAKES YOU TO THE EDGE OF GOD'S PATH OF FREEDOM.



LIVING ON THE PATH OF FREEDOM SHOWS YOU THE KIND OF LIFE THAT'S POSSIBLE WHEN YOU LET GO OF YOUR

FEAR AND WALK ON GOD'S PATH.

READ GAIL'S PERSONAL STORY AND THE HEARTBREAKING, YET REDEMPTIVE, STORIES OF TEN OTHERS WHO LIVED IN DARKNESS BUT NOW LIVE FREELY THE WAY GOD INTENDED.



In a recent meeting, Adam's fellow elders decided to reexamine Scriptures often cited to limit women in the church and home.

So he gifted each of them with a copy of On Purpose: Understanding Freedom for Women through Scripture, to offer them a fresh perspective on the passages in question.

A few weeks later, one elder expressed his appreciation for the book. "God's freedom for women is so obvious to me now," he told Adam. "I don't know how we missed it all these years."

What made the difference? Careful consideration of each passage's context.

Most believers agree that the Bible is the Word of God, divinely inspired, accurate, and powerful. Yet even the greatest Bible scholars hold differing opinions as to what certain passages mean. How is that possible?

While the Bible is God's Word, human interpretation is not. We all have factors that can affect our understanding. Among others, there are the basic beliefs we were taught from an early age, be they right or wrong. These become a lens through which any additional knowledge is gained. Our experiences chime in as well.

So while Scripture is God's Word, human interpretation of it is open to error.

The chance of a mistaken interpretation is exponentially larger when we've already decided what we think before studying the text. Another common mistake is to neglect the context. A verse or set of verses was not written to stand alone. I always ask my Bible students: Why is this verse in there? How is it a part of the whole?

A great example of the importance of context is 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. "The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church" (NASB).

A look at the rest of 1 Corinthians 14 provides much-needed background information.

- Meetings at the church in Corinth were very different from ours today. Paul described them: "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. All things are to be done for edification" (1 Corinthians 14:26 NASB). He then addresses three specific groups that came prepared for the meetings: those speaking in tongues, those prophesying, and women asking questions.
- All three groups had become a distraction to worship. They were so busy hogging the attention, they were keeping others from participating. So Paul urged each group to be silent (Greek: *sigao*). He told the tongue speakers (both men and women) to be silent (14:28), the prophets (both men and women) to be silent (14:30), and the women asking questions to be silent (14:34).
- The problem was they were edifying themselves at the expense of all the others. Their spiritual gifts were specifically given to build up the church and not themselves (1 Corinthians 12:7).

As a young girl, I was told 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 was a rule: women must be silent in all church meetings. Only men had a voice, even in business meetings and prayer gatherings. It was a classic case of taking verses out of context, resulting in a misapplication of the writer's original intent.

It's time to take a second look at those passages. Because if we are unnecessarily limiting half the church in how they use their spiritual gifts, we are requiring the church to walk on one leg when we were given two.

Literary, cultural, and historical contexts can help us come to more accurate interpretations.  $\odot$ 

Julie Zine Coleman is a conference and retreat speaker with an M.A. in biblical studies. Her new book, On Purpose: Understanding God's Freedom for Women through Scripture (Kregel Publications, 2022) was awarded the 2022 Golden Scrolls Book of the Year. She is the managing editor for Arise Daily Devotionals (for the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association) and a member of the pastoral team at New Hope Chapel in Annapolis, Maryland.



"Laura, my spouse and I just came from a counseling session with our pastor.

He's a great pastor. However, the advice he gave us contradicts what I'm reading in Christian stepfamily resources. I'm confused."

As an adult child of divorced parents, and a stepmom of 37 years, I understand. And my heart grieves because the number of stepfamilies has increased substantially.

I'm sure this pastor has admirable intentions. He just doesn't know—what he doesn't know.

Most church leaders haven't experienced a divorce or remarriage. Plus, the subject of divorce in the Church requires an impeccable balance of compassionate truth and holy grace. When considering those multifaceted factors, it's understandable that a pastor might struggle to guide and advise stepfamilies.

The following insights will help the Church understand the vast difference between a first-time marriage and a stepfamily.

Stepfamilies are birthed on loss. A death, divorce, or breakup of the biological family dwells beneath the newly formed family. It's a fresh start for the couple. Extended family and the kids often have a different lens.

The adults, teens, and children are carrying a load of grief, anger, confusion, and fear that isn't present in a first marriage.

Very few couples properly prepare for merging the two families. Traditional premarriage resources do not contain the crucial instructions and topics necessary for a remarriage. The complexities of a blended family are unique.

Kids, at any age, are devastated by the loss of their biological family. This is a painful truth for parents to embrace. To the child, young or old, the remarriage of a parent is often viewed as the final nail in the coffin of the biological family.

The parenting dynamic is drastically different. For the first few years, it's advisable for the biological parent to remain the primary disciplinarian. The stepparent comes alongside him/her as a support. The child already has two parents who have established guidelines with and for their child.

Before the couple can move onto traditional marriage subjects, they must tackle co-parenting with another home, a spouse who is parenting from a place of guilt, kids living with two radically different sets of rules, and stepsiblings, as well as visitation schedules, financial commitments to the other home, future court appearances, and much more. None of these disputes are present in a first marriage. And yet they are the key reasons a second marriage fails.

Stepfamilies try to hide in the church. The shame and stigma of a second marriage or blended family often keep the stepfamily in silence. They pretend they are a biological family until that dreaded moment when someone says, "Your mom brought the cookies today; isn't that nice?" and her stepson screams, "She's NOT my mother."

### What Can a Church Do?

- Say the words "stepfamily" or "blended family." If the leadership, particularly the senior pastor, includes stepfamilies in his messages or teachings, it conveys a sense of belonging for those in the congregation.
- Utilize a remarried couple from your congregation when promoting a ministry, mission trip, or seminar. This communicates to other stepfamilies that God hasn't rejected them.
- Have a separate premarriage class for those who are getting remarried or bringing kids. It needs to be strategically designed to concentrate on circumstances which are not present in a first marriage but are commonplace in a second. Traditional resources do not address these imperative issues.
- Hire someone to educate and help launch a stepfamily ministry. Passionate and mature stepfamilies who have a history of overcoming the storms make the best leaders in this area.

Church Leader or Pastor: Stepfamilies are an untapped mission field. The stepfamilies in the Bible are an excellent way to reach the stepfamilies in your backyard. God's Word is jam-packed with examples of how much God loves stepfamilies. It's filled with the hope, forgiveness, strength, wisdom, and redemption He longs to give them and that they desperately need. 

•

Laura Petherbridge is a speaker, life coach, and author of The Smart Stepmom, and 101 Tips for the Smart Stepmom.

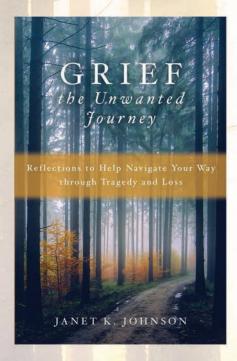
Finding JOY in the Mourning.



lavigating life's difficult moments

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HE promised

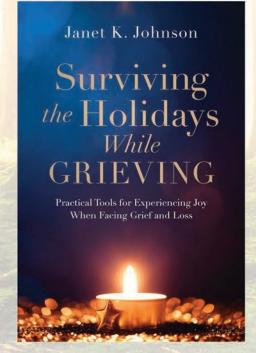


Surviving the Holidays While Grieving: **Practical Tools for Experiencing** Joy When Facing Grief and Loss

While recognizing the holidays are difficult after a loss, this book, written for families, singles, adults, and children, encorporates ideas, scripture, and hands-on ways to honor and celebrate the loved one no longer present.

Grief the Unwanted Journey: Reflections to Help Navigate Your Way through Tragedy and Loss

Grief and loss are a part of life but getting through them is often difficult. This devotional that helps readers navigate the different stages of grief, focus on God's presence, and find joy on the journey.











Life's disappointments, delays, and detours can leave you feeling as though what God promised you will never come to pass.

You've seen the visions and dreamed the dreams, however you're still waiting. Or unexpected circumstances and devastations are keeping you stuck, causing you to question whether you heard God correctly.

Perhaps you heard God correctly but everything He promised is waiting for you to act. You must do what God expects of you before His blessings will appear. To live the life planned for you, a God shift is required.

A God shift is the moment you ditch disruption or delay, collide with God's purpose, and move into a greater destiny. God uses waiting and challenging circumstances to get your attention and invite you into greater possibility. How you respond to His invitation determines how long you wait to get your blessings.

Some blessings are time sensitive and there is nothing you can do to speed up getting them into your hands. But what if much of what Heaven has for you has not become a reality because you are not doing your part? It has been said, "We cannot do it without God, and God will not do it without us."

The meaning behind this saying is you have a role in God's will for your life. You can pray for a job and God can open the door of opportunity for a great position, but it is your responsibility to go to interviews. God can declare this is your year for marriage, but you must go on dates or marriage will not happen for you.

What is required of you during your God shift to get God's blessings faster? The most powerful weapon you have as a child of God is your mouth, but most of us use our mouths against us and not for us.

One of the primary blocks delaying you from destiny is

that Is your speech is out of alignment with what you are believing for and what God has promised you.

You will begin to unlock Heaven if you are more careful about the words you allow to slip from your lips. It is impossible to believe for financial increase and experience more money while speaking words of lack or complaining about inflation. It is impossible to believe for a spouse and find the relationship of your dreams while declaring that no one is looking for real love.

Scripture tells us in Romans 4:17 that God "calls those things which do not exist as though they did." For us, it is highly more effective to say, "I have more than enough" and "Love is all around me and my divine spouse is headed to me now." Speaking in alignment requires you to develop a new habit.

If you find yourself speaking contrary to what you're praying for, immediately confess that you do not agree with what you spoke and replace the previous declaration with one that proclaims what you desire.

Another behavior sabotaging your destiny is you making an idol out of clarity and confirmation. Obedience is needed over clarity or confirmation. When God instructs you to take a step and you continue to look for more clarity and confirmation, it is an indication you are full of doubt.

Doubt and destiny are polar opposites so begin to see opportunities as confirmation that God has answered your prayers. Then research what the task requires so you can get in action, rather than seeking additional clarity and confirmation.

Esther did not have clarity when she went before the king who could literally chop her head off, but she was obedient to the demand.

Once you begin to do your part you will have more, be more, and do more.  $\odot$ 

Shayna Rattler, founder of A God Shift Movement, is a minister, speaker, author, podcaster, and TV show host. For more tips to shift successfully into your destiny, download the FREE guide When God Says Shift at www.GodSaysShift.com.

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