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LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD

FOUNDER & CEO OF AWSA





"One of the best investments I made in my speaking and writing ministry was membership in AWSA.

I connected with fellow Christian women authors and speakers. These sisters have contributed to my books and recommended me for speaking engagements. Most of all, I made lifetime friends who continue to inspire me. "

Carol Kent

Founder and Executive Director of SpeakUpConference.com Speaker and Author of Speak Up with Confidence 1990—AWSA Founding Member









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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
ASSOCIATION



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A Place to Belong

Hove to create spaces of belonging, places of Feeling as though you don't belong is love and friendship, especially in my ministry

life. So, it was with great disappointment when I realized the large fellowship I'd attended for several years did not know, want, or need me. The people I sat with every Sunday didn't know my name, and if I tried to greet them when the service ended, they'd disappear as soon as the lights came up.

Once a lady asked me if I was new, and I replied that I'd attended that church for over ten years. She'd never seen me before, and I never saw her again.

This is a belonging-gap which can be a challenge for the megachurch. The worship and the preaching are great. You love the people of the church because you know Jesus, even though you don't know the people of the church.

I know not every megachurch has this problem and that community can be found if you are willing to volunteer or join small groups. My ministry schedule made it impossible to attend weekday small group meetings, so I decided to try volunteering at the church on Sundays. But as soon as I applied, the leadership told me they didn't need me.

It's hard to be unknown and unneeded.

My hubby and I finally began to visit other churches, and one day I walked into a little church where people loved the Lord and wanted to know my name. The next time I visited, the people remembered my name and were so glad to see me as we worshipped the Lord together. One dear lady even remembered me from a workplace we'd shared forty years earlier. I loved it, the feeling that I was known, loved, and that I did belong to a local body of Christ. How beautiful.

difficult, lonely, and unnecessary.

If you feel you've boarded the 'don't belong' ship in your worship community, keep praying that God will either show you how to make a difference where you are or lead you where you can make a difference.

But being with us in our Leading Hearts community is a good start. My editorial team and writing friends are here to love you and encourage you, and we hope that you will in turn encourage others by sharing this free magazine resource with your community.

We hope you'll join our Facebook page, our mailing list, and monthly FaceBook lives, and whenever we host our Arise Esther Evenings on Zoom, where we can meet you and pray with you. In fact, I'd love to invite you to hear my message for last month's Arise Esther meeting, click here to watch.

We want to encourage you to create spaces where others can belong, whether at work, home, church, or community.

You are a leader, and you can step up and step out and welcome those whom God has put into your life.

Enjoy this issue, which brings belonging, love, and service. We are glad you are here. ●

Love.

LEADING HEARTS PUBLISHER | AWSA, FOUNDER

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Auld Lang Syne for the Soul

I can hardly believe 2024 is just a few weeks away. As the year draws to a close, I tend to fixate more on goals left unfinished, problems unresolved, and regrets still

lingering. It's naturally easier to dwell on the "if onlys ..." rather than celebrate the progress made.

Yet the familiar "Auld Lang Syne" lyrics of the New Year resound: "Remember the good times ... forget what's behind."

The song echoes both nostalgia and reluctance as we reflect on "old times" now gone while still pining for the "good old days." It's tempting to mentally box up the past year's bright moments as "gone forever" while dragging painful regrets like overpacked luggage into the year ahead.

However, Paul sets up the best approach we can take to the New Year in Scripture: "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I PRESS ON ..." (Philippians 3:13–14).

So, maybe it's time to lay it on the table. What would it look like to fully embrace the last twelve months instead—both wins and losses—carrying forward only wisdom gained and letting the rest slip into memory? Perhaps take some time to think about how implementing this concept would affect what you focus your brain on tomorrow.

As C.S. Lewis wrote, "There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind."

The comfort of Christ can overcome regret's relentless soul-wearying gravity if we practice intentionally releasing it into His care.

That's why I have chosen "Ease" as my guiding word entering 2024, and I'm praying for the same peace for you. True ease won't happen if I cling to past regrets or overextend my control. But amid rapid changes, I can pause and breathe in Philippians 4:8's familiar invitation to "Think on these things."

Let's reflect on the true, honest, just, pure, lovely glimpses of grace refining our path, not just for nostalgia but because Christ meets us there, arms open wide in every moment, ready to lighten our load.

James 1:17 assures us, "Every good gift is from above." So as you read this issue of *Leading Hearts*, may you recall 2023's good gifts that refined you, and leave any heavy stones behind so you can enter 2024 with open hands to receive fresh blessings in the year ahead. ●

LEADING HEARTS EDITOR | ART DIRECTOR

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

to the expectant heart

karen porter & cherry mcgregor | makeyourheartamanger.com



The Christmas story
might be the most oft
told story of all time. Make
Your Heart a Manger is a new
Christmas book written by Karen
Porter and Cherry McGregor, a
mother-daughter duo from Texas.

The story of Christmas is so familiar we might overlook the new heart available from

a powerful Creator who became a babe in a manger

The Broken Heart

Elizabeth's (Luke 1) heart was broken in a way only a childless woman can understand. Thousands of women who have never conceived or have miscarried or aborted children, know the misery she felt.

Cherry's Story

I (Cherry) walked into my doctor's office. I was 16 weeks pregnant—my first. My husband and I waited in the room for the doctor, eager to hear the rapid thuds on the monitor. Seconds passed. Minutes. I saw the doctor's brows furrow.

Silence. No heartbeat. The next evening, we walked to the hospital to deliver a lifeless baby boy. I left the hospital with empty arms.

The Expectant Heart

God wants to give us a miracle if we will open our broken hearts. God had something more amazing for Elizabeth than a house full of children. She would raise John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah. She taught him Scripture. She was the one—maybe the only one—who understood Mary. She encouraged Mary in a culture quick to condemn.

Just when Elizabeth felt life was worthless, God showed up with great plans for her.

God had a different plan for me. A year later, I was pregnant again. I was filled with immense joy and intense fear until I hald my baby in my arms. For many, miscarriages and failed pregnancies open their hearts to a different type of miracle—adoption. Wonderful children needing exactly the right family. God's perfect purpose and His perfect plan.

What about you?

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV).

Exploring Your Heart.

If your heart is broken and your dreams are crushed, wait on Him with an expectant heart, trusting He has a hope and future for you as well. But caution, waiting is difficult.

In 2 Chronicles 20:12, Jehoshaphat declared, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (NIV).

Tracing His Hand

You may be tempted to give up hope. Instead, trace His hand. Throughout the Psalms, David traced the hand of God

"I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds" (Psalm 77:11-12 NIV).

"Yes, I will bless the Lord and not forget the glorious things he does for me" (Psalm 103:2 TLB).

What has God done in your life in the past? What has He done long ago, last year, last month, last week? Take a moment to trace the hand of God in your life.

Christmas Miracle

For many, the Christmas season is exciting and wonderful. But perhaps you don't feel like celebrating the holidays. If so, take a moment to reflect on the greatest miracle of Christmas. God himself came as a baby because He loves you. Oh, how he loves you.

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalms 34:18 NIV). •

Adapted from Make Your Heart a Manger, by Karen Porter and Cherry McGregor, Bold Vision Books. www.makeyourheartamanger.com.





Michele Chynoweth—

TRAGEDY, TENACITY,

with Karin Beery LH Contributor

They say that God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called, and sometimes He qualifies us before we even suspect He'll

Call US. That was the case for Michele Chynoweth, who didn't realize her life was preparation for the calling God had planned for her.

Living the Journalism Dream

When Michele graduated from the University of Notre Dame, she wanted to be the next Barbara Walters. She earned a degree in journalism, then queried dozens of newspapers before landing her first gig as the first female reporter to cover the police and court beat in Bel Air, Maryland. From there, she climbed the journalism ladder to a small daily paper, then a large daily paper before switching to television, where she was an on-air reporter for a local station.

Michele was on the path toward becoming her hero, but something was missing. Journalism lacked a creative outlet, so she shifted into advertising, becoming a senior copywriter for a Delaware ad agency before starting her own firm. She ran her business for twenty years before Someone changed her course.

The Call to Write

"I dreamed of being an author when I was ten," she said. Though she put the dream on hold to start a career, it never died. "Toward the end of my time running the agency, I felt compelled to finally write my first book."

With a husband and three kids at home, plus her business to run, writing that first book wasn't easy, but she did it, and she did it well—her manuscript took first place in the drama category for the Maryland Writers Association fiction contest. The prize: representation with a literary agency. "I thought it

would be the next great American novel," Michele admitted.

But then 9/11 happened. The turmoil of terrorist attacks surrounding the agency made her lose the prize. "I was devastated," she said. "They didn't have self-publishing back then, so I queried several agents, but nothing came of it."

Purpose Born in the Fire

While her dream of publishing faded, her marriage began to crumble. She soon found herself battling for custody of her kids amid a divorce, and when the recession hit, she lost her ad agency. Broken and alone, she plummeted toward the bottom as she struggled with the disease of alcoholism.

But despite her losses and hurts, God wouldn't let go. One day while driving through a small Maryland town, she saw a neon sign: Used Books and Bibles. "I heard a still small voice telling me to write a modern-day novel based on the Book of Job," she said. And though the idea of writing appealed to her, the topic didn't.

"All I wanted was to be a rich and famous author," she admitted. "Biblical fiction wasn't what I wanted to write, but that voice wouldn't let go. I now look back and know it was God calling me."

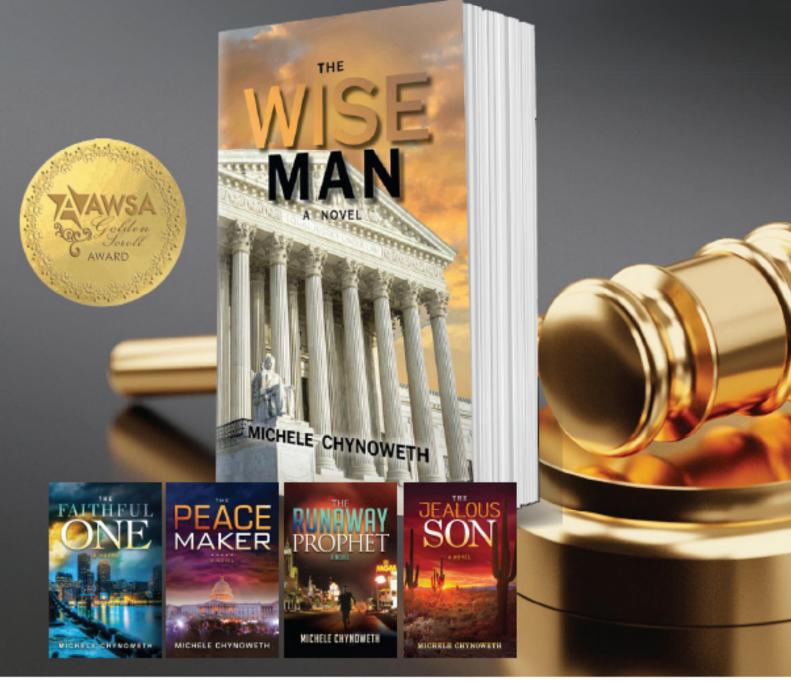
Begrudgingly, she started researching Job and writing while working to stay sober. She also met a wonderful Christian man, remarried, and added two bonus children to her family. Meanwhile, she took a marketing director job to help her

continued on p. 13



FROM AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, SPEAKER & BOOK COACH MICHELE CHYNOWETH

"Riveting... Ripped from the headlines." —Kirk Cameron, Actor







continued from p. 11

husband raise their blended family of five. Eight years after she started, she finished her first modern-day suspense novel, *The Faithful One*. She couldn't ignore the similarities between her life and Job's.

"I got everything back and then some, just like Job," she said. "God called me to write that story to get me through all that and help others through similar circumstances."

Writing into Your Healing Process

Michele's next book, *The Peace Maker*, a retelling of David and Abigail, surprised her. Someone recommended the idea, to which she responded—who's Abigail? "I was never a big Bible reader until then," she said. "I still hadn't read the Bible through." But as she researched, she saw another connection. "Abigail was originally married to a domineering, abusive, heavy drinker. I could relate."

While writing that story, a Christian publisher approached her about creating a line of reimagined Bible stories. "They asked if I would like to write that, and I already was!"

Michele discovered she enjoyed writing contemporary biblical suspense novels, and people enjoyed reading them. Churches and women's groups invited her to speak, so she joined Toastmasters to improve her speaking skills. She was



(above) Sitting on the set of Kirk Cameron's 'Living Room Reset' tour in Delaware with the actor and her husband, Bill Chynoweth.



(above) Michele walking the red carpet as a guest at the International Christian Film Festival where she pitched her books to TV and movie producers.

invited to speak at larger events and conferences as she published more books and won awards. After a college in Maryland asked her to guest teach a class, she saw a new path for her life. She quit her marketing job and moved full-time into writing, speaking, and coaching.

"Writing *The Runaway Prophet* 'sealed the deal' for me," Michele said when asked about switching careers. The retelling of Jonah's story shares a powerful message: God often rescues you in the process when you try to rescue others. "God heals me each time I write a novel so I can help heal others."

Helping Others Follow God's Call

With God's guidance and grace, Michele has finally achieved her dream. She also tries to pass on what she's learned—that God qualifies writers He calls—to her editing/coaching clients and online "Your Book Done Right" Master Class students.

While some people may look at her past and see obstacles that slowed her down, Michele sees how God has used everything in her life for good and for His glory.

Michele Chynoweth is the bestselling author of several award-winning contemporary suspense novels that re-imagine Old Testament stories from the Bible in an edgy, modern-day way. She loves helping writers become authors and is a sought-after conference speaker, professional editor, book coach, and founder of "Your Book Done Right" Master Class and Elite Coaching. A former news reporter, college writing instructor, and ad agency owner, she is also a proud member of AWSA and lives with her husband in North East, Maryland. ®





Healthy decisions bring a healthy life, but getting to these healthy decisions can feel as elusive as trying to capture a beautiful fluttering butterfly.

According to the *Journal of Marriage and Family* in 2012, poor communication was reported as the number one reason for marital dissatisfaction by 65% of surveyed couples.

For years in our marriage, Bill would think we were making a decision, only to have me bring up the subject again but with more options and suggestions. On occasion, I would think a decision was made, yet, perhaps, Bill failed to act on that decision. Finally, one day, my wise husband said, "Can we end our discussions with "Okay, is this a decision or still a discussion?" By adding this simple ending question, a lot of misunderstanding is solved, and we both feel heard and valued.

In our Marriage Meet Ups: A Planner for Couples Who Want More Passion, Purpose, and Productivity we help couples make wise decisions TOGETHER. Solid decision-making can be rigorous, and it can take time to discuss and dialogue (but poor decision-making takes A LOT MORE time in overcoming errors and having to backtrack!)

In our book 10 Best Decisions a Couple Can Make, Bill compares good decision-making to a wise carpenter. Bill built one of our homes and remodeled all the others and there is an important rule in carpentry: "Measure twice, cut once." This is just a reminder that it is WORTH IT to take time to process a good, solid, healthy decision.

So Worth It!

Here are a few verses along with a little science that we hope will motivate you to take the time to process your decision-making. When we make choices rooted in faith and seek God's guidance, we can experience God's favor over us and will likely see a progression toward a healthier and more fulfilling life.

1. Healthy Decisions Aid in Physical Well Being

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."—Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

Reduced stress levels research has shown that individuals who are decisive tend to experience lower levels of stress. A study published in the journal *Psychological Science* in 2013 found that people who struggled with making decisions had higher levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, in their bodies. Chronic stress can have a detrimental impact on physical health, including increased risk of cardiovascular disease,

weakened immune function, digestive problems—and weight gain! Amid life's uncertainties, trusting in the Lord and making decisions with confidence can help reduce the detrimental chronic stress associated with decision-making.

2. Healthy Decisions Strengthen Our Mental Wellness

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies."—1 Corinthians 6:19–20 NIV

Enhanced mental health of being decisive is often associated with increased self-confidence and self-esteem. According to a study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* in 2009, people who are decisive tend to experience greater life satisfaction and overall well-being. Improved mental health can positively affect us by reducing the risk of depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders. When we honor our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and make choices that reflect this, it contributes to overall well-being.

3. Healthy Decisions Help with Greater Productivity

"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil." —Ephesians 5:15-16 NIV

Improved time management, when grounded in wisdom and faith, helps us make the most of every opportunity, thus granting us the ability to be swift in making healthier choices. In short, decisive individuals tend to be better at managing their time.

When you can make solid BIBLICALLY-BASED decisions, you're less likely to waste time stewing over choices and good decisions lower the negative fallout—which can also become time consuming! Effective time management also creates a better work-life balance.

God Wants to Help You with Decisions

"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." —James 1:5 NIV

The overall key to healthy decisions as a couple is to invite God into the choice, dialogue options, then once in agreement, clearly state who is responsible for any next steps of that decision. We have created a simple decision-making tool "Decide, Do, Delight!" to aid you in your decision-making as a couple (available at Love-wise.com).

"By wisdom a house is built and through understanding it is established; Through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures." —Proverbs 24:3-4 NIV ●



are designed to bring you the hope and encouragement of biblical truth written within the context of real life.

Asse each morning to words that will refresh your soul as you see God reveal pictures of His love for you.





Q: How can I improve my life in the new year?

The beginning of the year provides a wonderful opportunity for us to consider

Who we are. What kind of legacy are you leaving? What will people say about you at the end of your life?

The Apostle Paul looked back over his life and said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:7-8 ESV). He lived an excellent life just like we long to do.

Let's ask a few questions to pinpoint important topics.

First, how is your relationship with God?

Jesus told his disciples, "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14 ESV). What a privilege to call yourself a friend of your creator.

Unfortunately, I thrive on ticking things off my to-do list. I can get so busy I push aside worship, study, and prayer. During 2024, I want to "... pray without ceasing ..." and feel closer to my Father.

Let the Spirit point out what you can improve.

Second, are you using your gifts? Ephesians 2:10 says God created us "... for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (ESV). How exciting that God has a special job for each of us, and the world needs what we can offer.

As Paul's life ended, he wrote his protégé, Timothy, "... I

remind you to fan into flame the gift of God" (2 Timothy 1:6 ESV). What great advice. Perhaps you need to take a few classes to improve your gift or maybe you need to discover where God wants you to serve next.

Spend time in prayer and ask the Lord for guidance.

Third, are you using time wisely?

King Solomon wrote "... teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12 ESV). What a lesson! How can you balance work and rest while following Jesus? In I Corinthians, Paul wrote, "... look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18 ESV). Invest time in eternal things! I try to set realistic goals and limit the hours I scroll through trivial videos on my phone. Pray about how you can improve.

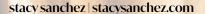
Fourth, how healthy are your relationships?

Romans 12:18 says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all (ESV).

That's a huge assignment and one that requires your heart to be at peace. Maybe you should ask God to help you release an offense or seek counsel. I want to work less and set aside time to renew old friendships.

How is God leading you?

In summary, as we approach 2024, evaluate your relationships and how you use your time and gifts. With God's assistance, you can leave an amazing legacy.





I was a "good Christian girl," and now I was pregnant. Instead of gossiping and shaming me, my church loved me ...

Hope Ashley will be her name!" I decided then and there as the ultrasound tech wiped the gel from my pregnant belly. It was a girl, or so she informed me. Despite the technician's confident proclamation, she was wrong. And, it would turn out, I was wrong in harboring fears about this unexpected child. I would come to learn that there would also be unexpected blessings.

This story doesn't solely revolve around the gender mix-up as much as it offers my testimony of resilience, faith, and the transformative power of the church community, for me and other teens facing unplanned pregnancies. Without Christ and His people, this story may have ended much differently. Four months earlier, I sat alone in a doctor's office, waiting to hear the results of my pregnancy test. As the doctor entered the exam room, I could see the answer on his face. Emotionless, he confirmed what I feared, "You're pregnant."

The doctor announced his prescription. "Don't make this into a bigger problem. Get an abortion and get on with your life. Schedule it at the front desk."

Across my chart, he scribbled in large red letters: ABORTION and exited the room. Alone, I hung my head.

At 19, I was nowhere near ready to become a mother. A recent high school graduate, I lived with my parents. I couldn't support a baby. Although my boyfriend and I had planned to marry someday, those dreams disappeared when he walked out the door, leaving me to sort this out alone.

As a "good Christian girl" from a respected family, the shame

felt insurmountable. I wrestled with the fear of societal judgment and the weight of my family's reputation in our church.

During a moment of despair, I sat on the edge of the bed sobbing. If I had the abortion, no one would ever have to know, I reasoned. I could go on with my life free of embarrassment. That was tempting. But I would know—God would know. Lord! I don't want to have an abortion! What have I done? Forgive me, but I don't know what else to do. I'm desperate.

Suddenly, I was overcome by a profound sense of presence that surrounded and embraced me. It brought indescribable comfort. Although no one was physically in the room, Jesus was there. I was not alone.

"I will choose hope," I whispered, determined to navigate this unexpected journey with faith as my compass. "Please, God, bring hope from these ashes."

My story is all too familiar. Many other young women have found themselves in the same demoralizing situation. Statistics reveal that 14% of girls will give birth in the U.S. before the age of eighteen. Although there's been a commendable 73% reduction in teen birth rates since its high point in 1991, the issue persists.

Teen pregnancy rates have dropped for various reasons, but the United States is still nine times higher than other Western industrial countries.

Our churches play a pivotal role in addressing the challenges teen parents face.

Here are five easy and intentional actions a church can take to truly support teens coping with unplanned pregnancy.

1. Be Proactive

Initiate open dialogues with teens about sensitive topics, including sex. They have questions. Sex is all around them: at school, on television, and social media. It's not enough to tell them not to have premarital sex because the Bible says so. There are many others with louder voices telling them why it's okay. Teens want to talk about issues. They want to discuss the reasons for God's instruction. Help them make healthy decisions based on biblical principles.

2. Give Teens a Purpose

Teenagers are essential members of God's family and need compassion, love, inspiration, and acceptance. Foster a sense of belonging and purpose within the church community. Establish platforms for youth voices to be heard and acted upon. With the guidance of a godly person, start a youth council. Let the young people tell the congregation what

issues are important to them. Then, provide the biblical tools and opportunity to address the issues. Studies show that when a teen feels valued, suicide and pregnancy rates drop.

3. Come Alongside

Replace judgment with compassion. Trust me. You cannot judge an unwed, pregnant teen more than she's judged herself. Many teen moms walk away from the church to avoid the stigma of being a "sinner" and don't want to be the focus of gossip. Young mothers need understanding and support, not condemnation. Let's not forget the father. Teen fathers are often overlooked. He will need as much compassion as the mother. Find a godly man to walk with him and teach him how to become the man God intended him to be.

4. Pledge Support & Stick With Them

Both teen parents will need support. Provide mentorship from spiritually mature individuals. Offer guidance and love without preaching. Let them know they are deeply loved by God and by the church.

A teen parent has many needs, financial, physical, and emotional. Demonstrate the love of Jesus tangibly.

Find volunteers to drive them to doctor's appointments. Many teen parents don't graduate high school. Help with homework. Babysit so they can study. Assist with any paperwork. Offer childcare during youth group. Sometimes, older women in the church are looking for opportunities to volunteer. Connect them with the new parents. It's a win-win.

5. Support the Grandparents

Minister to the parents of the pregnant teen. They will need judgment-free support. They've been blind-sided. An unexpected responsibility has been placed on their shoulders. Find a spiritually mature couple to walk alongside them.

Fortunately, my family offered unwavering support, guiding me into motherhood. Initially a source of concern, the church community became a pillar of strength. They were "Jesus with skin on" for me.

They made it their mission to love me, which helped me love myself again. The congregation showered me with support, hosted numerous baby showers, and welcomed my son into the family of God.

My story is a testament to the power of hope, community support, and the transformative influence of a church willing to embrace and uplift those in need. It's a reminder that amidst struggles, there's always room for redemption and joy, ultimately leading to a life filled with unexpected blessings.

When crisis strikes, does God truly care?

In the re-release of the awardwinning bestseller, Praying Through Hard Times, Linda Evans Shepherd compassionately shows how to see God amid tragedy, offering practical strategies to survive hurt, release worries through prayer, and rediscover hope. She reveals how tough times can draw you closer to God.

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What to Pray When a Loved One Won't Believe

linda evans shepherd | lindashepherd.com

What would you be willing to do to see a loved one follow Jesus with their whole heart?

Wouldn't that be a relief to know they've connected to the power of God's love and forgiveness?

But what if this same individual was sitting at your table or at the other end of a phone call, arguing with you and mocking you for your faith, while pushing all your buttons until your cheeks flamed and your voice rose in anger?

You might be tempted to tell your so-called "loved" one what you really think, even though your words would only serve to push this "dear heart" even further from the truth of God's love.

And that's the dilemma: If only your loved one would cooperate to hear and believe the good news—the news that Jesus died for their sins and rose from the dead, so that they could surrender their lives to Him.

This miracle would help them experience not only salvation, but the love of God, the peace that passes understanding, and the joy of the Lord!

If only they weren't so stubborn!

Stepping Back in Love

When I was a college kid, my friend Carla was exasperated with her fiancé. She told me privately,

"He just won't get 'born again,' so all we do is fight about it. I told him I love him but I won't marry him until he gets 'saved." "Maybe," I told her, "the problem is that Bob doesn't want to lose the argument. He doesn't want to bow to your will because he wants to figure out his relationship with God for himself, not because you told him to."

"What should I do?"

"Tell Bob you're sorry you interfered with his decision. Explain that his relationship with God is between himself and God, not between himself and you. Tell him you will pray for him, but you will no longer argue with him."

Later, that night Carla said those very words to Bob in a phone call. When they hung up, Bob felt free to think about what he wanted to do with the God question hanging over his life.

That very night, Bob decided to give his whole life to Jesus. He later said,

"That's what I wanted to do the whole time. I always wanted Jesus. I just didn't want to be forced into it without it being my own decision."

Maybe the key to winning the argument of faith is to step back in love, allowing your loved one to have the freedom to discover God's love for herself, without losing the argument.

Let's pray ...

Dear Lord,

I pray for my loved ones who do not know You. I will share the truth in love, but I will yield to You all arguments that pit my will against my loved one's will. You are the author of salvation, and I can trust You to bring my loved one to yourself. Show me how to speak the truth in peace, and may Your love transform my loved one's heart. In Jesus' name, amen.

•



Natalie Layne grew up in a musical family in Colorado Springs, with parents and grandparents who were musicians and worship leaders.

The Belmont University graduate has gained millions of views on Instagram and TikTok with her soulful songs, including "Love Me Back to Life." Her independent releases led to worldwide attention, opening for CCM greats like Jeremy Camp, Chris Tomlin, and We the Kingdom, as well as a recent record deal with Centricity Music.

Early Musical Roots

Natalie comes from a musically-talented family. Her mom leads worship; dad plays bass and trombone; and her grandmother was her first piano teacher. "I just remember music being such a consistent thing in my life. Even after high school, I started leading worship at church, and then ended up coming to college in Nashville."

Growing up in the church blessed her with the musical influences of her family and mentors at New Life Church in Colorado Springs. "In high school, they had me leading worship with the team and learning from really amazing worship pastors like Cory Asbury and Jon Egan. These pastors took me under their wing, and I got to learn from them.

So, I pin them as early inspirations that I still carry with me," she said. "My influence comes from a little bit of everywhere, but I think that's why it's unique because it draws from a lot of different areas. So many inspirations, and it's continuing to grow as I meet great people in Nashville."

Pursuing Dreams

After earning music degrees from Belmont University, Natalie has gained millions of fans online and recently signed with Centricity Music. She has already collaborated with inspirations like Rita Springer and Bernie Herms.

"We have a lot of songs that are kind of different. There's something for everybody."

As a resident of Music City for six years, Natalie has earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in piano following the love of music that she's always known. "I remember always having a sense that I would be a musician. I was super little. I think I was probably three or four when my Grandma asked me if you could pick right now, what would you do for your job?

I thought about it for a second, and I said I think I would lead worship and write songs," Natalie remembers. "I think it's always been kind of ingrained in me."

Now as a Centricity artist, she has been blown away by God's goodness and the wonderful opportunities available at her door. Pandora recently brought Natalie and her team some early Christmas cheer as she was named as one of their 2024 Pandora Ten Artists to Watch. The artists are supported on Pandora's socials and platforms throughout the year. And, Sirius XM is currently featuring Natalie on one of its Times Square billboards in New York City. All of this promotion seems like divine timing as new fans will be able to enjoy streaming Natalie's new Amen (At The Piano) EP on December 15.

Natalie has also had the opportunity to make music with some of her dream collaborators. "We made a list of dream co-writes, people I could write songs with, and they like put all those people on my calendar. They just went after it. So highlights already have included people like Rita Springer," Natalie said.

"I grew up listening to her. She has such amazing songs that have inspired me." She has also worked with Bernie Herms, who is married to Natalie Grant. "He is just brilliant. Brilliant arrangements orchestrated so we just connected on that level because I love to arrange for instruments too."

"These are the people I grew up listening to and enjoyed when I just started my career, people who are still performing their music.

Now I get to work with them, and sometimes I get to open for them, and that's crazy and super fun."

continued on p. 24

continued from p. 23

Natalie wrote songs for eight months, five days a week before starting to record, and then released her Amen EP in late July.

"We're just so excited about what God's gonna do to the songs."

Encouraging Others in Their Wait

Seeing her dream come to reality, Natalie wants to encourage others who are still waiting for their dream, miracles, and breakthrough. "I think you know that God is working it out. God is working in His perfect timing, and working for the good. But it doesn't always feel like that in the middle of it. Or you just don't see the way that it can work out," she said.

"For me, it's really fun now on the other side of it. The last year was a huge year for me in terms of career stuff, finding a record deal, and life stuff in really putting my roots down in Nashville. It's so fun seeing the dreams coming to life and coming to fruition, and I think there's a new perspective on the other side of it.

Natalie realizes God could have done this years ago, but she trusts in God's timing and knows there was value in the waiting.

"God really does know what He's doing. And so, from the other side, I can say, I wouldn't have changed a minute of the waiting and I would have waited longer for it to be as good as it is right now."

She knows the wait is hard, but she wants to encourage people to keep going and keep worshipping like no one else is watching.

"I think that God really honors our faithfulness. Just keep going, and that's what He ultimately honors." •



Find out more about Natalie's new album at www.natalielayne.com

CHRISTMAS MOVIE EXCLUSIVE



(above) King Herod portrayed by Academy Award-Nominee Antonio Banderas.

jennifer taylor | entertainment contributor

The live-action Christmas musical "Journey to Bethlehem" stars music artists Moriah (Peters) and Joel Smallbone of For King & Country, Lecrae, and others.

Their musical gifts help bring fresh energy to the story of Jesus' birth.

Filling in the Gaps with Care & Creativity

While sticking to the biblical narrative, the film takes creative license to imagine untold details about Mary, Joseph and other characters. Breathing life into the margins brings a new perspective.

"When we read about Mary, I personally have always pictured her as being kind of a lone ranger. So I loved that Adam, our director, and Nikki, his wife, played with this idea of Mary being a middle sister," Moriah said.

"In the relationship of the marriage of Scripture and script, there is not a whole lot of Scripture to go off. We have a few Scriptures of Mary being a virgin and the appearance of Gabriel. We have to fill in the gaps anyway.



(above) Moriah (Peters) Smallbone (Deborah), Fiona Palomo (Mary) and Stephanie Gil (Rebekah)



(above) Gabriel portrayed by CCM artist Lecrae.

We've always done this with our church plays and felt characters. It's like our characters are breathing life into the margins of the Scriptures, and that is a high responsibility that we take very seriously."



(above) Joel Smallbone portrays Antipater

Joel & Moriah on the Art of Collaboration

Leading Hearts readers may remember that we featured Moriah in the magazine when she and Joel were newlyweds. Recently, the couple celebrated 10 years of marriage and this project is not their first together.

"Joel and I help one another test and approve each other's creations. There's nothing that has ever gone out publicly from either of us that has not been sifted through one another's hand," Moriah said.

"We both believe that equality starts in the home, and that it's the responsibility of husbands to lift up their wives and wives to lift up their husbands. So it's really special for us to be able to practice the art and act of vulnerability and humility, not just in our

(above) Mary, Mother of Jesus portrayed by Fiona Palomo.

home, but in the creative work that the world sees.

I think it's important to know that anything we do publicly is an overflow of what we do privately. And so if we're partnering on a film, if we're partnering on an album, it's because we partner under our own roof." Joel adds that the arts lead people to points of conversation and their director helped to steer us away from anything that felt sacreligious.

"We kept the key parts of Jesus coming to Earth, who Mary and Joseph were, Elizabeth and Zachariah, in their place, but that leaves us with the fun of painting in between the lines, which is what I love to do in the arts."

Movie-Inspired Bible Study Extras

With its PG rating and focus on the nativity story, "Journey to Bethlehem" promises to delight families this holiday season, but it has more to offer than just another Christmas Movie. A "Journey to Bethlehem" reading plan is available from YouVersion to help viewers explore the biblical Christmas story. Great for individual or group study. The movie release also aligns with Moriah Smallbone's recently released single, "You Mean the World" from a multi-artist album, "A New Heaven and a New Earth." Proceeds go to support Creation Care. Her song echoes the movie's uplifting tone.

Check your local theaters for showtimes. The movie is also available for rent or purchase at journeytobethlehem.com Click below to watch the movie trailer.





If the idea of hosting all your relatives and in-laws over the holidays already has you feeling maxed out, you're not alone.

I used to get totally overwhelmed trying to entertain big groups with ages ranging from 2 to 92. But over the years, I've collected some super fun traditions that bring all generations together.

My friend and I were just chatting about ideas to keep kids and adults happy (and off their devices!). Whether you'll have guests for a day or whole week, try adding in a few of these memorable activities...

1. Craft Ornaments for Lasting Memories

First, get those little fingers busy creating ornaments for your tree or their own mini kid tree. We have craft stations ready with supplies to design unique decorations. Seeing their homemade treasures dangling proudly always makes me smile. You can find ornament kits and materials at Dollar Tree and other craft stores for affordable prices.

2. D-I-Y Gingerbread Houses

Speaking of smiles, wait till you see their glee attacking gingerbread houses with loads of candy! We use graham crackers and sugary "cement" to assemble the houses, then let imaginations run wild.

3. Take in the Twinkling Lights Together

Bundling up for a Christmas lights tour and belting out carols remains a yearly highlight! We bring fresh-baked cookies (which you can also bake together) to munch while admiring over-the-top displays.

4. Put Away the Video Games, Pull Out the Board Games

Set up some festive board and card games that will have young and old gathered around the table competing together. Christmas Trivia, anyone? You add to the cheer with holiday versions of classics like Bingo, Charades, Uno and more.

5. Attend a Christmas Eve Service

Make attending a local Christmas Eve service part of your tradition. Christmas carols, dimmed lights, Christmas trees, and decorations gave our family a glimpse of unity and peace. Going with my family to our midnight service growing up is one of my favorite childhood memories!

6. Plan a Christmas Movie Marathon

Of course, Christmas movie night is always a staple.(Check out the new "Journey to Bethlehem" movie on p. 24). We

make several different kinds of popcorn the afternoon before the movie night. It sets the tone for the evening. The following is a family favorite.



Cinnamon Roll Popcorn

This quick and easy meal is kid friendly and continues to be enjoyed by both adults and children. This tasty dish will bring out the cowboy or cowgirl in anyone! Prep time is 20 minutes and only takes 30 minutes to bake.

Ingredients

Eight (8) cups of popped popcorn

1 cup brown sugar

½ cup butter

1/4 cup white corn syrup

1 Tab cinnamon

1 Tab vanilla extract

½ tsp baking powder

1 cup chopped pecans (optional)

Preheat oven to 325°F. Grease or use parchment paper on a cookie sheet. Place popcorn into a large container. Combine brown sugar, butter, and corn syrup in a saucepan and boil, stirring occasionally.

Remove from the heat and cool while stirring for 2 minutes. Add the cinnamon, vanilla, and baking powder into the butter mixture, pour over the popcorn, and toss it to coat. Add the nuts into the mixture and spread the popcorn on a single layer onto the cookie sheet.

Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, then cool before breaking apart. Serve in a large bowl with lots of napkins.

I could go on, but you get the picture! Laughter, joy, togetherness—these are the ingredients for a holiday that feels merry and bright.

•



edie melson | ediemelson.com

10 THINGS TO REFOCUS YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA

in the New Year

A New Year is coming and that means change.
Everywhere I turn I see ministry leaders throwing up their hands in frustration

The algorithms and rules are constantly changing. But we don't have

and exhaustion.

to drink the cup of chaos to stay active online. Instead, we can take a deep breath—metaphorically and physically—resetting our expectations and strategies.

Remembering these 10 things will help you stay sane in the craziness of online ministry

- 1. Remember Your Why: Change is inevitable. Now the world isn't just dealing with upheaval in social media, but also in AI (Artificial Intelligence). When we remember WHO called us to ministry and WHY God has us here, it's easier to endure the other changes.
- 2. Let Go of Expectations: We often get things mixed up when we begin serving online. We start focusing on the part of the equation that belongs to God and ignoring the importance of our part. What are the two parts? My part is obedience—write the post, share the prayer, film the video.

My obedience is doing the things God has called me to do. God's part is the result—the number of people who see what my obedience has crafted. I get frustrated when I focus on outcome.

3. Don't Forget to Diversify: With all that's going on in the digital universe we can see the wisdom of not putting all our social media eggs in one basket. What many may not know, is that it includes finding a base of operations to work from. This means we all need a regular place—that we

own—to be found by those we serve. That can be a website, landing page, or even a group site.

- 4. Continue to Build Your Email List: We may not always have access to everyone through social media. Because of that, we've got to become even more proactive about building our email list.
- 5. Serve Those Who Are Loyal: The list of people who have given you permission to contact them through email are your number one fans. These people deserve your best. Don't become so focused on growing that you forget to return the loyalty of these generous friends and fans.
- 6. Experiment and/or Expand Your Use of

VIOCO: We need to be more open about trying new things and new ways to connect. One consistency we've seen online is the fact that video continues to dominate.

- 7. FOCUS ON ONE: We serve ONE God. He calls us ONE at a time. He sends people for us to minister to ONE on ONE. God is a God of relationship. This is an example we must follow as well. We shouldn't despise small numbers, because ONE is enough.
- 8. Supply Answers: Think about the questions those you minister have and use your online presence to provide them with answers or the places to find those answers.
- 9. Don't Be Afraid to Share: Remember Matthew 9:37–38, Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." We don't have competition, we have fellow laborers.
- 10. Pray First: This one is paramount. Pray before your fingers hit the keyboard—whether it's a mobile keyboard, a computer keyboard, or a dictated keyboard. By taking your message to God first, we can relax into His plan and allow His peace to flow through us. ●



In 2010, we decided we wanted to consider a family again, and adoption was a great route, given my medical history and disability. Along with the stroke, medicine, and physical challenges, I also developed epilepsy from the stroke. We were both only children and desired a bigger family, so we adopted a sibling group.

When we began the adoption process, we originally planned on adopting boys as I was not a girly or drama-type person. However, God must have chuckled at our request because our first adoption of two boys fell through, and our referral from Colombia, South America, was for two girls and a boy! On April 12, 2011, they united us with a sibling group of three. The kids were ages six, eight, and ten at our adoption.

2. Drop the unrealistic expectations.

Our unrealistic expectations made our journey of raising adoptive kids more challenging. We grew up in stable, supportive households and wanted to give that same love to children in need of a family.

However, we soon realized we had not received proper training or had the right expectations for kids who came from backgrounds filled with trauma.

These kids desired love and a family, but they also faced abandonment, instability, trauma, and low expectations in their lives. So love is a powerful tool and resource, but it takes more than love to heal many of the challenges we found when we adopted. We discovered support for your kids and you as the parents are all extremely important but hard to find, and juggling support, positivity, and parenting can be overwhelming.

I'm grateful we positively impacted our kids' lives and left a legacy through love and support. A big blessing in adoption is obeying a calling, regardless of your children's acceptance or rejection.

3. Don't focus your agenda.

All we can do as parents, no matter how our kids come to us, is plant our seeds of faith, respect, integrity, hard work, and values and pray they go in the right direction. As with God, we can't force our agenda.

When we adopted our children, our son was the youngest in the sibling group at age six. He was loving, compassionate, young for his age, and very introverted around his peers once we were home. As he continued to grow and mature, puberty took place, and his attachment and mental challenges became apparent.

I believe all parents look back at their journey and wish they had made different parenting decisions. We were so overwhelmed being first-time parents of three all at once, along with the accompanying challenges, that survival became our focus along with our hopes and expectations for our children.

Looking back, I would have been more vulnerable about my own needs, advocate more support for both myself and the kids, and made family counseling non-negotiable.

4. Realize adoption is not easy, but that's ok.

God did not grant me the easiest parenting journey, and my kids also had struggles adapting to us as adoptive parents. But that is OK, too. Our parenting journey was not easy because of the challenges my kids had gone through early on in their lives, as well as their unwillingness to accept our help and support once adopted. But I am grateful to have that first-hand perspective on mental challenges so I know now how to relate to, support, and encourage others. You don't truly understand what you have not experienced.

Without my experiences with my children, especially my son, I truly would not understand the mental health issues in

today'S World. As an author and a speaker, I hope having these challenging personal experiences will help me relate to others more effectively.

Our kids successfully graduated high school, and two have completed tech school. My oldest daughter is a mom of two, and my youngest daughter will be a first-time mom soon.

As an adoptive mom, one of my greatest disappointments is knowing that no matter what I have given my children, I could not provide them with the love, security, support, and stability they deserved from the day they were conceived. Their experiences before joining our family have transformed both their lives and ours.

However, because of our love and support, we have been able to change the next generation. Our legacy to our children is what they have learned from us, the traditions, the values, and what they can now give to their children.

5. Just trust God

My children received parents who understood tough challenges, resilience, and perseverance. Life is not about our plans but about having the blind faith to keep looking toward God and His amazing plan, even on the days when our lives make little sense.

Though adoption brought unexpected twists, it gave us perspective on overcoming obstacles with resilience and faith. Our journey shows that when one plan falls through, have hope: another path exists to bless your life.



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Wake Up to War Choices

When the Christmas season arrives, the coffee creamermakers-that-be are inevitably compelled to break out the

eggnog.

I'm sorry, but I don't even like eggnog in my eggnog.Why would I mix it in my coffee? You can never

unscramble that nog.

I'm not sure why I need to Christmas up my coffee, anyway. I was happy with my regular everyday caramel macchiato. I feel like we sometimes can't see the coffee for the creamer.

Isn't it true, though, that our Christmas celebration can get just as diluted?

Stir in too many events and all the shopping and the pageant after gathering after even more shopping, and we can find ourselves giving our attention to all-things-busy and miss much of the true taste of Christmas. We end up whipped into every kind of frenzy. With extra whip.

Psalm 34:1 is such a marvelous reminder of what to do with our lips. "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips" (CSB). Verse eight beautifully follows it up with "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

Tasting His goodness. There's a conscious choice to take that sip. It's about making Him a priority. Putting all else aside.

The Jesus we celebrate is worthy of our attention. And time. And worship. The Savior-King is worthy of our focus.

Father, help me keep my eyes on You this season. Wake me up anew every morning to the sweetness of Your presence. Thank You for Your amazing plan to redeem us, the plan that spanned manger to Cross and touched eternity from every direction.

Every time I stop to think about His plan and about His love for us that set it in motion, I'm gobsmacked again. Jesus came. He died. He bought our pardon. He gives life eternal.

Oh, how His gospel fills our cup. "Lord, you are my portion and my cup of blessing" (Psalm 16:5 CSB).

Cup full. Cup overflowing. Forget the creamer, bring on the blessing of the presence of God. Let's choose to place our focus on Him this Christmas season with every ounce of energy we've got.

And if I could add one more drop to the nonsense side of this coffee creamer conversation, may I ask what I'm supposed to do with espresso flavored creamer? Because, seriously, isn't my espresso already espresso flavored?

The whole thing is keeping me up at night. Okay, wait. That might be the coffee. ●





December arrives and fills my heart with breathless

anticipation. Perhaps the sparkle of it all, and reflecting on childhood memories, no doubt the presents played a huge role. So, when it's time to store the tree and drag the last tote of decorations to storage, do you feel like me? A tiny twinge of sadness?

How can we carry the joy beyond the season?

Each December I invite readers to join me in a joy-seeking adventure through the Gospel of Luke to countdown to Christmas. The mission is to seek joy to share the good news of great joy to a weary world. The Gospel of Luke is special, not only because it's loaded with joy, but also because we experience an entire account of the life and ministry of Jesus on Earth. Jesus lived, breathed, died, and was resurrected for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

This adaptation from Seeking Joy through the Gospel of Luke: A Christmas to Calvary Advent Countdown illustrates how to carry joy in your heart when the shine of season's greetings fade away, or perhaps when your situation seems uncertain. We join the scene in Luke 24 after sad Peter denied Jesus in Luke 22.

I know, these last few chapters of Luke are the story of Calvary that we celebrate on the Easter holiday. But, indeed, they intertwine.

Back to our dejected but not rejected friend Peter. He needs some hope. Look at him over in the corner. Quietly, solemnly contemplating his major mistake. How will he ever make it up to his friend? His friend is gone. He's grasping for anything ... something to redeem his relationship with the friend he seriously wounded.

In walks a gang of giddy girls with some unbelievable news. The disciples scoffed and laughed at their nonsensical chatter.

"But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense" (verse 11).

But Peter, he gets it. In fact, it's the answer to his current problem. As the news startled him, I'm positive he jumped up for joy. Yes, yes! A spark of joy. Certainly, something exciting stirred in his heart because he ran.

"Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away,

wondering to himself what had happened" (verse 12).

Hmm ... Jesus's linens in the tomb. His body gone. I wonder what Peter pondered in that moment.

Jesus is taking His time to reveal the unbelievable story to Peter. Why would He do this? Why delay the joyful reunions? Jesus speaks to two men on the road to Emmaus: "He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (verses 25–26).

These two men returned to Jerusalem immediately to exclaim the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus to His disciples. He's alive; He's alive. It's true! Do you think the other disciples were intrigued? Intrigued, most likely. Convinced? Not quite yet.

"And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, 'Do you have anything here to eat?" (verse 41).

Jesus is once again showing us while He is fully God, He's relatable to us as fully man. Give the guy something to eat.

They scarcely believed this moment. Jesus prepared them for years, and yet here they are in the jaw-dropping moment. Unspeakable joy. And I can't help but realize that their doubts were overcome by this abundant joy now spilling from their hearts. Jesus gifted them with this joy during their amazing journey with Him on Earth. Imagine how far this joy-fueled band of wanderers will travel with this good news.

The disciples received the final earthly blessing from Jesus as their time together in person came to an end.

"Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God" (verses 52–53).

Worship. Always seek joy. And continually stay in the presence of God—most intimately through His Word—every day.

Accept His Christmas gift to you. Go out and share His joy and peace today. (Excerpted from Chapter 24 "Blessings and Great Joy" in Seeking Joy through the Gospel of Luke.)

As we wrap up Christmas with a bit of sadness in our hearts, we look forward to the second Advent, the second coming of Christ. May it fill our hearts with breathless anticipation, comfort, peace, and joy in the story after the Christmas story to carry us beyond.

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Joy Dunlay 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







meet the publisher

LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD @LINDASHEPHERD is publisher of *Leading Hearts* magazine. She is also a best-selling author, an in-demand speaker, and president of Right to the Heart ministries. She is founder of the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association (AWSA). She lives in Colorado with husband, Paul, and son, Jimmy. Subscribe to her "Prayer Investigator" show on YouTube and visit her at www.lindashepherd.com as well as gottopray.com.



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LORI VOBER believes God has a plan for each of us, but life is about your choices! She and her husband, Dainis, were able to become adoptive parents to a sibling group of three. She published her first book, CHOICES: When You Are Faced with a Challenge, What Choice Will You Make? in March 2022 and has been connecting and encouraging others to choose to survive and thrive. Her book received the 2023 Reader's Choice Awards from The Christian Literary Awards in the categories of Christian Living and Testimonial. www.lorivober.com



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