

The Award-Winning Voice of the Advanced Writers & Speakers Association

EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN TO ARISE

2022 Winter Edition | Vol. 8, Issue 4

LEADINGHEARTS

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*“I’m tired of praying
for my miracle.”*

*Author Chris Manion—
Caring for parents
who’ve lost a child*

Staying Strong?

**HOW IS YOUR MARRIAGE
IMPACTING YOUR MINISTRY?**

*How the Pandemic Should
Change Your Blogging Strategy*

**WRITING ESSENTIALS
FOR A GREAT DEVOTIONAL**

Dr. Sharon Norris Elliott

Live Significantly!

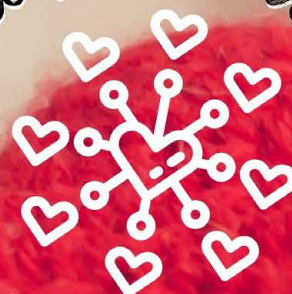
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MAKE DIFFERENCE FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS!



ARISE *Esther*

Evening of Purpose!



FEBURARY 23RD
7 PM ET; 6 CT; 5 MT; 4 PT

DURING THESE TWO HOURS YOU WILL:

WORSHIP WITH OTHERS

from around the world led by renown
recording artist Sharon Tedford



BE ENCOURAGED TO ANSWER YOUR CALL TO PURPOSE

with Best-Selling Author Pam Farrell



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with Pam Farrell

STORYTELLING FOR SPEAKERS AND LEADERS

with Karen Porter



Small group time for intimate fellowship and prayer.

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Featuring

PAM FARREL, KAREN PORTER, WORSHIP WITH SHARON TEDFORD,
SMALL GROUPS & MORE WITH HOST LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD

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FROM THE PUBLISHER linda evans shepherd



happy NEW YEAR

If you're feeling overwhelmed as you stare into the face of this new year, you're not alone.

These last two years were challenging, so challenging that it may have changed the landscape of your life. Things you counted on have faded or even disappeared and you're uncertain of your way forward.

Maybe discouragement has tempted you to sit back, fold your arms, to wait and see what the future holds.

But it's not so much what your future holds, it's who holds your future. No matter what you've lost, you still have a God who loves you, who's called you to step into your destiny. God can take whatever broken pieces you have in your life and turn them into the steppingstones to your purpose.

If you've not sure you can still hear God's voice so you can follow his plan, you need to lay down your depression, and turn back to joy by praising the one who is worthy of your praise.

Think of the goodness of God and his love for you and soon you will come to a place you can trust God with your days ahead.

Though the path you've walked was treacherous, God has never let go of your hand. He's not letting go because you are being called back into service. His service. Other people are hurting too, and they need an encouraging word and gesture of kindness from you.

It's time to take inventory to see what tools God has given you for such a time as this. First, you have His Word, second

you still have the name of Jesus which is above any other name, you can still pray to a faithful God, and you still have us because, like you, we are still standing, still pushing forward into our destiny.

We have so many exciting things planned for you, in this issue, and coming issues of Leading Hearts.

Also, we'd like to invite you to follow our ministry in our daily online devotional, Arise Daily, at www.AriseDaily.com

Second, we'd like to invite you to our very next Arise Esther event — Arise Esther Evening — February 23rd at 7 p.m. ET; 6 p.m. CT; 5 p.m. MT; 4 p.m. PT.

It's our evening of PURPOSE!

Pam Farrel, our keynote, is speaking on purpose, Sharon Tedford is leading worship, and we have two elective workshops — Pam Farrel on Strategic Planning and Karen Porter on Story Telling for Speakers and Leaders. Plus we have small-group time, where you can make new best friends as you share and pray for one another.

Reserve your spot at:

www.AriseEstherEvening.com

God wants to do a new thing in our lives. Are you ready to believe with us! We have the power of the living God in us, new doors opening before us, and a faithful God who will be with us every step of the way. ☺

Happy New Year! We Love YOU!

Linda

PUBLISHER, LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE | AWSA, FOUNDER

THE OFFICIAL PODCAST OF **LEADINGHEARTS** 
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Esther, is this your moment to Arise?

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Dawn Damon, shares
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courageous leadership.

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Modern Esther Stories of
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with host

Dawn Scott Damon





FROM THE EDITOR amber weigand-buckley



His message by all means

Do you feel like God is calling you to write a book? What would you do if I told you you could reach **one person** with the message that God's given you without a book contract?

What would you do if I told you you could reach **thousands** with the message that God's given you without a book contract?

In God's economy, every opportunity to share that message is just as crucial for the one as it is for the masses. Sharing that message is simply being obedient to the call.

Are you keeping that message hidden away, neglecting those who could receive it, in the hopes of achieving the book contract?

Reality check: I GUARANTEE God is not wanting you to wait for the contract.

The Apostle Paul said:

"I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22 NIV).

Let me rephrase Paul's words to the question I ask myself regularly.

"Am I sharing the message God's giving me in the way that the people will receive it and with all the tools at my disposal?"

The truth is, whether we reach the one or the thousands, we can share every day the message He has given to us to write.

You have the largest mission field in the world at your fingertips. In the age of pandemic and lockdown, the digital gospel is reaching farther than it has ever gone before. Sisters, it's a prime opportunity! YOU AND I have the power to self-publish His message in the online world every day if we want, so some might be saved!

Whether you are writing prayers, reposting an inspirational pin, sharing a word of encouragement, a miracle story, or a blog post — begin pinning the story He has given you to share in one-on-one moments and in social media space.

Believe it or not, I can look back over the years and see the beginnings of the very first book I am writing now, one Instagram pin at a time.

Time is short! Our Savior is coming! Don't wait for the book contract to be obedient to the work!

When you look back on 2022, what book will you have written in the online world that reinforces His calling on YOU?

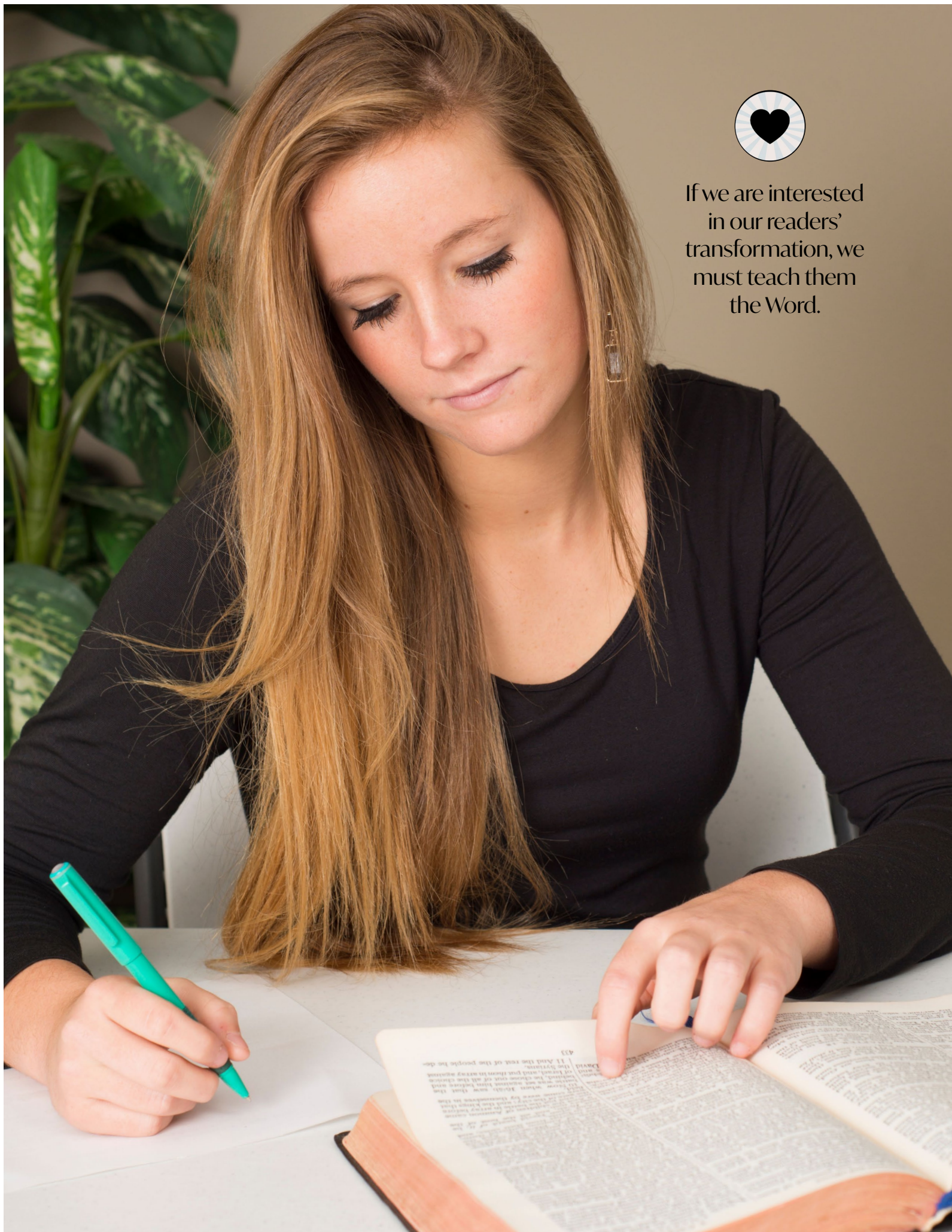
May this issue of *Leading Hearts* give you the tools and tips to start writing the story that God is unfolding in you, so some might be saved! ☺

Love,

EDITOR | ART DIRECTOR *LEADING HEARTS* MAGAZINE
| AWSA, MARKETING DIRECTOR



If we are interested
in our readers'
transformation, we
must teach them
the Word.



6 DEVOTIONAL WRITING essentials

julie zine coleman | juliecoleman.org



As the managing editor for Arise Daily (arisedaily.com), many devotionals come across my desk.

Each writer has a story to tell, an important truth to share with our readers. But not every article gets published. The ones that do have certain things in common, traits that will leave a positive mark on our readers.

Here are the things that make an article stand out from the crowd.

1. Effective devotionals go for one main point. It is impossible to effectively cover all the things in 400-600 words! Preachers call it the Big Idea. Can you express the main point of your article in one sentence? If you can't, your readers won't be able to, either. What is the one thing you want readers to remember after reading your article? Knowing the main point will clarify how you edit. Chop anything in the article that does not support the main idea. Extra material will just muddy the water for readers.

2. Effective writers come alongside their readers. We are all traveling the same narrow road. Engage your readers with a personal story that will draw them into the article. Be transparent — be someone to whom the readers can relate. They might think: *I have that problem, too!* Or: *That's just like me! I need to read more.* When they feel an affinity with you, they will want to know what you have to say. Never brag or put yourself above the reader in any way. Humility is key to being an effective teacher.

3. Effective devotionals teach the Word of God. While story is engaging, the real power in a devotional is the Word of God. God promises in Isaiah 55:11 (NASB): "[My word] will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the purpose for which I sent it." God's Word is transforming. If we are interested in our readers' transformation, we must teach them the Word.

But be careful that you don't take a verse or passage out of context. We don't want to put words in God's mouth by giving it a meaning it was never meant to give. Always consider what it says as a part of the whole. Pray over your passage and ask God to guide you to the truth. Tread carefully! You can make the Bible say anything you want if you are willing to pluck a verse out of its context. But that's a slippery slope. Avoid it at all costs. When we interpret and teach a verse or passage correctly, what we offer is solid gold.

4. Effective devotionals teach, don't preach. Avoid the use of the word *you*. Instead, use *we* and *us*. Paul tells us that we are given our spiritual gifts to strengthen each other: "to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the **common good**" (1 Corinthians 12:7 NASB, emphasis added). Our articles should build up and encourage, not tear down or burden our reading audience.

5. Effective devotionals call the reader to action. This might be a specific action or maybe a change in how they think. The best way to find an appropriate application is to first look for the timeless principle in your verse or passage. It should be something that can be applied to any people group at any time in history. Drop that principle into the 21st century, and ask God for ideas on how to practically act on that truth today.

6. Effective devotionals point readers to God. He is our hope, our strength and our salvation. We can (and should) depend on Him always. One way to point to Him is to teach about one of His attributes. Inspire your readers to look up. We need to point them heavenward, not at their own two feet. Remember, Jesus said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30 NASB).

Peter tells us that we are a holy priesthood. What does a priest do? He or she ushers people into the presence of God and helps them go deeper with Him. It is God's intention to use our spiritual gifts to contribute to the work of building His kingdom. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" Ephesians 2:10 NASB). Writing an effective devotional article can move you and your readers toward that goal. ☺



if I could tell
myself then
what I know now...

karen porter | karenporter.com



Never let a problem grow because
you refuse to talk about it.
Face touchy situations immediately.



Wouldn't you love the opportunity to go back and have coffee and a coaching session with your younger self?

For me, it would definitely start with a list of leadership don'ts, along with a little "you can do this" cheerleading.

This personally tested experience would have served me well. I hope these tips inspire you to reframe your leadership perspective and avoid some of the pitfalls I've encountered.

1. Put a High Value on Quality Friendships

When I started in the corporate world, I focused on rising to the executive branch. Every day, I worked hard to help make one of the top managers' job a little easier. And I followed through on every project doing excellent work so the manager would notice — and be impressed. Soon they came to me with new projects and sought my advice on next steps.

Eventually, management invited me into the strategy sessions and became a contributing member of the executive team — followed by promotions and additional responsibilities. I was part of the company planning and policy committees at the highest level. But one day I realized I had not made friends along the way. I ignored personal viewpoints and involvements. My goal was the top. And the top was lonely.

If I started again, I would slow down and care about the people who worked around me and for me. I would find out about their family situations and get to know details about their lives. Relationships, especially friendships, are too valuable to let slip away.

Thomas Aquinas said, "There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship."

2. Watch Your Back.

Not everyone in life has good motives or kind intentions. So be careful when you confide in people who may use the information to betray or hurt you. Unfortunately, people are often pretenders. They laugh with you and hang around, but they are not your friend, and they only love you until the benefits of being your friend stop.

How do you know the difference between a genuine friend and someone you should not befriend? Observe how they behave and what they say. Someone who will talk about others with you are sure to talk about you. If they gossip, it is only a matter of time until you are the subject of their tales.

Do not reveal your deepest dreams or desires to anyone who will betray or lie or spread rumors.

As a leader, you may hear of people within your influence who are unhappy or have said something negative. At that moment, your best course of action is to go directly to that person and work it out.

I heard of a pastor who held the position of senior pastor for more than 35 years, and it was said there was never any trouble in the church. I asked how this could be true. The answer was that when he heard there was any glimmer of grumbling or complaining, he got into his car and went to the home of the person to address and solve the unhappy situation. Never let a problem grow because you refuse to talk about it. Face touchy situations immediately.

3. Stay Close to God.

You are a leader because you have talents and skills and qualities that make people want to follow you. When we've had success, it's easy to believe in ourselves so much that we leave God out of the equation. You must spend time each day in Bible reading and prayer. Set a schedule for "soul" retreats — once a week for a few hours or once a quarter for a few days. These times will become your shelter when leading gets hard. James 4:8 says, "Come close to God and God will come close to you" (NLT).

4. Delegate

One of your hardest roles as a leader is to delegate responsibility to someone else and then allow them to do their job without interference. I know it is hard because, like me, you probably think you could do it better. If you are growing to grow a team, then let them make missteps or go at a task the harder way. They will become your strongest ally if you give them the latitude to serve the best way they know how.

5. Forgive

Once I was going to fire a person on my team. I had my boss' permission and agreement. I called the person into my office, still fuming from the reports of her gossip around the office, which had stirred up trouble on several fronts. As she walked into the room, the Holy Spirit softened my heart and I said, "You have a job here as long as you need one." No one was more surprised at my words than I was as forgiveness flooded me. Forgiveness is your key to freedom. Who do you need to forgive today?

6. Don't be afraid to fall or fail.

Follow God's leading as you lead. And before you know it, you'll have advice for your younger self too! ☺



God desires to
do a new thing
through us. We
are called to do
our best with
what we've
been given.



LIVE SIGNIFICANTLY!

with dr. sharon norris elliot

sharon norris elliot | lifethatmatters.net

“Be strong ... and work; for I am with you,” says the Lord of hosts” (Haggai 2:4 NKJV).

God used these words, communicated through the prophet, to encourage those who had returned from bondage to rebuild the temple. The context of the passage reveals the people did not think their rebuild was worthy to be compared with the glory of the original. God told them not to worry about looks. The important thing for them to know was that God had made a promise — a covenant — when their ancestors left their Egyptian bondage, and He wasn’t about to go back on His word.

His Spirit remained with them, so they had nothing to fear. God even justifiably bragged that the silver and the gold they were using belonged to Him anyway.

The glory of this new temple would be even greater than the glory of the first one because His glory would fill it. All the people had to do was rebuild the temple of God — which was why they had been released from bondage.

Their significance was directly related to their completion of what they were selected to do. Then God intended to give them the one thing they couldn’t buy, sell, or design — He would give them peace. (See Haggai 2:1-9.)

Here are seven truths we learn from this rebuilding remnant about how we can live significantly — especially as Kingdom speakers and writers — in our post-Christian culture.

First, refuse to live with what enslaves us.

Just as the remnant of Israelites left their captors to return to their homeland, we too must refuse to be enslaved by anything except the grip of God’s hand. As an African American woman, even in 2022, racism threatens to keep me out of places and away from opportunities. In fact, some industry professionals were discussing that they saw me at a publishing event and remarked to one another, “She’s still here.” That’s right — I just keep showing up. I may need to work harder, but I will go through doors God opens, leaving the shackles designed by my haters behind.

Next, rely on the certainty of our call.

It is imperative that we get clarity from God about our purpose. The remnant knew their job: they had returned to rebuild the temple. We are, in essence, rebuilding a temple. Our current American culture has drifted from a Christ-centered mindset. When I was growing up, everyone I knew went to church and had a basic, shared understanding of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and morality. Not any more. The new rallying cry is, “Well, this is my truth.” Our call today as Christian writers and speakers starts with establishing — rebuilding — the truth that sets people free. Our significance lies in the completion of what we were selected to do.

Third, we live significantly as we realize we *will* have to work.

There are responsibilities associated with freedom and new assignments. A young person may sense her call to be a doctor from the time she’s 4 years old operating on her dolls. However, she will not be fully equipped to live out that calling until she attends medical school. We will need to put in the time to hone our skills, invest in our vision, and build our platforms, all while patiently waiting and working so we’ll be ready for when the right doors to open.

Fourth, recognize the quality of our work.

The remnant recalled the glory of the former temple and began to get discouraged because their work didn’t look as grand. Yes, we can learn from the wisdom of our predecessors, but we cannot get caught up in comparing our work with theirs.

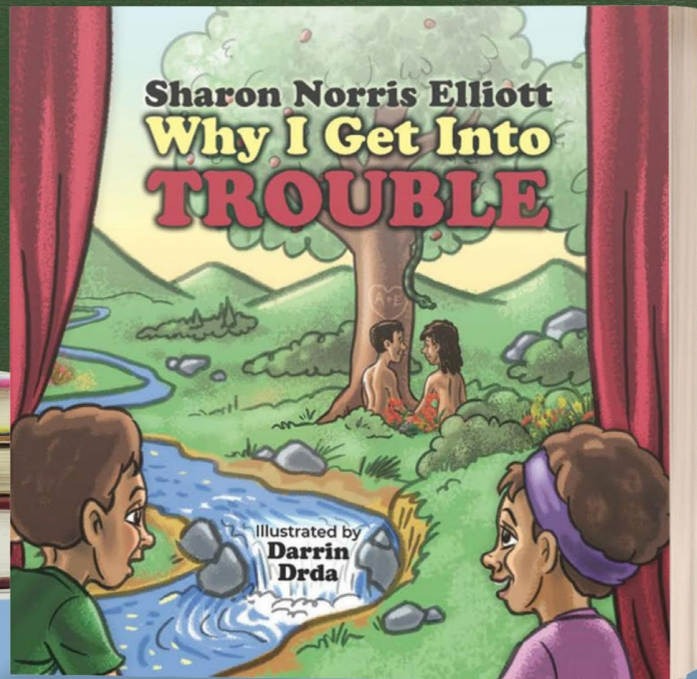
Shag carpets, popcorn ceilings, and walls separating rooms were all the rage in the 1960s. Now we’re all excited about hardwood floors, smooth ceilings, and an open concept floor plan. God desires to do a new thing through us. We are called to do our best with what we’ve been given.

continued on p. 15

—AVAILABLE MARCH 2022 FROM ELK LAKE PUBLISHERS—

*"How I want to behave but
my mischief won't stop."*

*Oh what makes me do things
that I know I should not?"*



Join our little friend as he explores the reason behind why he finds himself in trouble over and over again.

Help little ones discover the power that all of us have to help us do the right thing.

SHARON NORRIS ELLIOTT – LIFETHATMATTERS.NET



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER WALKER.

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The fifth way to live significantly is to remember God's former promises.

Go back to what God said when He first called, when we were first stirred by the vision, and we knew we had heard God's voice. We may even be able to hearken back to our parents' or grandparents' dreams for us.

Years before I was publishing books and delivering sermons, my daddy stood up in church one Sunday, pointed to me, and said, "There's the preacher!" That was the first of a series of prophetic messages pertaining to my call. I was to make a significant difference for the Kingdom of God on this planet by preaching God's truth through the spoken and written word.

Next, relish in knowing God will do His part.

We may not be sure of our purpose, but God is. He will "shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land" to get us to our destiny. Then with His own substance, He will fill the temple (your body is His temple, you know) with His glory for all the world to see. I always tell people, "I have none of my own material."

Everything I write about, teach about, and preach about has its foundation in the Bible. Unlike the common outlook of our humanistic society, we do not have our own truth.

The truth we share — from children's picture books, to romance novels, to heavy theological treatises — must be God's truth. When we do so, He adds His explosive power to our words.

Finally, relax in God's peace.

At the printing of this article, I am finalizing my 13th book for publication, and my first children's series will soon take off. I used to wonder if each book would be my last great idea, but I no longer entertain that concern. Since I'm called to preach, I'll see sermons all around me; since I'm called to write, ideas will pop into my head.

Florence Littauer taught me to be alert to life. As writers and speakers for the Kingdom of God, we live significantly in our culture as we focus on Jesus, listen to God's voice, remember the above seven truths, and echo what we hear from heaven. ☺

DR. SHARON NORRIS ELLIOTT shares her "live significantly" message through books, preaching, teaching, and also by training writers through AuthorizeMe Consulting, Coaching, and Editing Firm, and Literary Agency LLC. Her joy is full and her significance realized as she coaches others to discover theirs. www.LifeThatMatters.net



STRONG MARRIAGE= strong ministry

pam farrel | love-wise.com



“I’m glad from the inside out, ecstatic; I’ve pitched my tent in the land of hope” (Acts 26:2 MSG).

So how does a person, or a couple, go about “pitching our tent in the land of hope”?

Since God is the Creator of EVERYTHING, God can create a way forward on the path of hope! I recently released *Renewing Hope Journal* as a “tent of hope,” a place to gather verses that give you hope and quotes about hope and create drawings and doodles to help you capture the hope building in your heart and mind. It can be used in your individual devotional time, but my husband and I recommend using a hope journal together!

Hope comes from our choices, as an individual, as a couple, and as a family. My working definition of hope, based on studying verses about hope, is: “Waiting expectantly for God to show UP and show OFF for YOUR GOOD and GOD’S GLORY.”

You do not have to journey to hope alone, you can team up as a married couple and pursue hope TOGETHER! Here are several activities that have helped me and husband, Bill, cultivate hope:

- **Spend Time in the Promises of the Word of God:** First and foremost, to gain more hope, we need to get our hearts in the Bible, a book full of precious promises from the Creator. Max Lucado, author of *Unshakable*

Hope says, “God’s promises are pine trees in the rocky Mountains of Scripture: abundant, unbending and perennial.” Second Timothy 3:16-17 reminds, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (NIV).

- **Pick a time to traverse the Scriptures with your spouse.** Over coffee, share a favorite Scripture from your individual quiet times, or pick a simple devotional to read together, like our *A Couple’s Journey with God*.
- **Spend Time with Jesus:** The good news is Jesus came out of love for you, for me. He lived sinlessly, then GAVE His life in our place: “...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8 KJV). Max Lucado shares, “When Jesus died on the cross, so did your sin; when He rose from the dead, so did your hope.” Our deep, abiding, faithful hope comes from what, or rather WHOM, we are placing our hope in. God has the surety to cover all His promises of hope. Your friendship with your Creator is the rock solid, gold and diamond, bedrock wealth of eternal hope.

When you are in the car, turn up some praise music and worship your way to hope! Or at home, shout, “Alexa, play Christian Music!” Then dance together and watch the smiles reappear.

continued on p. 19

The Perfect Gift

365 days a year!

"Linda shows the way
as she guides us right
into those needed
'ick-freeing' prayers.
This book goes on my
keep-it-handy shelf!"

—RHONDA RHEA, TV PERSONALITY,
AWARD-WINNING HUMOR COLUMNIST
AND AUTHOR 18 BOOKS



AVAILABLE NOW WHEREVER
BOOKS ARE SOLD.





continued from p. 17

- **Spend Time Creating:** Paint, sew, build, draw, doodle, mold, whittle, carve, string together your hope! While writing *Discovering Hope in the Psalms: A Creative Bible Study Experience*, we (I and my co-authors and Harvest House Publishers) decided to include creative expressions and Scripture coloring pages, in part because the science behind creativity is powerful. In addition to writing the Bible study book, I did more research and wrote a blog for Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith's ichoosemybestlife.com on the many benefits of creativity.

Dr. Bea adds that coloring “relaxes the brain. When thoughts are focused on a simple activity, your brain tends to relax ... we are not disturbed by our own thoughts and appraisals. The difficulties of life evaporate from our awareness” Additionally, Dr. Joel Pearson, a brain scientist, adds “concentrating on coloring an image may facilitate the replacement of negative thoughts and images with pleasant ones.”

As a couple, do sidewalk chart art or paint rocks with encouraging words or Scripture and place them along your prayer walking path. Create your own backyard “paint and sip.” Pop up a blank canvas and create a work of art to hang over your bed. My friend Lexi painted the traits of 1 Corinthians 13 on her headboard as a gift to her military spouse. What a nice welcome home!

- **Spend Time in Nature:** We live on a boat, and we concur with the studies that show people who live near water are jovial! “Water makes you happier, healthier, more connected to other people, and better at what you do,” says Wallace J. Nichols, Ph.D., the author of *Blue Mind*.

As a couple, take time to plan dates to gaze at a beautiful sunset, stand in awe at the sight of a majestic mountain,

sense the calm of wading in a cool babbling brook, rest under the stars, or the feel the refreshment of breathing in fresh country air. We, the created, connect to the Creator when we rest in creation.

Princeton researchers found that even “gardening at home had a similar effect on people’s emotional well-being (or happiness) as biking, walking, or dining out.” So as a team, pick up a trowel and rake and plant some flowers or a vegetable garden, or create an outside romantic garden oasis with twinkling lights and a bistro table for two.

- **Spend Time with Life-Giving People:** We are made for relationships. In our book, *10 Best Decisions Every Couple Can Make*, we encourage people to create a successnet for their lives by inviting positive, proactive, productive, and philanthropic people into their world. “According to *Psychology Today*, face-to-face contact can reduce the risk of mental illness, such as depression and anxiety.”

Call up a mentor couple for a double date, invite friends over for a backyard barbecue, or gather friends at a lake or beach for a campfire, s’mores and honest heart-to-heart conversation.

- **Spend Time Moving:** Exercise boosts your happy hormones! In studies reviewed in the journal *Brain Plasticity*, movement “boosts mood, lowers stress levels and even improves cognitive functions like attention, memory and problem solving. According to LiveStrong.com, these benefits may be rooted, in part, in exercise’s ability to increase our brains’ production of the chemicals dopamine and serotonin”

In our book *Red Hot Monogamy*, we quote multiple studies that show that couples who exercise together have more “red hot romance.” Make a weekly date with your mate to walk, run, bike, dance, hike, kayak, paddleboard, stretch, or take an exercise class. In short, exercise accompanied with these other proactive activities will help you both feel happier, healthier and more hope-filled. ☺



PODCASTSPOTLIGHT



YOUR BEST WRITING LIFE *with linda goldfarb*

With a Global Ranking in the Top 5% of all podcasts, “Your Best Writing Life” is making a difference in the Christian writing community. Each week, host Linda Goldfarb and her Christian Writing industry experts share content for all levels of writers. Whether you’re a beginner or bestseller, you receive practical information and how-to application you can use to grow your writing career as a faith-based author.

Linda’s guests cover various topics, including the craft of writing, fiction topics, nonfiction topics, self-care for writers, and the business of writing to name a few.

If you’re an aspiring Christian writer, “Your Best Writing Life” has content to help you grow. Published writers, there is current content to make your next book proposal, manuscript editing, speaking event, and writer’s conference worth your time and energy. You can find “Your Best Writing Life” on all podcast platforms. ©

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GOD IN THE ORDINARY *with sharon tedford*

Do you feel too “ordinary” to impact those around you for Jesus? Isaiah 61 tells us how to reach our communities with the truth of the gospel. Regardless of what you do, ordinary Christians are the perfect candidates to serve God. But perhaps you don’t know how to get started.

“God in the Ordinary” is a twice-monthly interview podcast hosted by Sharon Tedford. Through encouraging and engaging stories, she will inspire you to learn how to make an eternal difference in your community and beyond.

Episodes feature interviews with everyday people like you: a small business owner, an artist, a stay-at-home dad, a non-profit worker, and other Christians worldwide.

You can find the “God in the Ordinary” podcast on iTunes and many other platforms, as well as on host Sharon Tedford’s website 61-things.com. “God in the Ordinary” is a Wiseword Radio & 61 Things co-production. ©

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jennifer taylor
profile contributor

Sinach HE MAKES A WAY!

continued on p. 22>



continued from p. 21>

“Way Maker, Miracle Worker, Promise Keeper, Light in the darkness, My God, that is who You are ...”

Two years ago these powerful lyrics became #1 on American Christian radio and an anthem for churches to sing around the world in the midst of uncertainty. With such great inspiration, it seemed to be written “for such a time as this,” and the song was covered by many artists and worship leaders including Michael W. Smith, Leeland, Mandisa, Kari Jobe, and Darlene Zschech. However, “Way Maker” originated from Nigeria in 2015.

It was written and released by worship leader Sinach, who has performed the anthem in countries around the world. In the midst of the global pandemic, the song has had more than 150 million views on Facebook, spent 12 weeks at #1 on Billboard’s music chart, won the Dove Award Song of the Year in October 2020 and BMI Song of the Year in August 2021, a first for an African gospel song.

“I’m just amazed at what God is doing. It was a message of encouragement. A message of assurance to me, and here we are — everyone celebrating it around the world,”

Sinach said. “It just warms my heart and tells me that God’s word is relevant in all seasons. His word is relevant in any situation there is. It assures me also that God can use you whoever you are, wherever you are. No matter where you are from, God can use you to be that voice. It’s amazing.”

Sinach was actually inspired to write the song while praying on a 13-hour flight from America back to Nigeria. She was praying while on the way to lead worship at another event when she felt the Lord was telling her to step out in faith.

“Sometimes when the Lord asks you to do something, you’re hesitant to change because you’re comfortable where you are. That’s what happened to me,” she said.

“The Lord was assuring me in that song. He was telling me, ‘I am the One who made a way for you in the first place. I’m the One who brought you where you are, and I am the One who will take you to the next level. You need to trust me because I am the Way Maker, and if I promise, all My promises are true.’”

The Lord continued to remind Sinach that He is the Light in the darkness of situations that we do not understand. “I believe these words were spoken not only to me, but to everyone who is feeling the same way, that they need clarity in their life. They need the strength and courage to move to

the next level of operation, the next level of faith — a decision in the home, marriage, business, finances, or whatever,” she said.

“The Lord is saying, ‘I am the One who makes a way, and the provision is there. I’m a Light in every situation. I promise and you can trust Me. Whatever My Word says, I’m going to do it.’”

Sinach was so encouraged by the song that she shared it with her team upon arrival in Nigeria. They sang it at the meeting the next morning, receiving a huge acceptance.

It went on to become a major hit in our churches, our country, in Africa, in the UK as well. We did a tour in the UK. Then, America picked it up, and major gospel artists picked it up and here we are,” she said. “It’s still going on and on because the message is that God’s word is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

Following the continued success of Way Maker, Sinach released “Greatest Lord” in 2021. “It’s a declaration that the name of Jesus is the greatest. He is the Answer to any situation that anyone might find themselves in at this moment. He is the Answer to whatever is going on around the world,” she said.

“Since 2020, we’ve been hearing all sorts of things: rumors of war, diseases, fear. It’s like the Bible says, ‘they don’t know their God, and they will be strong and do exploits.’ The name of Jesus is higher than any name in Heaven or Earth. That’s what this song is all about, that the name of Jesus can be trusted. There’s power in the name of Jesus. These are songs that inspire us to worship God for who He is; they assure us of who the Lord is in these times that people’s hearts are shaken.”

When your faith is shaken, she encourages people around the world to listen to songs that are faith-filled, songs that can declare the word of the Lord over your heart and over your health and declare who you are in our strong and mighty Lord.

“From one track to another, you will see that we will prevail. We have prevailed in Him. It says that He is the hope that holds me. He is a stronghold to shelter, my confident assurance, the only God for me,” she said.

“I hope that everyone who listens to the tracks and music will be inspired. Their faith will rise up, and they will experience the joy of the presence of the Lord.”

“At this time, you need to hear something positive. You need to hear the Word of God. You need to be firm in who you are in Christ Jesus,” she added. “In this time, you need to remember who you are and that you have the name of Jesus. Remember that you are more than a conqueror. It’s very important.”

Whatever the circumstance, she remembers that the Bible tells us to not let our hearts be troubled.

Jesus said there will be situations of persecution and rumors of war, but we should not let our hearts be troubled because we have overcome in Him.

“We should not focus on the news; what we should focus on is the good news, the gospel,” she said. “Jesus encourages us: ‘In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration; but be of good cheer [take courage, be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you]’ (John 16:33 AMPC).

There is no better time to lean on the Lord and the Holy Spirit. Allow His peace to wash over you, knowing that His plans for you are good.

It doesn’t matter what the devil is doing because what God has for us is greater. It is good. That’s my message. That’s what I believe, and that’s how I walk.”

Scan or click the code below to watch the “We Prevail” video, featuring Miranda Curtis. Go to sinachmusic.com to find out more. ☺





One never gets over losing a child. Grief is fatiguing work that cannot be rushed or rationally dismissed.

WHEN THE TOPIC GETS TOUGH:
ministry to grieving parents

chris manion | chrismanion.com



It's for the best.

Now you have an angel
looking after you.

I understand how you feel.

These are but a sampling of cringe-worthy phrases friends often offer grieving families upon the loss of a child.

I studied bereavement ministry, however, my experience with infant loss was peripheral. My mother lost a sibling between my brothers David and Richard, but never spoke about the baby to me. My daughter's third pregnancy ended after sixty days. Not wanting to wait alone to deliver her little one, she asked me to stay with her and her husband and grieve when the time came.

Through my experiences and writings, I've created some help for those who are grieving and those who love them, starting with:

Myths We Believe about Those Who Grieve

1. If we mention the name of the deceased, it will sadden the bereaved parents. FALSE. Bereaved parents are already sad.

2. You'll get over it. Time heals everything. FALSE. One never gets over losing a child. Grief is fatiguing work that cannot be rushed or rationally dismissed. Sometimes circumstances prevent us from properly grieving until much later.

3. You can always have another child. Possibly true, but each child is uniquely made. Each child's loss is unlike any other. Parents with fertility issues have no guarantees of conceiving another. Other parents with health issues, known and unknown, may not live to see another child born.

What Not to Say to Bereaved Parents

To help Christian leaders like you increase your sensitivity as you minister to the grieving, I asked bereaved parents to identify comments that hurt despite being well-intentioned.

Please avoid saying:

It wasn't meant to be.

At least you weren't further along.

This happens to everyone; it's not a big deal.

You'll be fine in a few days.

Maybe you should have/shouldn't have . . .

It's for God's glory.

This was God's plan.

If you see nothing wrong with these phrases, ask Spirit-filled friends to help you increase your sensitivity. Pray for wisdom and understanding.

Ministering with More Sensitivity

Here are three ways to increase your sensitivity to bereaved parents.

1. If you're a fixer, realize a child's death is not fixable.

Let go of saying the right words. A compassionate look or listen sometimes offers the best solace.

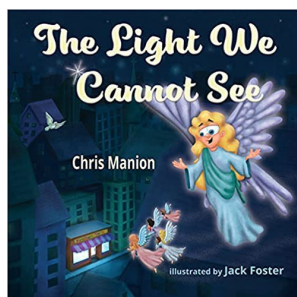
2. Speak the child's name. Say: "Tell me about (name of child)." If the infant has a name, say it aloud. It is music to parents' ears. You will not spare a parent grief by avoiding their child's name. They think about their child all the time.

3. Affirm their emotions and God's love for them.

Instagram influencer Rebekah Clayton said, "Messages like 'This was God's plan' just gutted me. But I'll never forget when Rev. Aldo Mesa, who did my son's funeral, looked me in the eyes and said 'this was not God's plan. God does not plan for babies to die. He does not plan for families to grieve. It's okay if you feel angry. He's angry too.' Death and pain came because of man's fall, he reminded me, and was never in God's plan at all. He said it was okay if we blamed God. He said, 'God can handle your anger. Be angry. It's okay. He'll still be here holding you.' It gave me so much relief to hear that."

Christian leaders help others find the truth and light of Christ. In asking Jesus to be our Savior or in comforting the grieving, there are no perfect words.

Jesus uses simple, unexpected gifts like a picture book to continue to build His Kingdom. May this humble little tool that softens hearts help you offer peace and comfort to those God brings your way. ☺



Chris is the author of the picture book for children and parents who have lost children, *The Light We Cannot See*.

—New From Award-Winning Prayer Author **LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD**—

Power-packed prayers for every moment of life



Whether life sends us trouble or blessings, we should pray. We know this, yet we often don't know what to say—so we say nothing.

No more! This compilation of powerful prayers is arranged by topic so you can find the words you need when you need them in order to ask God for help, consolation, wisdom, patience, and more for yourself or others.

The prayers in this book will be the ones you turn to again and again as you walk through life with the ones you love.



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



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Q: How can you lead without being a hypocrite?

Excellent! We define a hypocrite as a person who claims to be something she isn't.

Originally people used the word to describe actors.

They pretend to be another character to entertain. Of course, we don't mind movies and TV shows with good acting, but in real life, we dislike fakes. Besides, standing in an ivory tower and tossing out advice doesn't work well. Let's list some ways we can be authentic.

First, stay humble.

Those of us who want to minister to others must face facts. We aren't perfect. The Apostle Paul said, "... let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12 ESV).

The Pharisees thought so highly of themselves, they made up rules for everyone else they had no intentions to obey. Ugh! I have a precious friend who co-taught a Sunday school class with me years ago.

Sometimes when we meet for lunch, she'll remind me about what I taught and encourage me to take my own advice.

Ouch! That's painful, but I need her input to see my blind spots.

Second, be honest about your own struggles.

The Apostle Paul explained his battles by saying he had to "... discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after

preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27 ESV).

Remember he wrote large portions of the New Testament and suffered persecution. After all that, we'd all assume he would find obedience easy, but he didn't.

When you share how God helped you overcome temptation, people tune in because you aren't fake.

In fact, your success in overcoming sin may be the key to helping someone else.

Third, examine your motives.

Are you serving others or promoting yourself? We tend to forget the Pharisees were the conservative Jews of their day. However, Jesus scolded them because they performed good deeds so people would praise them. Imagine them praying aloud in the streets and building huge tombs to exalt the prophets.

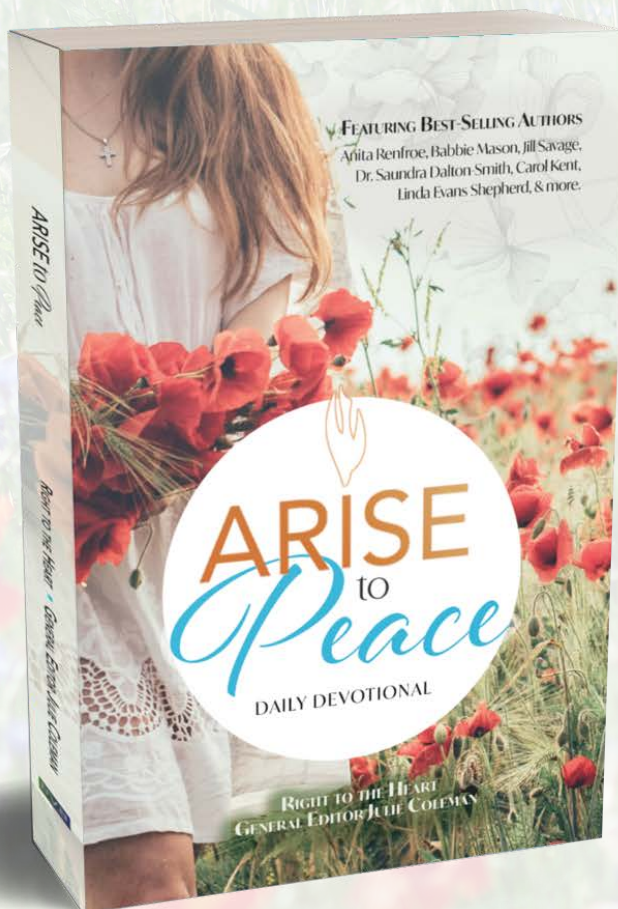
Having others respect you feels so good, but the prophet Jeremiah said, "... let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me" (Jeremiah 9:24 ESV).

I ask the Lord to search my heart because I tend to overlook or minimize my sin. I've had the Holy Spirit tell me I spoke out of pride rather than concern for others, and I have to ask His forgiveness.

In summary, remember Jesus, the God of the Universe, washed the disciples' feet before the Last Supper. He had no sin, yet he took the place of a servant. Follow His example.

Stay humble, share about your failures and seek to promote Christ. ☺

You Can't Find **Peace**
by wishing for it.



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WHEN YOU'RE TIRED OF praying for your miracle

linda evans shepherd | lindashepherd.com



My husband
charged toward
the TV. “You’re
going to want to
see this,” he said as
he switched on the
news that Boulder County,

Colorado, was raging with fire!

Leaping flames danced on the screen and everything on my to-do list vanished. Paul and I huddled together and watched live as a fire hurricane, with gusts up to 105 miles an hour, plowed through nearby towns. We saw the wind push tall flames flat as they brushed through the prairie grass, spreading huge swatches of black. We watched as winding fire-snakes crept into backyards, exploding everything they touched into cinders.

I watched till two in the morning, horrified by the sight of 1000 homes burning to the ground.

By morning we got our miracle. The winds died, the snow fell, and the fires hissed to a stop. But the sunrise revealed the heartbreaking site of once beautiful houses transformed into scorched concrete foundations filled with ash.

One woman told of seeing a wall of fire five feet from her house. She ran with only her life, returning a day later to find a smoking hole in the ground.

So, my question is, what happens when the miracle you’ve prayed for turns to ashes?
The answer: I believe it means your miracle is still in process.

Eighty years ago, when my dad was fourteen, he was in charge of the family farm as his brothers had joined the war effort. It was left to young Leroy to plant an acre of peanuts, and he got tired of waiting for his harvest. He told me, “I dug up my crop to check on it, but the process of digging up my crop killed it.”

If my dad had trusted God’s miracle process of growing peanuts and given his crop more time, he would have enjoyed a harvest.

It’s the same with us. We will reap bitterness when we get tired of waiting for our miracle or if we believe God has let us down. But if we give God more time, trusting Him no matter what, our miracle will come, even if it doesn’t look the way we’d imagined it.

As for my Colorado neighbors, their story isn’t over. If they wait on God, He will turn their calamity into a blessing. But if they turn their backs on God, they will reap bitter hearts.

I’ve learned God turns ashes into miracles in my own life when I trust Him.

Isaiah 61:3 says, “He will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair” (NLT).

Trust God’s miracle process. Give God your ashes, mourning, and despair, and watch Him turn it all to joy. Your miracle may only need a little more trust and a lot more time.

PRAYER: God, teach me to trust You with the ashes of my disappointments so I can see You turn my heartache into miracles of joy and praise. ☺



understanding your passion & purpose

penelope carlevato | penelopecarlevato.com



“What is your passion?” It’s probably a question that you’ve been asked a million times already.

But have you thought about it lately?

What is your “Why” in life? What drives you to share what you love? The best way to understand our passion is to ask ourselves, “What do I enjoy the most? In my spare time, what would I rather be doing?”

And would I do this regardless of getting paid or not?”

It may feel awkward at first to discover that your passion is simply doing what you love. It may only be a dream at this time, but dreams lead us to find fulfillment in our lives. Many women have found their passion in life and have incorporated it into their careers. But others struggle to identify what they feel is their passion or even their calling.

Is there a big difference between passion and purpose? The two are certainly connected but are two different entities. While passion energizes and motivates you, purpose (or your calling) is why you do what you do. Passion is also our call, or our dreams, as it is the emotional component and can boost our confidence and give us the nudge to follow through with our purpose. Purpose gives life a specific direction to keep focused. Passion and purpose go hand-in-hand.

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.”

—Harriet Tubman

Don’t feel bad if you haven’t found your unique passion and purpose in life. In our society, we tend to be so busy that we rarely take time to be still and answer some of life’s questions. What do I love to do, and what am I good at?

Even go one step further and think back to what you loved when you were 12 years old. What do your friends and family members tell you you’re good at? Take a break and focus on finding the answer to this million-dollar question. What do I love to do, and where do I lose track of time while engaged in this activity?

When I searched for my passion, I thought it was just for artists, musicians, or daydreamers, indeed not for me. I felt I might be irresponsible to want to share my passion.

I was passionate about my nursing career, but there was something more that I knew I needed to know. I took a class at my church called Operation Timothy.

In this class, I began to feel a calling to be part of God’s plan for my life. It was all new to me, but it excited me and pushed me to know my purpose. I was shocked to discover that God

wanted me to join Him in reaching out to others. And He had a specific path for me.

It was okay to find my passion as it fits with my purpose. And right at the top of the list was the clue ... whatever I did, whatever my passion or purpose, all of it was to glorify God, to follow in the Great Commission: “go and make disciples.”

My passion for tea was the tool that God would use for His glory. Wow, that inspired me to make a difference in my choices, to go with the flow.

My newfound passion made my life worth living and gave me a purpose. It moved me out of my comfort zone and into a whole new dimension of life.

Look inward and see what truly inspires you. God has a definite plan and purpose for your life, we are created to live life with vision and joy. Following our passion takes work and vulnerability. It gives us the confidence to work on our strengths and interests. It provides us with internal motivation to find fulfillment in our lives, jobs, and relationships. Passion is the energy that keeps us going. It helps us accomplish things we set our minds to and helps us live life to the fullest.

When I realized that my passion was creating relationships around tea, I attracted like-minded people. There was a realization that what I loved could benefit many people. I had the expertise to pursue my passion in a variety of venues. Things began to happen. I began to see that my love ignited my work, and it could bring enjoyment to others. It sparked me to follow my dream and start writing.

When we realize our passions, we pursue the faith that counts on God’s power through our spiritual disciplines – prayer, faith, and obedience. God’s character and authority in our lives are what fuel us for our spiritual passion.

As we seek God’s purpose for our lives, there are things we can do to align ourselves with Him and not get caught up following the external benefits of passion.

What has God given you that you love doing? Begin to read about those things, brainstorm, and ask others to join you in your quest. Research your passion and interests. Then get good at it. Practice.

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17 NIV).



Scotch Eggs

Since tea is a tool that God uses in my ministry, I find I love having both Afternoon Teas and High Teas in my home. This is a wonderful savory dish that I often serve at High Tea (supper). Once you try them, they will be a favorite.

Scotch eggs are very popular in England and sold in most grocery stores and food shops. Fortnum and Mason, an upmarket department store in London, maintains that it created Scotch eggs in 1738 for wealthy travelers!

The combination of sausage and eggs in a new presentation is always fun to try. My mother made this recipe by frying them. This one, by baking, is much quicker ... and eliminates many calories! They can be eaten hot or cold.

1 pound pork sausage

1 Tablespoon fresh chopped chives or green onion

Salt and pepper to taste

8 to 12 small hard-boiled eggs, peeled

Flour for coating

2 eggs, beaten

1 1/2 cups breadcrumbs or Panko

Mix sausage, chives, salt, and pepper.

Divide into 8 to 12 portions. On a floured surface, flatten sausage mixture into a round circle. Dust eggs with flour. Place beaten eggs into a small bowl and the breadcrumbs into another bowl.

Place each egg on a circle of sausage; mold the sausage around the egg, sealing seams well with water. Roll each sausage-covered egg in beaten egg, then into the breadcrumbs. Place onto a cookie sheet.

Bake the eggs in the oven at 400° F for 30 minutes or until sausage is well done. Drain onto the paper towel. To prevent the eggs from rolling on the baking sheet, place a toothpick through the bottom of the eggs at an angle. Serve with spicy mustard or dipping sauce. ☺



For those of us with
a heart for ministry,
these changes are
an opportunity and a
challenge.



HOW THE PANDEMIC SHOULD CHANGE *your blogging strategy*



The world has changed. Statistics vary, but most experts agree that between sixty and seventy percent of the world's population is digitally savvy and connected online.

However, the way information is accessed has also changed. No longer are we able to thumb through physical media to find information. Now everything is quantified and categorized through mathematical algorithms. That means we all need to know the basics of SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and Keywords.

Keyword Basics

The first term we need to become familiar with is Keywords.

A keyword is like a label. It's a short way — although almost always more than one word in length — to state the purpose of your article. Articles can have several keyword groups or only one. I only have one main keyword group for this article and it's "Blogging Basics for a Post-Pandemic World." Some related keywords to this topic could be "SEO Basics for Blogging" or "How to Use Keywords Effectively."

I use groups of words because the point of the keywords is to direct the searcher to your website. You want your keywords to match, as closely as possible, what someone types — or speaks — into a search engine. People rarely type or speak just one word because it gives too many options.

Here are the guidelines for using keywords effectively:

- Always use the keywords in the title.
- Repeat the keywords at least once in the first 50 words of your article.
- Spread the use of the keywords naturally and evenly throughout the rest of the article. (In a 400-word article, that would mean using the keywords a minimum of three more times.)

SEO Basics

Remember, this acronym stands for Search Engine Optimization. It's basically where, in the list of millions, your content will show up when searched by a reader through a search engine. This is determined by a closely guarded, mathematical equation called an algorithm.

When you use different search engines — Google, Yahoo, Siri, Alexa, etc. — you'll notice each will give slightly different results from any given search, because they each have a proprietary calculation. But there are things we can do as writers to move our content up in the rankings. To accomplish this we have to have a basic understanding of how SEO algorithms work.

Early on, these algorithms were less complex and depended heavily on keyword usage. Website writers would just use pages of keywords to raise their ranking. The search engines caught on and the equations got more complex. These algorithms will continue to evolve, with the goal being to give the searcher the most valuable sites first in the rankings.

Even with the evolution of algorithms, one thing hasn't changed. They are still mathematical equations and as such, Search Engine Algorithms take words literally — and that can be good or bad.

This means that they don't always understand double meanings or the clever usage of words. For example, a recipe for vegetarian chili cleverly titled, "Too Hot to Handle Chili" will rank far lower than one titled, "Homemade Vegetarian Chili" if someone is searching for a vegetarian chili recipe.

This is because an algorithm uses the literal meaning of words, and the first title doesn't even have the word "vegetarian" in it. Oftentimes a clever title will result in fewer clicks.

For those of us with a heart for ministry, these changes are an opportunity and a challenge. Now, going and telling may mean something very different from what we ever imagined. That means blogging — and doing it effectively — is more important than ever. ☺



The body doesn't want to be in a state of sickness. Instead, it continually strives for health, so long as we allow it.



IT'S TIME FOR A FULL-BODY RESET!

dr. saundra dalton-smith | ichoosemybestlife.com



As time passes, stress can build in the body. We all know the feeling. We get to the end of a long period of work and by the end of it, all we want to do is collapse on the sofa and binge on Netflix.

It's at this point where our bodies tell us that they've had enough and that we need to give them a break for a while. Keeping up an intense pace just isn't possible.

The effects of reaching this stage vary from person to person. For some, sleep becomes an issue. Others turn to food to take away the pain that they feel in the evenings. Others take part in dangerous hobbies.

While compromising on your wellness journey is usually okay for a couple of days a month, it starts becoming an issue when it's the norm. Your body never gets the opportunity it needs to recover, and so it remains in a continual state of alert, never able to focus on repairing itself and boosting the immune system.

If you keep operating at a high level, you'll eventually crash. The body will give up, and you'll find yourself having a breakdown or something similar.

It's just not possible for the average person to continually slave away in a situation for months or years with no end in sight. Eventually, something will go wrong.

The Full Body Reset

The body, however, doesn't want to be in a state of sickness. Instead, it continually strives for health, so long as we allow it.

Full-body resets get you feeling like you used to. You feel happy and energetic, and you're not constantly reaching for things in your life to manage the pain.

A full-body reset is similar to the famed 12 Steps Of Recovery from dependency. However, this time, you're focusing more on changing the lifestyle factors that led to your current situation.

The Elements of a Full-Body Reset

The first step in the process is to take some time out from life. If you're in a stressful job or relationship, it's vital to provide yourself with some genuine distance from it so that you can reevaluate.

The initial priority is to temporarily eliminate the source of stress and give yourself space.

You want to feel free to explore your feelings, without having to continually work or experience intense pressure.

The next step of the full-body reset is to eliminate any of the palliatives that you've been using to numb the stress or the pain.

Examples include alcohol, food, and media addiction. Once you get rid of the bad stuff and give your body only healthy things (such as vegetables), it'll naturally get on with healing itself. You'll feel less stressed and more able to take on the challenges in your life.

The third pillar of the full-body reset is spiritual.

Living day to day without a purpose isn't healthy and can leave you feeling empty. Meeting your spiritual needs, however, changes your perspective and allows you to live more fully.

Once you get your underlying philosophy right, everything else follows quite naturally. ☺



Whether we are entertaining
[our audiences] with a story or
providing information, we have a
responsibility to keep current on
the world we share.

WHY WRITERS CAN'T IGNORE THE WORLD

diAnn mills | diannmills.com



We writers find it far too easy to ignore the world around us. Let's face it. We get so immersed in our writing projects that nothing else matters.

Our minds focus on the words spilling, or not spilling, onto the page.

Writers genuinely care about others, but working in cave mode keeps us on task and meeting deadlines. A quiet place with our laptop is much more appealing than noisy crowds. I understand the writing preference because many times I'm right there with you. Don't bother me; I'm busy. Working independently is admirable, but there's a flip side to a writer's life that we should all heed.

We can't address our readers' needs when we neglect the world around us. Our readers wait expectantly for our fiction and nonfiction projects. Whether we are entertaining them with a story or providing information, we have a responsibility to keep current on the world we share.

Let's explore seven areas of writing that reinforce this imperative;

1. Nonfiction writing is about real events, people, places, history, and various sciences. They can be books, articles, textbooks, devotions, or commentaries. Every topic has an insightful application for today.

If a writer doesn't know what others are experiencing, their information might miss the mark. Physical, mental, and spiritual challenges motivate the reader to find answers.

2. Fiction is about a character's or characters' journey to solve a problem or reach a goal. A writer creates fully developed characters who resemble reality to the reader. Wants, needs, victories, flaws, and life experiences mirror the reader.

If a writer isn't interested in people's issues and problems, how can they entertain, inspire, or encourage readers?

3. Blogs are focused on addressing specific needs within a specialized topic. They inform, teach, entertain, and raise awareness for those interested in various subjects.

If writers aren't aware of their readers' needs, how can they create a dynamic and engaging post? Survey your readers for topics that add value to their lives.

4. Devotions are spiritual aids resulting from in-depth study of a biblical passage. They can explain, teach, encourage, and even convict the reader in clear and concise language. The writer hopes readers will meditate on the devotion's contents throughout the day.

Writers who have no idea what people are facing in their day-to-day lives might miss the best approach to resonate

with readers on a spiritual level. We want to speak to what's happening in the world that shakes their faith.

5. Social media posts call attention to art, blogs, podcasts, images, videos, media information, and more. The post draws attention to the featured topic, enticing the reader to further explore a topic.

If a writer foregoes what's happening in their community, state, national, and world events, how can a social media post draw distinction?

6. Poetry uses words to express intense feelings and ideas about any subject. Writers use unique styles and rhythms to showcase the piece through descriptive language.

While writers might not find value in keeping informed of life and happenings, how can they fashion poetry others will appreciate?

7. Biographies show us the life history of people who have accomplished something noteworthy. These people come from every walk of life with one distinction: they achieved leadership and success by battling the odds against them.

A writer who pens a biography must consider why this person would be of interest. How can their challenges help or address a need today?

Your readers are priceless gems. Nurture and take care of them. Once a writer loses an audience, she may never get them back again.

Examine the following statements to see how you can reach your audience and cultivate valuable relationships. Note every item is what you will do for your audience, not the other way around.

- Dear reader, my goal is to build a friendship with you. I care about you, and I'm constantly working to answer your questions, inform you, and entertain you.
- The passion for my stories comes from a deep desire to provide a great book for you. Your encouragement is why I work hard to develop strong characters and an intricate plot.
- You can trust me to stand firm on my brand. I'm a writer who is true to my promises. My books, blogs, and social media posts reflect my integrity.
- You are important to me. My multiple daily posts are about how I can meet your needs. My promise to keep in touch is reliable. Leave comments, and I will respond.
- Your input helps me be productive. I'm listening to your suggestions, questions, and advice.
- We're a team. No writer is ever alone. We need each other to walk this path called life. ☺



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LET'S *do this*

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Here's the message I considered texting to everyone I know.

I'm at that décor mega-super-store. It's so mega and so super that I'm pretty sure I've been here for four days. I can no longer feel my feet. Please send help.

I fought off the urge to send it, but that shopping trip finally ended like this:

Cashier, as I'm checking out: Did you find everything okay?

Me, unloading my eight carts: Not really, but I'm too weary and dehydrated to go on.

Cashier, deadpanning with Garfield eyes: Do you have a rewards card?

Okay, it probably wasn't four days and I might not have had eight carts. But there were some deals I could not say no to. It was like, if I stopped shopping, the store would instantly sell out of some piece of prize décor. So I pressed on. Like a total maniac. Like a total maniac with feelingless feet.

Paul charges us to press on with a better enthusiasm, in a better direction, and for a better purpose. In Philippians 3:14, he says,

"I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus" (CSB).

"Press on" is from the Greek "diōkō." It implies a sold-out, soldiering on, lifelong commitment. And it's in the present tense, so that we understand that this pressing on is not just for a couple of hours. Not even for four days. Paul is saying that this pressing on is the constant habit of his life.

Warren Wiersbe said that the Greeks used

"diōkō" to describe an "intense endeavor," as in "a hunter eagerly pursuing his prey."

Yes, that does rather describe my shopping. But so much more, I want it to describe my passion for pursuing Christ and the ministry He's called me to. I want this to be the constant habit of my life.

Paul clues us in about what that pursuit looks like just prior. In verse 12, he says, "Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it." Then he shares his motivation with us in the next verse. His why. His "because." "Because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus."

To be taken hold of by Christ is to be cherished. Cradled. This is the most loving, eternally nurturing hold.

Oh, how I want to pursue Him and to intensely endeavor to live out His call — out of love for the One who has redeemed me, the One who has taken loving hold of me. The prize? When we pursue this goal, we win His forever presence. There's nothing in the universe more mega or more super. We're talking about the reward card to end all reward cards.

I'm encouraged as well that Paul wasn't necessarily all about perfection. He freely admitted he was not there. That tells me that it's a growth process — and reminds me I need to be growing and maturing. He says in verse 15, "Therefore, let all of us who are mature think this way." The Amplified version expands on it this way: "All of us who are mature [pursuing spiritual perfection] should have this attitude" (Philippians 3:15 AMP).

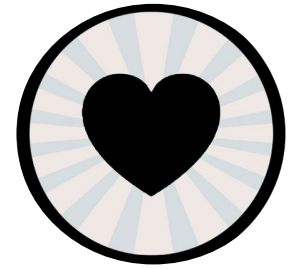
Press on. Let's do it. Let's take on this charge. Let's put on this attitude. Let's pursue it. Let's pursue Him.

I want to pursue my Jesus with all the strength I have. And if He ever needs it, all the feeling in my feet. ☺





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