FALL EDITION
October | November 2026
Volume 13 • Issue 5

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LEADING hearts

THE OFFICIAL AWARD-WINNING VOICE OF THE ADVANCED WRITERS & SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION

MORE THAN THE MIRROR

Award-winning suspense Novelist DiAnn Mills on silencing the voices taking aim at God's calling

"Hope can't rest on what the mirror, the world, or our what our own doubts say about us."

–DiAnn Mills

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FROM THE PUBLISHER | LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD

The Crazy Yes

lindaevansshepherd.com

It was an ordinary day when I was talking to the Lord and felt Him impress something rather extraordinary on my spirit: I want you to start a women's magazine. My first response was not, "Yes, Lord! Here I am!" I was horrified. Immediately, I could see my future—constant deadlines, articles to gather, issues to produce, and the never-ending machinery required to get a magazine into the hands of readers. It wasn't like I wasn't already busy with my own family, running Right to the Heart Ministries and leading the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association.

"SO? WHAT'S YOUR POINT?"

"Lord," I protested, "only a crazy person would do that." Then I felt His answer in my spirit. It came with what I could almost imagine as a grin and a raised eyebrow: "So? What's your point?" I laughed out loud.

Now, I wouldn't technically describe myself as crazy. But I will admit to a certain kind of craziness—the kind that has caused me to spend much of my life saying yes when I believe Jesus is asking me to follow Him somewhere. Still, I had no idea how to start a magazine.

JUST THEN, THE PHONE RANG

Just then, the phone rang. It was my dear friend Karen. As we chatted, I told her about the strong impression I'd just had from the Lord about starting a magazine. She surprised me. "Did you know our friend Amber's magazine just closed down? She was the editor, and she's looking for another opportunity."

I was stunned into silence. "Really?"

"Call her," Karen said. "Let's see what happens next."

As soon as we hung up, I called Amber. "I think God just told me to start a magazine," I blurted, "but I don't know how it would—" She interrupted me. "Yes. I'll be your editor." And just like that, *Leading Hearts* was on its way.

Our first issue launched in March 2014. More than twelve years later, yes, there have been late nights and time-crunching deadlines—exactly the things I feared. But there have also been stories told, readers encouraged, hearts touched, and lives changed around the world.

HE GAVE ME AN INVITATION

Looking back, I realize I wanted to know how before I said yes. But God didn't give me the whole plan that day. He gave me an invitation. And after I began to entertain the possibility of saying yes, He showed me the next step.

Maybe God has put something on your heart that feels too big, too complicated, or even a little crazy. But the secret of following God into the crazy is this: You don't have to rely on your power; you go in God's. Perhaps you don't need to understand how everything will work before you move forward. Perhaps you simply need enough faith for your next yes.

So welcome to this issue of *Leading Hearts*—one of the many things I couldn't see on that ordinary day when I finally gave God my yes.

Love,

Linda

God didn't give me the whole plan that day. He gave me an invitation.

ARISE. INSPIRE. LEAD.

LEADING hearts

OCTOBER | NOVEMBER 2026 • VOLUME 13, ISSUE 5

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Information

Leading Hearts magazine for Christian Women is published bimonthly by Right to the Heart Ministries 2026.
ISSN 2380-5455

Advertising | Display rates are available at leadinghearts.com. By accepting an advertisement, *Leading Hearts* does not endorse any advertiser or product. We reserve the right to reject advertisements not consistent with the magazines objectives.

Manuscripts | Writers guidelines are available at leadinghearts.com.

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Member | 2026 Evangelical Press Association, Award of Excellence 2014–2021, 2023 Evangelical Press Association Award of Merit Winner—Christian Ministry Digital 2024 Christian Ministry Print Publication & 2022 Christian Ministry Digital Best in Class, 2025 Second Place Best in Class

Cover Photo Courtesy of: DiAnn Mills

Photos Courtesy of: DiAnn Mills, Hoganson Media, Canva, Adobe, Envato Elements

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You are Called, Equipped & Empowered to do Great things!

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ARISE Esther
This is YOUR Moment!

On the Flip Side of a Crazy Yes

Linda has told you about the day God put a women's magazine on her heart in Longmont, Colorado. What she may not have told you is that nearly 800 miles away, in Springfield, Missouri, I was praying the other half of that prayer.

WHEN EVERYTHING FELL APART AT ONCE

About a year earlier, my world came apart all at once. The print industry was collapsing, and the staff of the magazine I edited dwindled until it was just me. The irony? That same season, I won two big awards for my magazine. Then everything crumbled. The pressure escalated into a six-month manic writing spree and a stay in what I lovingly call the funny farm. While I fought for my sanity, the cuts came and my job went with them.

Holy Spirit works beyond our capacity, and when Father hands us a dream, He helps us carry it.

Even then, God took care of me. Between severance and short-term disability, He gave me almost a year off with pay, as if to say, You need to rest now. I could barely lift my head, let alone write. When that year ended, I landed in fundraising, the last place I ever expected to be. As far as I could tell, my dream was dead.

A PRAYER FROM THE BOTTOM

So I prayed the most honest prayer I knew: God, you gave me this gift, this journalism degree, and this longing that won't leave me alone. How could you put all of that in me just to take it away? Let me do what I do. I'll even do it for free.

One week later, my phone rang. It was Linda Evans Shepherd. "I feel like God wants me to start a women's magazine," she said. "Would you help me?"

Be careful what you ask for, because you just might get it. We had no money; and I was willing to honor what I said to God . But in faith, Linda agreed to pay me and prayed a prayer of faith over every dollar she knew God was going to have to provide. It definitely didn't come rushing in all at once, but those funds came in right on time. That was the beginning of *Leading Hearts*. In its first year, it won an award.

HOLY SPIRIT HOLDS IT TOGETHER

Every time we finish an issue, I stand on the other side of it and wonder, *How did this happen?* But I know the answer. Holy Spirit works beyond our capacity, and when Father hands us a dream, He helps us carry it. Thirteen years later, He has sustained this ministry and used it to encourage countless women, authors, and speakers. I thought I had lost everything. Instead, God gave me more than I ever dared to ask for.

This issue is another one of those moments. You'll find inspiring stories, celebrations of thankfulness, and reminders that God is still writing the next chapter, even when we can't see past the page we're on.

DREAMS DON'T DIE; THEY CHANGE SHAPE

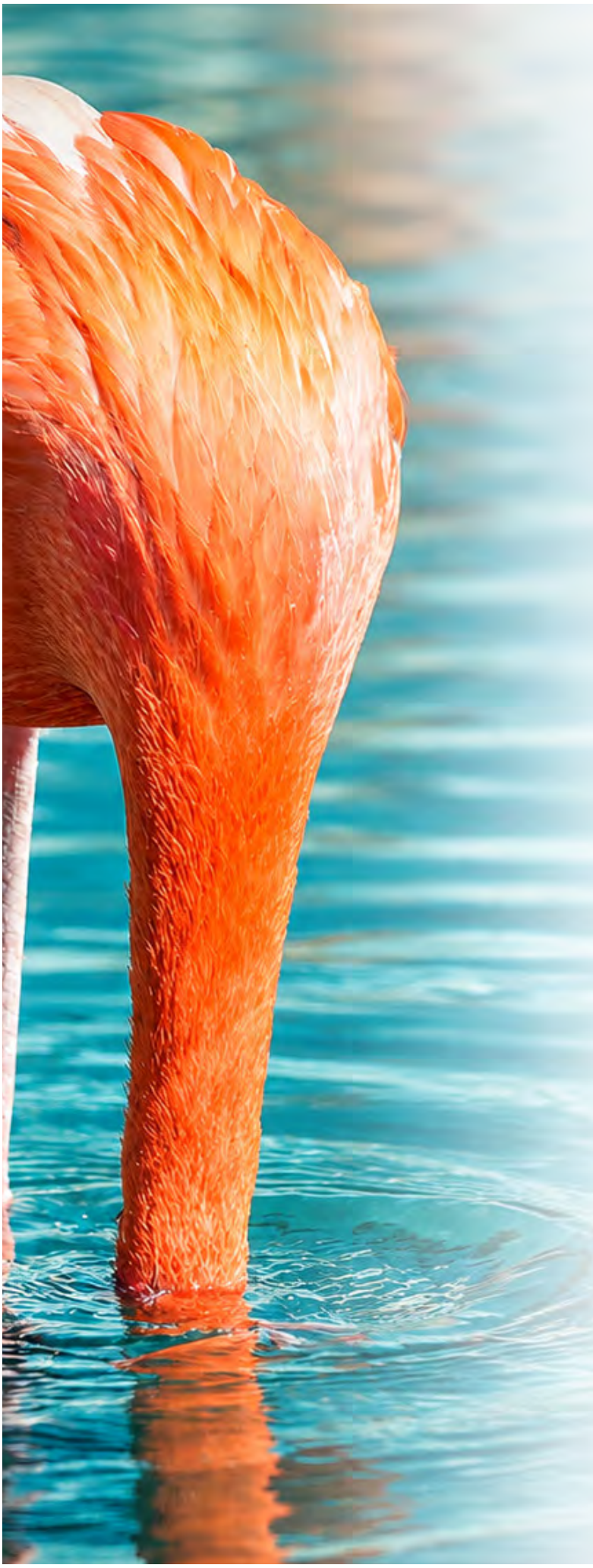
If you're holding a dream that feels dead right now, hear me: when God plants a passion in your heart, He doesn't let it die. It may change shape, but He will not let it die.

Pray the fearless prayer. Then keep your phone nearby.

Love,

Amber

shortyellowpencilRX.com



Christian humility does not require you to hide, shrink, or apologize for creating value.

—KATIE HORNOR

The Gift You've Been Given Wasn't Meant to Stay Hidden

KATIE HORNOR | THEFLAMINGOADVANTAGE.COM

Like many Christian authors, speakers, and leaders, I knew God had given me abilities to use for others. I willingly invested hours developing messages, preparing presentations, writing resources, and helping people solve problems. Yet naming a price for that work felt uncomfortable.

If God gave me the gift, was it right to make money from it? If all my work was ministry, should I charge for it?

For years, I assumed gifts should be given away. Because I saw my work as ministry, I believed I could not compete in the broader marketplace. I wanted to serve God faithfully, but I had quietly equated faithfulness with remaining small, unseen, and underpaid.

Perhaps you recognize that conflict?

You know your book can encourage people. You know your message can change lives. You know your leadership can move an organization forward. Yet when someone asks about your fee, you hesitate. You lower the price before anyone objects. You volunteer when you should send a proposal. You call it generosity, but underneath that generosity may be fear of appearing greedy or prideful or of being rejected.

YOU ARE NOT SELLING THE GIFT

God is the source of every ability we possess. He created our minds, personalities, voices, experiences, and opportunities. We cannot take credit for the gift, but we are responsible for what we do with it.

A speaker may be naturally gifted at communicating, but developing a powerful presentation takes years of practice. An author may be gifted with words, yet writing, editing, publishing, and promoting a book require significant labor. A leader may naturally see solutions, but wisdom is often forged through education, experience, failure, and perseverance.

People are not simply paying you for personal gain. They are investing in the result God can produce in their lives through the abilities He has entrusted to you for their benefit. When an investment costs them something, they are often more committed to using what they receive.

You are being compensated for the preparation, experience, expertise, and service required to deliver your gift in a way that creates value.

Scripture condones receiving compensation for honest work. Jesus said that the worker deserves his wages in Luke 10:7. Deuteronomy 8:18 reminds us that God gives us the ability to produce wealth. Colossians 3:23 instructs us to work wholeheartedly as for the Lord.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TALENTS

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells of a master who entrusted resources to three servants. Two put what they received to work and produced more. The third buried what he had been given.

The master expected the entrusted resource to be developed, and he rewarded accordingly.

Faithful stewardship produces an increase. God owns the gift, but stewardship requires our participation. We must develop it, use it, and multiply its effect. How will the business grow if all of the assets and profits are given away?

YOUR DIFFERENCE HAS VALUE

In *The Flamingo Advantage*, I wrote:

> *There is no one in the world who does what you do exactly like you do it. And that is what I call your unique flamingo advantage.*

> *Your uniqueness is not permission to believe you are better than others. It is an invitation to recognize the particular value God created you to offer.*

> *Two speakers can teach the same principle and reach different people. Two authors can cover the same subject and create different experiences for their readers. Your background, personality, convictions, stories, and communication style allow you to serve people someone else may never reach.*

> *Hiding that difference does not make you humble. It makes it harder for the people who need your help to find you.*

A BETTER QUESTION

Instead of asking whether a Christian should make money from a God-given gift, ask:

Does my work create real value?

Have I developed my ability with excellence?

Am I honest about the results I can help create?

Is my fee based on wisdom or fear?

Can I receive payment with gratitude rather than guilt?

Will I let God direct both my earning and giving?

Money should never measure our identity or master our decisions. But fear of money should not keep us from obeying God, serving people, and building sustainable work.

God gave the seed, but He expects us to cultivate it.

Christian humility does not require you to hide, shrink, or apologize for creating value. Your gift was given by God. Developing it is stewardship. Sharing it is service. Receiving honest compensation for delivering it well allows the sacred work to continue.

Katie Hornor rose from extreme poverty as an overseas missionary to become an international keynote speaker, prolific author, and award-winning business strategist. She equips Christian authors, speakers and leaders to turn their God-given message into greater influence, income, and impact. Known for her flamingo metaphors, and now the CEO of the National Christian Association of Professional Speakers, Hornor brings biblical wisdom, bold strategy, and unforgettable moments to every stage. Connect at TheFlamingoAdvantage.com.

With Love & Appreciation

YOU LOVE YOUR MAN—HERE ARE SOME CREATIVE IDEAS TO KEEP THE SPARK AND SIZZLE IN YOUR LOVE LIFE.

PAM FARREL | LOVE-WISE.COM

God loves me so much that He orchestrated every detail to bring me here ... at exactly the right time.

—PAM FARREL

Your heart desires to help your husband feel like the most fortunate guy on the face of the globe because he had the good sense to marry you.

In our book *Red Hot Romance Tips for Women* I make a case for expressing a little more gratitude, appreciation, and value toward your spouse. One basic component of a strong love relationship is a man feeling appreciated, valued, and esteemed.

I (Pam) love the look in newlywed brides' eyes. The gleam in their eyes and the broad smiles shout appreciation! When your husband senses you feel you've won the grand prize by marrying him, his heart will be drawn to you. You become priceless in his eyes!

"A good woman is hard to find, and worth far more than diamonds" (Proverbs 31:10 MSG).

WHY YOU?

When *52 Ways to Wow Your Husband: Put a Smile on His Face* was released, one of the first events I had it on sale at was a "women's day," where women from all walks of life came for education, encouragement, and inspiration. Several times that day I heard:

- Why me?
- Why not him?
- Why "Wow"?
- Why is it worth it?
- Why try?

My response was usually "Why not you?" Love must begin with someone someplace, sometime, and somehow

BE THE SPARK PLUG

You can ignite the romance in your marriage! That, my dear, is power! You're not a doormat, not pathetic, not weak just because you want to be a woman who loves her man or even, dare I say it, a gal who wants to please her guy. That is not weakness—it is strength.

Your love for your husband and your marriage can change your marriage and, yes, perhaps even change him. As you change yourself, your change compels a change in the relationship, which may lead to him changing too.

(Important note: If you're married to a husband who abuses you in any way—make sure you and everyone else in your family is physically safe and then read Leslie Vernick's book *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*.)

For most of us, however, a little bit of lovin' will go a long way toward improving the atmosphere in our relationship.

TIPS FOR RED-HOT ROMANCE

Say thanks! Choose one of these synonyms of appreciation to tangibly express your gratitude to your man.

- Through written or spoken praise, let your man know you admire a specific quality he possesses.
- Applaud a specific effort or accomplishment your man has made.
- Approve heartily of a particular choice he's made today.
- Commend him in front of his friends or colleagues.
- Compliment one of his physical features.
- Accept one of his quirks with a quick hug or kiss when you see it.
- Laud one of his accomplishments with a gift or family celebration.
- Warm toward an idea he's brought up by asking for more details.
- Support one of his dreams by placing a photo of him pursuing that dream on your desk or refrigerator.
- Adore his body in the bedroom by giving a full-body massage.
- Enthusiastically embrace one of his opinions. Say, "I so agree with you!"
- Show pleasure in his company. Try speaking, "It's so nice to have you in my life."
- Be mindful of one of his needs by running an errand or picking up an item for him without being asked.
- Order a coffee mug with "I thank God 4 U!" printed on it. Take him breakfast in bed, including coffee in that special mug.
- Place a thank-you note on a helium balloon and float it into his home office when he's working.

In our book *The Marriage Code* we explain that men long to feel successful—especially successful in their relationship with you. Expressing an enthusiastic "thank you" is like picking up a love football and running it down the field for a touchdown! Appreciation will help you win at love.

Pam Farrel and husband, Bill, received the 2025 AWSA (Advanced Writers & Speakers Association) Lifetime Achievement Award. Find out more about their books and ministry at love-wise.com.

Without the protection of the Lord, you can't discern the authentic from the counterfeit. .

–JENN NIZZA

Darkness *in* Disguise

FORMER PSYCHIC MEDIUM JENN NIZZA EXPOSES THE DOORS WE OPEN WITHOUT KNOWING IT AND POINTS US TO THE ONE WHO CLOSES THEM ..

BY AMBER WEIGAND-BUCKLEY | SHORTYELOWPENCILRX.COM

Jenn Nizza has walked where most of us never will. For years, she was a psychic medium. Today she warns the church about what she left behind in her new book, *Darkness in Disguise: A Biblical Warning About Spiritual Deception in Our Culture*.

I'll be honest. This interview was personal for me.

IT STARTED WITH AN OPEN DOOR

For Jenn, the supernatural was dinner-table talk. Lights flickered, objects moved, and her mother, raised around a psychic aunt, took it in stride. "Those were the open doors inviting demonic entities into the home," Jenn told me. At 12, she had premonitions. At 13, a tarot card reading became "the gateway, full force, into divination."

Her story stirred something in me. I've known since childhood the fight between darkness and light is real, and for a long time, that knowledge made me afraid.

"It's just an open door," Jenn said gently. "Without the protection of the Lord, you can't discern the authentic from the counterfeit. And every time you step into divination, you're inviting more in."

WHOSE VOICE IS THAT?

So what exactly is a psychic? "A psychic is somebody who gets a counterfeit prophecy," she said, information from "familiar spirits" that have watched families for generations. "The tarot cards don't know anything. They're just cardboard with paintings."

Here's what I know: we all hear both voices, the voice of God and the voice

of the enemy. So the question I care about most is how we tell the difference. Jenn admits the line can blur, even for believers. "The enemy can trick you so craftily into thinking, 'You're a Christian, so this is okay, and this is prophecy,'" she said. "And then it turns into really psychic communication, 'cause you have not discerned properly."

Her answer is to test every spirit (1 John 4:1). "We need to test every idea, concept, practice, person," she said. "Instead of just signing up for the thing, we need to look into it."

Then she offered hope. "You know what the good news is?" she said. "When you're truly born again, you don't have to fear. You come into the battle from a position of victory."

IT STARTS WITH A COOKIE

I asked Jenn about the gateways we might never recognize as gateways. Her list was longer than I expected, and much of it has settled comfortably inside the church: "manifesting," New Age visualization, Reiki, zodiac talk in the fellowship hall, even fortune cookies.

Let me be clear: cracking open a fortune cookie after dinner isn't going to send anyone to hell. Neither is buying a pretty stone, though I'll admit even that makes me a little nervous. Jenn put me at ease there. Crystals "are not evil. They're God's creation. They're beautiful. But don't worship them." Some of these things are so tiny.

That's the thing about a gateway: it doesn't look like much. It's the path it opens that matters. "Until you get the fortune that resonates with you, and now you wanna hunt it out," Jenn said. "See how it can start like this little innocent thing and blow up before you even realize it." The question isn't whether the cookie or the stone is evil. It's whether you give it power, or let it make you curious enough to keep moving to the next level.

On yoga, she was firm: "Christian yoga, holy yoga. Oxymoron." In an exercise class where a pose sneaks in? "Sit it out. You serve God, not that instructor. And pray for the people around you."

DON'T DRINK THE KOOL-AID

I told Jenn about a dream. Everyone around me was drinking green Kool-Aid at a big party. I drank too, then looked in a mirror and saw my eyes spiraling. I was blind to everything that was actually happening in the room—things that would normally make me feel convicted.

"That makes a lot of sense," Jenn said. "If you're drinking the Kool-Aid, you can't see spiritually clear."

That dream clarified everything. Most of us aren't setting out to become witches or mediums. We're simply sipping what's handed to us until our vision blurs. The enemy is an orchestrator of confusion, and confusion is the Kool-Aid.

VICTORY DEFEATS FEAR, EVERY TIME

For years, I lived with fear, convinced the devil was around every corner. Learning that I don't have to be afraid, because God is on my side, took time. Jenn put words to what I've come to know. "He says more than anything in the Bible, 'Do not fear.' It's a command," she said, one given "to give us freedom and rest." We don't need to fear demons. "We need to be aware of them, so that we can avoid it and keep going." We don't fight for victory. We speak from the victory we live.

Her mission isn't to condemn. Scripture tells us to expose the fruitless deeds of darkness (Ephesians 5:11), and that's where her job ends. "What you do with the information," she said, "is between you and the Lord."

EVEN IF YOU DON'T AGREE WITH THE LIST

You may not agree with everything here. That's okay. Don't take my word for it, or Jenn's. Bring it to the Lord.

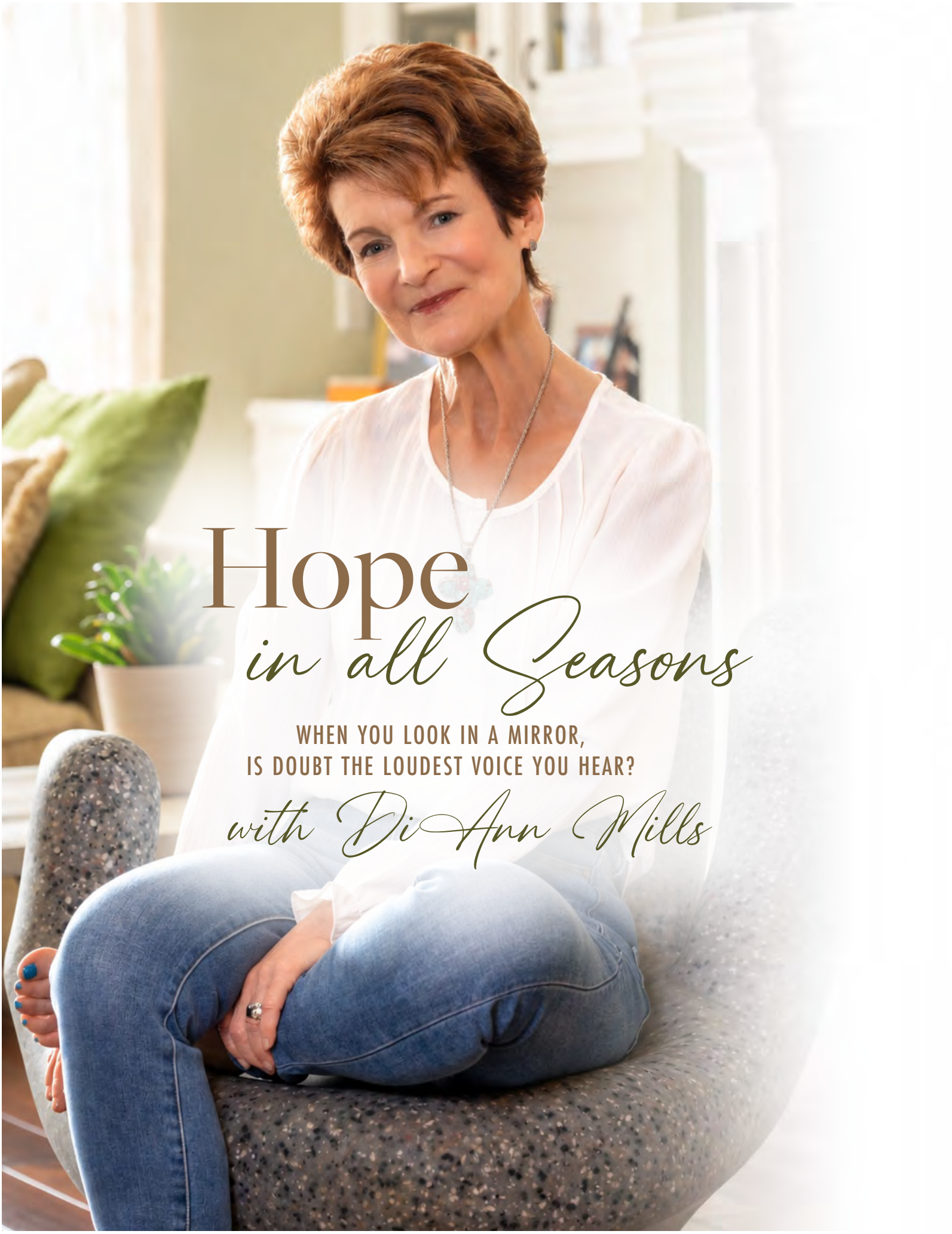
The practice you love, the show your kids watch, the habit you've never questioned: bring it to Him. "There is nothing you're holding onto that's better than Jesus," Jenn said. And if you lay something down, "He is a good provider. He will restore what you lost."

God does not manipulate. He does not trick us. When we ask and seek in prayer and in His Word, we will know the truth, and it will never contradict Scripture.

So whatever you're wondering about today, bring it to the Lord.

Jenn Nizza's book, Darkness in Disguise, *is available on Amazon, at Barnes & Noble, and wherever books are sold. Learn more at www.expsychicsaved.com.*

Amber Weigand-Buckley is the founding editor of LH, as well as a bestselling and award-winning author, newspaper columnist, podcaster and mental health advocate. Find out more at shortyellowpencilRX.com.



Hope in all Seasons

WHEN YOU LOOK IN A MIRROR,
IS DOUBT THE LOUDEST VOICE YOU HEAR?

with DiAnn Mills

Hope is the "confident expectation" that something is true. No doubts or wishful thinking, but pure joy. Those who trust in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ embrace an amazing, courageous faith.
—DIANN MILLS

Hope is a word I once misunderstood. It's not a wish, a desire, a gamble, or a dream. Hope is the "confident expectation" that something is true. No doubts or wishful thinking, but pure joy. Those who trust in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ embrace an amazing, courageous faith.

Your hopes, dreams, and aspirations are not the same as mine, but that doesn't make yours any less important. In our still moments, we focus on what we believe will make the perfect world. Our expectations focus on what ensures something good will happen. The sensation is thrilling, and it's our human nature to grasp onto the positive and not the negative.

But hope can't rest on what the mirror, the world, or our own doubts say about us. It rests on what God has already said. That matters, because the mirror rarely says anything kind.

THE STONES THEY THROW

Our hope is often tied to our sense of worth. We look in the mirror, and it seems to say:

- Hey, old girl, it's time to settle back in a rocking chair.
- You have more wrinkles than smooth spots.
- What if someone learns about your past mistakes?
- You haven't got what it takes to be successful in anything.
- Your season will never arrive.
- We turn to the world, and they are hurling more stones. The world, like our mirror shouts condemnation and criticism.
- Hey, loser, how much is in your bank account?
- Hey, loser, do you really think you have purpose?
- Hey, loser, what is your social status, career, nationality, religion, education, political party?
- Hey, loser, why would the world be interested in anything you've written?

Satan comes after us. He not only throws stones, but he pelts us with accusations. You'll never measure up to God. You're a miserable failure in every area of your life. You're a fool to believe God loves you.

BUT WE HAVE A ROCK

What the naysayers don't know is we have a rock. And He is Jesus.

"The Lord is my rock and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:2 ESV).

I want you to grasp hope in Jesus and never let go. But that hope must begin inside us, and it happens when God calls us to faith. Without that anchor, the stones have a way of sticking.

"It is my eager expectations and hope [confident expectation] that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or death" (Philippians 1:20 ESV).

THE STONES THAT STICK

Our identity develops in a healthy or unhealthy way as others throw stones at our value. If we're not careful, those stones become our identity.

- **Spiritually**—What's the use in praying? God doesn't care.
- **Mentally**—My weaknesses are all I can think about.
- **Emotionally**—Depression hits me like a dark shadow chasing me. I either want to sleep all the time or can't sleep at all. Should I seek counseling or prescribed medication?
- **Physically**—Stress takes its toll. Headaches. Heart attack. Colds. Flu. High blood pressure.

We are miserable until we understand God truly defines us. He sees us as a sculpture, a work of art. How do we trust Him to make positive changes in every season of our lives?

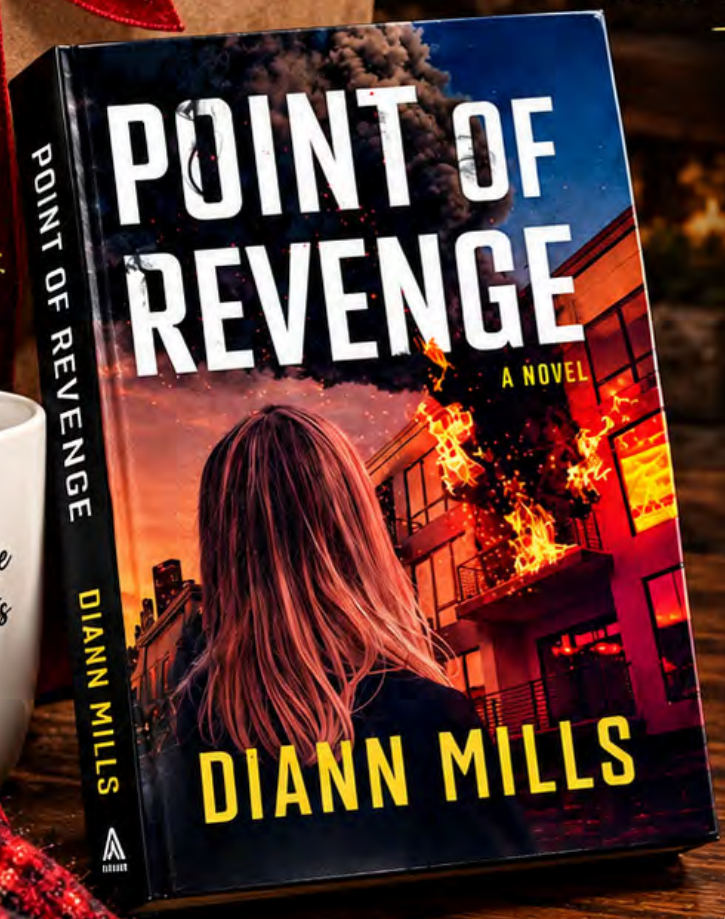
"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10 ESV).

—CONTINUED ON P. 17—

POINT OF REVENGE

Holiday Gift Guide

GIVE THE GIFT OF A GREAT STORY



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A meaningful gift for readers of all ages.

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Twists, suspense, and unforgettable characters.

Great Books Make Great Gifts

Tis the season for great books!

—CONTINUED FROM P. 15—

Friends, when we choose God, the world, Satan, and our own misgivings can't touch our true self. Those accusations only feed us lies if we choose to listen.

MORE THAN A TUBE OF LIPSTICK

We are made in God's image. That means we are all beautiful. A masterpiece. How can we embrace our beauty?

It starts with trusting God's definition of beauty over the world's. "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you" (Song of Solomon 4:7 ESV).

True beauty comes from within and radiates to everyone who not only sees us, but hears and feels us. And because we are all fashioned in the image of God, anyone who criticizes or condemns us is saying God created someone without value. That is a lie.

Mother Teresa was one of the most beautiful women in the world. What defined her beauty was her sacrificial giving to the people of India. She risked her health and her life to care for and love a people group that many others chose to ignore. We are all more than we've ever been told by the world.

I have no doubt that Mother Teresa based her hope, worth, and beauty not on the world's standards, Satan's accusations, or her own misgivings, but on God's definition of true inner beauty.

"She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet" (Proverbs 31:20–21 ESV).

Friends, embrace your beauty. You are more than a tube of lipstick. Beauty begins in the heart. You are a daughter of the King. That is exceptional beauty.

You are beautiful. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, just as Psalm 139:14 says.

WHEN THE PRAISE GETS LOUD

Do people say nice things about you? Do you embrace positive affirmation? Those statements may not be true. Life isn't about us. It's about God and His kingdom. It's not about our happiness—because happiness comes from the outside in, not like joy, which comes from the inside out. If people, the mirror, and the world are singing your praises, chances are you're not following Jesus.

Every woman has the potential to make this world a better place, and that potential lies in the act of thinking higher thoughts and practicing deeper truths. We have the capacity to create positive change.

"God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns" (Psalm 46:5 ESV).

WHAT WILL YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO DO?

Living that out, though, takes something most of us are short on: courage.

I love getting to know how God feels about me. It's all a part of His perfect plan and fills me with hope in every season. But I've discovered finding out who I am in God's eyes takes courage.

"You aren't an accident. You weren't mass-produced. You aren't an assembly-line product. You were deliberately planned, specifically gifted, and lovingly positioned on this earth by the Master Craftsman."—Max Lucado

When I'm teaching fiction writing, I pose the question: What will your character have the courage to do at the end of the story that he/she doesn't have courage now? There lies growth, the path to spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional growth.

What do you need courage to do this very minute? Open a journal and list those things you'd really like to accomplish. How can you step forward? Pray. Seek wisdom and guidance. Plan. Pray again.

"He who began a good work in you will see it to completion" (Philippians 1:6 ESV).

Try writing your own name in the blanks: _____ is joyful, humble, kind, loving, compassionate, and _____ wants to influence others for good.

You are a brave, beautiful woman, and you have the courage to fulfill God's purpose in you. Hope embraces every season. So the next time the mirror starts talking, remember who had the first word. Your life is a light to others. Let it shine.

Di Ann Mills is an award-winning novelist of 110 books. To find out more about her ministry and story check out diannmills.com

"You know how the Lord is—He'll always make it better than we can actually imagine."
—RACHEL PURCELL

The Keys to Keep Going

Rachel Purcell

interview with Lisa Burris Burns

Leading Hearts *contributor Lisa Burris Burns recently sat down with Centricity Music recording artist Rachel Purcell to talk about the songwriting behind her recently released EP,* Keep Going. *The Muscle Shoals, Alabama, native opened up about returning to the soul and R&B sound she grew up with, finding the right collaborators and the message she hopes listeners carry with them.*

LH: Let's talk about the new EP. I'm excited to know more about how everything came together for you.

Rachel: This EP is different. You know, I'm from Alabama. My home in Muscle Shoals is the source of some of the greatest soul music in the world. I've always wanted to write music that reflected the classic style and heart of so many of the artists launched from there.

When I first moved to Nashville, I was signed to do country music, but for the life of me, I struggled to find collaborators with that R&B sound I was raised with. My current label, Centricity Music, allows me to produce music that more fully reflects my faith. I do feel like I'm able to be more authentically me.

LH: So what finally set this new sound in motion?

Rachel: A year ago, I felt the Lord reminding me to keep working toward that hometown style. I went to my friend, singer-songwriter Blessing Offor, and shared what I felt like I was supposed to do. Blessing and I have been friends since I moved to Nashville. He's not only a great friend but also a sounding board. He assured me that we could do this. The two of us went to work, and we wrote the song "You Love Me the Best." It was the beginning of this new sound.

We took the song to my producer, John Strandell, to give him the vision. John was like, "I'm willing to go there with y'all! Let's get risky. Let's have fun and see what we can do!" I remember hearing the demo for the first time, and I was just bawling my eyes out, like, "Lord, this is better than I even imagined." You know how the Lord is—He'll always make it better than we can actually imagine.

LH: What was the writing process like once you found that sound?

Rachel: Every single song we were writing was the thing it was supposed to be, which is not common. Normally you have to write a lot of songs and then work to figure out what the thing is—you know, which songs work best together. And we probably wrote 20 songs that fit together perfectly for this new record. And I'm just like, "Lord, wow! God, you're so cool!"

LH: Now that new sound you've had in your heart for years is being prepped for release, what are you feeling?

Rachel: I'm thankful that God led me to really go for it. Initially, I'd been trying to go into writing rooms with people to create with that goal in mind, but the sound wasn't quite there yet. I don't think it was necessarily anyone's fault. I think you have to have the right paintbrush in your palette to be able to serve the right artist.

LH: Writing styles can be so different, and when the collaboration clicks, it clicks. I think about famous singer-songwriters and their collaborations, like Elton John and Bernie Taupin. They wrote such amazing songs together. So finding the right collaborator is important?

Rachel: Yes! I'm thankful to have found my "Bernie," or my few little collaborators who have just made so much sense and have honored me. God was so good to bring the right people so that I could share who I am and what I've been through with them. The songs are based on things I've walked through.

LH: What do you feel God is using you to say to us through the most recent songs?

Rachel: Through my experiences, I feel the biggest thing I can say is keep going. Wherever you are, whatever you're going through, the highs and lows—it's a blessing to encourage people to keep going!

LH: How was the recording process different this time around?

Rachel: I enjoyed the process so much. This is the first project where I've had the same producer on every song. It's like you can feel the same fingerprints on every song.

LH: It's amazing to have continuity, just like that thread running through every song.

Rachel: Yes. You know, it really is the Lord just putting it together. Content-wise, we're able to tell a person struggling in their own journey that God is going to heal and redeem in time.

LH: I know it's hard to pick a favorite, but if you were to steer us to the one that's closest to your heart right now?

Rachel: I will say that these two songs on the EP are really special. "You Love Me the Best" was the first song that really started this project, and "Who I Belong To" is such an anthem for me. I can't wait to hear what people think of them!

You can listen to Rachel's music now on all streaming platforms.

Lisa Burris Burns is a bestselling and award-winning author and is co-host of *Coffee Chat with Amber & Lisa.*

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The Big Question *with Cynthia L. Simmons*

God tailored your gifts with a distinct expression that no one else possesses.
—CYNTHIA L. SIMMONS

Q: "How do we trade the frantic rush of our daily agendas for moments that actually echo in eternity?"

When I researched photography for my last novel, I learned an unexpected lesson about time. In the 1860s, a photographer expended immense effort just to capture a single portrait. Without a flash, he had to calculate the natural lighting, mix chemicals, and sensitize glass plates in a dark room. After focusing the heavy lens and praying his subjects sat motionless, he still had to develop the image before the collodion dried.

He worked hard to freeze one fleeting second—a slice of life that vanished into the past. A single moment can feel insignificant, yet a lifetime consists of thousands of those moments strung together. Each one counts.

In our hurried culture, checking off items on an overflowing to-do list or building a platform makes us feel productive. But I often ask myself how much of my frantic rush is merely busywork with no eternal weight. If we want our brief days to matter, Scripture points to three intentional shifts:

1. Exercise your unique, God-given design.

The apostle Peter reminds us, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the multifaceted grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10 NASB). God tailored your gifts with a distinct expression that no one else possesses. When we neglect to build up the body of Christ with our specific calling, the whole family of faith misses out on that grace.

2. Watch for divine interruptions.

In Ephesians 5:16, Paul exhorts us toward sacred urgency: "making the best use of the time, because the days are evil" (ESV). The Greek word used here for time is *kairos*—an appointed, opportune season. Redeeming the time often means setting aside our "essential jobs" when God presents a sacred appointment. When a friend calls in tears or a family member needs to share a heavy burden, stepping away from our "urgent" tasks allows us to capture that holy moment for the Kingdom.

3. Anchor your heart in heaven's timeline.

Paul also encourages us, "Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2 ESV). When Ruth chose to follow Naomi back to Bethlehem, leaving behind everything familiar, she couldn't foresee the future. Yet her quiet resolve placed her into the lineage of Jesus Christ. What seemed like a small decision on earth became an eternal cornerstone.

Just like that 1860s photographer patiently preparing his film, we must choose the appropriate exposure of our time. The frantic demands of today will soon fade, but what we invest in people, in service, and in Christ lasts forever. Let's lay down our rushed agendas, open our hands, and trade the fleeting noise of today for moments that echo forever.

Cynthia L. Simmons is the mother of five grown children, past president of Christian Authors Guild, radio host, media coach. She writes both fiction and non-fiction and loves history. She ministers to women of all ages but has a special place in her heart for young mothers and homeschool mothers.
www.clsimmons.com

"Somewhere, someone is praying, God, I don't need everything fixed today. I just need enough."

—STACY SANCHEZ

The Abundance *we almost miss*

5 SMALL WAYS TO MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

BY STACY SANCHEZ

Thanksgiving has a language all its own: abundance, overflowing tables, second helpings and too much pie. We bow our heads and thank God for the more than enough He blessed us with.

But not every Thanksgiving is bountiful. Some years, we come to the table empty.

Maybe this is our first Thanksgiving without someone we love, and the empty chair seems to take up more space than the occupied ones. Maybe illness has divided our lives into before and after, a marriage has fractured, or a child we love is making choices we cannot fix. Maybe we've spent too many nights awake carrying worries that refuse to sleep.

We stopped asking God for more and started asking Him for just enough: enough strength for today, enough money for tomorrow's bill, enough grace to forgive, enough hope to believe this isn't the end.

Abundance is easy to recognize when it overflows. It's harder to notice when it arrives one handful at a time.

RECOGNIZING ABUNDANCE

We tend to measure abundance by what we can count: money in the bank, food in the pantry, and people around the table. True abundance is easily overlooked.

This Thanksgiving let's notice the blessings that don't make our gratitude lists. Abundance doesn't announce itself. It sits quietly in our ordinary lives, waiting for us to notice.

Notice who made the load lighter. Who stepped in, answered the phone, made us laugh, checked on us or stayed when things got hard? Who are the people who made a hard season a little less lonely?

Notice what is here. The budget may be stretched beyond what we can fix. Grief may be heavy and the future uncertain, and yet, a favorite song came on at just the right time, the first sip of coffee tasted good, or a child's smile touched our heart.

Notice what we forgot to count. Who notices when we don't show up? Who can we call at an inconvenient hour? Where can we arrive without pretending we're okay? The people with whom we don't have to have it all together are priceless.

Notice how far we've come. Think back to a time we weren't sure we'd make it through. We may carry the scars from it, but we're standing. Along the way, we've grown stronger, wiser and learned what it means to hold on to faith.

Through my ministry with grandparents raising grandchildren, I've watched people discover abundance in places they never expected to find it. Their energy may be limited, their budget planned for retirement rather than backpacks and growing feet, and the future nothing like they imagined. Then a child needs a safe place to land, and somehow, they make room.

They can't undo the circumstances that brought that child to their door. They can open it. Love has a way of taking what feels like barely enough and turning it into abundance.

Most of us won't be asked to rearrange our lives. But their story reminds us that even when we don't feel like we have much left, we may still have exactly what someone needs—love, acceptance, and Jesus.

5 SMALL WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Being an answer to someone's prayer doesn't require a grand gesture.

1. See the need. Who is doing life alone? Who has become a caregiver? Who has stopped showing up? Instead of waiting for someone to ask, pay attention to the changes happening around us.

2. Share what we have. We may not have much money to give, but can we squeeze in one more chair at the table? Share what's in the freezer? Or offer a ride to a doctor's appointment?

3. Save some margin. Prepare for needs we don't know about yet. Tuck away a grocery gift card or make a double batch of dinner and freeze half. It's a simple way to be ready when a need arises.

4. Start small. A grocery card won't solve financial problems, and a casserole won't heal a marriage. An afternoon of childcare won't remove the pressures of raising grandchildren. But small doesn't mean insignificant. On a hard day, simply knowing someone noticed can feel like mercy.

5. Say yes to receiving. Some seasons we have something to give; in others, we're the ones who need help. When we let someone show up for us, we give them the opportunity to experience the joy of helping. Even receiving can be a gift to someone else.

Somewhere, someone is praying, God, I don't need everything fixed today. I just need enough.

What looks like "just enough" in our hands may look like abundance in someone else's.

This Thanksgiving, along with asking, What am I thankful for? let's also ask, What do I have that might be an answer to someone else's prayer for just enough?

Stacy Sanchez is the founder of Parenting ... Again?!! Grandparents Parenting Grandchildren. Find her on Facebook and stacysanchez.com.

Bill taught believers they didn't have to win arguments or possess all the answers. They could ask thoughtful questions, listen, open Scripture, and trust the Holy Spirit.

—LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD

A Call I Almost Ignored

I had just made a decision to start saying no.

BY LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD

I was a young mother and caregiver to my daughter, whose life had been profoundly changed by disability and injuries from a car crash. My world had become much smaller than I had once imagined it would be. Though I had books in my heart I longed to write, I had decided I could no longer say yes when someone asked me to write or co-write their book.

Then the phone rang.

A Christian radio station knew I was a writer and attended Christian writers' conferences. They wondered if I might be interested in helping someone write a book.

My answer was going to be no.

Then they told me his name.

Bill Fay.

I knew Bill. He had spoken at my church, and I had been fascinated by his remarkably simple approach to evangelism. Bill knew how to share Jesus without turning the conversation into an argument. He asked questions. He listened. He opened the

Bible and allowed people to read God's Word for themselves.

HOW COULD I SAY NO TO THAT?

Before long, Bill and I were having regular phone dates. I would cradle the phone between my shoulder and ear while typing as fast as my fingers could move. Bill would tell me his story, explain his evangelism method, and recount one astonishing encounter after another.

AND BILL HAD QUITE A STORY.

Before Jesus transformed his life, Bill had been a successful corporate executive who also operated Fantasy Island, a house of prostitution with ties to organized crime. Eventually his criminal life collapsed around him.

But God was already pursuing Bill through the patient witness of a Christian doctor he knew from his athletic club. After Bill's world began falling apart, that doctor called him—not to condemn him, but simply to ask, "Are you okay?"

That kindness helped lead Bill on a journey that ended on his knees in a little chapel in the Colorado mountains. On March 4, 1981, Bill Fay gave his life to Jesus Christ.

And then this man who had been so skilled at talking to people about girls and gambling began talking to people how Jesus could save their souls.

Bill taught believers they didn't have to win arguments or possess all the answers. They could ask thoughtful questions, listen, open Scripture, and trust the Holy Spirit. One of his favorite questions after someone read a Bible verse was simply, "What does this say to you?"

Those telephone conversations eventually became the book Share Jesus Without Fear.

I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT GOD WOULD DO

Our book traveled around the world, was translated into more than fifty languages, and expanded into Bible studies and training resources used by churches and ministries like the Gideons and the Navigators. Through Bill's message, millions learned they could share their faith without fear.

Because of my daughter's needs, I had wondered if I would ever have much opportunity for ministry again. I couldn't simply leave home and travel wherever I wanted. My first calling in that season was caring for my child.

Yet from my home, often with a telephone tucked under my chin, God allowed me to help create something that traveled to places I couldn't go and reached people I could never meet.

What I thought was a limitation wasn't a limitation to God at all.

Bill died April 21, 2026, at eighty-five. At his memorial in Littleton, Colorado, I looked around the room, surprised to see only about forty people.

How could the memorial for a man whose influence had reached around the world be so small?

Then I realized: most of Bill's generation had already gone home to the Lord.

HIS HARVEST BEYOND HIS GENERATION

These people Bill influenced told stories about the man behind the famous evangelism method. They remembered his phone calls, his persistence, his friendship, and his refusal to let people slip through the cracks.

Retired detective Carine Shelley was there too—the police officer who had once put Bill in handcuffs. Years later, after seeing the transformation in him, she became his friend. Bill called her "Sis" for the rest of his life.

Even as death approached, Bill was still Bill. At his memorial, we watched one final video he had recorded. It wasn't really a goodbye.

It was another invitation to receive Jesus.

As I sat there, I thought about that phone call I'd received so many years earlier—and the no I had been prepared to give.

I'M SO GRATEFUL I SAID YES.

I thought I was helping Bill Fay write a book.

Instead, God allowed me to become a small part of a ministry that traveled around the world while I stayed home caring for my daughter.

And perhaps that's part of Bill's legacy too: never underestimate what God can do with one conversation, one opportunity—or one unexpected yes.

Linda Evans Shepherd is the author of 41 books including co-authoring *Share Jesus Without Fear* with Bill Fay. gotopray.com

Still Bearing Fruit

FINDING JOY, PURPOSE, AND HUMOR IN LIFE'S LATER SEASONS

BY PENELOPE CARLEVATO

As we begin pulling out our fall decorations, the thermometer here in Tennessee is still hovering around 90 degrees, and it's the end of September! Apparently, autumn hasn't received the invitation yet. But there is something comforting about changing seasons, and fall has always been one of my favorites. I love the rust, gold, and crimson leaves, the pumpkins appearing on porches, and the fun of pulling out sweaters we haven't seen for almost a year. Whether or not the temperature agrees, I am ready for fall.

Our lives have seasons, too. The problem is that we women sometimes forget that one season has ended and another has begun. We can spend a great deal of energy trying to live the way we did ten, twenty, or even thirty years ago. Eventually, however, our bodies, and more often than not, our knees send us a firm reminder that things have changed.

LATE BLOOMER, RIGHT ON TIME

I am learning that growing older is not an obstacle to overcome but an opportunity to embrace. There are things I cannot do as easily as I once did, but there are also things I can do now that I could not have done when I was younger. I have experience, perspective, and hopefully wisdom!

I didn't begin writing until almost the end of my long nursing career. If I had decided I was too old to begin something new, I would never have written the five books I have today, with number six, *Amazing Women on the Titanic*, about to be released. What a wonderful reminder that God does not put an expiration date on our talents or usefulness.

Scripture tells us, "They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green" (Psalm 92:14 NIV). God doesn't say our fruit-bearing years end when our children leave home, when we retire, or when our hair turns gray. There can be fruit in every season; it may simply look different.

FRUIT THAT LOOKS DIFFERENT NOW

Our grandchildren brought a wonderful new season into our lives, and now our great-grandchildren have given us opportunities we never imagined when we were busy raising our own children. We have traveled to see our grandchildren and taken several of them to England. Sharing the country of my birth with them and watching them experience places that are part of their heritage has been a gift to me as much as to them.

KEEP WHAT MATTERS, PACK UP THE REST

Travel has also been an important part of our lives. Years ago, while working as a nurse, I cared for another nurse recovering from bilateral knee replacements. One evening she gave me advice I never forgot: "Travel while you can. It gets so much harder later in life."

She was right! When we are young, we have the knees for travel but not the money. When we finally have a little more money and time, our knees begin filing formal complaints. There is something humbling about discovering that the cobblestone streets you once thought were charming have become an orthopedic challenge.

COOKING UNDER PRESSURE

Even my kitchen reminds me that life has seasons. When our children were young and I worked full-time, my Crock-Pot® was my best friend. Years later, I bought an Instant Pot®, but I wasn't entirely convinced cooking dinner under pressure was a good idea. It sat on my counter for quite a while as I wondered if the thing might blow up! Eventually, I gathered my courage and tried it. It wasn't nearly as frightening as I had imagined.

Isn't that often true of new things? Growing older sometimes means being willing to try something unfamiliar, even when we

Isn't that often true of new things? Growing older sometimes means being willing to try something unfamiliar, even when we are perfectly comfortable with the old. Interestingly, after all the newer gadgets, my Crock-Pot® and I have become good friends again.

PERMISSION TO SIMPLIFY

Even holiday decorating has changed. There was a time when I spent days decorating every room, especially at Christmas. Now, before I put something out, I ask one practical question: "How much trouble will this be to put away?" That question has eliminated quite a few decorations!

Growing older gives us permission to simplify, to keep what is meaningful and release what has simply become work.

Ecclesiastes reminds us that "to everything there is a season." Perhaps growing older gracefully begins when we stop trying to drag yesterday's season into today. We don't have to desperately hold on to the women we once were. Instead, we can become, with gratitude and a little humor, the women God is still shaping us to be.

There is grace for every season. Sometimes wisdom means embracing something new, sometimes it means letting something go, and sometimes it means rediscovering what worked beautifully all along.

And if we can do all of that while sitting down occasionally to rest our knees, all the better.

Penelope Carlevato is an is the author of The Art of Afternoon Tea: From the Era of Downton Abbey and the Titanic as well as Tea on the Titanic, First Class Etiquette and The Tea Lover's Journal. www.penelopecarlevato.com

Crock-Pot White Chicken Chili

This is a great dinner for those upcoming cool fall nights. It was a dinner my whole family loved and still does. It's great for a few people, or you can double the recipe and invite the grandkids. There are a lot of varieties of chili recipes, but this one will soon be your favorite.

Ingredients:

1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breast (2–3)
1 onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
24 oz. chicken broth
2 – 15-oz. cans Great Northern beans, drained and rinsed
2 – 4-oz. cans diced green chilies
1 15-oz. can corn, drained
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. pepper
1 tsp. cumin
¾ tsp. oregano
½ to 1 tsp. chili powder
¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
1 bunch fresh cilantro, chopped
4 oz. cream cheese
1/3 cup half-and-half
Toppings:
Sliced jalapeños (optional)
Cubed avocados
Sour cream
Cilantro, chopped
Tortilla strips
Shredded Cheese—your choice
I

INSTRUCTIONS:

Add chicken breasts to bottom of slow cooker and add all the spices

Top with diced onions, minced garlic, beans, green chilies, corn, chicken broth and cilantro and stir.

Cover and cook on Low for 8 hours or High for 3–4 hours.

Remove the chicken to a large bowl and shred with two forks, then return to the slow cooker.

Add the cream cheese and half-and-half and stir into the chicken mixture and cook on High for 15 minutes.

Stir well and place into bowls and top with desired.

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Give, Don't Add

THE SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY FOR THE HOLIDAYS

BY EDIE MELSON

Instead of another spiritual checklist, help our communities recognize God's presence in ordinary moments.

—EDIE MELSON

The holidays are coming—along with an avalanche of expectations and emotional overload.

Decorate the house. Plan the meals. Buy the gifts. Attend the parties. Make memories. Keep up with traditions. And somehow find time to enjoy it all. Then we open social media, and the pressure increases.

Our feeds fill with beautifully decorated homes, creative gift ideas, and picture-perfect families. Even inspirational posts can become overwhelming. Everywhere we look, is the unspoken message to do more and be more. someone offers one more thing we should do.

As Christian leaders, we have an opportunity to offer something different.

Instead of adding to the holiday noise, what if we used our social media influence to make life easier for our followers?

What if our holiday strategy could be summed up in three words?

GIVE, DON'T ADD.

Here are five ways to put that principle into practice.

1. Give Permission, Don't Add Expectations

One of the greatest gifts we can offer is permission to simplify.

Share a tradition you've simplified. Talk about something you've decided not to do. Remind followers that store-bought cookies are perfectly acceptable and saying no to another commitment isn't selfish.

Sometimes the most encouraging words we can offer are, You do not have to do it all.

2. Give Practical Help, Don't Add More Work

Instead of sharing elaborate holiday projects, offer resources followers can use immediately.

Post a simple hospitality shortcut, a short prayer, an encouraging Scripture, or an easy way to bless someone who's lonely. How can I help make the lives of others easier?

And remember, not every post needs a download or email signup. This is the season to give without expecting something in return.

3. Give Breathing Room, Don't Add More Noise

Here's an unusual social media strategy: We don't have to post more because it's the holidays.

Our followers already face endless promotions, announcements, and invitations. Instead of competing for attention, focus on sharing content that matters. One thoughtful post may offer more encouragement than seven hurried ones.

Our goal isn't constant engagement. It's serving our audience well.

4. Give Connection, Don't Add Comparison

Not everyone has a beautifully decorated home or a large family gathered around the table. Many of those online are navigating grief, financial struggles, or difficult relationships. Share joyful moments, but remember that others may be experiencing a different season.

Use social media to build genuine connections. Ask questions. Invite conversation. Respond thoughtfully. Sometimes the greatest encouragement comes when we create opportunities for followers to encourage one another.

5. Give Jesus, Don't Add Religious Obligations

As Christian communicators, this may be our most important gift. Instead of another spiritual checklist, help our communities recognize God's presence in ordinary moments. Share a prayer they can whisper while grocery shopping. Offer a Scripture verse for a stressful afternoon. And encourage them to put down their phones and spend five quiet minutes with Him. That goal isn't engagement statistics, but pointing people to Jesus.

A DIFFERENT HOLIDAY STRATEGY

This season, instead of asking, What should I post? let's ask, What does my audience need?

Before publishing, consider one question:

Am I adding to her holiday load, or helping make it lighter?

Let's give encouragement instead of pressure, practical help instead of more work, and connection instead of comparison. Because sometimes the most meaningful gift we can offer through social media isn't more content.

It's content that asks less of our followers and gives them more of what they truly need.

Edie Melson MA, ASBC is the director of the Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers Conference. Her top-ranked blog, The Write Conversation, reaches thousands of writers each month. ediemelson.com.

In all fairness, the messages are not urgent, even the ones marked urgent

—RHONDA RHEA

ANOTHER MEETING

(that should have been an email)

I will not tell you how many emails are currently sitting in my inbox, so don't even ask me. Don't even try to guess. I'm a wimp when it comes to deleting. It's too embarrassing and I simply, wimply won't tell you how many are in there. I'm probably considered an e-hoarder though. If you suggest therapies, I won't refuse to look into them. Just zip me an email. Or 13,000.

URGENT!!! (NOT REALLY)

In all fairness, the messages are not urgent, even the ones marked urgent. Even the ones marked URGENT in all caps. They're not nearly as URGENT as they try to insist they are, and most of them need to calm that drama down about eight notches. I get that the exclusive offer is about to expire, that I have 873 social media notes and invitations today, that there's a 50% off lightning deal I shouldn't miss, and that I have several thousand updates I can't successfully maneuver life without. Still, I don't think any of that is as earthshaking as the caps imply. Or the over-exclamation-point-ing. Or the over-over-over-emoji-ing. So many emojis.

98 REASONS TO HIT "SUBSCRIBE"

It doesn't help that I'm pretty sure I'm on every email list ever created. All of them. Hard to imagine, but I may be better at deleting than I am unsubscribing. But also, I just saw an ad that said if I sign up for this certain e-newsletter I'll get two percent off all future purchases. I'm bad at math but suddenly I have what feels like 98 reasons for signing up. I'm practically overflowing with reasons.

AN INBOX WORTH OVERFLOWING

No doubt there are better ways to overflow—urgent ways, I'd dare say. Paul wrote to the Colossians about "overflowing with gratitude." In context, he was teaching about walking in Jesus, living for Him the same way our relationship with Him begins. "So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude" (Colossians 2:6–7 CSB).

WE RECEIVED HIM BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH.

And we live life through and for Him by grace, through faith. That's gospel living. Gospel living keeps our faith grounded, built up, established. And gospel living very naturally leads us to a place of sweet thankfulness, a gratitude that goes beyond just us. It overflows and sloshes happiness on those around us.

Jesus still sends this message today. "I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance" (John 10:10 CSB). Or even better as The Amplified Bible says, "to the full, till it overflows."

Overflowing life and overflowing gratitude meet in beautiful, earthshaking, joyous drama, with nary a need to calm it down—not even a smidge of a notch. I'll take all the best drama and every one of these meetings: grace meets faith meets thanks meets life meets overflow. Oh YES!

I seriously and sincerely want these meetings every day. I want to live gospel-gratitude urgently. And simply, not wimply, share it urgently as well. Maybe even email it. Maybe even email it 13,000 times. I'm without question an unashamed life-long subscriber.

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

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