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GREATER CONNECTION

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but then God asked
me to raise him."*

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Purpose
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FROM THE PUBLISHER linda evans shepherd



Revival Can Start With YOU!

I climbed the stairs to the stage in Hughes Auditorium on the Asbury University campus and faced the audience, a small group of writing friends waiting for me to confess.

It was a warm August night in 2022, a few months before the now famed 2023 Asbury revival.

One of the writers in my audience was my friend Rhonda Dragomir who had attended the 1970 Asbury revival with her dad, an Asbury professor, who'd brought his entire family to witness that amazing move of God.

Rhonda told us before we entered the auditorium that the presence of the Holy Spirit still lingered inside even now, fifty-two years later.

My friends and I had gathered to retrace the steps of the previous revival, the seventh revival to take place inside Hughes Auditorium since 1905.

These revivals were often sparked by a small group of students who sought the Lord. When one of the students would confess to a secret sin, tears of repentance would sweep through the student body gathered in the auditorium. Weeping and songs of praise filled the air as students got right with the Lord.

But on the August night of 2022, my friends and I each took the lonely walk to the platform where we confessed our secrets. Some confessed to shame that their children had

gotten off track, others confessed to secret health issues, while others shared their past mistakes.

But what would I share? I looked down at my friends and I knew I had to admit to a deep hurt that had shamed me.

As I confessed my secret wound, my heart healed and my shame lifted.

A few days later, I happened to run into the very one who'd hurt me, and not only did I know I had forgiven her, I realized I was free of both the pain and shame I had carried.

This revival is spreading.

If you want to be a part of it, first come to Jesus understanding He is the Son of God. He died on the cross for your sins so you can be set free of sin and death.

Repent and ask Jesus to forgive you and be the Lord of your life.

Jesus will transform you, and His Spirit will rest on you. Live your life as a gift of love for Him. The One who loves you will be with you always. ❤️

Love,
Linda

LEADING HEARTS PUBLISHER | AWSA FOUNDER

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I Have a Horrible Boss (and She's Me)

As I sit down to write to you, I can't help but reflect on my own journey, particularly my relationship with myself. You see, I have a horrible boss in my life, and she's me. It's a humorous response I often use to describe my self-employment, but recent events have made me realize the reason it's so funny is ... because it's true.

A recent car accident served as a wake-up call from God, urging me to confront the patterns of behavior I've been ignoring. I've been talking about these lessons, but now it's time to truly embrace them and grow beyond them. God has greater plans for me, but I can't move forward until I address the issues holding me back.

So, how do I make lasting change?

It starts with reclaiming my quiet space and holding that space as a appointment in my day until it becomes a new habit. I've realized that I don't need to turn every space in my life into a makeshift office. Constantly being reachable and always finding the next task to tackle has become a barrier to true focus and peace.

During a moment of reflection in my backyard, God spoke one word to my heart: FOCUS. It was a simple yet profound message that made me question how I could achieve it.

While God offers grace and patience, straying from His plans comes with consequences. For me, it's in the garage waiting for my car insurance, awaiting the damage assessed to my family's pocketbook.

One of the biggest decisions I made was that I wasn't

going to take my business into every single room of my life. And that in itself requires BIG impulse control. This is going to require me to set aside sacred space in my life that doesn't get filled with doing business, accountability and FOCUS.

But one thing for sure is that sustained change needs to happen if I'm going to grow a healthier relationship with myself.

As Proverbs 4:23 reminds us, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." And I'm learning to understand that for over 50 years, I've taught my heart to disregard the healthy boundaries my body needs.

In this issue of *Leading Hearts*, we focus on relationships, but let's not forget that the one we have with ourselves needs attention too. I encourage you to delve into these pages with an open heart.

Perhaps it's time for some self-reflection and evaluation. Let's embrace healthy relationships, starting with the one we have with ourselves. ❤️

Love,

Amber

LEADING HEARTS EDITOR | ART DIRECTOR

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

karen porter | karenporter.com

Encouraging Words Change *Relationships*





As a college freshman, I watched a friend struggle with world history. Despite the fact that she won valedictorian at her high school, she barely squeezed out a “C” in Professor Anderson’s class.

Since I had not been valedictorian, I avoided the class. Instead, I took the summer course at my hometown community college. Summer classes are intense—three hours a night, three nights a week—covering a full semester’s work in a few weeks. Then I missed three days—nine hours—the equivalent of three weeks work (Yes, youth camp was more fun than summer school).

The next Monday, a friend said, “Tonight, we will be tested on the material presented while you were gone.”

I wanted to give up.

I sat on the ottoman at the foot of my father’s favorite chair and told him my dilemma. “I’ve decided to drop the class.”

He removed his reading glasses and looked at me with his clear blue eyes. “Karen, read the textbook, then take the test tonight. If you fail, I’ll let you drop the class. If you do well, you can finish the course.”

I studied hard, passed the test, and finished the semester with a “B.” Those few encouraging words gave me the boost I needed.

Good thing too. Because during the second summer semester, I met George at that community college, and we were married a year later. Without my Daddy’s gentle push, I would have quit school and not been there to meet my husband.

Encouragement words are powerful.

David lived in danger and fear because Saul, the king, followed hot on his trail and intended to kill him. “While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. And Saul’s son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.” (See I Samuel 23:15–16.)

Jonathan, Saul’s son and heir to the throne, encouraged David instead of following in his father’s evil plans. He

helped David find strength in God. Jonathan pointed David to the source of all strength.

When my beloved father died, our pastor said, “Karen, I don’t know how you feel, but I care how you feel.” Those words comforted and encouraged me. He could have quoted Scripture or said that death always follows life. He could have told me to celebrate my heritage from my godly father or done some practical deed for our family. Any of these actions would have been nice and helpful, but saying he cared encouraged me the most.

When we make a show of encouragement by speaking kind words, sending thoughtful cards and letters, and visiting in person, we are encouragers.

The church council in Jerusalem sent Paul and Barnabas, along with Barsabbas and Silas, to Antioch. They sent a letter to the believers there. “The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.” (See Acts 25:31.)

Encouraging words, whether spoken or written, build up others and offer hope. Tell your friend she is a capable, valuable person and then see what happens.

When I first began speaking, a Christian educator’s club invited me to speak. The thought of standing in front of a bunch of schoolteachers intimidated and terrified me. I doubted I could pull it off.

One week before the big night, I found an encouraging card taped to my front door. The next day, another card appeared. For seven days, I found a new card taped to the door. Each card was sweet encouragement.

My friend Mary Sinclair placed those cards on my door because she believed I could do it. By the time of the event, I believed it too.

Become an encourager by speaking words and writing cards and letters. Your encouraging words will change another person’s life. ❤️

Adapted from Karen’s book I’ll Bring the Chocolate: Satisfying a Woman’s Craving for Friendship and Faith. Used by permission.



Unveiling the Path to Purpose

Lane P. Jordan

Lane Jordan Burday, who writes under the author's name Lane P. Jordan, may live in Texas now, but she will always be an Atlanta girl at heart.

Divine Threads in Life's Fabric

Originally, she dreamed of being in the fashion business, but God had something else in mind. God unfolded His beautiful plan for Lane's life and ministry so subtly that she didn't even realize it was happening.

"I grew up Methodist," Lane said, "but one of my very best friends went to First Baptist Church in Atlanta."

Though Lane had made a commitment to Christ when she was younger, she'd wandered away from faith.

"When you don't walk with Christ daily, you get closer to the world," Lane said. "I didn't think that was true, of course. Nobody does. We think we're good."

Embracing Divine Direction

Lane's friend brought her to First Baptist, and that's where God took hold of her heart. In the midst of her college life, Lane had somehow managed to avoid God, and now she found herself close to graduating from Georgia State University with a degree in journalism and broadcasting. She thought following Jesus would upend her plans of working in media.

"I was so afraid that if I became a Christian, I'd have to wear long dresses, stop putting on makeup, and go to Africa." Lane laughed. "But in that worship service, I told God that my life was a mess, and I needed Him to come into my life. I surrendered and told Him that even if I had to go to Africa, I will follow You."

The next morning, Lane was totally different. She began to love the strangers she saw as she walked to work, stopped cussing, and got back into the Word. It was a total change.

Faith-Fueled Surprises

One year later, Lane's life took a turn she didn't see coming.

"After I graduated, I remember walking up Peachtree Street, going to radio stations to look for a job," she said. "Everybody kept saying that getting into media would take forever."

Spontaneously, while she was job hunting, Lane stopped to visit a friend at First Baptist Church, and the associate pastor pulled her aside.

"He just came right over to me," Lane said, "and he gave me the opportunity to work with In Touch Ministries. God was right there with me, leading me to the job He had for me!"

Over her years as associate producer for In Touch and its weekly television broadcasts, Lane worked almost daily with Dr. Charles Stanley and forged relationships with many other men and women that propelled her into a life of ministry.

"I look back," Lane said, "and I just thank the Lord."

Stepping Stones of Service

Lane worked for First Baptist in Atlanta as both associate producer for the television show as well as the editor of the church's newsletter, *The Witness*. During that season of her life, she married and had two daughters. Then there was a move to Indiana and after three years, they moved to Colorado.

With two small children and limited social time, Lane believed she'd reached the end of her ministry potential. But God wasn't finished.

"I thought my ministry time was over," she said. "But then, I was able to attend a neighborhood Christian Women's Club through Stonecroft Ministries. Sitting with others around the table that weekend, I felt God calling me to speak for Him."

continued on p. 13



AN AWARD-WINNING MODERN DAY ESTHER ROMANCE
FROM AUTHOR LANE P. JORDAN

NAVIGATING LOVE, TURMOIL, & DIVINE CALLING



The story is creative and captivating and the truth transformative, leading us to truly seeing each other as God does and loving one another. —Jelani Lewis, Gateway Church, Plano, Texas Campus Pastor.



Winning the Golden Scrolls Award for Romance Book of the Year, *Evangeline* is a modern retelling of the biblical story of Esther, set in 1960s New York City during the Civil Rights era.

Follow the captivating journey of a biracial heroine as she navigates love, turmoil, and a divine calling that transcends color and class.

Evangeline offers a unifying voice and a transformative truth that will change how you see others through God's lens.

A brilliant and creative masterpiece that reimagines a timeless narrative for our divided world.



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continued from p. 11

Lane spoke to the area representative for Stonecroft Ministries, and she was invited to send in a tape of her testimony.

Lane wrote her script by hand, recorded the tape herself, and submitted it. Stonecroft Ministries brought her on board right away, and she had the opportunity to speak in Christian women's clubs all over Colorado, Wyoming, and several other states.

Isn't God full of surprises?

After her family moved to Texas, Lane continued speaking for Stonecroft as well as other churches, retreats, women's functions, and MOPS. Then COVID hit.

"I have spoken only a few times since COVID," Lane said, "but God has blessed me with a sense of serenity that I'm where I'm supposed to be. It's helped me learn to relax and be more responsive to what God wants. I still have writing to do, and it's blessed work."

Promise in Every Season

Both she and her husband attend and serve at Gateway Church in Frisco, Texas, and Lane is proud to be a mother and a grandmother, with one granddaughter and a grandson on the way.

"One of the main goals for me speaking to women is to motivate them and encourage them," Lane said. "No matter if you're changing a diaper or cleaning the house or taking a parent to the doctor, you are working for God."

Lane's first book, *12 Steps to Becoming a More Organized Woman*, was a bestseller that went into nine printings. After that, she wrote more books on organization.

"The main reason I stress being more organized," she said, "is not so that someone can check your bathtub. It's so you have more time to serve the Lord. You want to have your ducks in a row so you can serve God, your family and others."

Lane may be best known for her books on organizing, but the book she's really the most excited about is her historical fiction novel, *Evangeline*.

"I was reading Esther in the Bible in my quiet time," Lane

said, "and I remember wondering what Esther's story would have looked like in a different culture. What would have happened if Esther was a biracial woman in 1960s Georgia?"

Evangeline has already won the AWSA Golden Scroll for historical fiction and was a finalist for the Christian Literary Awards.

"It's so hard to get published," Lane said. "I still can't believe I did. Perhaps the only reason I was published is that God knew I'd open my mouth and preach the gospel!"


Lane's many projects include teaching Bible studies (for almost 30 years), writing blog posts, writing magazine articles, hosting radio/TV programs, coaching, and several other ministries. She has also been painting for about 20 years.

"I am so grateful that God saved me," Lane said. "I love being a mom. I love being a wife. I woke up this morning, and the sun came up. I have a purpose in my life, legs that work, a roof over my head, hot water, clean sheets. Every day is a miracle."

Most recently, the Lord led Lane to Pearls of Promise Ministries, a ministry devoted to helping women overcome life's trials. There, she fills many roles, including hosting radio and TV shows, writing blog posts, and currently managing a devotional book project that she hopes will be completed by the end of the year.

"The one thing I don't want anyone to forget," Lane said, "is that God is God. He is on His throne, He is in control, and He will allow all things to work together for good for those who love Him."

Lane couldn't have planned the way her life has unfolded, but she was willing to walk through the doors He opened for her.

"In other religions, you have to find God on your own, but in Christianity, God comes to us," Lane said. "God is so amazing!" 

To find out more about Lane, her books, art, organization tips and ministry, visit:

www.LaneJordanMinistries.com

www.PathwaysToOrganization.com

www.PearlsofPromiseMinistries.com

www.ArtbyLane.com

pam farrel | love-wise.com

7 Red-Hot Date Ideas

Romance to the Rescue





Since My lover said to me, “Rise up, my darling! Come away with me...!” (Song of Songs 2:10)

Boredom can be a nail in the coffin of your love. People with marriage on the rocks often say, “We just drifted apart.” If you drifted apart, then that means you can drift back together! Often all it takes is a little TLC, Tender Loving Care—or as we recommend:

Time—Set aside a weekly date space (any time of day will work!).

Love—Put on a heart of compassion toward your mate.

Creativity—Brainstorm some fun ways to spend time together.

These are a few TLC dates we have enjoyed, and in our book, *Red Hot Monogamy*, we have 200 red hot romance ideas!

1. Always and Forever: One man wanted to comfort his wife when her parents divorced, so he took her out on a date where the theme was “Always.” He filled the living room with helium balloons, and on the bottom of each was the word “Always.” Over dinner he gave her an inscribed bracelet with the word “Always.” On the back he had inscribed their wedding date and “til death do us part.” He danced with her to the song “Always and Forever,” and they watched the movie *Always*. By the end of the night, she was sure he would always be there for her.

2. Love Lifted Me: Another man created a thank-you date where he and his wife relived some of the best moments of their marriage. With each part of the date, he gave her a thank-you card with a puzzle piece inside. As the date progressed, the puzzle was a picture of a hot-air balloon. The last thank-you contained the directions to a field where a hot air balloon awaited them. The words “Your love lifted me higher” were penned on the card.

3. Memory Lane: We often encourage couples to revisit their firsts: the first place you first met, the location of your first, “I love you,” the place you first kissed, the spot you had your first date, the destination you honeymooned. Nothing is more effective in sparking your love again than to realize what you have invested in the relationship. Having a date of firsts ensures you this won’t be your last!

4. Yee- Haw!: This is a getaway our sister-in-law gave my brother. He is a real cowboy. He doesn’t simply dress the part; he actually ropes, brands, and drives cattle, but only on the weekends. During the week, he works in the oil industry, but his dream was to one day own a ranch.

As a gift to her midlife man, his wife took him to the national rodeo finals. They wore boots, shopped in the cowboy

booths, ate down-home food, and listened to country music on the radio—and a few years later the dream came true—he is now a rancher!

5. Pacific Rim: I traveled to Japan to speak to women in leadership, so while there I gathered up the makings for a dream date, Tokyo style. I brought home traditional Japanese music, a Japanese paper lantern, and a set of his and hers kimonos. I greeted my husband in the airport by placing a Japanese coin in his front trouser pocket and whispered in his ear, “Have I got a yen for you!”

6. Superman/Wonder Woman: I wanted to thank my husband for putting me through college. One of my nicknames for Bill is “My superman,” so on this “You are my hero” date, I gave gifts of all his favorite things.

I wrote a feature article, complete with a picture titled “World’s Best Lover.” I gave him a star on our walk of fame (inside the star was a tie tac with the word that Bill is known for saying when he teaches: “Wow!”). I also gathered my collection of items with the Superman logo, then added a jotted note remembering the times he rescued me.

7. Little Bit of Heaven: One of our most memorable romantic dates was one that was almost a complete disaster. I sent my husband a card that said, “Our love was made in heaven! Can’t wait to see you tonight!” He came home and all the kids had mysteriously vanished (to their friends’ homes). I gave Bill some of his favorite snacks and coffee. Then I disappeared with an, “I’ll be back in a moment to get you.” Well, “just a moment” became quite a long while.

As time ticked by, Bill began to debate how he should handle this: *Do I go into our room and risk messing up some surprise Pam has dreamed up for us? How long do I stay here? Do I go in to help?* Fortunately, I emerged from our room. Bill could see candlelight and hear romantic music but he also read discouragement and disappointment on my face. He led me into our room. As we entered, Bill heard an unusual popping and sizzling noise.

In the dim light he spotted several pans of dry ice and water around our room. Instantly he knew what I was trying to do—I was attempting to make a cloud (heaven!) in our room. He said, “Angel, I think I know how to fix this problem.”

He moved all the remaining dry ice to the sink in our master bedroom, put the stopper in the bottom and filled the sink with hot water running slowly so it leaked out of the overflow. Amazingly, a cloud began to appear and rolled across our floor until it filled our room as high as the bed. We spent the night in heaven!

Set a date and plan something to surprise your spouse! It might become a “heavenly” memory, too. ❤️

Find more tips in Pam’s book, *Red Hot Monogamy*; 52 Ways to Wow Your Husband.

lll
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Equipped & Empowered
to do Great things!



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This is YOUR Moment!



THE BIG Q

with Cynthia L. Simmons |

Q: What Does the Bible Say about Conflict?

Conflicts started when sin entered our world. In contrast, the Bible says, "... the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason ..." (James 3:17 ESV).

Let's talk about how we can handle conflict with God's wisdom.

1. You may not be able to interact. Seek the Holy Spirit and use discernment, especially in our volatile society. "... do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you" (Matthew 7:6 ESV). Unfortunately, you may meet an opinionated person, and a discussion with them would be fruitless or dangerous. For example, a man once approached me and told me I was stupid because of the bumper sticker on my car. That man wasn't open to reason. He had already made up his mind and would probably attack anything I said.

2. Separate the person from the disagreement. The intensity of conflict shows us we face spiritual warfare today. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12 ESV). Pray for the Lord to soften hearts to the truth.

3. Value the individual. "... God said, 'Let us make

man in our image, after our likeness..." (Genesis 1:26 ESV). That proclamation sets us apart from the rest of creation. Regardless of my neighbor's opinion, I must value them. We have a weekly tea party at our house, and people come to discuss whatever topic bothers them. If someone states they believe that Jesus died on Wednesday rather than Good Friday, we don't laugh at them or call them names. I might not like their idea, but I must show them respect as someone who bears God's image.

4. You can attempt a civil discussion if the person is open. The Apostle Paul "... reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4 ESV). At our tea party, we allow a person to bring up a problem. Our conversation will then revolve around looking at the issue from all angles, including the Bible, Jewish traditions, philosophy, apologetics, and history.

The individual might agree, disagree, or decide to research further, but we don't attack them.

Francis and Edith Schaeffer used the same method in L'Abri. Many people came to Christ through that ministry.

Conflict arose because of the Fall, and we face a huge upswing of spiritual warfare today. As believers, we must use wisdom and discernment when faced with conflict. In some cases, we must remain silent. If we discuss the issue, we must respect the person while praying for God to open hearts. Remember, God's wisdom is peaceable and gentle. ❤️

PARENTING... AGAIN?!!

“Just When We Thought We Were

Empty Nesters

God Asked Us to Parent
Our Grandchild”





“God, You want us to do this again?” I cried. “Dealing with his mother’s issues almost ruined our marriage, tore our family apart and destroyed our finances. I don’t know if I can do this again. Would you hate me if I said ‘no’?”

Just when I thought I was entering the wonderful season of life as an empty nester, my dreams came crashing down. My daughter’s poor choices led to her losing custody of her son. Suddenly, my husband and I became full-time parents again—this time to a traumatized little boy. Sadly, my story is all too common.

That day, we became statistics in an ever-increasing crisis. Approximately 2.7 million grandparents in the United States, including 64,000 in my home state of Arizona alone, have taken on the task of raising their grandchildren.

The opioid epidemic, parental mental illness, incarceration, and deaths caused by COVID-19 have contributed to 13 million children losing their parents and living with grandparents or great-grandparents. For every child in foster care, there are around 25 children in the care of grandparents.

Many grandparents volunteer to take in grandchildren to avoid the foster system. However, this prevents access to resources tailored for children separated from parents due to abuse, neglect, or dependency. One-fifth of grandparents have incomes below the poverty line and cannot afford the expensive treatment these children need.

A New Opportunity to Be Hands & Feet

The need is huge and it’s right under our noses—these grandfamilies need extra support, especially from the church. The Bible says in James 1:27, the kind of religion God wants involves helping the orphans and widows.

Here are 5 ways a church can support grandfamilies:

1. Start a Grandfamily Mission

Add Grandfamilies as a missions category. Budget funds to support them like other missionaries. Offer scholarships to grandchildren for church activities. Donate gift cards for school expenses. Sponsor grandchildren’s extracurricular activities.

Grandparents raising grandchildren are missionaries to the next generation. These traumatized children need the church’s help and often feel unloved. The church can show them the unconditional love of Jesus.

2. Learn What Grandfamilies Need

Grandparents need financial support and legal guidance.

Invite a social worker experienced with grandfamilies to speak to church leadership about their special needs. Make the social worker available to guide grandfamilies to resources. Ask a legal aid group to answer grandparents’ questions on rights and navigating the legal system. Many states have grandfamily support services to help grandparents—partner with these groups. In Arizona, Duet: Partners in Health and Aging is a resource.

Give grace to grandparents who drop off grandkids at Sunday School without volunteering. They are already in the trenches of ministry and sometimes need to sit at Jesus’ feet awhile.

3. Start a Grandfamily Support Group

The grandparents who have started parenting again have had a big lifestyle change and may not easily fit into their social groups anymore. Their friends may have fallen away because they are no longer as free as they once were. These grandparents often cannot relate to the younger parents but also no longer relate to their peers. They may feel like outsiders everywhere.

Although they love their grandchildren, grandparents may be angry at having to raise them. They may also be dealing with the grief of losing a child or blaming themselves for their child’s actions. A support group will provide others who understand what they are experiencing and give an opportunity to address their feelings without judgment.

4. Form Family Networks

So much has changed since the grandparents raised their children. It might seem like a completely different world to them and may be overwhelming. Connect them with another family with a child in the same school as the grandchildren attend. They can lovingly guide the grandparents on how to maneuver the ins and outs of raising a child in today’s society.

5. Provide Technology Classes

Technology may come naturally to some, but it is not instinctive to the generation of grandparents who are faced with living in this brave new world. Offer classes to teach the grandparents what they need to know about technology so they will be aware of the good and bad aspects of it. Give them the resources they need to protect their grandchildren from those who wish to cause harm on the Internet. Once victimized, children often are more easily revictimized.

To all the grandparents doing the hard work of parenting again, you are not alone. I see you, and I’m cheering you on as a fellow traveler on this unexpected journey.

Although our call isn’t easy, we can be sure we are doing the Lord’s work by caring for the children He dearly loves. Well done, good and faithful servant. ❤️

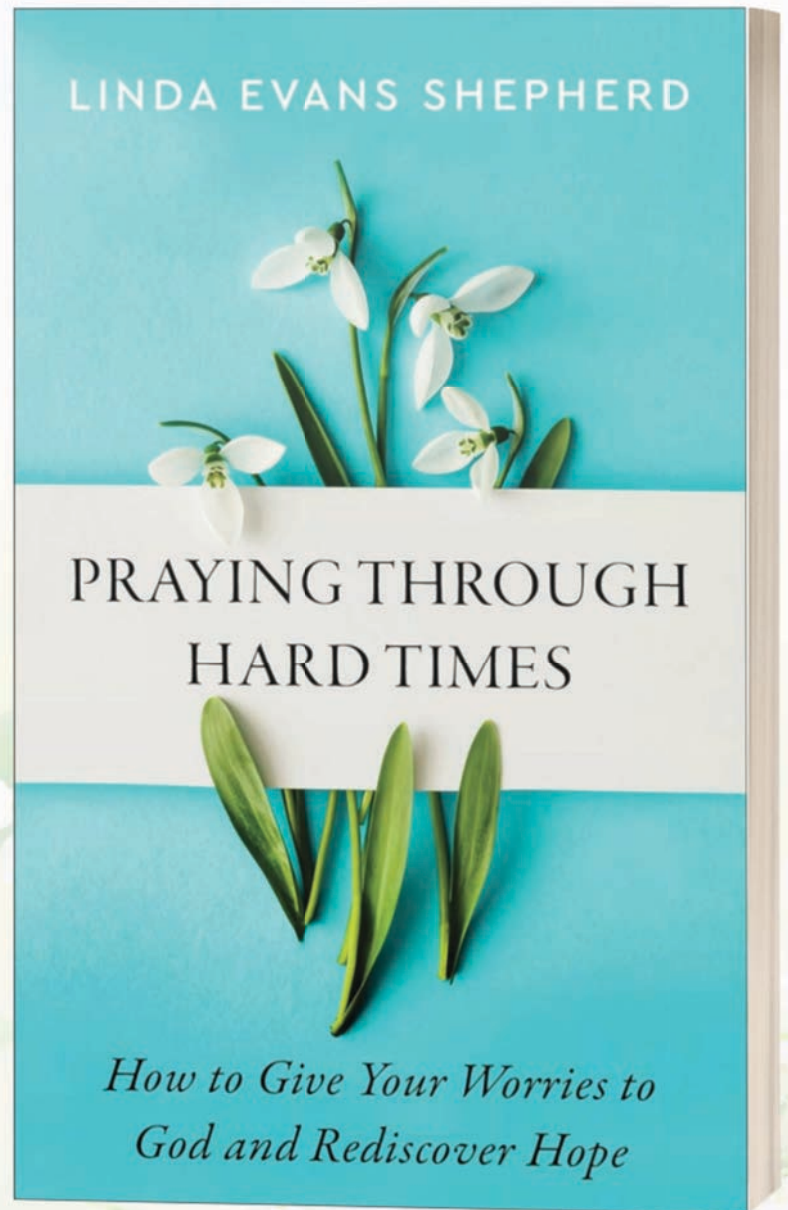
Read the full article with even more ideas of how you can care for grandfamilies at [leadinghearts.com](https://www.leadinghearts.com) and [stacysanchez.com](https://www.stacysanchez.com).

When crisis strikes, does God truly care?

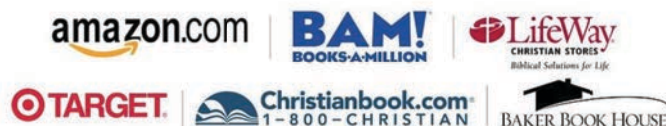
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What to Pray When Your Tongue is On Fire

linda evans shepherd | lindashepherd.com

Picture the disciples, lingering in Jerusalem as Jesus instructed.

Fresh from the Resurrection, Jesus had spent forty days with them, unveiling how the law of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets all pointed to Him as the Son of God, destined to die for humanity's sins before triumphantly rising from the grave.

Then on the day Jesus ascended into heaven, He left His friends to wait until they were "endued with power from on high."

Encouraged by the knowledge that Jesus was the awaited Savior, the men spent much of their time in the temple, worshipping God.

But one morning, while they were still in the Upper Room, the Holy Spirit descended upon them with tongues of fire and the disciples burst into the streets, praising God in languages they didn't understand. Imagine the astonishment of these visitors to Jerusalem as they witnessed uneducated fishermen and tax collectors, the very followers of Jesus, glorifying God's name in the languages of the pilgrims.

Imagine having the power of God set your tongue on fire, and speaking only words of worship, love, and peace. That would be nice, but sometimes the words that come out of our mouths are not so holy.

James, one of the disciples, warns about another kind of fire that can consume our tongues, one fueled by hell itself, capable of harming others and destroying lives.

He writes, "But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and

Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God." (James 3:8-9 NKJV).

If you're like me, there have been times in your life where you are horrified by the burning arrows that fly out of your mouth.

A flaming word to a loved one, a sarcastic word to a colleague, a critical word to a friend, a careless taking of the Lord's name in vain. How can we stop this flow of destructive words?

Is the solution to muzzle ourselves? But then how would we eat, pray, or offer encouragement to others?

Perhaps the answer lies in yielding more of us to the Holy Spirit, saturating ourselves with God's Word, which is alive with His Spirit, and learning to flow not just in peace but in the love of God himself.

Yet, even as new creations, filled with the Holy Spirit, we can still stumble into hurtful speech. When you find yourself regretting your words, pray this:

Dear Lord,

Forgive me for using Your name in vain and for hurting others with my words. Forgive me for aligning my words with the enemy's plans for my life. Instead, fill me with Your love and the power of Your Spirit, so I may speak the language of love through Your indwelling presence. Guard my mouth and when I speak evil words or hurtful remarks, grant me the humility to repent to You and to apologize to others.

In Jesus's name, Amen.

Linda is a best-selling prayer author, publisher of Leading Hearts magazine, founder of the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association and YouTuber. Visit her website at: gottoprayer.com and lindashepherd.com.

lh music contributor jennifer taylor

a conversation with Kayla Berry



An Open Invitation

Residing in
His Presence

SAME GOD
Gratitude
KAYLA BERRY



5:04

Fresh Mississippi-based worship leader Kayla Berry is on a mission to lead people into an encounter with the living God through worship.

With a powerful testimony of God's healing in her own life, Kayla's passionate worship flows from an intimate friendship with the Lord which she has cultivated over years of pouring her heart out to Him.

In this exclusive interview with *Leading Hearts*, Kayla shares about her journey of being transformed from "just a song leader" into a worship leader. We'll discover the inspiration behind her new single "Same God/Gratitude," her hopes for its impact, and how she longs to see religious and racial barriers broken down as believers unite in exalting Christ's name together.

Leading Hearts: *You started leading worship at 18 in your dad's church. What did you learn in that season as God was shaping you into a worship leader?*

Kayla: He really used my brokenness. Some things happened that caused doors to open, and I ended up falling into relationships when I was only 13 years old. That experience shaped my life, and I found myself looking for love in all the wrong places. Meanwhile, I was singing in church every Sunday, pouring my heart out to God because He was the one who could heal me. I was finding myself pouring out in those sacred places, closing the door and getting on my face before God and pouring out all of my pain.

He became my best friend in those quiet, private moments. I was pouring out, but had no idea that He was pouring back into me.

LH: *Your new single "Same God/Gratitude" combines two powerful worship anthems. What drew you to record those songs together?*

Kayla: Those are two of my favorite songs to lead in worship. With 'Same God,' I love that I'm declaring that I believe God is exactly who He says He is and able to do exactly what He says He'll do. I've watched Him do those things, and I've seen Him do it in my personal life. With 'Gratitude,' I love the intimacy of it. I'm really big on thankfulness with my children every single day because gratitude is something that moves the heart of God.

LH: *What are you hoping this song accomplishes in listeners' lives?*

Kayla: My biggest prayer and heart's posture is to lead people into the presence of God where they can be healed, where they can be free, where they can find the peace of God that passes all understanding. All of those things are available whenever the anointing of the Holy Spirit saturates the room.

My heart is to break through barriers—religious barriers, racial barriers—let's break it all down and glorify the presence of Jesus Christ, glorify His name so people will come to know Him.

LH: *You're releasing more new music soon. Can you share about that?*

Kayla: We have several songs ready to be released. I'll be releasing a few singles and then I'll be doing an EP in the middle of there somewhere.

LH: *What Scriptures or songs have inspired your faith journey when leading worship?*

Kayla: One of my favorite Scriptures is Psalm 27:4–6. The Amplified Version emphasizes that requiring the presence of the Lord is my greatest need. I love that emphasis because so many times we can come into God's presence focused on our needs. But when He says 'Seek My face,' He wants us to require His presence as our greatest need first. Then it says 'All these things will be given to you' if we realize He is our everything, our all in all. When we have Him, we have access to everything.

LH: *How do you approach being a worship leader in these trying times?*

Kayla: It's very exciting to me because I know God is doing some things. When the enemy is getting loud, I believe God's presence and Spirit is about to get even louder. Every time I get on a platform, I'm looking for God to do something, to make changes. I want to see people receive freedom, breakthrough, healing, restoration, reconciliation—all those things that come from worshiping Him.

My worship took me from being a broken leader to being transformed into a true worship leader, learning to lead people to worship.

It took brokenness, but God molded me. That's why I'm so passionate about worship now. I've experienced His love and healing through my worship as I've poured everything out to Him. ❤️



Be sure to check out Kayla's new single "Same God/Gratitude" available now, with more new music coming soon.

You can follow her latest news at kaylaberrymusic.com.



A Gathering of FRIENDS



“A sweet friendship refreshes the soul.”—Proverbs 27:9 NIV

There were four of us. We had daily phone calls, Bible studies, couples dinners, church, shopping, and afternoon tea together at least once a month.

Then, with great sadness, we had a going-away party for one of the couples. It was a bittersweet parting, but as we were all approaching the “getting older” time, some of us would change locations to be closer to our grown kids and grandkids. Our group of four was now down to three. We decided we should have a girls’ gathering once a year, even though one of our buddies was on the East Coast, and we were still on the West Coast.

I know these women in my life are not accidental.

God put us together many years ago when we were on the same committee for a women’s ministry luncheon.

Tackling Life Together

Since none of us had ever been this “old” before, we didn’t welcome all the changes that were popping into our lives. Alzheimer’s hit one of our hubbies. That was really a shock, as he was the youngest of our group. Then, one became grandparents to quadruplets, and they needed to be extra hands. Another’s daughter and family moved to Texas, and my friend and her husband followed. We were spread out all over the country.

But eight years later, we finally had our girls’ gathering on the West Coast. It was so much better to have physical hugs and not cyber hugs! We only slept a little during those four days of our gathering as we had much catching up!

“In friendship ... we think we have chosen our peers. In reality, a few years’ difference in the dates of our births, a few more miles between certain houses ... But, for a Christian, there are, strictly speaking, no chances. A secret master of ceremonies has been at work.” —C.S. Lewis

“We four women have loved one another in each season of our lives. When we met, we were mothers of college-age kids; now, we are grandmothers and great-grandmothers.”

Enduring the Test of Time

I often wonder what has kept us close friends for so many years. I feel these women have my back, and I can count on them. We are vulnerable with each other, and we understand each other’s point of view. We are there for one another when life isn’t going according to our plans, but we are also the greatest cheerleaders when we have success. Plus, we have fun together.

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Long-lasting relationships like ours are possible, but they require time and effort. Most of all, we point our friends to Jesus in every situation. True friendship is serving one another for the long haul.

We all like to cook, but not at the expense of having fun!!! One day is always devoted to afternoon tea; we all make our favorite tea-time treats.

We value the Crock-Pot® for the freedom it gives us to enjoy our time together. It does the work while we are enjoying our time with each other.

Nothing makes a gathering more enjoyable than a delicious bowl of soup and a loaf of crusty sourdough bread. This recipe is so easy; it has been a family favorite for years.

Crock-Pot® Split Pea Soup with Ham

6–8 Servings

1 Ham hock from Honey Baked Ham (lots of ham on the bone.) If no Honey Baked Ham store nearby, add 2 cups of chopped ham.

16 oz pkg of dried split peas

6 cups of chicken broth (I use Better than Broth and water)

4 stalks of celery, sliced

3 large carrots, peeled and sliced

1 large onion, chopped

2 minced fresh garlic cloves

1 bay leaf

½ tsp pepper

1 tsp thyme

Fresh parsley for garnish

Rinse the peas and drain. Place all ingredients into the Crock-Pot®. Cover and cook on low for 8 hours or until the peas have split. Remove bay leaf and ham hock and put any ham left on the bone into the soup. I like to use my immersion blender and blend some of the soup to make it creamier. ❤️





5 Principles for Authentic Online Communication



During the past few years we have seen a major shift in our world. Statistics indicate that loneliness has become a deadly epidemic. People crave authentic connection, and that kind of connection is harder and harder to find.

This is not who God designed the body of Christ to be.

As ministry leaders, we can make a difference in this tragic trend. But to do that, we must first make sure we are authentically serving those God puts in our path.

Five Principles to Ensure Authentic Online Connections

1. We must be willing to be vulnerable.

Being vulnerable can be scary—especially online. Allowing others to see our real selves opens us up to hurt. It exposes us to possible injury and misunderstanding. However, it also opens us up to incredible ministry opportunities. When we are vulnerable and allow others to see how God has and is working in our lives, we provide hope. Our vulnerability is a gift to those who are struggling.

2. We must be willing to listen and hear what others are saying and the feelings behind the words.

So much of the world's turmoil could be gone in an instant if we'd just begin listening. Unfortunately, the normal practice is for us to hear part of what's being said and jump immediately to rebuttal, justification, blame, and/or anger. I'm ashamed to admit I'm just as guilty of this as anyone else. But I'm trying to be aware and stop jumping to a conclusion instead of listening.

3. We must learn to put ourselves in the situations of others.

My grandmother used to call this “walking a mile in her shoes.” The idea behind this concept is a willingness to examine a situation from another's point of view. When we do that, we're often able to see things more clearly. Sometimes, we just can't make the leap to understand another's situation. When that happens, it's important to be honest and explain that we cannot imagine, but we want to understand. So often the willingness to try is equally as important as being understood.

4. We must be willing to be transparent.

Transparency is a first cousin to vulnerability. When we're transparent, we're honest—about who we are and about our motives. Transparency means we show up tired, unqualified, and without all the answers. We are willing to admit we—and the lives we lead—are not perfect. We are all in the process of becoming who God means us to be. That process can be messy, and that's okay.

5. We must be committed to the role of ambassador for God.

As ministry leaders, we are a liaison, a bridge, from God to a world that is hurting. Every word we share, every action we take reflects on God. We are not claiming prestige or importance, but we are representing God in all circumstances. For me, 2 Corinthians 5:20 expresses it best: “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (ESV).

Our world has been overcome with superficial, conditional interactions. But we can change this and become part of the solution. I believe God is calling His people to a new commitment of inclusion, understanding, and love. He's given us the tools to reach the world. Now we must do so in a way that reveals His purpose and His love. ❤️

A photograph of two women standing in front of a chain-link fence. The woman on the left has her hand on the head of the woman on the right. They are both looking down and to the side, creating a sense of intimacy and connection. The woman on the left is wearing a dark purple long-sleeved top, and the woman on the right is wearing a teal tank top. The background is a chain-link fence with a blurred outdoor setting.

Building
Connection
through Conflict



Conflict is often viewed as a negative aspect of relationships to be avoided, but in my own journey, I have seen it actually strengthen my connections with others.

When handled constructively, conflict has the potential to deepen our understanding, increase empathy, and overcome our resistance to loving those who can be more difficult to love. It is possible to navigate disagreements in a way that strengthens, rather than damages, our connections.

Conflict is a natural part of any relationship. We're all unique individuals with our own personal experiences, so it's only natural that we won't always agree with those around us.

Differences in opinions, values, and preferences are inevitable, whether it's between a couple, family members, friends, or colleagues. However, how we handle these differences determines whether conflict becomes a destructive force or a catalyst for growth. It's an opportunity to lean into the fruit of the Spirit and show love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Healthy conflict begins with effective communication focusing on open and honest dialogue. This means clearly and respectfully expressing our thoughts, feelings and needs while actively listening to others' perspectives.

Too often, conflicts escalate because of misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

Creating a safe space where both parties feel comfortable sharing their vulnerabilities and fears without fear of criticism or invalidation is essential. Then we can bridge the gap and better understand each other's viewpoints to find common ground.

Another key aspect of healthy conflict is maintaining a mindset of empathy and understanding. It's important to remember that everyone comes to the table with their own unique experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. Instead of viewing conflict as a battle to be won, let's approach it as an opportunity to learn from each other.

Empathy involves stepping into the other person's shoes and striving to understand their viewpoint. It's about showing kindness, understanding, and support, even when we may not fully comprehend their stance. Integrating empathy into our interactions can significantly ease tension and foster greater connection.

When we approach conflict with empathy, we can more easily find solutions that benefit everyone involved.

Another key aspect of managing healthy conflicts is practicing self-care. It's easy to allow stress to overwhelm your life and make it difficult to be patient with others. Prioritizing our physical, emotional, and mental health is essential for our well-being and the sake of those we care about. By taking time to recharge and replenish our reserves, we will be better equipped to support others and navigate any challenges that arise.

Forgiveness is also key in building connection through conflict. Holding grudges or resentments erodes trust in relationships and creates distance between you and others.

Instead, we should strive to release the weight of past hurts and move forward with a renewed sense of freedom. This doesn't mean we should minimize the impact of hurtful actions, but rather that we should be willing to extend grace and forgiveness when appropriate.

The Bible provides numerous examples of healthy conflict resolution. Jesus himself modeled humility, compassion, and forgiveness in his interactions with others, even in the face of betrayal and rejection. He taught his followers to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:38–39), love their enemies (Matthew 5:44), and seek reconciliation with those who have wronged them (Matthew 18:15). These are timeless principles for navigating conflict in relationships.

Remember that healthy conflict is not the absence of disagreement but rather the ability to navigate disagreements in a way that honors our relationships and strengthens our bonds.

By prioritizing effective communication, empathy, understanding, and forgiveness, we can transform conflict from a source of division into a pathway to deeper connection. ❤️



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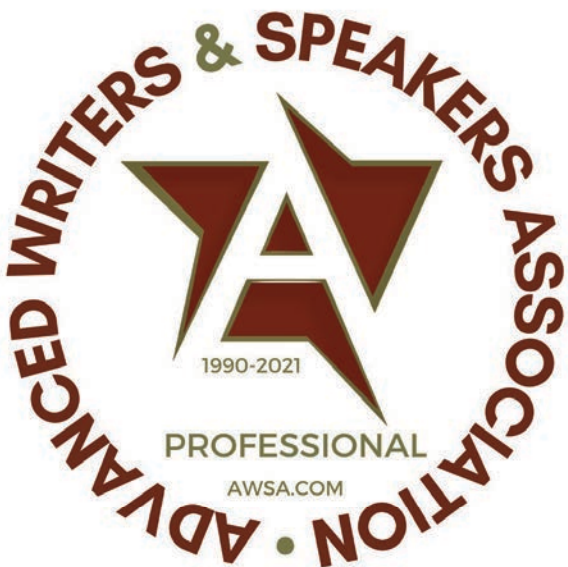
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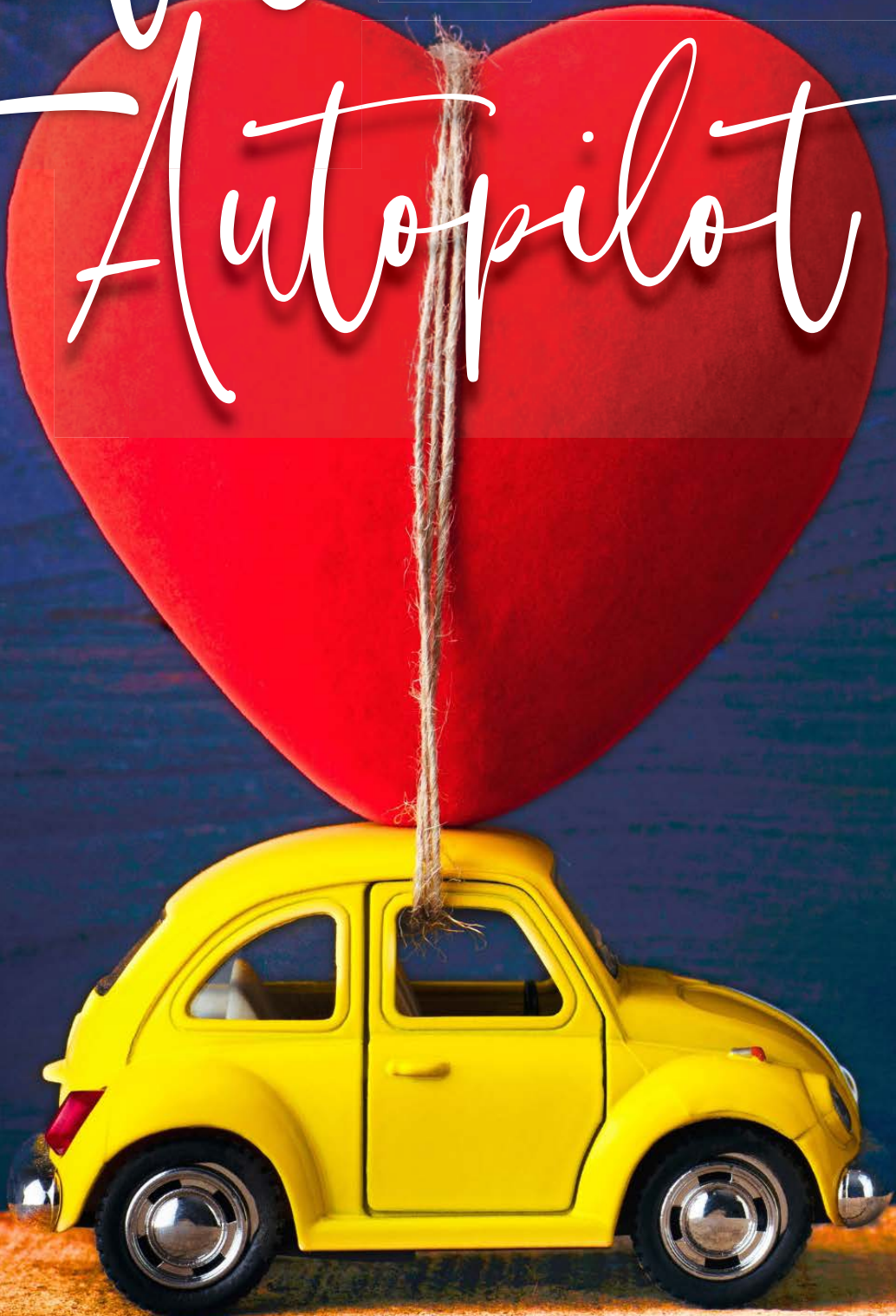
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Love ON Autopilot





Confession time. Sometimes when I'm driving and realize I'm lost, I automatically turn down the radio. It's not so I can hear the GPS.

I turn down the radio even when there's no GPS. Why do I do it?

Honestly, I don't know. Maybe it's so I can more clearly hear what "lost" sounds

like.

Of course, if I had to guess what lost sounds like, I'd guess it makes an "I-should-pull-in-here-for-coffee" sound. If I listen hard enough, I can hear extra whip.

Want to know what else I do without thinking? I'll be looking in the fridge for something to eat, finding nothing.

So I close the fridge and move to the pantry. Nothing there either. Then—and I can't explain why, but—I go back to the fridge. I open it up and study every shelf again. Like I think something new will have materialized while I was in the pantry. And if that's not ridiculous enough, I then repeat the process. Why? Fridge, pantry. Fridge, pantry.

I guess my subconscious thinks that if nothing magically appeared the first couple of times, surely somewhere between the fifth or sixth round, I'll swing open the door and: TACO.

Oh, the things I do without thinking. I'm also a notorious knee-bouncer. And a pen-clicker. They're basic fidgets that are part of my no-thought default setting. It makes me wonder how many other things I do on autopilot.

I'm praying the Lord will grow me to a place where those things I do without thinking will have substance, meaning, blessing—love—in exactly the right volume.

In 1 Corinthians, after Paul teaches about spiritual gifts, he ends chapter 12 with the teaser, "And I will show you an even better way" (verse 31 CSB).

GPS or no, I want to head that better way. The Amplified expounds on it: "a still more excellent way [one of the choicest graces and the highest of them all: unselfish love]."

Paul launches next into a beautiful description of that unselfish love—the kind of love that, in and through Christ only, can happen as naturally as a bouncing knee or an unconscious pen-click.

Look at His "better way."

"Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." (1 Corinthians 13:4–8 CSB).

The ever-satisfying love we hunger for is not in the fridge. Not in the pantry. Not anywhere else. Only in Christ.

The very first verse in chapter 13 tells us this sacrificial love is vital. "If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (CSB). Loveless language? That's exactly what lost sounds like. And I want to turn down that volume. Consciously.

Lord, teach me to listen, search for—even hunger for—opportunities to purposefully love unselfishly, simply because I love You.

All and only in You. May Your love be my default as I learn to sound more like You.

Meanwhile, as I'm learning to love through Jesus—a little extra conscious of the thinky part—here's another confession: I'll still probably pull in for that coffee. A little too conscious of the whippy part. ❤️



Speaking Joyfully



Joy Dunlap
WRITER | SPEAKER

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

WHAT'S BEING SAID...

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

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

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

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



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joydunlap.com

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