

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

2021 Holiday Edition | Vol. 8, Issue 3

LEADING HEARTS

EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN TO ARISE



Will we ever
get past this?

*How to cope when grief
hits your holiday table*

Breathe “New Normal” Life
Into Your Ministry Model

*Unleash the Superpower
of Momma-LOVE*

WHAT'S CLOUDING
YOUR VISION?

Martha Bolton

Celebrating Hope

LETTERS FROM BOB

From Protégé
to Published Author



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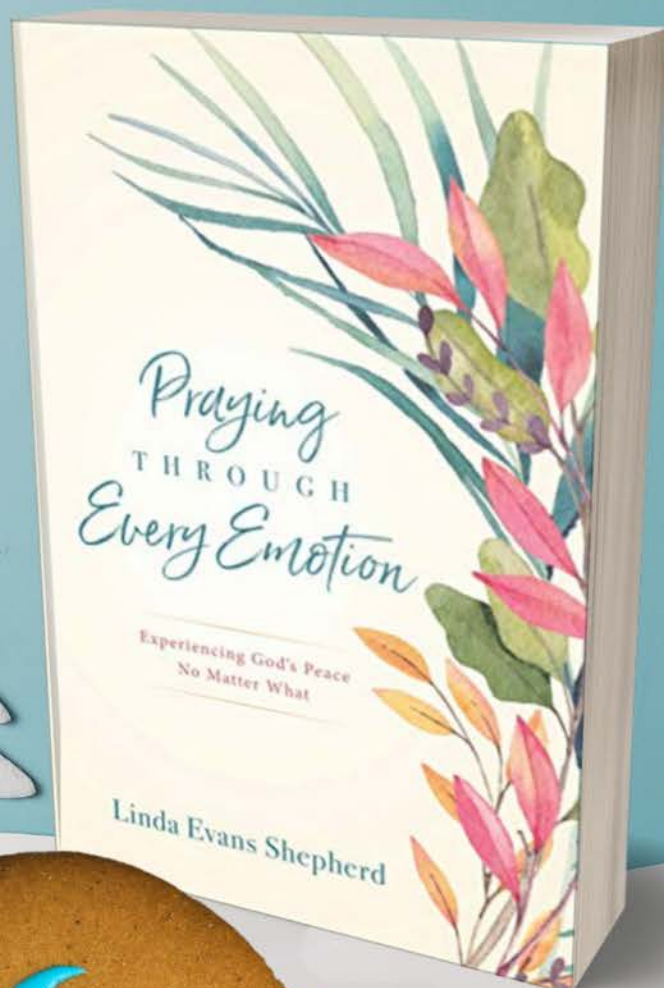
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—RHONDA RHEA, TV PERSONALITY,
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AND AUTHOR 18 BOOKS



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FROM THE PUBLISHER linda evans shepherd



escalading DANGER

A kid in his dad's new Cadillac Escalade turned off the busy street, then sped his eight-ton vehicle toward the ramp of a nearby parking garage.

With 420 horsepower beneath his hood, he aimed his SUV directly at the three people already walking through the crosswalk.

Never mind that yellow caution lights blinked a warning to all approaching vehicles.

I almost didn't witness the scene because I was too busy walking through the crosswalk, my eyes transfixed on the beauty of the Denver sunset ahead of me. The pink clouds glowed while the sun winked as it dipped behind the inky-blue mountains.

"How beautiful," I told the two walking through the crosswalk with me. My son and a stranger lifted their heads and stared at the colors painted across the sky and smiled.

Something caught my eye and I turned my head toward the accelerating SUV, now only a few feet from where we stood.

"Look out!" I shouted as I leapt forward. The white monster roared past, so close it was only a breath away. My son and the lady leapt too, though Jim turned around and slapped the truck with the palm of his hand. He yelled at the glazed-eyed kid as he roared passed. Neither the slap or the angry shouts impressed the driver. Instead of slowing down, he accelerated into the parking garage, squealing his truck around a sharp corner.

The three of us pedestrians stood in the fading light shocked, shaken, but glad to be alive.

Though I have no idea what could have possessed the young man to rush his SUV at us, I do know what possessed me to shout a warning.

I was the one who saw the SUV and therefore I was the one who could alert the others to the danger.

But isn't my story a reflection of the times? We women, who have been imparted with God's truth, can see danger as it recklessly accelerates toward our unsuspecting friends and loved ones.

We know the misery and pain this danger can inflict if those in harm's way don't jump to safety.

The danger is real, and it's escalating. Now is not the time to be shy or even ashamed of the truth we know. It's the time to announce a warning as best you can.

Not everyone will hear or even understand what we are saying. However, some will leap; leap into a saving relationship with a God who loves them. For our warning is not to condemn; it's to save. It's to say, "We love you! You are in danger!"

Sharing the truth in love may be the only way our friends and loved ones will know they need to make a leap of faith.

"Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it." (1 Peter 3:15 NLT)

Enjoy this issue that's filled with hope and designed to help you shine your light into the darkness. ☺

Love,

Linda

PUBLISHER, *LEADING HEARTS* MAGAZINE | AWSA, FOUNDER

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feelin' hopeful?

The more I look at the word HOPE, the more I see it as the ultimate faith proclamation.

And it runs much bigger than an emoji that you put on your Facebook status update.

When I look at the season of Christmas, I don't see it as the celebration of everything made right. It's the season of HOPE that one little baby would bring about an eternity of change. We have this promise, but for us on this earth the promise is yet to be completely realized.

So there is no need for HOPE when the PROMISED gift is finally received. It's like when I was a kid picking things from the JCPenney Christmas catalog in the hopes that Santa might pick something for me to open on Christmas morning.

When the day came and all the paper was torn off and tossed to the side, I knew what had made it from my wish list.

Some of those gifts that we get from God are just that — glorious little unexpected blessings. And some are hopes — those things that are promised but not yet seen.

The most significant for the whole of this world is the Blessed Hope. It's that promised Hope that Christ gave His disciples: in John 14: 1-3:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.
You believe in God; believe also in me.
My Father's house has many rooms; if that
were not so, would I have told you that I am
going there to prepare a place for you?
And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will
come back and take you to be with me that
you also may be where I am.”

John 14: 1-3 NIV).

Christ is coming again, and those who believe in Him will be caught up to meet him in the sky. What God doesn't promise are the details of tomorrow. He says only that in whatever may be and whatever may come, He's got it. And He is working it out for our greater good in ways we do not even see.

That is the hope of a faith-filled life that is not contingent on getting A, B, or C. It's the HOPE that we have that God's got us. We can rest in that certainty.

I may feel hopeful about getting chocolate and Starbucks cards for Christmas (if anyone is looking for gift ideas), but the hope I can be assured of is that God has me now, and He's coming back so that I can reside where He is.

As Christ followers, we should have so much love running through us that we want as many people as possible to experience the real, certain HOPE that comes to those who accept Christ's love into their lives.

The beauty of Christmas lies not so much in the reality that Jesus came and left, but in His promise that He is just waiting for the day He can have us with Him. That is where true HOPE ultimately resides.

You may be feeling hopeful about calling heaven your home, but how many others need that same opportunity — the opportunity to embrace a hope-filled eternal destination. Spending tomorrow on this earth is not guaranteed, but with Christ, a beautiful destination awaits.

I hope this issue of Leading Hearts will help you package HOPE so that many others may be able to unwrap it and find the all-consuming need to regift it. So all may hear and be saved. ☺

Love,

— Amber

EDITOR LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE | AWSA, MARKETING DIRECTOR



What was hoped for
last year, for some,
will never happen.
There are empty
chairs where a loved
one once sat.

HAS GRIEF HIJACKED
your Holiday Spirit?



janet k. johnson | janetkjohnson.com

It's Friday, but Sunday's coming! You've heard that said, haven't you? It's spoken on Good Friday when we recall the Crucifixion.

It is usually expressed with hope, knowing above all the uncertainties, the best day ever is almost upon us. It's Friday, but the Resurrection is coming.

The pandemic has many of us living in the atmosphere of Good Friday. How can we feel even a sparkle of joy when some of the worst days of our lives are upon us?

Like the disciples, many of us have fears and doubts, and we wonder, "What's next?" Will COVID once again impact holidays? Will we ever recover from this pandemic?

Before COVID, life was, well, "normal." Sure, we had concerns, but life was mostly predictable. Then, in a matter of weeks, we found ourselves isolated, unable to celebrate milestones together. We couldn't see each person's smile or share their hug. It was our current day Friday. We didn't know if or when "normal" might return. We still don't. Like the disciples, we live in those "in-between" days.

Last year, many celebrations were reluctantly put on hold. Families reasoned it was best to wait until this year so everyone could safely be together.

How long, Lord? How long?

We are now approaching another much anticipated season. Yet, life is not where we thought it would be. Some are taking more chances, making plans, joining with family and friends. Others are remaining extra careful before visiting the elderly or the health-compromised. Many are grieving. There have been so many losses. So many.

Researchers estimate that more than five million Americans are in mourning, including more than 43,000 children who have lost a parent (USA Today, May 30, 2021).

What was hoped for last year, for some, will never happen. There are empty chairs where a loved one once sat. For some, the loss of jobs and dreams has been devastating. Still, amid the uncertainty and grief, we hope.

We hope and wait.

We wait like our Hebrew ancestors waited for freedom. Amid pain and turmoil, things beyond our control, fluctuating mandates, and unpredictable viral mutations, we wait for good news. While much is still unknown, according to McKinsey & Company (August 23, 2021), we may pass the pandemic stage by the end of the year and transition to an endemic stage where normalcy partially returns. Some areas are already seeing this.

There is hope that, with common sense and precautions, we will be able to come together and share special memories again this year.

Still, many will carry grief into the holidays. For those, it is important to both grieve and celebrate, to remember and find hope in each day. If you gather, share special memories of ones who are not present around the table. Allow their presence to be among you through the stories.

If you cannot gather, Zoom, or Facetime, eat at the same time other family members are eating. Carry on conversations as if you were all around the same table. If you are alone, reach out to someone else who is alone and do something together.

A great way to honor a loved one is to volunteer at a place that is serving food to those who are alone or hungry. Many churches and organizations do this during the holidays.

The first Thanksgiving after our son was killed, I was in deep grief. His loss was devastating. A local group giving a dinner for anyone who was alone or didn't want to cook for Thanksgiving asked for food donations. I decided to take my son's favorite pie. When I took it, they asked if I would join them in serving. Knowing our son would have served and sensing God's nudging, I agreed.

That Thanksgiving meal was one I will always remember. I not only saw the joy and gratefulness of those who received, my grief and its burden felt lighter.

Yes, for many it may feel like the desperate sadness surrounding Good Friday, but the days that lie ahead are hope-filled.

Our holidays may be different but we live in the hope and promise of our God who is our source of strength and comfort.

The pandemic has left its mark but we are not defeated.

As Paul wrote, "We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8,9 NIV). ●



HOPE in the future is the
indispensable ingredient
for leaders.

leaders. getting tired of THE “NEW NORMAL?”

karen porter | karenporter.com



“I hope we can go back to normal soon.”

Heard that statement recently? I admit I like the idea of normal in our crazed and dysfunctional world. But I have to admit, I don't like the idea of going back. Ever.

Going back feels like we have lost hope in the future and seems like the wrong direction. We need to be looking forward instead. Let's go forward. Maybe it will be a new normal or maybe the future will be more chaotic, but hope embraces the future, not the past.

Isaiah said, “But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31 NIV).

One of the groups of people who read this column is a large number of women's ministry directors in churches across America. You have written to me to talk about your ministry situations and many of you have asked what to do about the restrictions of the pandemic. It hasn't been easy or fun, has it? Small group activities have been canceled or moved online, and large events, such as retreats or conferences, were postponed — some indefinitely.

As each state or region has opened up in varying degrees, women's ministry directors have asked all the questions:

- *Do we start our small group activities and Bible studies in person again?*
- *What about those in our group who feel they must isolate because of health reasons?*
- *How do we encourage our women to attend in person?*
- *Do we plan a big event knowing the possibility of having to postpone again?*
- *Do we try the same kinds of activities again, or do we start something new?*

While some have big support from pastoral leadership, others do not.

Finding a way to start again is hard and unpredictable.

A recent survey of women's ministry directors proves the uncertainty is real. They are solving the problem in various ways:

- 1) About half are moving ahead with in-person small group and study group events.
- 2) About a fourth are continuing online meetings.

3) A small number who have the technology available are incorporating online with in-person groups to try to meet all needs.

4) About 80% of those who had a big event (retreat or conference) planned before COVID are moving forward with the event and have rescheduled the speakers and musicians.

5) Those who did not have anything planned when the lockdowns started have been slow to plan anything new.

These groups stated the following reasons for their reluctance:

- *We haven't regrouped enough to plan something.*
- *We are worried a new variant will shut us down.*
- *Let's see what others were doing before we plan a new event.*
- *How do we start over?*
- *Some of our leaders have dropped out.*

What is a leader to do?

We encourage you to renew your hope and strength. Here are some ideas.

- 1) **Revive your passion** for women's ministry by meeting with women one-on-one or in groups of four or five. Listen to their needs and desires. What programs can you lead to meet their needs?
- 2) **Meet with your pastoral leadership team**, asking them for support — spiritual and financial.
- 3) **Call each of your former team members** to obtain a commitment for the future. Recruit new team members.
- 4) **Using a calendar, plan a regular event** to encourage the women of your church. The most successful programs are churches who have regularly planned events. One church has a Christmas event the first Saturday of December every year. One group has a girl's night out once a quarter. One church plans two events a year. Plan these larger events around a solid program for small groups and study groups.
- 5) **Invite an outside speaker to come** to the event. The pandemic has affected all Christian speakers in a negative way. Those canceled events were their livelihood and their ministry. I promise these talented and anointed and powerful speakers are ready to bring God's Word and powerful messages of hope and healing to your ladies' group. Reach out to them. Bringing in a person from outside the church will generate excitement with your organization in a fresh new way.

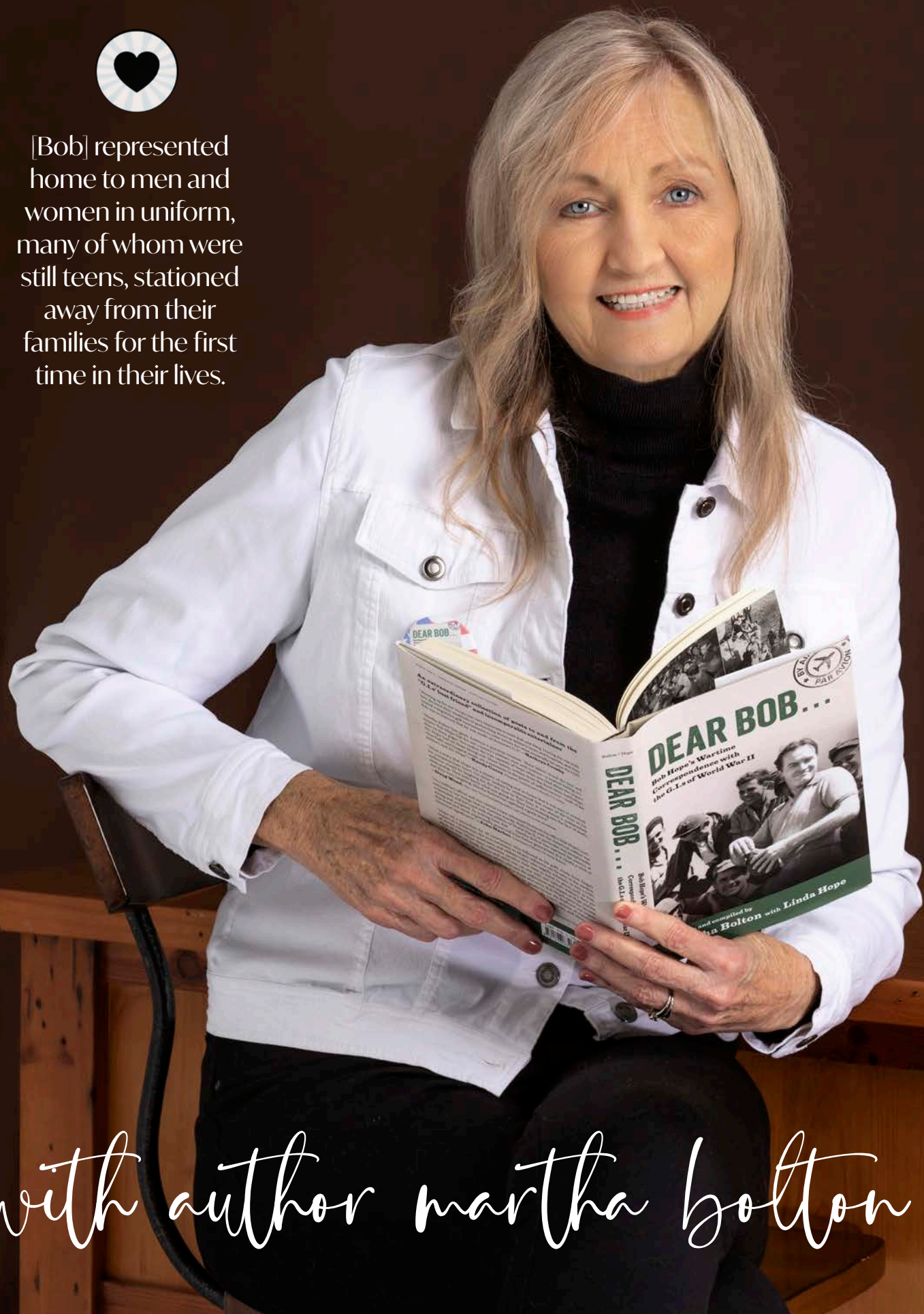
HOPE in the future is the indispensable ingredient for leaders.

“Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD” (Psalm 31:24 NIV).

If you need encouragement or ideas, reach out to me at kaeporter@gmail.com. **Let's move forward!** ☺



[Bob] represented home to men and women in uniform, many of whom were still teens, stationed away from their families for the first time in their lives.



with author martha bolton

THE MINISTRY OF HOPE



At Bob Hope's funeral, I first heard the term "the ministry of Bob Hope," and in so many ways, it was fitting.

According to estimates, over Bob's 50-year history of entertaining the troops, he had seen more people just before their deaths than many clergy members. In one audience alone, some 60 percent lost their lives in the next battle.

Bob Hope was a bringer of hope, whether he saw the G.I.s at his shows or was visiting them in field hospitals. He represented home to men and women in uniform, many of whom were still teens, stationed away from their families for the first time in their lives. As one soldier put it, Bob's presence and entertainment "lifted the chins off the belt buckles."

He did that and more.

If any soldier could get close enough to give Bob his mother's phone number, Bob would spend days calling those moms as soon as he returned home.

How do we know Bob Hope did all this? Because it's written in the thousands of G.I. letters that he received during WWII.

During the height of the war, Bob's mailbox saw some 38,000 letters a week. The G.I.s wrote to him from their bunks, hospital beds, and even foxholes.

It wasn't "Dear Sir" or "Dear Mr. Hope," either. It was "Dear Buddy," "Dear Pal," and "Dear Brother." They joked with him about the rations and the weather, sent him photos and souvenirs, and told him things they hadn't even shared with their families. And they offered their prayers.

The letters sat in boxes for years at the Hope house, where his daughter Linda grew up, and where we all first began discussing the book. The letters now reside at the Library of Congress, where I, along with Linda, completed the manuscript for *Dear Bob*.

One sample letter was from a wife left behind.

Cranston 10, R.I.
June 6th, 1944

Dear Bob,

I'm writing to you because my husband was one of the soldiers you brought a little of home to in Sicily. It was the only entertainment he had during his nine months of active service overseas, and now he will never see any other. Yes, I mean that he was killed in action. He didn't die a hero. He never did anything spectacular. He just did his duty as best he could. His name will never go down in history as being great, and yet he was to me and I am very proud of him.

... My husband was like millions of others — he didn't want to leave home and go to war, but there was a job to do and he was never one to shirk, so he went cheerfully.

... I wrote to you because my husband wrote me of the show he saw with you and Miss Langford. You seem like a friend and you saw him since I did — I guess that's why I've told you all about it. ...

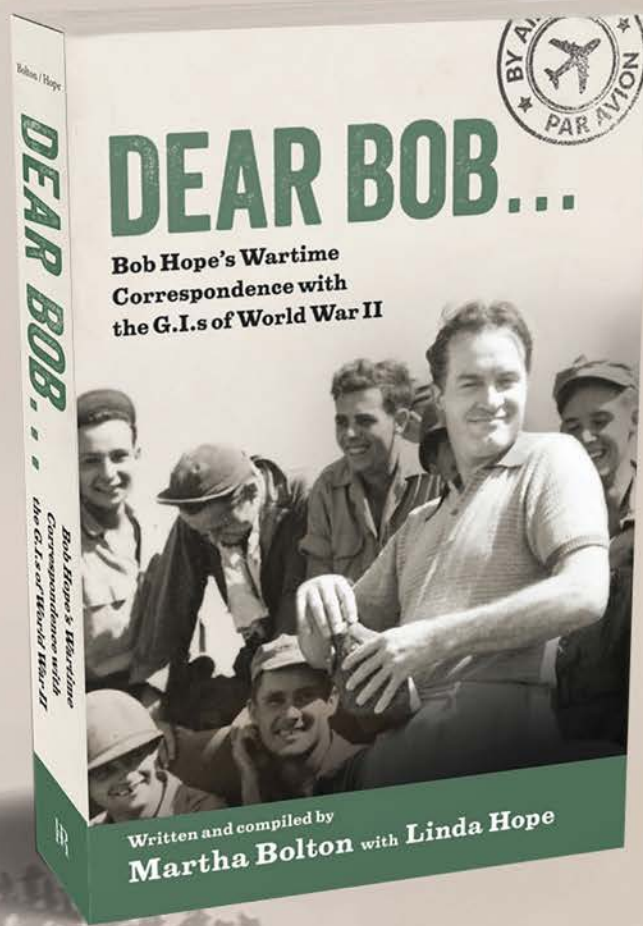
Sincerely,

Mrs. Harriet M. Petersen

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An extraordinary collection of posts to and from the
“G.I.s’ best friend” and incomparable entertainer.



“I WAS OFFERING TIME
AND LAUGHS — THE MEN
AND WOMEN FIGHTING
THE WAR WERE
OFFERING UP THEIR
LIVES. THEY TAUGHT ME
WHAT SACRIFICE WAS
ALL ABOUT.”
—BOB HOPE



This award-winning book, written by Martha Bolton, with Linda Hope (daughter of Bob and Dolores Hope), an Emmy-winning television producer, *DEAR BOB* tells the story of Bob Hope’s remarkable service to the fighting men and women of World War II.



AVAILABLE NOW IN HARDCOVER AND E-BOOK WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD.



Many of the letters thanked Bob for his sacrifice, private actions often done out of the limelight.

Somewhere in the Pacific

October 15th, 1944

Dear Bob,

I am writing you this letter for myself and my gang. My Gang is the Whole U.S. Army. We really think you are a great guy and you sure have done more for the boys than all the rest of them put together ...

We just read an article about the time you were giving a show and some boys marched 10 miles to see it, and when they got there, there were already so many G.I.s that they couldn't see, so they started to walk back. And when you heard about it, you hopped in a jeep and overtook them and performed for 40 minutes in the rain. That is just what a real soldier would do, and we Aviation Engineers are proud of you, Bob...

Sincerely yours,

Pvt. Dick Graine, U.S.A.A.F.E.



Bob Hope was no fan of war, but for five decades, he championed the causes of America's G.I.s, taking their needs to the people, Congress, and if necessary, the president himself. For Bob, the presidents, Republican and Democrat alike, were just a phone call away.

Dear Bob ... Bob Hope's Wartime Correspondence with the G.I.s of WWII was originally scheduled to release in 2020 in honor of the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII. But the pandemic changed that.

The release happened this year instead, which proved even more timely. America needs a good dose of hope right now, and one sure way to get it is by remembering all those WWII heroes who gave so much for our freedom.

As Christians it's our job to carry that same title as ministers of Hope, because Bob's message is a reflection of God's Message ☉



Emmy-nominated AWSA (awsa.com) member Martha Bolton served as the first female staff writer for Bob Hope (1980s and 1990s). She is the author of 88 books and a popular playwright. **Dear Bob...** won the 2021 Christian Market Book of the Year and Golden Scrolls Memoir of the Year. Martha was also named AWSA Member of the Year (2021).

HHEART



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CULTIVATE HOPE

Together

pam farrel | love-wise.com



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

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

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

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

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

- **Spend Time in the Promises of the Word of God.** First and foremost, to gain more hope, we need to get our hearts in the Bible, a book full of precious promises from the Creator. Max Lucado, author of *Unshakable Hope* says, “God’s promises are pine trees in the Rocky Mountains of Scripture: abundant, unbending and perennial.” Second Timothy 3:16-17 reminds, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (NIV).
- **Pick a time to traverse the Scriptures with your spouse.** Over coffee, share a favorite Scripture from your

individual quiet times, or pick a simple devotional to read together, like our *A Couple’s Journey with God*.

- **Spend Time with Jesus:** The good news is Jesus came out of love for you, for me. He lived sinlessly, then GAVE His life in our place. “... while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8 KJV). Max Lucado shares, “When Jesus died on the cross, so did your sin; when He rose from the dead, so did your hope.” Our deep, abiding, faithful hope comes from what, or rather WHOM, we are placing our hope in. God has the surety to cover all His promises of hope. Your friendship with your Creator is the rock solid, gold and diamond, bedrock wealth of eternal hope.

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

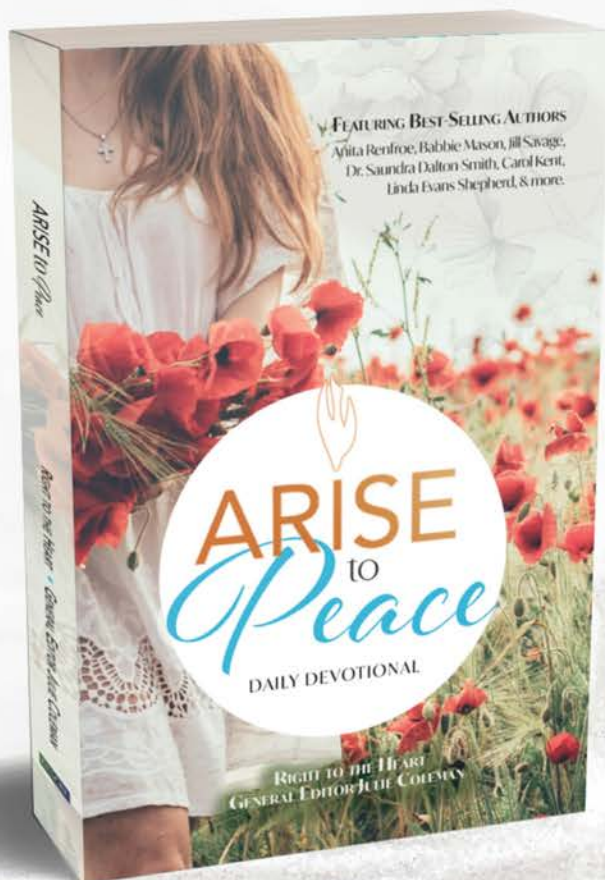
- **Spend Time Creating:** Paint, sew, build, draw, doodle, mold, whittle, carve, string together your hope! While writing *Discovering Hope in the Psalms: A Creative Bible Study Experience*, we (I and my co-authors and Harvest House Publishers) decided to include creative expressions and Scripture coloring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

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

continued on p. 19

You Can't Find *Peace* under a tree!

(but, you can get pretty close.)



Peace is a process of knowing and understanding how trustworthy God is.

ARISE TO PEACE will point you to the God of Peace through vibrant stories and sound biblical teaching.

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continued from p. 17

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

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

As a couple, take time to plan dates to gaze at a beautiful sunset, stand in awe at the sight of a majestic mountain, sense the calm of wading in a cool babbling brook, rest under the stars, or the feel the refreshment of breathing in fresh country air. We, the created, connect to the Creator when we rest in creation.

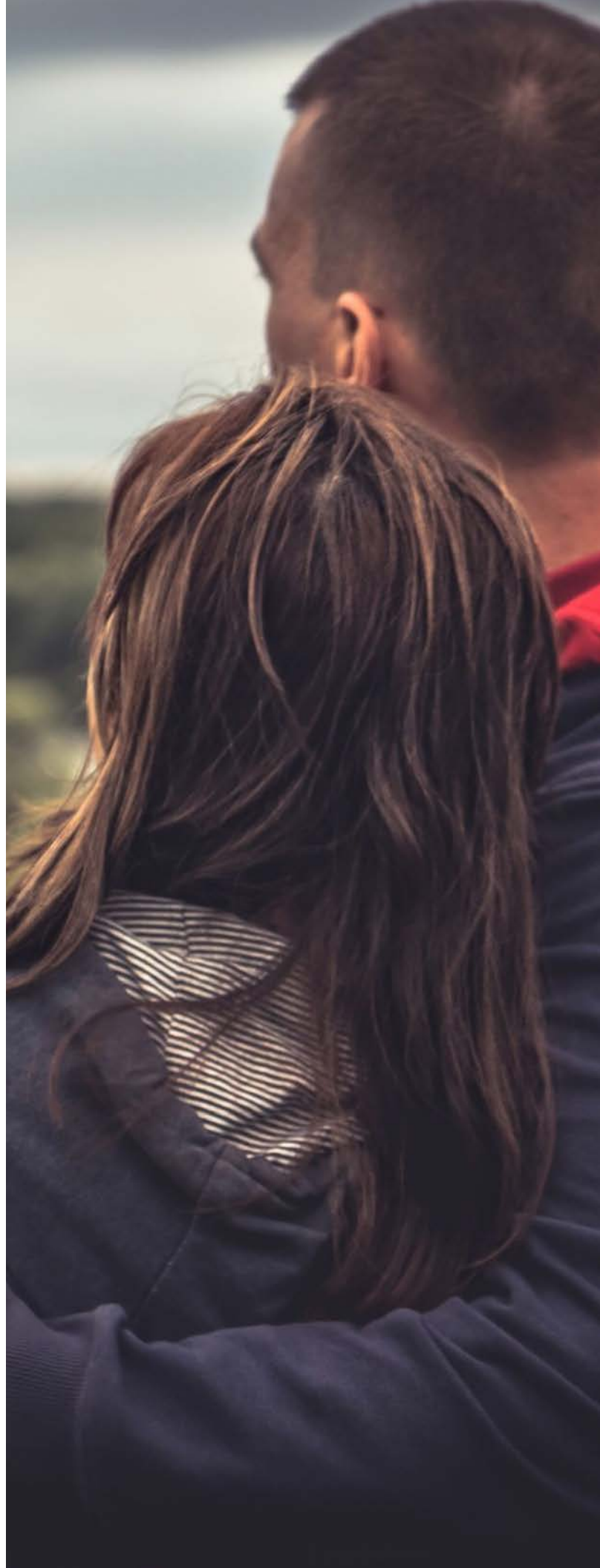
Princeton researchers found that even “gardening at home had a similar effect on people’s emotional well-being (or happiness) as biking, walking, or dining out.” So as a team, pick up a trowel and rake and plant some flowers or a vegetable garden, or create an outside romantic garden oasis with twinkling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

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

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

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

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





heather van allen | music reviewer

MUSICREVIEWSO



KING SIZE MANGER

josh turner

Get ready to celebrate a country Christmas with country recording artist Josh Turner this season. His 11-track *King Size Manger*, released October 8, 2021, will have you dreaming of gathering around the fireplace with family and friends, singing songs and sipping hot cocoa while soft snow falls outside.

Inspired by Josh's childhood memories of Randy Travis' Christmas collections, *King Size Manger* combines country arrangements of several familiar classics of the season with four original tunes. Wrapped in the warm, feel-good comfort of Josh's deep bass vocals and blue-grassy guitar is the deeper meaning in the story the album tells.

Expressing his fondness for the title track, Josh says "*King Size Manger* tells the story about how there had been so many prophecies of a Messiah coming and being born and so He fulfilled all the prophecies and then some. ... It's hope in a hopeless world that God would send His only Son for us to set an example and show us a new way. It's about belief, it's about grace, it's about hope, it's about love ... and that to me is the reason for the season." ●



COMFORT & JOY

highlands worship

Highlands Worship, of Church of the Highlands, presents *Comfort and Joy* (released October 15, 2021), a contemporary offering for the Christmas season.

About the project created during the 2020 Christmas season at the multi-campus Church of the Highlands, Chris Griffin, who produced and arranged the album, says, "This was the best Christmas experience that I've ever been a part of. The team pulled off a technically intricate night that involved each of our church's 23 campuses and an online experience, all emphasizing the Hope of the season alongside a nostalgic thread that connected well-known lyrics and melodies with contemporary production and music."

Highlights of the 10-track album include the brief but beautiful instrumental title track, an innovative arrangement of "Carol of the Bells" and original praise track, "Greater."

The remaining tracks are instrumentally refreshed renditions of classic carols, including "The First Noel," "O Holy Night," "O Come All Ye Faithful," and more. ●

Cheryl Stark & CROSS POINT MUSIC

never going back

jennifer taylor | profile contributor



continued on p. 22

continued from p. 21



Working in collaboration with a team of nearly 400 volunteer musicians, vocalists, and songwriters that attend the multi-site Nashville and Middle Tennessee church, Cross Point Music released their first LP, *Never Going Back*, in July.

During the pandemic, worship leaders Mike Grayson and Cheryl Stark frequently met with their team for Zoom writing and worship sessions. The duo hosted more than 100 Instagram Live Worship sessions that led to the creation of the LP as they searched to encourage the church in one of its darkest times.

Just weeks before the pandemic, the church and the Nashville community were devastated by the EF3 tornado that hit March 3, 2020.

The worship team was on tour with Annie F. Downs on the weekends before and after the tornado, only in town that week to experience the devastation.

“It was sobering, to say the least. To realize that the tornado not only ripped through our city, but it hit our broadcast campus.

It tore through our kids’ environment. It ripped away all of our offices. It blew the roof off of our warehouse and just destabilized the entire structure,” Stark said. “We have five other campuses around middle Tennessee, but that is our largest and broadcast campus.

So literally, everything was ripped away. Then, within the next two weeks, we go through a global pandemic where we are told to shut our church doors and work from home.

For us specifically, we were already grieving and trying to figure out how to do remote, have church, and optimize communication with our staff. It was double grief for us, and how are we going to make it out.”

Stark credits the leadership and support of Pastor Kevin Queen that led the charge to the church in this wilderness season. He encouraged the church to not waste the wilderness. “Don’t be grieving for what was and what could be when God could have something for you here,” she said. “Creatively, when you’re traumatized, and you’re grieving, you’re not feeling this huge creative spirit over you. As the church’s songwriters, we felt like we had the responsibility to put a song in the mouths of our people.”

So, the team kept pressing on through the moments that felt like defeat and discouragement. One of the first Zoom songs led to the first single, “Oh the Wonder.” Grayson said that was the moment for him where the sky started to part. He realized that they would make it out of this season and needed to sing about where God was leading and what He gives in the middle of the wilderness. He gives us joy. He gives peace. He gives His presence.

“We are called to praise Him in advance of the miracle. We are called to be grateful before we see what we are praying for,” Stark said.

She added that the team was able to have a few in-person writing sessions. “I just walked into the room, and I cried. I started hugging everybody,” she said. “You just don’t realize how much you need people until you are away from them for so long.”

The LP title is *Never Going Back*, and Stark said that is a nod to never wanting to go back to what we were doing. They weren’t bad, but there was a heart change, a vision change, and a call to return to the Lord and being in His presence.

“Be in My Presence because God can meet us anywhere,” she said. “In our home. In a car. You don’t have to be in a church to feel His presence, which I think is so wonderful about the Lord.”

Once signed as a country songwriter with Sony/ATV, the Mississippi-raised Stark aspired to be Faith Hill. In 2012, she married Apollo LTD member Adam Stark, and the two musicians got to tour supporting acts like The Band Perry, Brooks & Dunn, Diamond Rio, and Wynonna Judd.

“Several of the artists that I grew up idolizing as a kid, I was getting to meet them and come alongside them,” Cheryl said. “I remember at one point after I had gotten married, I looked at my husband and said, ‘I know it’s not always going to feel this awesome. Will you remind me that I’m living out my dreams right now? Will you remind me of this moment?’ Sure enough, I got out of that deal with Sony/ATV in 2015, and shortly after, I had an ACL reconstruction on my knee. Followed by another surgery on the opposite knee. And it just felt like setback after setback trying to come back.”

But it was also in 2015, Cheryl became part of the Cross Point Church team after the couple had moved to the church in 2014. Shortly after becoming part of the church staff in 2017, she was offered to become the Artist in Residence.

“I had really felt the call to get back into songwriting, and I didn’t know if it was country or worship, but I just felt like the Lord was telling me it’s time to dream again,” she said.

“Just because it didn’t happen the way you thought that it would, it doesn’t mean that I don’t have great things in store for you.”

Being offered the Artist in Residence position commissioned her to write songs for the church and worship. Soon after, they would stumble upon the song “Living Hope,” written by Phil Wickham and Brian Johnson. Not released yet, Phil gave Cross Point Music permission to release the song, and Cheryl became the featured voice for the song. “It was in that season that everything changed for me. The Lord really started affirming for me. Writing worship for Him. Opening doors and leading worship in multiple places. Really calling me to that as a career path.”

Since then, Stark has also been touring with Matt Maher and Natalie Grant as a background vocalist. She’s thankful for the opportunities to travel, continuing to write songs, and being a boy mom to Judah and John Pac.

Speaking of the new LP, Cheryl is grateful to have written five of the seven songs. “I feel like this is the beginning of the songs at our church. I’m full-time now at our church. I get to work with our worship leaders and songwriting community,” she said.

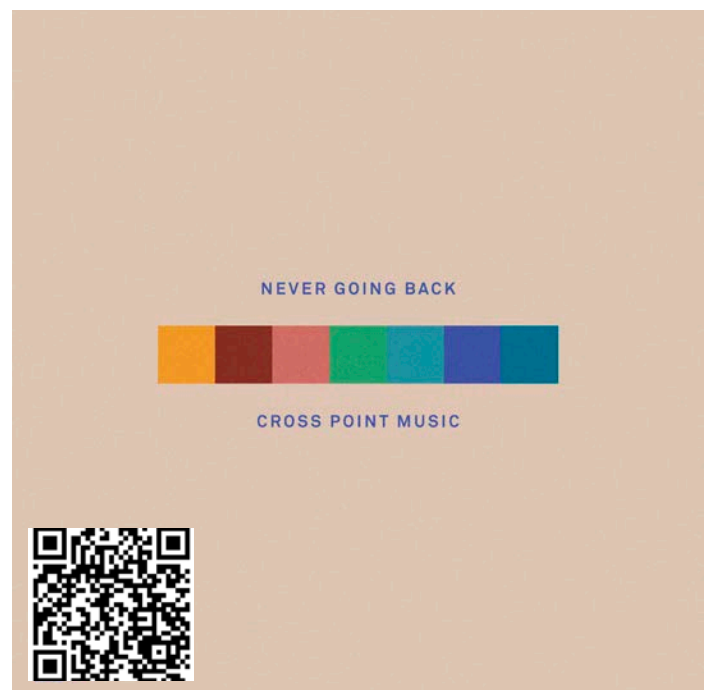
“I had some great successes as a country writer, but I feel like I am in my wheelhouse now just writing songs for our church and just in worship.

Sitting in the presence of the Lord is really where the sum of the songs comes from for me. I’m really grateful to be where I am.

Obviously, it looks a lot different in that I’m not headlining the country tours, and I’m not the next Faith Hill, but I believe there is a difference in 21 and 31.

Following Jesus, He will take care of your dreams and open doors that you never thought imaginable in different ways. That is my testimony at this point.”

Scan Code below to listen to “Never Going Back.” 🎧



THE SOUTHERN GOLD HISTORICAL FICTION & CURRICULUM SERIES

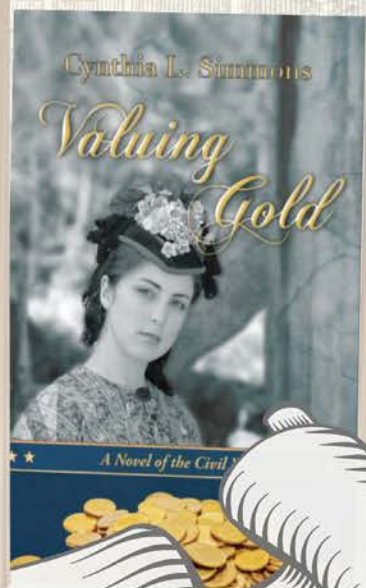
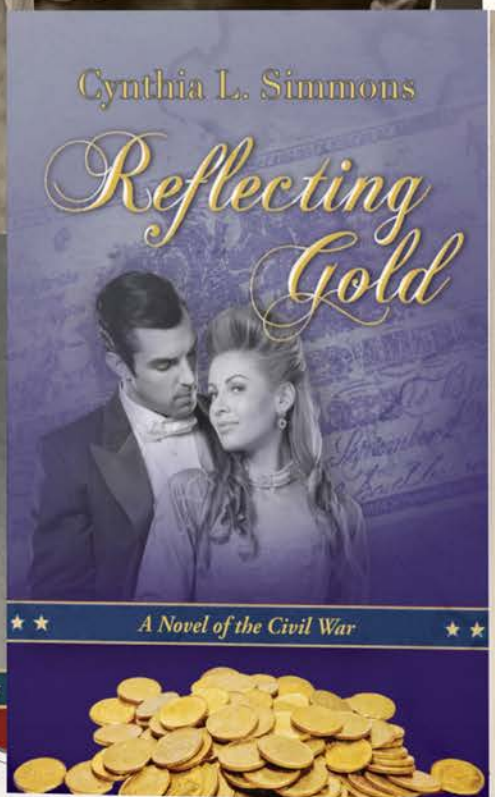
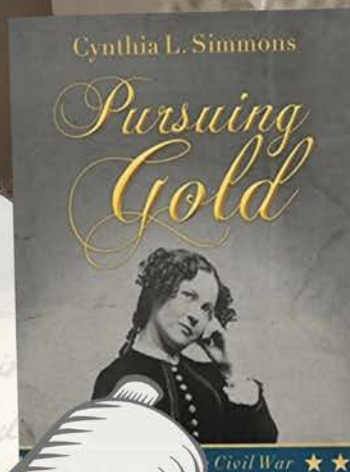
FROM AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

Cynthia L. Simmons



PETER GAZED DOWN AT HIS SLEEPING WIFE WHO LAY ATOP THEIR BLUE VELVET BEDSPREAD. WITH HER BLONDE CURLS SPREAD OUT AROUND HER HEAD, AND HER PEACEFUL FACE AT REST, SHE RADIATED BEAUTY.

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THEBIGQ

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Q: In difficult times, how can I distinguish God's leading from Satan's deception?

Excellent question. Scientists believe an average individual experiences around six thousand thoughts every day.

Obviously, we consider an action before we carry it out, so I believe Satan attacks our minds.

Scripture encourages us to "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ," which means we need to examine and toss the bad ones. Here are several "test questions" that reveal the origins of our thoughts.

First, does it contradict God's commands? In I Peter 1:6, God says, "Be holy as I am holy," so He won't inspire you to sin or encourage you to harbor jealousy of another lady's accomplishments.

Scripture refers to Satan as the father of lies. Therefore, it is essential to measure any thought that pops into your mind with the Word of God.

Second, does it divide you from other believers or isolate you? God intends the body to function as a unit rather than individuals alone.

That's why Hebrews says, "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13 NASB1995).

I heard a story about a man who stopped going to church. His pastor visited and removed a log from the fire. Of course, the log stopped burning fast. What a good illustration of the body of Christ. We need each other.

Third, does it belittle you? God demonstrated the depth of His love by sacrificing His Son for you, but Satan despises you. He will communicate you are worthless and unloved. Don't mull over any thought with that message.

Fourth, does the thought create guilt feelings or condemnation? Satan will remind you of your former failures, so you feel terrible about yourself. The Psalmist said, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12 NASB1995).

In contrast, the Holy Spirit will point out specific sins so you can repent. At times, I've had the Lord reveal that I spoke out of pride, and I had to ask forgiveness.

Sixth, does the thought make you fearful or panicky or generate chaos? In James, we learn the wisdom of the world brings disorder, but "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits" (James 3:17 NASB1995).

For example, remember the times an angel appeared to Daniel to give him a message. He reacted in terror of the supernatural, but the angel always told him not to fear and even strengthened him.

I've learned the sweetness of the presence of Jesus — that's the opposite of panic and fear.

Satan will do the opposite of the Word of God, and we need to be aware of his tactics. Let's fill our minds with God's Word, so we are prepared to recognize Satan's deception and "prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2 NASB1995). ●

CAN MOMMA LOVE
Change the World?





linda evans shepherd | lindashepherd.com

It was a starlit night and I was snuggled into a deep dream when POUND, POUND, POUND!

Rotating blades chopped the air directly above me as a police helicopter swooped down to shine a spotlight through my skylight.

I sat up blinded, my heart pounding. The only coherent thought I could manage was, “Quick, get under the bed! They’ve discovered there’s a Christian in Hollywood!”

The cobwebs began to clear and my feet hit the concrete floor of my tiny bungalow and I ran outside. Across the yard, the doors of the old mansion swung open and a bevy of teenaged Hollywood interns, as well as our landlord, ran to join me in the night. We watched as the police chopper rose to continue its search for the perpetrator of a nearby hideous crime. Oh, my goodness. What a Hollywood welcome!

Some months earlier, I’d decided to take a screenwriting course offered by the Act One Community at Hollywood Presbyterian. I knew I would be an odd duck.

My faith set me apart from my rich and famous neighbors in the Hollywood Hills where I rented a converted potting shed bedroom. But the other obstacle I faced was the fact that I was old enough to be everyone’s mother.

Before I left Colorado in my red Subaru, I’d taken all my concerns to the Lord. “The people of Hollywood aren’t going to like me,” I complained. “I’m an, ahem, ‘mature’ woman who loves Jesus. Whatever will I have in common with the people outside the Act One community?”

The answer filled my heart: Momma love! I instantly knew what this meant. The Lord wanted me to spread Momma love to all the young people who crossed my path. I would treat them as though I was their loving Mom.

What a secret weapon! Powered with Momma love, I saw the young people back at the mansion becoming my dear friends. Every Sunday, I filled my Subaru with my housemates and drove them to church.

The greeters at the church thought I was my tribe’s mom, and that became their nickname for me. “Hi Mom!” they called as I and my intern friends filed inside. One of the young interns came back to Jesus that summer.

I bribed another young man with free lunch just so we could talk about where he was with the Lord. Even the landlord, who struggled with faith, ventured a trip to church with us.

The aspiring young actors who waited on me in the restaurants were always glad to see me. I kidded with them and loved them, knowing how much they missed their moms. One young waitress, when she realized it was time for me to head back to Colorado, knelt next to my table. “You are so needed here,” she told me. Even my landlord said, “You are a breath of fresh air. Hollywood needs you.”

You know, what Hollywood really needs — what your community really needs — is for women of faith to treat their family, coworkers, and neighbors with love: sweet, unconditional Momma love, straight from the heart of God!

This kind of Momma love is missing from our society. We have a generation who has missed out on the love of a healthy family.

But we have the power to bring Momma love back to our family, church, and communities in the way we treat others.

This is a powerful strategy we can use to win people to Jesus. If we can’t love our neighbors as ourselves, they won’t care to hear about the love of Jesus because they’ve never seen us demonstrate it.

The best way to demonstrate love is to first allow God’s love to pour into us. When we can open our hearts and minds to the fact that we are loved by God, that we can be forgiven through the work of Jesus on the cross, that we can turn from our sins and trust our very lives to God, then we can manifest a more perfect love to share with others. This kind of love sources from a never-ending supply as we continually bask in God’s love for us.

When others know we love them, that’s when we can share the source of our love and tell them the good news: that Jesus died on the cross for their sins and that they can trust in Him and experience the ultimate love of God.

Even though my Subaru and I are back in Colorado, I still practice Momma love whenever I get the opportunity. And even if you’ve never been a mom, you’re still equipped to love with the love of Jesus.

The world is desperate for God’s love. But it starts with us. Will you join the Momma-Love movement? ☺

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“I Choose My Best Life” is all about helping you live fully, love boldly, and rest intentionally. If you are fatigued and overwhelmed by the life you’ve created, Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith shows you how to isolate your lifestyle pain points and gives you actionable answers to enjoying your best life.

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You can find the “I Choose My Best Life” podcast on iHEART Radio, iTunes, Spotify, Google Play and on Saundra’s website, ichoosemybestlife.com. 🎧

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Episodes include “Finding Joy in the Storm,” “Truth vs. Feelings,” “Overcoming Anxiety,” “Hope for an Angry Mom,” and “When Your Dreams Get Interrupted.”

You can find the “Soul Anchor” podcast on iTunes, Spotify, Google Play, Breaker, Radio Public, Pocketcasts and on Cynthia’s website, cynthiacavanaugh.com. 🎧

Listen Now

if teacups could talk

penelope carlevato | penelopecarlevato.com



“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart”
(Psalm 37:4 ESV).

Several years ago, I spoke at a women’s retreat in Mexico for English-speaking women. Many were discouraged and lonely, and this retreat allowed them to worship, encourage one another, and enjoy fellowship in their language. The theme for the retreat was “Hearing His Voice,” with the opening session an actual “English Afternoon Tea.” I accepted, as I loved the idea, and began to pray for direction and inspiration.

While planning, I realized we would need teacups and teapots. The planning committee in Mexico had enough teapots but didn’t have the 70 plus teacups for the attendees as gifts. I was excited that each lady would be taking home a beautiful teacup after the retreat. They had to be pretty bone china teacups, not Styrofoam, plastic, or chunky mugs.

When my family and friends heard about the tea party in Mexico, many of them gave me their best — lovely English bone china teacups from their collection. Every teacup had a note and a prayer attached to the handle with a pretty ribbon. My Sunday School class also donated tea, sugar cubes, and teaspoons, and my British friends contributed beautiful tea napkins.

I was concerned about transporting all these teacups to Mexico safely, but God took care of that. Packed safely in bubble wrap and two hard-sided Samsonite suitcases (purchased at the local thrift store), every one of the 77 cups and saucers arrived intact. I even breezed through customs and immigration. But this was just the beginning of many miracles at the retreat.

The dining room of the conference center looked beautiful. The retreat committee filled the cake tiers with the sandwiches, scones, and desserts they had made. When it was all placed on the table, the room was as spectacular as the Ritz! Each table had a vase of fresh flowers, and we set the teacups randomly around the tables.

The ladies began arriving, many adorned in hats and gloves. Each lady could sit where she wanted, and we purposely did not have place cards so they could sit with friends.

Many women said this was their first tea party. We heard many “oohs and aahs” as they found their places around the beautiful tables.

Fanny, a Mexican missionary, spent her childhood in England, and she was thrilled, as afternoon tea was one of her favorite memories!

Inga, a missionary from Germany, approached me with tears in her eyes, “How did you know?” I was confused and didn’t know what she meant. The inside of her cup had the inscription, To the Bride. Several days earlier, her boyfriend, a Mexican, had proposed, and she had accepted. But she was not sure this was the right decision. Could they combine their two cultures? She came to the retreat to hear the Lord’s answer.

Christina shared how she worked with children in the inner city. She took some little girls to a tearoom and was astonished how the atmosphere of beauty and peace helped those little ones feel God’s love for them. She was so excited to finally have her own teacup, as it affirmed her relationship to Jesus. She felt worthy, valued, and beautiful.

Sarah, an English girl, was thrilled her teacup had her birth month of May inscribed inside but doubly excited to have a proper English Afternoon Tea!

A Canadian missionary, Rowene, received a teacup that had the verse "The Lord is my Strength and Song" inside the cup. She had recently lost her young daughter to cancer, and this verse was unique for her. Just before her death, Rowene's daughter had tea with Prince Charles at Buckingham Palace as part of Make-A-Wish Foundation! Tea had become very important to Rowene, and receiving this cup brought comfort and confirmation that she was Hearing God's Voice that weekend.

Cornelia was a new mom who had recently moved to Mexico and was very lonely and craving the fellowship of other women. The tea party and retreat gave her a fantastic time to get to know women in her neighborhood and have companionship.

Another lady shared how the teacup she received was the exact pattern of her grandmother's china. She couldn't believe it! Still, another precious lady divulged her cup was the same pattern as the wallpaper in her family's home kitchen in Denmark where she grew up. So many women experienced supernatural connections with their teacups.

Sandy was a very busy young mom with four little boys. She longed for some girl time. She told me the Lord had gone above and beyond giving her the desire of her heart, a tea party. Sandy received a cup from one of the gentlemen in our Sunday School class who had recently lost his wife. She keeps that cup on her buffet. Each day it reminds her that God is such a God of detail. He cares for her and knows her longings.

Sandy is now involved in planning the annual retreat, and God continues to show His love in very supernatural ways.

The seemingly random placement of the cups, along with every woman's choice of seats, became a God-directed moment planned by the Creator of the amazing intricacy of our world.

God is a God of detail and a God of Love. Those women heard loud and clear that God loves them, cares about them, and about every detail of their lives.

Little did I know that going to Mexico with two suitcases full of teacups would have such an eternal message inside each cup. And an added blessing was the notes the women at the retreat sent back with me to give to those who gave their precious teacups.

Those teacups did talk to so many women that weekend. God was there for each one of us. He loves to delight His daughters with the desires of their hearts, and each one received the perfect teacup for her life.

Scones are such a big part of Afternoon Tea. Our grandchildren have always loved them and it is one of the first things I make when they come to visit. They especially love the clotted cream that goes on the scones.

Now our great-grandchildren are becoming scone lovers. This is the recipe that our granddaughter Nicole made for her little

girl's second birthday this year. They are incredibly delicious when served right out of the oven, but even reheated, they are delectable. Scones were also a huge hit at the retreat in Mexico.



Blueberry Lemon Poppy Seed Scones

Scones

2 ½ cups flour
2 Tbsp sugar
1 Tbsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
1 stick of butter, cold and cut into small pieces
1 egg
¾ cup buttermilk + more for brushing on top
1 Tbsp vanilla
1 ½ cups fresh or frozen blueberries
Zest of ½ lemon

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

Combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Add the butter and use a pastry blender or your hands to mix with the flour mixture until just combined. Don't over mix. Fold in the blueberries and the lemon zest.

Bake until golden brown on the middle rack of your oven for about 12-15 minutes. Watch carefully as depending on your oven, they can burn quickly. Let the scones cool slightly on a cooling rack, then drizzle with the *Lemon Poppyseed glaze. Serve warm with butter or clotted cream. (Recipe adapted from Half-Baked Harvest.)

*Lemon Poppy Seed Glaze

½ cup powdered sugar
2 Tbsp butter, melted
¼ cup fresh lemon juice
Lemon zest of ½ a lemon
½ tsp vanilla
1 ½ Tbsp poppy seeds

Whisk together the powdered sugar, butter, lemon juice and vanilla. If too thick, add water, or if too thin, add more sugar. Stir in the zest of ½ a lemon and poppy seeds. Drizzle the glaze over the scones. ●



...our cyber walk should reflect Jesus as much as any other aspect of our spiritual walk.

Jesus Chick



dos & don'ts

ON THE SOCIAL MEDIA

mission field

edie melson | ediemelson.com



We want to reach the world for Jesus. And now — more than at any other time in history — we have unprecedented access to the world.

It sounds like a match made in heaven, and it is ... at least until it isn't.

There are things about reaching out to show the love of God through social media that are made easier, there are some that are made harder, and there are some that just won't translate. We must know the difference before we start shouting into cyberspace.

The most important thing to remember is that if we want to have a lasting impact on the worldwide web, our cyber walk should reflect Jesus as much as any other aspect of our spiritual walk.

What to Remember about Online Interactions

Social media is largely a world without context. Most of the people I interact with online have never met me. They don't know my story — my experiences, where I live, what I've endured, etc. They only know glimpses of what they see online.

Even if I'm always genuine and transparent online, those glimpses can leave someone with an incomplete picture.

It's also a world without commitment. I know there are exceptions to that generality. But it's important to remember that even though we have friends we interact with regularly online, that's generally a secondary relationship.

It doesn't hold the same commitment level as those we see in a friendship where we can be physically present.

My List of Dos & Don'ts

- **Do reach out.** Sharing the experiences of others, acknowledging the highs and lows they're sharing online, will help them know they are seen.
- **Don't criticize, EVER.** What goes online stays online. We mustn't make the mistake of venting at the expense of someone else. I've never regretted being nice, but I have a long list of things I wish I hadn't said.
- **Do be bold to offer prayer.** I felt awkward the first time I wrote out a prayer in a comment on a social media post. But the response was overwhelming. Now, like when I'm in person and feel the nudge to stop and pray with someone, I follow that feeling and share a prayer online.
- **Don't get into an argument.** God's Word is clear that we shouldn't be quarrelsome. And that applies online as well as in person. Some people prowl online to stir up strife and contention. We fall into the enemy's trap when we engage in that way.
- **Do avoid controversial subjects.** How to live this out online is a matter of personal prayer. I avoid all controversial subjects because I believe those hard conversations are better in a place with an actual physical presence. I prefer to hold difficult discussions in a place where thousands of people are NOT eavesdropping.
- **Don't be fake.** It's easy to fall into the trap of portraying our lives like a fairy tale. Life isn't like that, and when we only share the high points, we're not fully honest. It's OK not always to complain, but life is full of ups and downs. When we share the whole story, God receives glory because the world sees how He helps us overcome.

The list above is mine, personally. I wanted to have specific boundaries of what I do and don't do regarding online interaction. I recommend coming up with your own list so you're ready before a situation arises.☺



Mentoring is more than merely telling someone about the Word of God. It involves showing someone how to love and serve God.

THE HEALING BENEFITS OF MENTORING

dr. saundra dalton-smith | ichoosemybestlife.com



Every leader has room for spiritual and professional growth.

Ultimately, Holy Spirit is our faithful guide leading us into all things pertaining to godliness, but God's Word does encourage mentoring relationships. One of the best examples of this is shown in the relationship between Paul and Timothy.

It is also referenced in Titus regarding older women mentoring younger women. Even the relationship Jesus shared with His disciples is a form of mentoring.

Mentoring is more than merely telling someone about the Word of God. It involves showing someone how to love and serve God. It is an active form of blessing where one person serves another through the shared gift of their life experience.

Whether you are looking to develop your understanding of Scripture, clarify your calling, build your leadership gifts, or deepen your spiritual walk, you can benefit from a godly mentor.

A spiritual mentor can help you develop your overall skills in multiple areas as a leader or help you if you feel stuck and unsure about your next steps. Mentors often function at a level of experience and success you aspire to achieve. Their spiritual intelligence has been developed through experience with God in places you may not have encountered yet.

Mentors can offer wise counsel and advice based on their own journey alongside the examples from Scripture. They are living epistles from which you can glean.

A mentor is concerned about all aspects of your growth and well-being. They often desire to have a doing-life-together relationship where they give you access to intimate parts of their life.

Spiritual mentors may also share personal details with you about their discipleship habits, introduce you to their friends, and act as a referral source for new opportunities to directly help you move forward in your calling.

Mentoring is usually a mutual agreement based on relationships. Your mentor should want to mentor you as much as you want to be mentored by them.

Godly mentoring can be healing and restorative for both parties involved when they share these five characteristics.

5 Key Characteristics of Healthy Mentoring Relationships

#1 Vulnerability

Mentoring relationships will require a greater level of vulnerability from both sides. The mentor must be comfortable sharing about both the high and low points of their journey and the mentee should be open to discussing their current struggles and difficulties.

#2 Personal growth

Mentoring often covers many interlinking personal growth areas affecting your calling. If you are embarking on a new opportunity, a mentoring relationship would encompass a holistic look at advancement in your personal growth.

#3 Accountability

Mentoring is not rigid but should have some level of ongoing feedback to keep you on track. There will likely be no established performance measures or specific assignments related to the mentoring relationship.

Improvement is often measured by intangible interpersonal changes. The accountability is to help keep you from getting stuck in your problems and instead moving forward as you focus on God.

#4 Mindset management

A mentoring mindset focuses on a long-term relationship. When seeking mentorship, consider someone you know personally or professionally who you admire and would like to achieve a similar level of growth in an area.

#5 Authenticity

In your mentoring relationships, you should strive to be authentic in your interactions. For a mentor to guide well, you will need to feel comfortable being truthful about where you are getting stuck and most needing assistance. Before they can help you move forward, they will need to see where you are currently in the process.

Lack of authenticity will negatively affect the effectiveness and limit the healing benefits of having a mentor. ●



As a Protégé, I felt an overwhelming sense of passion and purpose from the AWSA community, plus received a ton of practical advice for someone new to this ministry life.

FROM PROTÉGÉ TO PUBLISHED AUTHOR

christine trimpe | christinetrimpe.com



The memory of walking into my first Advanced Writers and Speakers Association (AWSA) Conference in 2019 fills me with great joy and a grateful heart.

As someone newly called to the life of ministry through writing and speaking, I had several questions and even more nerves. If you're an introvert, I bet you can relate. And even if you're not an introvert, I bet you can still relate as you take this giant leap of faith into your new calling as a writer and speaker.

As a Protégé, I felt an overwhelming sense of passion and purpose from the AWSA community, plus received a ton of practical advice for someone new to this ministry life.

As a new writer, I also discovered I love alliterations, so let's carry on with this practical advice to help you plan and prioritize your new path!

Now in walking this journey from being an AWSA Protégé to publishing my first book, *Seeking Joy Through the Gospel of Luke*, are three tips to guide you:

- *Planning for ministry.*
- *Promoting a platform on social media.*
- *Publishing options.*
- *Planning for ministry.*

As a health and wellness coach, I know the importance of having a plan to guide your new adventure. Planning leads to follow through which leads to success.

First and foremost, find a verse to ground and center you on Jesus. Write it, memorize it, keep it handy. One of my go-to verses is the wise words in Proverbs 16:3 (NIV): "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and He will establish your plans."

Know your why. What is the message that God wants to share through you? You could probably write an entire book to answer this question! I bet you will.

Identify your audience. Who is the Lord bringing into your life to hear your story of hope? You will hear the term "niche" in all your training. By definition, "niche" means finding the market segment ready for a particular kind of product (or service). This takes time but is essential work.

Find your tribe. The writing and speaking life is quite lonely. Your friends and family might want to support you, but they might not understand this new passion you possess in your heart. Network and build connections through conferences, online writing groups, and through groups like AWSA.

Establish your praying partner team. These people must be trustworthy, committed, and protective of the requests you make of them. Ask the Lord to identify this team for you.

Promoting a Platform on Social Media

I know, it sounds like something you don't want to do. Social media can be awkward and divisive. But you are going to use it for good to share the gospel. It's important to know that publishers and event planners will want to see your message reaching and resonating with an audience.

These are tips of the trade I wish I knew when I started this journey! Now I could write an entire article on each of these tips to jumpstart promoting your platform:

Prioritize this first: your email subscriber list. There are many free platforms, such as MailChimp, MailerLite, ConvertKit, Constant Contact, and more. Go on YouTube and search "How to Build an Email List for Dummies" to get your basic beginner instructions. When I need to learn anything new in technology and online marketing, I always include the phrase "for dummies" to get started. Important: you can build an email list before you even have a website!

Design a free resource to offer your audience as a gift. This is how you can serve your audience while adding their name to your email list and building your audience.

Build your website. Again, research this on YouTube or establish a budget to have this done professionally. I built my website (ChristineTrimpe.com) from scratch with a lot of trial and error (and I'm still learning). If you aren't afraid of technology, give it a try. There's also a ton of website designers in the Christian marketplace.

Sign up for an account on every social media platform. This does not mean you will keep each one updated, but the purpose is to reserve your name. Here's a list to get you started: Facebook Business Page, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok, Clubhouse, and MeWe. Go to YouTube for social platform tutorials.

Publishing Options

Don't feel overwhelmed by the process of publishing your first book. What a relief! As you network and build connections in the Christian writing world, you will discover various options. Here are the details about a few options to explore:

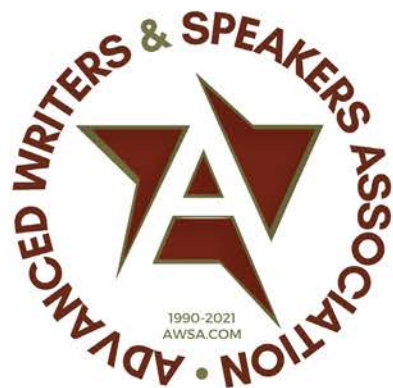
Self-publishing. This is exactly as it sounds — you do all the work yourself or hire help. An example of where to self-publish is Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP).

Hybrid publishing. This is a great option for new authors. I chose this option to publish my first book. It required a personal financial investment up front but allowed me to have more control over the project and more profit on the back end from book sales.

Traditional publishing. This option typically requires a solid book proposal, an agent, a great pitch, and a timely topic.

In Summary

Remember the three Ps — planning, promoting, and publishing options — as you progress. Enjoy this journey. Watch the Lord work in helping you deliver the good news of great joy to the right people! ☺



**Are you a Christian Woman
Called to Write & Speak?**

*Join
Us!*

FIND OUT MORE @ [APPLYAWSA.COM](https://www.applyawsa.com)





awsa memberships

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



AWSA PROTÉGÉ

For women who feel called to communicate.

Annual Membership includes:

- Opportunity to attend live conferences and network with published authors (\$1000 value)
- Invitation to join Protégé Power Call — lively group coaching with experts. (\$100 value)
- AWSA Connect, virtual, quarterly mini-conferences with small group network time. (\$500 value)
- Invitation to submit to AWSA's Leading Hearts magazine and daily e-devotionals. ((\$100 value)
- Access to Certified Writing Coaches (\$100 value)
- News and happenings, plus invitations to ministry/career changing courses (\$500 value)
- Fast Acting Bonus: "How to Get More Speaking Engagements" course. (\$500 value)
- Fast Acting Bonus: Writing and Speaking Guides by Kathy Collard Miller. (\$200 value)

Annual package worth: \$3000;

Yours for \$97 a month, or save \$164 and pay \$997 a year.

AWSA PROFESSIONAL

For women who are professional writers, speakers or communicators.

Annual Membership includes:

- An online networking and resource loop. (\$1000 value)
- Online prayer loop. (Priceless)
- Opportunity to attend live conferences and network with editors and published authors (\$1000 value)
- Opportunity to become an AWSA Certified Coach. (\$100 value)
- Opportunity to become a P.O.W.E.R. Certified Speaker (\$100 value)
- News and happenings, plus invitations to ministry/career changing courses (\$500 value.)
- AWSA Connect, virtual, quarterly mini-conferences with small group network time. (\$500 value)
- Invitation to submit to AWSA's Leading Hearts magazine and Arise Daily e-devotionals. (\$100 value)
- Fast Acting Bonus: "How to Get More Speaking Engagements" course. (\$500 value)
- Fast Acting Bonus: Writing and Speaking Guides by Kathy Collard Miller. (\$200 value)
- Exclusive access to Golden Scroll Awards Contest (Priceless)

Annual package worth: \$3000;

*Yours: \$47 per year.**



Act fast because of pending membership package increases!*

Go to applyawsa.com.



Once we realize it is
not about us, we will
begin to see God has
numbered our days
and will fulfill every
purpose He has for
each of us .

are you
Free to See?



There has been a war going on from the time we were born—a battle for our life. God, our Father, created us with a beautiful plan in mind.

God formed us; He knew us before we were born. He knew us from our mother's womb.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5 ESV).

Before you ever took your first breath, God knew you. He knew how tall or short you would be, the color of your eyes, the color of your hair, and a thousand other details. You are not a genetic accident; God the Father created you. He sees you; the key is we must see ourselves through His eyes. It was God who formed you in your mother's womb. Even before you were born, He knew you and was working in your life.

He not only knew you, but He also formed you for His purpose. He told Jeremiah that He appointed him as a prophet and that He had a special message for the people of God that could only come through Jeremiah. He also has a unique task for each of us, His children, to complete.

Action Steps — Make these confessions:

- **God knew me before I was born.**
- **He formed me with His own hands.**
- **God has appointed me for a special purpose.**
- **I am known and loved by God.**

Many of us were born into disappointment: a mother addicted to drugs, a father who chose alcohol over family, poverty in a world of riches. The odds were stacked against us from the very beginning, so how could we see anything but defeat? Sometimes disappointments cannot be overcome, only endured. If we look back over our lives, how many times did God have a plan different from the plan we had for ourselves? Seasons of pain and suffering. Times of loss and heartache. Days of darkness when we wonder if God was really with us at all. In the past, I have wondered if God loves us and if all things are under His control, then why does He not stop others from hurting us?

The world said I was nothing, so I am nothing. If the enemy can get us to believe the lies and only see our circumstances, we will never believe our lives are more than what we see. I challenge you to see we have a choice each day to make God our Father proud. To wake up and take one step at a time to work out the appointment He has set before you according to His divine purpose as well. There are some good deeds that only you can do. He has called you to be a light in your world.

God has a plan for your life, and that plan is good. That plan began before you were born and will not find completion until you see Him face-to-face. God knows and loves you beyond your comprehension. He sees the wonderful person He created. He sees all the potential that He created in you.

He has a plan for our lives, and we are always living in that purpose even though it's not filled with just sunshine and rainbows. His plan makes us uniquely us. Its design brings us to our future and expected end. God's plan is not always easy, but we can trust it. He will lead us every step of the way — we just cannot stop stepping. We must follow the process and learn to trust God for who HE is.

God orders our steps. We must choose to not stop at disappointments. We must look beyond distractions and seek the plan God has for our life. He works all things, including our life, according to His purpose. Nothing can happen without God ordaining it.

Psalm 57:2 says, “I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me” (ESV).

Once we realize it is not about us, we will begin to see God has numbered our days and will fulfill every purpose He has for each of us.

Our adversary also has a plan, a plan to kill, a plan to destroy by any means necessary. He does not want us to discover the beauty of God's plan for our lives, so he works long and hard to keep us blinded, distort our view, and blur our vision, whatever it takes to destroy the plan God has for us to live a life of abundance.

The first line of John 10:10 states that the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Often we get stuck at the first line of this passage. If we keep pushing past the colon, however, we will see victory in the battle. “I have come that they might have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10 NKJV).

Seeing who we are gives us the freedom to go beyond our circumstances, look beyond who others tell us we should be, move past distractions, move past disappointments, and truly seek who God has created us to be.

Your vision may be blurred, but you can choose to trust God to lead you to the plan He created for your life (Jeremiah 29:11). However messed up our lives have been, God has a plan of love toward us. We will suffer troubles on this earth, and often we will not understand, but He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

He can go to the broken places in our hearts and heal; He will take the pieces and make them brand new. His triumph over all evil will get us through whatever suffering we must go through in life. Taking steps to lay aside everything (Hebrews 12:1) that the enemy designs to hold us back will allow us to clearly see that God's plan for us is one designed for us to walk in life on purpose with a purpose for a purpose. ☉



YET IN THY DARK STREETS shineth

rhonda rhea | rhondarhea.com



I get it. Sometimes we have difficulty letting go of the season. I was thinking that this year we should try something different.

We could try doing Christmas. And then when it's over, we could wait until next year to do Christmas again.

My good friends — who also happen to be my neighbors — kept their Christmas lights up, and even the tree up, until June last year. June!

It was so cute. They still turned the lights on every night.

When summer rolled around we were trying to decide if it was a late Christmas celebration or an early one for the next year.

When they came over for Bible study one evening, I teased them. “Tonight you will be visited by the Ghost of CHRISTMAS IS OVER, PEOPLE!”

Then again, I've heard a lot of people judge when it's time to take down the Christmas tree by how dry it is and/or whether or not it's currently on fire. Counting my blessings. Since my neighbor's tree is fake.

I do understand how tough it can be to get motivated to take the decorations down and put them all away. Decorating? So exciting.

But taking them down is rather a bummer.

Last year I tried, “Okay, Google: Take down my Christmas lights,” but ... nothing. There really should be an app for that.

Still, you know what? My neighbors might just have it right. Their twinkling tree and all the shiny lights on their house lit up our neighborhood most of the year.

Maybe I'm the one who needs to adjust my thinking about what's seasonal and what's not.

The truth is, my neighbors don't leave their Christmas decorations up because they're lazy about taking them down. They leave them up because they love Christmas. They really, really love Christmas.

The pre-Christmas celebrations started long before there was a first Christmas. Seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah wrote, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness” (Isaiah 9:2 CSB).

Then in verse 6 he wrote, “For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

This? Oh my, this is something to shine about. Jesus confirmed it when He said,

“You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:4,16 CSB).

Light up the neighborhood. Light up the world.

We sing “O Little Town of Bethlehem” every year. It's a song sung to the city where our Jesus was born and it includes the phrase:

“Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.”

The everlasting Light that shone in Bethlehem is still shining. Our Father doesn't want us to pack away our thoughts of our Savior's coming like so many Christmas decorations. We're to shine gospel-light-living through our streets and through our world.

So let's do it. Let's light it up in every season.

And if you'd specifically like to see it lit up come summer, head on over to my neighborhood. We'll leave the lights on. ☺



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inspired to live.
equipped to lead.

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