

A woman is sitting on the edge of a long wooden dock that extends from the bottom center towards the middle of the frame. The dock is made of wooden planks. The woman is seen from the side, wearing a light-colored top and dark pants. She is looking out over a calm body of water. The water reflects the sky and the surrounding landscape. In the background, there are dark, silhouetted hills or mountains under a twilight sky with soft, wispy clouds. The overall color palette is dominated by blues and greys, creating a serene and contemplative atmosphere.

JENTEZEN FRANKLIN

the
amazing discernment
of women

learning to understand your spiritual
intuition and God's plan for it

More Praise for ***The Amazing Discernment of Women***

Jentezen Franklin reveals the strategic influence wise and discerning women can have in the lives of those around them. Allow *The Amazing Discernment of Women* to alter your perspective and speak to your heart.

—Joyce Meyer

Best-selling author and Bible teacher

The Amazing Discernment of Women is a powerful new revelatory work! Pastor Jentezen Franklin has tapped into the God-given, Spirit-driven wisdom that is able to protect, guide, and mold women into God's greatest vessels in their homes, businesses and ministries. This is a must-read for every woman seeking a deeper understanding of herself and her power as a Woman of God!

—Paula White

Founder and co-pastor

Without Walls International Church

Abraham Lincoln said, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." Jentezen Franklin, in this exciting and life-changing book, reveals how women of discernment have changed lives forever of people in their circle of influence. The difference between Adolf Hitler and John Wesley was the woman of influence in their lives. The difference between paradise in the Garden of Eden and a world of thorns and thistles was Eve. In the words of Jentezen Franklin, "Women of God, you either carry an embalming spirit or anointing spirit." If you read one book this year, make it *The Amazing Discernment of Women*.

—John Hagee

Best-selling author

Senior Pastor, Cornerstone Church, San Antonio, Texas

Jentezen Franklin's new book is a "must read" for every man! (Or at least every man who wants to understand how the woman in his life can come to incredible insight without necessarily knowing how she got there.) I ought to know. Having been married to my wife for more than 30 years and having only daughters in my life, I feel like I have been swimming in a sea of estrogen. Finally, my friend Jentezen threw me a lifesaver. If a woman wants to be able to explain how she knows what she knows, and if a man needs to understand that she just knows it, this book is necessary.

—Tommy Tenney

Pastor and best-selling author

Founder, GodChasers.network

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This book is dedicated to the five darlings in my life:
to my wife, Cherise, without whom I would be nothing,
and to my four daughters: Courtney, Caressa, Caroline and Connor.
May the lessons in this book be a part of the spiritual legacy I leave behind for you.

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**the
amazing discernment
of women**

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Chapter One

Your Internal Compass

In the middle of China, an ordinary person repeatedly drops a shard of iron onto a leaf and watches as the leaf floats on the water then inexplicably spins until it points in the same direction every time. Historians and archaeologists believe this is how the compass, the original navigational tool, was discovered—years before the Bible was written.

They had no concept of north—the direction naturally sought by the magnetized shard—and for millennia no one would discover why this solitary piece of metal behaved as it did. Nevertheless, an ancient someone invented the compass. Years later, the compass would find its purpose with sailors and anyone needing to know where to find their destination.

Inside of every person, ordinary and extraordinary, is an internal compass placed by God and waiting to be discovered and used for His glory. How can you discover that special, internal direction unique to you? What is God's plan for you as a woman? Most women today can feel anything but special as they try to fulfill the ever-present demands of career, church, and family. They feel left out, stressed out, overwhelmed, and frazzled.

You have a key role in Satan's ultimate defeat. Perhaps the reason gender bias is one prejudice with which the church still wrestles is because Satan fights hardest what he fears the most. Satan hates women. The first words he heard God utter about women were, "She shall bring forth a seed that will crush

his head” (see Gen. 3:15). From that moment forward, Satan decided he must attack women. He doesn’t want women to be productive!

Many women feel average. At worst, they feel like they will never measure up to people’s expectations. Yet God says you are extraordinary, and He desires to use you in extraordinary ways. God is searching for women who dare to believe they can make a difference. Think about it. The last creative work of God was the formation of woman. Ladies, you are the crown on God’s Creation. Something in Creation was missing without the presence of a woman, so God put you on the scene.

After forming Adam from the ground, why didn’t God take another handful of sand to make Eve? Because He didn’t want His new creation to be identical to man. God purposely created man and woman unlike each other because He wanted them to *complete* each other. Imagine that after God made man, He looked at him and said, “I can do better than that!” Adam fell into a deep sleep while God created the first woman out of Adam’s rib. Just think, Adam fell asleep single and woke up married.

Never fall asleep when God is working.

Because He wanted them to complement each other, God gave Adam and Eve different gifts. And one of the primary gifts to woman was her intuition, that remarkable blend of emotional and intellectual understanding that gives her an amazing ability to discern things men just don’t get. This gift shines in today’s world, but it’s also evident in a number of vital passages of Scripture.

Women were last at the cross, first at the tomb, and present in the upper room. Men didn’t discern Jesus’ last critical days

before His Crucifixion; instead, a woman named Mary discerned “it was now or never” and anointed Him for His burial just hours before His death. Jesus honored her by saying, “She has done a good work for Me” (Mark 14:6).

After Jesus’ burial, a man named Nicodemus brought myrrh to embalm Him. His attitude was, “It’s over now; it’s time to bury the dead” (John 19:39). Discerning women also brought spices for making anointing oil. Perhaps they remembered Jesus’ teaching more clearly than the men did. They were looking beyond His death.

Women of God, you carry either an embalming spirit or an anointing spirit. You can approach your marriage, family, future, and dreams with an embalming spirit that says, “It’s over. I give up. What’s the use?” Or you can approach your future with an anointing spirit that says, “I don’t know how, but I’m going to move this situation from a death position to a resurrection position.” Those women who brought anointing spices to the tomb were prepared to change the dead body of Christ from a *death* position to a *resurrection* position.

Today, the body of Christ (the church), must change from a death position of form and ritual to a resurrection position of revival. Could it be that the key players in these last days will be discerning women?

Just as Jesus began His ministry at a wedding, He is going to end His ministry at a wedding—the marriage supper of the Lamb. Do you know how His ministry was launched? Jesus’ mother Mary approached Him with a need. “We have no wine,” Mary said.

“What have I to do with you, My hour has not yet come,” Jesus said.

But His discerning mother knew when to push her son out into ministry. She heard Jesus' response, yet she turned to the servants and commanded, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Discernment is reading between the lines, understanding the unwritten or unspoken message. When Jesus said, "My hour has not yet come," something about how He said it caused Mary to read between the lines. When she turned to the servants and said, "Do whatever He tells you," this discerning mother triggered Him into action. She discerned the right time to push her son into His destiny. Your children have gifts, talents, and special destiny moments that God has already arranged in their lives. Discerning mothers can read between the lines, seeing potential and greatness in their children no one else can see.

I was six years old, taking a bath with my G.I. JOE action figures one Saturday night, when I began to sing Bill Gaither's song, "The King is Coming." My mother, who was listening, entered the bathroom and said, "Jentezen, our church musicians are out of town tomorrow and your dad asked me to take care of the music. I have everything lined up but the special for the offering. Will you sing that song tomorrow for the offertory?" She kept on pushing me, not taking no for an answer.

"I will if you'll pay me twenty dollars," I finally said.

"It's a deal!"

Mom read between the lines, hearing something about her son's destiny through her perceptive intuition. Neither one of us knew that singing "The King is Coming" the next day on the stage of that little church would launch me into my ministry. Believe it or not, I still remember that day. Tears were flowing

as the congregation was moved. The tender touch of God came upon my life. Later I began to sing in the choir and play the drums, the sax, and the piano, which led to my accepting the call to preach.

Today, I pastor an amazing church filled with thousands of people, and I reach millions by television. It was all triggered by the amazing discernment of a woman.

Can you imagine Abraham looking for a place, “for which I will tell you of?” Women tend to understand this better than men. Sometimes when I ask my wife what she’s shopping for, she’ll say, “I’m not sure, but I’ll know when I find it.” There are things that you know, that you can’t explain. First John 2:20 (KJV) says that you have an unction from God, and you know all things. “Unction” is an anointing that provides you with remarkable insight; God is the true source of your intuition.

Through the Holy Spirit from whom flows all the gifts, graces, and superior knowledge of God, you have inside information on what God’s will is.

Ladies, you have an unction to function! This ability to know things others do not is a gift from God. You know things about your kids. You know things about other women’s intentions by the way they relate to your husband.

God has given every ordinary woman an extraordinary gift. He has given you an internal compass to guide and discern things about your children, your mate, your family, and your finances.

This discernment is unique to women. In the next few chapters, I will teach you how to:

- activate discernment

- apply discernment in everyday life
- make a profound difference in your loved ones' lives by just being you
- hear your inner voice of discernment

As you will soon see, this will be your most important life lesson in fulfilling your assignment as a woman of God.

Chapter Two

The Atmosphere a Discerning Woman Creates

Someone said, "To live above with those we love, that will be glory.

But to live below with those we know, well that's another story."

We seem to have forgotten hospitality is a spiritual gift. Discerning women understand that they create the atmosphere in their home. I heard of one woman who was so negative she would have made a good cover girl for the Book of Lamentations. What's the atmosphere of your home? Is it negative or positive, peaceful or angry, upbeat or depressing? Is your home a shelter or a storm?

"The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite three months. And the LORD blessed Obed-Edom and all his household" (2 Sam. 6:11). Obed-Edom had seventy children and grandchildren, and he kept the ark of the covenant in his home for three months. Imagine having God's presence in your living room for ninety days. It had such an impact on his family that all seventy of his children and grandchildren worked in the temple. The faith of Obed-Edom flowed in his bloodline from generation to generation. Obed-Edom's family became addicted to the presence of God because of the spiritual atmosphere in their home.

Another man in the Bible, Ahab, had seventy sons (2 Kings 10:1). Ahab and Jezebel were reckless in their lifestyle and godless in their home life. All seventy of their children were

captured by a man named Jehu, who beheaded each one of them. You can't tell me Ahab and Jezebel's lifestyle didn't affect their children negatively. Likewise, you can't tell me having the ark of God's presence in their home for ninety days didn't positively affect Obed-Edom's family.

All the water in the world won't sink a ship until it gets inside. If you allow the atmosphere in your home to become negative, it will begin to decay from within.

Have you heard the story of the timid little boy who went to Sunday school for the first time? During the class, the teacher asked this first-time visitor, "Where is God?" Startled, he jumped up and ran out of the class. He found his mom in the church, and said, "I need to go home. This is my first time here; God is missing, and they're blaming me."

If God is missing in your home, I'm not blaming you. I'm simply saying women are either the thermostat or the thermometer in their home. A thermometer simply reflects the temperature of a house, but a thermostat changes it!

God has called women to be the thermostat of the home. Oh, the power womanhood has to create the right or wrong atmosphere in the home. Before he denied Christ, the last influence in Simon Peter's life was a woman with an accusing, sarcastic attitude (Mark 14:69). On the other hand, the atmosphere created by Deborah transformed a weak man named Barak into a warrior. In Judges 4:8, when Barak said, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!", a positive remark from Deborah gave him the confidence he needed to win. Her pat on the back made him feel like, *If she believes in me, I know I can do it!*

Ladies, your power can influence for right or wrong, for

victory or defeat. Remember, people have a way of becoming what you encourage them to be, not what you nag them to be. Speak to the fool in your child, and the fool will stand up. Speak to the champion in your child, and the champion will stand up. Speak to the fool in your husband, and the fool will stand up; but speak to the king in your husband, and he'll hurt himself trying to please you.

Discern when the atmosphere of your home is negative and unpleasant, and become more than a thermometer that reflects the present climate. Instead, be a thermostat that changes the climate of your home. You can't grow bananas in Alaska, but you can in Jamaica. Why? Because the climate is right!

My mother understood the power of atmosphere. She and my dad raised five kids. All five of us were virgins when we got married. Not only am I in full-time ministry, my older brother is a pastor, one of my younger sisters is a pastor's wife, and my other brother and sister are strong Christians who are very involved in their local church. My parents constantly created a godly environment in our home that was so real none of us ever forsook the God of our parents.

What's the climate of your home? You have the ability to change it with your words and your attitude. You can become a great lifter of people. James likened the tongue to a rudder on a boat, or a bit in the mouth of a horse. Where our tongue goes, we go! It determines our direction. We cannot separate what we say from where we are going. Your words are atmosphere changers.

There is a tremendous power in atmosphere. The taste for spiritual things can be lost because of atmosphere; moral senses can be deadened because of atmosphere. Men can lose

their capacity to be shocked and forget how to blush if they are constantly exposed to the wrong atmosphere.

What kind of kids do you want yours to grow up to be? One man said, “My kids are the kind of kids that I don’t want my kids to play with.” Our greatest influence is our example.

Second Kings 4 tells of a nameless woman called the Shunammite woman. Because of the atmosphere she created in her home, her family experienced a miracle of healing. She built a little church in her home. We know how to have church at church, but we need to have a little church in our homes to save our children. To paraphrase Deuteronomy 11:21, “May your days on earth be as days of heaven on earth.”

The home is supposed to simulate days of heaven on earth. The Shunammite woman created this atmosphere in her home. God called her “a great woman” (2 Kings 4:8 KJV). Great doesn’t mean large; it means that she was outstanding. She was not a prophetess. She was not a musician. She was not a famous Bible teacher. Yet she was in the ministry—a good wife, a good mother, a good homemaker. In Titus 2, Paul teaches that the older women should teach the younger women to be keepers of the home and to love their husbands. Ladies, your primary ministry is to your family, creating a godly atmosphere in your homes.

I’m sure there were prophetesses living in that area, but God didn’t send Elisha to their homes. The word *Shunammite* in Hebrew means “peaceful plant.” The Shunammite woman valued the atmosphere of peace in her home. Blessed are the peacemakers, not the troublemakers, for they shall have a happy home. No amount of success can compensate for failure in the home. Even the best family tree has its sap.

Determine to be a peace manufacturer in your home—make peace when there is none. Peace is not the absence of trouble, nor is peace the absence of enemies. You may have conflict all around you, but refuse to let it inside you. Proverbs 16:7 says, “When a man’s ways please the LORD, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Ask God for an anointing for peace in your home. He will give it to you.

How can you create peace in your home?

- Impart peace by your words.
- Don’t jump into the struggle.

You have the ability to impart peace by your words. “A soft answer turns away wrath.” If they don’t receive your peace, then you don’t have to get into the struggle. You don’t have to lose your peace because other people refuse to be at peace with you. Learn to be at peace with the fact that not everybody will be at peace with you! They may make themselves your enemy, but you can refuse to make yourself their enemy.

Part of the blessing of God upon a family is peace. Peace is the absence of alarm. In Numbers 6:24–26, God commanded families to be blessed with peace: “The LORD bless you and keep you... And give you peace.” Strife, contention, and resentment do not belong in the atmosphere of your home. Victory over these begins with a thought. Defeat begins with a thought. What are you thinking? You may say, “But, Jentezen, you don’t understand how difficult some of my family members can be.”

I heard about a lady whose doctor told her, “You’ve got rabies.” Immediately, she pulled out a pad and pen and began

writing. Thinking she was making out her will, the doctor said, “No, no, this doesn’t mean you’re going to die. There’s a cure.”

“I know that,” she said. “I’m making a list of people I’m going to bite.”

Revenge is like rabies. Sometimes it devastates the ones who get hurt, but it always destroys the one who does the hurting. It is insidious because it forces you to get bogged down in bitterness and self-pity. It makes you spit in the well from which you may someday have to drink. It sidetracks you and causes you to take the low road. Don’t insist on getting even. Be at peace.

God will take care of it. If you’ve been hurt, forgive. Then, for your own good, put it into God’s hands. He’ll handle it, if you’ll let Him. Remember, unforgiveness is an acid that always destroys its container. Nothing destroys the cutting edge of the Holy Spirit in our lives like unforgiveness.

If you want to change the atmosphere in your home, go on a fast from criticism. For the next twenty-four hours, do not criticize anybody or anything. During the first half of the day, you’ll feel a great void. At lunchtime as you listen to others, keep silent. As the day progresses, you’ll notice that the federal government, the company you work for, your church, and your family can apparently get along just fine without your critical observations. By mid-afternoon, you’ll be amazed at the newfound joy you’re experiencing. You’ll feel more inspired than you have in years.

You see, a critical nature will not solve one thing in which it finds fault. Instead, criticism will stifle your creativity. Psalm 141:3 points out that “Words kill, words give life, you choose.”

Negative words create an atmosphere in which positive people cannot live. Only in a climate of faith and acceptance can risks be taken and dreams be fulfilled. That's why you need to pray today, "Take control of what I say, O Lord" (NLT).

How can you create the right atmosphere in your home?

Control the climate around you. Negativity is contagious—do not be a carrier! Be a can-do attitude person, always looking for the best.

Smile more often, even when you're not on candid camera.

I heard about a woman who received a lovely plant. She took the plant home, watered it, fertilized it, and sat it in the sun. Later, she discovered it was silk. To this day, she still laughs about it.

When you are secure, you can laugh at yourself. I've been told your smile muscles are linked to the part of the brain that determines your mood. That's why Solomon said, "A merry heart does good, like medicine" (Prov. 17:22).

When I choose to smile, I become the master of my emotions. My smile becomes my calling card. It has the power to break the ice and calm storms. My smile is the most potent weapon I possess. If I always smile first, this display of good attitude will tell people what I expect in return.

If I said your name to your children, what would be the mental picture they would envision of you? A warm, cheerful you or a frazzled stressed-out mom who rarely smiles because she's too busy spending her day cleaning up spills, washing laundry, and chauffeuring to soccer practice? You may say, "It's hard to smile when I don't feel like it." The good news is, we don't have to wait until we "feel happy" before we smile.

Smiling is something we choose to do. It's an act of

kindness, a gift we give to others; especially our kids. It takes fewer facial muscles to create a smile than to produce a frown. A smile offered on a regular basis can make a world of difference in the way our children view their days, their lives, and their moms. Joy is so important to God that He mentions it 180 times in the Old and New Testaments.

Mother Teresa, the Nobel prize-winning nun who spent her life helping sick and needy children in Calcutta, India, said this about smiles: "Peace begins with a smile. Smile five times a day at someone you don't really want to smile at, at all. Do it for peace." If Mother Teresa could smile in the midst of suffering and poverty five times a day, surely we can offer a smile in our homes when our children and our loved ones surround us.

The power of a smile is enormous in creating a happy atmosphere in the home. Your children benefit greatly from a smile when they come home from school after a long day. Husbands are greatly encouraged when greeted with a smile after a day's work. You have more to smile about than you do to gripe about. Even when you don't feel warm and fuzzy joy bubbling up on the inside, try to smile every day, including PMS days. Smiles are contagious, so infect your family members with yours.

Ask yourself, *Do I want to be right or reconciled?*

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks" (Isa. 2:4). Swords and spears are instruments of war used for fighting. Plowshares and pruning hooks are instruments of harvest used for reaping. God wants to take you from fighting to reaping a harvest where you have been fighting.

All of us at times experience battles in our family life. When

the bottom falls out, what do you do? Blame others? Blaming others only makes you bitter. Do you wallow in self-pity? Self-pity only paralyzes you and alienates others. God knows how to turn your sword into a plowshare. No day lasts forever! In the meantime, what doesn't destroy you will only make you stronger. Your weakness can become the discovery point for the strengths that you never even knew you had, so where your biggest battles are is where your greatest harvest will come if you just keep pressing on.

If something matters little, make little of the matter. Most mud holes will clear up if you don't stir them. Some people overreact about everything. I heard about a man who accidentally swallowed a potato bug. He drank a cup of arsenic to kill it. Don't overreact—the mess just isn't worth it. Remember a bulldog can whip a skunk anytime he wants, but he needs to ask himself if the stink is worth it. Before you make a big deal out of something in your marriage, or with one of your kids, ask yourself if it's worth the stink.

Some people aren't trying to solve a problem; they're just trying to win an argument. Instead of winning a war where everybody loses, consider a compromise where everybody wins! If anyone tells me they've never compromised, I know they've either never been married or they're a liar.

A discerning woman senses when the family is drifting apart — when they are occupying common space but are no longer enjoying common interests. Does your family talk, smile, and make eye contact, or are they losing touch with one another? Discerning women can change the atmosphere.

The Shunammite woman created a spiritual environment in her home by building a room where the prophet Elisha could

stay and study the Word when he was traveling through.

One day, while working with his father in the field in the heat of the day, the Shunammite's son became ill. Just like most men, the father didn't discern that anything major was wrong with his child. A crisis was at hand with one of the children, but the father didn't even know it. "Take him to his mother," the father nonchalantly told one of his servants.

Discerning a crisis in the lives of your children is one of your greatest responsibilities. Men aren't as deep thinking as women when it comes to children. Men are headliners; women are detailers. A husband says to his wife, "I went to town today." She says, "Who did you see? Where were they going? Where had they been? What did they say?"

By God's design, women notice things men don't. How do I know? I'm married to one of those noticers! Cherise, my wife, has amazing radar. I'm the pilot of our home, but she's the radar. She senses things about our five children that I would never notice. She is usually first to alert me when one of our kids needs special attention. Nobody but a mom can tell when her child is about to vomit! How do you put a price tag on that kind of "mother's intuition"?

A discerning mother senses when something is not quite right with her child. Listen to the inner voice that tells you to pray for your child or that tells you that he needs to be built up or loved on. Don't drown out those out-of-the-blue, random thoughts you get concerning the safety, health, spirituality, and emotional well-being of your child. You carried that child for nine months inside you; it makes sense that you carry an awareness of what is going on with him by just reading body language, tone of voice, mannerisms, or unusual silence. By

instinct, women pay closer attention to all of these things when it comes to their families. Trust that inner voice, at least enough to explore what you're sensing about your child.

A discerning mother will occasionally say, "Something's wrong; it's too quiet. We better check on the kids," and most of the time she's exactly right.

Several years ago, we went on a family vacation in Florida. We stayed at a nice resort with a beautiful golf course. The scenery of the course was breathtaking, from greens that looked like carpet to vast palm trees; it had it all, including live alligators in the ponds. It was a golfer's paradise.

Early one morning, Cherise awoke out of a deep sleep feeling that something was not right with one of the children. She was disturbed and didn't have a good feeling. She kept telling me to check on them, but I was exhausted and kept sleeping. She then jumped up to check on the children herself and noticed that Connor, our two-year old, was missing. About that time, we could hear men yelling outside of our room. "Who does she belong to? Where did she come from? Someone needs to get her." Connor had opened the glass sliding door and had gone outside of the hotel room onto the golf course. She had picked up one of the golf balls and was running toward the ponds where the live alligators were.

Connor had looked out and seen all the white golf balls on the eighteenth hole and was mesmerized. Her curiosity got the best of her, so out she went. We don't know how she was able to get the door open and leave the safety of her room, but she did; and she was running toward harm. Thank God for a mother's intuition. Cherise knew she was sensing something was wrong with one of her babies, and she wasn't about to

ignore that feeling. Mothers, when you feel disturbed about one of your children, don't ignore your God-given intuition.

When the Shunammite woman's sick son was brought to her from the field, that great woman held her son and rocked him. I don't know how busy she was that day, but she dropped everything in recognition that her desperately ill child was her number one priority. The Bible doesn't record that she felt any guilt about dropping whatever she was doing and putting her child first. Sadly, the child died in her arms.

At this point, 2 Kings 4 records something easy to overlook. The Shunammite woman did not immediately inform her husband, who was still out in the field working in the heat of the day.

Why didn't she hurry and tell him? Discernment not only sees hidden things, but it knows when to reveal them. In times of crisis in your home, timing is everything concerning when to unload those problems on your husband. Men feel pressure at work from facing deadlines, quotas, cutbacks, downsizing, or competition for their jobs.

The Shunammite woman sensed it was no time to unload another trauma on her husband. Timing! Certainly, she had the right to go to her husband and unload such a great crisis, but she felt her responsibility and picked her timing. She could have sent word back, "You idiot, couldn't you see the boy was half dead?"

The Shunammite woman put her child in God's loving hands, and he was resurrected. Elisha the prophet came to her house and stretched himself out over the dead child. You would think since Elisha was a grown man and the child was younger and smaller in stature, the prophet would not need to stretch. But

Elisha knew if you want a miracle, sometimes you have to stretch your faith. The next generation doesn't need to shrink in doubt; they need to stretch in faith.

This generation does not need less of God—they need more of God. We need to stretch our children in spiritual things. In 2 Kings 4:34, Elisha lay upon the child. He put his mouth on the child's mouth, aligned his eyes upon the child's eyes, and put his hands on the child's cold lifeless hands. The hands represent a restoration of the work, the eyes represent a restoration of the vision, and the mouth represents a restoration of the word.

The child suddenly sneezed seven times and was resurrected. A sneeze is an involuntary catching of the breath, and then violently expelling it. It is usually caused when something irritating is caught in the nasal passage, and the respiratory system is saying, "Ah-choo, get out of here!" Sometimes we catch things like unforgiveness, bitterness, and disappointments in life that can kill our vision and stop our work.

We need spiritual allergies to sneeze out whatever we picked up that is affecting our spiritual lives! It's time to breathe again. It's time for your marriage to breathe again. Notice this miracle didn't happen in a church or synagogue, it happened in the home of an ordinary housewife who had created a spiritual atmosphere in her home for her child to experience the supernatural.

Hours before Jesus' death, when Mary broke the alabaster box of anointing spices at the feet of Jesus, her worship changed the atmosphere in the room. The aroma of her worship created an atmosphere in that home that made Jesus

comfortable there.

Women can create an atmosphere in their homes that welcomes Jesus. Creating this atmosphere is one of the most powerful jobs on earth. Remember, attitudes are contagious. Thankful people are happy people. Inject your home with a thankful, positive, spiritual atmosphere.

Chapter Three

Guarding the Unguarded Moments

It's a typical Sunday morning in the Franklin home. I'm up at 5:00 a.m. to put the finishing touches on my sermon. Meanwhile, back at the house, Cherise is left with five kids to get dressed for church. Sometimes she feels like she's in a trial run for the battle of Armageddon!

One Sunday morning, I received a frantic phone call from her. "I've had it; I can't take it anymore. I've reached my breaking point." Have you ever tried to get five kids ready for church by yourself, plus get yourself ready? After she had all the kids fully dressed, Drake, our seven year old, spilled something all over his clothes. Connor, our eight year old, could not find her shoes anywhere. Courteney and Caressa, our teenagers, were fighting over who got to wear what blouse. Caroline, our twelve year old, ate too much candy the night before, so she got sick.

By the time Cherise arrived at church, twenty minutes late, she was so frazzled she wished she had pulled the sheets over her head and stayed in bed! Have you ever been there? If so, you know how David felt when he had what I call an "unguarded moment."

David was anointed king over Israel during Saul's reign over Israel. David did not get to the throne immediately. He was anointed at seventeen, but he was not appointed until he was about thirty. Have you ever been anointed to do something

great, but not yet appointed?

David was coming close to his thirtieth birthday. The clock was ticking and none of God's promises had come into fruition. How can God say one thing, but you find yourself experiencing the opposite?

Often, before you reach your dream, you will experience the opposite of what you want. Abraham was dreaming for Isaac, the promised child; but first he experienced Ishmael, the problem child. The children of Israel were dreaming for a land flowing with milk and honey, but first they experienced the desert with no food or water. Jacob dreamed of a beautiful bride named Rachel, but first he was tricked into marrying Leah. Have you ever had God show you a glimpse of your beautiful future, only to wake up lying beside a Leah, the opposite of what you believed would happen?

To make matters worse, David was leading six hundred men who were in debt, distress, and discontent. David rose to the task of training them into a mighty army. One day, they approached the vineyard of a man named Nabal.

Nabal was a rich man married to a very beautiful and intelligent woman named Abigail. Although Nabal acted foolishly, Abigail used her discernment to honor David, the man of God (1 Sam. 25:2-42). Many women spend their lives pretending to be stupid because their husbands can't handle an equal!

David's men decided to protect and guard Nabal's vineyard, and instead of asking for payment in money, they asked for food to replenish their strength. Nabal acted just like his name, which means "foolish." He refused to give them any food, and then adding insult to injury, he accused David of being a

servant who had broken away from his master. In other words, he called David a “nobody.” Nabal insulted David by refusing him. In order to appreciate David’s reaction, you need to understand the crucial point at which David was living at that moment.

David represents men who are in a transition in their lives; men who are close to reaching their dreams, yet the fulfillment seems so far away. They’re just living on a promise! David was wondering, *Did God really say I’d reign as king, or was I just fantasizing?*

For thirteen years, David had been hanging onto a promise. He had believed God every step of the way, but now he had come to his breaking point, and at this tender-touchy moment Nabal came along. David was spiritually frustrated, and what God had said about his future was not foremost in his mind. He probably had forgotten and suppressed what God had promised him. He was just thinking about his location and his hunger.

Don’t ever focus on what you’re going through. Focus on where you’re going. What you focus on becomes bigger. David was focusing on where he was, not where he was going. In this unguarded moment, David reacted like most red-blooded men. In the heat of the moment, he assembled four hundred of his fiercest warriors. These men were so mean that wherever they spit, the grass died. David said, “I’m going to kill Nabal and his entire family—great and small, women and children.”

Nabal was about to feel David’s wrath. The throne kept eluding him, his goals kept escaping him, and David just lost it. He felt like everything was falling apart, so he just gave up on

his future. Have you ever reached the point where you wanted to scream, “I can’t take it anymore!” Facing endless tons of laundry and screaming children tracking dirt all through the house you just vacuumed, you can’t remember the last time you had a break from it all. You long to rejoin the human race and have an intelligent conversation with another adult. You’ve reached the breaking point! You’re having an “unguarded” moment.

You never know when your unguarded moment is going to come. In one unguarded moment, you can lose your reputation and your Christian testimony. Human passions are unpredictable. Christians are not exempt from those times when life’s pressures bring out in us the rawest, deepest emotions.

One Wednesday night some time ago, I experienced an unguarded moment. I was taking the children home from Wednesday night church. Cherise had gone out of town, and I had all five of the children by myself. I finally hooked them in their car seats and started on our way home when they informed me that they were starving.

We stopped at a fast food restaurant down the road that has big yellow arches! The Wednesday night before, we had stopped at the same restaurant and gone through the drivethru window where I specifically asked for five cheeseburger kids’ meals with no onions and no pickles. We drove all the way home, and when the children opened up their bags of food, onions were all over the place. They all threw fits, went to bed hungry, and I felt upset.

So again, it was Wednesday night, same restaurant, same drivethru, same lady at the window. I pulled into the drivethru, rolled my window down, and began to speak to the little box. I

was extremely nice, because I'm Pastor Franklin, and some of my members were in the line behind me watching. I spoke to the little machine saying, "Please, ma'am, no onions. This is extremely important: no onions and no pickles. We asked for this last week, I'm not being negative, but you didn't do it. Please take care of it this week. Make sure our cheeseburgers have no onions and no pickles."

She said, "I'll handle it."

We pulled on through and were handed our five meals. The kids asked, "Can we eat it in the car, Dad?" I responded, "Absolutely not, you are going to eat it at home. I'm not going to have that mess in my car for another month!" We made it home, and I walked in the door with two or three of the kids screaming like they're starving to death. I open up cheeseburger number one, I look at it, and there were no onions, and no pickles... and no meat! There is a slice of cheese with a blob of ketchup and mustard! I walk over and I take cheeseburger number two, ditto! I look at cheeseburger number three, same thing! By now, steam was whistling out of my ears, and my eyes were rolling around in my head like the child in *The Exorcist*.

I'm ready to tell somebody what they can do with those cheeseburgers! I called the restaurant and demanded, "I want a manager! Who owns this restaurant? I want a name and a phone number!" The girls were standing there saying, "Get'em, Daddy; get'em, Daddy; tell'em, Daddy!" About halfway through, it dawned on me that I had just preached. I had just stood in the pulpit and had a good old time in church, and now I was about to let somebody have it. I was having an "unguarded" moment.

In David's life, at the point when he was about to kill Nabal, God sent a discerning, smart woman into his life. It is always good to have a discerning woman around. Abigail's wisdom had nothing to do with her beauty, her education, or the fact that she was married to a wealthy man. She was smart because she feared the Lord, and she could think fast to defuse an explosive situation in her home. She believed what God had said about David—that he truly would become king—so she stood flatfooted on the Word of God to save her family. In this critical, transitional time in David's life, he needed to run into an Abigail.

It's always good for a man to meet an Abigail, but especially when he's in transition. When he is trying to own his small business, but he can't get the loan; when he's counting on getting a raise, but it hasn't come yet. When he's searching for a job, but he hasn't found one; when he's got to relocate, but he can't sell the old house. When he is chasing his dream, but never quite reaching the top. Always trying, but never quite getting there. It's a dangerous, tricky place. These times are when a man needs an Abigail to cross his path.

Our men are in trouble. They can't seem to get where they are going. They are always pushing, but not quite reaching their dreams. When Abigail heard that David was coming to destroy her family, she did not crumble in that moment of crisis. Instead, she prepared baskets of food. She knew, "A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger"(Prov. 15:1). She carefully picked her timing, and then she went to meet David. When she arrived, she met him with a meal. She fed him, calmed him down, and got him to relax.

How do you deal with a man's temper or a man who is going

through a transition? A man who seems so far from his vision, one who is frustrated, broken, and seems to have lost his dream? How do you deal with a man when he doesn't have enough money? The answer is not the divorce court, nor packing your bags and going back to Momma's house. You need to ask God to give you discernment and a wise tongue. Our men are in trouble, and being a wife is more than wearing high heels, having babies, and smelling like perfume. Being a true woman of God is being able to speak with a wise tongue to a man in transition.

You can be his dream restorer. The first thing Abigail did when she met David was honor him. You have to understand, he didn't look like anything worth honoring. Here is a man who lived in a cave with six hundred rejects. He didn't have any possessions to his name; all he had was a promise from God. But she showed honor to that dirty, smelly, angry, unreasonable man, and then she called him "lord." In doing so, she acknowledged that she was in the presence of a king. David did not look like a king. He wasn't wearing a crown on his head, but Abigail said, "I believe what God says about you," even though she wasn't there when the prophet poured the oil on his head. She said, "I heard it through the grapevine, and I believe in your future. In my eyes, David, you are a king whether you are on a throne or not. I know you can't see your kingdom yet, but hold on a little while longer. Don't sell your future. God said it, and I believe it for you." She was using the Word of God to save her family and her future. She kept on using the Word, and it got inside David. It took away his temper. It took away his violence. It took away his anger. Instead of trying to act sexy, she used the Word, and it worked.

Use the Word to save your home. Charm may run out, the perfume bottle may empty, but the Word will win your home.

Many times, we just don't want to use the Word. We would rather use our intellect and wit. We would rather use manipulation and control. That is why many marriages are unhappy—because there is no love in the home. I dare you to ask God what He thinks about the man you are sleeping next to. Ask God where he is going. Ask God what He says about your husband. We give up too soon! You will be either a woman of faith like Abigail, or a foolish woman like Job's wife, who advised her husband to curse God and die.

God's Word can't lie. Keep talking about it until the Word becomes flesh. Remember to talk to the king in your man, and the king will stand up. He is a man in transition—speak life into his future. David said, “Blessed is the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed *is* your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand” (1 Sam. 25:32-33).

There will be times in your life when you feel like giving up on the dream God has given you. Before you destroy your destiny by doing something unalterable, God will always send the Holy Spirit, like He sent Abigail, to intercept you and remind you what God says about your future. Jeremiah 29:11 tells us, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Is there a man in your life who is in transition? Like David, is he in the in-between place? He just can't seem to get where he is trying to go? Ask God to give you discernment and a wise

tongue. You could be his Abigail—the woman who speaks the Word of God to him in his “unguarded” moment, stopping him from throwing away his destiny. Anybody can believe in himself when he is on top of the world, but the Abigails of this world have discernment to call the things that are not as though they were. In other words, you could see potential in a man when he doesn’t see it himself and help him to achieve greater things. Pray for God to give you the right words to speak to that man in transition and restore his dream. Your words can make him or break him.

David went on to become a great king. Nabal died a premature death three weeks later, and David eventually married Abigail and made her his queen. In saving David’s future, Abigail secured her own.

As I’m writing this, my mind is racing through my many years of pastoring and the two or three critical moments when leaving seemed easier than staying. During one particularly hard time, I was greatly discouraged. Division wrecked our church. Some people left who I thought would never leave. It seemed like the problems just kept on coming, one after another after another. Everything I had worked for felt like it was hanging by a thread. It was the darkest hour of my pastorate.

To make matters worse, while driving home one day I rear-ended a car at a stop sign. Even though it was just a little fenderbender, it felt like I couldn’t do anything right. When it rains, it pours. Just when I thought things could not get worse, I walked into the door of my home, and the phone rang. The person on the other end of the line was the man I had rear-ended. His first question was, “Are you that guy who

pastors that big church?" Then he informed me that suddenly his neck and back were hurting. A lawsuit seemed imminent. At that moment, something inside of me collapsed.

After dealing with the church problems for months, the straw that broke the camel's back broke mine. I just began to weep. I am a strong person, a "can do" person. I am not a quitter, but at that moment I had reached the end of my strength. You are never finished until you are defeated on the inside, and I felt defeated on the inside.

I will never forget how my wife instantly discerned my vulnerability. At that critical moment, she took control of the situation. She immediately got on the phone and dealt with the crisis, defusing it masterfully. She spoke confidently to me about my future. By the time she got through with me, I felt like I could whip a pack of lions. Suddenly, I knew I could make it. I had always been the person giving hope and encouragement to others with my preaching, but this time, God wanted to encourage me.

I know without a doubt, had I not felt my wife's strength at the moment, had she not stood up to the crisis and become the voice of God to me about my future, I would have left the church in defeat.

Never underestimate the power God has placed in you to discern the seasons your loved ones are experiencing. Don't drown out that voice on the inside, for it could be the voice that restores their dreams. Now, years later, thousands of people attend Free Chapel. We have a 150-acre campus, a beautiful new sanctuary, and outreach programs that win thousands of souls. It all teetered that afternoon on the discernment of my wife.

Had I given up that afternoon, many souls that have been saved would have been lost. When I reflect on the discernment and strength Cherise exhibited that day in my “unguarded” moment, I feel like David when he said to Abigail, “Blessed is the God of Israel who sent you to me to keep me from sinning.”

The Holy Spirit will speak to you when your family needs encouragement. If my wife had put me down that day, if she had not stood by me, I don’t know where I would be. Your tongue can make or break your loved ones. Ask God to show you what you need to do to encourage them in their “unguarded moments” of discouragement.

The impressions the Holy Spirit gives you about your loved ones are for a reason. Pray about them, and wait for the right time in their lives when God will open the door for you to speak to them. Discernment will let you know when to say nothing, when to back off, and when to give them some space. Sometimes the voice of discernment will strongly urge you to speak when your family needs encouragement.

If my wife had put me down that day during my “unguarded” moment, I dare not think where my family or I would be today. I truly was at a breaking point, but thank God I had an Abigail in my life. I had a discerning woman.

Chapter Four

Unlock Discernment with Prayer

I've learned a secret. When you pray, prayer invites angels into the war zone of your experience. The apostle Paul set up a command post in a Philippian jail and began to intercede. As a result, angels came into that jail cell and set him free. When you pray, God dispatches angels. Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, and angels came and ministered to Him.

Paul prayed in the middle of a storm, out in the middle of an ocean, and God sent an angel to stand by him. When you pray, God releases standby angels. No matter what you're going through, they stand by you.

One of the greatest tragedies of prayerlessness is the unemployment of angels. Millions of angels line up at heaven's unemployment office when no one on earth prays to God. Angels are attracted to the place of prayer. In Acts 12:5, the church prayed without ceasing for Peter, and an angel came and touched him. When Peter awakened, the chains fell off as a result of the angel's touch and he was freed.

Maybe the reason we are not touched by angels is because we don't touch angels in prayer. The angel touched Peter, but it was prayer that touched the angel. Angel activity is the result of prayer. Charles Haddon Spurgeon pastored the first mega-church of ten thousand members in London, England, back in the 1800s. His sermons were published and still inspire millions today. You may have heard of Charles Spurgeon, but

have you ever heard of James Spurgeon? James was Charles's brother and business manager.

When Charles Spurgeon took the pulpit at Metropolitan Tabernacle, James went under the pulpit in a secret prayer closet. The key to Charles Spurgeon's powerful preaching was his brother's powerful praying. When you pray, you build a power base to do what God commands you to do. Anna was an elderly woman whose ministry was continually waiting on the Lord in prayer and fasting. The New Testament church had an appointed place where she could exercise her ministry (Luke 2:36).

We've seen the power of disagreement destroy churches and homes; it's time to start seeing the power of agreement in prayer ignite our churches and homes, as well as revive us personally.

Praying women have had a profound impact on the church. The greatest people on earth are the people who pray. I don't mean people who talk about prayer, nor people who believe in prayer, nor even those who can explain prayer beautifully; I mean people who take time to pray. These people don't have spare time to pray—they take the time from something else. This something else is very important and pressing—sometimes urgent—but powerful people put prayer first.

Put prayer first and your schedule second. There's no power like prayer power. If a woman can pray, then she can do anything; heaven and earth are at her disposal.

The act of prayer is striking the winning blow! Whatever you do after that is merely gathering up the results of prayer. The prevailing prayer of faith is the power on earth that commands all the power of heaven.

Prayer has brought hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind, life to the dead, salvation to the lost, and healing to the sick. Prevailing prayer should be the main business of our day.

Every day, we must pray!

If prayer is anything, prayer is everything. If the church will not pray, God will not act. For Jesus said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19).

What is prevailing prayer? It is not foxhole praying; praying only when you are in a crisis. It is not half-hearted, lukewarm, spasmodic, lay-me-down-to-sleep prayers. Prevailing prayer is wrestling against principalities and powers. Paul said, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men" (1 Tim. 2:1). Before anything else, prayer goes first. It is the protracted prayer, fasting prayer, weeping prayer, effectual prayer, and fervent prayer of the righteous that avails much.

Holy women of the past, who subdued the powers of hell and were more than conquerors, were all women of intensified, incessant prayer.

Prevailing prayer is Esther fasting and praying for seventy-two hours (Esther 4:16). Her prayers caused the balance of powers in the Persian Empire to change. The enemies of the Jews were humiliated. That's prevailing prayer!

Prevailing prayer is Hagar interceding in prayer: "I can't endure to see my son Ishmael die." God heard her prayer and blessed Ishmael because of the prevailing prayer of a mother (Gen. 21:15-19).

Prevailing prayer is Rizpah, the concubine of King Saul who had two sons ages nine and eleven. When the Gibeonites invaded Israel, they killed the king and hung her sons by the

neck until they died. She decided to go sit on a rock and fight the vultures off her boys' dead bodies (2 Sam. 21:10).

What would you do? I want to tell you what this mother did. She took a piece of sackcloth and spread it upon a rock. For four months, she sat there in a vigil with nothing left but bones. She never gave up on her children. She reminds me of God's love. No matter how far we go, or how bad we look, God never gives up on us. He's keeping a vigil, watching over you today.

The days grew into weeks and the weeks grew into months, but this mother kept her vigil over the dead bodies of her children. She fought the vultures off her boys. This mother protected what she had borne. She told the vultures of doubt and unbelief, "You are not getting my family." She used to adorn herself with silk in the king's court, but now, after four months of sitting on a rock fighting for what was left of her family, she was wild-eyed and haggard, like a lioness guarding her cubs.

This woman kept praying for her children when they were powerless to do anything. She didn't forsake them through the wind, rain, cold, or sun, not even through the attacks of the wild beasts and vultures. She sat there defending them. She would not give up on her children until they were cut down and let loose.

Finally, word reached King David about what she was doing (2 Sam. 21:11). One night King David was so restless he couldn't sleep. He dressed in his royal clothes and went to the temple. As he was praying, God told him there was a reason the land was in a drought. It was because he had allowed Saul's and his sons' bones to bleach in the sun. David gave a

command to bury Saul and his descendants in the graves belonging to the kings. Because she prevailed in prayer, the king heard about Rizpah, and her sons were loosed. They were honored with burials in the royal tombs of the kings. Rizpah prevailed in prayer for her children.

Prevailing prayer is Ruth, cleaving to her mother-in-law, Naomi, saying, "Entreat me not to leave you" (Ruth 1:16). In other words, she was saying, "I'm not going anywhere." Orpah, Naomi's other daughter-in-law, had an entirely different response. She wept, cried, kissed, and left Naomi. She kissed, but she wouldn't cleave. She disappears from Scripture. She was a kisser, not a cleaver.

Are you a kisser or a cleaver when it comes to prayer? Judas was a kisser. He betrayed Jesus with a kiss. He kissed the gate of heaven and went to hell, but Ruth was a cleaver. In prayer, we must cleave to God's promises until He brings them to pass.

Prevailing prayer is having the tenacity to hold on until it happens. One of the greatest weaknesses of this generation is a lack of commitment for the long haul. The fastest animal on earth is the African cheetah. It has been measured at seventy miles per hour. However, the cheetah has one problem; it has a small heart, so it tires quickly. If it doesn't catch its prey quickly, it won't last. Some people have a cheetah approach to prayer. They lack heart to sustain the effort for the long haul. They burst out in prayer, but it doesn't last long. They have a cheetah heart when God wants them to have an eagle heart.

Isaiah 40:31 says, "Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary." Why is it that Christians often neglect prayer? I believe we do not understand the effect

our prayers have in the spirit realm. As I was reading Revelation one day, some verses seemed to leap off the page:

“Golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (Rev. 5:8).

“The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God... Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth” (Rev. 8:4–5).

What a marvelous image! When you pray, you are filling the prayer bowls of heaven. In God’s perfect timing, your prayers are mixed with the fire of God (His power) and cast back down to earth to change your situation. Your prayers don’t just bounce off the ceiling; they rise like incense before the throne of God.

Even if you don’t feel like anything is happening in the natural world, when you pray, you are filling the prayer bowls in the spirit realm. When they are full, they will tilt and pour out answers to your prayers!

I believe that God is ready to tilt the prayer bowl on this generation. One out of three babies is aborted in this nation. Why is the devil trying to keep this generation from being born? It is because God’s got something special in mind for this generation, and the devil knows it. The first generation Satan tried to keep from being born was the Moses generation. Pharaoh decreed that all the male children under two were to be killed. It’s significant that the Moses generation was a deliverance generation.

The second generation Satan tried to keep from being born was the Jesus generation. Herod decreed that all the children under two were to be killed. That was a deliverance generation. The third generation Satan has put a contract on is our

generation. The reason there is such an attack on this generation through abortion is that you are destined to be a deliverance generation!

I don't know what kind of hell you're going through, but prevail in prayer until you tilt the bowl in heaven.

Some time ago, I read a true story of a pilot in a small plane who had a warning light that a door was open on the plane. He got up to check it out and just as he got there, the door blew open and sucked the pilot out of the plane. The copilot radioed back to the tower, "I'm coming back. The pilot just got sucked out of the plane! Send rescue choppers to search for his body." What he didn't know was, when the door flew open and pulled the pilot out, the emergency ladder fell and clinging to it was the pilot. He was holding on for dear life. In fifteen minutes, the copilot landed the plane, unaware that the pilot's head was only three inches from the concrete.

When onlookers realized what was happening, they ran out onto the airstrip to help the pilot. They had to pry his fingers loose one finger at a time.

Do you know what you call that? Perseverance! Hanging in there! Prevailing prayer is hanging in there until you fill the prayer bowls.

Two of the major contributions women bring to the body of Christ are prayer and discernment. Women are prayer warriors. The apostle Paul had a vision in which a man was saying, "Come to Macedonia." When Paul arrived there he didn't find a man, but instead, found a group of women praying by the river (Acts 16:13). Every church needs a band of women praying by the river. Praying women turned the gospel from the east to the west. Because of these women's prayers in

Macedonia, Paul changed his direction.

If those women had not been praying, Paul would not have gone west, but east towards China. What a profound difference praying women have made between the east and the west.

Nobody can pray like a woman. Nobody has a discerning spirit like a woman. Nobody has a servant's heart like a woman. Praying, discerning, serving women are what has built the church. I don't know if you have ever heard of Stone's Folly in Topeka, Kansas. It is where the Holy Spirit outpouring in North America began on January 1, 1901.

Charles Fox Parham was the principal of a Bible school where he allowed a group of women to have a prayer meeting. In that women's prayer meeting, Agnes Ozman began to pray. This woman was the first person recorded in the "latter rain" outpouring of the Holy Spirit in North America (see Hos. 6:3; Zech 10).

Later, in 1906, Byron Seymour was invited to a women's prayer meeting on Bonnie Gray Street in Los Angeles. He went to this women's prayer meeting and was filled with the Holy Spirit. Out of that came the Azusa Street revival, which gave birth to every major Pentecostal denomination and ultimately the entire Charismatic Holy Spirit movement.

Proverbs 30:15-16 says, "The horseleach hath two daughters, crying Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough. The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough" (KJV).

Horseleach is a strange word used only once in the entire Bible. The horseleach is a bloodsucker, a greedy thing that has

an awesome appetite. It just can't get enough. This text says the horseleach has two daughters who cry "give, give." The double annunciation is important. This Scripture is saying there are four things that are never satisfied:

1. The grave

If you go to Washington, D.C. and visit Arlington National Cemetery, as far as you can see there are white crosses. Thousands and thousands of soldiers have passed away, but the grave is still hungry. The grave still reaches up with grassy teeth, grabs men by the ankles, and pulls them down. The grave never gets enough. The grave doesn't respect old or young, male or female. It just keeps crying, "Give, give!"

2. The earth that is not filled with water

The ocean is fed by mighty rivers such as the Mississippi, the Nile, the Niagara, and the Amazon. Yet, with all the water flowing in from all over the world, the oceans never cover the earth. Water falls from the sky and rises up from the ground. Floods and rivers explode their banks, but the ocean never gets full. The ocean never gets filled with water. It just keeps crying and crying, "Give, give!"

3. Fire

Think of the great fires of history: The Great Chicago Fire,

the San Francisco Fire of 1906, or the Great Fire of London. Fire gulps up businesses, hotels, and homes. It's never full. The more you put in its way, the more it takes. It's a horseleach. It keeps crying, "Give, give!"

4. The barren womb

How can the writer compare the barren womb to a fire that is never satisfied, to the ocean that is never full, or to the grave that never has enough? What is God saying? A great lesson contained in the Scripture is this: God is not moved by gentle suggestion. Nor is He touched by passive people. God is not shaken because we whisper a little prayer. In the history of the Bible, all of the great events that had a tremendous impact sprang from an incessant, enormous desire.

As thirsty as the ocean is to swallow up the rivers and still be thirsty, as hungry as the fire is to eat up everything it can get and still look for fuel, as unsatisfied as the grave is to take in millions yet still cry for more every day—that's how much we must desire to birth the promises of God. How do we birth God's will in the earth? We travail in prayer. The word travail expresses the pain and hard work of birthing a baby. No man knows about that word on the same level as a woman.

As the ocean has for water, as the grave has for bones, as the fire has for fuel, so must the desire of the church be to bear souls and revival. When God gets ready to birth a promise, He looks for a barren someone who is crying, "Give, give!" He looks for daughters of the horseleach.

Rachel had two children who represent the two ages in the

church, the “early rain” and the “latter rain.” The first was Joseph, but the latter was Benjamin, which means “son of my right hand” or “son of my power.” The midwife spoke to Rachel when she had her first son and said, “You have birthed a son.” But then she said, “Behold, you shall have this son also.”

I want to prophesy to the church. “You’ve had one revival, but we’re about to have this son also; the son of my right hand, the revival of power.” This birth will be a movement of God that no one can stop—an operation of the spirit that is coming to His glorious church. The latter rain and the former rain together.

To whom will this revival be given? It comes to people who are hungry as a grave, thirsty as a river, and as ravenous as a fire. It comes to the congregation who never stops crying, “Give, give!”

Rachel was not happy with just one child. She was a daughter of the horseleach that cries “Give, give!” So, she gave birth to this second child, who represents the latter rain. Prevailing prayer is Rachel praying, “Give me children lest I die.” Tragically, she died giving birth to her second son. It’s going to cost us to produce a latter-day revival that brings the latter rain. Oh, how we need praying women in the church again!

When the world needed a prophet whose words would not fall to the ground, barren Hannah began to pray against the cold stone pillars of the temple. She wept, “Like unto a thirsty ocean, crying like unto a raging fire.” It was hunger like unto the grave.

“If You will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will

give him to the LORD all the days of his life” (1 Sam. 1:11). Only Hannah understood why she had to give birth to a son. Even Elkanah, her husband, didn’t understand her obsession with birthing a male child. He said to her, “I ought to be better to you than a thousand sons.” Even Hannah’s pastor, Eli, didn’t understand her strange behavior. He accused her of being drunk in the temple when he heard her in travailing prayer. But this discerning woman knew she was supposed to birth a child of promise out of her barrenness.

She was so burdened that it drove her to desperate means. Eli rebuked Hannah, “Woman, don’t you know that you’re not supposed to be drunk in the house of the Lord?”

Hannah replied, “Thy handmaiden is not drunk, but I have poured out my soul unto the Lord.” She was saying, “I’m a daughter of the horseleach. I’m a river. I’m like a grave. My womb is barren, I have no children, and I’m crying, ‘Give, give!’”

Every time God has given anything of significance, it came from total barrenness. Samson’s mother was barren, but God sent the power ministry of Samson through her barren womb. She was one of the 762 nameless women in the Bible.

Elizabeth was barren, but she was a daughter of the horseleach who kept crying, “Give, give!” Through her, God gave the world John the Baptist, the greatest preacher of all time. Jesus said that there was no man greater than John the Baptist (see Matt. 11:11).

Perhaps the greatest daughter of the horseleach was Mary. Her womb was barren because she was a virgin. Four times in the Gospel of Luke, the angel told her she was highly favored and chosen of God. If she was chosen, that means there were

others in the running to be chosen. Why did God choose Mary? Because He saw the spirit of the horseleach in her that was crying “Give, give!”

Nothing is more barren than this generation; but if the daughters of the horseleach will begin to cry out, not just “Give” but “Give! Give!”, they can make a mighty difference.

“You will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ And to the south, ‘Do not keep them back!’ Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth” (Isa. 43:6).

In Luke 18:5, we see the power of persistent praying. Sometimes you just have to keep asking. The widow in this story appears before a judge repeatedly. But there was a period of time when it seemed her request was falling on deaf ears. When it doesn’t happen overnight, it’s easy to get discouraged. Waiting a long time has a way of making you feel like God doesn’t love you and He’s not hearing you.

You must be persistent. You have to go the distance. Like Jacob, you pray, “I will not let You go unless You bless me” (Genesis 32:26). The judge told this persistent woman, “I don’t normally do this, and under normal circumstances I wouldn’t. But I’ve got to do something for this woman or she’s going to wear me out.” You have to wear Jesus out mentality. Get to the place where you’re a spiritual pest. Every time God looks up, let Him see you in His face.

Some people have realized the only way to get results is to be persistent. There are two kinds of people. There is the person who buys a new car still under warranty, and when they notice the car making a funny noise, will take it in for service. They explain that a new car should not be making that kind of noise. “Fix it, please.” A week later they notice the car making

the same noise again. “Oh well,” they tell themselves, “maybe it will go away. I hate to keep going back.”

Then there is another kind of person, the more persistent one. I know of a woman who, after driving a new car for only a few weeks, noticed it making a funny sound. She immediately drove it back to the dealership for repair without thinking anything of it. She informed them that they needed to fix her car!

A few days later, she heard the same noise again, and again she returned to have it serviced. As the days went by, this same scene was carried out repeatedly. Finally, she looked at the service manager and said, “Listen, I paid too much money to have a new car making so much noise.” I’m sure it finally got to the point where they wanted to run when they saw her coming, but persistence paid off. That afternoon my wife pulled in the driveway with a brandnew car. Needless to say, it made no funny noises.

After a while, you get in their hair so much, they are willing to give you a brandnew car just to leave them alone. That’s what you have to do about spiritual things you want from God. You have to desire it so much that you tell God, “I’m going to wear You out. I’m going to keep praying until You save my children, until You bless my family. I’m going to stay in Your face. Jesus, I’m going to be a spiritual pest and wear You out. I’m not going to break down; I’m about to have a breakthrough.”

To the widow who appeared in court in Luke 18, the judge said, “I don’t usually do this. I don’t even know why I’m doing this. But because you were desperate enough to defy the status quo, I’m going to grant your request.” Push through

what people say, and prevail in prayer.

Not long ago, a friend of mine named Tommy Tenney, author of *God Chasers*, introduced me to a great woman of God. She has a reputation as a true prayer warrior. She and her husband started a church in Alexandria, Louisiana, where they established a prayer meeting that has never stopped in over thirty years. For over thirty years, twenty-four hours a day, there has been someone in that church praying.

Her son is now the pastor of this great church where thousands attend. She made God a promise concerning her son. She vowed to God that she would fast and pray for her son on his birthday all the days of his life, from sunup to sundown. For over fifty years, on her son's birthday, she has gone to the church in the early hours of the day to shut herself away and pray all day without food for her son. He has become a great man of God. But it gets even better. Watch what prevailing prayer can do:

When former President Clinton was then-governor of Arkansas, he met her son. The former governor was so impressed with this minister that he began to fly into town just to attend his church for special services. They became friends and even golfed together. Invited to the White House numerous times, especially during the scandal with Monica Lewinsky, he was the pastor that former President Clinton wanted to minister to him.

For more than fifty years, that silver-haired mother prayed and fasted all day for her son on his birthday. This persistence moved her son from the small obscure town of Alexandria, Louisiana, all the way to visiting in the most powerful office in the world.

God is not looking for ability; He is looking for availability. Like Deborah, Hannah, and Esther, you are part of an all-female army that God is raising up to crush the enemy's skull. I heard God say, "Get the women to praying again. I'm going to use them in the final battle."

Chapter Five

How to Recognize the Voice of Discernment

Have you ever been reading a book at home near a light when a little moth buzzed by you? You barely feel it; it's a tiny little insect. Did you know there is only one time in Scripture when God refers to a moth?

During one of the most prosperous eras of Israel, the prophet Hosea pastored God's people. Living in the lap of luxury, Israel backslid. Hosea warned: "Therefore I [God] will be to Ephraim like a moth" (Hosea 5:12). Two verses later, he warned that God will be to Ephraim as a lion. What Hosea said to Israel reveals a great concept about discernment because it teaches how God speaks to His people.

If you will be sensitive enough to the Holy Spirit's voice when God wants to guide you, He will never hit you with anything more powerful than a moth. If you are insensitive to His voice, He will come to you like a lion. God is so gentle. He says that His first choice in getting your attention is to come to you like a moth. He doesn't want to have to roar like a lion. If you opened your closet door and a little moth was flying around the light bulb, you might not even notice it. But if you opened your closet door and met a lion, wouldn't that get your attention?

It's a beautiful thing to feel gently checked and gently led by the Holy Spirit. As gently as a moth, God is trying to direct us and show us His way; He does not want to use the lion to

chase us in the right direction. If you won't be sensitive to the gentle moth, He will come like a voracious lion.

His voice starts as gentle as a moth. If we refuse to obey Him, then He comes like a lion with sharp teeth and claws, sometimes tearing our lives into pieces. If we still won't listen, as a last resort "I will return again to My place Till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me" (Hosea 5:15).

If we turn away from God, He just leaves and goes back to His place to let you function on your own. The pattern is there. He tries first to communicate to us as gently and harmlessly as a moth. When we don't follow the gentle leadings of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, then we become insensitive. Insensitive people wait for the lion to come before they believe God is telling them anything. Some people say, "Well, if God doesn't want me to do it, then He needs to send something to stop me." He can send a lion, but He would rather send the gentle brush of conviction like a moth.

Some people think that rules and boundaries are cruel and mean. The psalmist David said in Psalm 16:6, "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places." I'd rather have God's lines in pleasant places than the devil's lions! Ladies, don't wait for the lion or divine abandonment before you obey God. Be sensitive to the ministry of the moth. Whenever God wants to communicate with you, He will first come with a moth spirit, which is gentle and harmless.

But if we continually ignore His word, then He will come with a lion spirit, which may be a destructive force. Second Samuel 14:29-31 is an example. Absalom sent for Joab to come to the king, but Joab would not come. Absalom then sent for him a

second time, but still he would not obey the king. Finally, Absalom sent for him a third time still with no response.

Then the king ordered Absalom to set Joab's barley fields on fire. When his barley fields were burning, Joab came running to the king. He asked the king, "Why did you burn my fields?"

The king said, "I sent for you once, twice, then three times, and you didn't come, so I set your barley fields on fire as a last resort to get your attention."

The king of Israel, just like our King, tried the moth approach first. When Joab would not listen, the king released the lion. You must remember, if you will be sensitive, the most God will ever hit you with is a gentle moth.

I hope by now you are wondering, *How do I activate this discernment in my life? How do I recognize the prophetic whispers of God?*

I once heard about a money examiner who had the job of identifying counterfeit dollar bills. He said, "The key to identifying a false bill is to spend hours and hours handling the real thing." In other words, you have to get a "feel for the real" if you want to identify the fake.

As you spend time with God praying and studying His word, you will develop a feel for the voice of God. You will instantly begin to recognize when something does not feel just right in your spirit. In Genesis 27, Isaac could have avoided being deceived if he would have had a "feel for the real."

Jacob, the younger son of Isaac, wanted his older brother's birthright blessing. In order to have it, Jacob had to get Isaac to speak a blessing over him. Jacob came up with a clever scheme to fool Isaac, who was old with failing eyesight. Jacob

disguised his voice to sound like his brother Esau's and covered his arms with the hair of an animal (because Esau was a hairy man). By pretending to be Esau, Jacob deceived his father and obtained the blessing that was reserved for the firstborn child.

Since Jacob and Esau were twins, their voices sounded similar, just as the voice of error can sound nearly identical to the voice of truth. When Jacob approached his father to deceive him, his father felt Jacob's arm because something in the sound of his voice did not resemble the voice of Esau. Notice, the old man could have discerned the fraud if he had trusted his ears.

You have to learn to trust your spiritual ears. Jesus said, "The sheep follow him, for they know his voice" (John 10:4). Isaac knew something wasn't right when he heard Jacob's voice. He felt Jacob's arm and was deceived by the hairy texture. Spiritual things cannot be judged by outward circumstances.

Although Isaac was old enough to recognize deception, realize you don't ever get too old to be deceived. One never gets to the place where you don't have to fine-tune your spiritual sensitivity. You need to handle the Word of God enough to know truth from error. Psalm 115:7 warns us, "They have hands, but cannot feel" (NIV).

The gift of discernment is the ability to have a "feel for the real." Some things don't feel right. It doesn't necessarily mean God is saying no, but if there is a check in your spirit, you should wait on God to give you the green light to proceed.

If you feel that something is not right, wait on God's timing. The prodigal son would have gotten his inheritance without

any sorrow if he had waited on his father's timing. Acts 17:27 says, "They should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us." Just like the counterfeit money handler, we can become so familiar with the voice of God that we immediately recognize the counterfeit voice of Satan when we hear it.

Have you ever thought you heard God tell you something, only to find out later that you didn't hear from God at all?

Not too long ago, I suffered a humbling experience in this area. My wife and I had gone out for the evening. We left the kids at home with strict instructions about what was permissible and what was not. It was Christmas time and a lot of candles were sitting around the house, so one of the instructions was not to play with matches. We were clear: there was to be no lighting of candles.

When we arrived home from our evening out, we were shocked to discover that some of the candles had been burned. We knew this because the guilty culprit left a trail of melted wax on the hardwood floors. I called the kids in for a lineup and interrogation. "Who lit these candles?" I asked. They all denied it. I explained that if they confessed, their punishment would be less severe. Still, no one admitted it.

I then went down the list of names one by one. Did you do it? All five kids denied any involvement. My wife and I knew one of them was not telling the truth. We asked them repeatedly, but still no confession. We began to get upset with the kids. Not so much because of the candles, but because we knew one of them was flat out lying.

The atmosphere grew more intense by the minute. We warned the kids of the dangers of lying, and I preached every

sermon I have on the subject. By the time I got through with my little lecture, I had them all dangling by a thread over the hot flames of hell! Repeatedly I warned, "This is your last chance. Who did it?"

To our amazement, only silence filled the room. We decided to separate the kids; hoping one of them would crack and tell on the other one.

After talking to each of the kids, it appeared that our oldest daughter was skirting the truth. Out of all of them, she appeared to be guilty. Like two NYPD detectives, we asked her one question after another trying to obtain her confession, or at least to find an inconsistency in her story.

Her story stayed the same, but so did the guilty look she wore on her face. I was convinced she was lying to me. Finally, we got the break in the case we'd been looking for when her sister, Caroline, entered the room. She said, "Just admit it, Courteney. I didn't see you burning the candle, but I did see you watching TV in that room and touching the candle."

Now we had an eyewitness. To our amazement, she still denied it. Finally, I said, "Courteney, you don't have to admit it. I feel in my spirit that you did it. I feel like God has revealed to me that you're the one."

I gave her a spanking and sent her to her room. Before she left the room I told her, "Courteney, you can't fool the Holy Spirit. You can fool your parents, your teachers, and other authority figures, but you can't fool God. He always knows the truth."

About an hour later, Caroline came to us in tears. She admitted, "I did it, I'm sorry. I didn't want to get in trouble. It was me!"

The whole family gathered to remind me that I had just spanked an innocent child, and even worse, I did it because I felt God was telling me she was guilty.

"I thought you felt it in your spirit, Dad," one of them said. From across the room, another one accused, "Yeah, Dad, God told you to whip the wrong kid, right?" It has become one of the family jokes that we still laugh about today.

I apologized to my daughter. I was sorry I had misjudged her, and I told her the discipline would count as a credit for her in the future, and I was sure she would need it. As for Caroline, let's just say that her conscience felt better, but her bottom didn't.

There are many voices in the world (1 Cor. 14:10). There is the voice of God, the voice of the devil, the voice of people, and your own voice. How do you discern between God's voice and all the other voices? How do you know the difference between a word from the Lord and too much pizza or, even worse, gas? God is not the author of confusion. It has been said that when you get caught between a "Yes sir," and a "No sir," that you get an Ul-cer!

You must have the ability to hear God's voice in order to receive His direction. In the Old Testament, it was easy. Whenever God wanted the Israelites to go in a certain direction, He just moved the cloud that guided them. When the cloud moved, they moved. When the cloud stayed, they stayed (Num. 9:21).

It's a little more complex now. The cloud of the Old Testament has moved inside of us. "The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD, Searching all the inner depths of his heart" (Prov. 20:27). The way God speaks to us and leads us is by our

spirits. We have to be spirit-conscious in order to hear God's voice and receive His direction. First Thessalonians 5:23 says, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." He is saying that we are a spirit that lives in a body, and we have a soul, which is our mind.

Solomon's temple had an outer court, an inner court, and a holy of holies. In the Old Testament, God had this temple for His people, but under the new covenant, He has a people for His temple. Our body is the outer court, our mind is the inner court, and our spirit is the holy of holies. God lives in a three-room house: body, soul, and spirit.

Whenever God is going to lead you, He will not lead you by your carnal mind or by your flesh, but He will lead you by your spirit. When you are born again, your spirit is born again. Ephesians 3:16 says He will strengthen us with might in our inner man.

First Peter 3:4 speaks of the hidden person of the heart being adorned. Therefore, we have a hidden person, and we have an inner person. Someone lives on the inside of you that looks just like you. It is your eternal spirit. You can't make your inner person enjoy sin. If you start to do something wrong, your inner voice will say, "Hey, what are you doing up there? I'm down here, and I don't like that."

Before you were born again, it never bothered you to do certain things; but when you were born again, you received an inner man that is like Jesus. Your spirit has a voice, and you need to start listening to your spirit, because your success depends on being led by the spirit. Not being led by your mind,

your emotions, or your flesh.

You should know five things about your spirit:

1. Your spirit can be stirred.

Acts 17:16 informs us, “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.” Notice that his spirit was provoked; he got stirred up.

Has God ever stirred you up about something or somebody? Maybe it was a friend whom you hadn’t seen or someone you hadn’t thought about in a long time, but God began to stir them up in your heart. Sometimes, that is God urging you to reconnect with them because He needs you to minister to them.

2. You can be compelled by your spirit.

Acts 18:5 says, Paul was “compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.” Isn’t that strange language? *Compelled* means “to be impressed”; sometimes God will press you into action. When your spirit is pressed, the Holy Spirit is strongly urging or impressing you to do something. Whenever you feel pressed into action by God, don’t fool around. Get going! Learn to be spirit-conscious.

3. Your spirit can have purpose.

Acts 19:21 teaches, “When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through

Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem.” Paul purposed, not in his mind or in his flesh, but in his spirit. If you are going to do what God wants you to do, you must purpose it in your spirit, not in your mind or emotions. If I purpose in my flesh to worship God, then I won’t do much worshipping. If I purpose in my flesh to go to church, then I won’t go very often. You have to purpose in your spirit to worship God.

When we started building our new worship facility, I purposed in my spirit that we were going to build it. Usually there is a time of divine misery before there is a divine change. I remember feeling urgency about the building program. I began to receive scriptural confirmation and a stirring in my spirit that God was saying, “Now is the time to build.”

Some people said that we could not do it; however, when purpose gets in your spirit, all things are possible. You have to purpose in your spirit that you’re going to live for God. You can’t let your flesh or your mind tell you what you’re going to do. You must purpose in your spirit to obey the voice of God and do what He has called you to do.

4. You can be bound in your spirit.

Acts 20:22 declares, “And see, now I go bound in the spirit.” When God wants to put you somewhere, He binds you in your spirit to that place. I’m bound in the spirit to the church that I pastor; I’m bound in the spirit to my wife. When God binds you in the spirit, you can’t go anywhere else. Even if you want to leave, you can’t because you’re bound in the spirit.

Don’t ever walk away from something to which God binds you. You can’t just leave. Stay the course and don’t quit.

Don't give up because God has bound you in the spirit to that thing. Don't just go to any church; let God bind you in your spirit to a place. Places matter—God created places before He created people. God created the garden of Eden, and then He created Adam and Eve and placed them in it. Many people have location frustration; they're in the wrong place. Let God bind your spirit to the right place, the right people, and the right plan for your life.

5. Your spirit can give you peace about the right direction.

Second Corinthians 2:12-13 says, "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit." Notice that Paul had a big door open for him, but just because a door is wide open doesn't mean you're supposed to walk through it. This is where you need the Holy Spirit's guidance. Do you realize that if Paul had continued to go in the direction he was going, which was toward Asia, the United States and the western world would probably be pagan nations today?

The door was wide open, but he said, "I had no rest in my spirit." It's so simple to know God's will. If you don't have rest in your spirit, then don't do it. If you're about to do something, but you don't have a divine rest in your spirit about it, that's God's way of saying no.

If you're still trying to decide between marrying June Bug or Scooter, the answer is simple. If you still have two on the hook, don't marry either one! If it's not quite, it's not right. If you don't have rest in your spirit about a relationship or a major decision that you're about to make, then I encourage you to

give yourself some time to pray. Isaiah 28:16 teaches: "Whoever believes will not act hastily." I have learned that God is always right. If you don't have rest in your spirit, then something is not right.

"Is this God's will or not?" is a question you will have to confront on more than one occasion in your lifetime. Discernment to know God's will is available. It's what I call the nod of God. The nod of God is when you feel a divine yes on the inside about something. In Numbers 22, Balak tried to bribe Balaam to curse the Israelites. Balaam asked God if he should do it. When God told him no, Balak offered Balaam more money. Never move for money. Balaam, the prophet, went back to prayer and asked God a second time to let him curse Israel. No matter how much money was involved, God would not change His mind. Balaam kept going back and asking God repeatedly.

Balaam was trying to talk God into doing his will instead of doing God's will. This reminds me of how many people make decisions that do not have the nod of God on them, and then they try to get God to bless the decisions or relationships when He has already said, "No, I don't believe that relationship is right for you. I have someone better for you." Like Balaam, we sometimes go back to God, trying to change His mind. He said, "I am the LORD and I change not" (Mal. 3:6 KJV). If God doesn't change, guess who's going to have to do the changing?

Our problem is, we don't ask God how He feels about our relationships, our financial investments, and the major decisions we make. We just want His stamp of approval on anything we do. I once wanted to buy a house in a great

subdivision. I could just see our family living there, but when I would go to pray about the house, it seemed as though heaven's phone number was unlisted. Even though I told God what a good buy the house was, and what a great investment it would be for us, I could not get the nod of God to purchase that house. I might add, my wife did not think the house was right for us either.

I kept going back day after day and asking God in prayer for peace about buying the home, but I just couldn't get peace about it. I passed on purchasing the house, and a few months later, I learned it had to have some major reconstruction. If I had not listened to the voices of God and my wife, it would have cost me tens of thousands of dollars. Proverbs 3:6 says, "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." Your part is to acknowledge Him; His part is to direct your path. You may really want to buy that new car or house, but pray about it first and wait for the nod of God.

Balaam kept asking God repeatedly to let him go, until God said, "All right, if you want to go, then go." It reminds me of my seven-year-old asking, "Daddy, can I go outside and play?" I say, "No, it's bad weather outside, you can't go." Five minutes later, he is back pleading, "Daddy, Daddy, can I go now? Can I? Huh? Please, please, Daddy." Finally, at some point, you get so worn down and so tired of being asked, that you say in frustration, "If you want to go—then go." In reality, I'm not giving my permission; what I'm really doing is saying, "I dare you." I know that if he goes out in bad weather, he will suffer the consequences. He'll probably catch a cold.

In the same way, God said to Balaam, "If you want to go, if you insist on going over My will, then go." You see, there

comes a time when, if you keep on persisting about something that does not have the nod of God, He will yield to your will instead of you yielding to His. This always leads you down a painful road. Balaam rode off on his donkey to curse Israel, but God put an angel in his path to try and stop Him.

Balaam's donkey saw the angel in the middle of the road, but the prophet didn't. Sometimes, we can't see what we should, but God is gracious enough to surround us with others who can, until we can see it for ourselves. Have you ever been so headstrong and so outside of God's will that nobody could reason with you? The donkey was Balaam's friend, but Balaam beat the animal mercilessly because it would not continue to support him in going against God's will. God supernaturally opened the mouth of the donkey and allowed it to speak to Balaam.

This had to be the world's most unusual conversation, with one jackass talking to another one. Let me clue you in on something: if a jackass talks to you, and you understand what he's saying, you might be a jackass! Can you imagine these two donkeys talking to one another? One of them is a four-legged donkey, and the other is a two-legged donkey. The strange thing is that the four-legged donkey is the smarter of the two.

Balaam began to kick and beat the donkey. Instead of kicking the donkey, he should have been kissing it because the donkey was only trying to save his life. When you get stubborn and out of God's will, usually it is the well-intentioned whom you will kick and mistreat.

Young people kick their parents and kiss destructive friendships. The people they are kicking, they ought to be

kissing, and the people they are kissing, they ought to be kicking. Eventually, Balaam saw why the donkey was trying to turn him around; eventually, that was all Balaam could see.

When you go in a direction that does not have the nod of God, eventually, you will see that God's way is the right way. When you do see, you should double back and say thanks to all the people who had the courage to tell you the truth. Even when you were blinded by love or blinded by sin, God was good enough to put people in your path to try and stop you from walking off a cliff.

I don't want to be like Balaam, a fool on a mule in the middle of the road. If I'm getting ready to mess my life up, I want God to stop me. When you have the nod of God, it is like an early warning system that detects the enemy's mines and missiles before they are visible to the natural eye. From years of experience, I have learned to heed God's warnings. Every time I have brushed them off as merely being a case of indigestion or a mere coincidence, I have regretted it later. When you're about to make a major decision and you feel a "check in your spirit," or have a sense that something is wrong, you better heed the warning and wait for the nod of God.

When you have His approval on your decision, He will provide everything you need to do His will. Don't ask how much it costs; ask if God wants it done. If it's God will, then it's God's bill! Where God guides, He also provides. John 10:14 says, "I know My sheep, and am known by My own." His sheep follow that familiar voice and refuse to follow a stranger's voice.

How do the sheep know the Shepherd's voice? Daily communion with the Shepherd. We must have the ability to

discern the voice of the Holy Spirit. When our relationship is distant, His voice seems muted. I know the voice of my children. I can be at a busy mall and have other voices all around me, but when I hear one of my children say “Daddy,” even in the midst of all the noise, I know that voice.

Our problem is, we don’t spend enough time with God to recognize His voice when He speaks. You cannot raise a family successfully without the voice of God leading you in wisdom. You cannot run a Christian business without the voice of God giving you direction. There is a vast difference between being driven and being led. When we don’t hear Him, we find ourselves running at break-neck speed, confused and unproductive, always pushing and driving.

Are you driven or led? The spirit wants to lead you; the flesh wants to drive you. The flesh thrives on noise, activity, competition, and busyness; the spirit thrives on silence, stillness, solitude, and Scripture. “Be still, and know that I am God,” (Ps. 46:10).

A few years ago I took a mission trip to the Ukraine. Our church supports an orphanage in Kiev. While touring the orphanage I noticed a beautiful little eight-year-old girl. She stuck to me like glue. Every time I preached in the city at different churches, if she was there, she would come up and give me a hug. She truly captured my heart.

I went home and told my wife about her. I showed her pictures and after much prayer and seeking God’s will, we decided to pursue adopting the child. We were told it would be a relatively quick and easy process; however, nothing could have been farther from the truth.

We made numerous attempts to work out the adoption,

including trips to the Ukraine where we met with government officials. We used all the contacts we had in that nation, as well as contacts within the states, but each was to no avail. Nothing we did brought us any closer to adoption. After two and half years of emotional highs and lows, we finally realized that we were being driven by our own desires, rather than being led by the spirit of God. It was one of the most painful times in our family's history.

When you try to force things and pressure things to happen, it's almost always a sign that you are being driven, not led. As Psalm 23:2 reminds us, "He leads me beside the still waters." The whole time we were trying to adopt the little girl, we didn't have peaceful still waters in our home. We had turmoil and confusion. We will never fully understand everything during that season of our lives, but we have realized there is a difference between being led to do something and being driven by our own desires.

Jesus spent much time alone with God. There are times when we must be alone with God. One of my favorite singers and musicians is Jason Upton. His music is some of the most inspirational that I have ever heard. He and his band go to a monastery every year for three to four days to seek God. During those days, they fast words. No sound, no music, no noise at all. In the quiet, God begins to speak. You see, the spirit thrives on solitude. The voice of God does not scream; it's a still, small voice. In order for you to hear Him, you must learn to get quiet in His presence. You don't learn anything while you're talking.

Many people will argue that listening for the voice of God is too hard. In my family, there are seven of us: my wife, four girls,

my son, and me. Every meal is chaotic, every bedtime is a battle, and every outing can be an ordeal, but all are necessary and part of everyday life. Spending time with God is a necessary part of everyday life.

You have to plan your time with God. Make plans after the kids go to sleep or before they get up. You need those times to spend alone with God so He can speak to you. He will give you confirmation about His will for your life. To spend time consistently with God, I need a place of prayer and a time of prayer.

God guides by His Word. Every believer has a right to hear God. Not knowing the Word of God can greatly hinder you from receiving God's direction. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." The Scriptures are the mouth of God. The Spirit of God thrives in the Holy Scriptures. Pore over them; the Word of God washes us clean.

Psalm 32:8-9 says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you." Parents understand what eye contact is with their child. You can just catch their eye. It's like a telepathic communication. You can be led by God's eye, or by the bit and bridle. Don't be like the horse or the mule that has to have a bit and a bridle. You're a sheep, not a mule. Don't be stubborn and mule-headed. Learn to listen to His impressions and wait on the nod of God.

Once I was out walking out in the woods. As it was getting dark, I heard something in my spirit say, "Don't move in the dark." Those words had such urgency. When I looked down,

there was a large spider web with a huge spider that I was about to walk right into. I learned a life lesson that day that I will never forget. Don't move in the dark. If you can't see—don't move. Wait on the nod of God. Stop moving in the dark. Don't do anything unless you ask Him first. Make it hard on God and easy on you. If God wants something to happen, He will get it done. Listen for the quiet voice of the Lord. Don't try to force it to happen.

Have you ever tried to put a puzzle together? Sometimes, a puzzle piece can look right, but it doesn't fit properly. It has the right appearance, but it will not fit into the empty space without force. You must never force a piece to fit a space for which it was not designed. Just one misplaced piece destroys the finish; it causes all the other pieces to become disjointed.

Every piece of a puzzle is connected, just like the pieces of our lives. We were created for a particular purpose, and just one piece out of place can greatly affect all the other pieces of our life.

Don't try to force things to fit. Wait on the nod of God. If you don't have His approval for the direction you're headed, don't force it. God holds the missing piece of the puzzle.

You see, God has this problem. He really thinks He is God. His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa. 55:8). His greatest pleasure is to be trusted.

Beware of two extremes to avoid when trying to discern the voice of God. The first extreme is over rationalizing. Only do what is logical. Every door has to open and every question has to be answered before you will make a move. We say to God, "You show, and I'll go." But God says to us, "You go, and I'll show." God teaches us to "Walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor.

5:7). Faith is usually spelled R-I-S-K.

The other extreme is mysticism. Mysticism is totally ignoring reality. Everything is “I just felt led,” or “God told me.” One of the problems with the Scud missiles in the first Gulf War was that, even though they were high-powered weapons, nobody knew where they were going to land. Being high-powered but misguided can cause more harm than good.

A discerning woman experiences seven ways God guides:

1. Inner Convictions

On February 24, 1989, a United Airlines 747 took off from Honolulu, Hawaii, headed for Sydney, Australia. While in flight, the cargo door blew open and sent some of the passengers to a watery grave in the Pacific Ocean. A man named John was on that flight, and he later spoke at a Christian business luncheon our church held. He was sitting at the passenger door, and a few minutes before the door opened, he heard a voice on the inside saying, “Move from where you are sitting.” He delayed, so the inner voice spoke again saying, “Move now!” He moved into the back of the plane, and a few seconds later, there was a huge hole where he had been sitting.

Several people lost their lives. Miraculously, the pilots were able to land the plane. John escaped death by listening to the voice of God. First John 2:20 says, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.” You can know by the Holy Spirit anything at any moment. You can know things that you didn’t study or train for by listening to the Holy Spirit.

2. Scriptural Confirmation

Second Timothy 3:16 teaches that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Just as a pilot trusts his instruments, God guides us by His Word and His Spirit, whom we trust. A good pilot will tell you that when you are in a storm, you must trust the gauges on the flight panel. When the storm is raging, stick to the gauges! The same is true in spiritual storms. Read the Word of God to pull through the dark clouds of life.

3. Prophetic Confirmation

Through a prophetic word from someone, God can confirm what He has already spoken to your heart. Sometimes He will use prophetic preaching, and it will seem as though the minister has eavesdropped on you. First Corinthians speaks of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit. Two of them, the gift of prophecy and the discerning of spirits, can help you know the right direction from the wrong direction.

4. Godly Counsel

Proverbs 11:14 teaches, “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” Psalm 1:1 says, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly.” Get feedback from experienced, wise,

godly people before you make any major decisions.

5. Circumstances

If you are laid off from your job, God is directing you to another place of employment. He isn't leading you through prophecy or an angel, but through your circumstances, just as having no money in the bank would indicate the need to work. Circumstances and common sense go hand in hand. I realize that we do not govern all our decisions by circumstances. As Christians, we walk by faith, not by sight. However, there comes a time when we must use common sense to interpret what we are to do.

6. The Peace of God

“Let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (Col. 3:15). Don't enter into a contract or make a decision that robs you of your peace, even if everything looks good and sounds good. Always apply the peace test.

7. Provision

As I've already said, where God guides, He provides. Where's the provision? That doesn't mean you won't experience financial challenges, but it means that where He guides, He has already put provision for the vision into motion. “I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants

begging bread” (Ps. 37:25).

In conclusion, I feel it is important for you to realize that, although God chooses any one of these ways to answer our prayers, He will use more than one to confirm. Deuteronomy 17 and 2 Corinthians 13:1 teach us, “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.” The bigger the decision, the more you will want the seven ways God may choose to guide you to line up, confirming His direction.

When you develop the ability to hear and discern God’s voice, you will be amazed at how involved God wants to be in your everyday life. Ask God for His guidance. Once you get the nod of God on your decisions, everything else will fall into place. “And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isa. 30:21 KJV).

You have a device in your brain called the reticular activating system. Have you ever bought a car, thinking no one in your area owned one? But as soon as you drove off the lot, you began to notice other cars just like yours? Suddenly, you noticed identical cars everywhere! Why didn’t you notice them before? Because your reticular activating system programmed your brain to notice what you didn’t see before you owned that particular car. As you’re reading this book, God is putting a word within your spirit called discernment.

Maybe before you read this book, you didn’t notice it was there. But from now on, it’s going to be hard to miss the spiritual intuition God has given you.

It just so happens that as I’m writing this book, I’m on a twenty-one-day fast. I would like to pray the principles in this chapter into your life:

Father, in Jesus’ name, I pray for the woman of God who is reading

these words. I pray that You will activate the gift of discernment in her life. May You have full reign of her spirit so she can be stirred by Your spirit, pressed by Your spirit, bound by Your spirit, and have rest in Your spirit. I pray she will recognize the gentle whispers of the moth and be led by them. I pray for the nod of God to be on her decisions and relationships. I ask You to give her such a feel for the real that she will not miss Your purpose for her life in every area. In Jesus' name I ask, Amen.

Chapter Six

Discerning Women Always Make a Difference

Psalm 68:11 describes an army on the march proclaiming the gospel. One of Satan's greatest fears is that women will find out who they really are and what a significant role they play in his ultimate downfall. Women have not been relegated to mere privates in God's army, rather they have been chosen as key players. The biblical record shows that God will use women to transform the world.

The devil is afraid of women because they are God's secret weapon for the final battle. Why would God use women? It's simple: the opening round of the battle was between the devil and a woman. Consequently, it is logical that the last round of this important final thrust should also include women.

A revelation about women in the Bible underscores your important role. In Judges 8:31-35, an evil character named Abimelech conspired with the inhabitants of Shechem to kill all of Gideon's seventy sons so that he could rule. Eventually a dispute arose between Abimelech and the people of Shechem. Abimelech destroyed the city, defeated its army, and murdered most of its inhabitants. However, a thousand men and women fled to a fortified tower. At that moment, Abimelech showed his army how to cut branches from the trees. Once they had enough firewood, they transported it to the lower chamber of the tower. They set it on fire and burnt alive one thousand men

and women (Judg. 9:49). This was a cruel and vile act. The killing of civilians, especially women, amounted to genocide.

Next, Abimelech went to Thebez and captured it, but some of its residents took refuge in a tower. He decided to burn them alive just as he had done to the people of Shechem. However, as Abimelech approached the tower, a woman pushed a millstone onto his head, crushing his skull (Judg. 9:53).

As he lay there dying, he was more distressed by a woman killing him than he was about dying. In desperation, he commanded his armorbearer, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him' "(Judg. 9:54).

Notice the parallels between Abimelech's relationship with women and the devil's relationship with women. Abimelech, the personification of evil, had his head crushed by a woman, just as Satan was warned in Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity... between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head." In the same way Abimelech despised women, the devil has also singled them out for harsher treatment. By showing his army how to cut branches into firewood to turn the otherwise impregnable tower into a human torch, Abimelech transformed a common tree into a devastating weapon. Similarly, Satan turned the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden into a lethal weapon.

Undoubtedly, Abimelech's victory at Shechem gave him great confidence, yet a woman crushed his head before he had a chance to repeat it. Likewise, Satan appeared to be ahead of the game because of Eve's transgression. I believe it took the devil by surprise when a woman named Mary had a son named Jesus. Luke 20:17 says, "And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders

rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?" (KJV). The stone the builders rejected became the stone thrown by a woman that crushed Satan's head at Calvary.

Abimelech never thought a woman could harm him, but unexpectedly a woman found the will to fight, and she won a great victory. You can make a difference. It's easier to make a living than it is to make a difference. Deborah decided to make a difference when she arose and led Israel into battle (Judg. 4:9–10). Two major things opposed her that day. First, she was a woman in a male-dominated society. Second, she didn't have a sword with which to fight. But when Deborah got involved, God got involved.

If you will decide to make a difference, then God will make up the difference. You have to believe in yourself because God believes in you. You can't love your neighbor until you love yourself. You may feel inadequate to complete the task, but that's OK. Remember: God's supernatural involvement requires faith.

If you have never responded, "Who? Me?" when God asks you to do something, then God hasn't ever talked to you. In other words, if every time God tells you to do something, you respond, "I'm not able to do that," God will say back to you, "Well, now that we've got that out of the way, are you ready?"

In Judges 6:15, the one thing God had to deal with before He could use Gideon was a bad self-image. When God called him to lead Israel he replied, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." The real question is, "Who asked your family?" When God calls you to do something, too many are overly concerned about how their families will react. What will

my relatives think? You came through your parents, not from them; you came from God. Jeremiah 1:5 reveals, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”

Why do so many people not accept the way God made them? The biggest enemy we face is that nagging voice, “If you could just be like them.” If you are trying to be like someone else, then the best you can be is second best. Be yourself! The person who walks in someone’s tracks never leaves their own footprints. Don’t build a case against yourself. Proverb 23:7 says, “As he thinks in his heart, so is he.” What you constantly attach to the words “I am,” you will become. You may succeed if nobody else believes in you, but you will never succeed if you don’t believe in yourself.

God is never drawn to full. He is drawn to empty. In fact, more believers fail because of strength than because of weakness. There is weakness in strength and strength in weakness. The weakness of strength is found in 2 Chronicles 26:5. King Uzziah was sixteen when he began to reign. Notice that as long as he sought the Lord, God caused him to prosper, and he was marvelously helped. His fame spread far and wide, but then we read the haunting phrase, “Until he was strong.” A mistaken notion in Christianity is that God is looking for strong people. Wrong! God is looking for weak people whose strength will come from Him. If you examine the lives of men and women who have fallen, you may conclude, “They became too strong.”

That is the weakness of strength. But also notice the strength of weakness. The strength of weakness always begins with brokenness. Paul was stoned and left for dead, an oozing

mass of broken bones. He was broken internally. He was hurting emotionally, mentally, and physically. Paul was a broken man, but oh, the strength of weakness! When properly responded to, weakness always leads to graduated blessing. God's answer to Paul was, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9).

When do you find that God's grace is sufficient to help you? When you look around and there is nothing left but the grace of God. As long as anything else remains, we tend to trust in it.

Paul said, "Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9). Stop looking at your weakness and concentrate on His strength. In Ephesians 1, God gives His view of you. It says He has blessed us, chosen us, predestined us, accepted us, redeemed us. He has abounded wisdom to us, and He has made known the mystery of His will to us.

You are already a success in the eyes of God. You have a winner's blood in your veins. What is success? It's not fortune or fame. It's knowing your worth in the eyes of God and using your gifts properly. Popularity is others liking you, but happiness is you liking you. You may say, "You don't know how I failed." But, as Ed Cole once said, "You don't drown by falling into the water; you drown by staying there." Romans 12 teaches us that the renewing of the mind is the secret to transformation. What you see in your mind, you will have in time. See yourself with victory. See yourself making a difference. Visualize where you want to be and act as if you're there. "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). In other words, in His mind, He pictured the victory of the resurrection while He was going through the

crucifixion.

You were created as a visual being. Your eyes take in four million bits of information at the speed of 184,000 miles per second. They not only take in images, but they create a picture for you and add 3-D color, while instantly putting the picture in motion. If you doubt you are a visual being, think about how your mind, without even trying, converts words into pictures automatically. For example, if I say “roller coaster,” instantly your mind tries to convert that word to a picture.

In the same way, faith operates with photographs. You will never change the direction of your life until you change your sights. When advertising companies spend three million dollars for thirty seconds of commercial time during the Super Bowl, these companies are not throwing money away. They recognize that if certain images are put before people, they cause movement toward those products. People are moved by what they see.

No individual will ever rise above the picture painted in their mind. One of the keys to making a difference and rising to another level is painting new pictures in your mind. You must see yourself there before you get there. The Holy Spirit will not increase your life until He increases your vision. Everything you do to raise the level of your thinking will raise the level of your income and lifestyle. Your life will always move in the direction of the dominant images you envision in your mind.

Why did Lot stop prospering? The answer is because of the dominant images he allowed in his mind. Let me explain. Genesis 13:12 says, “Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom.” The dominant image Lot saw every morning, noon, and night was the city of sin.

Consequently, it wasn't long until he moved to the gate on the edge of the city. Finally he fled the city and lost everything. Never forget that you always move in the direction of the dominant images in your mind. Envision a good mental picture of victory, and your life will move in that direction. You must take ownership of your miracle in the invisible before you can take ownership in the visible.

Visualization is not New Age teaching. In Genesis 22:17, God said to Abraham, "I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore." God gave him a picture. Jesus said to His disciples, "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (John 4:35). He didn't say a lot of people need saving. God gave them a mental picture.

Matthew 20:33 says, "They said to Him, 'Lord, that our eyes may be opened.' " Your dream will never be more than you envision it to be. No matter how much you have failed in the past, begin to see yourself as a success. If you can see it, you can be it. Your outlook determines your output. I've learned failure is an opportunity to begin again intelligently. For your life to make a true difference, three things must change: your thinking, your expectations, and your vision. Dare to believe God for a new vision of victory.

Your greatest liability could become your greatest asset. Zacchaeus was small in stature. Perhaps he stopped growing when he was eight or nine years old. I'm sure he heard all the short jokes. Maybe the kids in the neighborhood called him nicknames like "peanut" and "short stuff." Imagine him when

he was twenty years old still looking like a kid. All of his life, he could not reach things that normal people could. He had to use a stool or ladder or ask for help from someone because he was too short. I'm sure his stature was a great liability and many times he thought, "Oh, I wish I were average height like everybody else."

One day, Jesus came to his city. The crowd was enormous, so it was perfectly natural for him to do what he had done all of his life. He climbed up a tree so he could see over the heads of all the average-height people. If Zacchaeus had been an average height, do you think Jesus would have gone home with him? The answer is no. His liability drove him up a tree to see Jesus. His liability became his greatest asset because it drove him to a place where he saw Jesus and got the Master's attention.

Jesus told him, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9). Whatever your liability, whatever your insufficiency, whatever you lack in life, it could become your greatest asset if it drives you to a place of desperation to seek Jesus.

My mother-in-law is a breast cancer survivor. My wife and I will never forget hearing the news. Cancer is a devastating word when it is attached to someone you love. After a few tears and a lot of prayer, Pat began to fight back. She refused to give up; although the doctors recommended radical mastectomy surgery, she decided on an alternate route.

She went on a strict diet and took immune-boosting vitamins. I felt impressed to fast three days for her healing. On the third day, God gave me a word of encouragement for her. "You shall live to see your children's children." Pat has now

been cancer-free for over 14 years! After going through such a storm, every day is like a gift. She has turned her liability into an asset by encouraging other women through her testimony. Through the test came a testimony, and from the mess came a message of hope for others walking through the emotional meat grinder of cancer.

The reason some people are never used by God is they have never been through anything. God gets His best sailors from the roughest seas and His fiercest soldiers from the toughest battles. God can use what you have experienced to bless others.

Such was the case in the life of a member in my church named Sylina LiBasci. I felt impressed to share with you a portion of the personal testimony she shared with me about the most devastating day of her life.

On May 16, 1977, I was being a mom as usual, and I got up early enough to have my devotion and pray. My four-year-old son, Caleb, came in, and I bathed him. Soon, my two-year-old Benjamin was awake, so I bathed him. I fed them breakfast while Wesley, my ten-year-old daughter, was dressing for the day.

We were planning a day of fun at our church: water day at our Parents Morning Out class. I taught it on Fridays.

The boys wanted to wear their "Jesus" shirts. These pictured Jesus with children and the Scripture from Matthew 19:14, which reads, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

They were so eager that morning. I had no way of knowing this would be our last morning together. On the way to the church a dumpster truck struck us. My four-year-old, Caleb, went to be with Jesus instantly. Benjamin was critically injured. He lived only two days and sixteen hours after the accident. My daughter, Wesley, was taken from the scene of the accident by med-flight to the Children's Hospital.

Thankfully, Wesley fully recovered from her injuries. Though I will

never fully understand why God chose to take my children, I can say God has turned my crisis into a miracle. The driver of the truck that struck us asked Jesus into his heart. Many doctors and nurses told us they would never be the same. The memorial service is where my husband and I believe the greatest miracle happened—sixteen of our family members were saved.

We had been praying for a household revival, and this was the beginning. God has opened the doors for us to minister to many grieving families. We have seen the Lord bind up the brokenhearted through our hardest life experience.

Although Sylina and her husband faced the greatest tragedy of their lives, God was able to bring something good out of it. Nothing can ever take the place of the children that she lost, but she takes comfort in knowing a difference has been made in the lives of others who are hurting and one day she will see them again.

Be like Deborah the prophetess, who didn't know what to do but was determined to make a difference. Deborah arose to lead God's people to victory over Sisera, the evil captain of the Canaanite army. He was reduced to running for his life. He ducked into a woman's tent to hide, thinking an ordinary housewife wasn't much of a threat to him. But while he was sleeping, an ordinary woman named Jael took a tent peg and drove it through his temple (Judg. 4:21).

Think what a surprise it must have been to hear the news that Sisera, the mighty warrior, had been slain by a housewife wielding an ordinary household item. You can make a difference. God wants to raise up an army of housewives to proclaim His good news and defeat all His enemies that are coming against the family and the church.

In Genesis 33, when Jacob had to face his brother after stealing the birthright, he was afraid for his life. Esau and four

hundred of his soldiers were approaching with fire in their eyes. Do you know what Jacob did? He put all the women out in front and hid behind them. When Esau saw the women, he broke down and began to weep (Gen. 33:1-7).

The presence of women on the front line broke the spirit of the enemy. What if the women had been absent? Esau represents a spirit of destruction that was coming against Jacob's family. He was going to kill Jacob and all of his family to get the birthright blessing back. When everything else had failed, the women prevailed over a home-wrecking spirit.

The enemy fears discerning women who know how to pray. The first mention in the Bible of any women gathering together is in Genesis 24:11. The women had gathered to draw water when Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, was sent to seek a bride for Abraham's son Isaac. Eliezer represents the Holy Spirit. Abraham, the father, is a picture of our heavenly Father, and Isaac, the son, represents Jesus, the bridegroom searching for a bride.

Eliezer went to the place where women had gathered to draw water. The parallel is clear; the Holy Spirit is attracted to the place where women gather to draw spiritual water. Jesus said, "But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

That's why God is leading many spiritual leaders to host women's conferences. Bishop T.D. Jakes started teaching *Woman Thou Art Loosed* in a Sunday school class. Later, it became a best-selling book, and today his Woman Thou Art Loosed Conferences attract over fifty thousand women annually. Numerous other women's conferences all around the world are attracting thousands of women. God is mobilizing

and equipping an all-female army to build His church and do His work in these last days.

You might be surprised to learn what kind of women God is going to use in this end-time army. Only four women are mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1:5-6. They are four of the “bad girls” of the Old Testament—Rahab the harlot, Ruth the Moabitess (the offspring of incest), Bathsheba the adulteress, and Tamar the daughter-in-law (who seduced her father-in-law). These four bad girls were in the lineage of Jesus Christ. It would seem that God could have found better women than that to put in the family tree of Jesus Christ. I believe he deliberately chose those four women because he was trying to teach us about the power of redemption.

These four wretched, sinful women made up the physical body of Jesus Christ. If women with that kind of past could be part of the physical body of Jesus Christ, then the spiritual body of Christ which is the church can be made up of women who have come from sordid pasts, but now they have been washed and cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. You may not be all you ought to be, but thank God you’re not what you used to be. If God could get you from where you were to where you are, then He can take you from where you are to where you ought to be! Don’t let your past haunt you. Paul tells us to forget the past and reach for the future (see Phil. 3:13). Isaiah said, “Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old, Behold I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth” (Isa. 43:18-19).

Just as the prophecy in Genesis foretold a woman will give birth to the seed that will crush Satan’s head, women are still

giving brain-damaging, head-crushing blows to Satan. The enemy fears praying, discerning women! They can break his authority over the home, over the family, over the husband, over the children.

I can promise you, hell is frightened that you're reading this book. New orders have come out of hell: Don't let women catch a word of what's in that book. Don't let them understand what travailing prayer can do. Don't let them pick up on a spirit of discernment. Let the women stay so burdened with problems, so full of inferiority and self-pity, that they will never discover who they really are and what a vital role they play in Satan's defeat.

Break free from the bondage of self-pity. You really can make a difference, but not until the bondage of self-pity is broken off of your life. Many things can happen to you in life, and you can get bound. You can throw a pity party, but the bad thing about throwing a pity party is that the only ones who show up are you and the devil. Break free from the bondage of self-pity. We're called to walk through the valley, not wallow in it.

There are four steps to being set free:

1. *Trace it.* When did it start? Cut down the root if you want to get rid of the fruit (Luke 3:9).
2. *Face it.* Admit to God that you have a problem. "I need help Lord; I'm struggling with this."
3. *Erase it.* Forgive! Forgive! Forgive! Let it all go. Erase all sin and offense by applying the blood of Jesus Christ.
4. *Replace it.* Let the Holy Spirit fill the void. Ephesians 5:18

says, “. . . be filled with the Spirit.” Renew your mind in the word. Think God’s thoughts, and ask God for a fresh baptism of Joy. Isaiah 61:3 teaches us to put on “the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

Many of us stop in the midst of our valley experiences and throw a pity party to which we will invite anyone who will sympathize. When these problems are solved, there will be some more. God will always allow a little crisis to keep us dependent. The Lord will either calm your storms or calm you while the storm rages. God can turn every Calvary into an Easter, every midnight into a noonday, every sob into a sigh. He’ll take every tear, string them up, and arrange them into a diadem of pearls. Jesus will never allow you to drown in your own tears. He will not permit hurt to destroy your mind. He bottles every tear in His eternal container.

Right now, there are some women reading these words who need to be set free from the bondage of self-pity. You are a child of God filled with His Spirit. Your name is in the Book of Life. There is a lot more right with you than there is wrong with you. Break free from the bondage of self-pity! The greatest issue in your life—the sin issue—has been settled. Your sins are under the blood of Jesus.

Say this right now out loud: “I’m through feeling sorry for myself. God wants me to be a victor, not a victim; to soar, not sink; to overcome, not be overwhelmed.”

Nothing outside of us can cause depression, but our unbiblical response to things can. In Jesus’ name, I break you free from the bondage of self-pity.

Ezekiel 18:2 says, “What do you mean when you use this

proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children’s teeth are set on edge?’” This text is about how the sins of parents affect the children. Sour grapes the parents eat set their children’s teeth on edge. Sour grapes may be an abusive father or mother. Maybe your parents didn’t know how to show love. Maybe they were absent or never available to you. Perhaps you could never do well enough for them. Possibly you never had any affection or affirmation. Sour grapes could be alcoholism, drug addiction, anger, negativism, or depression. These are some of the ways parents who eat sour grapes affect their children—a good reason to have a pity party, right?

Wrong! “ ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel’ ” (Ezek. 18:3). Good news! No matter who your father or mother is, no matter what were their issues, if Jesus is alive in you, then your parents’ behavior no longer stains you. Jesus broke the curse.

No matter what sour grapes your parents ate, no matter what they did wrong, it doesn’t have to destroy your joy. Why do you keep bringing it up? Get over it! You don’t have to be held hostage by what they did to you or didn’t do for you. So many people are dealing with issues that stem from past incidents of deep rejection, sexual shame, need for approval, never feeling good enough, or lack of self-worth.

No matter how your parents behaved, through Christ the pain stops—the sin’s progression in your family line is broken. To the people who know their sovereign Lord lives, this sour grape proverb is defeated. Buddha and Muhammad can’t break the family curse for you; neither is alive. Our sovereign Lord is alive! In Jesus’ name, I loose you from the bondage of self-

pity.

The assignment God has for you is too great to be sabotaged by the past. Depression and lack of self-worth is illegal in your life. Life has done nothing to you that God can't work out for you, if you will put it in His hands. God can turn your pain into purpose. It's time to make a difference.

Chapter Seven

The Benefits of Discernment: The Right People, Right Place, Right Plan

God wants to help you make wise choices in relationships, from friendships to romance. It's time to put an end to getting burned and start enjoying the healthy, balanced relationships everyone wants and needs.

If you have ever been in a relationship where you were used, abused, or abandoned, this chapter is for you. Good people can get entangled in bad relationships. "Looking for love in all the wrong places, looking for love in all the wrong faces," is the theme song of many people.

Discernment is a very helpful tool for avoiding toxic entanglements. Have you ever given your best and gotten the worst in return? Character discernment is a skill many of us lack. If your last three boyfriends were Jack the Ripper, Jake the Snake, and Slick Sammy, then you need character discernment. What is character discernment? It is simply being able to tell the sheep from the goats in your life.

Character discernment is the ability to find relationships that are good for you and to avoid those that are not. If God wants to bless you, He will send a person; and if Satan wants to curse you, he will send a person. That's why every day we need to pray for 20/20 discernment in the world of the spirit to know the

right people from the wrong people.

The apostle Paul said, “You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Gal. 5:7). Notice he says *who*, not *what*. Romans 8:5 says, “Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.” Every person who comes into your life has a body and a spirit. Many people get into trouble because they have orphaned hearts; they did not get what they needed in childhood, so they try to get everyone to love and accept them.

Remember: hurting spirits seek each other out. Angry spirits, controlling spirits, sick spirits all seek each other out. When someone comes into your life, they don’t just bring their body, they bring their spirit. Two people with wrong spirits don’t make one couple with a right spirit.

If you have a hurt spirit and you let someone in your life who has a hurt spirit, then you are twice as bad off as you were by yourself. There are flesh people and faith people. Flesh people tear you down and feed your fears, but faith people build you up and feed your faith.

Flesh people waste your time and drain your energy. It does not mean they are bad people, it just means those kinds of people don’t belong in your inner circle. Often Christians find themselves in confusing relationships that drain them of their emotional energy and greatly reduce their effectiveness. Think of the personal pain that could be avoided if we knew how to avoid unhealthy relationships. Right people are individuals who draw us closer to being the person God created us to be. Right people are those who will be honest with you. Right people are strong when you are weak.

One of the first signs of spiritual failure is when people begin to isolate themselves from their Christian friends and from the house of God. Our self-confidence must be healed before we are free to discern who the blessing people are in our lives.

When Paul needed to be saved, who did God send? Ananias was the right man in the right place at the right time (Acts 9:10). That's what I call a "Kingdom Connection." How would you like some Kingdom Connections in your life and career? I'm referring to people who God puts in your life like bridges to get you where you're supposed to go.

Because Paul persecuted Christians before his conversion, he was rejected by the early church. The disciples were afraid of him, so God put Barnabas in his life. Barnabas used his influence to get Paul's foot in the door of the church. When Paul was discouraged, God sent Titus to encourage him. Have you ever had a discouraging day? In 2 Corinthians 7:6, Paul said, "Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus."

The right people encourage you. The right people bridge you to places you're supposed to go. When Ruth was lonely, God sent her a Kingdom Connection. Does God care if you are single, widowed, or divorced? Does He notice when everybody goes home together, but you go home alone? You bet He notices! The God who said, "It is not good to be alone," stepped into the shadows of Ruth's life and gave her a Kingdom Connection.

God sent her a man named Boaz. God has a Boaz for you. He didn't send her a loser or a reject. He didn't send her a smooth-talking player who would leave her brokenhearted. He sent her a man who was capable and could care for her. History books

say Boaz was quite handsome and a bit older than she was, and he had enough money to make her comfortable.

Notice the qualities that you should look for, or teach your children to look for, when trying to discern the right mate. Boaz was a stable man. He wasn't just released from prison or recently checked out of a rehab program. Nor was he lazy and unproductive. Marriage is important. It is a commitment for life, so you better be sure that it is ordained by God. Notice that he was respectful to Ruth's relatives. He gave Ruth food to take home to her mother-in-law. Boaz fed Ruth and her mother-in-law, and they didn't "go Dutch." These days' men don't seem to understand how to respect a woman and show respect to her parents. For example, if you are dating a guy who reluctantly pays for the meal on the date, but expects you to pay for the movie and the popcorn, then you're dating a deadbeat.

Boaz was a kind man—a perceptive man, a sensitive man, a spiritual man, a financially capable man—and that equals a **h u* s* b* a n d***! When Ruth came home loaded with presents and food for her mother-in-law, Naomi began to mentor Ruth on how to conduct herself in a proper way. She gave Ruth some sound advice. Ruth wanted to know what she should do about this man showing her romantic interest (Ruth 3:18).

Naomi advised Ruth to "sit still and wait." In other words, "Let the man pursue you; don't pursue him." If it were today, the girls would call back in thirty minutes saying, "Do you remember me, Boaz? I met you in the field." The next morning they would be calling again. "Do you remember me? Can we go out on a date sometime?" Sitting still and waiting is the hardest thing to do. There is nothing as big a turnoff to a guy as a

desperate woman.

When a guy shows interest, back off, sit still, and let him pursue you. Even if you're camping out by the phone waiting on him to call, don't let him know it. Sit still and wait! Ruth could have gotten an attitude and told old Naomi, "You don't know what you're talking about. Just because you lost your husband doesn't mean that I'm going to lose a chance at a second one." But she didn't. The Bible said she obeyed and respected Naomi's advice.

Boaz got busy and arranged a legal wedding. He became her kinsman-redeemer, and they were married. They had a son named Obed, and Obed had a son named Jesse, and Jesse had a son named David, and David had a descendant named Mary, and Mary had a little Lamb named Jesus.

Ruth's character discernment not only landed her a fantastic husband, but it also placed her in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5).

I am asking God to restore discernment to you, so you can recognize the right people, the blessed people, the faith people, the kingdom connections He has for you. I'm also praying for you to start discerning the wrong people. When Jonah went down to Tarshish, disobeying God's will, the ship he was in ran into a storm and nearly sank. Jonah 1:5 says, "The mariners were afraid." Have you ever stopped to consider that there were more people in the boat getting ready to lose their lives besides Jonah? One man was about to take down a whole shipload of people because of his disobedience.

There is a very important lesson here. Sometimes you have to realize you're not the problem. The problem is the people with whom you're associating. The mariner's boat was rocking

and reeling, so everyone on board was afraid for their lives. And it wasn't their fault. They were in a storm because they were hanging out with the wrong person—Jonah.

While the boat was about to sink and the mariners were casting off supplies to lighten its load, verse 5 says that Jonah was down in the bow of the boat fast asleep. Isn't that something? The mariners were crying out to God and casting things off the boat trying to stay alive, while Jonah, who was the problem, was down in the boat fast asleep.

Sometimes your life is rocking and reeling in the storm, but it's not because of something you've done. It's because of the people who have attached themselves to you! Finally, the mariners woke Jonah up from his sleep and asked him, "What shall we do unto you that the sea may be calm for us?" Jonah answered them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me" (Jon. 1:11-12). Now I have a problem with Jonah's request. He knew that he was the problem, so why would he ask them to cast him over? Why didn't he just jump off the boat? Why did he put it on them to throw him off?

Sometimes rebels try to make you feel bad. If you have a forty-five-year-old son who won't get a job, is still living at home eating your food, and is not paying rent, then it's time to throw Jonah off the boat! If you do, don't be surprised if he tries to make you feel guilty for doing the right thing. I can just hear him pitifully say, "You're right; I know I should do better. I'll just find somewhere else to stay. I guess I could sleep at the bus station."

Often we get into storms because we try to help people instead of putting them into God's hands. If the mariners had

not forced Jonah off the boat, he would have stayed on board until the whole boat perished. If you have people in your life who have a free ride, they're not going to voluntarily jump off the boat. If you have relatives or friends who can get you to pay their bills or give them money, do you think they're going to stop? If you have a husband who physically abuses you or has affairs on the side, and you allow it, then you are giving him a license to treat you like a dog.

The Bible says that before they threw Jonah off the boat, they tried rowing harder to bring the ship to land. Often we know who the problem is, but we're afraid to make a decision. So we just try harder to make a success out of sin. Finally someone on the boat decided to call a boat business meeting. They took a vote and decided to throw Jonah off the boat. I'm sure the mariners were sorry about all the ramifications of Jonah being thrown into the ocean, but they knew that if they didn't, they were not going to make it to the other side. The Bible continues, "They picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging" (Jon. 1:15). As soon as you get the wrong people out of your boat, your storm will cease. You will experience a great calm. Some of you need to throw some Jonahs off your boat!

If you throw a Jonah off your boat, then live with the decision you made. When they threw Jonah off, God had already prepared a fish to swallow him and take him to Nineveh, where he was to preach. When you allow the wrong people in your life, you are not helping them—you are keeping them from what God has prepared for them.

Ask God to reveal to you any Jonahs who are rocking your world, and pray for the courage to throw Jonah and all of his

baggage off your boat! Sometimes you have to do what is best for you. As soon as Jonah was off the boat, the mariners began to worship God (Jon. 1:16).

You see, you cannot worship God as you ought to as long as there are toxic relationships and turmoil all around you. Whatever is stealing your peace and rocking your boat, whatever is taking your smile away, just reach down, pick it up, and throw it overboard. Then do what the mariners did—start worshipping God.

Ask God for mentors. Sometimes mentors are tormentors, but if you want to know the secret of Joshua's success, it was in his relationship with Moses. Always standing in the shadows halfway up the mountains or outside of the tabernacle, there was Joshua hanging around Moses. If you want to know the secret to Elisha's success, it's found in his relationship with Elijah. He spent hours and hours learning from the wise old prophet. The apostle Paul speaks of Timothy, his son in the Lord (1 Tim. 1:2).

Timothy was an apostle at seventeen years of age. He was the youngest in the Bible. How did he succeed at such a young age? He literally sat at the feet of the great apostle Paul and caught his spirit. Jesus spent three and a half years of His life in ministry. Most of His time was not with the multitudes, but with twelve men into whom He poured His life and wisdom. He would speak in parables to the crowds of people, and they would leave with questions, but He would give answers to the disciples.

The twelve disciples became the building blocks of His church. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27:6). Mentors expose you to

new orbits of ministry, new habit patterns, and new stress levels. Ask the weightlifter or the track-and-field high jumper what a coach does for them. If you want to be the best, the mentor will keep raising the bar, asking for more effort, expecting more from you, and teaching you to expect more from yourself.

At times, you may think mentors are cruel and inconsiderate, but if you want to be a winner, their coaching can bring you to the top. It's a happy day when God gives you someone who loves you enough to put you under stress so you can be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ and reach your highest potential.

If you have spent your life picking all the wrong people, I have good news for you. God will bring the right people and close out the wrong people, but when He does, don't return to the wrong people. "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away" (John 15:2). That does not mean they're inferior and you're superior; it just means they don't belong in God's plan for your life.

God has a plan for them, but if they don't fit into your life and you insist on grafting them in, then God will have to do relationship surgery and graft them out. Beware of false brethren. It was only when the prodigal son failed that he realized what his older brother was made of. The father did not discuss the sins of the prodigal son. Guess who brought them up? It was the elder brother. The moment trouble struck, he pointed his finger and condemned the prodigal son and his father (Luke 15:11-32).

Joseph discovered false brethren never celebrate your dream. They think your gain is their loss. They think your

blessing is at their expense. Joseph's brothers threw him into a pit and sold him into slavery (Gen. 37:24). Pray for discernment—20/20 vision—to recognize the right people from the wrong people in your life.

Some people bless you when they come into your life, and some people bless you when they exit your life. There are many good people out there. To find them, make sure you use discernment and wisdom. If someone is destructive or producing bad fruit in your life, be careful. Keep looking, praying, and seeking until you find the right people who draw you closer to being the person God intended for you to be.

Chapter Eight

Discerning the Right Place

Over twelve years ago, God began to speak to me about the amazing discernment of women. I had a dream one Saturday night that was so vivid I will never forget it. I dreamed I was attending the funeral of a child. When I walked up to the little casket and looked in, I was devastated to see my three-year-old daughter lying lifeless in the coffin. Immediately, I woke up from the dream and awakened my wife. We both began to pray for our family. We wept as the strong presence of the Lord entered our bedroom.

Still shaken by this experience the next morning, I went to church to preach. I preached a sermon I titled “Cancel the Devil’s Assignment.” At the end of the message, I tearfully told the congregation about my dream. I explained how I believed God was warning me that Satan had targeted our children at a young age, but through the blood of Jesus Christ, we could cancel the devil’s assignment in their life. It was one of the most moving services I’d ever taken part in, as fathers and mothers began to cry out to God on behalf of their families.

Now this is where the story becomes almost unbelievable. Our family had planned to go on vacation to Disney World in Florida the next day. For some strange reason, my wife begged me to leave after the morning services ended. She kept on pleading with me, “Let’s go one day early so we can go to Sea World tomorrow.” Sea World hadn’t even been on our

itinerary, but I consented, and we arrived in Florida one day early.

The next morning, we took our two daughters to Sea World. It was a beautiful, sunny day as we waited for the ski show to begin in the uncovered, five-thousand-seat stadium. Out of nowhere, a huge, dark storm cloud emerged and covered the park. The wind picked up drastically. We heard a clap of thunder when, suddenly, right before our eyes, a streak of lightning hit the top of a nearby hotel, setting it on fire. Panic-stricken, five thousand people rushed up the steps of the stadium, seeking shelter from the storm. Total chaos ensued.

Cherise grabbed the diaper bag and accessories while I snatched one of the girls. Our youngest daughter walked up the steps herself. By the time we neared the top of the stadium, as thunder and lightning struck everywhere around us, both of our girls were hysterical. To be honest, so was I. Never before had I encountered anything like this. The strong winds triggered my mind to watch for a tornado. When we reached the top of the steps, it was so crowded that Cherise quickly turned to pick up our crying three-year-old.

But when Cherise reached for her, Caressa ran right past her to a total stranger standing nearby. The stranger, a twenty-six-year-old lady, reached down and picked up our daughter without hesitation. Caressa wrapped her arms around the young lady's neck and wouldn't let her go.

Of all our children, Caressa was by far the clingiest to her mother; she would never go into a stranger's arms. She always wanted her mother or me to hold her. She would not give people the time of day if she didn't know who they were.

Yet, as Cherise began to plead with her to come into her

arms, Caressa wouldn't even acknowledge Cherise or me. She just clung to the lady with all of her might. The lady began to cry—I'm not talking about a tear or two—I mean she was broken and weeping as she held our three-year-old.

Cherise turned to me and whispered, "Jentezen, do something. This lady is acting weird, and she has our child." I noticed the young lady's mother and father standing beside her, and saw that the mother was crying, too. Now we were totally confused.

My wife gently asked the young lady's mother, "Why is everyone crying?"

She responded, "You just don't understand. You just don't know. Your daughter is a little angel sent from God to us today."

As the storm started to recede, she began to explain.

"Two months ago, my daughter's three-year-old child died of congestive heart failure in the middle of the night. "This is the first time we have been able to get our daughter out of her bedroom because she has been so devastated with grief. She's been blaming God for taking her little girl."

The young woman continued to weep, holding our child tightly, as Caressa continued to cling to her. Cherise was moved to tears and so was I. As the crowd began to break up and return to their seats, many of them were staring at us, wondering what was going on.

I asked the young mother who was holding Caressa to listen to me. I said, "I'm a minister, and what I'm about to tell you is taped on video if you don't believe it. This past Saturday night, I had a dream. In the dream, God let me feel your grief. I saw my three year old in a coffin. I have never felt grief like that

in my life. I went to church the next day and told my congregation about seeing my child in a coffin. The reason we're here today at Sea World is because my wife decided she wanted to come one day early, and now I know why. God wanted you to know your precious daughter is with Him in heaven."

I went on to tell her that our three year old has never run into the arms of a complete stranger. "This is a sign from God to you of how much He loves you." I explained to her that she was like King David when he lost his son. "You must determine, even though you can't bring back your child, to go where your child is someday" (2 Sam. 12).

The whole family tearfully prayed with us. God's healing presence was so strong, we felt like we were standing on holy ground. While the young mother still held Caressa, our daughter began to play with a little pearl necklace around the mother's neck. The grieving mother had placed the same necklace around the neck of her child as she lay in her casket.

The young lady unhooked the necklace and snapped it around Caressa's neck to symbolize letting go of her little girl and placing her in God's loving hands.

The grandmother kept thanking us. "We've been so concerned for our daughter. We're believers. We attend an Assembly of God church. This has meant the world to us."

The young woman told us this experience had restored her faith in God. After we all cried and prayed, it was time to go our separate ways. When we tried to pry Caressa from her arms, she threw a fit because she wanted to stay with the young lady. To us, that was stranger than anything else.

My wife and I will never forget that family standing there

weeping as we walked away with Caressa reaching back towards that mother. Think of the measures to which God will go, just to tell us He loves us when we are hurting!

If we are hurting, He hurts, too. “For we have not a high priest who cannot be touched by the feelings of our infirmities.” Jesus allowed himself to be forsaken by God so He could say, “I know, I’ve been there.” God is moved by the things that distress us.

Suffering never leaves you where it finds you. You either become bitter or better. It turns you into a miserable complainer or conforms you into the image of Jesus Christ. God loved that young mother so much that He gave me a dream, rearranged our schedule, gave my wife discernment to insist on leaving early, and He even used my three-year-old daughter’s discernment to move her to the right place at the right time—the arms of a broken, hurting woman.

Think of it. Out of thousands of people in that stadium, God put us in the right place, at the right time.

One of God’s primary purposes for your life is proper placement. Being in the right place at the right time is an important key to discovering God’s will for your life. In Genesis 1, God created Adam; in Genesis 2, God planted a garden in Eden where He placed Adam.

What does this tell you about God and His will for your life?

1. God doesn’t leave you where He finds you.
2. God has a proper placement for you.

The owner of the first “placement service” in the world was God. Paul wrote, “God has set the members, each one of them,

in the body just as He pleased” (1 Cor. 12:18). God wants to take you from where He found you and give you a purpose, a mission, and a place.

God gave Adam a place of employment before He gave him a wife. If you're a single woman, you shouldn't consider marrying any man who doesn't have a job.

Proper placement profoundly affects your future in seven ways. Proper placement:

1. Releases supernatural provision in your life
2. Always provides protection

3. Demands the death of pride

4. Is often preceded by a season of discomfort
5. Releases the glory of God on your life
6. Prevents subjection to sinful situations and temptations you would encounter if improperly placed
7. Will solve many of life's problems

First Kings 17:2-4 describes supernatural provision: “Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.” During a famine, God gave Elijah a clear instruction, “Go to Cherith. I have commanded the ravens to

feed you ‘there.’” If Elijah had said, “Well, I don’t like it there, I’m going somewhere else,” then he would have starved to death.

God told Elijah if you move to the right place, supernatural supervision will show up. Divine supply follows divine placement. If Elijah had been any other place but the right place, the ravens would not have fed him. God holds your place of supernatural provision— God has a “there” for you!

Just about the time Elijah thought he had God all figured out, (perhaps he was even about to write a book called *How to Get the Ravens to Feed You and the Brook to Flow*) suddenly the brook dried up and the ravens stopped bringing food.

I once preached a sermon called, “What to Do When the Brook Goes Dry and the Birds Won’t Fly!” In it, I explained that the only reason God lets the brook dry up is because He wants to drive you back to your source. We are to seek God’s face, not His hand. We want a handout, but God wants a face-off.

Don’t get hung up on the method and forget God is your source. The brook wasn’t Elijah’s source; God was. We get married to a method or anchored to a memory, but we must be open to change. When the Holy Spirit wants to do a new thing, we have to get away from the old wineskins. God told Elijah to “Go to Zarephath... I have commanded a widow there to provide for you (1 Kings 17:9).

My wife has her own contracting company. She has such a great gift in this area that her talent has blessed us financially. I want to encourage every woman reading this to maximize your gifts and realize your financial possibilities. For example, the first home that my wife and I owned was one that she built.

We lived with our in-laws for four years while saving our money. We finally had enough money to buy a lot. Cherise found a lake lot in Gainesville, Georgia, and really felt that we needed to stretch our resources and try to purchase it. We bought the lot for \$50,000. We exhausted all the money that we had. We secured a \$130,000 loan for the home, and Cherise was responsible for building a beautiful home on the lake. We lived in it for a year and sold it for \$389,000.

The story gets better. She later found another lot on the lake in a beautiful neighborhood. This lot was a whopping \$180,000! That was almost all of our profit from the sale of our first home. I felt like the lot was too costly, and that we would “never” get our money out of it. Still her amazing financial discernment caused her persistence. She said, “I can build a home on this lot and make a fortune.” Thankfully, I listened to her. The lot alone is valued today at over one million dollars.

Through the years, my wife has had an uncanny ability to make wise financial investments in the area of real estate. Regretfully I did not always listen to her. Consequently we’ve missed some incredible financial blessings. I’ve learned that one of my wife’s strong points is in business, so I’m glad to take a back seat to her in this area.

A strong woman frightens only weak and insecure men. Women who have strong qualities of leadership in business and in other areas do themselves a disservice if they try to hide their strengths out of fear of frightening away men. Women should not hide their strengths in an effort to be accepted by men.

Many weak men want women who appear to be less intelligent and less confident because of their own insecurities.

Many women hide their strengths for fear that they will put off potential dates or opportunities for marriage. Many women disguise the very qualities that might make them attractive to strong, confident, godly men.

Discern the place of blessing for your life. If God says, "I'll bless you 'there,' " and you insist on staying "here," then you're going to miss His provision. Elijah told Elisha, "If you are with me when I'm taken up, you will get the double portion blessing." Everything was dependent upon Elisha being in the right location.

Ruth represents the growing number of women who are forced into the workforce. When Ruth was looking for the right place of employment, she prayed for discernment to find the right job where she would have favor with her employer (Ruth 2:2.) She prayed for proper placement. "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor."

You don't want to work in just any field. Pray for discernment that will lead you into an occupational field where you have favor. The place God has for you will be a place of influence, favor, and prosperity.

Sometimes, the place God sends you won't appear to be a place of blessing. When Ruth found the right field in which to work, she labored in only a small corner of it. Later, she was promoted from working in that insignificant corner to owning the whole field! But you see, her promotion was contingent upon finding the right place of employment.

Are you in the right place, or are you leaning on an old plow, afraid to let go? A double portion begins with the breaking of an old plow. Church denominations are old plows. People are

changing churches in order to attend a place of anointing, regardless of the denominational affiliation.

In 2 Chronicles 7:12, God said, “I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice.” Oh, the potential of a chosen place. If you are in such a place, don’t leave it. If you are not, don’t stay another day. In Exodus 33:21, God says, “Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock.” There is a place reserved for you by God. If you will move there, God will supernaturally provide all you need to do His will.

Proper placement will always provide protection. Don’t worry if your supply begins to dry up—you’re protected if you’re in the proper place.

When you stay out of the wrong places, you protect your integrity. A wrong place is a place where you know your Christian walk is compromised. Any place that Christ himself would not go is the wrong environment. A good rule to follow is, “If Christ wouldn’t, you shouldn’t!”

In the cool of the day, Adam and Eve would walk with God in the Garden of Eden. When they were together, Satan would never show up.

Satan attacked Eve when she was absent from God’s presence. As long as Peter stayed near Jesus’ side, he was strong in faith; but when he was alone—absent from the presence of Jesus—he warmed his hands by the wrong fire and denied Christ three times (John 18:25).

There is protection in His presence. Don’t stray too far from the body of Christ, which is the church, or you’ll become easy prey for the enemy.

Proper placement demands the death of pride. This is a

tough one! Pride is one of the main obstacles blocking your move to the right place. “Well, I’m not going to work there. I’m better than they are.”

God resists the proud. According to Leviticus 11:13-15, God considers ravens to be unclean birds. Occasionally, He will use dirty birds to bless His people. Sometimes, when God cannot get Christians to do what He wants, He uses unsaved people.

Elijah was a great and mighty man of God. He was a big strong hairy-legged prophet who killed 450 prophets of Baal and called down fire from heaven, but now God was instructing him to go to a widow. “I have commanded a widow there to provide for you” (1 Kings 17:9). He was to go and receive food from a widow. This would have been a perfect time for pride to swell within him. Elijah could have let pride take hold and refused her. He could have said, “I’m not going to listen to that woman,” but he didn’t allow pride to keep him from the right place.

Men could learn a lot from their wives, but pride won’t let them say, “I was wrong, you were right.” Proper placement demands the death of personal pride.

Proper placement is often preceded by a season of discomfort. Until your misery factor exceeds your fear factor, you won’t change. We prize security. When a mother eagle wants her eaglets to learn how to fly, she begins to tear up the nest. She removes the animal fur to expose the briars and thorns. Suddenly, the nest isn’t a comfortable place anymore, so the eaglets swiftly desire to stretch their wings and learn to soar.

You’ll never fly if you’re too comfortable. What you are willing to tolerate, you will never change. God has a way of

making us move out. It's called discomfort.

Proper placement releases the glory of God on your life. In the Book of Exodus, God told Moses how to construct the tabernacle. He gave him specific dimensions and colors, and even furniture placement. "See, you build the tabernacle according to the pattern that I give you." In Exodus 40:34, "The cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." In 2 Chronicles 7:1, after Solomon completed the temple and all the furniture was properly placed, the glory of God filled the temple.

The right place, the right location, and the right job release the glory of God upon our lives. Get in the right place, and God's glory will be your reward.

Improper placement will subject you to sinful situations and temptations. The first words God spoke to Adam after he sinned referred to Adam's location (Gen. 3:8). God asked Adam, "Where are you?" Adam's sin drove him out of the place specially prepared for him.

Lot, who was a friend of God, left Abraham and moved to Sodom and Gomorrah. What was he doing living in Sodom? Lot saw an opportunity to get rich, but in the process he lost his wife because he wasn't where he was supposed to be.

Proper placement will solve many of life's problems. If you live in the right city, go to the right church, find the right job, hang out with the right people, and marry the right husband, most potential problems will be averted.

How do you move to the right place? Repent, pray, and expect divine guidance.

1. Repent; stop doing your own thing.

Psalm 92:13 says, “Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.” Don’t be a tumbleweed Christian, just floating around. Tumbleweed Christians are fruitless and rootless, blowing in and out of churches. Get rooted and grounded in the right church. The prodigal son was in the wrong place, living in a pigpen, when he came to his senses: “I will arise and go to my father’s house.” He was saying, “I’m leaving the wrong place and going back to the right place.”

2. Pray for God’s timing and God’s place.

Acts 17:26 says, “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.” This Scripture says God assigns a place for you and a set time to be there.

3. Expect divine guidance.

Missing God’s will produces severe consequences. You are safer fighting in a war in the will of God than playing in Disneyland out of the will of God.

It has been said, “if God closes one door, He will open another one.” That is true, but it’s hell in the hallway. When God closes one door and you’re standing in the hallway waiting for the next door to open, expect divine guidance. The Lord orders the steps and stops of a righteous person.

The voice of discernment God has put inside you will lead you to the right places where you will make Kingdom Connections, (the right people, at the right place, at the right time). Listen to the inner voice of discernment to release supernatural provision into your life and the lives of those you meet.

The words of the song “Daystar” say it all: “Lead me, Lord. I’ll follow anywhere You open up the door. Let Your words speak to me, show me what I’ve never seen before. Lord, I want to be a witness— You can take what’s wrong and make it right. Daystar, shine down on me, let Your love shine through me in the night.”

Somebody is in his or her dark night. They need you to be sensitive enough to be led to the right place, so God can shine His love into their darkness.

Chapter Nine

Discerning the Right Plan

One idea from God can change your life. Thomas Edison had one idea, and today we have electric light. The Wright brothers had one idea, and now we have aviation. Betty Crocker had one idea, and we have been fighting the battle of the bulge ever since! There are “good ideas” and there are “God ideas.” The Holy Spirit wants you to discern the difference between the two.

You may need a miracle for your family or your life. When you ask God for a miracle, He will always give you a set of instructions, a plan. When Joshua needed a miracle of conquest, God gave him a plan.

Joshua 6:3-5 says, “You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him.” God’s plan brought the walls of Jericho down.

When Naaman asked God for a miracle of healing, God gave him a plan. He said, “Go dip seven times in the Jordan River.” That simple set of instructions from God brought a miraculous

healing to Naaman's body (2 Kings 5:14).

At the wedding in Cana when Mary asked Jesus for a miracle of provision, Jesus gave her a plan. He said, "Get six water pots full of water." The servants set the water pots before Jesus. The water blushed in the presence of its creator, turning from water into wine (John 2:8-10). When you ask God for a miracle, He always connects your miracle to a miracle plan.

Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." God made you for a purpose. When you don't know why something is made, you can abuse it. Don't ask the creation what its purpose is; ask its Creator. Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

When you were created, God encoded you for an assignment, and He gave you the power to get it done. The Bible teaches, from the time a child is born God has an assignment for the child's life. Every battle experience is waged over that assignment. The enemy's job is to try and pull us out of the will of God. Jeremiah was given his assignment before he was in his mother's womb (Jer. 1:5).

In Luke 1:13, Elizabeth and Zacharias were told by the angel of God they would have a son. They were given his name and his assignment before Elizabeth was pregnant with John the Baptist.

Josiah was eight years old when he became king of Israel. His name, his birth, and his assignment were prophesied 374 years before he was ever born! (1 Kings 13).

To reach your destiny, get there by discerning those

transitional moments when God sends you His roadmap leading to your purpose.

Every assignment has a birthplace. The church I pastor, Free Chapel, has been in existence for over fifty years. The former pastor, Roy Wellborn, scheduled me to come preach a revival every year when I was a full-time evangelist. The last year I preached for Pastor Wellborn, he scheduled me to come nine months in advance. He became ill a few weeks before our date and was hospitalized. The exact week he had scheduled me to come, nine months before, was the week he passed away. He died on Friday night, and I was to preach two days later on Sunday.

The congregation loved Pastor Wellborn very much. They were devastated that their only pastor was gone. You can imagine how inadequate I felt standing in the pulpit that Sunday morning, where this beloved man had stood for over thirty years. As soon as the morning service ended, they rolled the coffin in and held Pastor Wellborn's memorial service.

That day, as I preached to the congregation of Free Chapel, I didn't know I was there by the divine plan of Almighty God. When Pastor Wellborn scheduled me to preach in his church, he had no idea he would be in heaven that very week, or that God had chosen me as his replacement.

God really does have a marvelous plan for our lives. Pray for special insight into His plans. You will discover that the "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

God's plan for your life will often come through unexpected events that force you in a direction you never would have

gone. Esther experienced the providential leading of God that gave her assignment a “birthplace.”

The book of Esther opens with a wild seven-day party in the king’s palace. King Ahasuerus asked all of his council of warlords to join him on his next military expedition. He was hungry for power. In order to sell his idea, he decided to wine and dine his warlords for seven days. At the end of seven days of partying, the epitome of the seduction was flaunting the best-looking women in the king’s harem in dance.

These shapely, beautiful women danced before the drunken warlords. One swing of the hips and every one of the military generals was ready to follow the king wherever he led them into battle. As the icing on the cake, the custom was to bring the queen out to dance scantily clad to close the deal. There was nothing unusual about the king asking her to dance. What was unusual was for her to refuse.

When the king extended the invitation for his gorgeous Queen Vashti to dance, she turned him down. She snubbed the king because she was enjoying her own party with the warlords’ wives in the east wing of the palace. It was “girls’ night out,” and they did not want to be interrupted. Who knows, they might have brought in a few male dancers for their own entertainment.

When Queen Vashti failed to appear, the warlords exclaimed, “When the women hear it, they’ll start treating their husbands with contempt. The day the wives of the Persian and Mede officials get wind of the queen’s insolence, they’ll be out of control. Is that what we want, a country of angry women who don’t know their place?” (Esther 1:17-18, MSG). Greatly embarrassed, King Ahasuerus decided to get rid of his queen.

Suddenly, here was a king without a queen. In order to help find a new queen, the palace announced a national beauty contest. As a result, 127 women out of the provinces were selected for the king to consider. Esther, a young orphaned girl, was chosen as one of the 127.

Queen Vashti's attitude set the stage for the higher purpose of God. Sometimes, when doors close and things happen you can't explain, these paradoxical occurrences tell us somebody else is in charge besides us. Always remember God is still in it, no matter how embarrassing or humiliating the situation becomes.

As Christians, we don't believe things happen by chance; instead, we believe God has a plan for our lives. It's interesting how God seems to always go after people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Esther was an orphan, but God has a habit of picking up nobodies and making them somebodies.

He is forever searching written-off neighborhoods and finding greatness. The people to whom we wouldn't give the time of day, He washes in His blood and makes into reflections of His glory.

God picked up the orphaned girl, Esther, and put her in the palace overnight. Her godly uncle, Mordecai, had raised her and groomed her for greatness. She knew she was special even if she didn't have pretty shoes and even though she lived in a little hut. Mordecai had taught her about her covenant relationship with God.

Many times, like Esther, we are oblivious to God's plan for our lives. She was looking for an ordinary life. She probably dreamed of having a traditional little Jewish family, leading an

ordinary life, not knowing she was meant for extraordinary things. I'm sure she dreamed of holding hands with her fiancé under the olive tree and planning her wedding ceremony. While she was planning everyday things, God was planning supernatural opportunities for her.

While we are so busy grabbing lesser things, ordinary things, mediocre things, God is planning extraordinary things for our future. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't reach for the stars. Even if you don't get there today, you possess the possibility that, maybe tomorrow, you will make it. "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Esther was groomed psychologically and spiritually to become great. God always sets a mentor alongside to give insight, wisdom, and direction. Esther had her Mordecai, Ruth had her Naomi, and Mary had her Elizabeth. Timothy had the faith of his mother and grandmother "When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded [that faith] is in you also" (2 Tim. 1:5). You could be your children's mentor. What you tell your children now gives them the basic ingredients that prepare them for unexpected greatness and unlimited opportunities.

A godly man laid the groundwork in Esther's childhood to prepare her for her life assignment. When the king selected his new queen, out of 127 women, he chose Esther.

You know how beauty contests are won. It's all about good looks and a good shape, but this contest was not based upon physical presentation alone. Many beautiful women were

entered in this contest. How many hips, bust lines, and nice curves can you look at? All these women had nice curves, olive skin, beautiful hair, and gorgeous teeth. This choice was not based on shape.

If the purpose of God were solely based on the physical, many of us would not qualify. The purpose of God is not based upon your maintenance of a certain physical shape or beauty. You have a higher purpose than the *Vogue* magazine fashion pages. You have a higher purpose than the sale at the mall or the new perfume out on the market. God created you for something more marvelous. After a while, those kinds of things run thin and lose their thrill.

God must have had a higher purpose for young Esther in the palace other than being the king's contest winner. Before this young girl was selected from her province to enter the contest, she didn't know proper protocol: she hadn't been taught formal table manners; she didn't know how to curtsy; she didn't know the right clothes to wear; she didn't display manners befitting royalty. Yet, God picked up this ignorant, orphan girl fresh from the hills. Today, she would be called a country bumpkin.

Like Cinderella, overnight, Esther entered the palace. As William Cowper famously wrote in his hymn, "God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform." Sometimes our lives look backward, but I assure you, He's in our lives. Perhaps your life makes no sense right now, but hang in there because there's a chapter coming in your life that will bring it all together. Wait until you read the end of the chapter; don't get stuck on one page of the book.

The king chose Esther, not because she was Jewish or

because he had a spiritual revelation. He was using his senses, but he didn't know God was guiding his eyes.

God can use people who aren't spiritual. Have you ever had someone say to you, "I don't know why I'm doing this for you; I don't know why I'm breaking the rules for you?" They're telling the truth—they don't know why they're helping you. They can't intelligently explain why they want to help you. God will even use your enemies to make a way for you when you're in His will. Proverbs 16:7 says, "When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

Esther went to the palace, the king chose her, and then she had to go through the purification process. Along with the call of God comes "the process." We like to be called out and chosen by God, but for every calling there is a discipline.

First, Esther had to soak in oil for six months. Oil in the Bible typifies the Holy Spirit. I'm sure her feet were calloused from walking barefoot in the hills and mountains. She had to be oiled down in order to smooth the skin between her toes and the soles of her feet. Before God can use you, He has to dunk you in the Holy Spirit to take away the rough places in your life.

Only the Holy Spirit can make you fit for a king. Like Esther soaking in oil, you have to become familiar with the Holy Spirit. This woman was going to determine the fate of her nation. She had to be anointed. She was affecting future generations. Queen Vashti was an independent woman concerned with doing her own thing, but Esther understood it was not about her thing, it was about doing God's thing.

By soaking in oil every day for six months, Esther represents a woman of God being very spiritual and familiar with the Holy

Spirit. Don't think you're a freak because you're spiritually sensitive. You're not only a person who has a mind and a body, but you also have a spirit. Therefore you're spiritual, not just cute. You can wear a beautiful dress and makeup, but still have Holy Ghost anointing underneath. Don't be ashamed of your spirituality. This young woman had to be oiled as part of the process to prepare her for the king.

Secondly, she had to be perfumed. You know what perfume does. It makes you smell nice; it draws people to you. Sometimes people will ask, "What's that perfume you're wearing?" Perfume can attract people to you so much that they want to get close to you. Incense in the Bible represents our praise to God. There was an altar of incense in the Old Testament tabernacle. When the priest poured the perfume on the hot coals of the Altar of Incense, the scent would go up to heaven. The Bible says that God received the incense offering as a sweet-smelling savor of praise (Lev. 2:2). Of course, under the new covenant, we don't have to sprinkle incense on a fire. All we have to do is open up our mouths with praise and give God the fruit of our lips, which is the fragrance of praise in His nostrils (Heb. 13:15).

When we praise God verbally, it's like spraying Giorgio or Calvin Klein fragrances; it goes up to heaven and creates an aroma that gets God's attention. Praise is more than making a noise. When you say thank you to God, it's like bringing Him expensive perfume. When you praise Him, you invite the presence of God, the calm of God, and the serenity of God into your life.

Praise is called the oil of myrrh. Remember the wise men who came to Bethlehem when Jesus was born? They brought

frankincense and myrrh, which connote praise and adoration. Learn to be a worshiper.

Esther's scent reached the king before she did. The reason the king extended his scepter to Esther was that she filled the throne room with her perfume of praise before she was given access into the king's presence. We, too, come into God's presence first by the perfume of our praise.

No wonder the ultimate worshiper, the psalmist David, said, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name" (Ps. 100:4). Esther was chosen, groomed, oiled, and perfumed.

When you praise, you get a sense of what God wants you to do. In praise, prophecy comes; in praise, direction comes; in praise, you receive God's plan for your life.

I'm sure that after six months of bubble baths, oil massages, pedicures, manicures, pampering, the opulence of the palace, and the luxurious lifestyle Esther was afforded, she began to dull a little spiritually. If you are not careful, then you will become so pampered and comfortable spiritually that you will forget there is a godly reason for being where you are. This is no time to get comfortable! There is still a plot to annihilate our children, our homes, our marriages, and our nation.

You are a woman of purpose. You have a call of God upon your life; you have an appointment with destiny. When Esther got comfortable and almost forgot her purpose, Mordecai put on sackcloth. Sackcloth is ugly-looking clothing. He got ugly. Every now and then, we have to get ugly to get God's attention. We have to afflict ourselves with fasting and prayer.

Sometimes the crisis demands that you take off your makeup, fancy hats, and high heels—it's time to get ugly over

somebody's son or daughter on drugs. It's time to get ugly over somebody's husband or marriage that's in trouble.

Mordecai reminded Esther that she was not just there to look cute and to wear beautiful dresses. This was not just a Cinderella story where you close the book and they live happily ever after. No, there was a mission! "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13-14).

Don't forget your purpose. To all of you Esthers out there, there is a plot to destroy your family. You need to come out of your bubble bath. I know you like being pampered, but tell the masseuse to back off right now; you have a battle to fight and a victory to win. There is a cause!

Esther got the message from Mordecai, and she sent word back: "I was a little foggy for a while. I went on a fantasy trip, but I'm back on course. I might perish if I make this move, but I've made a decision about my purpose. I know what God has called me to do, and I've got to make this move." Esther preserved her race.

No more sitting in a church like a fashion model. It is time for you to make your move. Mordecai told Esther, "You have come to the kingdom for such a time as this." It's all about timing. Maybe two years ago you could afford to play God games, but now it's your time. Don't forget your purpose. It's time to sell out. Move out and do it—submit to God's will. Be anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit, be perfumed with passionate

praise for God. You have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. Jesus prayed, “Not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Pray and expect God to give you the right plan for your life.

Stay open to divine interruptions; when God does a new thing it’s not like the old thing. Lot’s wife only appears one time in Scripture. Why did Jesus tell us to remember her (Luke 17:32)? It was because she refused to break up with her past. She turned into a lifeless monument. Stop rehearsing your beginning, and write the rest of your story. In Isaiah, God even tells His prophet, “I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth.” (Isa. 43:19). If you’re afraid of the future, check your past. He has never failed you.

Chapter Ten

De-Masking the Marriage Assassins

On different occasions through the years, my wife has sensed a vibe from someone who was up to no good. Sometimes she would feel uneasy about certain women who kept trying to get close to me. Sometimes she would feel uncomfortable around men who she sensed were trying to make sexual advances toward her or one of our girls. Almost every time she would be right. I usually would be the last one to see it, sometimes to the point of defending those people. I've learned through the years when my wife whispers, "watch that one," I better heed the warning.

In Genesis 21:10, Sarah sensed a threat to her marriage when she told Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son," speaking of Hagar. It is interesting that God said to Abraham, "Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice." Just as Sarah felt unrest about another woman being around her husband, the Holy Spirit will warn you about the improper intentions of a seducer. You must be able to discern when you're being set up for moral failure or when you're being targeted by marriage assassins.

According to Dr. Tim Clinton, President of the American Association of Christian Counselors, sixty-seven percent of all women will experience at least one or more premarital or extramarital affairs in their lifetimes. Some experts believe this percentage is much higher. Why are so many women

struggling with extramarital affairs? Many women are tempted because their husbands do not meet their emotional needs. Do you have a difficult time responding to your husband's sexual advances because you feel he should meet your emotional needs first?

In the same way men crave physical intimacy, women crave emotional intimacy. Consequently, just as men are vulnerable to unfaithfulness in the absence of sex, so women are vulnerable to unfaithfulness in the absence of emotional connection.

Men give love to get sex; women give sex to get love. A woman's emotional needs are just as important to her as a man's sexual needs are to him. That's why guys are stimulated by what they see and why women are stimulated by what they hear. Think of the word *intimacy* as "into me see." It is both physical and emotional.

Nobody would have an affair if he or she could see where it would ultimately lead. 1 Kings 14:6 records the prophet of God asking Jeroboam's wife, "Why do you pretend to be another person?" Sin will always wear a pretty coat. To Adam, sin cloaked itself in the sweetness of the fruit. To Judas, sin disguised itself as financial security. To David, sin wrapped itself in the body of the beautiful woman, Bathsheba.

We must strip away the deceptive disguise in which sexual immorality cloaks itself. Bathsheba enticed David as he watched her bathe, but he could not see beyond the steamy sexual affair to adultery's devastating effect: his baby died, one of his sons raped his daughter, and one son killed another son. Adultery brings pain, grief, and sorrow and always disguises itself as sexually exciting and titillating.

Samson, if only he could have stripped away the beauty of Delilah, just beyond her disguise, he would have seen what sin never wants to show. You know how Samson's story ends: this strong man became a prisoner of the Philistines who blinded him, bound him in jail, and made him work like a common ox. Samson learned that sin has a blinding effect (he lost his vision), a binding effect (he lost his freedom), and a grinding effect. Every day he felt his life grinding away in misery.

Blinding, binding, and grinding, what a despairing picture of a man who was once a strong man of God. Chalk him up as another victim fallen prey to lust.

Sexual sin only shows you the excitement and immediate gratification it can offer you. It never shows you the brokenhearted children of divorce. It never shows you the sexually transmitted diseases that ravage the body. Satan only shows you the prodigal son's hotel suite, never his pigpen. He only shows you Judas's money bag, never the gallows from which he hung himself. Satan only shows you his entrance, never the exit.

In 1 Kings 14, the queen went to see the prophet Ahijah in disguise, but the man of God recognized her immediately... and the evil she and her husband had done. It takes discernment to recognize sin for what it really is.

Sin never comes and says, "Here's what I really am." Sin must constantly change its wardrobe so it won't be recognized. Deception is Satan's number one weapon, and discernment must be our number one defense. Satan is a master of disguise.

When the apostle Paul was converted, he was traveling on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:6). Before God's will may be

accomplished in our marriages, God has to get us on the road to “de-mask-us.” Often we are wearing religious masks to church, but beneath the religious façade, serious marital problems loom that must be revealed and healed.

Let’s strip off the disguise and de-mask twelve marriage assassins targeting your marriage.

Marriage Assassin #1: A long marriage is a secure marriage.

That’s like saying, “Just because you lived a long time, you’re physically healthy right now.” Not necessarily. You can develop false security, thinking that because you’ve been married for many years, your marriage is safe. However, there is an increasing ratio of divorce among people married twenty-five years or more.

After many years of the wife chasing the children and of the husband chasing his career, with both of them going in opposite directions, they find themselves having nothing in common but the children. However, once the children go off to college or go out on their own, they discover they are strangers. The common ground they once shared is gone.

The sad thing about divorce is that you separate before you divorce. Years before the actual divorce, silent erosion, like sands on a seashore, dissipates and slowly washes away the love. Your marriage can experience erosion through the years.

Anything you do not feed will die. To maintain a marriage there must be “maintenance” of the marriage. Often church people live under the illusion that divorce can’t happen to them. As they spend less and less time with each other, the marriage spark extinguishes. It is foolish to think that as long as you come home every night and occasionally have sexual relations with your mate, you have a good marriage.

Lazarus didn't just suddenly die. First he got sick, and then he died. Likewise, destruction in a marriage follows a progression. A weak marriage becomes a sick marriage; a sick marriage left unattended will die. Don't wait until your marriage dies. Heed the warning signs. It's too late to call a lifeguard after someone has already drowned.

Do you want a good marriage? Pay attention to it. Now is the time to rescue your marriage.

Marriage Assassin #2: Selfishness and a preoccupation with You.

Some time ago, I was traveling with my wife and three oldest daughters. It was getting late, and I was ready to get home. My wife asked me to stop at a store and get her a Coke to drink. Any other time, I would have been glad to accommodate her, but the store was on the other side of the highway, it was late, and I was tired. Besides, we were only a few miles from the house, and there was plenty to drink there. I decided to drive right past the store. You could have cut the atmosphere with a knife. Cherise didn't speak another word to me the rest of the ride home.

The girls wisely sat silent in the backseat. As I got out of the car at home, I heard an ice-cold voice say, "Leave the keys in the car." As we got out, my wife burned rubber going out of the driveway. (She really wanted a Coke!) I learned a great lesson over the next three or four days from getting the cold treatment. If she wants a Coke, buy her that Coke! As a matter of fact, I'm thinking about buying stock in Coca-Cola. Marriage requires us to put the other person first constantly. The job description for a husband is found in Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the

church and gave Himself for her.” It can be summed up in one word—*sacrifice*. The job description of a wife is found in Ephesians 5:22: “Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.” It can be summed up in one word also—*submit*, which means “to show honor.” We need to get ourselves in gear and start sacrificing and submitting one to another.

It’s all about you. Everything is about what you have to have and what you’re not getting out of the relationship. Nobody gets divorced worrying about what his or her spouse needs. Remember the word sin has an “I” right in the middle of it. Beware of the “me, myself, and I” spirit.

Marriage Assassin #3: Immaturity.

I am seven years older than my wife. I told her that I wanted to marry someone who could push my wheelchair very fast when I get old! The age difference presented some challenges early in our marriage. Cherise was just eighteen years old when I married her. She thought being married to an evangelist would mean that she would live a carefree life traveling from city to city. She envisioned having fun sightseeing all day and dressing up at night for church. It sounds like fun, doesn’t it? After about three months of almost non-stop travel and going to church almost every night, she was about to go stir crazy. She was sick of living in hotel rooms.

I remember that it all came to a head in Washington, D.C. I was preaching a revival at a church, and she informed me that she was bored and getting tired of going to church all the time. She said that she wanted to go home to her mother. After a heated discussion, she left the room. That’s right; I married the first runaway bride. I searched everywhere in the hotel for her for hours. I called her mother, and we were both in tears

worrying about her. It was getting close to church time, and I was about to have a nervous breakdown. I didn't know if something had happened to her, or if she had been kidnapped. Where was she? She had gone into the gift shop at the hotel and bought some magazines to read. Then she went into the laundry room of the hotel to hide from me—just to be mean.

As you can imagine, by the time that I got to church that night, I was a wreck. Cherise still laughs about how I requested prayer from the congregation because, “I had been fighting the devil all day long!”

We worked through our problems. I learned to take time off, and she learned that life is not always a bed of roses. We both grew up eventually. (Sort of.) However, I still occasionally feel like “I’m fighting the devil all day long,” if you catch my drift. Pray, saints, pray! Looking back, it had to be hard on my eighteen-year-old wife to try to be so mature when she was so young.

Immaturity is when somebody in the marriage refuses to grow up. In 1 Corinthians 13:11, Paul said, “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” There comes a time when temper tantrums and pouting must cease.

Marriage Assassin #4: Manipulation.

Manipulation in marriage occurs when you think you are so wonderful, and the only reason you married your mate was to straighten out him or her. Deep down inside you think you need to change your mate into the person you want. You're trying to make your mate just like you, and half the time you don't even like you! Before you were married, you celebrated your individuality.

In a loving marriage relationship, sometimes you do things because your partner wants to do them. You go places because your partner wants to go. You enjoy certain things just because they enjoy them. But not so in the manipulative marriage relationship. One partner tries to change the other into what she wants him to be, instead of what God made him to be.

Marriage Assassin #5: Lack of Commitment.

Your mate needs to know, regardless of what happens, you will not leave him. Maybe at the marriage altar you said your vows to a 32-inch waist, but now he's a 44-inch waist. Maybe he married a size 8, but now he's married to a size 18. Marriage is a commitment regardless of the changes relationships—or the people in them—undergo. Remember the words, “for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.”

I heard the story of a university president in South Carolina whose wife became ill with Alzheimer's. Every day this man would sit by her bedside and read stories to her. Eventually, he decided to resign his prestigious position at the university in order to spend more time with her. Upon his resignation, one of the board members asked him why he was resigning, saying, “Your wife doesn't even know who you are.” His response was a classic: “Fifty years ago, I made a commitment to her, and though she may not know who I am, I know who she is.”

In an uncommitted society, one of the keys to happiness is costly commitment.

Marriage Assassin #6: Promiscuity.

We live in a sex-driven society. Everywhere you look the media is pushing sex. Modern technology has opened vast avenues of opportunities for someone looking for companionship, understanding, or sex. Pornography, cybersex,

webcams, and chat rooms have drawn millions into their clutches by giving the illusion that they are offering exactly what you're missing.

Marriage cannot compete with affairs, or with the fantasy of the Internet. In an affair, you get only the best of the person. You only see them when they are dressed up with their makeup on, so to speak. You do not wash their underwear; you just get to take them on and off. But when you get married, you discover marriage breathes in and out and has its ups and downs.

There are three levels of love in every marriage. There is hot love, warm love, and cold love.

Hot love: The sex is great. It's wild, great, fun, and free! Your marriage can't operate at the hot love level all the time.

Warm Love: You've been married a while, and you've delivered a few kids. You're running all over the place taking care of the kids, and he's working late trying to build his career. Consequently, you're both tired and busy, so naturally things begin to cool in the relationship.

Cold love: A season of little sex. Sometimes it is from friction in the marriage, sometimes it is because of physical illness, but cold love is the most important love because it's covenant love. It's love that is committed to each other no matter what. All marriages have all three temperatures. The reason cold love is the most significant is because when you have cold love, the other two temperatures always come back. A marriage moves from hot love to warm love to cold love, but if you are committed to each other it will not always stay cold. It will once again go back to the hot love you have once known.

Marriage Assassin # 7: Stress.

When both the husband and wife are working and have no time for each other, the stress can assassinate the marriage. I recommend a date night once a week, where you and your spouse get away from everybody and everything just to spend time together. Maybe going out to dinner and watching a movie is an idea you would enjoy with your mate.

At times, your mate may be so burned out from stress that you have to pull him out of the fire. You may revive the enjoyable person who has been hiding inside of your mate when you escort him away for an evening of relaxation and romance.

Marriage Assassin #8: Economic Pressure.

Arguing about money can destroy your marriage. The thing that brought you together didn't have anything to do with money. When you were first married, life was all about being together. It's so easy to lose sight of that.

For many marriages, I highly recommended plastic surgery. That's when you cut up those plastic credit cards that are charging you 18 percent interest. Put yourself on a budget. Don't try to keep up with the Joneses, because by the time you've finally caught up, they will have refinanced!

Marriage Assassin #9: Outside Interference.

Don't allow your mother or his mother, your ex-husband or your best friend, his children or your children, associates on the job or third parties to come between you and your mate. The Bible says to leave and cleave. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Matt. 19:5).

Psalm 1:1 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly." Never allow ungodly people to

counsel you about your marriage. Beware of outside interference.

Marriage Assassin #10: Unforgiveness.

In a marriage, a spirit of forgiveness must operate continually. Every time you get in an argument, are you the kind of person who reaches back and brings up old dirt? If you are, then you are sabotaging your marriage.

You can't change stuff in the past, so admit it, quit it, and forget it. All you have is a future, so build on your future together.

Be quick to forgive. You may say, "But they haven't asked me to forgive them yet." Jesus forgave on the cross before His murderers asked. He prayed, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Marriage Assassin #11: Comparing.

Constantly comparing your husband to other men is very unhealthy for your relationship. "I wish my husband looked that good." "My husband just doesn't meet my emotional needs like her husband does." "I wish my husband would go to church on Sunday like hers does."

Before you know it, you are convinced that the grass must be greener on the other side. Comparing your husband to other men can lead to fantasies about being with other men.

Let's face it. There will always be better looking, smarter, and more successful men than your husband—just as there will always be prettier, thinner, and smarter women than you. Second Corinthians 10:12 says, "They, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."

Do you fantasize about being intimate with someone other

than your husband? Do you converse with strangers in Internet chat rooms?

“What does it hurt if I fantasize about someone other than my husband?”

Just as you would be offended if your husband’s eyes wandered when a beautiful woman walked by in short shorts, men have a right to be offended with wives who have wandering minds. It is okay to fantasize if the fantasy is restricted to your marriage partner; otherwise, fantasizing is mental and emotional unfaithfulness.

Marriage Assassin #12: The Wrong Environment.

Many times when people fall morally it’s because they allowed themselves to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Second Samuel 11:1-2 says, “At the time when kings go out to battle. . . David remained at Jerusalem. . . and walked on the roof of the king’s house.” This Scripture describes when David saw Bathsheba bathing. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was on the ledge of lust. You have to be able to discern when you are on the ledge and edge of lust. It’s dangerous to be alone in the wrong place with the wrong person.

Avoid “bedroom settings.” You have the chemistry for anything to happen; I don’t care how spiritual you are. Married or single, the key is to not put yourself in situations where you have no business being.

A blind man will always be at an advantage in a dark room. Why? It is because you are on his turf. If a blind man wants to beat you up, all he has to do is turn the lights off. Satan is the prince of darkness, so he tries to entice you into the darkness where he has the advantage. Stay off his turf!

Remember: Sexual sin always disguises itself at first. It may begin with an emotional bond or friendship with someone of the opposite sex. As it progresses, a mental stronghold of lust will develop. Before you know it, every morning when you get dressed you choose your attire based on trying to be attractive to him.

This is dangerous on many levels and can work against you in your employment as well as your marriage. In the workplace, be careful. It is wise to keep doors open in the office when you are meeting with people of the opposite sex. Even a casual hug can lead to misunderstandings. If you are married, you should never ride in the car alone or go to lunch alone with someone of the opposite sex. The devil does not have the authority to tempt you above what you are able to bear, but if you get in the wrong setting, the need to connect intimately with someone will take over. You should save your affection for your husband, girlfriends, and immediate family only.

Decide what your principles are before you ever get into a tempting situation. Build your “hedge” before circumstances go awry (see Job 1:10). That way, when the temptation comes, you have already made the decision. If you have to wait until a crisis comes to make up your mind about how you’ll behave, you will be too late. If a voice on the inside says, “Something is not right about this setting,” listen to it. When confronted with a tempting situation, be like Joseph in Genesis 39:15—run!

Today, a happy home, a good marriage, and a loving family are endangered species. There are fewer and fewer traditional families. The divorce rates continue to rise, and the number of unmarried couples cohabitating keeps soaring. Sadly, when the family splits up, the chances of the children serving God are

diminished greatly.

The two greatest institutions on earth are the family and the church, which is why Satan targets them both. If the home is the number one priority of the devil and his marriage assassins, you better make it your number one priority!

I'm very concerned with the devaluing of the sacred vows of marriage. Nehemiah 4:14 says, "Fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." Your loved ones are a cause worth fighting for. Fight for your family! Strong families produce a strong church and a strong nation.

You can't afford to play around with sexual sin. You can't afford to compromise your convictions. If you do, your children and your children's children will be adversely affected. You have to stand firm on the Word. Surround yourself with high moral standards and strong personal convictions. We know how human nature is—once you start letting down the standards, you open up the gate. If you don't want to commit adultery, then don't return that look or that wink. "Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22).

Sometimes you may feel pressure to be nice to people who are acting out of line. You may say, "If I tell them to stop, they will think I'm being rude."

You are not being rude; you are being faithful to your mate and to God. Are you in a pressure situation at work? Your personal standards can affect future generations of your family. "For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me" (Exod. 20:5).

God has standards; He set limits and boundaries in this world. We are not of this world. Our obligation to God is to

burn with righteousness, not to fit in.

Ask the Lord for strength in this area of your marriage. Simply ask, “Lord, give me the guts to stand for what is right! Even if it costs me, even if I feel pressure from the top to compromise, help me to remember that some things are just not for sale. Thank you, Lord.”

Square your shoulders and say to the world, the flesh, and the devil, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15).

Chapter Eleven

Discerning Sexual Temptations

I suggest that every mother reading this book share this chapter with her teenage daughters. We are living in a society where young girls are asked to become women overnight. Many young girls have been trained to think that once they have sex, they will be a woman; until then, they are still a girl.

“Girls Gone Wild” seems to be the moral theme of our current times. The twisted sexual images pop culture continues to produce, promoting everything from lesbian experimentation to oral sex, are not sex; they are in direct contradiction of God’s Word.

The negative influences of the media, music, movies, and fashion magazines are brainwashing a generation of young girls and women into believing it is perfectly normal to be sexually active before marriage.

“It’s no big deal,” “Everyone does it,” “It can’t be wrong if it feels so right,” are the responses of women, young and old, who are making wrong decisions that seem right to them. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

You must remember that even “good Christian” girls are not exempt from temptations. Often it is the “good” girls, who say they know sexual intercourse is wrong, asking, “How far can I go sexually?” When it comes to sexual integrity, most people want a list of do’s and don’ts. What they really want to know

is what they can get away with.

What is the answer to, “How far can I go sexually?” It depends on your destination. The destination determines the route. If you want to reach God’s divine plan for your life, then I would remind you of 2 Timothy 2:22, “Flee also youthful lusts.”

Many young girls believe that anything short of sexual intercourse is okay. This is deception. Maybe you’ve never had sexual intercourse, but you’ve allowed a guy to put his hand up your shirt. Even worse, maybe you’ve engaged in oral sex, or other sexual activities, because you don’t consider them as technically having sex.

It is shocking to know we live in a society where young girls are dared by their peers to perform oral sex in the back of school buses, and even more shocking to realize they are doing it. Could this be because society has tried to convince us that oral sex is not “real sex”?

In 1998, President Bill Clinton claimed he did not have sexual relations with Monica Lewinski. He claimed that oral sex was not technically having sex. While his accusers didn’t buy his argument, unfortunately many young people did. (According to the 1999 fall issue of *Seventeen* magazine, of 723 male and female teens, ages 15–19, 49 percent considered oral sex inferior to sexual intercourse; 40 percent said that it did not count as sex.

Sexuality is God’s gift to you. You must protect it and fight for its purity! Ezekiel 23:3 says, “Their breasts were there embraced, their virgin bosom was there pressed.” You can’t sing in the choir on Sunday with your hands raised praising God, then let a guy fondle your breast on Saturday night in the

backseat of a car. Ephesians 5:3 emphasizes that believers should not even allow a hint of sexual immorality to plague their lives.

Since premarital sex is not an option for Christian singles, some resort to violating each other's body parts—heavy petting, making out, vulgar dancing, fondling, and having sex with the clothes on. You are progressing in the wrong direction. What do you expect the end result to be? There is no need to frustrate yourselves sexually. Don't even go there!

Girls must discern sexual temptations. The following is a list of the seven lines boys often say to girls to get them to engage in sexual activity before marriage:

1. "If you really loved me, you would."
2. "Everybody's doing it."
3. "I'm so excited, I can't stop."
4. "You will not get pregnant."
5. "If you get pregnant, I will marry you."
6. "We're going to get married anyway."
7. "Nobody will ever know about it."

Sound familiar? If Satan can persuade young women into believing just one of these lies, then he has robbed them of their purity and sexual integrity. Statistics show that forty-two percent of teens ages 13-17 see having a baby outside of marriage as morally acceptable. (*Teens' Marriage Views Reflect*

Changing Norms, Linda Lyons. The Gallup Organization, 18 November 2003).

The pressure to go along with the crowd is greater than ever. The need to fit in and be liked at any price will cause you to live a life of regret. We are living in the most promiscuous society that humanity has ever known.

The atmosphere of the world we live in is filled with insidious demons of lust. We must be careful! It can't be 210° on the outside and not affect the inside. Even though we live in a hostile environment externally, we must constantly renew our minds in God's word and guard our hearts from evil. It's easy to compromise in little ways that, in reality, are more harmful than they seem.

There is nothing wrong with having fun or wanting to be attractive to the opposite sex, but you must learn to protect yourself from destructive relationships that are born out of lust.

One of the areas you must avoid is wearing suggestive clothing. The weakness of every man is a woman's body. When putting your clothes on, you know exactly what kind of reaction and effect it will have on men. With food, it has been said that presentation is everything; the same is true for the body. Dressing fashionably and attractively is different from dressing in a way that flaunts your body as if you are sending out a sexual invitation. Things have certainly changed from a few years ago. Now, it is not unusual to see a Christian woman strolling down the street wearing a short shirt and low-rise jeans just to show off her belly button ring.

The way you dress teaches people how to treat you. You teach the opposite sex to respect you or to disrespect you by

the attire you wear. If you dress provocatively, you may cause a guy's "babe radar" to go off for all the wrong reasons. First Timothy 2:9-10 teaches women to dress modestly with decency and propriety. Wear what is appropriate for women who profess to worship God. If that voice on the inside whispers, "This neckline is too low, that skirt is too short, or those jeans are too tight," then you should listen. Let the redeemed of the Lord dress just so, not just say so!

The cost of running sexual red lights is very high. You must balance the outward power of the world's hostilities with an inward thrust of moral conviction and dedication. First Thessalonians 4:3 says, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality." The word *abstain* means "to willfully hold back."

You can measure what kind of Christian you are by the cost you are willing to pay. What is your Christian life costing you? It costs something to dress modestly. It costs something to monitor the TV shows, movies, and music you listen to. It costs something to miss out on all the "so-called" fun that everyone else is having because what they're doing violates your code of ethics. It costs something to decide not to be popular with the guys for all the wrong reasons.

We live in a society where anything goes. I want to ask you a question. Do you find yourself doing things you feel the need to hide? (See 1 John 1:6.) If you're hiding things from your parents, things like steamy love notes, books, or movies that you would be embarrassed to talk about at church, then you are stepping into the darkness to do things you're ashamed of in the light.

Maybe you are reading this and you already feel like

damaged goods because of things you have done in your past. You feel that no respectable man would want you. You may feel as though you have to give men what they want, or nobody will want to date or marry you.

I assure you that God has destined someone to love you. Rest assured that he is living and breathing right now somewhere on this planet. He is going to love God and love you passionately. Your job is to trust God and from this day forward keep yourself just for that special someone God will send to you.

God is a matchmaker! When He ties the knot in a relationship, it will hold—if you don't pick at the knot. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says that a three-fold cord is not easily broken. You can't afford to have a two-fold cord, which is a relationship committed just to each other. You must have a three-fold cord relationship: you, your mate, and God intertwined together in a loving relationship.

According to the Bible, some are eunuchs for the Lord's sake (Matt. 19:12). To be a eunuch means to be sexually inactive. You can approach your sexually inactive single years in one of three ways: you can be a griper, a grabber, or a gripper.

Do you gripe all the time because you're not married or, depending upon your age, because you're not getting to date as much as you think you should?

Or are you a grabber? You will grab hold of anyone you can date or marry, regardless of his reputation. You're like the old maid who was praying under a tree asking God for a husband, when she heard an owl in the tree saying, "Whooooo, whooooo!" She replied, "Anybody, Lord. Anybody will do."

Anybody won't do! Don't be a griper or a grabber, but be a gripper. This is someone who grips hold of God's purpose. God said that it was not good for man to be alone, so most likely it is His will for you to marry. You may ask, "What about Jesus and Paul?" They were single, yes, but they were murdered. God knew they would die prematurely. Unless you're planning on being martyred, or unless you've given yourself so fully to God's work that you have no desire to be married, then God has someone for you when the time is right.

To the woman contemplating marriage, I would ask, "What are your dreams? What goals have you set for yourself that you want to achieve before marriage?" You need to grip hold of God's purpose for your life. You need to use this time of waiting as a time of preparation. If you are half a person, you will attract half a mate. Quit attracting halves and start attracting wholes. It's all about His timing! Use this time alone to grip hold of God's plan for your life.

Revelation 21:2 teaches that God is preparing a bride. Do you have emotional baggage you need unload? Do you have your finances in order, or are you what I call a "She-need-a?"

"She-need-a car payment, and she-need-a house payment; that's why she-need-a husband!" You may say that two can live as cheaply as one, and that's true, but only for half as long. No money, no honey! Prepare for marriage.

Note two things about the first marriage in Genesis. First, God knew what kind of mate Adam needed; and second, it was God who brought Eve to Adam. It is not unrealistic to believe that if you will wait on God and be sexually pure, then He will bring the right mate to you when the time is right. Don't waste valuable time until then.

Several years ago, I spoke to 24,000 teenagers in Knoxville, Tennessee. The message I preached became one of my most requested. It was entitled, "Keep Your Underwear On!" Exodus 28:42-43 tells us that when the high priest came into God's presence, he was instructed to wear a linen robe. Beneath the white robe, he was commanded to have his underwear on. No matter how religious the priest looked outwardly in his priestly robe, if beneath his religious garb he did not have his linen britches (underwear) on, then God would not allow him to live in His presence. The priest had to have sexual integrity in his private life.

Outwardly, many people have perfected their religious image. They look one way on the outside, but in private, they are someone else. First Samuel teaches, ". . . man looks on the outside, but God looks on the heart." If you want to live in the presence of God and have His favor on your life, then you must "Keep Your Underwear On!"

I waited until I was twenty-five to get married. I was a virgin, and my wife was a virgin. Don't believe the deceptive lie of Satan when he tells you that it is not possible to remain sexually pure until marriage. We were both virgins. Today we have five children, so obviously we have made up for all those years of abstinence!

When Cherise and I started dating it wasn't long until we began to fulfill the Scripture, "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16). It became our favorite verse. As our relationship progressed, we fell deeply in love. After we were engaged, we felt we needed to fulfill another scripture as soon as possible, "It's better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor. 7:9). We even moved up the wedding date.

Naturally, as you begin to date, the relationship develops and there will be different intimacies reserved for each stage of the relationship. Understand that there are some intimacies reserved for friendship, others for courtship, and others reserved only for engagement. Of course sexual intercourse is reserved for the confines of marriage only.

I realize you are not going to walk up to someone and say, “Hi, Bob, I’m Jean. Let’s get married in six months. I’ll see you at the altar.” First, you go through a growing and bonding process. What you must guard against is allowing a level of intimacy that is not sexually legitimate to cross over into relationships where they do not belong.

First Thessalonians 4:6 says, “no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother.” Paul is saying that you should not arouse sexual desires in another person that you cannot righteously satisfy. I know that when you love someone, and plan to marry and spend the rest of your life together, it is hard to walk away when the desire for each other is so strong. But trust me, it can be done.

Why should you maintain your sexual purity?

1. *So you won’t shame the Name.* Samson fell to sexual sin, and the Philistines made sport of his God (Judg. 16:23-25). When we compromise our sexual integrity, we drag the sacred name of Jesus through the mud. We’ve all seen this happen, particularly when moral failure is exposed in the clergy.
2. *So your witness won’t be discredited.* This sin cripples your testimony to all the people to whom you have witnessed. It will discredit your witness because what you

were offering did not work.

3. *So you won't contract sexually transmitted diseases.*
Today, not only are preachers preaching abstinence, but doctors and health experts are warning that multiple sexual partners can cost you your life.

If at any point you sense an alarm going off in your spirit saying, "Warning! This isn't right," you better listen to it. Don't ignore your heart telling you to slow down; let your conscience be your guide. God put that radar there. You may have ignored it in the past, but from now on, you should listen to it.

Don't repeatedly ignore those warnings inside of you, or you may become desensitized to real danger. Remember, nobody can guard your body and your sexual purity but you. Defending your virginity is your responsibility. I want to drive home the fact that if you are single and sexually inactive, you are not a freak! If you will be God's best, and He will send you His best!

How many times have you read these infamous headlines? Learn to "Please Your Man," "Lose Weight in Ten Days," and "Be Happy." On and on, the media plays on surefire ways to help women become happier, stronger, and more successful in life. Millions of dollars are spent on advertisements geared specifically for women who feel less than adequate in one or more areas of their lives. Please do not misunderstand me; I don't have a problem with magazines promoting good health or lifestyle improvements for women. I just hate the fact that so many women are not finding out the truth about who they are and what they possess.

Beauty is good, and much appreciated by men. I thank God that I have a beautiful wife, but more importantly, I thank God that I have a discerning wife. Real beauty comes from within, just as real happiness comes from within. Proverbs 31:10 tells us a virtuous woman, a discerning woman, is far more valuable than rubies, and her husband can safely trust in her. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

In order for women to achieve all the things they desire, such as beauty, health, happiness, success, and good relationships, they must know the truth about how to achieve these things. What is the real foundation on which they can build? It is not achieving the ultimate dress size or learning to please their man. No, the way to achieve all you desire is to become the woman God created you to be. Focus on pleasing Him.

Beauty is vain; it will fade away, but the inner beauty of a discerning woman will live on. She will leave a legacy long after she is gone. Generation after generation will remember her and call her blessed (Prov. 31:28).

Chapter Twelve

Discernment to Win Your Family

Have you ever noticed there are more women in the church than men? Often women are forced to be the spiritual leaders of their home. I have observed, more often than not, the wife will encounter God first, and then the husband will follow her spiritual footsteps. What do you do when you have an experience with God before your mate does?

In Judges 13, we read about a case of marital, parental, and spiritual incompatibility. Samson's father Manoah was a passive, laid-back, low-key person. The name *Manoah* means "rest." There is nothing wrong with a mild-mannered man who has a calm temperament. We all know men who rarely raise their voice, but they sure get the job done. However, this Scripture indicates that he was also low-key and laid-back concerning spiritual things.

Manoah's wife was one of the nameless women in the Old Testament. All we are told about her is that she was sterile and remained childless for a long period until an angel of the Lord appeared, not to Manoah, but to his wife. He informed her that she would have a child, and instructed her to follow the rules imposed on those who made a Nazarite vow (Judg. 13).

What makes this situation so significant is to whom the angel appeared, not to Manoah, but to his wife. The angel informed her directly rather than going through her husband.

How do you handle it when God speaks to you first? What

do you do when your man is laid-back and low-key about spiritual things and you are not? What do you do when you are excited about Jesus, the church, and the Word of God, but he seldom wants to go to church or discuss spiritual matters?

It's tough when you come home from church excited about what the Lord is doing in your life, but he's snoring on the couch or out hunting or watching sports on TV.

How do you handle it when his spiritual level is one-third full and yours is full and running over? Incompatibility is a real problem for many couples. It affects the relationship on all levels. It is a great area of testing for many marriages, and it takes a wise woman to know how to handle this challenge.

The real world of marriage is not always peaches and cream. The problem is that we marry illusions. It seems God has a sense of humor because He doesn't always give us the illusion we wanted. For example, you looked at that man before you were married, and you envisioned him attending church with you, holding his Bible in his hands, and leading the kids in devotions at night—so wonderful and spiritual and sensitive.

But after you're married, the only time he goes to church with you is when someone is "hatched" (baby dedication), "matched" (wedding), or "dispatched" (funeral). He's a CEO Christian (Christmas and Easter only).

Not only can you marry a spiritual illusion, but you can marry a romantic illusion. You imagine him coming home from work every day to you waiting at the front door with his bedroom slippers and his silk robe. You ask, "How was your day, Darling?"

He answers passionately, "It was like torture every moment I was away from you."

Then you say, “Kiss me, you fool,” as you fall into one another’s arms and begin to rip off each other’s clothes. That’s a nice fantasy, but it’s not real life.

After a few years of being in a “real” marriage, he comes home and the house is a wreck:

He growls, “What have you been doing all day? Where’s dinner?”

She replies, “Dinner? I’ve been chasing your kids all day.”

“My kids!” he replies. “Why are they *my* kids?”

She snaps, “Because they’re just like your mother!”

Not only can you marry a romantic illusion and a spiritual illusion, but you also can marry a physical illusion. They say love is blind, so you don’t see any of the physical flaws while you are dating. But a few years after you are married, you begin to notice all of his physical imperfections. His belly is hanging over his belt, he burps after meals, and when he snores in bed, he knocks you out of a sound sleep. He’s been attacked by the four Bs: Bulges, Baldness, Bunions, and Bifocals.

That’s when you stare at this man lying next to you and wonder, *What did I marry?*

After moonlight and roses comes daylight and dishes. After the violins stop playing and the bubbles have burst in the heart-shaped Jacuzzi, sometimes you feel real pain the next morning. Your marriage will not always pan out like the soap opera *Days of Our Lives*.

These are the “days of your life,” when you must reach beyond romance to responsibility, beyond sex to sensitivity. This is where the highway becomes littered with casualties who signed up for marriage without knowing what they were signing up for.

You didn’t marry a Hollywood illusion. This man is not Brad

Pitt, Denzel Washington, or Tom Cruise. This is a real man, from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. Maybe he's no Prince Charming. He might not be very spiritual or as romantic as you wish, but he's yours!

Either you divorce him and face the very real possibility of living alone, or you make it work (see Matt. 19:9).

According to the teaching of Christ, in order to avoid adultery, there comes a time in every marriage when you have to get down to the real nitty-gritty hard work of keeping it together. When it seems your marriage is incompatible, you have to take what is giving you fits and find a way to work it out.

Manoah's wife is a perfect example of a woman whose marriage was incompatible on several different levels. She had a spiritual encounter with God before her husband did. Then the angel of the Lord gave her specific instructions about how to raise her son, Samson. Manoah and his wife experienced parental and spiritual incompatibility.

Samson was to be raised a Nazarite. The Nazarite vow was an act of consecration. The person taking this vow was to avoid anything from the vine (no wine), could not touch anything that was dead (he could not attend funerals), nor was he to cut his hair until the resolution of the vow. This child was to be separated and isolated for God's use. He would live a restricted lifestyle that would require great discipline. The father and the mother both had to be committed to raising the child according to the Nazarite vow.

The problem was Manoah's wife was committed to obeying God's command concerning the rearing of the child, but Manoah did not share her convictions. It would be like the

mother of a child telling that child smoking and drinking alcohol are not acceptable, but the child then sees his dad smoke and drink around the house every day.

How do you raise kids to live for God when their father doesn't live for God? This woman had a son whom she wanted to set apart for God's call, but the father had the biggest say-so about the son's future. He was oblivious to God's will.

Instead of acting independently or maneuvering to get her husband to do what was required, Manoah's wife prayed a powerful prayer. She prayed a prayer that sounded something like this: "God, You showed me Your will. Now show him. God, You spoke to me, now speak to him." How do you raise your kids to live for God when only one of the parents is a believer? She wasn't ugly to her husband; she didn't move out of their bedroom because he didn't share her faith. She didn't badger her husband, or compare him to So-and-so's husband who was so spiritual. She simply prayed, "God, You spoke to me, so speak to him."

What makes you think God can't speak to him? I don't care if he has cotton in his ears. I don't care if he gets drunk or high, God can speak to him.

Let me encourage you to pray, "God, I know he's not spiritual right now, but speak to him. He needs to know how to raise our children, so speak to him. God, as the priest of our home, I need him to cover me spiritually. Speak to him on the job or in his sleep. Speak to him in his car or in the shower. Speak to him through circumstances and through other people, but please speak to him!"

Manoah's wife had an awesome revelation about how God wanted to use her son, but her husband was clueless to God's

assignment for their family. When she told him what the angel had told her, he wanted to have the same experience she had. There was something about this woman that provoked her husband to spiritual jealousy. She didn't provoke him to anger, nor did her encounter with God provoke him to frustration. She provoked her husband to spiritual jealousy until he craved what she had.

Spiritual jealousy, inspired by the life his discerning wife modeled before him, lit a fire in Manohah for the same spiritual relationship with God that his wife enjoyed. Live so your husband will want what you have. Observe how gently you treat him, when you could have embarrassed or cut him down. A holy life will produce the deepest impressions. Live so he can:

- Feel the warmth of your sweet spirit
- See the joy of the Lord in your life

When he watches your mannerisms and experiences your wisdom, you will effectively witness to him. As you sow seeds of respect and honor into him, you will begin to reap the same harvest back into your own life from him. Every man secretly craves respect and honor from his wife.

Some things you just should not do in public. I don't care how ADD he is, never fuss in public! I don't care if he's got his whole foot in his mouth, and he doesn't cross his T's or dot his I's, don't embarrass and belittle him publicly. If he gets his words mixed up, stand right there by his side and grin as though he were speaking eloquently. Afterwards, in the privacy of your car, you can discuss it further if you feel the

need.

There are not many good men around—you better rescue what you have! You can't read *Esquire* and *Cosmopolitan* and win this battle. Oprah can't tell you how to have a successful marriage because she's never been married herself.

If you will pray for him instead of pouting, then God will teach him how to treat you right. God will teach him how to be affectionate outside of the bedroom as well as how to fulfill you inside the bedroom. He taught Solomon. If you want to see how God can teach a man bedroom skills, read the Song of Solomon.

God is raising a new breed of women in the church. For too long, the church has been a haven for disgruntled women whose lives are out of balance. Some think that being close to God means being offended by sexuality. God created sex in marriage. Hebrews 13:4 clearly teaches that the marriage bed is undefiled. Think about *undefiled* as meaning “good and wonderfully creative.” Are you a woman whose life is out of balance when it comes to sex? Ask yourself, is my marriage bed wonderfully creative?

Married couples learn how to please each other; singles learn how to please the Lord. If you are married, your first ministry is to your husband. The Bible teaches that the sexual relationship in a marriage should be so intense, and so often, that you only refrain from sex for a short time of fasting and prayer. Then as soon as the fast is complete, you get back to business! Consistency is important; don't give Satan an opportunity to tempt you with unfaithfulness (1 Cor. 7:5).

Many unsaved men resent the church because it turns their wives into a holier-than-thou “church lady.” For example,

before you were saved, he couldn't wait to come home to you. You were a wildcat in high heels! You wore pink nighties to bed, and sex was wonderfully creative! But now that you're born again, you wear a granny gown to bed and sleep with a Bible lying on your bosom. If he makes advances towards you, you say in a religious, stained-glass voice, "Touch not God's anointed."

That may be a humorous image, but when it's time to be intimate in your marriage, if you're lying in bed speaking in tongues, he's wondering, *What has that church done to my wife?*

Make him jealous of your spirituality, not resentful of it.

When your husband and you are spiritually incompatible, it's easy to become frustrated and build up bitterness and resentment. If you will roll into his arms instead of rolling toward the wall or if you will cook him his favorite meal when he least deserves it, then you are planting seeds into his heart that will cause him to want what you've got spiritually. Manoah's wife decided to make her marriage work even though she and her husband were spiritually incompatible.

What she desired was for God to show him their assignment, His eternal purpose for this couple being together. God wanted them to raise Samson as the champion who would deliver God's people.

Every marriage has an assignment. God didn't put you together just to have sex, a house payment, and a two-car garage. When you enter the kingdom of God, you receive an assignment. Your children have a divine assignment, and the enemy wants to abort it. That's why divorce is so devastating; it not only affects the husband and the wife, but it destroys

God's assignment for the entire family.

It's hard to come home to an unspiritual man. It's hard to raise your children according to God's Word when your mate is not saved. Manoah's wife shows us, when you're living with a man who is not spiritual, you can provoke him to spiritual hunger.

Finally, the angel appeared to Manoah, too. After this visitation, he went to his wife and asked for further instructions. He began to ask her about spiritual things. If your mate is unsaved, don't talk to him about spiritual things all the time. Sometimes discernment means being quiet until God gives you the opportunity to speak. At the right time, God will give you a chance to talk. When he opens the door, ease on in. "The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish pulls it down" (Prov. 14:1).

Psalm 68:6 says, "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (KJV). The word "solitary" means "single," in reference to a single diamond, a precious jewel. In other words, God hovers over families, and He finds one single, solitary diamond in every family. He sovereignly picks one member of the family to deliver those bound with spiritual chains.

Do you know why God saved you first? You are His beachhead— God's entry point, God's doorway—through which He will reach the rest of your family.

Manoah and his wife raised Samson. They fulfilled the assignment of God upon their family. Samson grew up and became a mighty deliverer of God's people.

For over ten years, my personal assistant has been a lady who was the first to be born again in her family. For two years,

she attended church alone. Every Sunday after church, she went home to her husband and her twenty-year-old son, who did not share her faith. Susan's husband, Alan, was a good man and a good provider. He just was not interested in spiritual things. Sunday was his day to drink beer and play golf.

Often, Susan would leave the atmosphere of praise and worship at church and go home to her husband and son who were totally unspiritual. Many nights she cried herself to sleep, wondering if her family would ever be saved and share her faith.

After two years of coming to church by herself and living for God alone in their home, the Holy Spirit began to speak to her about how to win her husband. He challenged her to control her tongue. As she began to show Alan respect, honor, and unconditional love, slowly his heart began to melt.

She prayed Ephesians 1:17-18 for him everyday: "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

She was winning him without a word. Her gentle, kind spirit was witnessing to him.

As Alan watched the change in his wife, he decided to begin attending church with her in September 1993. Even though he was not converted immediately, every Sunday he attended church with Susan.

Tracy, their twenty-year-old son, observed his father going to church week after week with his mother. On October 3, 1993, Tracy decided to check out church. That Sunday morning,

Tracy walked down the aisle, was born again, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

A few weeks later, on October 31, I preached an illustrated sermon, where Tracy played one of the characters. When I gave the altar call that morning, Alan walked down the aisle and was gloriously saved and filled with the Holy Spirit.

God had an awesome assignment for this family. Tracy began to exhibit extraordinary leadership gifts. Several years later, he became the children's pastor in our church. Today, he ministers to over a thousand kids a week. He also has been instrumental in helping me reach tens of thousands of teenagers by assisting me with illustrated sermons.

Many times, Satan whispered to Susan that her family would never be saved, but this discerning woman kept on praying and loving. She was patient and kind to her husband. She knew God had an assignment for her family, and she would not give up until God brought it to pass.

Today, she is in full-time ministry as my personal assistant. Her son, Tracy, is in full-time ministry as children's pastor of Free Chapel, and her husband Alan is one of the greatest Christians I know. What if Susan had given up?

What assignment will you abort if you give up on your family?

The story of Manoah's wife is an inspiring one. First, she won her husband by praying a powerful prayer, "God speak to him." Second, she didn't badger or belittle him because he wasn't as spiritual as she wanted him to be; rather, she patiently and lovingly provoked him to spiritual jealousy through her kindness. That way, he began to want the same experience with God that she had. Third, she chose her words

and timing carefully. She waited until he began to ask her about spiritual things, instead of preaching to him all the time. Her discernment and wisdom opened her husband's eyes to God's assignment for their family. Acts 16:31 says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

God has set you as a solitary diamond in your family to deliver those bound with chains. Like Manoah's wife, you are going to see God's assignment for your family come to pass.

Chapter Thirteen

A Life Worth Remembering

Ask yourself, *A hundred years from now, will it even matter that I was born? Are the things I'm living for, worth Christ dying for?*

In the *Guinness Book of World Records*, I read about a man who eats glass, metal, and wood. He has eaten ten bicycles, a supermarket cart, and seven television sets. But the most astonishing reason he will forever be remembered is because he ate a Cessna light-flying aircraft, after grinding it up and mixing it with his food. That's how he spent the fifteen most famous minutes of his life.

Imagine him one day standing before God, and the Lord saying to him in a baritone voice, "What did you do with your life?" He will answer, "I ate an airplane!"

How will you be remembered? What kind of legacy are you leaving for your family?

Jesus tells of a woman who lived a life worth remembering. Her name was Mary. She did something so significant that Jesus commanded, "Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her" (Mark 14:9).

Mary and her sister were hosting a dinner to celebrate the miracle of their brother Lazarus being raised from the dead. Martha was cooking in the kitchen when Mary became overwhelmed with the fact that Jesus, the man who had raised

her brother from the dead, was sitting at her table eating. She couldn't bear to go into the kitchen to help prepare the food. Overwhelmed with tears, she approached Jesus with a lavish alabaster box containing expensive oil. Breaking it open, she poured the oil on His feet and used her hair to dry them.

Jesus was moved by this woman's passionate worship. All four of the Gospels record what she did. Today, she might never headline for Oprah or be featured on CNN as a woman of status, but Jesus remembered her. Who was this woman? In Matthew 27:61 she's simply called "the other Mary." A lot of different women named Mary are mentioned in the Bible: Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary Magdalene, the converted demoniac; Mary, the mother of John Mark; and Mary, the wife of Cleophas. The Mary that Jesus said was worth remembering is simply known as "the other Mary."

She wasn't the mother of Jesus. She didn't give birth to anyone who wrote a book of the New Testament. Her son was not an apostle. In fact, the Bible never mentions that she ever did any great deed.

There are only five things recorded in the Bible that she did. Interestingly, they all pertain to the feet of Jesus.

- She stood at the feet of Jesus.
- She washed the feet of Jesus.
- She dried His feet with her hair.
- She kissed His feet.
- She anointed His feet.

The other title she's given in Scripture is "Martha's sister," implying that Martha was the dominant sister. Mary was just the one in the background, the person in the shadows. Martha got all the attention. She was a perfectionist. She was the perfect housekeeper, perfect mother, and perfect wife. She was probably the type of lady who, if her husband got up in the middle of the night, would make the bed before he returned!

Mary was known as "Martha's sister" and the "other Mary." Many women feel like their life doesn't count for much. They think, *I'm not talented. I don't look like a supermodel. I don't stand out in any way. What can I do that will make a mark for eternity? What can I do that will be remembered a hundred years from today?* Notice the first thing Jesus said about Mary: "She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8).

The thing that made her life memorable was not the things that she couldn't do, but the fact that she did what she could do. Listen, God will never ask you to do what you can't do. If He asks you for something, it just means He's already put in you the ability to do what He's asking. Don't insult God by telling Him you can't do it.

Not only does the Scripture say she did what she could, but notice Mary did it in the face of criticism. Judas and others began to criticize her. Isn't it amazing, when you start to do something for Jesus, how many people will criticize you?

Criticize is the smallest size. Some people think by the inch, talk by the yard, and need to be moved by the foot! They have "yapping-itis" and they need to have a "yapper-dectomy."

Her critics attacked her. They accused, "What you're doing is a waste." Still, she did what she could.

Paul Anderson is the strongest man in the world. He has

carried 6,270 pounds on his back.

Once he was asked, “Were you ever a ninety-pound weakling?”

He replied, “Yes, when I was four years old.”

One day at church, Paul heard a quadriplegic man give his salvation testimony. It’s a fact—the strongest man in the world was won to Christ by one considered to be among the weakest. How did this happen? God used the weakest man He could find who was willing to do what he could do.

Mary is remembered for all eternity because she did what she could do, even in the face of criticism. If God uses you, you will have to pass the praise test and the criticism test. How do you pass these tests? You learn to give the praise and criticism you’ve received to God. Jesus immortalized Mary because of her extravagant worship. He was moved when she broke open the alabaster box of expensive oil to anoint His feet.

“We have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7). You and I are the earthen vessels, and the treasure on the inside is our worship to God. If people are going to know about your love for Him, brokenness must come. Just as the alabaster box was broken, we too must be broken, in order to offer Him praise. Many will never live a life that is worth remembering because they don’t want to be broken, they want to strut. You don’t have to be a super achiever or have a great IQ. You don’t have to be amazingly talented. All you have to do, to be remembered by God, is be broken enough to pour out your love on Jesus. If by that you get an inroad to win one soul, then you will have lived a life worth remembering for all eternity in God’s eyes.

I want to salute women who are living a life that is worth

remembering:

1. I salute the mothers who stick with their children through thick and thin.

In John 18:25, the most famous mother in the world is standing at the foot of the cross, while her precious son is being crucified.

In the midst of dying, Jesus tenderly instructs John the beloved to take care of his mother. Mary was present when He was born, and she was present when He died. She was there to console her son in His darkest hour. Men try to act grown, but if they get in real trouble, they want their mother's comfort. Jesus was no different. In His hour of trouble, He wanted His mother near. It had to be very difficult for Mary to see her son precede her in death.

Women carry a different burden for their children than men do. If kids do right, Dad says, "That's my boy." If they do wrong, he says, "Leave him alone. Let him learn the hard way about life." Not a mother. It's the mother's love that sticks with her child through thick and thin. She never gives up no matter how bad things look.

Often, people are who they are because they had a praying mother or grandmother in their lives. Some of you reading this book have parents who chose to have you instead of pursuing great personal success. They could have gone to college themselves, but they paid your tuition. They could have retired by now or could be living a better lifestyle, but they made some tremendous sacrifices to help you do things they've never done or go places they've never been.

Children don't always appreciate the enormous sacrifices their parents have made to ensure a better way of life for them.

Sometimes children feel their parents automatically owe them the best of everything. This is one of the most ungrateful generations. Instead of looking at what they have as a blessing, they expect it. "You bought me a car. So what?" You take them out to eat, and they look at the food and insult it. They don't realize just the room and board, along with clothing you provide, ought to make them kiss your feet!

Anybody who has a pair of \$120.00 shoes and designer clothes ought to be very grateful to her parents. I want to commend every mother for loving their children and standing by them in the good times and the bad times.

I want to warn you not to love your children to death. Sometimes mothers can love their children so much that they are practicing borderline idolatry. You have to discern when you love your child to death instead of loving your child to life. When you let them talk to you disrespectfully without disciplining them, you love them to death, instead of loving them to life.

You can go overboard in sacrificing yourself for your kids. When you love them to the point where you don't want anyone else to spend time with them, you're going overboard with your love. When you feel nobody is good enough to marry them or date them because you're so picky, your obsession with your child is hurting them, not helping them.

I've seen some children who are hardly worth a dime due to laziness and inflated egos; yet, their mothers would still have the nerve to be very picky about who their children marry. As though no daughter-in-law would be good enough for her little darlings! After the way the children had been spoiled, the mother ought to be glad that anyone would want to marry

them!

Love your kids to life, not to death. Teach them responsibility and respect. Don't smother them with your love. Remember, nobody is going to love them as a mother does. Nobody is going to do for them what you are willing to do as their mother. Therefore, if you're not careful, or if you allow them to be self-centered and spoiled, you will raise them to be handicapped in relationships.

Some people idolize their children. They don't prepare them for the harsh realities of the real world. When we don't show our children tough love at times when discipline is necessary, we can actually be sowing seeds of rebellion into our kids that make them think rules don't apply to them.

Sometimes parents put a criminal element in their child by refusing to discipline them, by overindulging them, or by buying whatever their hearts desire. Well-to-do parents make a terrible mistake by not being frugal, not teaching the value of money, or not showing the hard work to obtain wealth.

Love your children, support your children, and stand by your children like Mary did when her son was at His worst on the cross. Never give up on your kids. Love them to life, not to death.

2. I salute all the mothers who are living a life worth remembering by raising kids who came along unexpectedly.

In 2 Kings 4, the prophet Elijah wanted to pray a blessing upon the Shunammite woman for allowing him a place to reside. When Elijah asked, "What shall be done for this woman?" his servants spoke up and said, "She has no son; her husband is old; pray for her to have a child." It's somewhat humorous to me that neither the Shunammite woman nor her elderly

husband asked for a child, but they got one nine months later.

A lot of people, who thought they were through with the childbearing years of their lives, have discovered, “Oops!” Here comes little Raymond!” in their late thirties or forties. The Shunammite woman didn’t necessarily want children, but the next thing she knew, she was pregnant.

I want to salute all of you who didn’t necessarily want children at some particular time in your life, but when you became pregnant, you chose to have them anyway. You decided you would have one or two, but you ended up with five or six.

Maybe you thought you wanted children when you weren’t sober, so to speak, but now that you’ve come to your senses, you’re wondering, *What on earth was I thinking?*

Notice when the Shunammite’s child got sick, she went to the prophet of God for prayer. In 2 Kings 4:28 (NIV), she reminded Elijah, “Did I ask you for a son?” In so many words, she was saying, “Look, I had a good life. My husband was old, and we were enjoying our retirement. Then through your prayer, you put this child on me. Now he’s sick, and I’m not leaving until you come back with me and pray for him.” She was saying she didn’t ask for her son, but that she’d given him the best she could.

To all of you who have had children unexpectedly, by birth or by parenting stepchildren, I salute you for giving those kids love and the best care you can give them.

3. I salute the mothers and fathers who adopt or provide a foster home to a child.

I also want to salute the mother who did what was best for her child, even if it meant giving him up for adoption. Not

everyone will have agreed with your decision, but at least you had the courage to birth the child rather than abort him. It took courage to release the child into a loving, stable family.

Moses' mother hid him for three months because of Pharaoh's decree to kill all male children two years old or younger. I'm sure it was a difficult decision to send her crying infant down the Nile River in a basket. She was forced to give up her baby. Adoption is a very sensitive issue. Millions of women have had to give up their child by force or by choice, trying to do what is best for their child.

As teenage pregnancies continue to rise, some high schools are designated only for children who are pregnant. When I was growing up, if a girl became pregnant, then her academic career was pretty much over. She couldn't go to school; so consequently, the teenage unmarried mother would have to drop out of school.

Like it or not, today the family is being redefined. Millions of children are living in homes that don't fit the stereotype of what a traditional family is supposed to be.

The ideal family setting is two parents: mom and dad raising their children together. I remember reading in the Bible about a traditional family that had two parents. The mother was a homemaker, the father was a farmer working by the sweat of his brow, and they had two children. They had everything their hearts desired; they didn't want for anything. However, they ended up homeless, forced to live in the streets. In a domestic violence dispute, one of the sons killed his own brother.

They were supposed to be the perfect family, living in the perfect environment, according to the standards of the world. Yet they still became a very dysfunctional family. The parents

were Adam and Eve, and their sons were Cain and Abel.

So just because you have a perfect home setting with a two-parent family does not mean you have a wonderful home life. On the other hand, just because you're a single-parent family doesn't mean your family can't function well in the sight of God.

Families are hurting today. We have all kinds of secrets in our family trees. So many have families of which they are ashamed. Don't let family shame hold you hostage to the past. Moses' mother had to give her child up, not because she didn't love him, but to save his life! Maybe you were adopted and raised by one parent, a grandmother, or some other relative. You were given up for adoption. As a result, sometimes feelings of worthlessness flood your emotions. *Why would my mother or father give me up?* Perhaps like Moses' mother, yours did what she had to do to save your life.

Moses' mother did what was best for her son. She knew that in her present condition, she couldn't give him what he needed. Pharaoh's daughter eventually adopted Moses. He lived in somebody else's house, not with his real mother. However, he lived a better life than he would have if his natural mother had raised him. Thank God for people who take children into their homes and invest in their lives by loving and treating the children as one of their very own. You're living a life worth remembering.

4. I salute every single mother who has raised children alone.

In 1 Kings 17:8, we're told the story of the widow and her child living in the midst of a famine. This single-parent home was on a strict budget. Mother and child were down to their last meal.

Perhaps you had to make tremendous sacrifices working two jobs or more, just to make ends meet while raising children all by yourself. You tried to do what was right in front of your children, doing it alone, without a live-in boyfriend. Congress can't seem to balance the budget in Washington, D.C. They need to take lessons from the amazing single mothers who live on a shoestring budget with three or four kids to feed and clothe.

I salute you, single mother. You're living a life worth remembering.

In Genesis 16:3 God gave Abraham a promise of offspring. Sarah, Abraham's wife, came up with the idea to use Hagar the servant girl as a surrogate mother. As a result, Ishmael was born. Years later, Sarah became pregnant with Isaac.

In verse 9, Sarah told Abraham to cast out the slave woman with her son. Suddenly Hagar was divorced from Abraham, and she and Ishmael had to take care of themselves. I want to salute the mothers who are raising the child who was pushed out.

Abraham and his new family just moved on. In other words, when he got his new family (his new son), Abraham closed the door on the other family. Poor Hagar (his ex) and Ishmael (his son from his first marriage) had to fend for themselves while Abraham went on with his new family, as if they had never existed.

It had to be a hard pill to swallow, but it happens every day. When a man divorces his wife and leaves his kids from his first marriage, that doesn't make them just go away. Just because a man gets a new wife and a new family doesn't mean the old family doesn't exist. It had to have been painful for Hagar to be

used like that. When he was finished with her, he just cast her and her son away.

I can imagine Abraham dressed up in a tuxedo, riding away in his Mercedes-Benz to become the father of many nations. Can you imagine how humiliating that was for Hagar? How embarrassing it must have been for Ishmael, to have a father who was famous and very rich, but would not give his son the time of day. I'm sure Abraham took great care of his new son, Isaac, but he wasn't sending one penny of child support for Ishmael. Poor sister Hagar was scrambling to get clothes to put on her child's back and applying for food stamps, while Abraham's new family was rolling in money.

Can you imagine how painful it was for little Ishmael to see Isaac all dressed up in beautiful clothes while he was wearing rags? Can you imagine how he felt when he saw his father attending Isaac's ballgames, but never attending any of his? Ishmael's father never called or sent birthday cards. He never went to any of his school plays. But thank God for Hagar who did the best she could; she didn't let a spirit of bitterness rise up in her heart.

Many of you may be in a similar situation. Somebody closed the book on you and just rode off into the sunset. He can't do enough for his new family, but he has totally forgotten about you and your children. We're living in that society. People get divorced, and then the father or mother moves on like nothing ever happened. They won't even send diaper and food money.

We live in a society where women pay a tremendous price. Men can get a woman pregnant and then just ride off into the sunset to become successful. However, He stands ready to make to you the same promise that God made to Hagar.

If you will not become bitter, then God will bless you and your children. You may have been dealt a dirty hand, but God is going to be gracious to you, and He is going to bless you and your child. You stood as a single parent, even when you were embarrassed and alone. You were left holding the bag, but God is going to bless you anyway! If you're not careful, a spirit of bitterness can come on you when you see your ex driving a new car when he won't send you fifty dollars to buy medicine for his child you're raising. Not even the court system can seem to get him to be faithful with his child support.

I have a word from the Lord for you: "Even if the child's father never blesses you, God will bless you!" Lift your head up. Don't let anybody make you feel ashamed. If you won't get bitter, God will be a Father to the fatherless and a Husband to the husbandless (Ps. 68:5).

5. I salute the women who are raising the kids of their kids.

I want to salute those of you who may not have given birth yourself to the kids you are raising, but you've taken someone else's children, perhaps your son's or daughter's.

It is estimated that over six million grandparents are raising their grandchildren as their own. Sometimes, because of drug abuse or an immoral lifestyle, grandparents with big hearts are opening up their homes and adopting their grandchildren. They are living a life of sacrifice by investing in the lives of their grandchildren as if the children were their own.

Just like Mary, the woman whom Jesus immortalized in Scripture, yours is also a life worth remembering.

In Luke 2:42 Mary and Joseph had been in Jerusalem for the great feast. Religious business filled their days. Crammed full of what happened in the temple; they started their long trek home.

Their conversations must have been trite.

I can almost hear Mary the first time she looked at Joseph and asked, “Where is Jesus? Have you seen Him?”

A typical father, Joseph replied, “Oh, He’s back there playing with the little boys.”

“Are you sure?”

“Oh yeah, don’t worry about Him. He’s twelve years old.”

About noon, they stopped the caravan at one of the villages on the way back to Nazareth. Mary asked Joseph again, “Where is Jesus?”

Joseph, like most pragmatic men, answered nonchalantly, “Now, Mary, He’s probably eating with His cousins. Don’t worry about the boy!”

The evening’s shadows lengthened. It was suppertime now. Mary looked at Joseph with concern. They hadn’t seen Him all day. One more time she asked, “Where is Jesus?”

“All right, all right. I’ll go look,” Joseph said, “but I tell you, the boy is all right.”

There is something intuitive about women when it comes to the safety of their children. Mary knew that something was not right. Joseph walked up and down the length of the caravan, then returned a little bit ashen. His tongue was thick as he admitted, “Mary, I can’t find Him anywhere!”

The Scripture mercifully draws a curtain on what she probably said after that. Here’s the lesson in the story of lost Jesus. While leaving a tremendous spiritual feast, Mary and Joseph lost the presence of Jesus. Traveling in a caravan with holy people that had joined in their religious exercise, suddenly it dawned on them—we’ve lost the personal presence of Jesus!

If there is one thing I want you to carry with you after reading this book, even if you forget everything else I have tried to teach, you must be very astute not to lose the personal presence of Jesus! You cannot take Him for granted.

When you're not in the temple, ask yourself, *Do I have His personal presence? Am I fellowshiping and taking Him into my home?* Mary and Joseph had Jesus with them in the temple. They lost Him on the way home. Jesus doesn't just want to be in church. He wants you to have His personal presence in your home, in your daily life.

Women, do you realize how blessed you are to live this side of Calvary? In the Old Testament, no woman ever saw the glory over the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. Women were confined to the court of the women. No woman was ever allowed into the holy of holies. I can't explain why, but for some reason, God decided to give women full access to His presence under the new covenant.

I can say of a woman something that I cannot say of any man. For nine months, the womb of a woman was the holiest of holies. For nine months, the ark of the covenant was in the uterus of a woman. The only time the glory was totally incased in flesh outside the Trinity, was by a young Jewish woman. The first time the mercy seat in the New Testament was ever touched, a woman touched it.

The Bible doesn't ever tell us a midwife assisted in the birth of Jesus Christ. The Scripture says, "She brought forth her firstborn" (Luke 2:7). No one was there to assist Mary in the manger. She picked up and cradled in her arms the ark of the covenant, Jesus Christ. A woman embraced Him first, a woman nursed Him. Think of the little Scriptures that we overlook,

“Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts which nursed You” (Luke 11:27). No one is able to be more intimate with His presence than women.

For thousands of years, women were sold short. No women were allowed in the priesthood, no women were allowed in the Levitical ministry, and no women were allowed in the holy place, but after Calvary God decided they had a lot of catching up to do. Through Mary, a pattern was established. God was saying, “I will allow women to be intimate with My Son.”

God has endowed women with the special ability to embrace and entertain the presence of God. There is a special responsibility upon you to create consistently an atmosphere in your home and in your church. You can carry God’s presence like Mary did.

Don’t start for home and lose the personal presence of Jesus. The main thing is His personal presence. Is it possible to lose Jesus? It is possible. The most unlikely person to lose Jesus was Mary, His mother. I question if anybody loved and understood Him as much as Mary did. She was in His inner circle, but Mary lost Him. How close she was to Jesus! Their very lives were interwoven together. He was part of her; she was part of Him. Yet she lost Him. Although you may get very close to Jesus, you must be very careful that you do not lose Him.

Not only did Mary lose Him, but she didn’t know it. The Scripture said, “Supposing Him to have been in the company” (Luke 2:44). She thought He was there. Isn’t that the danger with all of us? We take too much for granted. We don’t do that in our business; we examine the books and the balance sheets. But when it comes to our relationship with Christ, we suppose

He is in our company.

Notice that Mary was among religious people when she lost Her Christ. Not only was she the most unlikely person to lose Him (for she was the holiest woman who ever lived), not only did she lose Him and not know it, but she lost Him in the most unusual place. Where? Not at a theatre, casino, or a club; she lost Him in the temple among holy things, among holy surroundings.

Mary lived three days without Him. When Mary and Joseph finally found Jesus, they found Him where they had lost Him, in the temple. When she found Him she blamed Him, but Jesus reminded her that He did not leave them, they left Him. Where did the prodigal son find his father? He found his father exactly where he had left him!

You'll find Jesus where you lost Him. If you'll only go back there, He's ready to forgive. "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely" (Hos. 14:4).

How will you be remembered? What kind of legacy are you building?

Ray Robinson's book *Famous Last Words* is a collection of farewell utterances from people in all walks of life. On his deathbed, George Kelly, the Pulitzer-winning playwright, said, "My dear, before you kiss me goodbye, fix your hair. It's a mess." President Woodrow Wilson's last words were, "The machinery is worn out." The last words of Queen Elizabeth I were, "All my possessions for a moment of time." Conrad Hilton, the owner of the international Hilton Hotel empire, was asked if he any last words of wisdom. He replied, "Leave the shower curtain on the inside of the tub."

As he hung on the cross, some of Christ's last words were

directed to a woman. “Woman, behold your son” (John 19:26). I pray that as you have read this book a new sensitivity to spiritual things has been activated in you. Your discernment has been awakened. You are a woman of purpose. You are equipped with a special gift from God to encourage and lift everybody to whom you are assigned. You will discern the hiss of the tempter, and you will recognize the still, small voice of God. Special promptings from the Holy Spirit will gently nudge you to encounters with the right people in the right places at the right times, fulfilling the right plans for your life. Your spiritual legacy will be worth remembering from generation to generation.

“I know that you sincerely trust the Lord, for you have the faith of your mother, Eunice, and your grandmother, Lois” (2 Tim. 1:5 NLT).

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