

MIND • BODY • SOUL & SPIRIT

WHO

W O M E N

Living Lively with Laines

NEW TRADITIONS
make goal setting a family affair

Unraveling the painful mystery of Lyme

Butcher, baker, candlestick maker. Who do you trust?

How to cope with

LOSS AT HOLIDAY TIME

LOOK IN YOUR
HEART
for the gifts that last

REBA MCENTIRE SUPERSTAR

The musical legend thrives on small-town values and big-time faith



FALL 2015



Share YOUR STORY

We all have a story to tell – be it struggle or victory, pain or praise. In *WHOA WOMEN*, you'll find stories that will motivate and inspire you to build a more fulfilling life, whether you're a homemaker running a household or a CEO leading a business.

You can contribute to the *WHOA WOMEN* experience by:

- Emailing us your personal stories at share@WHOAwomen.com
- Joining the conversation on our blog at WHOAwomen.com
- Signing up for the weekly *WHOA WOMEN* notes from Publisher Laine Lawson Craft



So I encourage you. If you ever have any pain - emotional, spiritual, or physical, no matter how large or small it might seem - cry out to God. Let Him know how much it hurts and ask Him to remove it.

- REBECCA DUVALL

Since 2011, the Lord seems to be urging me to tell my story. The urging has become stronger to the point that I really can't ignore it!

- CATHY EGGERTH

Substitutes never produce true spiritual and emotional peace and contentment. All the money, power and fame in the world will not fill the God-hole in every person's heart.

- BARBARA TAYLOR SANDERS

I entered Mercy Ministries to finally deal with the issues that were controlling me. God, the master healer, truly changed my life. I am not the girl I was before Mercy. Today, I have joy and compassion for others. I am completely in love with Christ, and I put my faith and trust in Him.

- MEAGAN OLLER

I came to see that I often saw my glass as half empty. I was very ungrateful for all the love that was extended to me over my lifetime. Today I see my life as overflowing, and I am grateful.

- VERLENE CARTER



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8 COVER STORY
REBA: MUSIC'S
'ORDINARY' SUPERSTAR

Reba McEntire is one of entertainment's busiest and most successful stars, with her recent *Love Somebody* album giving her another chart-topper. But it's not the glamour and glitz that get her through the day; it's her down-home Oklahoma charm and values.

Cover Photo by: Russ Harrington

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letter from the publisher



Dear *WHOA*women,

It's my favorite time of the year, and I just love to share it with all of you in the *WHOA*women community! Don't you just love celebrating and focusing on friends, family and food during the holidays? That's what this issue of *WHOA*women Magazine: *Livin' Lively with Laine* is all about: the holidays and family.

We have incredible articles that touch our deepest parts and show us how to overcome difficult relationships in the holiday season, how to rise above loneliness, how to deal with grief during the holidays, how to go deeper with God, how to thrive in the holiday season and so much more. Of course, we have great fashions, the latest makeup trends, and amazing recipes, too.

We were so blessed to have an opportunity to check in with one of country music's greatest female artists, Reba McEntire. She was so gracious in taking some time out of her very busy schedule and sharing with our *WHOA*women readers. You will love her heart and enjoy learning more about her and her family.

I want to encourage all of you that you are a gift to us at *WHOA*women. We love to hear your stories of hope. Every one of us has a story to tell about how our lives have been changed through the power of God. We would love to hear more of your stories. Please go online and share your story with us. Also, please connect with us on Facebook and twitter, and sign up for our weekly *WHOA* Notes, which is where I share what's in my heart to encourage all of us. We are here for you 24/7, so stay connected with us.

I pray that your holidays are filled with memories of a lifetime. I know these powerful articles shared through our outstanding contributors' own experiences will touch all of you. As we approach the New Year 2016, I declare that it will be the year of love. You will have an overflow of love in your life, and love will flow through you like never before. So let us love deeper this holiday season and get prepared for an amazing year of love in 2016!

Livin' Lively with love,

Laine Lawson Craft
Founder and Publisher



@Livin'LivelywithLaine



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I loved your latest issue with Kathie Lee on the cover. She is one of my favorites!

~SANDY K.

Thank you for the inspiration every quarter...I look forward to it!

~TANJA M.

Your magazine is my favorite read. I enjoy all the different perspectives of your writers! Thanks!

~SHELLY P.

@WHOAwomen thank you for the honor! Bless you all.

~@KATHIELGIFFORD

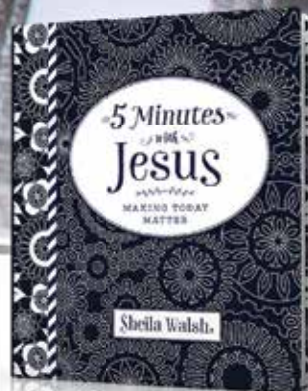
ANXIOUSLY awaiting my next issue of @WHOAwomen magazine. #bestgiftever #youbogoyfriend

~@HISBEAUTYXO



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Reba's MAGIC MIX

Music superstar blends small-town values with big-time faith

BY DEBORAH EVANS PRICE

Talent, hard work and deep faith have propelled Reba McEntire from her early days singing at rodeos to the world's most prestigious stages. Over the last four decades, Reba has found success in music, film, television and Broadway, and she even has her own line of clothing, luggage and bedding.

Her latest album, *Love Somebody*, hit No.1 on the country chart when it was released in the spring, and she's gearing up to continue her Las Vegas residency with Brooks & Dunn at the Colosseum at Caesars Palace in December.

Reba is one of the entertainment industry's busiest and most successful stars, yet through it all, she's managed to maintain her down-home Oklahoma charm and values. On this sunny summer day, she's packing up her home in Los Angeles to get it ready to sell. Since she's not currently taping



a TV series, she's spending more time at her farm in Tennessee.

A conversation with the country legend feels less like an interview and more like catching up with a great girlfriend. She's honest and transparent in her answers, and her responses are peppered with both moments of serious reflection and a lot of good-natured laughter.

It's obvious she's very intentional in everything she does and thoughtful in how she approaches life. "Every morning I pray for the Holy Spirit to speak through me," she says. "Let me speak with wisdom. Let me think with wisdom and not hurt anybody's feelings or hurt their hearts. Let me inspire and live as a good example."

Her kind heart and love for the Lord were nurtured by her family during her childhood in Chockie, Oklahoma. "I've always had a connection with

God and have been very in tune with my surroundings and God. My grandma made me realize and understand it, but I've always had a relationship with God. My faith has affected me in every way during good times and bad times. My relationship with God leads me, guides me, tells me what to do and what not to do."

Faith, rodeo and music were constants in the McEntire home during Reba's childhood. Her mother had wanted to be a country singer but gave up her dreams to concentrate on raising her family. When Reba and her siblings were young, her mother taught them to sing in the car while the family was traveling to and from rodeos. (Her dad was a three-time world champion steer roper.)

Her older sister, Alice, didn't sing, but her brother Pake and sister Susie also pursued music careers. Pake signed

with RCA Records and had a string of hits in the '80s, and Susie enjoyed a successful career in Christian music.

Reba's big break came when she was discovered by country music veteran Red Stegall singing the national anthem at the National Finals Rodeo in Oklahoma City. He introduced her around Nashville, and she landed a deal with Mercury Records in 1975.

Since then she's become one of the most successful artists in country music, selling millions of records, winning countless awards and populating country radio with such memorable hits as "Whoever's in New England," "Fancy," "For My Broken Heart," "Is There Life Out There," "The Greatest Man I Never Knew" and "Does He Love You."

She holds the record for the most Academy of Country Music Top Female Vocalist Awards (seven) and



“You’ve got to find the music. If the music isn’t there, I don’t care. If that song is not touching somebody’s heart, you might as well stay at home.”



American Music Awards for Favorite Country Female Artist (12). She also won the Country Music Association’s Female Vocalist honor four consecutive times.

Reba is the first to admit that it wasn’t easy getting to this place in her career. “There were a lot of obstacles, [including] being a female in a male’s world and not knowing the business when I got into it,” she says. “I’m from a ranch and rodeo family, but I had a lot of teachers and people who helped me through it. Thank God for them.”

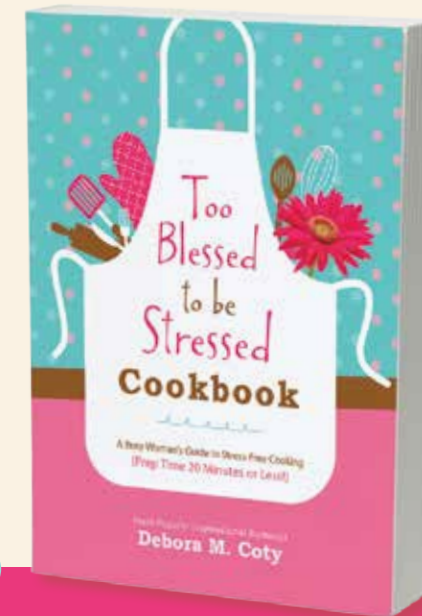
She says overcoming those early obstacles taught her perseverance, and encountering skeptics just fueled her drive. “People telling me that I couldn’t do things always ticked me off,” she says. “I was like, ‘Why not?’ So that just made me work harder.”

When asked what the most difficult thing is about success, Reba thinks for a moment and responds, “Maintaining it.” And she attributes her longevity in the business to two key things: “Great songs and hard work. You’ve got to find the music. If the music isn’t there, I don’t care. If that song is not touching somebody’s heart, you might as well stay at home.”

Stress-Free Cooking

(with a prep time of 20 minutes or less!)

Each of the 100-plus recipes in the *Too Blessed to Be Stressed Cookbook* can be prepared in 20 minutes or less, plus you’ll encounter some fabulous tips and suggestions as well as funny foodie quotes, scripture selections, and humorous stories of cooking misadventures, along the way. Recipes are arranged into 4 categories—Heart-Healthy, Soul-Fed, Time-Wise, and Company-Happy—and are accompanied by appealing full-color photographs.



Try This Delicious Recipe from the Book!

Gorgeous Grape Salad



PREP TIME: 10 minutes
COOKING TIME: none, refrigerate
SERVES: 12 to 14



- 8 ounces sour cream (light okay)
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 8 tablespoons sugar

- 1 pound green grapes
- 1 pound red seedless grapes
- ½ pound brown sugar
- 12 ounces chopped pecans or walnuts

Blend together sour cream, cream cheese, and sugar. Fold in whole grapes and gently stir until well coated. Mix together brown sugar and nuts; sprinkle over grape mixture. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Tip: Recipe is easily halved for smaller groups.



She's pleased at the reception she's getting to the songs on *Love Somebody*. "I was really thrilled and tickled to death with all the response that everybody has given me," she says. "It's all positive, very good and I couldn't be happier. This is an album about love. It's about breaking up, getting together, going your separate ways, but the overall theme is love. So I think it's an album everybody can relate to in one way or another."

One factor that makes Reba's music so relatable is that, even though she's

a superstar in the entertainment field, off stage she's a daughter, sister, friend and working mom who is juggling the same responsibilities and commitments as many other working women.

So what advice does she have for other working moms? "Take a deep breath, for one thing," she says with a sigh. "I was always so blessed to have great help that cared about my family and my business, so that's very important is to surround yourself with good people, and then don't get overwhelmed. It's so easy to get over-

whelmed when you are doing all of it and you want to do it to the best of your ability. The good Lord helps me so much on all that kind of stuff. When I do get overwhelmed, I just say, 'Help me, Jesus. Help me, Jesus. Help me' and He always does. He comes through for me. He has mercy on me and He always helps me out.

"I have hard days too," she continues. "There are days when you are working and then kids want this and you've got to take care of a business thing, but if I had it to do over again,



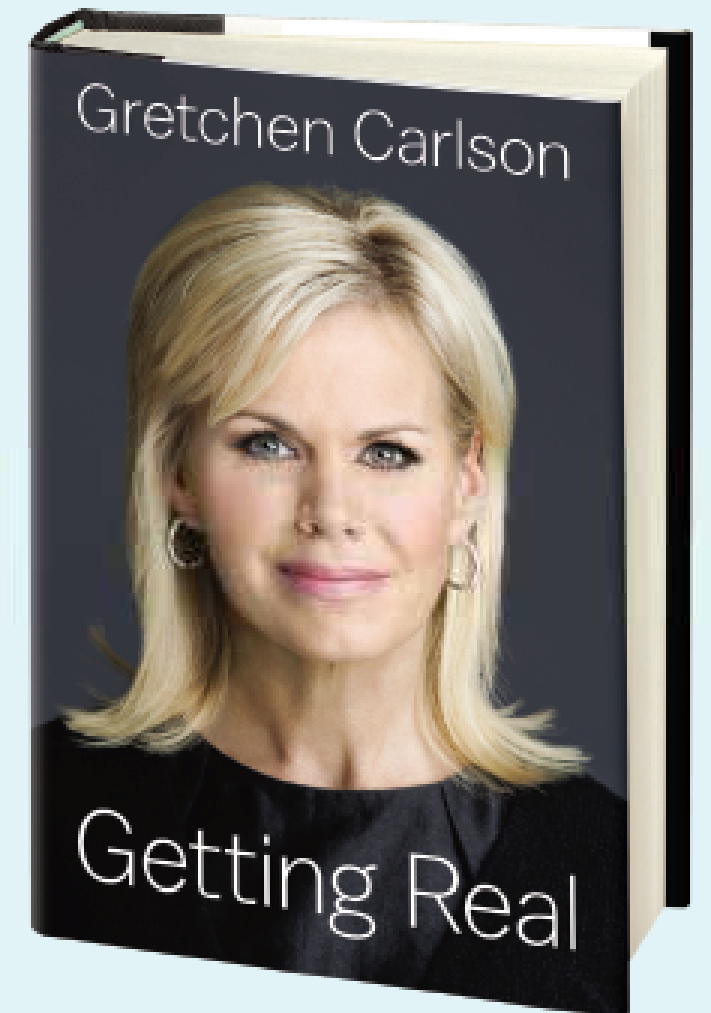
Former Miss America winner Gretchen Carlson gets real in this funny, inspiring memoir

"*Getting Real* is a powerful tool for young women who desire to become everything God designed them to be. Poignantly and humbly, she shares her struggles on the long road to success. Brava!"

—KATHIE LEE GIFFORD, co-host of "The Today Show"

"We can't all be Miss America, but we can all learn from Gretchen how to confront whatever comes our way and come out winners."

—DEBORAH NORVILLE, anchor of "Inside Edition" and author of *Thank You Power*



"There were a lot of obstacles, [including] being a female in a male's world and not knowing the business when I got into it. I'm from a ranch and rodeo family, but I had a lot of teachers and people who helped me through it. Thank God for them."



I think I would turn off that clock at a certain time and pay more attention to my family and their needs, and then kick back in (the next) morning after I got Shelby to school.”

Shelby is now 25 and has embarked on a career as a race-car driver. Though that vocation would make some mothers a nervous wreck every time their offspring put the pedal to the medal, once again Reba’s faith provides peace. “With Shelby getting into racing these last two years, my faith has gotten so much stronger. I’m talking to God more and it’s just amazing the strength

I draw from that.”

She’s learned to let go and leave her son in God’s hands. “I turn it over to God,” she shares. “I said, ‘God, you gave him the gift. I don’t know where it came from. You had to give it to him, so I send him right up to you to take care of him,’ and He just watches over Shelby all the time. I get nervous when I go watch and I pray over him all the time. I was at one race and a guy came up and said, ‘Hey, Shelby, can we pray before the race?’ and he said, ‘You bet!’ It just touched my heart so much that he is surrounded by people like that, so

[his dad] Narvel, Shelby and this gentleman and I stood there and prayed over Shelby’s protection.”

As the interview winds down, the conversation turns toward her legacy. As someone who has accomplished so much, what would she most like to be remembered for? “I just hope everybody knows how much I’ve loved them and love life,” she says. “And that I was a fun-loving gal who loved the Lord.” ☺

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We recently changed our name to better reflect our expanded outreach activities to help people of all ages find freedom from past and present hurts. These programs and resources are based on the same biblically based principles used in Mercy homes for over 30 years. God’s truth applies to everyday struggles as well as extreme situations!

*Pictured: Sophonie, 2012 Mercy Graduate
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Hope of the Daisy Petals: A Childhood Memory Conveys a Message of Love

BY KAREN FRIDAY

“He loves me; he loves me not.” I plucked the white daisy petals, deciding the outcome of my childhood crush.

Years later, during a Sunday church service, daisies on my dress stirred those memories as I waited for my pastor-husband Mike to call me to the platform. He had asked me to share the long journey of praying for my father to come to Christ. First we watched the Billy Graham video *Hope for America—a Message of the Cross*.

As I waited for my cue, the white-and-yellow daisies on a background of black seemed to blossom on my dress. The Lord put an image in my heart of plucking flower petals, representing a young girl’s hope for love. The memory conveyed a message. Hope was found in the kind of love that goes to the cross.

As a young girl, I longed for love—especially from a father. Starting in childhood, we form beliefs about love. Beliefs about God often shape what we think about love.

I wasn’t sure what I thought about God. Every other weekend I saw my father, a self-proclaimed atheist. He said, “People think there is a God but there

isn’t.” Truths about God’s existence were introduced to me by my mother and a small-town church we attended in Virginia.

At 16, when I came to Christ, I started praying for my father to believe in God and accept Christ as Lord.

Sixteen years later, my father accepted the message of the cross. He finally realized there was a God—a God who loved him and wanted him.

A few years ago, my father passed away five days before Christmas. The holidays that year were bittersweet. The family would not be going to his home for our traditional Christmas night Mexican feast. A lover of spicy food, he had started the tradition years earlier knowing that by Christmas night, his kids and grandchildren were ready for a change from the usual holiday foods.

Now my father was having his own feast and celebration in heaven. The image was sweet. And while we don’t typically think about daisies during the Christmas season, the message is forever ingrained in my heart. When we celebrate Christ’s birth, we also are rejoicing in Calvary’s cross and the resurrection.

There is a God. A Heavenly Father.

Love originates with God and love is from God. He is love. His love is not conditional on anything we do or don’t do. And His love is not based on a whimsical hope of the last flower petal landing on “he loves me.” It’s the hope of true love found in the cross.

God desires a love relationship with us. Plucking petals from a flower, we can never say about God, “He loves me not.” It is always, “He loves me, He loves me, He loves me. Jesus loves me.” ☺

KAREN FRIDAY
karengirlfriday.com

Karen, a pastor’s wife, is a writer, speaker and women’s ministry leader. She has two adult children. Her writing connects family life experiences, Christian ministry and real-life scenarios as women to the timeless truths of Scripture. Karen earned a communications degree and has marketing experience in a broad spectrum of business services, and is frequently referred to as “Girl Friday.”

7 Keys

TO LASTING FREEDOM

Learn to Walk in Lasting Freedom...
and Help Others Do the Same!

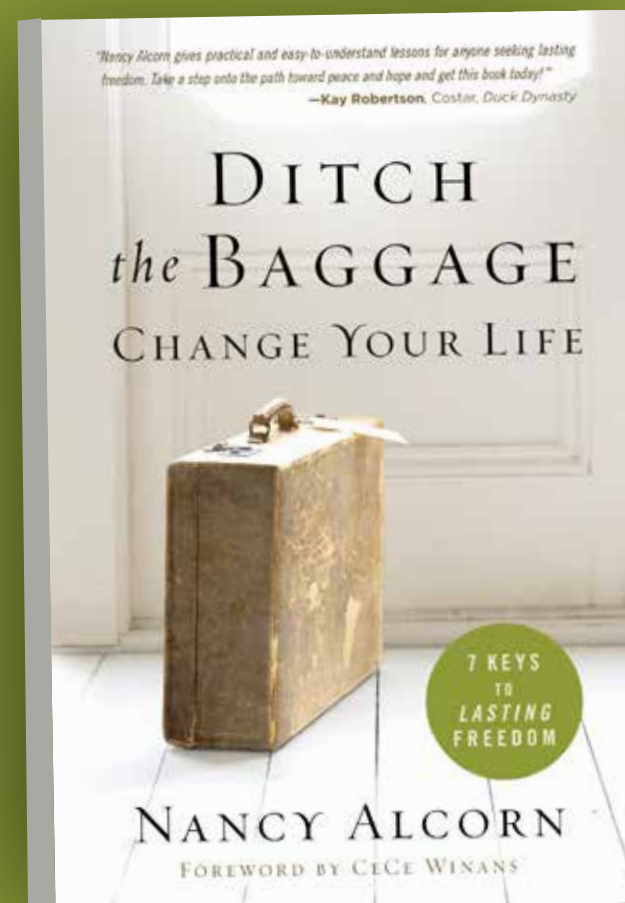
You were born to live free by God’s grace!

For some people, freedom means walking away from a terrible memory or experience. For others, freedom means getting unstuck from life-sapping thoughts or behaviors that keep them from flourishing in their relationships and walk with Christ. In her brand-new book, *Ditch the Baggage, Change Your Life*, Nancy Alcorn shares 7 pivotal keys to learning how to walk in lasting freedom.

A Study Guide, Leader Guide, and 8 video teaching downloads are also available at www.MercyMultiplied.com.

Nancy Alcorn

Founder and President of Mercy Multiplied, a nonprofit Christian organization that provides a free-of-charge residential program to troubled young women ages 13-28.



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God's Gift! Giving Birth to a Life with Purpose

BY LATRACEY COPELAND HUGHES

I was reminded today that at this time last year, God allowed physical limitation from cervical and ovarian cancer to overtake my body and have me on my back. The doctor said I am to be on strict bed rest for the remainder of my pregnancy.

First, I was uncomfortable about not having the ability to get up and do for myself and my daughters, but then remembered that last year God spoke so much into me that I was absorbed with the presence of God in a way that separated me from those I thought would be in my corner.

To wait on God and allow Him to direct the path in your life is what is necessary in the growth of any Christian. I can't imagine where I would be if I didn't have God to instruct my journey. God is so good to me! I just had to have a praise break for a moment.

I look back and realize that after my surgeries, the doctors told me that I would never give birth again, but at my six-month follow-up appointment, the doctors said that I was cancer free and pregnant. I know I heard God tell me that the shift is happening now and that I would be birthing purpose, but my God, who would have thought?

Well, my husband didn't agree with the blessings that God had in store for this next level and decided to leave our family because of his own fear and selfish reasons. But God love him! Romans 8:28 states: "And we know that

in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." I am grateful that as of today, I am on strict bed rest in the process of birthing purpose. I can only imagine what God has in store for me during this season. JESUS!

While resting today, I was planning for the baby shower, which is scheduled for next Saturday, and a lady from church called to see if she could bring some things by for us. I graciously accepted until she got here and gave me a stuffed animal that I thought was a sheep. It wasn't anything less than a lamb for baby Purpose. Yes, I decided to name the baby girl Purpose, for several reasons.

Do you know what the importance of the Lamb is? When Jesus is called the Lamb of God in John 1:29 and John 1:36, it is referring to Him as the perfect and ultimate sacrifice for sin. In order to understand who Christ was and what He did, we must begin with the Old Testament, which contains prophecies concerning the coming of Christ as a "guilt offering" (Isaiah 53:10).

In fact, the whole sacrificial system established by God in the Old Testament set the stage for the coming of Jesus Christ, who is the perfect sacrifice God would provide as atonement for the sins of His people (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 10).

Don't get me wrong. I understand that I was not in the will of the Lord when I went with my own emotions to get married only to cover up the sin of premarital sex. The sacrifice of lambs played a very important role in the Jewish religious life and sacrificial system. John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Trust me when I say that I am grateful that Jesus gave the ultimate sacrifice for my sins ahead of time.

That wasn't an excuse to do what I did but I also know that God has redeemed me for the sins committed both knowingly and unknowingly.

Another important sacrifice involving lambs was the daily ritual at the temple in Jerusalem. Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple for the sins of the people (Exodus 29:38-42). These daily sacrifices, like all others, were simply to point people toward the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Of course, that person was none other than Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God."

For my unborn daughter, Purpose, we were blessed with a crib, a changing table and a huge bag of items that had the lamb on them. To others it's just a theme, but to me it is truly a way of life that God has granted me for giving him my life. I know that I am not perfect, but I cannot continue to beat myself up for the past and present sins that I have

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committed. I know that God is my savior and forever more He lives in me.

I am so glad that I made the choice to live for Christ. I'm imperfect with a sinful nature, but I am His. In making my choice to live for Him, God has allowed me to be the vessel for so many and carry His purpose within me during this season. I appreciate the gifts given for my baby and the lessons that come along with her to share to the world today. What choice have you made today that will impact your life for eternity? 



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LaTracey is a publisher, author, igniting coach, business consul-

tant and blazing empowerment speaker. She comes with the passion to be a blessing to others, the purpose to know that her life's tests are only the beginning to a marvelous testimony and the prosperity that aligns with her worth.

In difficult times, the Word means courage

BY TRICIA LEONG

This year, 2015, is a Jubilee year for Singapore, and it started off well. But by mid-January, my mom had fallen into depression. My parents live in Malaysia while my family and I reside in Singapore, since I am married to

a Singaporean. I have a younger brother in Hong Kong.

My parents are in their mid-70s and they are on their own. In February, my toddler and I spent three weeks looking after my mom because my dad's eyesight was not too good, even as he still drove around to run errands and buy food.

While I was home, I had to run errands for them, take my mom to the doctor, cook, wash and do laundry, plus look after my toddler—the full works! One night my dad and I got into a heated argument because my toddler had disturbed him during his mealtime.

My dad had scolded my toddler, and it made me very upset. Shortly after the incident, I had to tend to my toddler since he was crying profusely. Later in the night, I felt convicted to seek the Lord for wisdom, strength, peace and joy as I served my parents during my three weeks at home.

In my weakest and most vulnerable moment, the Lord spoke from 2 Chronicles 20:15: "The battle is not yours but God's." This Scripture was my rhema Word that helped me persevere and totally trust in God's guidance for my speech, actions and thoughts. I was overwhelmed by His living Word, for it is sharper than a two-edged sword. The rest was history, as they say.

Then it was time for me to leave Malaysia for Singapore. My husband and older son drove to Malaysia to pick us up. My heart was heavy when I left because my mom was still not in good shape. But I pressed on, believing and declaring the Lord would protect and restore my parents' health and He would send godly community and counsel to my parents. And indeed, the Lord is faithful.

He sent a counselor to mom, and she was being counseled from the comfort of my parents' home. Meanwhile, my mom's only brother and his wife, who live in Australia, came back to Malaysia for a visit. The siblings had a great time bonding, and my uncle would cook for my parents every day. My uncle and his wife spent a good month with my mom

and even had the opportunity to take her for follow-up doctor's appointment. After a month in Malaysia, my uncle and his wife had to leave for Australia.

But the day of their departure, he had cooked up a storm for my parents.

My mom was worried about my uncle's health. A month after their return to Australia, I had received bad news about my uncle in the wee hours. He had an asthma attack that led to cardiac arrest. He went into a coma and was on life support for three days. My mom's two younger sisters flew to Australia.

Meanwhile, my mom was recovering very well. I could not break the news to my parents, particularly my mom, about my uncle's death. I was so shaken that I did not know what to do. Thank God for my spiritual mentor, who helped me navigate the entire process of how to break the news to my mom.

I had to contact her doctor and counselor to update them on what was happening. It was a very heavy and dark moment for me. I had sought everyone's prayers from pastors to friends. Most importantly, I had sought the Lord for His comfort and wisdom during this time on how to break the news to my mother.

I was scared, but I mustered up my confidence, picked up the phone and called my dad to inform him of my uncle's situation. As we spoke, my uncle's life support was being removed. Dad was shocked and shaken. He and I had to come up with a plan to bring mom to Singapore for a visit. The plan went well because throughout the time of planning, I needed God's hands and presence in it.

The trip to Singapore went fine. Yet when my parents arrived in Singapore, we had to keep mum about the entire situation. Three days passed, and I continued to pray daily asking the Lord for wisdom, and again He showed me His Word on John 14:6. I had a good dialogue with the Lord on the eve of my uncle's funeral. I sensed it deep in my heart that I had to break the news on his funeral day.

The following day was his funeral, and my mother told me that she dreamed

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that someone in the family had passed on but she couldn't figure out who. The Kairos moment came and I broke the news about my uncle's death to my mom. She was shocked but remained calm and composed, though some tears rolled down her cheeks. God's presence was so strong at that time.

I took the opportunity to pray for my parents, especially my dad, who is a pre-believer. I just want to say God is ever so faithful even when we are not. Unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain. The Lord's presence goes with me. What the evil meant for bad, God turns it around to save lives! This was a major breakthrough of faith in action. All Glory to God! 



TRICIA LEONG

Tricia was born and raised in Malaysia. She moved to Singapore a decade ago for business reason but now is a stay-at-home mom for sons Luke, 6, and Zacchaeus, 4. She developed a passion in uplifting all women and nurturing children. She is active in her church as a small group leader and in the children's ministry. She is learning to play the keyboard and is training to be a worship leader in children's ministry.

A Daughter's Death Brings a Family Strength

BY VALERIE HERNDON

"Mom, my knee hurts," our 14-year-old daughter told me after track practice one day. Thinking it was an injury from overuse, I told her, "Katie, you just need to rest and ice it for a while."

We were living life at breakneck speed, and I really didn't have time for this. I should have paid more attention. The pain was getting worse and worse. Little did I know that our lives were about to be turned upside down.

My husband, Wes, took Katie in for her X-ray. "Dad, can I talk to you outside for a minute?" the orthopedic doctor said. "Your daughter has a tu-

pital stays, her body wasting away, surgeries, isolation, loneliness and depression. She lost her beautiful, thick, black hair, and the stress it put on our family as a whole was immeasurable. It hit us all in the gut.

Treatments would separate my husband and me. We were living two separate lives before the diagnosis, and now we were being pulled apart even further. He lived at the office, I at the hospital. Our two older children, Nick and Bethany, were left to fend for themselves.

When Katie finished her chemo treatments, we were all so ecstatic. Imagine our devastation when the

"We will always miss Katie because that hole will always be there. But what was meant for our harm, God has used for our good."

mor covering her entire knee. I'm referring you to a cancer doctor at Texas Children's Hospital." The diagnosis: osteosarcoma, or bone cancer. Even with the terrifying diagnosis, we never thought our child would die.

Words cannot describe fully what it was like to watch my child suffer—the countless clinic trips, pain, needles, nausea, vomiting, emergency-room trips in the middle of the night, hos-

follow-up CT scan showed the cancer had metastasized into her right lung. We prayed harder than ever and believed that God would work a miracle. We stood on His promises and knew Jesus could heal our daughter. Surely He wouldn't let our child die.

Katie left this earth on Sept. 28, 2002. I wished I had died, too. It felt as though my faith had been assaulted. How could I ever trust in a God



Last year, sweet five-year-old **Fah** lost her parents in an earthquake that devastated portions of Burma. Suddenly orphaned, she was sent to live with her grandma in a small village in Thailand. But with Fah's arrival, her grandma now had seven children to feed,

THERE SIMPLY WAS NOT ENOUGH FOOD TO GO AROUND.

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who would allow such a thing? I had to come to the place of knowing that Katie was His creation; His child, not mine; and that He loved her even more than I did.

But then I began to learn about the abundance of God's grace.

We will always miss Katie because that hole will always be there. But what was meant for our harm, God has used for our good. God has restored our family and strengthened our marriage in a way we never thought possible.

These days, Wes and I teach a marriage class at church. But our greatest privilege is helping other couples that have experienced deep loss. God has given us purpose when we share our experiences with others. We have a peace and assurance that we will someday see our daughter again and take great comfort in knowing that no evil will ever touch her again. 🌿



VALERIE
HERNDON

Valerie, author of *Grace Poured Out*, has been involved in the teaching ministry for more than 40 years.

She and her husband, Wes, teach marriage class at Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. She is the mother of three beautiful children—two on earth, one in heaven—and proud grandmother of three.

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Make your goals A FAMILY MATTER

An annual tradition builds connections, meaning and memories

BY CAMILLE GAINES



Many years ago, my family began a holiday tradition that has had a major impact on our lives and brought us closer. Each January, we share our goals for the upcoming year. Afterward, we review the goals we wrote for the previous year. As we do so, we connect over both the disappointments and the accomplishments.

Over the years, I have tried to start traditions, but life gets busy and many of my ideas fail to get solid grounding. Our annual goal setting, however, is one tradition that actually stuck.

I'll share the reasons this effort worked in the hopes that you'll add this meaningful practice into your lives with your loved ones, whether that means just your spouse or the entire gang, including cousins and grandparents.

- One important element is consistent timing as to when the goals are written. You can choose any month. August is a good time since it's back-to-school time for most families, but we like the New Year because my husband and I are already setting our financial and life goals for the year. The children are in school then,

so it gives them an opportunity to refresh their memories about what's important to them, and a few good months to work toward any school-related goals.

In some years we didn't get to our goal sharing until Jan. 7, but we always did it. The exact day doesn't matter; it's the actual doing that matters. This has been invaluable because we love to look back over the years at what seemed important at the time, or what actually was important in hindsight.

One year we wrote our goals while we were traveling back from our New Year's ski trip. What special memories that year brings. In other years, we sat by the lingering Christmas tree, fireplace or at the infamous kitchen table. It doesn't matter where; it matters only that you connect.


- Another key: Avoid scattered papers by designating a special journal just for goal sharing. Use one with a pretty cover, or leather-bound, because it is certain to become a family trea-

sure. A worst-case scenario is that the goals get written on a sticky note and stuck in the binder. That's OK as long as the goals stay together in one place. This isn't about perfection; it's about completion.

- It's also important to keep the goal setting simple so that it gets done. This isn't about an elaborate business plan or complete life makeover. It's about a quick 5 or 10 minutes of thinking, writing and sharing.
- One last tip is to allow family members to be who they are, without feedback or input. It's easy to tell your children or spouse what they "should" want. This goal-setting practice reveals what's important to them. It's not about you, so don't try to make it that way. Honor one another for your goals and heartfelt intentions.

Now that my sons are young adults, we get some good laughs when we look back over the goals of the last 15 years. When they were 8, winning at a particular game was the intention. Now, the stakes are bigger, such as graduating from

college, an exercise routine or mastering a new business-related skill.

As you and your loved ones develop your goal-setting habit, you'll find that it actually shapes who you each become. But the best outcome is that, for a good hour, we share not only what's at the front of our minds, but also what's deep in our hearts. 



CAMILLE GAINES

Camille, best-selling author and founder of FinancialWoman.com, motivates women to discern what they really want, and then gives them simple yet life-changing solutions to get it. Through her programs,

she shares her proven process for helping women live a "rich life" while fulfilling important financial goals.



Holiday Hustle

'Tis the season of carts, cards, catalogs and Nutella

BY KERRI POMAROLLI

The commercialism has sunken deep into our culture, and the holiday retail displays go up in August. What is happening, people? When did we start drinking the Kool-Aid?

I hate the holidays. What? Did I say that out loud?

Well, first of all, I live in California. We don't really have seasons. We just go by what they are serving at Starbucks and dress accordingly. You can just see us in our Ugg boots and miniskirts drinking Pumpkin Lattes, and it's definitely fall by our standards. Starbucks pulls out the peppermint hot chocolate and Christmas time is here again.

So why would I make such a bold statement as to say I dread the holidays?

Because it's madness for anyone over the age of 12, that's why. If Santa is so real, why isn't he helping me survive the woman at Target who almost took out an eye while running me over with her cart?

The commercialism has sunken deep into our culture, and the holiday retail displays go up in August. What is happening, people? When did we start drinking the Kool-Aid?

And what about the fact that as a mom I need to come up with another epic politically correct holiday card to top last year's pink pajamas or my whole family dressed as super heroes?

But seriously, how much work do you have to go through to get that "loving pose" you want for the cards? It may appear you're all in white shirts, walking on a beach and singing hymns. But in

reality the baby's crying, the 8-year-old is vomiting from the cotton candy you bribed him with, your husband hates tucking in his shirt and you're upset the family dog had to be included because he's licking himself. You fight the whole time and then end up using God's gift to the modern world—Photoshop.

Don't even get me started about the mass delivery of every holiday catalog this century to my doorstep with my kids' mouths salivating at the latest toys they need to celebrate Jesus' birth. I can't control it no matter how hard I try. They absolutely must have the new space globe that tells time. That exact globe is sitting in my garage right now, and my kid still doesn't know her planets.

When Lucy was 3, I saw her putting some toys in a trash bag on Christmas Eve. I was amazed at her generous, Christ-like spirit, so I said, "Lucy, why are you doing that?"

"I'm giving these to the orphans," she replied.

"Wow, Lucy, that's amazing."

"Yeah, Mama, I'm doing it so Santa can take me off the naughty list!"

So you can clearly see that I have it all figured out. My kids are heartwarming and unselfish, and every holiday is a charmer.

Usually at the end of my articles I have a big "God moment" to give you, a nugget of wisdom for my beloved readers. But this time, I just want you to know that when you're shopping

at 11:59 on Christmas Eve night on Amazon and resentful that you didn't get your child's teachers Mason jars with homemade Chex mix, you are not alone. You aren't even close to alone.

We're all stressed and eating Nutella in the bathroom with a fork! We're women! And God loved us so much he gave us His only begotten Son and Nutella. It's like a birthday gift from Jesus to every one of us. Thank you, Jesus!

Now that I think about it, your birthday is going to be a great day. I get to eat the skin off the turkey before anyone else can get to it. And don't get me started on the mashed potatoes.

Sorry guys, I have to go get our Star Wars Jedi Costumed dry-cleaned for the Christmas photo shoot tomorrow.

Ta-ta for now! Jesus loves you! Merry Christmas! (And yes, that's still legal to say in most states!) 🙌



KERRI POMAROLLI
kerripom.com

Kerri, known as Hollywood's God Girl, is a stand-up comedian, author, actress,

mom and out-of-the-closet Christian. She has been seen on the *Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *Showbiz Tonight* and *General Hospital*. Her latest book, *Guys Like Girls Named Jennie*, is being considered as a motion picture.

TIME TO BUILD

A blueprint for strengthening relationships includes hours of focus

BY MARILYN SCOTT

When I got married, I didn't realize how much work I needed to put into my marriage for it to succeed. Who does? It took me some years to finally realize, "OK, I've got a house to build." So I asked God to give me a blueprint for building a successful marriage and relationship for my family.

"Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands." Proverbs 14:1

After you say, "I do," it's time to get to work. The "perfect wife" in Proverbs 31:10-31 is a perfect example for us to follow.

What are we doing to build our relationships with our husband and our family? If both spouses work, we spend about 12 hours preparing for work, actually working and commuting to and from work. That's already half a day.

If we make sure to get at least seven hours of sleep, we have only five hours to spend quality time with our family each day. That means we have to make the best of our weekends.

What's on your agenda for making a healthy and better relationship with your family? Are you making those hours count? I hope and pray it includes spending some quality time with each other before you both sit down to relax.

We must find time to build our relationships and invest in our own families to ensure we are setting an example for others.

How are you building your relationship with each other? The kids will grow up, go to college, get a job and get married. Have you ever thought about how your relationship will be when you grow old together?

Do we spend too much time with friends and on social media with people we don't even know? I had to ask myself, "Am I spending enough time with my husband when we get home from work and on weekends?" Are you spending enough time with your children? You need a balance with these relationships.

It's a good thing if couples attend the same church. I know couples who do not have a problem going to different churches, and it is not a sin. But if you fellowship together, it's a plus for the relationship. On the other hand, if we aren't careful, we'll find ourselves spending more time in church activities after work and on weekends than we do with our family. The Holy Spirit is very intelligent. He's here to guide us. If we don't know how to divide up the time wisely, He will teach us.

A successful relationship takes focus. People always say to me, "You and your husband are always together." Yes, and we work at it, because we want to have a great relationship. If we allow others to spend more time with our spouse than we do, that could be a sign of a relationship that's about to collapse.

We live in a world full of distractions challenging our



marriages and families. It is imperative that we determine if we are building better relationships within our families.

Too often, a spouse's job requires being away from home. In these cases, with today's technology, we have many ways of staying in contact with one another from almost anywhere in the world. We don't have too many excuses for not doing so.

I'd like for you to analyze how much time you are spending on building a better relationship with your family. Count the hours. Could the relationships be near collapse because you didn't pay attention to the blueprint that God gave you, or because you just don't have one? Some relationships may need rebuilding, others remodeling. Look into your home because there is always room for improvement. I'm still working on mine.

We have only one life to live, and we don't want to look

back in regret that we did not try to build a better relationship with each other during those years we spent together. We can't get that time back. It's long gone. 🌀



MARILYN SCOTT
[facebook.com/dreammessengers](https://www.facebook.com/dreammessengers)

Marilyn is known as a praying woman who exercises the gift of prophetic dreams and intercessory prayer. She is the author of *God Speaks: Discover How He Communicates through Dreams and Visions*, which also has been published in Nigeria. Marilyn has

more than 30 years' experience with companies such as IBM, Xerox and American Airlines. She is married to Nathan Scott, a minister and an author. Email Marilyn at marilyn@blesscott.com.

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"We also need to stop and think about the reason we celebrate these special holidays. We should have thankful hearts in all things and recognize where our gifts come from, and to share this."





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Christmas Decorations and Traditions

In my mind, I've turned the clock back 30 years. My sister and I are all dressed up in matching plaid dresses. We're getting ready for Christmas Eve dinner, and posing for pictures in front of the brick fireplace in our first house. I am old enough to remember how excited we were that Santa Claus would come and leave presents. I remember how much fun it was to have our crazy, loud family all together for Christmas.

I have so many fond memories of Christmases past, but beautifully set tables, brightly decorated trees and festively wrapped presents are the forefront of my memories. Our family was so much fun, and there was always so much laughter. At Christmas, our home was filled with hysterical storytelling, great food and an appreciation for the blessing of family.

For me, Christmas brings to mind times with family and friends, surrounded with delights for all the senses. In our home, we have always celebrated the original meaning of Christmas, which is the birth of Christ. It is a special time of gratitude. We read the Christmas story from the Bible and share with each other what we are grateful for in our lives. We speak of the blessings that we have been given, in the form of family, friends and things we have taken part of.

Gifts are a fun part of Christmas, and we enjoy the process of wrapping and putting them under the tree for the kids. But we also remember that Christmas represents the ultimate gift, the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ. Christmas brings me back to the reason for Inspired Design, to make people feel loved, included and to set the stage for memories to be made. It's about relationships, relationships, relationships—a relationship with our Creator, relationships with our family, and relationships with friends. It's about loving them, for love is truly inspired.

Just as we began the book with where we came from, we finish the book with where we are going from here. I hope you are inspired to design. Sometimes you may have no idea of how special you have made someone feel, or of the difference you made with a simple invitation. It is often surprising who is actually the most in need. Allow yourself to be surprised. ■ ■ ■



Riches, both material and spiritual, can choke you if you do not use them fairly. For not even God can put anything in a heart that is already full. - Mother Teresa



Hannah's POINT OF VIEW

It feels lovely to sit down at a beautiful table. When I look back at sitting at the Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner table, each looked clean and creative. Honestly that makes each dinner even better. Memories are all I have left of past Christmases and it really makes the memory even better to picture a beautiful setting. I remember all my family events looked wonderful and it contributes to the way I remember all celebrations.

— Hannah





A JOURNEY WITH LYME

Living with, and learning about, a mysterious illness

BY ROXANNE PACKHAM

I'm so thankful to the Holy Spirit within me. That still, small voice said, "Don't be discouraged, don't give up. You'll figure it out."

I knew in the core of my soul that something was wrong. Something in my body. And I'd known it for three years.

I'm so thankful to the Holy Spirit within me. That still, small voice said, "Don't be discouraged, don't give up. You'll figure it out."

The low point in my journey of diagnosis happened while sitting in my car. I had driven to Starbucks to get tea after an awful doctor's appointment when I started to get teary. After I parked the car, those tears began to flow and I cried for an hour. I never made it into Starbucks.

I was in anguish because I wondered if I would ever figure out what was wrong with me. This particular bout of crying came after one of many doctor's appointments during which I explained many symptoms.

One was weight gain—30 pounds in three years even though I took a hilly, 5-mile walk most days. Also, I eat organic, gluten-free, grain-free, soy-free, sugar-free and dairy-free, and mostly consume only vegetables and meat.

I cried not because I was no closer to a medical diagnosis, but because the doctor seemed to dismiss my concerns.

The only symptom he seemed to hear was the weight gain. He replied to me, "It's a simple mathematical equation: calories in, calories out."

He ordered blood work. It came back normal.

But I knew that my body wasn't working properly. The Holy Spirit told me to continue to search. Total exhaustion was another symptom. For example, one day I woke up at noon and took a shower around 1 p.m. Then I had to rest on the bed because the shower exhausted me. I blew-dry my hair, rested just a little more on my bed and then went to the grocery store. Yes, it was a big day, but I made it to the grocery store, finished my shopping and came home exhausted. I had months of this problem.

I saw dozens of California specialists from San Diego to Ventura: holistic, allopathic, naturopathic, chiropractors, acupuncturist, herbalists and energy healers. I tried cupping, healing rooms, prayer rooms, far infrared sauna therapy, herbs, essential oils, emotional release, massage and raindrop therapy. I had blood tests, urine tests, saliva tests, MRI's, thyroid biopsies, ultrasound of thyroid, ultrasound of stomach and GI, treadmill echo cardiogram, ER visits for allergic re-

actions and too many more treatments to list.

What was the matter with me? Simply, it was Lyme disease.

To answer the basic question first: No, I never noticed a tick bite and never had a rash. I'm speculating I was bitten about 3 years ago, but there is no way to determine the timing. If you catch the bite or see the rash—only 20 percent of those bitten do—it can be common to take antibiotics and be cured.

But you won't be prescribed the antibiotics if you don't see the rash or if you go to doctors who either don't know about Lyme or don't believe it exists where you live. It then sadly becomes a chronic condition for which antibiotics often don't work. This is what happened to me.

I'm on the road to recovery, but it is long and often scary. Some days are great, some not. I have had to pull back on a multitude of commitments so I can allow my body to rest and heal. Many sufferers have to stop working, even going on disability. I must constantly focus on God, His plan for my life and His great healing ability. If I worried too much about the details of the disease or the process, I would get depressed. I

am trying to keep my eyes focused on Him.

But, this story isn't about me. It's about an epidemic. My sole (and soul) purpose in sharing my story is to help those without a diagnosis who might be suffering now. This is a unique disease surrounded by misinformation.

Early symptoms, which I do believe I remember having but mistook for the flu, are aches, chills, fever and sometimes swollen glands. Many doctors will write those off as perimenopause, or menopause.

First, you do not need the rash or know of a specific bite. If you want a test, find an LLMD—a Lyme-literate medical doctor. The standard test, the Western Blot, often doesn't show active infection. In an article in *Business Insider*, James Meek, a public health researcher at Yale University, says Borrelia, the bacteria responsible for Lyme, "is also very difficult to culture from blood. Evolutionarily, it's a great little creature, but for us it's a terrible thing."

Second, it doesn't matter where you live. Lyme is more prevalent everywhere. It is under-reported, though great strides are being made, literally daily, thanks to popular entertainers like Avril Lavigne and *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*

HOW MY LYME BECAME A BLESSING

BY KENDAL KOORENNY



Never will I forget the day I was diagnosed with Lyme disease in 2014. I was only 14. For years I struggled with a plethora of undiagnosed health issues and desperately prayed, asking God for answers. Little did I know this single event would not only strengthen my relationship with the Lord, but also reveal His calling for my life.

Battling a chronic, debilitating disease isn't easy. It robbed me of activities I previously took for granted, such as functioning like a normal teenager, spending time with friends and playing on my high school golf team. But I never would change this experience because of what God has developed within me—strength, perseverance, compassion.

It's only with God's strength, not my own, that I get out of bed each morning. I rely on His Word to motivate me every day, especially when I'm discouraged and feel the weight of my disease crushing me. One of my favorite verses is from 2 Corinthians when God tells Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

This is quite possibly my favorite line in the Bible—although it's hard to choose just one—because it feels like God is speaking directly to me about my struggles with Lyme. Instead of worrying about my present or future circumstances, I am reminded by this verse that God's grace is all I need.

Although I'm imperfect, God's power covers me with an overwhelming umbrella of love and mercy.

You couldn't guess that I'm sick by simply glancing at me or that my treatment consists of 80 pills per day—no, that's not an exaggeration—plus multiple antibiotics and weekly IVs and injections. On the outside I may not look like I'm fighting an illness, but I battle this invisible, chronic, nasty disease every second.

Despite my struggles, I view Lyme disease as a blessing. The key is that I've asked God to grant me His joy despite my trials. Also, I obeyed when God called me to launch my website, Healthandhighheels.org, after igniting a passion in me for health and nutrition during my fight against Lyme.

It wasn't easy, but by listening to His command, I've found great joy in educating others about nutrition, sharing my gluten, dairy, and soy-free recipes with the world, and hopefully pursuing a career in medicine to help others just like me.

star Yolanda Foster, who are making their struggles public.

Finally, there is no standard of care or protocol because there is great disagreement within the medical community as to whether chronic Lyme exists. It does. I live in California and was told by two doctors that Lyme doesn't exist here. Well, I travel. Did I get it here or somewhere else? I don't know, but it is irrelevant to my care and the care of those across the country.

The risk of Lyme infections has risen 320 percent in the last 20 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control, as

reported in *Shape* magazine. There are many different theories as to why Lyme has grown so fast. The least controversial is that rats and birds can carry it now. According to Dr. Daniel Cameron, an expert in Lyme research, "I think it's the role of birds, who carry ticks long distances."

Another theory is that global warming is contributing. Cameron says, "The theory is that if the spring gets warmer earlier, then mice get infected earlier." So, what was once thought to be prevalent only in areas with a high population of deer—thus the deer tick as the carrier—is now not the

informed point of view.

Lorraine Johnson, CEO of lymedisease.org, says the number of people with disease prevalence—people who get the disease and remain ill—for Lyme is about a third. Johnson discusses a study by Johns Hopkins that looked at patients diagnosed and treated early. It found that 35 percent remained sick. The CDC/NIH estimates that 10-20 percent remain ill.

Lyme is an expensive disease for sufferers because of the complicated insurance industry. "Lyme patients are paying an extraordinary amount of money out of pocket compared to people with other diseases," Johnson says. A survey by her organization this year found that of more than 6,000 patients who tested positive for Lyme, 47 percent had to cut back on work and 17 percent filed for disability.

So, what should you do?

Use bug repellent when you go outdoors and make sure to put an organic, safe repellent on your little ones every day they go out to play. I was opposed to using the harsh bug repellents when my children were younger and didn't use it on myself either. If I had it to do over, I would use those sprays, even if only on my shoes and pants.

Don't obsessively worry, but be proactive. If you are going outdoors on a hike, stay on the trails; don't walk where there is tall, dry brush.

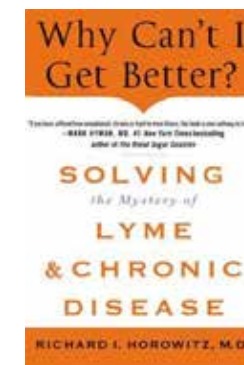
Wear light-colored clothing and check yourselves and your children when you come inside. If you find a tick, call the doctor, even if you don't think it bit you or your child.

I do not blame any of my doctors for my plight. I am married to one. I think it is the most admirable profession there is, which might be why I went through a little bit of a bitterness-anger stage. I love selecting a profession where you take care of others as your life's work. I think I was just profoundly disappointed that until I found my hero doctor—until I found my hero doctor—an LLMD who listened to and heard me—they just looked at me.

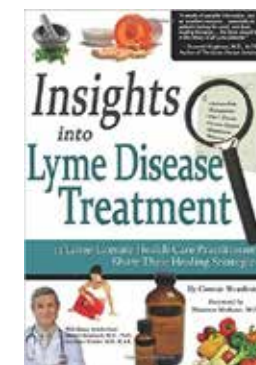
I went to our local prayer healing rooms several times for healing prayer, where I did have to forgive doctors. Again, I feel a need to say I don't blame them for not knowing what a huge epidemic it is. Lyme disease is called the "great imitator" because it mimics many diseases where sore joints are a symptom. In fact, many sufferers of those diseases have found Lyme to be the culprit.

Because there is no standard of care in Lyme disease, do your research. Even some of the information in the accompanying story is controversial to some.:

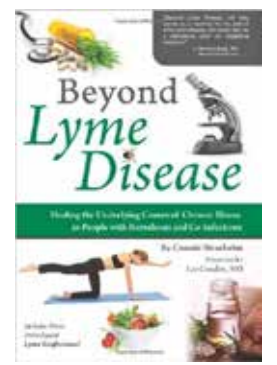
The Mystery of Chronic Lyme Disease, (article) *Wall Street Journal*, by Sumathi Reddy



Why Can't I Get Better? Solving the Mystery of Lyme and Chronic Disease by Richard Horowitz



Insights Into Lyme Disease Treatment: 13 Lyme Literate Health Care Practitioners By Connie Strashheim



Beyond Lyme Disease: Healing the Underlying Causes of Chronic Illness in People By Connie Strashheim

FASHION TO FALL INTO

Get excited! Fall is here, and with it come exciting new trends that will breathe new life into your wardrobe. Whether it's jumping in leaves, enjoying fall festivals or sipping on pumpkin spice lattes, you'll look ever so stylish during this cooler season.



Levi's 501 CT Destructed Denim \$64.50
V Fraas Blanket Wrap \$48
Dolce Vita "Juneau" \$200
Belk and belk.com

FALL COLORS

Celebrate the changing of the seasons with deeper, richer colors.



Vince Camuto Tie-Neck Print Blouse \$99
Vince Camuto Culottes \$99
Nordstrom and nordstrom.com



CeCe by Cynthia Steffe Bell Sleeve Dress \$148
Belk and belk.com



Maison Jules
Cardigan \$129.50
Dress \$69.50
Macy's and macys.com



Vince Camuto Embellished Collar Shift Dress \$158
Nordstrom and nordstrom.com



I.N.C. International Concepts
Sweater \$89.50
Jeans \$89.50
Macy's and macys.com

THE '70S

If you thought the '70s were over, think again. Those bell-bottoms are back, whether the thought makes you cringe or want to throw on your fringe vest.



Sophie Max Leatherette Jacket \$98
Suede Dress \$98
Belk and belk.com



Kiind of Coatigan \$139
Belk and belk.com



Crown & Ivy Sweater \$72
Belk and belk.com



Bernardo Faux-Fur Vest \$128
Nordstrom and nordstrom.com



Style & Co.
Sweater \$49.50
Moleskin Leggings \$42.50
Macy's and macys.com



Rebecca Minkoff Amis Trench Coat \$898
Nordstrom and nordstrom.com



HUE Super Fishnet Tights in black or nude \$15 or 2/\$24
 HUE Ribbed Boot Sock available in espresso, black and ivory \$8.50
 Nordstrom and nordstrom.com



Steve Madden 'Jilly' Platform Sandal \$99.95
 Steve Madden 'Betty' Pump \$99.95
 Steve Madden 'Joanie' Platform Bootie \$149.95
 Nordstrom and nordstrom.com

FALL ACCESSORIES

If going all-out hippie doesn't appeal to your inner Audrey Hepburn, adding little splashes of suede and fringe in your accessories will keep things trendy.



Frye "Parker" Fringe Boot \$318
 Belk and belk.com



Frye "Heidi" Fringe Bucket \$458
 Belk and belk.com



Dooney & Bourke Verona Elisa Satchel \$298
 Belk and belk.com



I.N.C. International Concepts Cross-Body Bag \$79.50



American Rag Combat Boots \$79.50



I.N.C. International Concepts Slide-Ons \$89.50



Bar III Spiked Earring \$24.50



Bar III Leather Cuff \$39.50



I.N.C. International Concepts Tassel Necklace \$44.50



Vince Camuto
Fringe Pendant \$58
Chard Pendant \$58
Belk and belk.com



Bar III Necklace \$49.50



ELIZABETH BERGMAN
msclassicglamour.blogspot.com

Elizabeth is the youngest certified Christian image consultant in the nation and was formerly a photo coordinator and copy editor for *Designed to Flourish Magazine*, a Christian women's publication. Elizabeth also has a style blog that encourages women to look and feel their best, hoping to bring out the celebrity in every woman.

LOOKING FRUMPY? TRY THE 'DIAMOND' SOLUTION


BY SHARI BRAENDEL

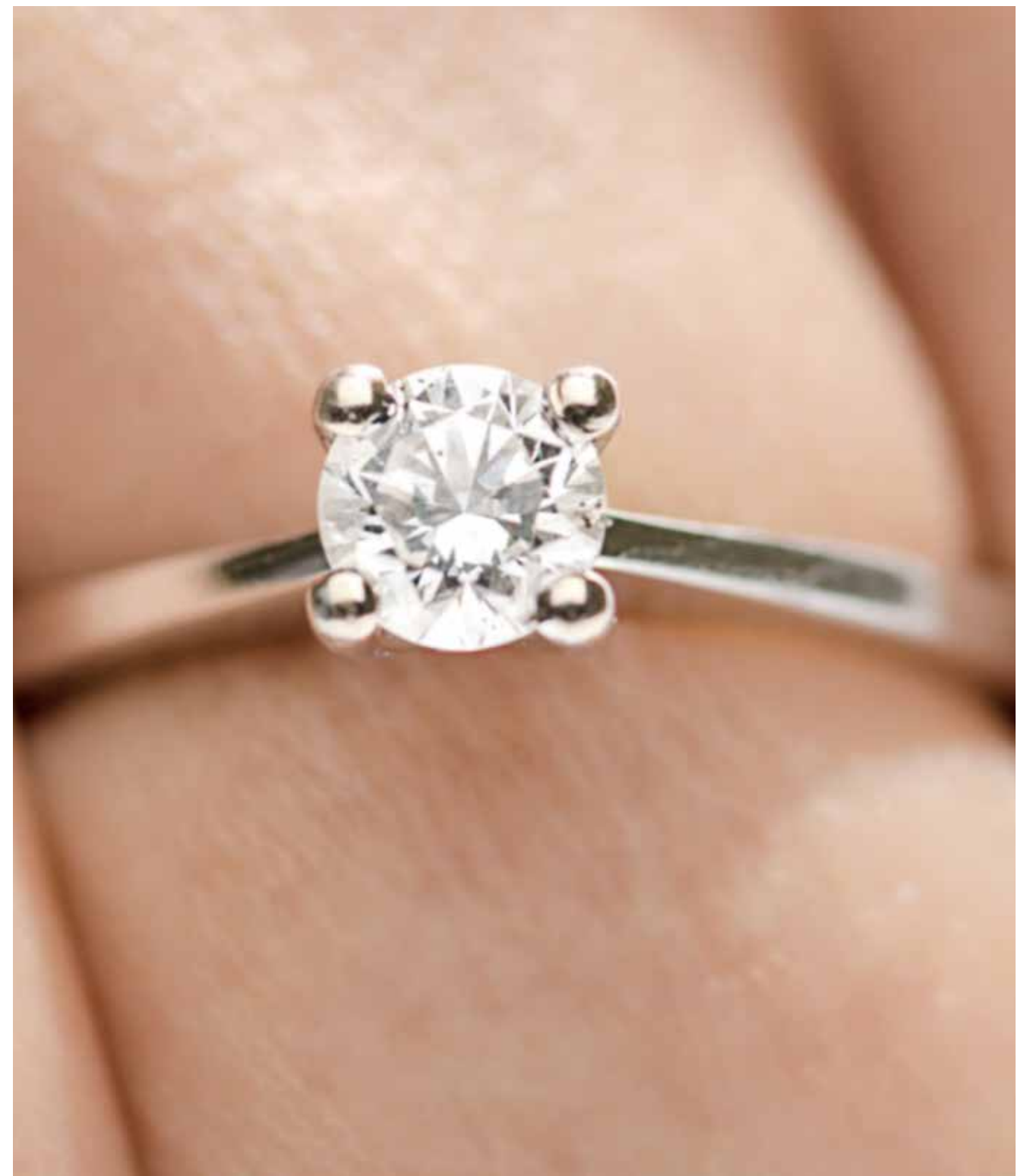
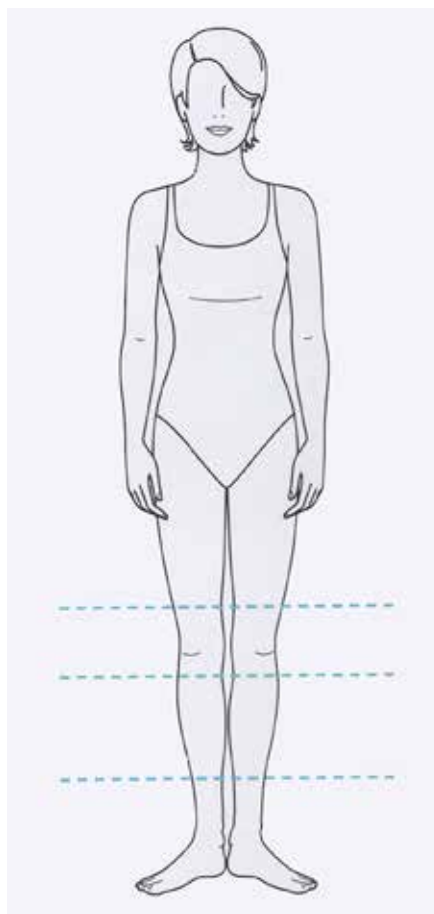
Have you ever stood peering at yourself in a mirror and had frump stare back at you?

This happens for a reason, especially if you're wearing a dress, skirt or capris. Frumpy will happen when these clothing items hit at the widest part of your legs. Never fear—there's a sure solution to this problem.

Your hems should hit at an opening or “diamond” on your legs. To determine your best length, stand in front of a full-length mirror, heels together, toes pointing toward 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock. Check to see where your legs touch and where they don't. The places on your legs where your legs don't touch, or rather the “openings” in the legs, are called diamonds.

Make sure all lengths, including skirts, dresses, shorts, capris and cropped pants, end in the center of a diamond.

Don't have any diamonds? No problem. Find the place at the middle of your knee where it bends in a little, and wear skirts that end right there. This is called the “Classic Chanel” length and looks ideal on every woman's body. 



SHARI BRAENDEL
FashionMeetsFaith.com

Shari, the founder of Reveal Your Dignity, is the nation's most sought-after Christian speaker on fashion. As a style coach, she developed the Fashion Meets Faith Conferences and Beauty Boot Camp Retreats. Her book *Good Girls Don't Have to Dress Bad* is the only full-color guide on outer beauty and style for good-girl fashionistas. Get her monthly newsletter at her website.

CARE FOR SKIN AND HAIR

BY ELIZABETH ORTEGA



PANASONIC

Facial Ionic Steamer

Panasonic's EH-SA31VP compact Facial Ionic Steamer helps keep your skin healthy and wrinkle-free. As we age, our skin begins to lose its elasticity and the ability to retain moisture, which leads to lines and wrinkles. Daily use of the steamer as part of your beauty regimen can help. Ultra-fine nano-sized particle gentle steam is 4,000 times finer than normal steam and can penetrate the skin to supplement moisture. As a result, you skin feels refreshed and renewed. Plus, the steam cleanses by removing makeup, dirt and excess oil.



PETER THOMAS ROTH

Camu Camu Power C X 30™ Vitamin C Brightening Moisturizer

The Camu Camu berry has 30 times the vitamin C of an orange. This highly concentrated vitamin C has superior absorption properties because of its low molecular weight, allowing it to better penetrate the skin; support natural collagen production; and brighten, smooth, firm and improve the appearance of uneven skin tone along with fine lines and wrinkles. The antioxidant Camu Camu, with vitamins A, D and E, also helps revitalize the look of skin while helping to fight free radical attack.

AVEDA

Green Science Lifting Serum

Aveda's Green Science Lifting Serum helps skin boost its natural collagen production for a more lifted appearance. The formula includes bio-fermented glucosamine, organic argan oil, anti-oxidants and peptides to promote surface skin cell turnover, moisturization and visible skin firmness.

Green Science Replenishing Toner

With the Green Science replenishing toner, you can minimize the appearance of pores as it exfoliates with naturally derived salicylic acid and glucosamine. This milky lotion-like toner contains aloe and ceramide 3 to leave a thin veil of moisture on the skin.

Deep Cleansing Herbal Clay Masque

With a unique blend of clay, this cool, aromatic masque absorbs excess oils and draws impurities from skin. It deep-cleanses, moisturizes and tones, leaving your skin clarified, conditioned and refined. For all skin types.



SMOOTH AFFAIR

Facial Primer & Brightener

Smooth Affair has anti-aging properties that even skin tone, minimize the appearance of pores and increase luminosity. A skin-quenching primer prepares the skin so makeup goes on more easily and lasts longer. Anti-aging, it firms the skin and prevents moisture loss, helping your skin maintain its youthful elasticity.





AESTHETICA
 Makeup Contour Kit

The Aesthetica Cosmetics Contour Kit works to sculpt and highlight your favorite features. It combines darker matte pressed powders and illuminating highlighting shades, all in a handbag-friendly mirrored palette. The art of contouring is a process that uses makeup shades that are lighter and darker than your base foundation to provide a chiseled and more flattering face and appearance. When contouring is combined with highlighting, it accentuates your cheekbones, adds structure to your jawbone or otherwise improves the appearance of symmetry.



UNITE
 Texturize Spray

With this dry, translucent finishing spray, you can create unbelievable volume and texture in your hair that will last all day and into the night. Spray onto dry hair in areas where you want volume and texture to finish your hair. The more you use, the more you build.



MAC
 MAC Tinted Lipglass

This unique lip-gloss, available in a wide variety of colors, can create a high gloss, glass-like finish or a subtle sheen. Designed to be worn on its own, over lip pencil or lipstick, Tinted Lipglass is the perfect product for creating a shine that lasts. Pigmented and very shiny, it can impart subtle or dramatic color. It contains Jojoba Oil to help soften and condition the lips.

L'OCCITANE EN PROVENCE
 UNITED STATES

Cherry Blossom Hand Cream

Soften and protect hands with the Cherry Blossom version of this international best-selling cream. The lightly textured formula is non-greasy and contains shea butter, which helps to smooth and moisturize skin. Enriched with a cherry extract from the Luberon region of Provence, it leaves skin delicately perfumed.



ELIZABETH ORTEGA
 makeup4realfaces.com

Elizabeth is a professional makeup artist who believes that all things work together for a common good. She feels we are all called to care for the world we live in, effect meaningful changes and give back heart and soul.



A brunch for **ALL SEASONS**

This Christmas spread will thrill your taste buds throughout the year

BY DEBBIE GREENHILL

Another season of holidays and celebrating is upon us. A song that has been around for a long time says, "It's the happiest time of the year."

It does seem to be a time when spirits are lighter, generosity is flowing, gratitude is more acknowledged and more love is in the air. I wish those holiday feelings could last all year.

It is a time when families get together to fellowship, share food, celebrate traditions from generations past and even start new ones. It is a time of sharing gifts and doing that "little bit extra" for friends and family.

As much as I love this time of year, it can be difficult for some. For different reasons, it may not be the happiest time of the year for everyone. We need to be sensitive to these situations and be willing to reach out. We also need to stop and think about the reason we celebrate these special holidays. We should have thankful hearts in all things and recognize where our gifts come from, and to share this gratitude.

I love the Scripture in 1 John 4:10: "This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." When we realize how much God loves us and what a wonderful gift we are given in Jesus, we can reach out and share.

God's love in us allows us to help people in ways we could not do on our own. So let us be sure to include God and His Son, Jesus, in this special time of the year as we remember His love and His gifts and share with all.

I have a menu to share with you to help celebrate this season. This is a brunch menu with dishes that can be made ahead and are easy to put together. I have chosen to decorate my table for a Christmas brunch with traditional decorations of red and green with touches of gold, and I have used my Christmas serving pieces and dishes.

This brunch is a great menu for other occasions as well.

I know that in my family, as children have married and we add more people to share this time with, we have to be flexible with what meals are shared with whom. Brunch can be an option for lunch or an evening meal to allow all family time with each other.

I have an Asparagus and Crab casserole that is delicious, different and made the night before. These wonderful Bacon and Egg muffins are full of flavor and color and make a wonderful addition to your brunch.

I love grits, and this cheesy garlic grits casserole is divine. This fruit dish taste, smells and looks like the holidays. The cinnamon and cloves provide such a wonderful spice, while using canned fruits makes it easier to prepare.

Eggnog baby cakes add that sweet, tasty dessert to your brunch, embracing that holiday flavor. The punch recipe is easy and delicious any time of the year. This beverage is so pretty served in a clear glass pitcher or your pretty punch bowl. The frozen grapes add that special touch, keep your punch cold and do not dilute as they thaw.

A wonderful touch to any of your celebration time is a gift for your guests. A great thing to do is prepare one of your favorite cookies, candies or savory treats and package it in a creative way for your guests to take as they leave. I have baked one of our favorite cookie recipes and show different ways to package. It can be as simple as clear bags tied with pretty ribbon or cute containers that can be found at craft or dollar stores.

I know you will enjoy these recipes as much as I do, and savor the celebration as you serve them at your Family Table Celebration. 🍷

SPICED FRUIT SALAD

SERVES 10-12

- 1 (20-ounce) can pineapple chunks
- 1 (16-ounce) can sliced peaches
- 1 (20-ounce) can pears
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 1 (3-ounce) cherry gelatin
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 5 whole cloves

Drain the pineapple, reserving ¾ cup juice. Drain the peaches and pears reserving ½ of the juice. Cut the peaches and pears in chunks. Combine the pineapple, pears and peaches in a bowl and stir gently. Combine the reserved juices, sugar, vinegar, gelatin, cinnamon sticks and cloves in a saucepan. Simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Cool slightly. Pour over the fruit, tossing to mix. Chill covered overnight, stirring occasionally. Discard the cinnamon and clove. This salad does not congeal but the gelatin keeps the liquid from being too thin. Serve in a pretty clear bowl.



CHEESY GARLIC GRITS CASSEROLE

SERVES 10-12

- 1 cup grits
- 4½ cups boiling water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 10 ounces herb and garlic cheese spread, such as Boursin
- ½ stick salted butter
- 2 medium eggs
- ½ cup half-and-half
- 1 tablespoon butter melted
- 1 cup crushed cornflakes

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 9x13 casserole dish. Cook grits in the boiling water with salt until thickened about 5 minutes. Add the garlic cheese and butter to the hot grits and stir until well incorporated. Beat the eggs and add the half-and-half to the beaten eggs. Slowly stir the egg mixture into the grits. Pour the mixture into the prepared dish. Pour the melted butter over the cornflakes and stir to distribute the butter. Sprinkle the crumb mixture on the top of the grits. Bake for 45 minutes. (This can be prepared the night before, up to the point of adding cornflake topping. Prepare and place in refrigerator overnight. Add cornflake just before baking)



HOLIDAY PUNCH

MAKES 1 GALLON

- 8 cups pineapple-orange juice
- 4 cups white grape juice
- 4 cups ginger ale
- Frozen grapes

Combine juices and chill. Add ginger ale and frozen grapes just before serving.

LAYERED ASPARAGUS AND CRAB CASSEROLE

10-12 SERVINGS

- 14 slices white bread, crusts removed
- 1 pound lump crabmeat, picked for shells
- 1 cup coarsely chopped steamed fresh asparagus
- 3 tablespoons chopped green onions
- ¾ cup mayonnaise
- 2 cups shredded Swiss cheese
- 1/3 cup Parmesan cheese, shredded
- 10 eggs
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 tablespoon coarse ground mustard
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ red pepper

Prepare a 3-quart casserole dish by spraying with nonstick spray. Arrange half of the bread slices on the bottom of the casserole dish. Combine the crabmeat, asparagus, green onions and mayonnaise in a bowl and mix well. Spread over the bread slices in the casserole dish. Combine the Swiss and Parmesan cheese and toss to mix. Sprinkle ½ of the cheese mixture over the crabmeat mixture. Refrigerate the remaining cheese mixture. Top the prepared layers with the remaining bread. Combine the eggs, milk, mustard, Worcestershire sauce, salt and red pepper in a bowl and mix well. Pour over the layers in the casserole dish. Refrigerate covered overnight. Remove from the refrigerator 1 hour before baking. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until brown and puffed. Sprinkle with the remaining cheese mixture. Bake an additional 5-10 minutes longer or until bubbly. Serve warm.



SOUL & SPIRIT



BACON AND EGG MUFFINS

MAKES 12 MUFFINS

- 12 slices thin bacon
- 10 eggs
- ¼ cup milk
- ¼ cup chopped green onion
- ¼ cup diced jalapeno pepper
- ¼ cup diced roasted red pepper
- 1 teaspoon season salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- ½ cup shredded sharp cheese

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Prepare 12 muffin cups with cooking spray. Arrange bacon on a microwave-safe plate. Cook bacon for 75 seconds. Place a slice of bacon into each muffin cup so that the bacon lines the edges of the cup. Beat eggs, cheese, milk, salt, pepper and dry mustard together in a bowl. Mix the chopped green onion, jalapeno pepper and roasted red pepper in a separate bowl. Ladle egg mixture into muffin cups. Top each one with one tablespoon of onion and pepper mixture. Bake in preheated oven until slightly moist on top, about 20 minutes.



ALMOND EGGNOG BABY CAKES

MAKES 12-18

- 1 cup sliced almonds
- 1 box yellow cake mix
- 1½ cups eggnog
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon rum extract
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 4 tablespoons butter, melted

Preheat oven to 350 degree. Grease cupcake pan or cupcake Bundt pan with non-stick spray. Press almonds onto the bottom and sides of pan. In a large mixing bowl, beat cake mix, eggnog, eggs, rum extract, nutmeg and melted butter on low speed for 30 seconds or just until moistened. Beat on medium for 2 minutes until smooth. Pour into prepared pans. Bake 12-15 minutes. Cool slightly before removing from pans to a wire rack to cool.



DEBBIE GREENHILL
thefamilytable.debbiegreenhill.com

Debbie is a loving wife of 30-plus years to Mike Greenhill, mother of three children and grandmother to Bryce. Debbie uses her gift of hospitality to provide physical and spiritual nutrition for God's children by service in inner-city missions. She is the author of the devotional-cookbook *Fun, Food and Fellowship at your Family Table*. She is available for speaking and cooking demos. Email debbiebg@gmail.com.

78 A LESSON LEARNED: GOD BEFORE 'THINGS'

“Our relationship with God really is what matters most. But sometimes it may take a little while for us to understand that.”

82 HOW TO COPE WITH GRIEF WHEN HOLIDAYS ARRIVE

“You may experience a flood of unexpected emotions anytime you are grieving, but these feelings may be heightened during the holidays. And this is completely normal.”

92 LOOK OUTWARD TO CURE YOUR FEELING OF LONELINESS

“Change is ready for you when you take that first step and start serving others and being friendly.”

98 DELIGHT YOUR FAMILY WITH GIFTS OF GRATITUDE

“Perhaps instead of another fishing lure or new tennis racket, this year you may think of a way to present the gift of gratitude for and to your family.”



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Rhonda Vincent's Season's Greetings: Old Memories and New Music

BY CHUCK DAUPHIN



Christmas time has always been very special in the life of bluegrass superstar Rhonda Vincent. As with many people, some of those thoughts have to deal with the culinary aspects of the season.

"My song 'Christmas Time at Home' sums it up," Vincent tells *WHOAwomen*. "My mother loved Christmas more than any other holiday. She always made it special. Each person in the family had their favorite."

For her brother Darrin, cinnamon rolls were at the top of the list so, Vincent said, "she always makes that for him. I love caramel dumplings, so you can always bet that our Christmas dinner is always going to have everyone's favorite. I tell her she needs to space it out, because I like cinnamon rolls, too."

"There's the great meals we have together, and spending time together. My mother loves playing Santa Claus, and to this day even though my younger brother just turned 40, he's the first one up to see what Santa has brought."

"Christmas Time at Home" appears on Vincent's brand new CD, *Christmas Time*. While she has released

one earlier Yuletide album (*Beautiful Star—A Christmas Collection* in 2006 on Rounder), this one is on her own label, Upper Management Music.

"I will own this one," she says, adding that "I took some liberties, and did some crazy things with this one, which is the great thing about being on your own label. There's no one to say 'You can't do this,' which they probably would have."

The singer cites a star-studded guest cast on "The Twelve Days of Christmas" as an example of that "crazy" approach. "That one definitely wasn't cost-effective. But, it's my own label and something I wanted to do. In fact, my husband said, 'Are you crazy?' But, it was something I wanted to do. After all, we have the rest of our lives to pay for it."

Sharing the microphone with Vincent and her band, The Rage, is a who's who of country music: the Oak Ridge Boys, Willie Nelson, Charlie Daniels, Bill Anderson, Dolly Parton, Ronnie Milsap, Gene Watson, Larry Gatlin, Jeannie Seely, Pam Tillis and Lorrie Morgan, and as well as young newcomer Emmy Sunshine.

Though "The Twelve Days of Christmas" isn't a spiritual song of the season, Vincent says there are many on the disc that are.

"Even though this album has some crazy content, most of the album is talking about Christ and the birth of Jesus. There's some obvious classics like 'Away in a Manger' and 'Silent Night.' Then, I wrote four original songs. When we started tracking the album last Novem-

ber, I wrote three Christmas songs three days in a row," she says.

Perhaps the most poignant cut on the album is the title track, inspired by the first Christmas without her father, Johnny, who died in October 2014.

Writing stretched her boundaries as an artist, the singer says. "I had never written three songs in three days. I was headed to Nashville on Wednesday to do the tracks on Thursday. On the Sunday before that, I started writing 'Dreaming of Christmas,' then on Monday, I wrote 'Christmas Time.' On Tuesday, I was headed to the airport, and started writing this crazy song called 'Milk and Cookies.' I had so much fun doing it."

Of course, any conversation about Christmas with Vincent has to include music—and that part of the holidays has always been very close to her heart.

"Growing up in Greentop, Missouri, we always sing at church. I never got to be one of the angels that wore the white robes with the halos," she recalls. "I was usually a wise man or something. But, when my daughter Sally was born, she played the baby Jesus. We always sang at the Christmas special at Church. I always make sure that we're home during that time, so we can spend it with family."

Standards on the album include "What Child Is This," "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" and "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." She said the latter particularly moved her spiritually. "I had never sung it before, and looking at it, it's almost the ultimate Christmas story. I was looking at these lyrics, and I was so awestruck by the message and the meaning of Christmas."

Recording the song in a medley accompanied only by a piano, she says she hopes that it moves the listener as well.

"I hope that in doing it with just a piano, that it is just a personal time where you're decorating the tree and thinking about Christmas. You're thinking about these songs and it touches your life. Maybe, if you're someone who doesn't have strong faith, it will inspire them to see the joy of having Christ in their lives." ❧

Tanya Tucker: Feeling 'tight' with her heavenly Father

BY CHUCK DAUPHIN



When you hear the smoky voice of one Tanya Denise Tucker, you don't have to guess who the singer is.

Since she burst upon the scene as a teenager in 1972 with "Delta Dawn," the Texas native has been one of the most distinctive stylists in the business. In a rare interview with *WHOAwomen*, Tucker recently spoke of her spiritual side. "My faith is what has gotten me through everything," she admits. "If I didn't have that, I wouldn't be anywhere. I have a strong relationship with my heavenly Father, that's for sure. We're tight."

As someone who has lived her life in the public eye, Tucker says that her faith has allowed her to get through the hard times—whether it be romances or addictions.

"No matter how bad or crazy things get, I believe that He will take care of me," she says. "When things are really bad, I will pray 'I've tried to handle this, and tried to work it out where I didn't have to bother you, but I need you now to figure it out for me.' That's what I do.

"I have a book that I read every

day called *Jesus Calling*. I have given it to almost all of my friends, and I read a passage in it every day. It starts my day off on the right track. It gives me strength and it gives me relief. It calms me and helps me to face the day."

Tucker says the book and its daily messages of hope can be very timely. "It seems that the book will have something to say on the day of whatever I'm going through. It's amazing how that works, but He has little messages that he's always sending to me, and I always try to listen. I ask myself, 'Is this something that He wants me to do?' I believe in whatever His will is for me. I ask for that every day."

Of all of the personal challenges Tucker has faced, nothing comes close to losing her father and manager, Beau, in 2006 and my mother, Juanita, six years later. "Losing one of your parents is tough. After you lose the second one, you feel devastated," she says. "You get angry and feel like you're on your own. There's no one you can go to and tell your troubles to that will understand you totally. That was very earth shaking for me, but my faith brings me through that. I believe that they are waiting for me in Heaven. I have no doubt about that."

She credits her father for leading the way for her to follow her dreams. "My dad was my career. None of it would have happened without him. It took two of us. He did his part, and I

did mine—most of the time.

"Growing up in the public eye, it was a little different, but it was the way I grew up. I had the best set of parents in the world. Anything I did wrong was because of me, not because of them. They always taught me better. This old world can be full of the devil, and you never really know who your friends are and who is not. I just have to leave that up to Him."

The former CMA Female Vocalist of the Year has just wrapped up her first studio album since 2002's *Tanya*, and she says her walk with Christ is reflected in many of the tracks on the disc. "I've got some songs on the new record that are really rooted in spirituality, and I like that. They have a message. One of these days, I want to do a spiritual album called *My Journey*. I've got that on the back burner but would love to do that soon. I'd love to do some great songs that would inspire other people."

Tucker says that she's not trying to let her light shine through words but rather through the example she tries to set. "I'm just a human being who wants to be a better Christian, a better human," she says. "I believe if I make Him happy, everything else will fall in line." ❧



GOING DEEPER WITH GOD

When 'things' matter more than a relationship with the Creator, 'you are too shallow'

BY JOYCE MEYER

Years ago, while I was praying one day for something I wanted, God spoke a life-changing truth to my heart. He said, “Joyce, seek My face and not My hand. If you seek My face, My hand will always be open.”

As I said, this was a life-changing moment for me. I began to realize that up to that point, it had been all about me ... and what I wanted. I began to see just how shallow I was and that it was time for me to go deeper.

I suppose I was like most Christians are at the beginning of our relationship with God. It is generally all about what we want Him to give us or do for us. For a while, this is fine. I believe this is where we all start. We come to God with our list of desires or problems and we want Him to just fix everything. But eventually the time comes for us to grow and mature.

Seek First

God told me to seek His face. Seek is a strong word. It

means “to crave, pursue, to make sacrifices to get, to go after with all of your strength and all of your heart.” What I believe He was saying to me was to go after a relationship with Him as if it was everything.

Our relationship with God really is what matters most. But sometimes it may take a little while for us to understand that. I remember coming to a point in my life when I had a lot of “things” but realized I still wasn’t very happy. After praying and asking God what was wrong, He spoke to my heart and said, “Joyce, you are too shallow—it’s time to go out into the deep.”

You see, God was more interested in what was going on inside of me than He was in my “things.” Romans 14:17 says, “[After all] the kingdom of God is not a matter of [getting the] food and drink [one likes], but instead it is righteousness ... and [heart] peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” God cares about every detail of our lives, but He is more

“Our relationship with God really is what matters most. But sometimes it may take a little while for us to understand that. I remember coming to a point in my life when I had a lot of “things” but realized I still wasn’t very happy. After praying and asking God what was wrong, He spoke to my heart and said, “Joyce, you are too shallow—it’s time to go out into the deep.”

concerned about our inner life than our outer life. I believe that’s because He knows that when we are spiritually strong on the inside, we will be able to properly handle what happens on the outside.

As we focus more on Him than ourselves, we not only begin to experience more satisfaction and fulfillment, but our desires come into alignment with His plan and what’s best for our lives. Psalm 37:4 (CEB) confirms this: “Enjoy the Lord, and he will give what your heart asks.”

Grow Roots

Nature has a way of demonstrating deep truths of God’s Word. Isaiah 37:31 says, “...Take root downward and bear fruit upward.” Large trees with thick, full branches have a massive underground root system that spreads both deep and wide. Without this support system, a tree could never weather a storm.

In the same way, we must develop deep spiritual roots before we can truly enjoy the big, full life God intended for us. This means cultivating a relationship with the Lord, finding out what He says about us in His Word, and becoming rooted and grounded in His love.

It is vital to build a strong foundation in God. That means learning to seek Him first, rather than things. So many times, we go about it the opposite way and seek “things” first—a bigger this or a better that or more of the other. However, without that strong foundation in God, these things won’t be very helpful to us. If we don’t first establish deep roots of faith in God, we will never be able to endure the storms of life that will certainly come.

Prioritize

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all

these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33 NIV). These are wonderful words to live by. I can tell you from experience that when you make God number-one, He will fill your life with peace, joy and satisfaction ... and then some!

I encourage you to make a decision today to pursue and seek God for who He is and make your relationship with Him a priority. Dig deeper. I believe you’ll discover what you’ve been looking for all along—what really matters most!

For more on this topic, order Joyce’s four-CD series Pursuing What Matters Most. You can also contact us to receive our free magazine, Enjoying Everyday Life, by calling (800) 727-9673 or visiting www.joycemeyer.org

Join Joyce for the Love Life Women’s Conference Sept. 25-27 in St. Louis, Missouri. For more information, go to www.joycemeyer.org/lovelife.



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HOLIDAY MOURNINGS

Let Jesus and His generous love comfort your grieving soul

BY LA-TAN ROLAND MURPHY

Losing a loved one is never easy, and losing a loved one during the holiday season strips away childlike naivety. Our once gleeful holiday mornings suddenly become holiday mournings.

I know this first-hand. December marks 11 years since my father left this world for his heavenly home. Each December, I find myself more sentimental than ever. Memories, whether sweet or bitter, have a way of drawing us backward to a particular place and time, holding us hostage in past pain, even while present joys happen all around us.

I also have experienced the personal pain of losing a brother to cancer on New Year's Day. Then, one year later, on Father's Day, a niece died in a car accident. And this year, on the Fourth of July, we sat in the chapel of the funeral home to remember the life of my nephew, who had died suddenly only days before.

As I write this article, darts of pain ping the bull's-eye of my heart. I remember vividly where I was and who was with me when I received the dreadful news. I feel especially blessed to have been by my father's bedside, standing with my mother and five siblings as he traded his final breath in for the breath of heaven.

I regret not being with my brother, but unfortunately death doesn't offer RSVP's. New Year's Day, 2008, my holiday morning turned into holiday mourning. While others celebrated new beginnings, I celebrated grief.

Each New Year's Day forces me to remember the pain of that sobering day. I choose to celebrate the powerful life he led instead of celebrating the grief. It seems like only yesterday that the air was sucked right out of the room upon his passing.

On Father's Day, 2009, while enjoying pizza in downtown Raleigh, yet another phone call: My beautiful niece, Gabby, had been killed in a car accident. Although Mellow Mushroom is still my favorite, it remains a painful point of reference. In much the same way, the memory of my neph-

ew's death will inevitably spark tearful fireworks inside my heart each Fourth of July.

I bet most of you can relate to losing someone you love. Perhaps it happened on your birthday. Regardless the day of your great loss, it will never feel like a regular day ever again. Tears will flow unexpectedly, and you might feel that no one understands your grief.

But I have good news: Jesus feels your pain. The Bible tells us that Jesus wept after learning that his good friend, Lazarus, had passed. Salty, hot, tears flowed down the Savior's face. Because He understood the brutality of death, he wept. The Comforter had come to Lazarus' family that day not simply as an onlooker, but as a grieving friend.

On holiday mornings, while the rest of world celebrates, you might struggle to keep the faith. Lean hard into the compassionate love of Jesus. I promise that He will prove himself faithful by comforting your weary soul in the most unexpected of ways.

In December 2004, only days after my father's death, my mom and I struggled to keep the faith. Grief came like a thief in the night, robbing joy and stripping our spiritual houses, much like the Grinch who stole Christmas. I suggested going to Dollar Tree. It was, after all, one of mom's favorite places on the planet. But only moments in, we were ready to leave.

As we headed toward the door, a tall, beautiful woman walked in. She seemed confused, as if she'd walked into the wrong store. I recognized her right away. After placing my hand into the small of my mother's back and gently pushing her toward the woman, I began a conversation: "Mom, this is Ann Graham Lotz, Billy Graham's daughter."

It was like an out-of-body experience. I had never met Ann before, but something inside of me knew she was there for us. And so I continued, "Ann, this is my mother, she just lost my father days ago. That's when I saw him ... Jesus, peering through her beautiful, tear-filled eyes." She gently cradled my mother's hand between both of her own and said,



"I am so sorry for your loss. But aren't we happy for the hope of heaven? Aren't we glad this is not the end? We will see our loved ones again. I promise to pray for you during the holiday season and beyond."

After Ann left the store, I turned to my mother, gently embracing her shoulders, looking intently into her eyes, I said, "Mom, when you are home alone, on your worst day, when the enemy overwhelms your heart with grief, remember this day, the day God sent the modern-day Abraham's daughter into the Dollar Tree to encourage and comfort you, to remind you that he is with you. Please, don't ever forget this day, mom!"


When we drove into my driveway, I saw a small gift at my front door. I could not believe my eyes when I opened it. It was a small book titled *Heaven* by Ann Graham Lotz. My neighbor had left it there while we were at the Dollar Tree, being comforted by God's appointed angel. We knew without a doubt that heaven was near. The comforter had come in a miraculous way.

If you are mourning the loss of a friend or family member this holiday season, my prayers are with you, friend. Please know that it's OK to walk around for a few days numb and unfocused. Give yourself permission to grieve, knowing these things take time. But know that you are not alone. Jesus is near to the broken-hearted—loving, comforting, even placing others in your path, in order to encourage and help you to keep the faith.

During your holiday mournings, remember to read the

Bible, even when you don't fully understand what you are reading. The power of God's holy word never goes void. As you draw closer to Jesus, the pain of death's sting will diminish.

Death goes against the grain of who Jesus truly is. He is life everlasting for those who place their hope and trust in Him. The people who witnessed Jesus' tears as He mourned the loss of his friend saw love—pure, unadulterated, selfless love.

There are many things in life I fail to understand, like the pain of death. But the one thing I am absolutely sure of is this: We never grieve alone. Jesus weeps with us in the midst of every painful calendar day, holiday or not. 



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GRIEVING DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Four ways to cope when a loved one is gone

BY ELIZABETH TAYLOR

For most people the holidays are a wonderful, although sometimes stressful, time of gathering with family and friends. It's a season of parties, gift exchanges, food and fun.

But if your family is incomplete this year because of the death of a loved one, it can be an incredibly difficult and sad time. Your emotions are likely to be quite tender. You may not want to do the things you've always done. It may not feel right to celebrate the holidays when your family member is gone.

Those feelings are perfectly normal because the holiday season often reveals a depth to our grief that we were previously unaware of.

I have had clients who say that trying to keep the regular traditions going seems forced. If that happens to you, make new ones. Instead of holiday dinners at grandmother's house, go out to eat with the group.

Another client had trouble deciding whether to hang her deceased son's stocking. She struggled with the confusion of her emotions surrounding the decision, frequently changing her mind, but ultimately did, because "he is still my son."

If you are grieving this holiday season, here are some reminders that I offer my clients and pray will help you as well.

1. There really is no right or wrong way to grieve

Seriously, no one feels grief exactly like another. And there is no time limit to the grieving process. So give yourself permission to grieve.

In a second, memories of holidays past can come rushing back. The sadness can overwhelm you, usually when you least expect it. You may hear a Christmas song or see a movie clip that that person always loved. You may be shopping for gifts and see something you know would be perfect for your loved one who is no longer here. The emotions of grief are sometimes sudden, unexpected and very powerful.

It is necessary to allow yourself to feel them. I've had clients tell me that just hanging certain ornaments seems unbearable, because in their minds they are reliving the moments of the past. Be aware that you may experience a flood of unexpected emotions anytime you are grieving, but these feelings may be heightened during the holidays. And this is completely normal.

2. Talk about your loved ones

Don't be afraid to talk about the people you have lost. They are gone and that is really hard. You miss them. You miss their help. You may even be angry that they aren't here.

Include your loved one's name in your conversations. Don't be afraid to verbalize your feelings of grief to supportive family or friends.

Ignoring your loss won't make the feelings go away, and talking about that person openly often brings healing and normalcy. You may find that joining a grief support group or seeing a counselor might be very helpful. You will eventually be able to celebrate his or her life, as well as your own.

3. Let your family and friends help you

Buying gifts or preparing meals for family feasts may be the last things you want to do. You may need to consider asking another family member to host the family gatherings this year. Or if decorating the tree seems like too much, ask another family member or close friend to help the children with that project this year.

Traditions are important for children, and often bring stability to them during a time of grieving. But if your family traditions bring you too much pain, ask someone else to help.

4. Express your faith

I strongly recommend that you reach out to your community of faith anytime you are grieving the loss of a loved one. The community of believers can be an irreplaceable source of strength, compassion, and understanding when you're hurting. Many congregations offer classes focused on grief recovery. Psalm 34:18 says, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and rescues those whose spirits are crushed." (NLT)

My hope for us this holiday season is that we shine the light of Jesus brightly. I encourage you to be aware of those around us who may be struggling with grief or loss this year. Offer to help with meals, shopping or decorating. Let's be the hands and feet of Jesus to those who are hurting. And if you are hurting because a loved one is gone, please reach out. Let others help you. 🌸



ELIZABETH TAYLOR
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ElizaBeth, a licensed professional counselor, holds a master's degree in counseling psychology and has more than 10 years of clinical experience. Now in private practice, she has been married for more than 20 years and has two boys, Matthew and Joshua.

Celebrate the family with something new

This year, go where you've never been before

BY ANGELA WELLS

The holidays are here, bringing with them the hustle and bustle of the season, the fun of Christmas parties and the gatherings of family and friends.

This is such an amazing time of year. But for many people, it can cause stress and anxiety if they are not careful.

The Christmas season has always been my favorite time of year, not only because of the fun I have shopping for others, but because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was born on Christmas Day. He is the reason for this beautiful season.

I recently asked some dear friends to think about their families—the good times, the bad times and, of course, the hilarious times. Then I asked them, “What does the word ‘family’ mean to you?”

Some of the responses I got were “love and laughter, endearment and trust, safety and covering.” Another even said, “practical jokers, non-stop fun and chaos.”

All of these descriptions are true and real. With family come all the good and all the challenges, but no matter what, a family is a strong heart bond that can never be broken.

When I think about my family, all I can do is smile and laugh because so many wonderful thoughts come to mind. My family is strong, faithful and courageous, to say the least. I had grandparents who were determined and bold; my par-

ents were amazing examples of love and gave their all for their family. I have aunts who keep me laughing; adventurous uncles who love to play family games like Uno and Monopoly; and cousins who keep me young at heart with all of their bursting energy and creative wit.

Together, my family has been through incredibly good times and very challenging times. A few seasons ago, my family and I mourned the loss of my precious grandmother, Madea, a week before Thanksgiving.

One of my favorite holiday traditions is the family gathering where we all get together and cook a huge, mouth-watering Thanksgiving dinner. The turkey and dressing, sweet potatoes, green beans, potato salad and, of course, my mother's sweet potato pie—all finger-licking good.

But that year was so much different. The cornerstone of our family, the sweet voice of my grandmother, was not present. Caring for Madea and mourning her loss had taken its toll on the family, and no one was in the mood to even boil water, much less cook Thanksgiving dinner.

But we found that God's amazing grace is always there right when you need it most. Despite the exhaustion and pain of our loss, we did not give up on our family tradition of coming together and thanking God for His blessings in our lives.

Even though no one felt like cooking or baking that year,



we had God's strength and His grace in the midst of the chaos, and we started a new tradition. The whole family went to dinner at a nice restaurant on Thanksgiving Day. We had never done this before and were unsure if we would enjoy it.


Once we got to the restaurant, we were seated at our table, got our Thanksgiving meal and gave thanks to our heavenly Father. Then I realized we were all laughing, talking, nibbling off each other's plates, tasting new desserts and having a great time.

I realized then that family is family, no matter where you are and or the circumstances that surround you. God's grace and faithfulness were with my family. He is with your family, too. The Bible says in Isaiah 61:3, “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.”

Even when there is pain, God will give you beauty for your ashes, and your joy will come again. My family was having such an amazing time that day that even the waiters and waitresses were laughing with us. It felt so good and refreshing to know that my family could come together, try something new and still have a great time.

That's just like our Heavenly father. He said in His word that He would never leave or forsake us. When it seems like

God is far away, rest in your heart and know He is right there with you, holding your hand.

Ladies, don't be afraid to start a new family tradition this holiday season in the midst of challenge. Try something you've never done before: Make a new recipe, bake a new dessert, try a different restaurant—whatever you like. You never know, your family just might enjoy it. 



ANGELA WELLS

Angela is an anointed vocalist who sings with power and a confident conviction. She has a genuine heart to serve and has dedicated her life to leading the body of Christ into His presence. Angela has opened for CeCe Winans during her “Throne Room” tour in Nashville, Tennessee.

She has sung alongside artists such as Darlene Czech and Nicole C. Mullen. She is working on her first CD project to be released in 2015. This album is about life, God's grace and hope, recognizing that God is great in every area of life.

LESSONS *in Trust*

What we can learn from the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker

BY KATHLEEN COOKE

*Rub-a-dub-dub
Three men in a tub,
And who do you think they be?
The butcher, the baker,
The candlestick maker.
Turn them out, knaves all three*

The origins of this nursery rhyme date back to the end of the 18th century, and there are actually many versions of the rhyme. This one was recorded in 1830 and is the one I learned while growing up.

This past July (I'm a firecracker, born on the Fourth) my thoughtful and devoted husband planned a surprise birthday trip for me to a destination unknown. I just had to trust him.

When I mentioned this at a recent event, a woman who told me she had been married for many years confessed, "Oh my goodness, I could never let my husband do that for me. I'd never trust him and would be scared to death."

I left that night reminded that some people can be in a relationship for years and still not really know and trust each other. Trust must be built on consistent choices and with multiple tests.

The surprise trip—and I never found out the destina-

tion until I got to the airport—was to a 400-year-old restored farmhouse in Italy. It was a week of exploring, with four of our closest friends, the many beautiful and romantic towns in and around the Umbria region. It was awesome.

As we visited the many hillside and ancient villages—one today called the "the dying city" because it was built on a cliff and connected only by a narrow bridge—I was reminded again how much relationships mattered in these isolated communities. The people who built and lived in these towns not only had to get along within families, but they had to get along as a community to survive. They had to trust one another intimately. When that trust was violated, it affected all of them.

Each of these ancient communities relied on key people for their physical survival: the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker, as the old children's verse conveys. And as the last line states, they were "knaves." A knave was someone who had been placed in a leadership position and turned out to be a thief, deceiver, scoundrel or, as we'd call them today, a scumbag.

On an earlier trip to Europe, I visited a nightmarish museum of ancient tools, instruments and devices that had been used during medieval times to punish, torture and kill people. One such device was an iron cage in which bakers





“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

MARK 11:25

would be placed and then dunked in the river if they were caught cheating on the size and weight of the bread they made and sold.

Bread was life, and cheating by a baker was a serious offense. Ever been around someone who sold you on their expertise and knowledge and then didn't deliver? I'd like to dunk them myself in the river a few times myself!

In our culture and within our relationships today, we still have these key people around us.

There's the butchers. This is one who looks as if he or she could bring us life-giving food, such as a quick, easy way to make money and gain notoriety. But in the end, a deceitful butcher brings only disease, destruction and death. Instead of providing life-giving food, bakers can destroy us by their unclean practices.

Then there's the baker. He or she offers an aroma of life but, alas, a knave baker brings dry, stale bread or a loaf that is hollowed out on the inside. The baker exudes knowledge that looks and smells good on the outside, but it falls apart once you have to rely on it.

Finally, there's the candlestick maker, who is suppose to make a candle that brings light reliably. But a knave candlestick maker would often add defective elements to the wax, causing the candle to burn too fast, too hot and inconsistently. In medieval times, unreliable light meant living in the dark

and living in fear. Ever have people in your life who promised you insight or truth but presented their own version of truth and information? And when you discovered the deceit and lies, you were left in the dark?

Most of us today live in urban cities with multiple butchers, bakers and candlestick makers. So if one of them swindles, hurts or lies to us, we don't have to we can do business with another one. In these Italian villages and communities, they didn't have that choice. They had to continue to live together and learn how to forgive and trust each other after they had been punished. The village community had to rely on these key people again to bring them meat, bread and light.

Families relationships are different. We can't ever fully “turn them out,” as the children's rhyme states, or completely detach ourselves from them. They are, after all, blood relationships. Family holidays are difficult for many as we must confront them and continue to sit at a table with them. The trust we had at one time may have been severed by hurtful, damaging and deceitful choices from the past that are still painful.

How do we forgive and move on? How do we let it go because they are going to be at that family gathering every year?

We can do it only because God gives us the unnatural and preposterous ability and commands—not “asks” but

“commands”—us to. He is bigger and more important than anything that is done to us or committed against us. We forgive because hate and resentment hurt us more than it hurts the transgressor and because it causes further destruction in the end. We don't have to forget what happened, but we have to forgive what happened.

We consciously and selflessly choose forgiveness so that life for us and for those we love will flourish. We do it so the kingdom of God becomes different from any other kingdom built on this earth and is known by others as a kingdom of mercy, grace and forgiveness.


Jesus came to earth to teach us how to forgive sacrificially. God gave us His Son for the forgiveness of our endless sins, our transgressions. God forgave. He compels us to do the same.

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” (Mark 11:25)

Thirty-eight years ago, when I married my husband—who has many flaws as I do—we began a trust relationship with each other. We have at times damaged that trust but we have forgiven each other. When Phil asks me to trust him, I do so willingly, and that trust allows me to take the trip of my

dreams on adventures unknown. How much more will God, whose heart is pure, whose promises are truth and purposes are eternal, do the same for you?

“Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.”

(from “Trust and Obey” by John H. Sammis) 



KATHLEEN COOKE
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Girlfriend Therapy

Good company makes for better shopping

BY TERRI KELLY

The worst shopping advice I've ever heard? Shop alone. Why? Shopping alone is lonely. When I'm lonely, I spend too much money, eat too much food and waste too much time. So contrary to fashion advice, I encourage shopping with a girlfriend. It's the TGIF Principle—Therapy, Girlfriend, Investments and Food.

Twice a year, my friend, Maria, and I shop together. At our latest TGIF, Marie hugged me then stepped back. "You're looking frumpy," she said. She took her hands and scrunched the sides of my shirt together. "Time for edgy, my friend."

Together we navigated consignment shops, name-brand shops and Goodwill. Marie taught me how to check labels, feel the fabric and search for holes and stains. And—very important—how to sniff the underarms on used clothing.

I introduced Maria to retail shops she'd never visited and the best way to use coupons. Between racks, we discussed our children, husbands and work. Before we hit the register, we added up our selections. "Consider how many times you'll wear each item," Maria smiled, referring to "cost per wear." Marie held each item up and then swiftly returned a formal dress back to the rack.

Several stories later, we packed the trunk with our bargains and collapsed into restaurant chairs to relax our shop-happy souls and aching feet. Over shrimp tacos and vegan burritos, we laughed and we cried. We discussed how people manage all the stress dominating our culture. We shared our crazy schedules, sad events and crazy-sad people who affect us. We admonished each other for working and volunteering too much.

"Quit staying up until 1:00 a.m."

"Slow down and sit at a table when you eat."

"Stop saying yes to so many volunteer activities."

"Leave your work at work."

We were serious. We agreed that our families were more important than anything other than our relationship with Jesus. We talked about not allowing our prayer life to slip.

"I don't feel dressed," Maria said, "if I don't pray and read my Bible."

"Yeah." I laughed. "We can't we face the world naked. Quiet time with Jesus is a vital part of every day."

My dinner plate was empty, but my heart was full. We had made more than an investment in our appearance; we'd invested in each other.

When I arrived home, I whisked myself into the bedroom to dress up in one of my purchases. When I walked

out modeling the new outfit—the one that accentuated my best features—my husband knew not to ask questions about prices, conversations or how many hours I'd been shopping. He smiled at my new edgy, elegant look. "Maria," he said, "gave you some good advice."

"The best." I winked with a smile of satisfaction that comes only from girlfriend therapy. "Believe me, never shop alone." ❧

Shop, Share and Strengthen Friendships

Five tips on making the most of the TGIF (Therapy, Girlfriend, Investments and Food):

- Nurture relationships.
- Shop only during pre-planned times.
- Avoid impulse buys.
- Take advantage of end-of-season sales.
- Rely on the good advice of a friend.



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FROM HURT TO STRENGTH

Three ways to get past pain during the holiday season

BY DEBRA GEORGE



“Oh, no, not another holiday!” was the thought that flashed through my mind right before Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Both of these days had always been my favorite times of the year. I enjoyed making dressing to go along with the turkey and loved putting together a pasta dish to add to our Italiano, traditional Christmas get-together at Mama’s house.

The best of memories lingered in my mind, recalling the loud, roaring laughter as family stories were told year after year in exaggerated measures. But this holiday season would be different. In addition to bringing a pot filled with meatballs and spaghetti sauce, I would be carrying something else with me into Mama’s kitchen—a gigantic hurt. The hurt was so big and so great that no matter how much I prayed, read my Bible or went to church, it wouldn’t stop.

Months before the holidays, my husband walked into our apartment one night, announced that he didn’t love me anymore and said he wanted a divorce. His words stung, as if a knife went through my heart. The pain was indescribable.

If that wasn’t bad enough news, I found out that he had another woman—one pain piled on top of another pain. I didn’t think I could make it through the holidays without him and I didn’t feel as if the hurt would ever go away. But I was wrong, very wrong.

Though my days, nights and holidays were accompanied by a roller coaster of emotions, I held on to someone

who was constant and never changing in my life: Jesus. I grabbed a hold of Jesus with everything in me and allowed Him to walk me through the valley of the shadow of death until I feared no evil. (Psalm 23) I learned a few things in this intense season of struggle that helped me to not only survive but thrive.

Here are three ways to find the strength you need during your holiday season:

Take a scrub brush to your mind

Many times we allow wrong, negative thoughts to live in our mind “rent free.” Today, decide to change the way you think about things. God wants to do something new in your life. For instance, instead of dwelling on the one person who didn’t want me anymore, I began to be thankful for the many people in my family who did want me. When we change our thinking, we change our direction.

Changing our direction causes our whole life to change. Big daily doses of reading, hearing and saying God’s Word causes the scrub brush of God to remove wrong, painful thoughts. “Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you].”

(Romans 12:2)

Forget the past

Break your rear view mirror off and throw it away. Stop looking behind you and start looking in front of you. Jesus understood the importance of not focusing on our past, saying that we cannot put our hand to the plow and look back. I understand this concept as a farmer’s daughter, because it is in the looking back that the rows of soil, like the rows of our life, become crooked and misdirected. (Luke 9:62)

Unfortunately, life is not a dress rehearsal. We go through this natural life only once and we can’t go back and change the past. When you catch yourself thinking back, deliberately focus on thinking forward and allowing God to paint a beautiful picture of your awesome future. By going forward, we change our future. “I do not consider, brethren, that I have captured and made it my own [yet]; but one thing I do [it is my one aspiration]: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead...” (Philippians 3:13)


Believe that God will give you double for your trouble

The trials of life have a way of pulling you down. Sometimes, without even being conscious of it, we bring trouble on ourselves. You may have broken dreams and a sense of despair. But look at it this way: When something goes wrong in your life, thank God that you have just been put in a position to receive double for your trouble.

In other words, God takes all of the injustices and wrongs

that have happened in your life, and with His Heavenly calculator adds them up and gives you double blessings back. Today, remind God of this promise. Say out loud, “God, thank you for my double blessings every day of my life.” He loves to hear from you and He loves to be reminded of what He said He would do for you. “For your shame you shall have double ... everlasting joy shall be unto them.” (Isaiah 61:7)

During this holiday season, allow Jesus to fill the empty places of your life with His love and allow God’s healing power to begin mending your broken heart. Remember that Thanksgiving and Christmas happen only once a year. Throw your head back, laugh and enjoy this season with family and friends, knowing that God has your back, your front, your sides and your future.

“I know what I’m doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.” (Jeremiah 29:11) 



DEBRA GEORGE

Debra has devoted her life to winning souls and raising up a soul-winning army for Jesus Christ. Whether Debra is walking the streets of the inner city to spread her message or speaking in a church or at a conference, her mandate from God is to bring hope to people from all walks of life.

THE POWER OF TRUE THANKSGIVING

Give thanks for what you have instead of dwelling of what you want

BY KAY WILLIS WYMA

One of the things I love most about Thanksgiving is its message: giving thanks.

Sometimes the underlying message of a holiday can get lost. We tend to put the proverbial cart (celebration) before the horse (meaning of a holiday). Thanksgiving—even Christmas—décor hit the stores about the same time back-to-school shopping started. But November's holiday, with all its turkey and pumpkin-pie frenzy, brings with it one of the most powerful secrets of life: gratitude.

Every year my mother takes a family picture, something she has done for the past 22 years. Throughout the year, in preparation for the photo, she keeps her eyes peeled for the perfect outfit. Yes, we 10 adults and 15 grandkids dress alike — or better said, the girls' matching outfits complement the boys.' The changing sizes, tastes and age ranges are a challenge.

Clothing isn't the only hurdle. For years, we had at least a half-dozen toddlers, and some younger, in tow. Try keeping that bunch happy while snapping pics. Mom came armed

with gummy bears and goldfish snacks.

John, the photographer, has faithfully taken each year's photo, even after he moved on from his photo studio. In the most amazing way, he whips through the lineup in no time at all: each child; each family; my dad with his girls; crazy-pic of all the boys; then the entire family in a group. John has captured every grandchild from the age zero (we were pregnant a lot!) to now 22. He knows them all by name and nature, even though he sees them only once a year.

As you can imagine, lots of life changes—some great, some filled with knee-callousing hardship—have occurred over the years. And those pictures offer such a terrific reminder; a reminder of the power inherent in the holiday.

Pictures, especially around the holiday season, are often an issue for people. Not only our own photos (even those created in our minds), but also those we see. Grocery store magazines display the perfect meal with the perfect centerpiece in front of the perfect smiling, happy people. Pinterest and Facebook weigh in with their own montages. And though we





likely know better, it's hard to fight our thoughts that can't help but park on someone's highlight reel and instantly compare it to our regular.

Contentment can be a challenge.

Enter the meaning of Thanksgiving, Stage Left:

Thankfulness. Gratitude. Giving thanks—a powerful reminder and swift weapon to fight discontent.

In the midst of every situation, something for which to be grateful resides. Recently my friend Greg shared with me the following

The most joy-filled woman I have ever met was in a barrio (read "slum") in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. She lived in a cinder-block box with a corrugated tin roof and she said to our group, "Please come into my home and let me show you what Jesus Christ has given

me." Her home was less than 450 square feet, no running water, no bathroom, and no windows yet she was content. No she was beside herself with thankfulness.

Society might see this as less-than, not enough, in need of more; but with a little perspective adjustment, we can see that things for which to be thankful abound. The woman chose to see provision (a tin roof) rather than focus on the lacking (so much.) Then, thankfulness acts as a source of oxygen available to be pumped into almost any situation, especially those that beg comparison. Such comparisons tend to flourish around the holidays when "er's" (thinner, prettier, smarter, faster), wish-it-could-be-me's, fair-not fair's, enough's and such try to plant seeds of discontent.

Instead of thinking about all that we could have—the holi-

"...that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

idays er's (better, thinner, prettier, more decoration, swankier vacation, ... fill in the blank), wish-it-could-be's, fair/not-fair's, elusive enough's—shift focus to all that we do have. That's a big difference.

According to ABC News, researchers have found that people who regularly write down things for which they are grateful in "gratitude journals" have increased satisfaction in life, higher energy levels and improved health.

My mom's yearly photo shoot, about which we might have been known to moan or possibly groan, proves it.

Each person in each picture throughout the years has experienced the good and the bad of life—the operative word being experienced, even though today it might be experiencing.

Those photos, like all photos, which any of us can scroll through at any time on any one of our handheld devices, can act as prompts to remember and consider all there is for which to be thankful in the midst.

Those smiling-pics serve as a string-on-a-finger reminder:

"...that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

The circumstances come and go. The people stay.

Might this year's Thanksgiving, though a celebrated holi-

day, be an everyday reminder to be just that—thankful. It's a powerful weapon against today's comparison-laden society. With our eyes off the would, could and should's, maybe we can see the person next to us who might need a boost of encouragement to see a gratitude opportunity of their own. 🌀



KAY WILLIS WYMA

Kay has five kids, ages 7-18, and one SUV with a lot of carpool miles. Before becoming a stay-at-home mom, she held positions at the White House, The Staubach Company and Bank of America. She's the author of *Cleaning House: A Mom's 12-Month Experiment to Rid Her Home of Youth Entitlement* (WaterBrook Press)

and *I'm Happy for You (Sort of... Not Really): Finding Contentment in a Culture of Comparison* (WaterBrook Press). She has been featured on NBC's *Today*, CNN-HLN, the Glenn Beck Program, USA Today.com and *Focus on the Family*. She attended Baylor University and the Thunderbird School of Global Management. She and husband Jon live in Dallas.

TRAPPED BY LONELINESS

Move out of your comfort zone for a richer, more rewarding life

BY LISA OSTEEN COMES

The holiday season is a wonderful time of the year. Many people look forward to the fun parties, shopping for presents, great food, lots of eating and being around those they love.

But unfortunately for many, loneliness is at an all-time high during this season. In fact, loneliness is the No. 1 emotional problem in America.

If you are going through a time of loneliness right now—maybe you lost someone you loved dearly, or you moved to a new city—know that you are not alone. God loves you, and He is with you. But I also know from experience, when you take small, proactive steps with God, you can overcome loneliness.

When I faced my unwanted divorce, I felt absolute loneliness. The first few holidays were hard for me. The last thing I wanted to do was get out and mingle. But finally, it dawned on me: if I wanted things to change, I needed to change. I needed to take action.

So I got out of the house, went downtown and volunteered to help feed the homeless with my best friend, Debra George. Not only was it a wonderful experience working side by side with people I didn't know, but it got my focus off of myself and on to things that mattered—sharing God's love with people. After all, how can we share God's love and be a bright light if we remain isolated?

As I served that day, I made some wonderful friends who

remain great friends today. I know that if I had not stepped out of my comfort zone that holiday season, I would not have made new friends, and my spirit wouldn't have been lifted.

This is what the Bible says in Proverbs 18:24: "A man that has friends must show himself friendly."

Did you catch that? To get a friend, you must be a friend.

I know this can seem like the most daunting task, especially when you don't feel like being friendly and loneliness hangs like a thick cloud. It's easy to retreat inward and do just the opposite. But this is what often happens if you do so: You'll begin to spend too much time at home alone, on the computer or watching television, and you'll start to see yourself as inferior to others, as unacceptable and unlovable.

Therefore, you won't go to social activities. You'll begin to program yourself for rejection, so you avoid close relationships and become obsessed with work because you want to fill the empty void in your life, which creates stress and exhaustion and gets you out of balance.

If you work too much, how will you meet new friends? How will you have time to date? See, it's a downward spiral. But God has hope for those who are lonely. He wants to give you the strength to rise from this place and to pursue change.

Change is ready for you when you take that first step and start serving others and being friendly.


Other times we think, "Well, I'll just keep praying about

it." So we go back to praying and produce no action behind our prayers. As nice as it would be for new friends to show up in our living room for dinner, that usually doesn't happen. Friendships do require action on our part. They are planned, made and developed.

The potential for making friends is endless when you are willing to step out of your comfort zone. If you are lonely this holiday season, plan for change. Don't settle on staying where you are at right now. Don't plan to be lonely. Plan to have friends and do something fun or meaningful.

There are many outreach programs available where you can serve and make a difference in your local community. I encourage you to check with your church or online for local service projects. As you do, ask God to connect you with the right people because He knows what is best for you.

You can rest assured, as you work with God and do your part, that He will meet you where you are, and together, you will rise above loneliness and enter into a new season.

Remember, loneliness is just a season. It's not meant to be a lifetime. Weeping may last for the night, but joy always comes in the morning. Change is surely on its way when you make that first step. I believe this will be your best holiday season ever and that God will bring meaningful relationships into your life. 



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Lisa is associate pastor at Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, the largest church in the United States. Lisa has survived both a birth defect and a mail bomb explosion, and she has overcome many other challenges with hope and optimism. Subscribe to her newsletter at her website, lisacomes.com. Her most recent book is *You Are Made for More*.



Dealing with DIFFERENCES

Acceptance, understanding and prayer can defuse the tension when viewpoints clash

BY SUSAN MILLIGAN

The fall season into Christmas is my favorite time of the year. I love watching the trees change colors, smelling the crisp air, sipping hot chocolate at my favorite football game and sitting by the fire as it snows.

I know many of you out there agree with me, especially those who have experienced a hot summer as I have. But others are the opposite. They prefer the heat, boat rides on the lake and lazy summer days reading a book (or better yet, *WHOAwomen* magazine). The thought of cold sends shivers down their spine.

I have grown to appreciate the differences among people; I see the world in a new light. I have noticed, however, that the world is growing less tolerant of different opinions and that we are

becoming more and more offended.

As we enter the time of year when we spend more time with family and friends, we need to be open to the differences in others and not stay offended. First, I believe in absolutes, especially the truths found in the Scriptures, but I do recognize that we are all at different places in our spiritual walks.

Some of us have grown up in the Word of God and are familiar with His ways, while others are new to the Bible and need help understanding. Those who fall into the first category, you know the Bible well; I encourage you to lovingly teach those who are new to the Scriptures. Please, don't beat them over the head with all the rules and regulations, but trust that the love of God will help them see the way.

So how do we survive the topics

that are not necessarily absolutes, but about which we have great passion? Try using these three steps to keep the holiday season from turning into a time of tension:

1. Understand that opinions and feelings are not facts. Many of us, including myself, have allowed our opinions or feelings to fool us into thinking they are facts. We also apply this truth to other people's opinions and feelings as well. A fact is something based on observation and hence is considered truth. An opinion, on the other hand, is an assumption or a belief. As you can see, one is not the other.

I have discovered that those with the most opinions often have the fewest facts. I recently read this quote by Marcus Aurelius that I thought was brilliant on this topic: "Everything we hear is



an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not a truth." We as Christians must be led by the Spirit of God and not by the opinions and feelings of ourselves or others. And as for facts, take those to God, too.

2. Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry. This is one of the most valuable Scriptures, found in James 1:19, when it comes to discussing our differences. We need to take it to heart and practice it in each and every one of our conversations, especially those that are challenging.

I have found that the more I keep my mouth shut and let people talk, the more apt they are to hear me if and when the opportunity arises. Also, the more I listen and clarify someone else's thoughts, the less angry I find myself. People need to be heard before we form our opinions (refer back to the

first step).

3. Finally, forgive those who do not share your opinions or think like you. For a Christian, this is a no-brainer, but as a frail human, this can be the hardest thing to do. In order to stay at peace with God, ourselves and others, we must be quick to forgive those who do not think the way we do. Instead of defending our points to the death, let's try praying more and seeing what God can do. We can do more in prayer than we can by yelling our beliefs to those who are not ready to hear. Many of the people who ruffle my feathers the most appear not to know God, so I have started praying more and saying less.

I encourage us all to embrace the fact that we will have differences. This can be done without offense. We as Christians need to be vigilant to show the world that we can be the loving peo-

ple Jesus refers to in the Scriptures. We can balance this acceptance with having our absolute beliefs. How do I know this is possible? Jesus did it, and we now have His Spirit to help us.

I am looking forward to enjoying that sip of cocoa while watching that fire, and I know others of you are dreaming of that next lake day.

All is well. 🌸



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REJECTED? FORGIVE

You'll give yourself the gift of a new beginning with those who have hurt you

BY SHEA WOOD

Have you ever felt the sting of rejection? Have you been left out? Talked about? Ignored? Spoken about in the same room as though you weren't there? Has your family quit speaking to you because you wouldn't do what they asked, good or bad?

That's the sting of rejection. The feeling is strong and it pierces the heart deeply. Then throw in the holidays to add a toxic cocktail to an already fragile emotional state, and you

have your casserole recipe for disaster.

Taking care of your emotional needs during the holidays can be a big commitment to yourself. The stress and pressure of attending, enjoying and hosting family and friends can bring anyone to the brink of an emotional breakdown.

Many times the root of that breakdown is rejection. Rejection can often cause us to put on a mask to hide our insecurity around those we love deeply but who also have hurt us.

*But our hope can now come from the Father in Heaven—
If we are faithless, God is faithful still, for God cannot disown his own.*

2 Timothy 2:13

Here's a situation: You haven't been to grandma's house for Thanksgiving lunch since you were 13 because your family moved across the country.

Now, you are visiting for the first time as an adult. When you walk into her house, the smell floods you with emotions you didn't know existed. Some are great, but then there is that one feeling you cannot place. Oh yeah, rejection.

You can recall what you were wearing, where you were standing and the feeling of your heart stopping as you overheard grandma criticizing your grades. She had not been as warm to you this time, and now you realized why as she talked to another family member behind your back. She responded to her disappointment by rejecting you.

This seems like a simple story, but often the simplest situations can injure us the most. They stay with us for years, and we find ourselves hiding and wearing masks to make sure no one rejects us again—not just during the holidays, but all the days in between as well.

The best way to get out of this trap is not to disown your family and friends, but to forgive. And forgiveness starts with you. You must first receive forgiveness for your failures, faults, mistakes and actions. As you begin to let yourself off the hook, you can then begin to take a look at the hurts that trip you up when you least expect them to.

This holiday season for you is about forgiveness. You are going to forgive yourself first as Ephesians says, "In Him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace..."

Rejection can put a sting in our holiday celebrations, but not this year. For you, my friend, you are letting God lavish His love upon you and forgive you. Then you will be able to give to those around you the same love and forgiveness. There is a saying, "You cannot impart what you do not possess." If you cannot possess forgiveness for yourself, then it

will be difficult to give it to those who have hurt you the most.

Can you relate to holding on to being unable to forgive? Can you relate to feeling rejected by someone close? Today, right now, you can start fresh, knowing that God has forgiven you and that you are willing to forgive those who have hurt you. The gift you are giving yourself this year is a brand new, big, shiny beginning of living free from rejection and living fully in forgiveness.

You are not rejected, you are not forgotten and you are forgiven! "But our hope can now come from the Father in Heaven – If we are faithless, God is faithful still, for God cannot disown his own." 2 Timothy 2:13

Happy Holidays to everyone and God bless you! 🙏

If you would like to dive deeper into forgiveness, Moving Him In: 12 Tangible Keys to Preparing a Place for Christ is a great resource. Shea Wood and Susan Milligan co-authored this book to assist others in breaking away from religion and moving into relationship with Jesus Christ.



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more than MEETING NEEDS

Let yourself connect and thrive during the holidays

BY LISA BEVERE



“I need.” These two short words drive the world around us. This seems to be heightened during the months that encompass our holiday season.

“I need.” The phrase follows us through grocery and department stores, at parties and events, and even to the tables where we gather with our families.

The default refrain of this season may be one of need, but there is potential for so much more. This is a time of year rich with opportunities to offer something better.

Let’s take a quick inventory of what we see in our culture. It fosters people who consume vast amounts of resources without ever truly giving back. They take time but rarely spend it. They receive money but are afraid

to give it. They pursue peace but rarely apprehend it.

It appears people are afraid to give too much of themselves. We see wives grudgingly meeting the needs of their husbands. Husbands do the bare minimum to meet the needs of their wives. Parents scurry around, busily meeting their children’s needs. Everyone is going through the motions and checking their lists, but is this really living?

Are we truly connecting? Are we thriving?

Where are tender care and encouragement? Where is the evidence of flourishing?

As friends, daughters, sisters, wives, mothers and grandmothers, we can be carriers of meaning and connection. We are meant for more than meeting needs. We are called to build lives and

relationships.

In our friendships and homes, we live with love. We foster dynamics where all have room to flourish. As mothers, we pursue heart connections with our children, forming intimate bonds that secure them with love. And as royal, divine ambassadors, we build heaven’s relationship with the inhabitants of earth.

Do you find yourself surrounded by the clamor of need? You can interrupt the chatter. Here are a few ways to infuse love and nurture into your world:

1. Stay aware of those around you

We love each other because [God] loved us first.

1 John 4:19 NLT

We live in a “mind your own business” world. But as Christ followers, we

are to be involved in each other’s lives. Check in with your friends. Ask your children and spouse questions that seek out their joys, hurts and desires. Look for opportunities to benefit those who cross your path. We can love—even in high-pressure moments—because we are loved.

2. Take tender care of those closest to you

Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 NLT

Tender care is genuine interest and concern coupled with a gentle approach as you interact with another. Children may be underfoot, and your husband may ask for help when you already feel overloaded. Feel released to

pause and respond with grace. There is no need to be harsh with those who love and respect you.

3. Encourage others liberally

So encourage each other and build each other up...

1 Thessalonians 5:11 NLT

Over the years I have found encouragement to be the most priceless gift you can give or receive. To encourage is to gift another with courage, hope, and confidence. What better way is there to celebrate the season?

Portions of this article were adapted from content in Lisa’s book *Nurture: Give and Get What You Need to Flourish* (FaithWords, 2008). 🌸



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Lisa believes in women and empowers them by weaving the practical with

the profound truth of God’s Word in award-winning curricula and best-selling books (*Lioness Arising, Fight Like a Girl, Nurture, Kissed the Girls and Made Them Cry* and more). Her heart breaks over social injustice. As an advocate for change, she rallies others to be an answer to desperate problems near and far. She and her husband, John Bevere, co-founded Messenger International, an organization established to teach, reach and rescue. Lisa is the mother of four sons and grandmother of three.

Your Gift of Love

This Christmas, shop and give from the heart

BY JONEAL KIRBY



Getting ready for Christmas always means shopping. I love those often-repeated trips to buy those special, thoughtful gifts for my favorite people. I love the hustle and bustle with all of the other mall shoppers, running into friends and visiting alongside them as we bump into one another and carve paths through the elbows and shoulders of the crowds.

I love hearing the Christmas music, listening to the children's choruses singing "Silent Night" and "Joy to the World." It makes the colorful assortment of trees and wreaths even more delightful.

Yes, as crazy busy as the Christmas season is, it's absolutely one of my fa-

vorite times.

Depending on your personal style, you are Miss Super-Organized or Miss Laissez-Faire, so you are either skillfully decorating the wrappings of the gifts you bought off your alphabetized, calligraphy-ized Christmas list or you are just beginning to realize the holiday is almost here and you better get going.

I typically fall closer to that latter style. After all, as long as the big day is not today, we've still got time, right?

Women are the primary gift-planners and buyers for most families. If you're like me, I want them to be personal as well as wonderful and memorable for each and every one. I think it gets harder year after year to come up with something unique. Whether you

are rushing to finish up your list or you completed your tree decorating and gift-buying before Thanksgiving, you may take a moment this year to consider putting on your list some things that will last longer than your pretty gift wrap will.

A couple that tried their best to do gift-giving well was made famous in the story "The Gift of the Magi." It's about a young married couple, with little money, and how they deal with the challenge of buying secret Christmas gifts for each other. Della, the wife, has beautiful hair flowing almost to her knees.

Jim, her husband, is the proud owner of a shiny gold watch that belonged to his father and grandfather.

To surprise one another, they each sell their most cherished possessions—she, her hair; he, his watch—in order to buy appropriate gifts. She buys a watch chain for Jim while he buys her a set of combs. When they exchange gifts, they realize that although they have no need of the gifts chosen for them, they now know how much each is willing to sacrifice to show their love.

The story has both an ironic and sweet moral message. The author of this moving tale, O. Henry, concludes the story by comparing the couple's sacrificial, loving gifts to the ones the wise Kings, the Magi, delivered to the Christ child the night of his birth while he lay in a manger. In case you didn't know, here's the rest of the story: Their gifts to Jesus started the tradition of giving gifts on Christmas.

Other artists address gift-giving through their craft. Amy Grant is a talented songwriter and musician. In 1992, she recorded what I believe is the perfect Christmas song, "My Grown-Up Christmas List." Many had performed the song before her. It was so popular that Grant revived it for her 2008 Christmas album. The lyrics speak the plea of an adult asking Santa not for any material gifts, but rather for those things that are good for all of humanity.

"Here's my lifelong wish
My grown-up Christmas list
Not for myself
But for a world in need
(Chorus)
No more lives torn apart
That wars would never start
And time would heal all hearts
Everyone would have a friend
And right would always win
And love would never end
This is my grown-up Christmas list."

Some gifts we give our loved ones are memorable and exceptional, but often they are not. When I buy my husband yet another sweater, he will be grateful because he's a nice guy, but it will stack up on his closet shelf on top of the others I've given him. While all presents on

Christmas Day may seem exceptional—after all, it is that magical holiday season—some are exceptionally thoughtful.

That's what Amy Grant's song is about. Perhaps instead of another fishing lure or new tennis racket, this year you may think of a way to present the gift of gratitude for and to your family. Tell your husband how glad you are he's in your life. Make your Christmas morning particularly personal with a letter or a poem you've composed, alongside a favorite photograph that expresses to your husband what a blessing he is. Don't be surprised if he appreciates your thoughtfulness and appreciation more than the new fishing tackle.

For others? Well, buying a gift for our mothers can be easier, since she is a girl and you know her so well, but surprise her and make her a gift of your personal gratitude. With sincerity, say or write, "Thank you, Mom, for all you do and have done for me and my family over the years."

If this seems too slight a gift, accompany your card with a cherished photo-memory. Your mom will love recalling those particular friends or family and the events, making this the Christmas morning she always remembers.

Do something for your children specific to their talents or skill sets. While they may want the latest tech device or fun fashion trend, you beat a path straight to their hearts when you speak words of affirmation and appreciation over them or hand them a handwritten blessing complemented with a gift card for a favorite activity you can do together. You have created space to share your approval and thankfulness for them. Words of loving care are seldom ever overdone in our busy, hectic, family-full lives. These tributes to your loved ones may not require a lot of money, but the emotional support you are giving makes them priceless.

If these verbal gifts don't speak well to you, there are some others that have life beyond Christmas morning. Gifts of service. Offer to take over a

chore that is typically your husband's job. You can wrap up a handmade gift certificate stating that all through January, you will take a task off their hands. Offer to vacuum, make dinner or pay the bills. Offer to fill up your husband's gas tank for a few months, or have his car washed.

These gifts show you are aware and grateful for your spouse's contributions to your family. If you want to lavish your spouse with a truly loving gift that will have long-term benefits, give your service.

Some gifts are good to share with your family regularly. In the days prior to the Big Day, you can be an unusually marvelous blessing to them. As wives and moms, we know the huge challenge of the big prep for the Christmas season.

This year, be the wise, strong, calm and happy wife and mom of the year in these days leading to Dec. 25. After all, we are celebrating Jesus' birthday. We could just go ahead and do this daily for comfort and joy all year long. Your maturity and kindness will be a good influence on them and will help everyone to have a merrier Christmas. That would make for gift that truly keeps on giving and is at the heart of any grown-up Christmas list. ☺



JONEAL KIRBY
Joneal holds a doctorate in marriage and family therapy and is the founding director of

the women's program Heartfelt Friends, a multi-generational ministry based on Titus 2. Her newest book is *Heartfelt, A Woman's Guide to Creating Meaningful Friendships*. She and her husband will celebrate 40 years of marriage in 2015. They have three amazing adult children with a super son-in-love and daughter-in-love and five awesome grandsons.



Brighter Days Ahead

When the season isn't so merry, look outward and try something different

BY TAMMY TURNAGE

I'm writing this article somewhere around 32,000 feet. Our early morning flight has gone from a smooth takeoff to a bumpier experience. The light from the seatbelt sign glows from the cabin area above my head as our captain navigates among the scattered clouds.

Our lives can seem similar to the flight: Here we are smoothly sailing along, maybe spotting a few scattered clouds, but overall it's a sunny happy day. Then, in a single moment, dark storm clouds appear and everything changes. Our life takes an immediate 180-degree turn, and life is never the same again. We fasten our seat belts tight and close our eyes for fear of what destination lies ahead.

As I look out the small airplane window, my mind reflects on the past few years. How life has changed. It's different now. We've had many happy moments. Yet in five horrible, dark, stormy months, our family has had to rely on our faith more than ever before as we experienced the worst turbulence of our lives. In those few months, we lost three very special people: my father, brother and aunt. No, our lives will never be the same without them. But God carried us through.

One stormy day at a time, one moment at a time, we slowly began to see the sun again. It's different. Life's different. But it's still a good life.

I don't like the word "different." Why can't things be the same be the same? Why do we have to endure heartache, loss,

death, loneliness and dark storm clouds? One day, our precious children are running down the hall in their new red pajamas early Christmas morning, and in what seems like only a moment, they are grown with families of their own. It's different.

And there's an empty seat is at our dining room table where Dad once sat. Even my best efforts at holiday decorating can't change the feeling of emptiness in my heart that he's not with us this year. The house is quieter—too quiet. No, it doesn't feel like Christmas anymore.

Turning on old Bing Crosby Christmas music, decorating our house in red and green, and hanging the twinkling lights from the tree, I can often feel anything but merry. It's during those times that I realize that happiness shouldn't lie in the circumstances around my life.

Just like in the book of Philippians, Paul's example teaches us to find happiness wherever we are, whatever life brings. And we can. It takes effort, but we can. I can and so can you.

Just because we go through difficult seasons, it doesn't mean that Christmas—or any day—can never be special again. Yes, it's different, but it can also be a season of new beginnings, new traditions and new memories. Through those dark days, I found out how, and I want to share it with you.

"We change the focus from ourselves to blessing others."

That's right. Turn around 180 degrees and look outward instead of inward. It works.

My Mama always said, "When you think you've got it bad, look around," and she was right. When we stop and count our blessings, we have so much to be grateful for. Even in the middle of the storms of life when we can't see two feet in front of us, there are blessings. Lots of them.

And the more we look, the more we will see. But we have to make the effort and the decision to look for them. They're all around: the sound of holiday music, the smell of a Christmas tree, the smile from a coworker at the end of a long day, the laughter of children. Look around and start counting.

You know, we have to be determined not to let loneliness, sadness and quietness get the best of us. We choose our attitudes. And you have something to offer this world that no one else can give. I believe we all have a desire to be needed. Being needed is one of life's sweetest blessings.

When we help others, we find a multitude of blessings: Time passes easier, our days seem brighter, we feel appreciated. It says, "My life matters to someone, and I have something to offer this world. I'm needed." How wonderful it is to make a difference in someone's life. And so many people need someone to share a smile, a word of encouragement or a quiet afternoon with a hot cup of coffee.

Here I am writing this article cruising at 32,000 feet, and I used to be absolutely terrified of flying. Praise God! Now, I actually enjoy it. What happened? I changed my attitude. I decided to let God be in control and not me. (Yes, it took me a few agonizing flights to learn this ... slow learner.)

After all, He has my life in His hands, so why should I worry. He's in the "Captain's seat." All I need to do is recline, buckle in, let Him navigate and enjoy this flight called life.

As our plane descends to our next destination, I glance out the small window of the plane. The early morning sun hits the top of the clouds and takes my breath away. It's stunningly beautiful. Heavenly. We exit the plane, and I realize that a new destination awaits to be navigated, with fresh opportunities and new experiences ahead.

And as we walk down the narrow tunnel to a unexplored destination, I know that life may never be the same. It may be—different. But it doesn't mean that it can't be sunny, beautiful and glorious. Maybe "different" isn't such a bad word after all, and maybe, just maybe, it could mean brighter days ahead. ☺

25 ways to have a different and much happier holiday season (and No. 25 could change your entire year ahead)

- Volunteer at a soup kitchen
- Deliver meals to the needy on Thanksgiving Day
- Write a note to someone serving in the military
- Write homebound members of your church
- "Adopt" a family who is in need for the holidays
- Participate in Operation Christmas Child and pack some shoeboxes for children
- Select a card from an angel tree and buy toys and gifts
- Send a card to those in your church who may be struggling this Christmas
- Mentor a teenager in your church
- Sew pillowcases for a local children's hospital
- Adopt a missionary family and send gifts and supplies, and commit to sending them a card every week for the next year
- Help with local charities
- Go Christmas caroling
- Bake cookies for those in your neighborhood or church
- Have a cookie exchange party
- Donate nice used clothing and shoes to local charities
- Participate in a coat drive
- Invite your pastor or church staff members to dinner in your home and let them know they are greatly appreciated for their ministry
- Sing in a Christmas cantata or Messiah chorus
- Bake small goodies and put in plastic bags, and keep them in your car to pass out as you run errands (my sister, Nancy, does this year round! She's such a blessing to others)
- Help to tidy up someone's yard, rake leaves, shovel snow or help them with their Christmas decorations
- Make you and your neighborhood happier by putting out festive lights and decorating your house, even with just one or two decorations
- Read the Christmas story to children
- Visit a nursing home or retirement home and sing Christmas carols
- Write down your New Year's resolutions and include an idea every week to do to help someone in need.



TAMMY TURNAGE
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Tammy began studying the piano when she was 3 years old and has a degree in piano performance. As a pianist, organist and vocalist, she has been featured as a soloist with symphonies, solo concerts, and church and local theater productions. Her new piano CD is *Classical Praise*. She writes and blogs from life's experiences and is working on a new book. Making their home on the Mississippi Coast for over 28 years, Tammy and husband Kendall stay busy with daughters Kristen and Maria, son-in-law Brian and granddaughter Summerlyn. Follow Tammy on her blog, Pinterest, Facebook and Twitter.



HAPPIER HOLIDAYS

How to brighten the season when it's less than cheery

BY LESLIE VERNICK

For some people, the holiday season feels anything but merry, and it's hard to pretend otherwise. You've lost a loved one and the season does not feel the same without him or her. You're recently divorced and the traditions and celebrations you shared as a family are now gone. Or you live alone and the approaching holidays only magnify your isolation and lack of family or close friends.

Others dread Thanksgiving and

Christmas because they conjure up bad memories of holidays past. There wasn't gratitude, peace, joy or goodwill but only drunkenness, disappointment, conflict and hurt that continues to rage wild in your mind even when you wish it would go away.

If that's you or someone you know, let me share five things that you can do that will help you get through these next few weeks.

1. Allow yourself to feel your feelings.

Give yourself permission to grieve

and process your pain. As Christians, sometimes we feel guilty for having negative emotions. Jesus knows how you feel and you never have to pretend with Him. Take time to journal out your questions, your emotions or your complaints as David did when he wrote his Psalms. Pour out your heart to God. Then listen to what God says back to you. You might discover, as David often did, that after you dump out your negative feelings, you not only feel better, but you experience God in a fresh way.

"I will give you treasures hidden in the darkness—secret riches. I will do this so you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name."

ISAIAH 45:3

2. Make it your daily practice to look for what's good.

When we're in pain, it's tough to be intentional and look for the good that is tucked within each day. But if you don't look, you will miss it. Before you go to sleep, review the day and ask yourself what happened today that you're most grateful for. No matter how little write it down.

Perhaps you heard the unbridled giggle of a child, found a shiny silver dollar on the ground or had time to walk outside and feel the sun warm your skin. Keep a gratitude journal of the things you discover. Reread it often. The Lord tells Isaiah (45:3), "I will give you treasures hidden in the darkness—secret riches. I will do this so you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name."

3. Do an act of kindness for someone you don't know well.

You are not alone in your suffering. We can always find someone who needs a kind word, a good meal, a meaningful card, a hug or a little bit of our time. Jesus said we are always more blessed to give than to receive. While you may not feel like it, give something of yourself to someone less fortunate. It will bless you as you bless another person.

4. Do something completely different from your normal holiday routine.

Sometimes we need a break from our traditional way of celebrating the holiday season to lessen triggers and create new memories. Book a cruise, volunteer to work a holiday shift for someone who has small children, or donate your time at an animal shelter or other worthy cause to keep yourself busy.

5. Give yourself permission to receive.

Sometimes we'd rather sit home and eat a can of cold soup than accept an act of kindness from another person. We're embarrassed and don't want to feel needy. Yet God may have put you on someone's heart in order to bless you.

I remember early in our marriage my husband became ill with a life-threatening problem. Our family did not live nearby, but the people from our church rallied around us and not only loved us through it but provided cash to cover some of the growing expenses. It was humbling, but their kindness met our financial need and it touched our hearts.

Let yourself receive someone's act of kindness. You'll be richer for it.

The holiday season does give us a reason to be joyful but not in the way we usually celebrate it. Christmas isn't about trees and gifts and carols and special cookies. Christmas is good news.

Emmanuel, God is with us. He sent Jesus so that we might know what God is like.

Spend a few minutes pondering Luke 1:78,79 when he describes this miracle: "Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide us to the path of peace."

If you find yourself in a dark place this season, ask God to help you experience that light and path to peace. 🌸



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Leslie is a popular speaker, licensed counselor, coach and author of six books, including

The Emotionally Destructive Relationship: Seeing It! Stopping It! Surviving It!

God's Greatest Gifts

This season, celebrate His Son and our place in His family

BY LAINE LAWSON CRAFT

[The God of Glory] How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.

I searched on what to share in this edition of *WHOAwomen* because both family and holidays are so special to my heart. As I looked for just the right Scripture, these words in Ephesians said it all. Not only did they put all of my thoughts together in just one place, they came from the living word of God. I hope these thoughts will not only touch your heart but give you a new love for God and for your family this holiday season.

Before God created earth, He had us on His mind. He was creating each one of us uniquely by His own hands. Isn't it amazing that the creator of the earth and universe created us? His love was so great for all of His children. We were made whole through His extrava-

gant love. Each one of us was designed by God and sent to reflect who our Father is: He is love. We were all created to be a part of His family, His sons and daughters.

This holiday season you may not have a family in the traditional sense. But I pray today that you see that indeed you have an amazing family. You were adopted into God's own family through His gift—His only Son, Jesus. You will never have to face life alone. You will always have a place in God's family. If, however, you are blessed enough to have a beautiful earthly family, also remember that we are all a part of one family—God's family. Let us all celebrate that we are all sisters and brothers in love created by our heavenly Father's hands.

With every holiday season, we celebrate with gifts to and from our families. But let us remember the most precious gift of all, that of God giving His only Son to die on a cross so that we could have life eternal.

The holiday season, of course, celebrates the birth of Jesus. But God loved us so much that before the earth's foundation, He knew He needed to give us His Son. Let's celebrate that gift, which is far greater than all others.

WHOA! Now we can have an intimate relationship with our heavenly Father because of the lavish gift He gave us.

How marvelous and amazing is our God! He is our Father and He loves us so extravagantly. May we all rejoice to be in His family. May we be thankful for His great love for us and praise Him for the gift of His Son, Jesus. As we share gifts with our families, may we always remember our true greatest gift—Jesus Christ. Let us thank God for His great love, for His Son and for adopting us into His family this season. 🍷



LAINE LAWSON CRAFT
Laine wears many hats - author; founder of *WHOA-WOMEN*; publisher of *WHOA-WOMEN*

Magazine; and host of an upcoming television talk program, *The WHOA Show*. Her passion is to let all women know that God loves them right where they are and He desperately desires an intimate relationship with them. Laine and husband Steve have been married for more than 27 years and have two sons and a daughter.

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