

MIND • BODY • SOUL & SPIRIT

# WHOA WOMEN



## HELP *IN* HEALING

Traditions can ease the sting of grief

## The **3** question

*guide to a new financial plan*

## JOYFUL JOURNEY

10 ways to find holiday happiness

## A HOUSE FOR *your heart*

Make your home a place you love all year long

LOOKS TO *Fall* FOR  
Something old, something new for your autumn wardrobe

# DOLLY PARTON

The entertainment legend rolls on with new music, a TV special and a full family life





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# INSPIRE *and* ENCOURAGE

*Notes from our readers*

I LOVE your magazine soooo much! Thank you Lord for all that are involved in its publication and all the readers!

- Sara T.

This site is inspiring and truly an encouraging blessing.

-Stevie C.

Congratulations Harris, they made a great choice, lookin beautiful on the cover.

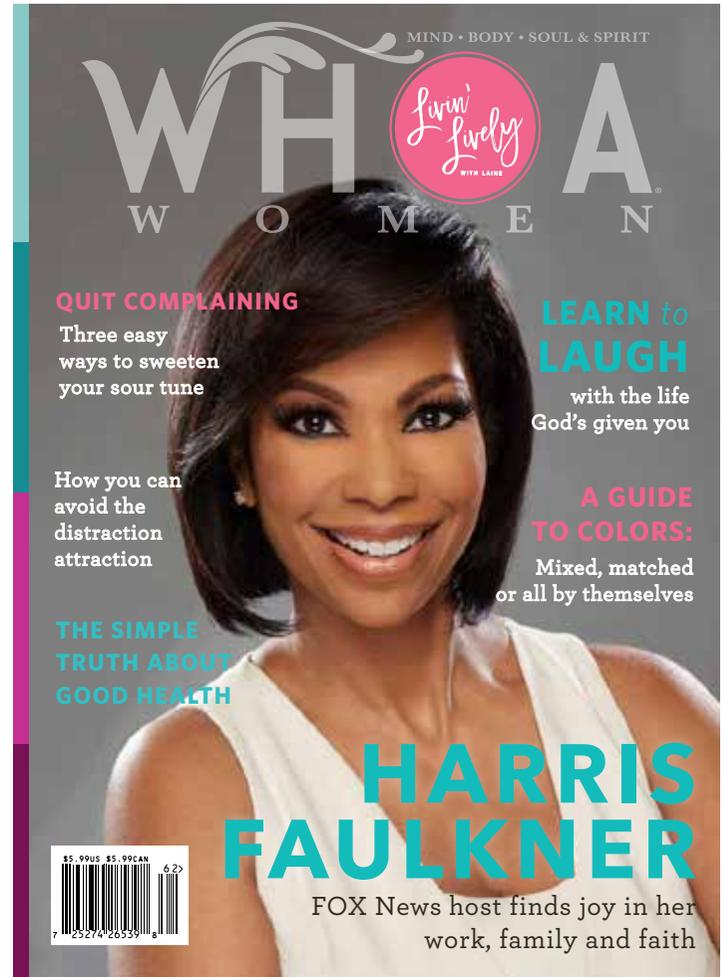
-John S.

I love that there are so many great women that write in this magazine! Love Harris, too!

-Sharon F.

Harris is a beautiful cover - can't wait to read WHOAwomen!

-Kris W.



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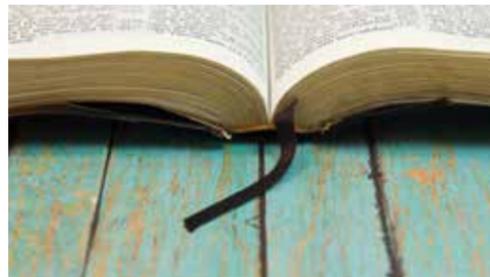
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DOLLY TURNS THE CALENDER WITHOUT MISSING A BEAT



It's hard to miss Dolly Parton these days. The 70-year-old entertainment legend is still going non-stop with a new album, a new tour and a new television special. How does she keep doing it? Find out what drives her in this edition's cover story by Deborah Evans Price.

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## letter from the publisher



Dear WHOAwomen,

The cool winds of fall have settled in and the holiday season is right around the corner. And with it will come a time of hypersensitivity to everything. Physically we are stretched to do it all. Emotionally we are challenged with those issues that surface only in the holiday season. Spiritually we are more aware than ever because we are focused on the reason for the season. In this issue of *Livin' Lively with Laine WHOAwomen Magazine*, we touch on many areas that are sure to help you cope better and make this holiday season your best ever.

Our talented contributors have shared on topics that will both enliven the season and pull at your heartstrings. You'll discover new entertaining tips as well as decorating ideas to transform your home into a sanctuary during the holidays. For the inner you,

you can learn how to keep your spirits up during the season and how to find joy in almost all that surrounds you. Plus you get our amazing makeup finds, fashion must-haves, delicious recipes and so much more.

*Livin' Lively with Laine WHOAwomen Magazine* is honored to feature Dolly Parton, one of the truly special women in the world. This true entertainment icon has been a woman of integrity and excellence throughout her career. Read all about her 50th wedding anniversary celebration and her upcoming projects, including a new tour and a television special. You will love every minute of what Dolly has to share with us.

As we wind down another year, 2017 is on the horizon. Each year I feel the Lord giving me a glimpse into His heart and wishes for His daughters in the upcoming year. I believe and declare that 2017 will be a year of grace and peace like never before. God's grace will cover all of us. It will remove the struggles and bring deep peace into our hearts. He will pour out His grace into overflow, making what seemed to be a struggle in 2016 a piece of cake in 2017. It will be His strength and love pouring all over us and through us throughout the year. I know that 2017 will be a year full of amazing grace and sense of peace that will be abundantly found in every area of your life.

We love you. You are the reason we love what we do. I pray blessings, grace, peace and love for you throughout the holiday season and throughout the New Year!

*Livin' Lively with Love,*

*Laine Lawson Craft*

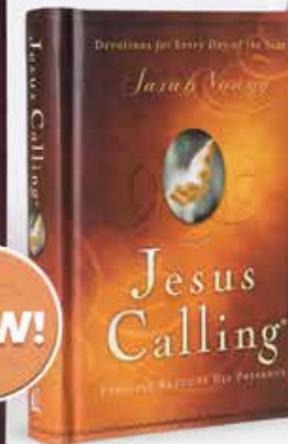
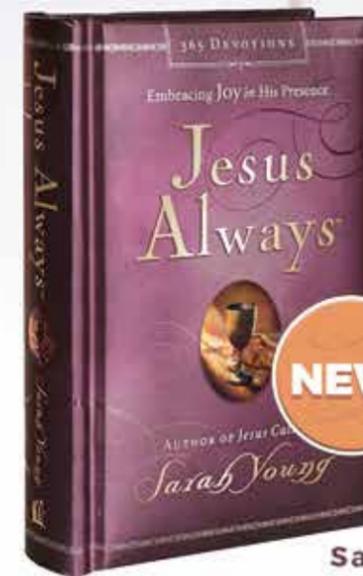
**LAINE LAWSON CRAFT**

*publisher & editor-in-chief*



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# Dolly's Drive

It's full speed ahead for the legendary entertainer  
with more music, movies and family

By Deborah Evans Price

**A**s she heads into the final months of 2016, Dolly Parton has a lot to smile about. This year the iconic entertainer has celebrated major milestones, including her 70th birthday and her 50th wedding anniversary. She's sold out venues across the country on an extensive tour; released her new album, *Pure & Simple*; and is gearing up for her next NBC television movie, *Christmas of Many Colors: Circle of Love*, a follow-up to last year's holiday hit *Coat of Many Colors*.

Sitting in her manager's office wearing fitted capris and a bright yellow jacket, Parton looks much younger than her 70 years and possesses the same buoyant spirit and determination that carried her from her east Tennessee mountain home to Nashville, Hollywood and beyond.

"I have never been one to live in the past," she shares. "I'm not sure that I ever really live in the moment, either. I think most of the time I'm living in the future, the one that I'm trying to create. I have new

ideas and dreams every single day and I can see them as if they were already happening. By the time they do actually happen, I'm already on to the next dream, working hard to make it a reality."

Parton's work ethic is legendary in the music industry and, at a time when some artists might be considering retirement, she shows no signs of slowing down. She's continuing her *Pure & Simple* tour through the end of the year and is enjoying the interaction with her fans.

"I'm really happy and really pleased that we're having such a great turnout and such great reaction. I'm really into the shows and they are, too," she says. "We started in June and are going through the 10th of December. We work a couple of weeks and then we're off a couple of weeks, so it gives me time to do other things. I actually get more rest and songwriting and business done when I'm touring than any other time because I'm here on the bus for all those hours. I don't like to waste time, so



it actually gives me a chance to do a lot of other stuff.”

Before heading out on her current tour, Parton celebrated her 50th wedding anniversary on May 30 by renewing her vows to husband Carl Dean in a simple ceremony at their Nashville home.

“It was sweet. It wasn’t overwhelming,” she says. “We didn’t plan anything big at all because we didn’t want any kind of strain, any kind of tension, any kind of commotion, so we planned it cleverly and carefully. We just had a simple little ceremony at our chapel at our place. We just had just a few people who needed to be there to make sure they got the pictures and the few things that we needed.

“We just had fun with it because once you’ve done it, it wasn’t something that I was worried that the groom was going to run off. He wasn’t worried that the bride was going to run off. We’re too old to run.”

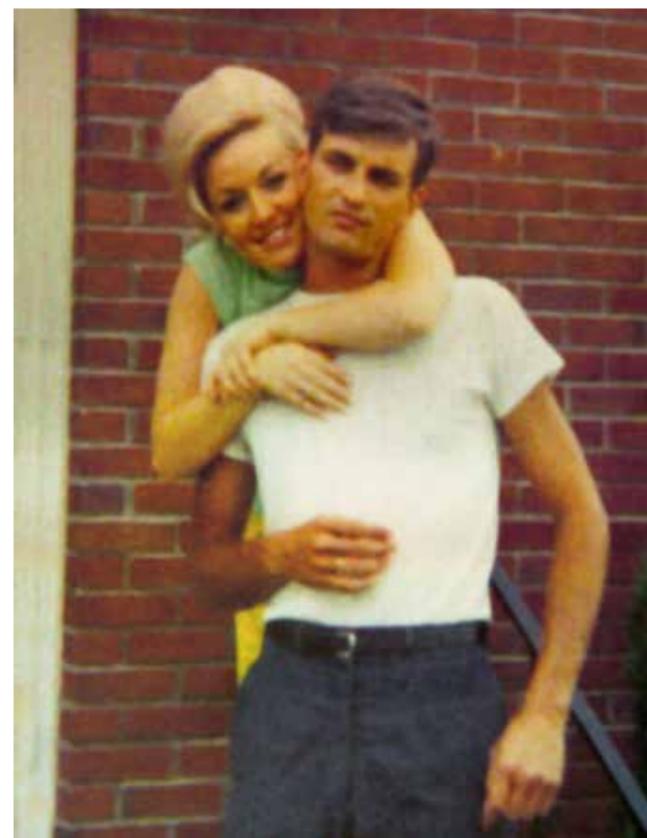
Though her recent ceremony was low key, Parton says she did want a beautiful wedding dress and she wanted Carl to be all dressed up this time because

their first wedding was a quick ceremony in Ringgold, Georgia. At the time, Parton says that was her only option because she had just signed her first record deal and the label didn’t want its new artist to get married.

“We didn’t get to do it like we wanted to the first time,” she says. “We ran across the border there in Georgia so we wouldn’t have a Tennessee license because I was asked not to marry for a year by the record label I had just started with. I had already planned to be married, and I didn’t want to make them mad so we just went across the state line in Ringgold, Georgia, and got married, and spent the night that weekend.”

Instead of opting for a tropical getaway or fancy honeymoon this time around, after they renewed their vows, she and Carl got in their camper and headed to Ringgold where they had said “I do” 50 years ago and had a second honeymoon. “We just went down there and slept in the camper. That’s what we did,” she says with a laugh.

Celebrating 50 years of marriage inspired the music

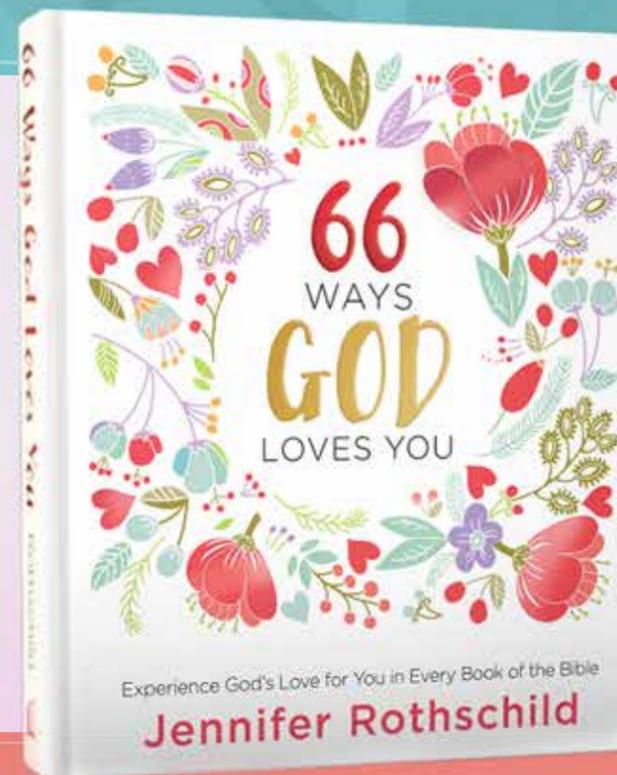


Carl and Dolly through the years



*"You just make do with what you've got and you don't know what you don't have until years later when you realize other people have more."*

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on *Pure & Simple*. “I was just trying to think about all the different colors of love through the years,” she says. “I thought, ‘Well, I’m going to write about mine and Carl’s relationship. It’s just a pure and simple relationship,’ so it started with that and then I thought, ‘Well, why don’t I just write a whole album of love songs?’ I covered every type of romance, like the friends with benefits the song ‘Outside Your Door’ and I felt like I wrote the ultimate cheating song in ‘Anything That Feels That Right, Can’t Be That Wrong’ so I wasn’t just writing for myself, but just all about love. I thought love would be the great theme and I did write several about mine and Carl’s relationship.”

“Forever Love,” “Say Forever You’ll Be Mine” and “Tomorrow is Forever” were inspired by her relationship with Carl, but one of her favorites on the album is “I’m Sixteen,” which was actually inspired by her sister’s relationship.

“I wrote it based on a new romance of one of my sisters who had a couple of failed relationships and just thought she was never meant to have true love,” explains Parton, who declined to say which sister out of respect for her sibling’s privacy. “She said, ‘I’ll never love again. I’ll never find anybody’ but she did find someone and they just act like two teenage kids, like they’ve never been in love before. I watch them and I get such a kick to see how happy they are and I think, ‘God they think they are 16! They are acting like they are 16!’ I thought, ‘Oh what a cute idea!’ And the line says, ‘Goes to show you’re never old unless you chose to be and I will be 16 forever just as long as you love me.’ I write a lot for people who don’t write and anytime my brothers or sisters go through something and they can’t express it well, I write stories for them.”

Family has always been important to Parton, who

grew up the fourth of 12 kids in a poor but loving mountain clan. Fans got a glimpse into Parton’s childhood last year with the *Coat of Many Colors* TV movie, based on her iconic hit song.

“People are missing faith-based, family oriented things on television, like *The Waltons* and *Little House on the Prairie*. I think it spoke to a lot of people. It’s always so hard to get Hollywood versions of things. Of course, we were poorer than that, but still I think it seemed to really strike where it counted. People really related to it and Jennifer Nettles did such a good job playing mama. Of course, Ricky Schroder did a great job playing daddy and my little Dolly was amazing. That little Alyvia Lind, she’s a precious little thing. We felt like we really lucked out with the cast.”

That cast will be back again in *Christmas of Many Colors: Circle of Love*. And Dolly herself will have a role as the painted lady with whom she was fascinated as a child. It was that woman’s flamboyant looks that Parton adopted as part of her persona.

“I’ve always talked about the first time I saw this lady, the town trollop,” Parton says. “She wore too much makeup, too much hair, high heel shoes, pretty much the way I do now. I thought she was prettiest thing I’d ever seen and I thought that’s how I want to look when I grew up, so when we started doing this movie—I do the wrap-arounds, talk at the front and at the back, and I do voice-overs—but I thought I would love to be in this movie, so why can’t I just play the painted lady? Who knows more of what she looks like than me? So I got to play the painted lady and I got a big kick out of that.”

The plot of the new movie will center on Parton’s family at Christmas time when a blizzard wreaks havoc on their mountain home, and it will also share the story

*“I’ve always talked about the first time I saw this lady, the town trollop. She wore too much makeup, too much hair, high heel shoes, pretty much the way I do now. I thought she was prettiest thing I’d ever seen...”*

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of Parton's father trying to raise money to get Dolly's mother a wedding ring for Christmas.

"Mama and daddy had been married for 16 or 17 years and had nine kids, and mama never had a wedding ring and neither had daddy," she explains. "They got married in my grandpa's yard and they slept in my grandpa's barn on their honeymoon and so the Christmas that mama got her wedding ring was always a special Christmas."

Though the Parton clan was always short on cash, they were rich in love, and Dolly has fond memories of her childhood. "We did everything on our own. We didn't get many store-bought things at all," she recalls. "Sometime the girls would get one of those pink little plastic dolls with rubber bands holding it together. We didn't have things the other kids did, but we made do. We cut our own trees, made our own decorations and in the early, early days we didn't have electricity so mama was creative and we did have fun. Mama always told us stories of Christmas and we sang all the songs and mama would read the stories from the Bible.

"You just make do with what you've got and you don't know what you don't have until years later when you realize other people have more," she continues. "I always made a joke we didn't know we were poor until someone told us, but a lot of people were poor in that

part of the country. We weren't the only poor people that didn't have money, but mama would always say, 'Don't you say that we are poor. We're not poor. We are rich in spirit. We've got love and kindness and understanding and each other and money can't buy you that.'"

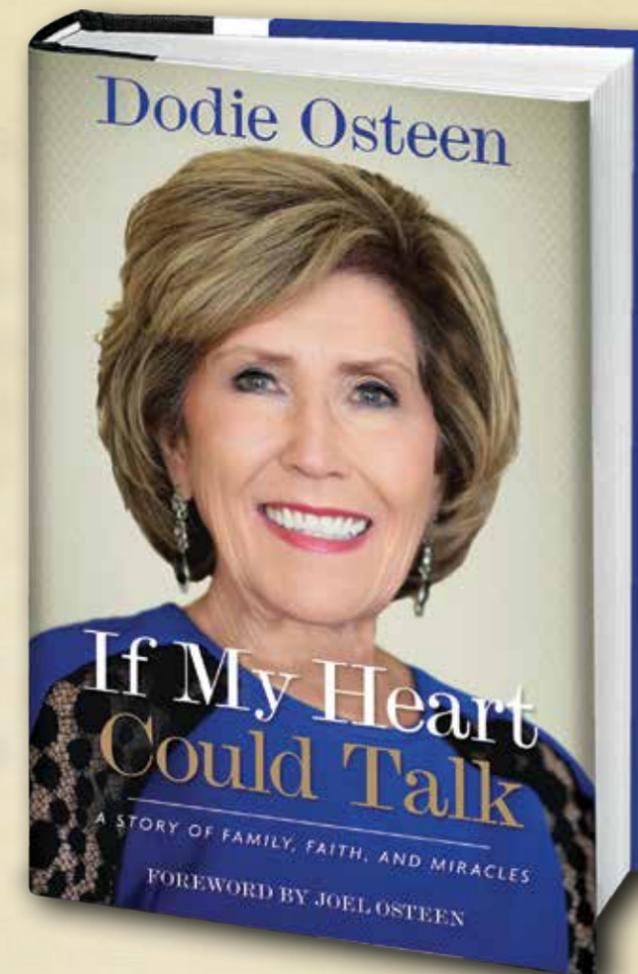
Christmas has always been a special time to Parton, and she revels in celebrating the holidays. "I love Thanksgiving and I love Christmas," she says with a big smile. "So I start celebrating at Thanksgiving and I never stop until after New Years, actually I don't stop until after my birthday which is the 19th of January. I always say that Thanksgiving through the 19th of January ain't nothing but a celebration for me.

"Sometimes I even leave my tree up through my birthday so I can stay in that celebrating kind of spirit. Most people take their tree down the second of January, but I'll just leave the tree up, at least one of the trees in my house. Christmas is wonderful. I love it! I love the family element of it."

Though she and Carl never had children of their own, they helped raise several of her siblings and are close to their nieces and nephews who call Parton "Aunt Granny." One of her favorite Christmas traditions involves baking cookies. "Christmas cookie night has been a family tradition for years," she says. "I get all my nieces and nephews and their kids over and we make all

*"There is a lot of my mother's life, example, and wisdom in this book. The lessons she taught me have changed my life, and these simple truths can change your life as well."*

— *Joel Osteen*  
Senior Pastor of Lakewood Church and New York Times Bestselling Author



"Over the years, people have often referred to me as Pastor John Osteen's wife. He was the founder of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, and a remarkable husband, father, and man of God. Now many refer to me as Joel Osteen's mother! But I'm just Dodie, a lady who loves God and

people and a mother of five wonderful children who all happen to be in the full-time ministry. I hope that as I share bits of my story with you, you will be encouraged and blessed."

—Excerpt from IF MY HEART COULD TALK

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# DITCH *the* BAGGAGE SERIES

*"I kept opening these presents and thought I was going to get something different and there was another pair of those potholder gloves."*

different kinds of decorated sugar cookies. I think more ingredients end up on the floor than in the cookies, but it's all part of fun. I usually find sprinkles in my hair until Valentine's Day."

Food is always a big part of the Parton family's Christmas celebration. "We all have our own special things we cook. We all like to eat," she grins. "We always like to have the same foods that mama used to cook or our aunts used to cook. We all have our own little specials that we bring and those of us that can get together, we do. And some of us that live down here, we've got a lot of backwoods country people that don't like to get out or won't travel, so we have to go up there if we're going to see them. But between Christmas Eve and New Years we try to see all of our relatives."

When it comes to gifts, Parton appreciates the simple things, like the year Carl got her four pair of potholder gloves. "I cook all the time so he got me four pairs of those because I have the lake house. I've got the Tennessee mountain home and I've got the house here (in Nashville). I kept opening these presents and thought I was going to get something different and there was another pair of those potholder gloves," she says laughing. "And he got me a toolbox one year because I'm always wanting to hang something."

Though the children in Parton's family always look

forward to getting gifts from Santa, Dolly says they teach the little ones the true reason for the season. "We always make sure that the kids know what Christmas is all about and what it really is and Santa Claus is not Jesus," she says. "Santa Claus is a character that we pretend that brings the toys. He's more like a messenger, a helper. We tell them the true story of Christmas and we sing the real songs of Christmas, about the birth of Jesus."

Faith has always been important to Parton. "I can't begin to imagine what life would be if I didn't have faith, didn't have something to believe in, something bigger than me, something greater than us," she says. "I want to be just connected to that and be a part of that and I believe in that with all my heart and that helps me a great deal."

In January, Parton will turn 71, and she's as busy as ever. She's developing other movie projects, writing songs and is passionate about the Imagination Library, nonprofit organization she founded to combat illiteracy by providing free books to children. "I don't feel any different actually when I came here at 18 years old," she says. "My attitude is still young and my work is still young. I'll just have to make every year to count and make it as meaningful as I can. I can't worry about (aging). It's going to happen anyway. I just try to look my best and do my best and let the years roll on." 🌸



## YOUR PAST DOES NOT DEFINE YOU!

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- STUDY:** Available at [www.MercyMultiplied.com/DitchtheBaggage](http://www.MercyMultiplied.com/DitchtheBaggage)
  - Explores the 7 Keys to lasting freedom, with steps for personal application
  - Features daily assignments, reflection questions, and journal pages
  - Leader's Guide includes suggested questions and notes, plus training and tips for leading others
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and our desire is to make more happy faces like this one.

We just want to share Christ and love people where they are—even if that means holding a carnival to encourage struggling families or feeding kids after school.



# SHARE YOUR STORY

These are first-person stories by women who have achieved a victory in their lives.



*Joyce Meyer Ministries* is a nonprofit organization called to share Christ and love people all around the world. Each year, Joyce shares the message of hope with millions through her *Enjoying Everyday Life*® TV and radio programs, conferences, books and resources, teaching people how to apply biblical truth to every aspect of their lives.

Through our missions arm, *Hand of Hope*, we provide global humanitarian aid; feed the hungry; clothe those in need; minister to the elderly, widows and orphans; visit prisoners; and help as many hurting people as we possibly can.

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## FINDING HONOR IN THE FACE OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

By Lori Peterson Owen

Sitting on the side of the bed, I was feeling the same anxiety as I had in years past. After I rubbed the sandman out of the corner of my eyes and stretched, I made the choice to have a good day in the Lord.

I prayed, arose and half stumbled into the kitchen to start breakfast for my mom. Yes, my mom. She lives with us and has had Alzheimer's since 2004. The assisted living center where she was living wasn't up to par, so we took her in on Jan. 7, 2015. I had to quit my job and become her caregiver.

As I started up the stairs to serve her in the bedroom, I quickly realized she was going to tear me apart verbally. It triggered memories. My mother was a stone-cold alcoholic when I was a child. Abuse was a daily event. I soon came to realize that it was not a good morning in her natural world.

The *36-Hour Day* by Nancy L. Mace and Peter V. Rabins is a family guide to caring for people with

Alzheimer's disease, other dementias and memory loss in later life. It addresses a lot of the elements that a caregiver must deal with, and how your day is much longer than 24 hours.

Each and every day is different with many challenges, such as cleaning up incontinence and reminding your loved one, maybe 15 times in five minutes, what day it is.

Later, as I sat on the side of my bed trying to regroup from the state of her mind, I realized that it was a mixture of her personality that had always been a present evil in my life. I knew to change gears. I felt led to zone out on emails.

I came across one from Laine Lawson Craft of *WHOAwomen* magazine, which I had signed up for a while back.

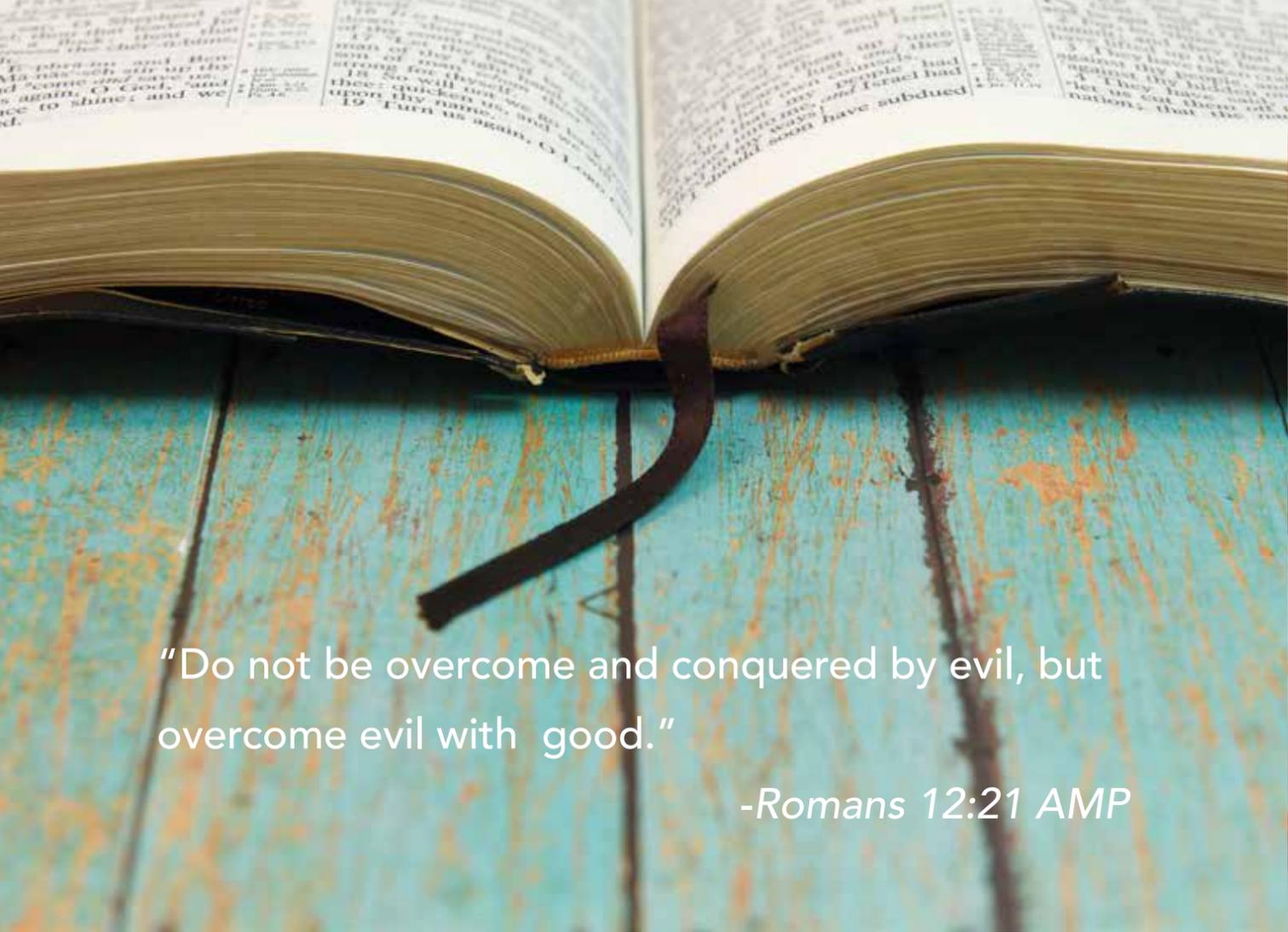
The words and the Scriptures that day were like cool honeydew on a hot summer day. The newsletter was right on time. It spoke of betrayal, heartbreak and overcoming evil with good.



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**WHOAwomen**



“Do not be overcome and conquered by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

-Romans 12:21 AMP

The quoted Scripture was *Romans 12:21 AMP*: “Do not be overcome and conquered by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

I realized what I had prayed before my feet hit the floor and that I had made the choice to have a good day in the Lord. I realized that although the evil of the mixture from Satan came at my spirit first thing, it was still my choice to have that good day in Him and to do it with His help.

The newsletter encouraged prayer requests and comments. I decided to send mine. After receiving a wonderful welcoming response from Laine, I realized that some of that “overcoming and conquering” could come in the form of writing to help others.

I determined two things when I brought my mother in my home:

First, I must honor my mother according to the word of God. *Exodus 20:12 AMP* says, “Honor (respect,

obey, care for) your father and your mother, so that your days may be prolonged in the land the Lord your God gives you”.

Second, I must keep her safe as I had promised my stepfather on his deathbed. *Ephesians 6:2-3 NKJV* says, “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

A great gift was bestowed upon me: honor. It was a choice, the same as having that good day in the Lord. 🌸



**LORI PETERMAN OWEN**  
Lori was born in Baltimore and now lives near Atlanta. She has 21-year-old twin girls. She has worked mostly in criminal justice but also is an entrepreneur who is interested in life-coaching and writing. She loves the Lord and loves to travel, read, bake and garden.

# MIND

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“Spending a little time on your bigger lifestyle and financial goals will help you use your money wisely this holiday season.”

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“You eventually will find a ‘new rhythm’ of life and a way to enjoy your alone time when your children are away.”



# FINANCIAL FOCUS

Take 15 minutes for the gift that really does keep on giving

By Camille Gaines



**A**s the season turns to stocking stuffers and decorations this year, try to look beyond the celebrations to a truly impactful gift for both you and your family: financial peace.

This is the perfect time to focus, evaluate and perhaps even splurge on timely initiatives that will allow you to enhance your wealth journey. In addition, spending a little time on your bigger lifestyle and financial goals will help you use your money wisely this holiday season so that you don't begin the year facing bills that were not aligned with your highest intentions in the first place.

Since many people still carry invalid negative money beliefs that keep them stuck, let's establish first that money is good and not evil. Here's why:

- Money allows you to do good things and create positive change.
- Money allows you to support yourself and others. which is empowering.
- The ability to manage money allows you to

live with peace since you know that you can pay for a comfortable home and lifestyle.

- The ability to make more money leads to confidence from contributing your gifts and talents, as well as creating financial freedom.

If you look at money from this insightful viewpoint, you're probably feeling that it's definitely worth your time and attention. It's probably also looking like a high priority in your life from a big-picture perspective. Now your mind is ready to focus and evaluate.

One of the easiest ways to align with your bigger goals and priorities is to answer a few questions. Clarity is sure to surface, and from that clarity comes answers for growth and positive change. This process calls to mind an old favorite Scripture:

“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” *Luke 11:9 ESV*

Ready to begin? Set the timer for 15 minutes,

which is way shorter than the time it takes to bake a loaf of ginger bread. Yet this process can be life changing. Grab your journal and write the answers to these three questions:

What is the one thing that is keeping me from having financial peace right now?

Possible answers: I am spending too much money every month on my home and utilities; I am not getting paid as much as I can for my skills; I am not meeting with my financial advisor to make sure my investments are doing as well as they can; I don't invest; I buy things I don't need or that I can't pay for from my current income.

What are three things I can do within the next 90 days to remedy this situation?

Possible answers: Meet with my financial adviser to monitor my investments better; work with a counselor to discover why I am buying things I don't need and how to stop it; move to a less expensive home; secure a higher paying job; learn how to invest.

Choose the easiest of the three actions in Question 2 and schedule the first step, then the next, and the next, until the first action is complete.

Possible answers: Email my financial adviser to schedule a meeting; ask a real estate agent what I need to do to get my house ready to list for sale; read an unbiased investing book or take a course; find a financial counselor; update my resume, order business cards, go to a networking event in my field.

You asked. You sought. The door is open. Now walk through it. 🌸



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.

## THE WONDER OF THE *Holidays*

Are bunnies OK? How about elves? It's all very confusing

By Kerri Pomarolli

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." James 1:5.*

**O**K, I'm so confused. Which holidays are we allowed to celebrate and which ones are we not? Clearly, since being a Christian for a number of years, it comes to my attention Halloween is from the devil and so am I. My birthday is on Oct. 31 and Lucy tells everyone, "My mommy and Satan have the same birthday!"

I was raised celebrating not only Halloween but the Easter Bunny, the tooth fairy and just about everything else. It fed my mother's need to decorate our house seasonally, and I don't mean the four seasons. I mean, St. Patrick's Day counts as a season. Even our toilet paper said "BOO" in October. Then I was forced to watch a documentary about the origins of Halloween and its occult roots, and it ruined the day for me forever.

I vowed not to decorate for Halloween anymore. It's like watching those TV documentaries on what's in our food. One of them was so horrendous I became a vegetarian—for nine days.

But now, with my kids I want to do it right. I want to honor God and I don't want my kids to grow up without wonder and believing in magic—except I heard magic is from the devil, too. But why is *Harry Potter* wrong and *Lord of the Rings* is not? I need the

guidebook here, people. Is there a Bible study on exactly how to do this?

I know for sure that the Elf on the Shelf is demonic. Those kids who believe an elf moves around the house when they are sleeping are definitely going to need therapy. I get the whole witches thing and try to stay away from it as much as possible, which only leads my kids to want to participate more in every haunted house they are not allowed to enter. Apparently, I've ruined an entire trip to Disney World because Lucy was not allowed in the Haunted Mansion. Cry me a river, kid!

But where do I draw the line? Is it OK to tell them a magical tooth fairy is coming to collect their teeth in their bedroom but Tinker Bell is not real? I keep hearing sermons that we don't want our kids growing up believing in sorcery and witchcraft and not putting their faith in God. And I'm OK with kind of side-swiping the Easter Bunny. Jesus rose again from the dead and we celebrate with sweets?

Is it any better to let the kids dress up on Halloween and go to a church parking lot to collect candy than to let them do trick-or-treat with their friends? The more moms' opinions I hear, the more completely confused I get.



Some moms have told me even the Care Bears are New Age and so are the Smurfs and pretty much every single cartoon show made during the 1980s. As a mom, I see everything with new eyes and I just don't feel prepared. I need to make decisions that are right for our family and, no matter what "the other families" are doing, stick to our beliefs that God will show us how to do this.

I know some are quick to point out that if you add and N to SANTA you get Satan. But maybe those are the same people who think Walt Disney was also the anti-Christ. And by the way, they're wrong. It's clearly either Barney the Dinosaur or possibly my workout teacher at the gym.

But I refuse to give up Santa Claus. My mean first-grade teacher, Mrs. Knapper, told us Santa was not real. Well, after I told my mom, guess what happened? Santa came to my house that year. I'm not kidding! There were reindeer prints on our sandbox and Santa himself—my Uncle Tommy—scared the daylights out of me because I wasn't asleep yet.

But he was just stopping by on his route and he posed for some photos. Who do you think the cool kid was in January who had actual Santa pictures for

show and tell? This girl!

So I've figured out how to do it for our family. Santa is real. He isn't all-powerful, though. He works for Jesus and that's who tells him who's naughty or nice.

*Dear God,*

*Help me to navigate holidays and traditions with your wisdom. I don't have all the answers but help me to take the time to consult you before putting a system in place. I know for sure. We all believe in you.*

*Amen*

1. How do you do holidays in your family? Are there any traditions you've been convicted about?

2. If you could make any changes now what would they be? 🌸



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.

# Making Merry Memories

FIND NEW WAYS TO CONNECT AND CELEBRATE WITH THOSE YOU LOVE

By Lynetta Jordan

Is your heart ready for the holidays? These joyous times of giving thanks and celebrating our Lord and Savior's birth inspire us to focus on generously sharing L-O-V-E. For me, the added beauty of Thanksgiving and Christmas is how these sacred holidays remind us to prioritize people and set aside time to celebrate and make new memories with family and friends. It reminds us to be intentional about caring, showing love and connecting with family.

Since childhood, the holidays have been my favorite time of year for family fun. I recall the "game" mom and dad played to make us think we were not getting an item on our Christmas list. However, God blessed us to receive all of our heart's desires every year.

I fondly remember delicious Thanksgiving and Christmas feasts at my grandparents' rural North Carolina home, too. Every year I was excited to reunite with all my cousins at the children's table. After dinner every Christmas, we became stars as we hosted our Hollywood-style performance of Christmas carols for our adult audience. Family time was so much fun. We made lots of merry memories.

Life was so simple and family ties were closer when we were children. In those days, we were all in a rush to grow up, graduate and earn the right to sit at the grown-ups' dinner table. We did not realize the brevity of life and how important it is to make as many memories as you can. Now, 30-plus years later, the home with all

of our loving memories is still standing; however, it is vacant because our family's favorite two occupants and spiritual leaders, my maternal grandparents, now reside in their heavenly homes. My mother and father have also transitioned to their homes in glory, too.

One thing that is certain about life is change. Children will grow up and pursue interests outside the family. They graduate, leave home, go to college, join the military and start careers. Some marry and move far away. Siblings' interests, geographical locations and attitudes can change, making it more difficult to stay as close and connected. Spouse changes and challenges—separation, divorce, health declines, even death—make celebrating the holidays different, too.

I miss the family togetherness and precious moments we experienced in holiday celebrations of yesterday. God comforts me daily, and He lifts my head and holds my heart every time I reminisce about those joyful childhood Christmases. He will comfort you, too, as you remember absent loved ones this holiday. So sister, I feel you and I understand if a few tears fall because your family circle has changed. As "The Motivator," I come to bring hope and an encouraging word. You can still make merry memories this year and experience tears of joy.

You can create fabulous new holiday experiences when life shifts and you can no longer celebrate them the old way. Here are three fresh ideas to try:

1. Start a new holiday tradition with a game for family fun. For example, a scavenger hunt featuring

"Let your family know that you love them this holiday... Christmas is not about how much money you have, but how much love you give."

little known facts and recent successes about attending relatives is a great icebreaker. It is fun, makes you laugh and builds the family bond, too.

2. Host holidays at a vacation destination. Plan in advance to take a three-day getaway. You don't have to stay in a hotel. Timeshare resorts feature up to four separate bedrooms and full kitchens and often have deals on multiple units. Many beach houses in the South have up to 15 bedrooms, plenty of living space and full kitchens, too. Costs are less when you book in advance.

3. Be charitable and give time to others. God has been so good to us, so why not share and show His love to others this holiday? For example, you can make or buy personal care kits for nursing home patients or adopt a less fortunate local child and shop for him or her for Christmas. Many churches host holiday dinners for the homeless. Your family can volunteer to serve, too.

If you can't be with family and friends physically, you can still create moments of togetherness with modern technology. Follow these tips and connect with those you cannot celebrate with face to face:

- Use social media to create more interaction. Take time to message family members whom you do not see or speak to often enough. Did you know that you can create a free private family group on Facebook? That is one way to communicate with relatives, share your favorite photos and videos. We do that for our family reunion, too.
- Use video to record and share experiences. Fancy recording equipment and a private photographer are not necessary when you have a cellphone. Most

cellphones have video apps, so you do not need to have a computer nearby either. Reach out to say "I love you" with Skype, Facetime, Marco Polo or other downloadable video messaging services.

- Call or text. Phone calls may seem old-fashioned, but they are a great way to touch base. Be intentional and schedule time to call loved ones. A call is appreciated when a visit is not possible.

Here's my final encouragement. Let your family know that you love them this holiday. If you are not as financially overflowing as you had hoped, remember this: Christmas is not about how much money you have, but how much love you give. Genuine love, which the Bible says covers a multitude of sins, is priceless. Never forget that the reason we celebrate Christmas is *John 3:16*: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son..."

With love as your motivation, make merry memories this holiday season. 🌸



LYNETTA JORDAN  
LynettaJordan.com

Lynetta, "The Motivator," is a speaker, author and life coach who builds women's confidence in God and themselves. A former college queen who graced the pages of *Ebony* magazine, she motivates the masses at church, corporate and community events. The founder of Lynetta Jordan Ministries, she has been heard on Rejoice network, and her book, *Love Without The Drama*, has been featured on CBN.com and Women.com. She holds a master's degree from Regent University and bachelor of arts degree from Elizabeth City State University. Connect with her on Facebook (LynettaJordan) and Twitter @LynettaSpeaks TODAY!

# How to co-parent through *Christmas*

WORK TO MAKE IT A SEASON OF PEACE FOR YOU AND YOURS

By Tammy Daughtry

“I wish my parents would not argue and fight over me at Christmas... it takes all the joy out of it! Sometimes I don't even want to come back to Florida to see anyone because it's so stressful!”

-- SHANNON, AGE 21 (PARENTS DIVORCED SINCE SHE WAS 12)

**T**his year marks the 15th Christmas I will “share” my daughter with her dad during Christmas. We've been divorced since she was 2 and we trade off so that one gets Thanksgiving and one gets Christmas.

Early on we decided not to “divide Christmas” at 6 p.m. on Christmas Eve since his extended family is in Georgia and mine is in Colorado. That has served us very well over the years. It has given us the freedom to travel and provide our daughter a relaxing “full experience” wherever she is each year.

This year, Angelia will turn 17 the week before Christmas, so all she wants for Christmas is extra fun money and a set of wheels. We plan to discuss this at our next co-parenting meeting: when will she get a car, who will pay for the insurance, what are the shared expectations with the car, and so on. This is exciting and scary all at once. Thankfully, through the years of being divorced, we have found a way to make all those “co-parenting” decisions in private so we are never fighting or arguing in front of her.

Now we are both remarried, so our co-parenting meetings usually involve all four parents meeting at McDonald's or Starbucks to discuss and organize life

to take care of Angelia. We come together much like a business meeting at work—we have a few specific things to discuss and to decide. We keep it brief and focused. Because of these co-parenting meetings, we don't discuss these details at her volleyball games or her choir concerts. We just show up and enjoy being her parents.

As I reflect on the journey of “sharing kids at Christmas,” I realize that for some of you, this may be your first year for some of you to be without your children at Christmas; maybe your divorce is not even final. This will be hard, but I promise it gets better. The sadness and the hurt won't linger forever.

You eventually will find a “new rhythm” of life and a way to enjoy your alone time when your children are away. I always tried to enlist other friends and families to celebrate with, to watch dollar movies with and to just hang out with so that my time alone was still very full and meaningful for myself. That was a gift to me. If I was stable, I was a better mom for Angelia.

For those who have been divorced for years, this might be the time of year that your stress with “the ex” increases because of schedules and unmet expectations. My encouragement to you would be to “stay stable” and give yourself permission to celebrate and enjoy every



*“IF WE KEEP AN OPEN HAND OUTSTRETCHED, PALM UP, THEY WILL COME AND GO WITH JOY AND PEACE INSTEAD OF GUILT AND STRESS.”*

single day of December. Don't get hung up on the 24th or 25th being the “most important days.” When we are parents, it's really a celebration 365 days a year.

And don't worry if the other parent has more money or gives bigger gifts. In 20 years, your children will remember how you loved them and how you baked cookies or sang carols or watched Christmas movies together. The kids will never remember who spent the most money on them; they will remember the love and laughter. Focus on enjoying your children and maximizing the time you have with them.

And then when they are with the other parent, enjoy yourself. Make fun plans and enjoy the time away. Your kids need to know that you are happy and stable even when they are with the other parent. That is a “gift of peace” you can give them at Christmas and every single day of the year.

If you have adult children of divorce, 18 and older, please give them time and space to grow into being the one who has to decide where they spend the holidays and for how long. I often work with emerging young adults in my counseling office who feel upset and in a “no-win” situation between their parents.

Since there is no longer a divorce decree to follow, it can be a huge burden sometimes for the young adult to decide matters such as whom to see first and how long to stay. I hear a common complaint from college-age that they resent going home because they are afraid of hurting or upsetting their divorced parents. What they need is a safe place to land and a great sense of “belonging” no matter how much time they are in your home.

The other thing they need when they come home from college is open-ended time to see their friends. Many young students feel guilty for seeing their friends

when mom or dad, or both, pressure them to split all their time “equally” between their houses. If we want them to keep coming back, let them have some fun time with their friends, too. Every young adult is in transition anyway, and when parents are divorced it's even more important to let them have a voice in these matters without getting upset or hurt.

If we keep an open hand outstretched, palm up, they will come and go with joy and peace instead of guilt and stress.

Though the seasons change, the sharing of the children will continue into the future with grandchildren, in-laws and others. Enjoy every moment and, when possible, encourage them to love not only you but to the love and enjoy their other parent and their extended families as well. The freedom to love everyone is by far the most priceless “gift” divorced and remarried parents will ever give their children.

May God bless our homes with love and laughter and our own version of “happily ever after!” 🌸



TAMMY DAUGHTRY  
CoparentingInternational.com

Tammy is the founder of Co-Parenting International, an organization dedicated to addressing the critical impact of co-parenting on children of divorce and in remarried families. Her book, *Co-Parenting Works! Helping Your Children Thrive After Divorce*, was released nationally through Zondervan/HarperCollins July 2011. Tammy is the executive producer of the new DVD series, *One Heart, Two Homes: Co-parenting Kids of Divorce to a Positive Future*. This multimedia resource includes 33 other guest experts and explores many different scenarios of co-parenting; it can be used in a small group setting, a seminar or by individuals at home.

# BODY

## 36 HOLIDAY TIPS FOR ENTERTAINING

**“Traditions can start anytime of the year. This holiday season is the perfect time to incorporate special memories, especially if you are a new bride or have new members in your family.”**

## 48 THE SWEET SMELL OF GOOD HEALTH

**“I have become something of an aromatherapy nut. There are no pills to swallow, the effect is almost immediate and there is an oil for just about everything. God is so good.”**

## 50 AN EASY WAY TO LOSE: KISS POUNDS GOODBYE

**“Traditions can start anytime of the year. This holiday season is the perfect time to incorporate special memories, especially if you are a new bride or have new members in your family.”**

# Entertaining Ideas for the *Holidays*

Celebrate with friends and family from Thanksgiving to New Year's

By Ann Platz Groton and Margo Gramling

*“Hospitality is when someone feels at home in your presence.”  
-Unknown*

It's time to entertain and deck the halls, gather your family and friends and celebrate the festive holiday season.

Traditions can start at any time of the year. This holiday season is the perfect time to incorporate special memories, especially if you are a new bride or have new members in your family. It's also time to pull out your best china.

Family gatherings usually involve good food and lots of merriment and festivities.

*Ann:* When I was growing up in the Low Country of South Carolina, our home was usually filled with family and friends on every holiday.

Think festive, especially from Thanksgiving through the New Year.

Here are some ideas to consider:

## THE DINNER PARTY

There is no better time to gather friends for a meal than during the holidays. It's the perfect time to repay others who have been special to you during the year. It's also a good opportunity to use your best china and crystal.

*Ann:* Some of my happiest memories growing up were seated at my mother's creative dinner tables. A legendary hostess, she always had a theme for her meals. Once she hosted a *Titanic* dinner party. She emptied her jewelry box with treasures from the sea as her centerpiece. And of course had a seafood theme.

## THE TABLE

Pull out your most festive tablecloth or buy three yards of fabric and make your own. Create a focal point



in the center of the table. Create a color theme:

- Browns and greens for Thanksgiving
- Traditional red and green for Christmas
- Silver and gold for New Year's

*Margo:* Bowls of colored Christmas balls can add that special sparkle to your centerpieces. Mix fresh greenery with your decorations and add candles for the night meal. Or maybe fill a bowl with red roses.

*Ann:* My mother often color-coordinated her food. Broccoli trees, red tomato aspic—creative salads with star fruit and other interesting fruits like figs, pears

and orange slices tossed in. (Google tomato aspic recipes. There are so many good ones that I've left it up to you to choose.)

## THE DROP-IN

This is usually a late afternoon or an early evening event with “pickup” foods—sandwiches, fruit, cheeses and easy-to-serve desserts.

*Margo:* Use different serving pieces to display the food. Square plates or odd serving pieces mixed in with the main pieces make for an interesting table setting.



Offer two kinds of drinks. One of our favorites is a peach tea and ginger ale concoction. This drink is a huge hit at holiday time. The other is cranberry delight, and both look lovely in crystal glasses.

### Peach Tea-Ginger Ale Concoction

- 1 Crystal Light package Peach Tea (mix by directions)
- Half a liter of diet ginger ale
- 1 jar of maraschino cherries
- Crushed ice
- Mint leaves (optional)
- Cranberry delight
- Half a liter of diet ginger ale
- Same amount of cranberry juice
- Serve over crushed ice, with a strawberry on the rim of the glass



“Hospitality isn’t about your house, it’s about your heart.”  
 -Unknown

Tips for a successful entertaining season:

- Plan ahead
- Choose an easy meal to prepare
- Involve children in preparing the meal
- Host a series of parties
- Enjoy hosting and celebrating family and friends.
- It’s fun, and it’s also the perfect time to model and teach the new generations manners and social graces.



ANN PLATZ GROTON

Ann and her daughter, Margo, work together in design. Ann is a native South Carolinian who has lived in Atlanta since 1973. She founded her interior design firm in 1976 and specializes in high-end estate residential homes. Her work has been featured in many national design publications as well as on PBS and HGTV. Known for her strong color sense, Ann enjoys sharing her talent with groups and readers. She is the author of 13 books.

MARGO GRAMLING

Margo’s career as an interior designer has broadened in the past few years from the one-on-one client work to writing her first book, speaking at conference, appearing on television and teaching at Emory University. Her work has appeared in publications such as *Southern Living* and *Atlanta Magazine*, and on networks including NBC and HGTV.

# A Sanctuary For The Seasons

Simple changes add special touches to your home for the holidays

By Melissa Michaels

**E**volving our home throughout the seasons with simple refinements can enhance our everyday experiences all year round and inspire us to live more fully in each moment.

Each of us may gravitate toward a particular season's style for a variety of reasons. Perhaps we prefer the climate of one season, or were inspired by our region during certain months, or we hold special childhood memories of a particular season.

Whatever our preferences, a well-loved home is enjoyed throughout the year. By allowing our spaces to reflect the mood and ambience each season represents, we can be oh-so-cozy in fall and winter with a warm and natural style, and then we can have our spirits lifted by the bright colors and freshness of spring and summer.

Making simple changes is the best way to fall in love—and stay in love—with your home throughout the year.

## Christmas Cheer

Around the holidays, our homes evolve even more. Traditions are something to look forward to. Whether you go all out with festivity or keep things subtle and

natural, your home can inspire you to celebrate and remember what each season represents. Try to keep things simple at Christmas and bring warm touches in layers:

- Layers of winter linens on the table
- Baskets filled with throw blankets (try plaid and extra-thick knits)
- Seasonal art or tapestries on walls for layers of warmth
- Nooks for reading holiday stories
- Warm area rugs in living spaces and by the bed

Incorporating elements you love will add the right amount of cheer for the season without too much fuss. You want your sanctuary to be stress-free so you can savor this special time of year. Here are a few things to help you get into the holiday spirit:

## Accessorize Your Senses

Have you ever thought of aromas as a seasonal or holiday accessory? Why not? The cooler months are especially fun to “decorate” with yummy scents. You can enhance the cozy factor with freshly baked cookies, lit candles in seasonal fragrances, and one of everyone's favorites, spiced cider simmering on the stove.



## DIY: Charming Snow Globes

These snow globes are waterless and easy, and they add such a seasonal feel to your home over the holidays. This antique blue Mason jar came from a secondhand store that was perfect for a unique snow globe, but you can use clear ones, too.

### What you need:

- Mason jars with lids
- Artificial snow from craft or garden stores
- Miniature figures of trees or other holiday items

Simply added a little bit of artificial snow (you can find it at craft/garden stores) to the bottom of the jar and set a small bottle brush tree inside!

For the clear Mason jar snow globe, use a hot glue gun to glue the tree to the lid before screwing it back together again and setting it upside down!

For a snowy look, add more snow for the jar while it is upright, and then screw on the lid and flip it over.

Get fancy and add cute little animals or add multiple small trees.

Adding holiday cheer to your home does not mean you have to go crazy with excessive effort and expense. Nor does it mean it's a tinsel or craft explosion everywhere you look. Do what works for you. Even on a budget of pretty much nothing, there are ways to keep our holidays beautiful with what we already have or can find on a budget.



### Hot Spiced Cranberry Cider

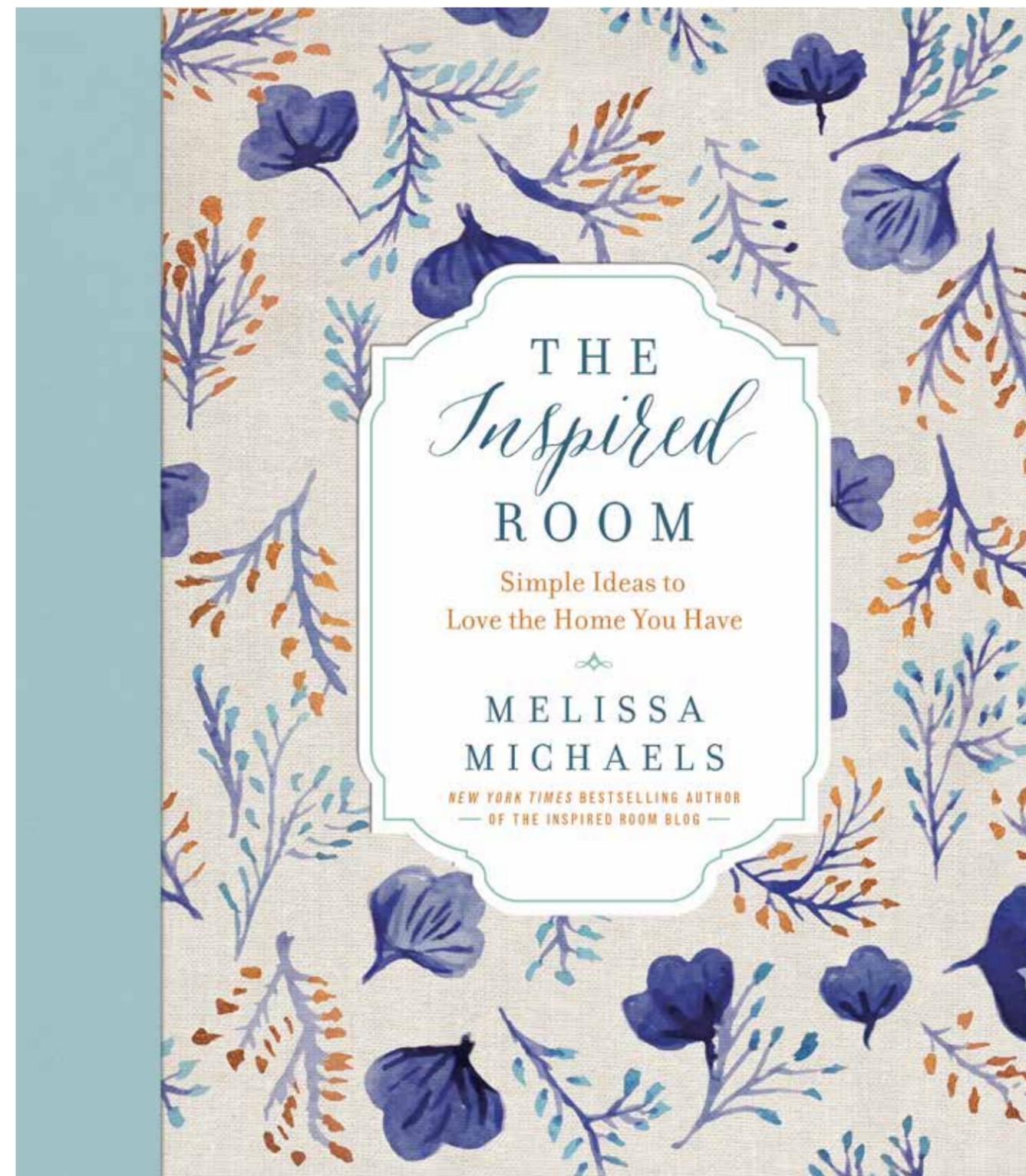
- 8 cups cranberry juice (not cocktail, just cranberry juice)
- 8 cups good quality apple cider (get it fresh from the farm if you can)
- 2-4 tablespoons brown sugar
- 4 cinnamon sticks
- Pinch of allspice
- 8 whole cloves
- Orange slices with peel (wash oranges and then slice)

In a large pot, mix all of the ingredients together. Heat until the liquid begins to simmer and then reduce heat and continue simmering until the brown sugar has melted. Taste the cider and adjust as needed (it may need a bit more brown sugar). Strain out the cloves before serving.



MELISSA MICHAELS

Melissa is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Love the Home You Have* and *The Inspired Room*. She is also the creator of [theinspiredroom.net](http://theinspiredroom.net), one of the top decorating blogs for the past eight years. It reaches over 600,000 readers each month and was voted *Better Homes and Gardens* Readers' Favorite Decorating blog in 2014 and in 2015. Melissa offers a refreshing perspective on finding contentment in creating an authentically beautiful home, right where you are. She lives with her husband and family near Seattle.



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# HAPPY HOLIDAY OILS

FIND THE PERFECT SCENT TO SET THE MOOD OR CALM YOUR NERVES

By Dr. Leesa Haire

Isn't it amazing how many of our memories are associated with the sense of smell? I bet you have all kinds of memories that involve smell—freshly baked cookies, the naturally scented Christmas tree, your favorite aunt's perfume or a fresh rain shower. The sense of smell is the strongest of our five senses and has a direct line to the brain. Interestingly, the sense of smell is hardwired to a part of the brain called the amygdala, which plays an important role in storing and releasing emotions.

I have become something of an aromatherapy nut. There are no pills to swallow, the effect is almost immediate and there is an oil for just about everything. God is so good. What an abundant natural pharmacy we have.

And it's needed during the holiday season. I love the time from Halloween to New Year's, but it's not without stress. The extra shopping, functions, decorating, family

and friends add a whole other layer to our busy lives.

Aromatherapy can help in a number of ways. First of all, since essential oils are effective by just inhaling them, you can set the mood for the whole house or just one room. Using them for calm at the end of the day or to set a joyful uplifting mood is as simple as diffusing them in the house.

On the calming side, sandalwood is great for obsessive worry—my perfectionist sisters. Lavender calms the nerves or anxiety, and Ylang Ylang supports emotional equilibrium. You can diffuse them in the house, rub a few drops on your hands and inhale, or apply drops to the back of your neck for quick results. If you are a busy mother and dreading the day school lets out for the holidays, or if you have a few sandpaper relatives, you can use Roman Chamomile. It increases our desire to nurture and supports our self-control. It might come in handy!



To set a joyous mood you can diffuse or apply wild orange, lemon, grapefruit, rosemary and peppermint. These are uplifting and smell wonderful. I love to add clove, ginger and cinnamon for the perfect holiday scent. They can set the happy, light mood we all enjoy.

The Bible also mentions oils in over 200 verses:

The magi brought two precious oils— frankincense and myrrh—to the Christ child.

**Frankincense** is a universal oil and can replace any other oil, and it was also used as incense. Myrrh is a preserver and was used to embalm.

**Cedarwood**, also mentioned in the Bible, is associated with cleansing and purification. It was used for cleansing leprosy. The great cedar trees of Lebanon are still around today.

**Spikenard** is probably the best known as the costly

ointment-perfume Mary used it to anoint Christ. It was highly prized perfume and very precious.

**Cassia** of the Bible resembles cinnamon. It is a fragrant hardwood used as a choice wood for building and a symbol of security, stability and prosperity.

The list goes on, but as you enjoy your holiday season, add a few oils. You are in good company. 🌸



**DR. LEESA HAIRE**  
Leesa holds a doctorate in naturopathy and is a licensed registered pharmacist. Having worked for more than 20 years in natural health and wellness, she incorporates biofeedback health scans, essential oils, fundamental lifestyle changes and the best nutritional support to restore vibrant health.

# Want to love your body?

## Start with a *Kiss*

By Eileen Wilder

“Could you kindly move your behind please?”

“What was ... that?” I exclaimed, spinning around to address the voice.

**I**t was then I realized my rear end was in the way, keeping the man from his table. Recognizing the hilarity of the situation, we both erupted in laughter, causing looks of irritation from those grabbing lunch around us.

Having just delivered my third child, I was 60 pounds over my normal weight. In my present state, I was unaware of my new body dimensions. Granted, my bottom was much rounder than normal, but in a strange phenomenon unique to childbearing, it had also grown horizontally.

It was as if a small shelf was now attached to my backside.

Why, the man could have rested his coffee on my behind if he had wanted to!

In that moment, it was as if time stood still. The lyric of the laughter, the “aghast” look on the gentleman’s face—life played in surreal slow motion as I contemplated:

I hadn’t always been as kind to my body as I was being now.

In fact, we had been vicious enemies for over two decades.

The moment lasted only seconds, but within the sound of the laughter was the echo of my freedom. I recognized something profound in this corner bistro, something that had eluded me throughout my youth:

I had finally made peace with my behind.

When what lies behind you is disappointment with your weight or frustration that you just can’t seem to move forward—well, it’s easy to let what’s behind you, define you.

As a 20-year-old, I had been so long involved with disordered eating that I began to believe disorder was my future.

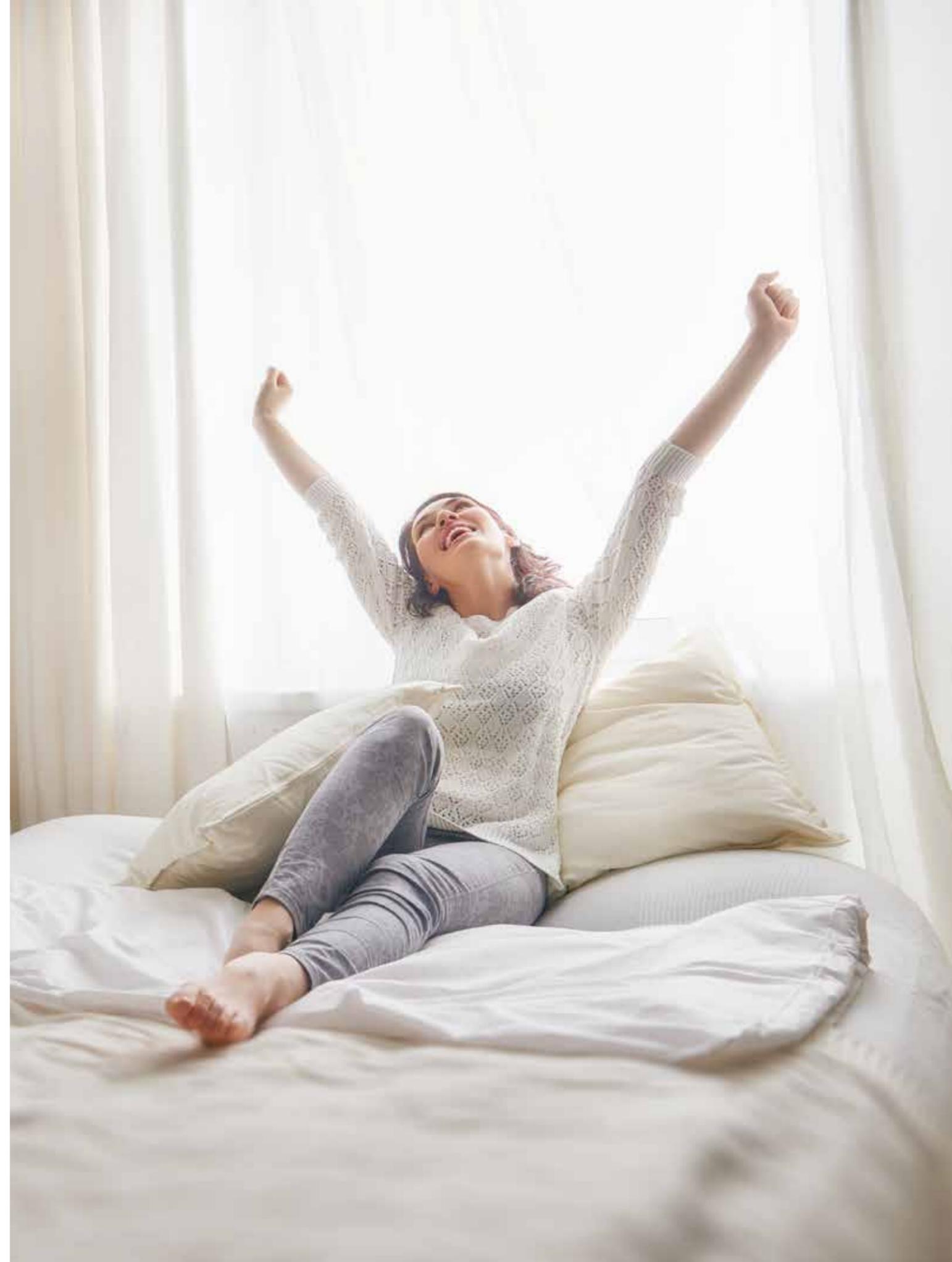
I couldn’t imagine a world where I would wake up and not obsess about my body or what I was eating.

I couldn’t imagine living light and free, devoid of the aching insecurity and depression that had become my constant companions.

I desperately wanted to experience a different reality, but I had no idea how.

My big behind was in the way.

It was as if there lay a chasm between who I longed to be—healthy, radiant, secure, confident—and who



“Have you ever felt like you can see your potential from afar, but there exists this ‘chasm’ of impossibility to get there?”

I saw in the mirror. All I saw was a girl—overweight, unstable, with a side of cray-cray.

Have you ever felt like you can see your potential from afar, but there exists this “chasm” of impossibility to get there?

My frustration drove me into such a quest for knowledge that it felt like I was Indiana Jones trying to discover the invisible bridge to get there. I read countless books and articles. Visited doctors and got a university degree.

What emerged were 4 simple steps—and when I finally did them about 10 minutes each day, I lost 35 pounds in three months. The biggest revelation of all? It was God’s will that I cease all negative self-talk.

Here are the 4 Steps I discovered, with at the acronym KISS:

**K— Know You’re Hot**

Ruminate and meditate in this truth: You are a Masterpiece, His finest creation. In the Greek, “masterpiece” denotes luxury item. You are a part of God’s luxury line, worth every cent and second you spend taking care of yourself.

**I—Inflict Damage**

Learn to speak out loud, powerful truths proclaiming who you are in Christ. As in the story of Creation, we do damage to the darkness when we use the weapons of our whispers. When tempted with insecurity and negative self-talk, speak out a powerful promise such as Isaiah 62:3: “I am so beautiful and prosperous as to be thought of as a crown of glory and honor in the hand of the Lord!”

**S—See the God Painting**

Cut out photos reflecting the inner image God has

placed on your heart. Keep His promises before your eyes and behold them daily. “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” *Pro. 29:18* Keep this God-Painting in front of your eyes, and you will give birth to what’s in your heart.

**S—Start Before You’re Ready**

Too often we wait to feel it before we do it. I love how W. Clement Stone, the famous businessman and philanthropist, had notes all throughout his home and workplace that said, “Do it now!” Start now sowing a small action, even if it’s only a brief walk, 10 minutes on the treadmill or that extra glass of water. Action is the most powerful confidence booster and low-self-esteem destroyer.

As you take the 4 Steps, you will begin to advance, make progress and uncover the brave God-identity inside you. You will love your body and not tolerate negative self-talk one day more. And the best part? With every step you are moving your big behind out of the way. 🌸



**EILEEN WILDER**  
Eileen is a best-selling author, life-coach and pastor on team at Capital City Church in Washington. Eileen suffered from eating disorders, depression and severe anxiety attacks for years. After finding the 4 Steps and learning how to pivot negative thoughts toward truth, she achieved lasting changes in her confidence, mood and weight. Her book, *The Brave*

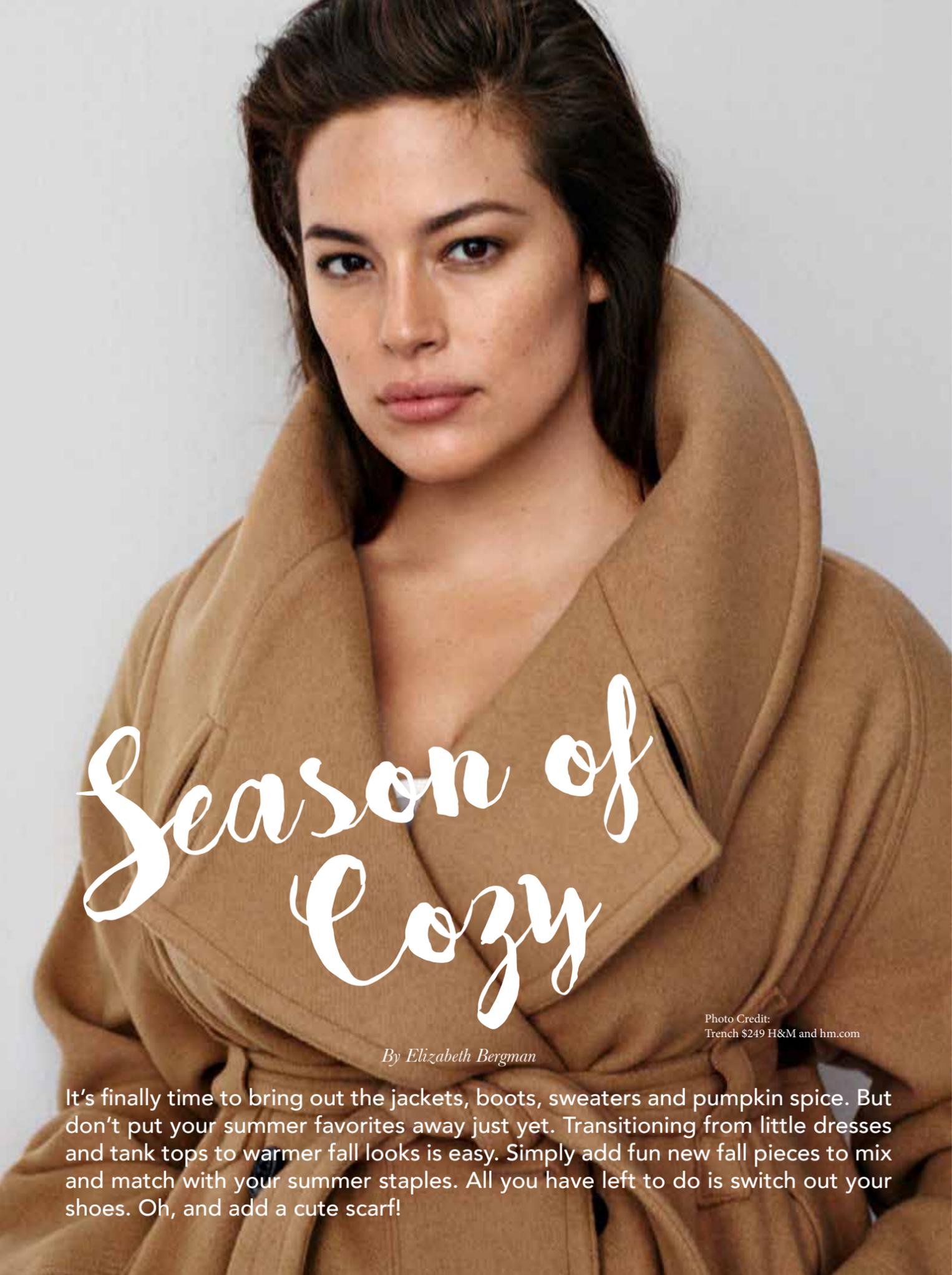
*Body Method*, was the foundation for her transformation. Now she teaches women thought containment, mood mastery and other strategies that will enable them to become the fearless, bold, hot versions of themselves that has always existed within.



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**WHOAwomen**



# Season of Cozy

By Elizabeth Bergman

Photo Credit:  
Trench \$249 H&M and hm.com

It's finally time to bring out the jackets, boots, sweaters and pumpkin spice. But don't put your summer favorites away just yet. Transitioning from little dresses and tank tops to warmer fall looks is easy. Simply add fun new fall pieces to mix and match with your summer staples. All you have left to do is switch out your shoes. Oh, and add a cute scarf!

## Fall pieces to add to summer dresses



Cuffed Boyfriend Jeans \$69.99  
Marshalls stores



Stylus Floral Bow Blouse  
\$44 JCPenney and jcp.com  
Stylus Flare Jean \$50  
JCPenney and jcp.com



Tassel Earrings \$9.99 H&M and  
hm.com



Nike Cortez Ultra Moire  
Sneaker \$100 Nordstrom and  
nordstrom.com



Stuart Weitzman Highland Over  
the Knee Boot \$798 Nordstrom and  
nordstrom.com



Giani Bernini Patchwork Handbag  
\$249.50 Macy's and macys.com



Faded Blue Plaid Shirt \$39.99  
T.J. Maxx and tjmaxx.com

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Worthington Turtleneck Short Sleeve Ribbed Sweater \$36  
Worthington Pleated Soft Skirt \$44 JCPenney and [jcp.com](http://jcp.com)



Tan Chain Link Necklace \$24.99  
T.J. Maxx and [tjmaxx.com](http://tjmaxx.com)



Mustard Scarf \$39.99 H&M and  
[hm.com](http://hm.com)

# Fall pieces to shop for



A.N.A. Flap Pocket Tab Sleeve Blouse \$36  
JCPenney and jcp.com A.N.A. Fashion  
Jegging \$50 JCPenney and jcp.com



Loafers \$59.99 H&M and hm.com



Blank NYC Easy Rider Moto Jacket  
\$98 Nordstrom and nordstrom.com



Thalia Sodi Rope Detail Bootie  
\$99.50 Macy's and macys.com



Frye Ray Fringe Leather Saddle Bag  
\$388 Nordstrom and nordstrom.com



Sheer Aztec Fringe Cardigan \$14.99  
Marshalls Stores



Embroidered Zip White Jacket  
\$29.99 Marshalls Stores



American Rag Denim Band Jacket  
\$74.50 Macy's and macys.com



I.N.C. International Concepts  
Colorblocked Hat \$32.50  
Macy's and macys.com



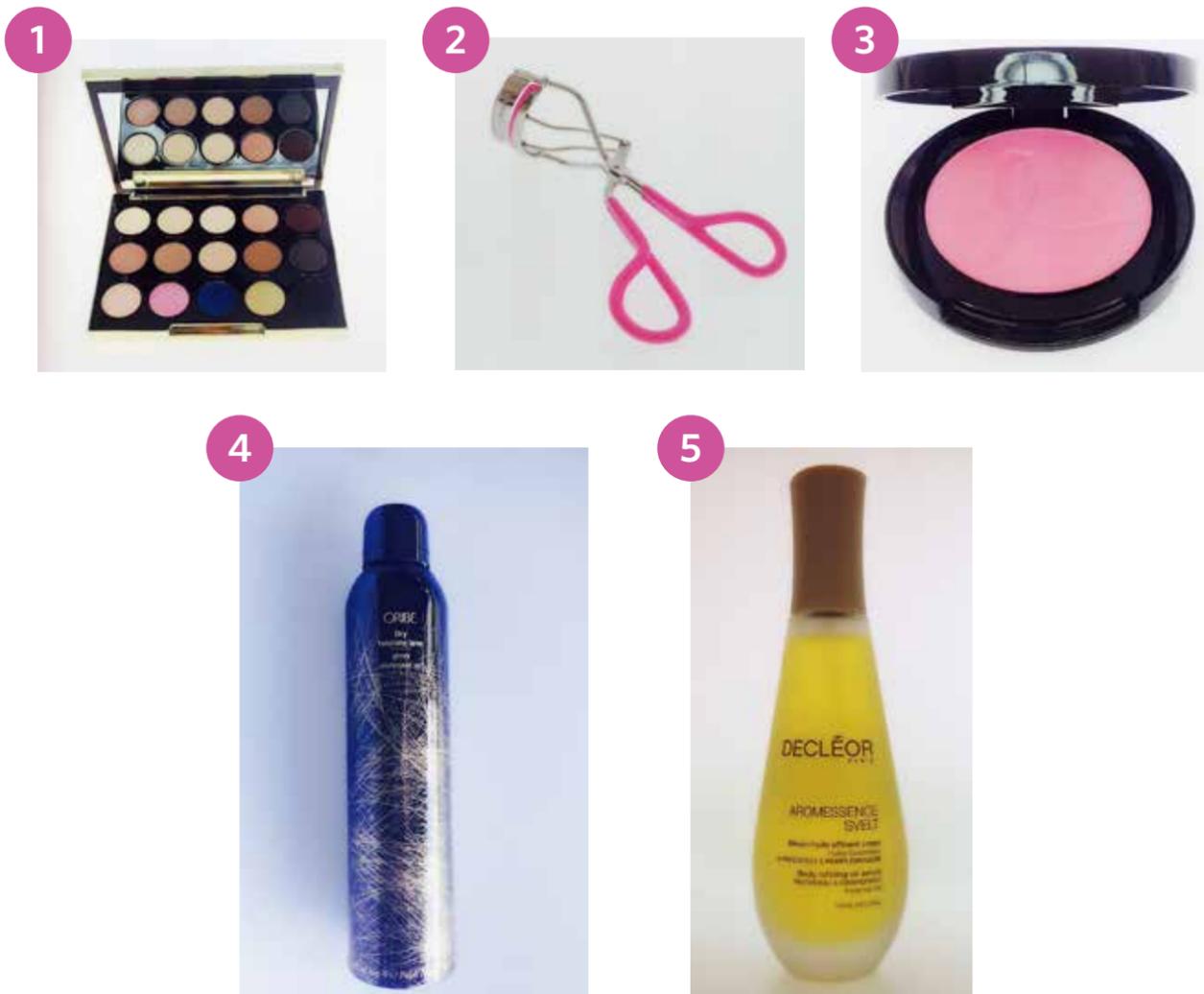
ELIZABETH BERGMAN  
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Elizabeth is the youngest certified Christian image consultant in the nation and was formerly a photo coordinator and copy editor for *Designed to Flourish Magazine*, a Christian women's publication. Elizabeth also has a style blog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

# Fall Beauty Products

Keep your hair, skin, lips and nails as beautiful as a crisp fall day with these beauty aids.

By Elizabeth Ortega



- 1. UD Gwen Stefani Eyeshadow Palette | Urban Decay
- 2. Neon Great Grip Eyelash Curler Pink | Tweezerman
- 3. Silky Powder Blush | Bobbie Brown
- 4. Texturizing Spray | Oribe
- 5. Aromessence Svelt Body Refining Oil-Serum | Decléor Paris



- 6. Argan Daily Moisturizer | Josie Maran
- 7. Coconut Milk Body Scrub | Pure Body Naturals
- 8. Nail Glow | Dior
- 9. Dior Addict Lip Glow | Dior
- 10. Slant Tweezer Pink Ribbon Breast Cancer | Tweezerman



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 FEAST FOR ALL FANS

EVERYONE'S A WINNER WITH THIS FOOTBALL-THEMED MENU

*By Debbie Greenhill*

**F**all is here, and with it comes the beginning of many opportunities to celebrate.

We have back-to-school activities, football games, harvest celebrations, Thanksgiving and Christmas—all times for gathering friends and family to share hospitality.

Hospitality is considered a gift. One of my favorite Scriptures is *1 Peter 4:9*: “Offer hospitality to one another with out grumbling.”

I realize that hospitality is not everyone’s strength, but this time of the year seems to bring out this gift. We all love to be with friends and family to celebrate these occasions and share traditions.

And it doesn’t have to be difficult. Entertaining can be as simple as asking guests to bring a dish for your gathering. If entertaining and cooking are your gifts, prepare the dishes and decorate yourself. Just enjoy!

I have prepared a buffet with the theme “Fall is for Football.” I have a football tablescape with items from the craft and discount stores. I went to our local home improvement store and had a piece of artificial turf cut for my table runner.

The menu is served buffet-style, but can be adjusted for tailgating. These dishes can also be prepared for other holiday celebrations or you can choose one to take to a potluck.

The Sloppy Joes have been one of my family’s favorites for many years and they show up for different celebrations. The Crockpot Chicken Nachos are delicious. This recipe is perfect for tailgating or for a potluck party. Keep warm in the crockpot and allow guests to make individual nacho servings.

The pizza rolls are tasty and popular with the teens or children at your party. The Pimento Spread is delicious and a great dish to make ahead for your gathering. I have shaped and decorated mine to look like a football, but it can be served from a small serving bowl.

Seasoned crackers are delicious and easy addition to any gathering. To add a healthy dish, I have prepared a fresh fruit salad, and it is great for a Christmas celebration with the colors of green and red.

Yummy cookies, with the addition of candy in the colors of your favorite team, are sure to be a big hit at your gathering. A harvest punch is the final addition to this menu. It is so refreshing with the addition of the sparkling soda.

So be ready to share the gift of hospitality with family and friends as we move into the fall and holiday season of celebrations. I hope you will enjoy preparing these recipes, and remember to always Celebrate the Family Table. 🍁



## SLOPPY JOE SLIDERS

MAKES 12-16 SERVINGS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 pounds ground chuck
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons steak seasoning
- 2 onions, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 8-ounce cans tomato sauce
- 1 can tomato paste
- 12-16 slider buns
- sliced American cheese

Heat a large skillet over medium high heat. Add oil and meat in the pan. Break up meat as it browns. Combine brown sugar and steak seasoning, add to the meat in the skillet and combine. Add onions, peppers, red wine vinegar and Worcestershire sauce to the skillet. Reduce heat to medium and cook for 5 minutes. Add tomato sauce and tomato paste, stirring to combine. Reduce heat to simmer and cook for 10 more minutes. Serve Sloppy Joe mixture on slider buns, topped with half a slice American cheese.



## PIZZA ROLLS

MAKES 16 ROLLS

- 2 cans pizza dough (usually with the canned biscuits)
- 1 cup pizza sauce
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1½ cups coarsely chopped pepperoni (1 large package pepperoni slices)
- ½ pound Italian sausage cooked and crumbled
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Roll out both cans of dough and shape in a rectangle. Spread with pizza sauce within half inch of edge. Sprinkle with mozzarella cheese, pepperoni and Italian sausage. Roll up jelly-roll style, starting with a long side. Pinch seams together. Cut each roll into 8 slices. Spray a 12-inch cast iron skillet or large round baking pan with non-stick spray. Place slices in pan touching each other, sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Bake until golden brown, about 15-20 minutes. Serve immediately or wrap in foil and place in insulated bag to keep warm.



## CROCKPOT CHICKEN NACHOS

MAKES ABOUT 10-12 SERVINGS

- 1 package taco seasoning
- 5 boneless chicken breasts
- 1 28-ounce jar salsa
- Tortilla chips
- Mexican cheese blend, shredded
- Additional toppings: sliced black olive, jalapenos, diced tomatoes, onion and avocado

Prepare crockpot insert with non-stick spray. Place chicken on the bottom of crockpot, pour salsa on top, and sprinkle with taco seasoning. Cook on high 4 hours or low 6-8 hours. When chicken is finished cooking, shred with a fork and return to crockpot, set on warm. Place tortilla chips in individual serving dishes, spoon hot chicken over tortillas, and top with cheese and toppings of your choice.



## FRUIT SALAD WITH HONEY LIME DRESSING

MAKES 12- 16 SERVINGS

- 3 honey crisp or gala apples, cubed
- 2 green pears, cubed
- 2 cups red grapes, halved
- 2 cups green grapes, halved

- Dressing:
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
  - ¼ cup fresh lime juice
  - ¼ cup honey
  - zest of one lime
  - ½ teaspoon poppy seed

In a microwave safe bowl combine the cornstarch and lime juice. Heat for 20 seconds, stir, heat for 15 seconds, stir. Add honey and poppy seeds and stir to combine. Set aside. Prepare fruit and place in a large bowl. Add lime zest and pour dressing over all. Stir to combine and refrigerate 8 hours or overnight.



## SEASONED CRACKERS

- 1 box mini-saltine crackers
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 stick butter, melted

Add Italian seasoning, garlic powder and red pepper flakes to butter. Whisk to combine. Spread crackers on a large baking sheet and pour melted butter mixture over. Toss to evenly distribute butter mixture. Bake at 250 degrees for 20 minutes. Store in an airtight container. Will keep for several weeks.



## BACON PIMENTO CHEESE SPREAD

MAKES 4 CUPS

- 10 pieces of precooked bacon slices, chopped
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- 4 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 2 cups mayonnaise
- 1 small onion, grated
- 2 tablespoons diced roasted red pepper
- dash of cayenne pepper

Cook bacon according to package directions for crispy bacon and chop. In a medium bowl combine all ingredients. Chill. Serve with your favorite crackers or bread crisp.



## GO TEAM COOKIES

MAKES 6-8 SANDWICHES

- 2 sticks of butter, softened
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 2 ½ cups flour
- 2 teaspoons instant coffee granules
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup color coated milk chocolate candy in your team's colors
- 1 cup Rice Krispies cereal
- ½ cup chopped walnuts

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large mixing bowl with an electric mixer, cream butter and both sugars together until well combined. Add the eggs, peanut butter and vanilla, beat until smooth. In a separate bowl, combine flour, coffee granules, baking soda and salt. Whisk to combine. Add slowly to butter and sugar mixture until it totally incorporated. Scrape sides of bowl. Add colored candy, cereal and nuts. Stir by hand with a wooden spoon. Chill cookie dough in refrigerator for about 20 minutes. Using a cookie scoop, scoop dough on cookie sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake 9-10 minutes. Transfer to cooling rack and repeat with remaining dough. Store in airtight containers.



DEBBIE GREENHILL  
thefamilytable.debbiegrenhill.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](mailto:debbiebg@gmail.com).

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# SOUL SPIRIT

## 72 ARE YOU AFRAID TO LIVE YOUR LIFE?

“The fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of death, fear of conflict and fear of change can capture our attention and distract us from living our life.”

## 86 HIS ABUNDANCE, YOUR INHERITANCE

“In one moment, God can and will deliver you from lack to abundance—from nothing to something and from a little bit to more than enough.”

## 90 THE HEALTHY WAY TO DEAL WITH GRIEF

“And it's important to understand that there is a difference between a healthy grieving process and having a spirit of grief in your life.”



## Leslie Cours Mather: Faith, friends help in overcoming challenges

By Chuck Dauphin

Rising country music star Leslie Cours Mather has quite the interesting story, one that revolves around many locales growing up because her father was in the military. But, she told *WHOAwomen*, there was one constant.

“I moved around a lot, but I did grow up in the church. To both of my parents, church was very important. I grew up in the Lutheran church when I was younger, so I don’t remember a time when we didn’t go—Sunday school, vacation bible school. It was definitely rooted in me at an early age. I was confirmed when I was 12. Every time we moved, we would find the local Lutheran church, and that helped make moving around a lot easier because we had a church we could plug into.”

When she moved to Nashville, she became enamored with congregations where music was a huge part, such as Belmont on Music Row. She would eventually marry and find herself a mother of three. It was an ideal existence until her daughter was diagnosed with leukemia.

It was the first test of her faith. “I don’t know how anyone can go through something so trying without their faith,” she says. “I remember praying. I think it was the very first night she was in the hospital after starting chemo. They would only let one parent stay. My husband said

he wanted to be there, and I needed to get out, so it was perfect. I drove home, and was praying all the way home. Of course, as a mom, you pray ‘Don’t take her, don’t take her.’

“Then, I settled down, and I realized I needed to reconcile if God was good or God was not good. That was the question I needed to ask myself. If He is good, then everything—no matter the circumstance—is going to be worked out, and it will be OK. There’s a God and there’s a devil. I had to separate the two. From that point on, I knew it was going to be OK, even if it was the worst-case scenario. That’s where my peace started to come.”

Around the end of 2015, Mather would need that faith once again after doctors told her that her kidneys were failing her. This time, her faith was stronger, and she reacted much differently than even she thought she would.

“It’s like a whole 180 kind of thing, where you’re going in one direction, and then you’re blindsided,” she said. “I lost the function of my kidneys in December, and I found myself actually laughing through it. There were moments of crying, but I realized it could be worse. That just has always been my overall attitude in life anyway.”

Losing her father this past winter tested her yet again. “When my dad died suddenly, that broke me. He was my biggest fan. He went with me to every musical thing he could possibly

get to,” she said, noting she did have one final moment with him that she will always cherish. “I had just seen him at the Country Radio Seminar. On that Wednesday, he dropped me off at the airport, and I hugged him and said, ‘Thank you for everything.’ Two days later, he was on the golf course, had a heart attack and died. On one hand, I was so thankful I got to say those words to him and to see him, but it was such a huge loss. I wanted more time with him.”

Overall, Mather says that it’s good to have a cheering section, or people who can be your sounding board. As someone trying to succeed in the business, she admits it makes it a lot easier.

“I think I actually waver a lot, and that has been the biggest test of faith for me, bar none, of anything. And I’ve gone through some crazy stuff. A lot of this business for me is having to look at myself as a product. I find myself not wanting to be the brand or the product, and just do the music. I want to duck behind it, and not deal with the business stuff. But that’s impossible.

“My husband, who is running the label, is phenomenal. Every morning, he gives me a devotion, a word of encouragement, and he reminds me of who I am. I think that every day, it comes down to surrounding yourself with those people who bring you out of the pit when you fall in. That’s the most important thing for me.” 🌸



## Sylvia: From a small church to the big stage, the country star evolves with a new album

By Chuck Dauphin

In the 1980s, few female country music vocalists were any more popular than Sylvia. A native of Kokomo, Indiana, the one-time secretary for famed producer Tom Collins (Barbara Mandrell, Ronnie Milsap) made a name for herself with such hits as “Drifter,” “Tumbleweed” and the 1982 million-selling smash “Nobody.”

Just as with many stars in the format, her exposure to singing started in church.

“One of my earliest memories was going to a Pilgrim Holiness Church that my mother went to when she was young,” she recalls. “It was in Forest, Indiana, which isn’t too far from where I was from. My first memory was singing ‘Jesus Loves Me’ in front of the congregation, which wasn’t a very big one—maybe about 30 people.”

Though she was very young, the singer-songwriter knew it was a special event in her development. “Actually, that was the moment when I realized what I would do in life—that I would sing. In the previous few days, my aunt had been over to visit my mother and me. I was 3 years old, and I overheard them talking. My aunt told her, ‘You should let Sylvia sing in church.’ I remember my ears perking up, and I’m remembering it like it was yesterday.

“It was a brand new thought. I just sang like I ate and breathed. I played and I sang. I didn’t even think about it. I’ll never forget that day. It was bright and sunny, with sunlight streaming through the windows. From that moment on, I knew when

I was older, I would be a singer when I grew up.”

And that became her path to success, with her ultimately being named Female Vocalist of the Year in 1982 by the Academy of Country Music. She smiles when describing just how determined she was.

“There was no questioning it. When I moved to Nashville at age 19,” she said, “I remember on a couple of occasions people saying, ‘If it doesn’t work out, that you can’t be a singer, what are you going to do?’ I told them ‘Oh, you don’t understand. This is what I’m going to do.’”

She said that knowledge came from somewhere inside her soul. “I had such a deep sense of knowing,” she said. “There’s a sense of knowing that doesn’t come from thinking. It comes from a far deeper place. I would say it’s ‘soul mind.’ That is where I try to stay plugged in every day of my life.”

She says that taking time to think through life’s ups and downs makes all the difference—and listening to a voice stronger than one’s self. “I try to be still and listen, and pay attention to where life is guiding me,” she said. “I think we have inner guidance, and I’m not saying I always listen. I’m human, but I really believe if you cultivate a practice of listening deeply inwardly, your life goes a lot more smoothly.”

The singer has just released *It’s All In The Family*, her first album since 2002. As one can glean from the title, she has a lot of lyrical content about relationships, with

several of the songs containing slices of spirituality.

Perhaps the greatest example of this would be “Do Not Cry For Me,” a track that contains her lyrics with the melody of her frequent collaborator, John Mock. To her, the lyrics say death does not mean people truly leave once they have touched our lives.

“We’re never really parted, in a sense,” she said. “For me, there is just a thin veil between this life, and what is beyond this body. For me personally, I don’t ever want to preach to anybody or tell someone what to believe, but for my own personal sense of what life is, it just feels like this body is like a piece of clothing I wear for a while.

“At some point, I’ll leave the piece of clothing and move into something I can’t really know or begin to describe. I can’t prove it, but I know the life energy I am is eternal. To me, the song is about how ‘not separate’ we are. There is no such thing as ‘other’—not in the deepest truth of life. We are all one. You can’t convince someone of it, but you can know it within yourself.”

Could she have recorded such an album back in the 1980s? She doesn’t miss a beat. “Absolutely not,” she said. “I see myself, life and humanity as something that is evolving, growing and expanding. I also don’t think I could make this record a year from now. It would be another kind of record next time. This record is in the moment, what wanted to be birthed now.” 🌸





# Faith *over* Fear

## FOUR WAYS TO LIVE A GOD-CENTERED LIFE IN A TROUBLED WORLD

By Leslie Vernick

**T**oday we live in a world gone mad. We hear of unexpected acts of terrorism and hatred, and in a moment our lives can be altered forever. We get tempted to stay home, hunkered down in fear, overcome by the mounting evil all around us. Each terrifying situation we live through, or read about in the news, challenges us anew to live by faith, trust God more and overcome evil with good.

Don't get me wrong. Fear is a normal human response to evil, terroristic attacks and anarchy. And if we face such evil, our fear response enables our body to kick into action so hopefully we can protect others as well as ourselves.

However, it's tempting to live today fearing what might happen tomorrow. In addition, many of us

chronically struggle with other kinds of fears. The fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of death, fear of conflict and fear of change can capture our attention and distract us from living our life. When we orient our day around avoiding what we fear rather than around serving and glorifying God, we will feel scared and sick. That is not how God wants his people to live.

The Bible repeatedly tells us "Do not be afraid." Why not? Because God knows that we are naturally fearful creatures and that life can terrify us to a place of being ruled by our fears rather than the love of Christ.

It's interesting to me that the psalmist says two seemingly contradictory things about fear. The first thing he says is, "I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?" *Psalm 56:11*. And then

"We are afraid to make a change, take a stand, or speak up against what's wrong. Chronic victims often allow themselves to be mistreated, or abused."

he also says, "When I am afraid, I will trust God" *Psalm 56:3*. What this tells me is that sometimes our faith can be so big we don't feel fear, even when circumstances around us are scary. Other times, we are so filled with fear we will be overwhelmed by it if we don't choose to trust God. It's both-and, not either-or.

I have learned to regularly practice four things that have helped me not to let fear get the best of me:

Name the fear. Whatever it is, it needs to be named and faced rather than avoided or ignored. It's only when you face your fear and courageously move toward it will you put your faith into practice and trust God with the outcome. For example, if you found a lump in your breast and feared cancer, naming your fear of cancer and taking appropriate action gives you the best chance of living longer if it is indeed cancer. Ignoring it or avoiding it will not make it go away. Courage is not the absence of fear. It is relying on God's strength to walk towards fear in faith.

Get some support. It feels shameful in our individualistic society to admit we need help, especially for Christians who are supposed to already know how to trust God. Yet we were not designed to walk through life all by ourselves. The victims of the recent attacks in France, Turkey, Dallas, Orlando and San Bernardino will need support to process the tragedy. On a smaller scale, I too needed support when I was called to write a book and feared rejection. Sometimes we need to borrow someone else's faith so that we can face our fear monster and slay it.

Take responsibility for your own life and how it is going. Sometimes I ask myself this question when I'm tempted to go to a dark place. Am I thinking like a victim or an owner? A victim lives in reaction to her circumstances and thinks about what's happening to her. An owner takes charge and thinks about how she is going to handle what happens to her. Sometimes we

stay victims way longer than we need to. We are afraid to make a change, take a stand or speak up against what's wrong. Chronic victims often allow themselves to be mistreated or abused. Because of fear, they get paralyzed and don't receive the help and support they need, or implement necessary consequences, including availing themselves of the laws of our land for protection.

Center Yourself in God and not in fear. By practicing Step 3, you must choose whether you will center yourself in love or fear, trust or unbelief, God's truth or human reasoning. When we center ourselves in God and live by faith, we still don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. We're not supposed to. We are not given the gift of omniscience. But Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow today *Matthew 6:34*. When tomorrow comes and if it is scary, God will give us what we need to face it with faith. Living in the "what ifs" cripple us today.

Right now, ask yourself: Am I going to live in faith or fear? Am I going to live in faith that God knows my story and faith that God is bigger than my story? Am I going to live in faith that God has a plan for my life and he is my helper in times of trouble?

The psalmist reminds us that even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of faith, we don't need to fear. Why? Because God is always with us *Psalm 23:4*.

We all have a choice. We either walk forward by faith or we cower in fear.

You can choose faith, even when you still feel fear. 🌸



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# How to avoid a **HOLIDAY SHIPWRECK**

THREE TIPS FOR FINDING CALM DURING STORMY TIMES

By Kathleen Cooke

**T**ied in their beds. The story I was reading gripped me because I was about to dive that morning to see the wreckage of the historic RMS Rhone, a UK Royal Mail ship embedded since 1867 in the depths of the Caribbean Ocean.

The site of the Rhone, now a national park, is one of the most popular diving destinations in the world. But what fascinated me was the tragic loss of life that resulted from doing “what’s always done” during a hurricane. In this case, it was tying people to their beds to keep them from being tossed about on the ship.

But as the boat sunk, what was done for protection became their doom. As a result, only one passenger survived the wreck of the Rhone.

Holidays are full of traditions—the way we always do it—but in our changing culture they often cause disasters. In today’s blended and disconnected families, holiday chaos occurs because traditions become misunderstood. Created out of a sense of love, identity, unity—even a need for security—what was meant to

bring joy and love sometimes brings strife.

Holiday traditions are tightly wrapped up in our spiritual and personal identity. Like the passengers on the RMS Rhone, we’re tied to them. Conflict is the last thing one wants during what is supposed to be a joyful holiday.

One of my constant struggles in life is to untie myself and trust God to bring new understanding of who He is into my life—to see things as He sees them, to relinquish what I want or think is important and follow His will and wisdom.

One reason I resist is that it requires me to make choices that might bring unwanted financial decisions, disconnection with loved ones and the probability of pain—living in a raging storm for a time.

When is it OK to break these tried and true rules and traditions? How can we stay true to traditions that bring spiritual meaning and joy but also embrace new traditions in our diverse and changing cultures? Will these new ideas bring havoc, bigger storms or loss of spiritual significance?



Here are three thoughts that might bring peace in the midst of a challenging holiday storm:

1. Write down your personal story. It sounds crazy, but most of us really haven’t taken the time to write down our personal story, or what’s been traditionally called our testimony. Include why the holiday traditions have such special meaning for you. Sometimes family traditions that began as acts of love lost their significance simply because the meaning of the story wasn’t passed to the next generation. Retell the story so that loved ones can connect with them and understand their meaning.

That might also reveal where some of those traditions are placing undue burdens on family members and unneeded stress. Jesus taught us the importance of traditions when he broke bread at the Last Supper and said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” But if the story behind significant holiday events becomes lost, they become meaningless rhetoric. So leave a lasting gift this holiday season by writing down the cherished story of your faith.

2. Examine your preparations. When I scuba dive, I

have to be prepared, so I check my gear carefully before I go underwater. It’s also important to have a diving partner, so I never dive alone. It may sound silly, but the first rule, once in the water, is to breathe. (Underwater, I find breathing essential!) Many divers have lost their lives because of thoughtlessness or lack of preparation. If panic sets in, mistakes are made and disasters occur.

During a dive, I’m constantly checking in with my diving partner. Each diver carries an alternative regulator so that if a diver’s tank runs out of air, you have an alternative source. In fact, in order to become a certified diver you need to learn to breathe out of your partner’s tank.

Likewise, during the holidays, prepare and be properly equipped. Plus, have a partner and alternative source of air—the Holy Spirit. Keep checking in with Him. If you get into unpredictable currents He’ll be there for you, helping you surface. The amazing thing about diving is that it puts you into a world that you’ve never seen before. Each time I dive I challenge myself to face the fear of the unknown, but the risk of seeing

“God wants us to be at peace in the midst of holiday storms and to bring His peace to those around us.”

God’s beauty below the surface is well worth it. So be prepared. You never know this might be a holiday that God reveals new things to you through His eyes.

3. Have a 3 a.m. friend. Storms hit at unexpected times. Holidays can be times of great emotional hardship for those who may have experienced tragedy during these times. Having a trusted friend to call can be your saving grace when uncertainty hits. Accountability is a trendy word in our present culture and it’s often talked about more than actually done. Working in Hollywood, I’ve seen the destruction that happens to celebrities who by the world’s standards seem to have it all together, but in reality are terribly alone. It’s been said that “It’s lonely at the top,” but it doesn’t have to be when you’ve built a strong relationship in God and an earthly relationship with a trusted 3 a.m. friend.

The Bible tells the story of the disciples awakening Jesus in the middle of the night during a storm at sea. His response: “Why are you so afraid?” Do you still not have faith?” The disciples physically had Jesus with them and they still lost their faith in His ability to calm the raging storm. In today’s chaotic world, having a trusted friend to pray and stand with you during difficult times can be your physical life preserver.

God wants us to be at peace in the midst of holiday storms and to bring His peace to those around us. It’s interesting that the first person who died in the RMS Rhone was the captain. He was said to have immediately been thrown overboard when the ship was thrown into

the rocky cliffs. A spoon can still be seen imbedded in the wreck that local legend says belonged to him.

Tying ourselves to our beds—those traditions that lack meaning—will only get us drowned. To survive, we must be willing to share our personal story about what these traditions mean to us, prepare for the unknown storms with the knowledge of God’s Word, and be anchored in an everlasting relationship with a Savior who can help us calm any unsettling storm that might occur.

Here’s to your ship making it into port this holiday season! 🌸



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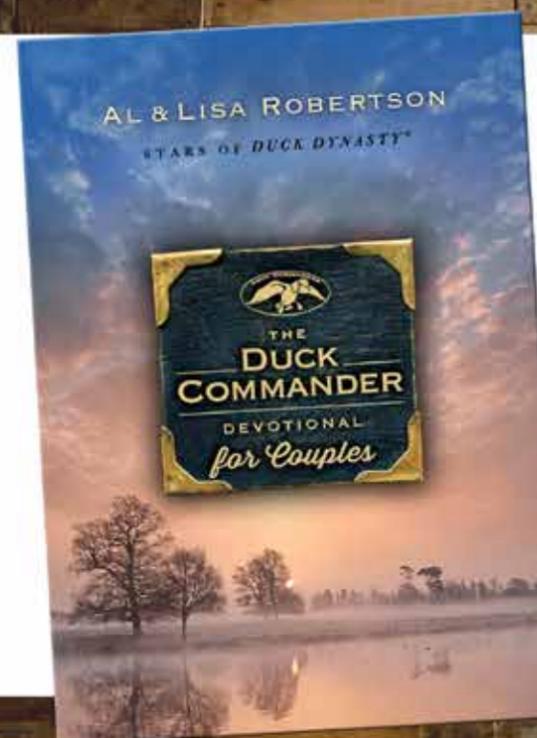
An actress, writer and speaker, Kathleen is a founding partner with husband Phil Cooke at Cooke Pictures in Burbank, California. Kathleen is responsible for casting and creative consulting for CP’s projects and productions, which include some of the country’s leading nonprofits and ministries. She is on the advisory board for the Hollywood Prayer Network, Hollywood Connect and the National Board for the Salvation Army. She is founder and former director of Christian Women In Media Association Hollywood/West Coast. She and Phil recently launched The Influence Lab, focusing on global missions. She is the editor of the monthly publication of *Influence Women*, [influencelab.com/women](http://influencelab.com/women). Twitter: [kathycooke](https://twitter.com/kathycooke), Instagram: [kathleencooken](https://www.instagram.com/kathleencooken)



## Write Your Own Love Story

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# Learning from *The List*

When you start comparing, you move away  
from your truest self

By Lisa Bevere

**T**he following account is a sadly true and embarrassingly ridiculous story about me. I hope none of you has suffered from the temporary insanity disorder I am about to lay down here in words, but if you have experienced this, you are not alone.

My day started out innocently enough. I pattered around the kitchen, hovering in front of my espresso machine. The winter sun was just rising over our backyard. There was no flight to catch, no early morning meeting to shower for. There was perfect stillness.

Which is the very reason I should have paused to bask in God's goodness to me. I should have known better than to turn on my phone. Believe me. I know now.

As I scanned my Twitter feed, I began to recognize my stream of friends acknowledging a list. This was THE LIST. A list I very much wanted to be part of.

Scanning the names, I realized quickly I had not made the list. Just about everyone else I knew was on it. People I had mentored made the list. Someone who translates my books into Spanish had made the list.

You may be wondering: What was this list and why was it so important?

It was a list of the top 100 female ministers in

America.

Ridiculous questions and comparisons flew through my mind. Why hadn't more than a million books sold and over two decades of traveling and ministering to women earned me a place on the list?

Realizing I was teetering ridiculously close to the brink of junior high insanity, I went looking for my husband. A fluffy whirlwind of pajamas, I stormed into his office bewailing, "John, I'm not on the list!"

When my rant was done, he calmly suggested a few Bible passages for me to review. This was not the response I was looking for!

No sympathy was going to be found in the company of my husband. I stormed out of his office yelling, "I don't need to read those Bible verses to know I am wrong! I know I am wrong! But knowing I am wrong doesn't make this feel right!"

Have you ever had one of those moments when you feel as though you are on the outside of yourself watching a crazy woman? That's the moment I was having.

I put down my phone, closed my eyes, took a deep breath and let it go. As I exhaled, I heard the Holy Spirit gently ask, "Lisa, would you be this upset about the list if you were on it?"

Truth time. I would not have. I would have used my

social media platform to point others to the list.

Busted.

Yes. I am the wife of one, the mother of four, and a grandmother, yet when I disconnect from my true identity I can still struggle with the cruelty of comparison. In that way, the list was a gift because it located me.

Comparison has a pull to it. If allowed to, it will always move you away from your truest center.

"But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding." *2 Corinthians 10:12 ESV*

When we look to others for our affirmation, we will always feel as though we are on the outside looking in. There is but one true measure—the immeasurable Christ. God alone understands what causes the quaking of a woman's heart. He alone knows how to calm the frenzy of women in pajamas who forget to still their souls before comparison comes to steal their peace.

The opportunity to know Jesus is our highest privilege. When I reached for my phone rather than choosing to know Him more, I chose the lesser thing.

I hope that you can laugh at my ridiculous

morning and arrest any of your own tendencies toward comparison. There is no lifetime achievement, list or award that can ever write with assurance the words God alone can scribe on your heart:

Loved, beautiful, valued, intimately known ...  
Mine. 🌸

*This article was adapted from Lisa's new book, Without Rival (Revell, 2016). Some content from this article originally appeared in that book.*



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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 curriculums and best-selling books (*Lioness Arising, Fight Like a Girl, Nurture, Kissed the Girls and Made Them Cry and more*). 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 (MessengerInternational.org) to teach, reach and rescue. Lisa is the mother of four sons and grandmother of four. Find her at [facebook.com/lisabevere.page](https://www.facebook.com/lisabevere.page), [twitter.com/lisabevere](https://twitter.com/lisabevere) and [instagram.com/lisabevered](https://www.instagram.com/lisabevered).

# Take Time to Give Time

This holiday season, turn your attention to those you love

By Cheryl Lane

A very wise woman in our church once handed me a quote that said, “The best gift you can give someone is time and attention.” In our busy society, time is a hot commodity but it truly is a great gift for us to give our loved ones. I believe it is actually the best gift we can give them.

Families used to sit together at meal time and talk about what was going on in their lives. That is not always possible these days because everyone is headed in different directions and operating on tight schedules. Still, I think it is always helpful to put forth every effort we possibly can to spend time together.

Charles Adams, son of President John Adams, was a very accomplished man who followed his father in the political world and became a U.S. diplomat to Great Britain. I have read that Charles and his son Brook both kept a diary. One particular day Charles’ entry read, “Went fishing with my son today—a day wasted.” It was very interesting that on the exact same day Brook wrote in his diary, “Went fishing with my father—the most wonderful day of my life.”

President Harry S. Truman believed in giving the gift of time. Story has it that he wrote 1,300 letters to

his beloved wife, Bess, over the course of a half century whenever either of them traveled. In that day and time, it wasn’t as easy as it is now to keep in touch, especially over long distances. However, as the most powerful leader in the world, Truman took time to keep in touch and show his wife his love and concern.

These real-life stories have great lessons to be learned for us concerning relationships. Taking time to sit and talk with each other or to have some fun and just enjoy being together forms a strong family bond. It shows our love and concern in a very profitable way.

You may be thinking, “Time is one thing I have too little of.” I understand that thinking, but let’s look at what an unknown source once wrote: Imagine there is a bank account that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. It carries over no balance from day to day. Every evening the bank deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the day. What would you do? If you are like me, you would draw out every cent, each and every day, and use it to your advantage! Wouldn’t that be fun?

Each of us does have such an account. It is called time. Every morning, it credits us with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off whatever we have failed to use.



It carries over no balance. It allows no overdraft. Each day it opens a new account for you. If we fail to use the daily deposits, the loss is ours. We are all given an equal amount of time each day. It is up to us individually how we spend it.

I realize we all have to spend so many hours working or fulfilling other obligations. I totally get that on some some days it takes all the strength we have to get home, finish our duties and crawl into bed. I also understand that we are coming into the busiest season of the year. All I am saying is that we should consider how we spend our time deposits and try to give what we can to our most cherished relationships.

It doesn’t have to be a big or costly thing. Remember, what Charles Adams thought was a waste of his time was what his son called “the most wonderful day of his life.” Think about it. What simple things can you take time to do with your children, grandchildren or spouse?

It could be fishing or taking a walk and picking some flowers. It could be reading a book together, or it could be simply listening to them talk about what you might consider to be inconsequential. You may think you have more important things to do, but as the late author and

speaker Steven Covey says, “Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.” He also said, “The key is not to prioritize what’s on your schedule but to schedule your priorities.”

When you give your loved ones your time, it is the best gift you can give them. It will bless them above any other gift you could possibly give. It will give them tremendous memories and a profound confidence in your love. Time spent with family is worth every second and will not be regretted. 🌸



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Cheryl is a co-pastor with her husband in Texas. She writes a weekly newspaper article and is a women’s ministry conference host and speaker. After overcoming breast cancer, Cheryl has published her first book, *What To Do If It Happens To you: The Path From Devastation To Celebration*. Her book extends beyond battling a disease and can be applied to every area of life. It is Cheryl’s desire to help others continue to stand with God during life’s sometimes devastating situations, and find hope and healing through the power of His Word. She has been a featured guest on local TBN and Daystar Christian television.

# Traditions change, JOY REMAINS

How to maintain your spirit through life's ups and down

By Susan Milligan

I love the holidays! Taking the time to be thankful and celebrating the birth of our Savior comes with such joy and anticipation. Every one of my five senses looks forward to what the season brings.

I love the smell of homemade pies, cutting into them and having a few bites. I love Christmas decorations and seeing as many festive homes as I can. You can see a person's creativity in their holiday decorations. It's such a blast to shop for presents, wrap them and then watch the faces of your loved ones open them, even if Black Friday is a bit overwhelming. Most of all, I love the holidays for the time to pause and connect with family and friends.

Because of those connections, I get to experience another part of what I enjoy about the holidays, which are traditions. I enjoy celebrating and learning about the customs or beliefs that families have celebrated from generation to generation.

Traditions are as different and personal as people. Some families decorate their artificial Christmas tree the day after Thanksgiving, while others cut down their tree on Christmas Eve. Family dinners are shared all over the country with different menu items, but each tradition is sacred and very meaningful. When I was growing up, my family traveled to Arkansas to visit our extended families. I loved seeing all of my cousins, having pizza on Christmas Eve, enjoying breakfast on Christmas morning and opening presents. Ah, the memories.

As life changes, however, what happens to age-old

traditions? Marriage, the birth of a new child, an injury, a death or a broken relationship can disrupt traditional expectations and gatherings. My family has struggled at times when change invaded our normal traditions. It is as if Thanksgiving and Christmas had lost their way because of some hiccup in the schedule. Traditions are important, but change is inevitable, and each one of us has to learn to enjoy the journey of life. Here are some helpful hints on how to maintain joy when traditions change.

- Be flexible. When an adult child gets married and has a baby, decades-old traditions can change in an instant. Remember that one of the main points of the holidays is to connect, not control. Your traditional Christmas dinner may no longer fall on the Christmas Day, but on a day of the week before or after. Either way, as long as connection is the goal, the date really doesn't matter. Flexibility is key to enjoying life. "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor." *Romans 12:10*.
- Try something new. A sudden death or broken relationship can put a damper on the holidays. Joy turns to sorrow; connections are not an option. This is the moment when you can choose to do something new. Go on that cruise you've always hoped to experience. Invite friends over who may be experiencing the same loss in their lives. Loss creates



an opportunity to begin new traditions. It can be a moment of sorrow, but a greater opportunity for change. In our grief, God promises us beauty for ashes. Take a risk and see what newness awaits you. "...he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair..." *Isaiah 61:3*.

- Serve someone in need. Sometimes in order to step outside of our own emotions, we need to step into someone else's. The holidays bring huge opportunity to serve others. Many people are without the means to celebrate; some might not even have the money to buy a meal. Decorations and presents are completely out of the question. You may do something as simple as ringing the Salvation Army bell, serving in a homeless shelter or starting a new ministry in your local church. Many elderly people, including those in nursing homes and assisted living facilities, don't have family members to help them celebrate. This could be something your family begins as a new tradition. There are quite possibly other people in your same scenario. Find a way to gather with them

and celebrate with understanding and a new kind of friendship. The opportunities are limitless and the needs are great. "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them." *Hebrews 6:10*.

Don't allow the stress of change rob you of your joy and keep you from traditions this holiday season. Remember that the point of the holidays is to connect with loved ones and be thankful for the greatest gift of all: the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Here's to the old and new traditions of this holiday season! 🌸



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# CELEBRATE

## *no matter what*

Don't let the unexpected ruin your appreciation of the season

*By Shea Wood*

One of the first years I lived on my own, there was a Christmas holiday tradition that I wanted to continue in my own house: cutting down a live Christmas tree from a tree farm. The drive out to the country and the hot cider they offer at the tree farm was a fun and festive way to celebrate the season.

This particular year, since I was newly on my own, I was low on funds and ornaments. I'm pretty crafty and creative so I decided to string popcorn, make some paper ornaments and keep it simple with only a few lights. The tree was small, but I was proud of keeping the tradition.

One night I kept hearing noises coming from the living room. I could not for the life of me figure out what was making the racket. One evening while watching television, I realized the racket was coming from the Christmas tree. Lo and behold, it was mice! They were feasting on popcorn and drinking the water from the tree stand.

By the time I was able to catch all the mice, the popcorn from the tree had been eaten. They had quite the feast sitting in the tree. Merry Christmas to them!

I just have to laugh. I made plans to enjoy the season, and who knew mice would try to take over?

That pretty much sums up many holidays for all of us. We set out to make plans and then something else comes in and tries to mess it all up. Sometimes that can be relationships, finances, disasters or tragedies.

Truly the holiday season is a wonderful time of year. Everything is festively decorated, Christmas music is playing and there is lots of hustle and bustle. People decorate their homes inside and out, and there are many opportunities for eating. God intends for us to celebrate. He knows there is a time for everything.

“A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance...” *Ecclesiastes 3:4*.

I really believe that if we were all able to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas fully as we wanted, it would bring its own revival. A holiday revival! The enemy of this world wants us to look at our circumstances and feel pitiful and defeated. He doesn't want us to celebrate what God has done for us. He wants us to crawl in a hole and not even celebrate. He wants us to be disappointed and disillusioned over broken relationships, financial hardships and circumstances that we could have never foreseen.

“Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the Lord and joyfully celebrate His mighty acts, for great is the glory

of the Lord.” *Psalms 138:5 AMP*

So many of us have experienced truly hard things around the holidays. Loss of job, death of a loved one and struggles with relationships can all put a damper on the holiday and bring the blues instead of the joy God intends. I am not making light of these situations, but I want to encourage us to continue celebrating in spite of our circumstances. God intends for us to celebrate and have a season of rejoicing. It is good for our spirits.

I wrote about my little Christmas mice in the Christmas tree because my circumstances at that time in my life were pretty rough. I didn't have a lot to celebrate, and then I had an infestation of mice on top of that. I chose to enjoy those little critters, and by the time I took the tree down and realized the popcorn was all eaten, I just had to laugh. I think God wanted me to see the good in that time and not focus solely on the bad.

I could have chosen to feel defeated over the mice infestation. I could have chosen to feel victimized at that moment when most things in my life seemed terribly wrong. But I don't like feeling pitiful. I wanted to celebrate no matter what and I wasn't going to let this latest nuisance take my last bit of joy. I have to begin looking for ways to turn my eyes away from my

circumstances and look to the one who knows all about my circumstances. As I begin focusing more on God and His gifts to me, I begin to feel my spirits lift so that I can celebrate in spite of it all.

Look for simple ways to know God is smiling down on you during this season. He wants you to know He is looking out for you and loves you in the midst of all that mess. It could be your favorite Christmas carol playing as elevator music, a beautiful Christmas scene you happen upon or simply the smells that remind you of the good seasons past. Our lives are full, busy and stressful at times. We can take a moment and pause to remember what this season really is all about. Let's laugh and celebrate Jesus. 🌸



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# Claim Your Inheritance

The Heavenly Father has a life of abundance waiting for you

By Debra George

**H**olidays can take on a whole new meaning after you lose someone you love. I remember my first Thanksgiving and Christmas after my husband left me for another woman. The constant questions from both family and friends can be overwhelming when all you want to do is crawl into a hole and hide until the storm passes. But I have learned firsthand that just because you lost someone or something does not mean you have to live a “lost life.”

Consider the five sisters in *Numbers 27*. Their daddy died. In that day and time, a father’s inheritance could legally be passed down only to a son, never a daughter. These gals made a choice. Instead of going with the way the law had always been, they decided to speak up for themselves. They went to Moses explaining the situation. Moses goes “Get your stuff back and more.” God takes up for his girls and changes the laws just for them when he says “you shall cause their father’s inheritance to pass to them.” *Numbers 27:7*. Yay!

Girls, that makes me want to jump over 10 tall buildings and shout from the rooftop that God is on my side. In one moment, God can and will deliver you from lack to abundance—from nothing to something and from a little bit to more than enough. Abundance is when God Almighty glances in your direction and changes everything in your life for the better.

That’s what happened to me. The day my husband walked out of our marriage was the day I didn’t think I could make it, but I did. A lot of times people ask me

to share my testimony. It can be summed up in three simple words, “I’m still here.” A situation that could have wiped me off the map was precisely what God used to put me on the map to make a difference in the lives of hurting humanity. The very thing that brought me the most shame and pain is what brings me the most joy today as God uses my story to bring Him all the glory for healing and restoring broken lives all over the world.

You may ask, “What is true abundance? How can I have a happy holiday season?” Here are a few things to open our eyes to what it really means to live the abundant life that Jesus Christ promised.

Abundance is:

Giving a cup of cold water to someone who is thirsty.

Holding a prostitute who is addicted to drugs in your arms and leading her to Jesus Christ.

Smiling really big at the woman in the grocery store who looks like she is having a rough day.

Cleaning out your closet and giving away your excess to someone who has nothing.

Approaching a perfect stranger and asking them what they need prayer for.

Thinking that you might lose your mind, but you don’t.

Being filled with the joy and peace of God.

I could go on, and on, friends.

Just like the five gals in *Numbers* received their father’s inheritance, your Heavenly Father has an inheritance with your name on the document. All He



is waiting for is your signature. When you sign on the dotted line, you receive your inheritance. You do this simply by agreeing with God’s Word and aligning your life with it.

When I was going through the toughest time of my life, I memorized *Psalms 23* and I said it over and over again in hopes that my mind didn’t snap. Little by little, God’s Word took root and He healed me. Today I continue to put myself in agreement with what He says.

Find Scriptures and say them out loud. Put your name in them and in doing so, you are signing your name on the dotted line to receive your rightful inheritance from your Father. Scriptures like:

*Colossians 2:10*: “I am complete in Him.”

*Ephesians 3:20*: “You will do exceeding, abundantly above what I ask or think.”

*Colossians 1:9*: “I am filled with knowing the will of God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

*Philippians 4:13*: “I can do all things through Christ.”

*Philippians 4:19*: “My God will liberally supply my every need.”

*Acts 16:31*: “I am saved and my whole family will be saved too.”

I believe, girls, that you will get all of your stuff back and more. Sometimes we try to hang on to the old when

God wants to bring in the new. We have to be willing to let go of our past and the things in life that are weighing us down.

Focus on your first love today, the Lord Jesus Christ. Spend time talking with Him. He wants to move us from relationship, the initial connection with Him the day we were “born again,” into fellowship, a daily dialogue between you and your Father.

Your story is not about what all we have lost in life, but about how we gained it all back and more. Remember, life is not about some grand destination. It’s about our journey and the people we meet along the way who make our journey sweeter and better. Today, make someone’s journey sweeter and better. Now that’s true abundance—not just on holidays but on every day of the week. 🌸



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 Great Tree

A cherished holiday tradition eases the sting of loss

By Jenny L. Cote

Carol's Christmas tree was always so grand, soaring 12 feet and filled with beautiful ornaments and a thousand lights. Beneath its branches, the floor was so packed with gifts wrapped in festive paper and gold wire ribbon that it was hard to navigate around the room. A standing rib roast slowly cooking in the oven filled the house with such delectable smells that our mouths watered as we opened gifts, anticipating a magnificent Christmas dinner.

The table was set with the fine china, silver, Waterford crystal and beautiful silk linens. Carol loved her family and, yes, she went overboard in her extravagance with gifts for the grandchildren and even us grown-up kids. But she loved every bit of it, and so did we. Carol knew how to do Christmas well.

But we lost Carol last fall. In the midst of the heartache of letting her go, the questions loomed before us. What about Christmas? It was always at Carol's. What about the great tree? How do we "do" Christmas without her?

Loss changes everything. It changes our everyday lives, of course, but it seems like holidays shine a cruel spotlight on loss. That first Christmas, New Year, Valentine's Day, Easter, July the Fourth, birthday—name the holiday or event. That event minus the name of our loved one on the attendance list seems to make the occasion feel hollow.

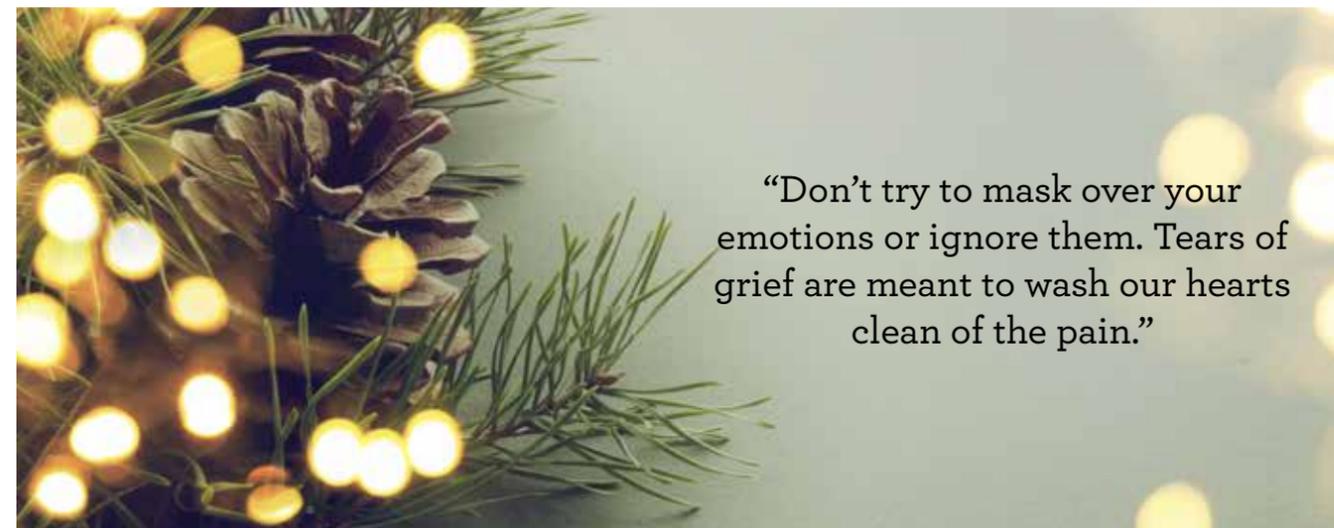
Why is that? I think it's because a special occasion is special only when it is shared with those we love. At those first hollow moments, we cry out, "I wish so-and-so

were here to see this. I wish they would come back." But isn't that desire for our sakes, not theirs?

"Even the insane call, 'Come back,' is all for my own sake. I never even raised the question whether such a return, if it were possible, would be good for her. I want her back as an ingredient in the restoration of my past. Could I have wished for her anything worse? Having once got through death, to come back and then, at some later date, dying to do over again? They call Stephen the first martyr. Hadn't Lazarus the rawer deal?" —C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

I love C.S. Lewis' raw emotion expressed in *A Grief Observed* after he lost his wife, Joy. The greatest theologian of the 20th century—a man to whom people look for some of the deepest insights on Christianity ever penned for the modern world—wallowed in grief to the point of despairing of life. So he wrote it all out and held nothing back. He cried, shouted and even shook his fist at God at times. And I'm sure God told him, "It's OK, Jack. Let it all out. Allow your pen to bleed, along with your heart. I'm here and will get you through this hard time. And you will get through it."

Grief is a process, and it cannot be ignored. If we stuff those emotions and do not give them expression, they will keep us in a perpetual state of gloom. Life will lose its magic in those moments that are meant to give us cause to celebrate throughout the year. If you're grieving, let it all out. Grieve. Don't try to mask over your emotions or ignore them. Tears of grief are meant to wash our hearts clean of the pain.



"Don't try to mask over your emotions or ignore them. Tears of grief are meant to wash our hearts clean of the pain."

Here's another glimpse into C.S. Lewis' grief: "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me."

Is that where you are for this holiday season? Do you dread the moments when the house is empty, wanting people around but wishing they would talk to each other and not to you? It's OK; it's normal to feel that way. There is no wrong way to feel when you are grieving.

But what about the practical side of grief? What about the holidays that are permanently etched on the calendar and come around each year whether we want them to or not? What do you do?

Well, at the Cote household we got through the first Christmas by keeping Christmas just as Carol would have kept it. Her house had not yet sold, so we had Christmas at Carol's. We put up the great tree that soared 12 feet with beautiful ornaments and 1,000 lights, and we packed the base of the tree with gifts wrapped in festive paper with gold wire ribbon. We cooked the standing rib roast to fill the house with its delectable aroma. We set the table with the fine china, silver, Waterford crystal and beautiful silk linens. We smiled, we laughed and, yes, we cried. It was a bittersweet day, but we made it through

and surprisingly felt joy in the midst of it.

When it was time to take down the tree, we spread the beautiful ornaments out over the dining room table, and each family took home those that held special meaning to us. So this Christmas, each family will have part of Carol's great tree trimming the branches of our own trees. Where will we cook the standing rib roast this year? We'll figure it out.

The places where we hold our beloved traditions may need to change, but the traditions can continue nonetheless. And when you add new traditions on top of the old, the magic of the celebration comes back to life as it is celebrated with the next generation. As the seasons change, so too does the season of grief.

And the great tree? Since we have the house with the 12-foot ceilings, it will be put up in my house this Christmas. And if Carol were here looking at the 1,000 lights, I'm sure she'd say, "I love it! It's perfect where it is." 🌸



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Award-winning author Jenny L. Cote, who developed an early passion for God, history, and young people, beautifully blends these passions together in her two fantasy fiction series, *The Amazing Tales of Max and Liz*, and *Epic Order of the Seven*. Likened to C.S. Lewis by readers and book reviewers alike, she speaks on creative writing to schools and universities around the world. Jenny lives with her family in Roswell, Ga. Learn more about Jenny and her books at [www.epicorderoftheseven.com](http://www.epicorderoftheseven.com).

# Going Through a Season of Grief

Let God walk with you through the difficult by natural process

By Joyce Meyer

**W**e all have times of crisis, or hardships, in our lives. Many times they are caused by major losses and the grief that comes as a result. And it can be especially challenging to deal with them during the holiday season.

Whether the loss is the death of a loved one, a divorce, a financial crisis that turns your life upside-down, leaving a church you've been part of for a long time—whatever the situation may be—you will need to go through a grieving process to deal with it. And it's important to understand that there is a difference between a healthy grieving process and having a spirit of grief in your life.

Grief is defined as “keen mental suffering or distress over affliction or loss; sharp sorrow; painful regret.” Although it's painful, it's actually healthy—mentally, spiritually and even physically—to go through the grieving process. Because if you don't, you will have a spirit of grief in your life that will keep you from God's comfort and healing, and you won't be able to move forward in

His plan for you.

The key is to go through the grieving process, with God's grace, comfort and strength. To help you do this, I want to share the stages of grief that are healthy and normal to experience.

Shock and denial is the first stage a person usually experiences when tragedy occurs. These reactions “cushion” the initial blow and often make the person feel numb to the situation; they act like a temporary anesthetic. Actually, God uses them to protect us from devastation because if we felt everything all at once, we couldn't handle it.

Sadness sets in once the shock begins to wear off. Sometimes the pain is so intense it causes physical symptoms, like fatigue, insomnia, loss of appetite and even chest pain. Waves of sadness can roll over you, and just when you think you're feeling better, another one comes crashing against you. Reading the Psalms can be very comforting during these times.

Anger is usually the next stage of grieving. The first thing an angry person wants to do is place blame. Some

get angry with God and blame Him for the tragedy; others blame themselves because they feel they didn't do everything they could have or should have done to prevent it. And sometimes, people blame someone else.

If you're struggling with being angry with God, understand that the enemy wants us to get mad at God and believe He doesn't care or love us, especially when we don't understand why something happened and we can't figure everything out. But the truth is, God is good! And when we get to the point where we trust Him completely, we can be OK even if we don't understand everything.

Depression often follows anger and causes a person to feel that hope for their future is lost. Life's activities seem pointless, making a person withdraw from connecting with friends and family. This is a normal response to loss, but if it persists too long, it may be a good idea to talk to a counselor or someone who has experienced the same thing you have gone through.

Acceptance and hope are the final stage of a healthy grieving process. Once you've taken your time going through the shock, sadness, anger and depression from

your loss, you can find grace and strength in Christ to get up and go on. But you must make the decision to do it with God's help, because that is the only way you can set your mind and keep it set for victory in overcoming grief.

The exciting thing about this last stage is that it's a place for a new beginning—and it's never too late for new beginnings in your life when you walk with Christ. God is on your side, and He will help you take one day at a time, walking by faith in Him and moving forward in His good plans for you.

I want to say again that the key to a healthy grieving process is going through. It's important that you face the reality of the loss in your life and then allow yourself to go through a time of grieving, hurting and crying. If you will do this, when the time comes and God speaks to your heart, “It's time to get up and go on,” you'll be able to do it by faith.

Remember that...

God is the Source of every comfort—He's your consolation and encouragement *2 Corinthians 1:3*.

You can put your complete trust in Him and you



“God is the Source of every comfort—He’s your consolation and encouragement.”  
-2 Corinthians 1:3



# CHANGES AHEAD

THE AUTHOR PLANS TO STEP OUT IN FAITH TO HELP OTHERS

By Kim Alexis

Many of you don’t know this, but I have been in hiding. I was hurt and wounded from a bad marriage and subsequent divorce. I have tried to keep my personal life quiet and stay hidden while finding out who the real Kim is and what she really wants in life.

For too many years, I have been a people pleaser, doing what everyone else wants me to do—poses on the set, how to dress and wear my hair and makeup, “obeying” my husband and putting my sons first and me last.

My first big life change occurred a few years years ago when I left my husband of 21 years in a five-bedroom home on 5 acres across the street from the ocean in Florida. The house was filled with 15 years of memories raising three sons.

I drove away from it all with just my dog and a car full of my possessions. Having my freedom and drawing the line with him was worth leaving everything I owned.

I stayed with friends and family for three months. I would ask and beg God to know if I was doing the right thing. All I knew was that I needed to get far away and find healing in the mountains. I finally arrived in Boulder, Colorado, in December 2013.

I didn’t know a soul out in Boulder and I spent some pretty snowy nights huddled up in my little place, lonely but free. It has been three years now and I have found wonderful friends in Boulder as well as my older friends around the country to help me find me.

I found in them love and support to help me heal my heart. They accepted me for who I am and gently forced me to make decisions, any decision, instead of saying,

“I don’t care. Whatever you want to do is fine with me.”

I have always known that some day I would move back to New York City. An unrelenting voice inside of me has been screaming to help other women, to encourage them by telling my story and struggles. I kept my inner ears opened for that right time to leave my healthy Boulder nest and venture back out into the real world.

I feel that now is the time. I am healthy and strong and have more of a passion and desire than ever to express myself.

So, just the other day in one instant, I heard that inner voice say, “NOW.” I am ready. No one is going to stop me or mess with my mind and emotions. I am through with trying to please others. I know what I want. Even though I am stepping out in faith, with no set apartment in the city, I have put a date on my move: Sept. 1. I made a big life decision this week and I am ready to show my inner strength and be heard. 🌸

don’t have to figure everything out or lean on your own understanding to be okay *Proverbs 3:5-7*.

God loves you unconditionally, He is always on your side, and nothing can separate you from His love. *Romans 5:7-8; 8:31-35*.

You can do whatever you need to do in life through Christ. *Philippians 4:13*.

You are more than a conqueror through Christ, who loves you. *Romans 8:37*.

*Proverbs 3:5 AMPC* says, “Lean on, trust in, and be confident in the Lord with all your heart and mind and do not rely on your own insight or understanding.”

Make a determined decision to put your faith in God, trusting that He is in control. With His help, you can go on, one day at a time, overcoming grief and loss. 🌸

For more on this topic, order Joyce’s two-CD series *Overcoming Grief and Loneliness*. You can receive our free magazine, *Enjoying Everyday Life*, by calling (800) 727-9673 or visiting [www.joycemeyer.org](http://www.joycemeyer.org).



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Joyce is a *New York Times* best-selling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries, Inc. She has authored more than 100 books, including *Battlefield of the Mind* and *The Mind Connection* (Hachette). She hosts the *Enjoying Everyday Life* radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide.

Please note: The views and opinions expressed throughout this publication and/or website are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Joyce Meyer Ministries.



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Kim rose to “supermodel” status in the 1980’s. Known for her beauty, she graced the covers of magazines such as *Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Cosmopolitan* and set the cover record for *Glamour*. She appeared in the *Sport’s Illustrated Swimsuit Issue* for six consecutive years. She moved into broadcasting and spent three years as fashion editor for *Good Morning America*. She has hosted TV shows, appeared in movies and written several health, beauty and business books, including *A Model for a Better Future*. A marathon runner, Kim now has a line wigs and hair extensions ([www.KimAlexisHair.com](http://www.KimAlexisHair.com)). She has three grown sons.



# Home & Heart

As holidays approach, tend to your spirit as well as your house

*By LaTan Roland Murphy*

Christmas means so much to me. It's the gatherings with good friends; reconnecting with family members near and far; relishing the rich, aromatic fragrance of freshly cut fir trees.

It's listening to Christmas music playing softly while you're sipping rich coffee fireside. It's the thrill of shimmering lights all around and being amazed that the twinkle in my granddaughter's eyes outshines them all. It's the excitement of creating our traditional gingerbread house with her.

It's also the memories of her dad, his brother and his sister on the barstools beside me, slinging powdered sugar-snow like confetti, as we build and accessorize our ginger house (shack) with every kind of candy imaginable.

I especially appreciate sweet Christmas time for offering me a free, personal pass to enjoy the limitless sugary deliciousness I'd otherwise feel guilty indulging myself in.

Regardless of Christmas past, the overwhelming

preparations of Christmas present often rob my joy. What about you, friend? I think most of us become overwhelmed as Christmas Day tiptoes its way across our jam-packed schedules, tapping us on the shoulder as if to say, "Surprise! Ready or not, here I come!"

But no matter how overwhelmed, or how excited we are, we all know that Christmas celebrations don't just happen magically. Christmas celebrations happen because someone took the time to carefully plan and prepare.

Oh, sure, some of us know how to prepare, making it look so easy. Some procrastinate, preparing absolutely nothing ahead of time, then panic over last-minute demands. It's no easy task to drag the gazillion stored boxes of decorations down from the attic. It takes time to decorate the table, the mantle, the tree and ourselves for the party that's happening tonight. Eeek!

Remember, you have to make a mess before you can prepare something beautiful.

While we get our homes for the holiday season, let's be intentional about preparing our hearts, too. What's



**“As you prepare your own heart for Christmas you are, in essence, preparing to create beautiful holiday memories your friends and family will treasure for a lifetime.”**

the point in working our fingers to the bone, preparing a beautiful home and perfect meals, yet failing to prepare our hearts for Christmas?

Remember, you are the most important decorating accessory. There is nothing stored in your Christmas bins with more opportunity to reflect the true spirit of Christmas than yourself. From what I’ve learned during my 25 years as a designer, the most elegantly decorated homes are often overshadowed by bad attitudes of a stressed and exhausted hostess.

And, truthfully, I have been the stressed-out, undone hostess more times than I want to admit. Because of this, I’m happy to share wisdom learned along the way.

This holiday season, prepare not only your home but your heart for Christmas.

Take time to rest and renew, to reflect and remember. If you do these things, you will be able to serve others beautifully, as if you are wearing the light of the world like a beautiful garment. Nothing you do will be done in your own strength but to represent the gift of Christmas, Jesus, the light of the world. You, my sister, will sparkle brighter than any Christmas lights adorning the tree.

As you prepare your own heart for Christmas you are, in essence, preparing to create beautiful holiday memories your friends and family will treasure for a lifetime.

I have been privileged to spend time in many homes. The most beautiful homes are those where others-minded people live. These clients leave lasting impressions because their purpose in creating beautiful comes from a selfless desire to share, love, serve and bless others with all they’ve been given, rather than feverishly trying to impress and “keep up with the Joneses.”

So, this year, as you prepare your home, also prepare your heart. Prepare to bless others with all God has given you. Remember what an honor it is to have a home, a place to display contentment in an environment where true rest is found. It doesn’t matter if you live in a mobile home or a mansion. Celebrate all you have been given to the fullest extent.

Bake to your heart’s content, but be sure to stop at a reasonable time and get proper rest. Take time out of your crazy to sip your favorite cup of tea or java as you write your “to-do” lists. Set reasonable goals for daily

tasks in preparation for Christmas traditions.

Reward yourself for your hard work by soaking in a nice, warm bath at the end of your day. As you decorate and rearrange, embellish and even purge random unnecessary things, ask God to decorate, rearrange, embellish and purge your heart and mind so you can be fully present in each moment during the Christmas season and beyond.

Don’t compare your home with others. Instead, do what you can with what you have been given. Celebrate what God has done in your life and the lives of those you love. As you unpack each decoration, think about how good God has been to your family. And when you find broken pieces in bottom of storage bins, thank God for healing the broken pieces of your heart and for carrying you through each season of life you have faced.

Make every obstacle an opportunity to express gratitude. In doing so, you will prepare your heart for Christmas joy.

Remember to be true to yourself. Don’t do Christmas like everyone else. Surround yourself with the things you love and the colors you treasure, and use items that remind you of joyful times past. Be creative.

No matter how elegant I try to decorate my home, my favorite ornaments are those my children made in elementary school. I smile each time I hang the scraggly button bracelet that my daughter made for me when she was only 4 years old, and I celebrate the creative, godly woman she has become.

I sometimes tear up when I see the wooden cross my

oldest son made and thank God his dreams of becoming a contractor and builder came true. I giggle as I hang the raggedy, one-eyed, paper reindeer my adventurous youngest son made in kindergarten, right next to my more elegant ornaments.

I marvel how much more valuable these are to me. My eclectic approach to Christmas decorating works perfectly for me, blending old and new, past and present.

Prepare for a Christmas that works for you and your family and be at peace with it.

As you blend your old, your new, your past and your present, may you look forward with hope to the brand new future Almighty God has for you. While preparing your heart for Christmas, you’ll be truly embracing the reason for the season, the gift of God’s one and only son, Jesus. In Him, you will be well prepared for all of your tomorrows.

I would love to hear how you prepared your heart for Christmas. Please visit my website and leave a message there, so others can be inspired by your wisdom, too. 🌸



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A nationally recognized speaker, La-Tan ministers worldwide through her talks, her mentoring and her award-winning writing. She finds great joy in reminding others of their worth. She has

been married to husband, Joe, for 28 years and has three adult children and a granddaughter.

# A prayer for TOGETHERNESS

How the children put aside differences to honor their parents

By Marilyn Scott

**M**emories are so precious as we recall our loved ones who have gone on to be with the Lord. Unpacking after our recent move to the suburbs, I took a break to look at pictures of my parents, family members and friends.

As I gazed at the pictures of my parents with all 14 children—me, 10 siblings and three special cousins they raised—I saw a photo of my father sitting in the living room with us during a Christmas holiday with a smile on his face. He was watching us unwrap our gifts and have fun as he read the newspaper.

Aww!

In another one, my mother is surrounded by her grandchildren as she watches them open gifts from around the Christmas tree. Oh, and here's one with my nephew kissing my mother on her cheek. And this one, so lovely, of my Dad and Mom's 50th anniversary celebration. So well-deserved! My parents were the absolute epitome of how parents should trust God to teach them how to raise their children. Though some of

us strayed early on, we have come back into the pathway of the Lord as they taught us when we were younger. "Train up a child in the way he should go." (*Proverbs 22:6*)

In the last two years, both parents have gone home to be with the Lord. I never realized while they were living just how much I would miss them once they were gone. I still can't believe it's so real. Before they passed away, I often wondered how our family holidays and gatherings would be without them.

Yes, we are siblings of the same parents, raised to be respectful toward one another. But because we have different personalities, we do not always agree or think alike. During the years, we've had our heated disagreements. So as I was preparing to get together with my siblings for our mother's homegoing, I prayed, "God, please let us come together, put our differences aside and have a beautiful celebration and gathering."

While my parents were living, I would pray that, when that time came for God to take them home, we would come together with humble spirits and work together to give them beautiful homegoing celebrations.



As the church says, "WON'T HE DO IT!" Both homegoing celebrations were absolutely beautiful.

In my previous article, I wrote that we would all get in the station wagon on Sunday afternoons to travel to the fellowship church services out of town. We would practice singing our songs all the way there. The beauty of our being raised up singing together as a family was a great thing to see for those who gathered for our father's home going in January 2014 and my mother's in September 2015.

During our mother's homegoing, my siblings came together once again to sing a song in honor of our mother. My heart rejoiced as I saw my little brother, who always played the drums for us as we sang growing up in church, and an older brother, whose favorite thing was not really singing in the choir when we were younger, come to the front of the church with the special cousins to join in as the Covington Children rendered an "A" and "B" selection.

God answered my prayers. We all came together, put

our differences aside and gave our parents a beautiful homegoing. That was a result of us having parents who I am sure prayed that same prayer many times.

Prayer is the answer to overcoming difficult relationships during any situation, whether it's having to deal with family during the holidays, loved ones passing or just being around family, period. We can do all things through Christ who gives us the strength.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." *Philippians 4:13* 🌸



MARILYN SCOTT

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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.

# Hope at Midnight

**In the darkest of times,  
God shines His light on us**

*By Lisa Osteen Comes*

remember like it was yesterday when the doctor looked at me and my husband, Kevin, from behind his desk and said, “Lisa and Kevin, I don’t think you’ll ever have children. I don’t think we can help you anymore.”

Those words knocked the wind out of my sails. It was the absolute last thing we wanted to hear. After nearly a decade of trying to get pregnant and two surgeries, I was handed an “it’s not going to happen—it’s over” card.

As we walked out of that office, we knew we had a choice. Were we going to cave in or trust God? I knew all the Scriptures by heart about how children are a blessing from the Lord, and it’s God’s will for me to be a happy mother of children. Yet, when we came home, I got on my knees in my bathroom and prayed:

“Father, I want You to know that Kevin and I are thankful for all that we have. If we never have children, we will serve You with our whole heart. I will never ask You why because I am so blessed that You gave me a wonderful husband. You’ve blessed us to be in the ministry. We have health, we have life, and if it weren’t for You, we wouldn’t be alive. We’re extremely grateful for what we do have.”

I meant those words with all my heart, and got back up and went about my life. I was not giving up on my dream or the Word of God, but I knew that I could not become bitter or ungrateful. I simply placed my dream in God’s hands. Little did I know that when I prayed that prayer of gratitude, heaven began to move on our behalf.

God was making arrangements for us. Three months later, we received a phone call from Nancy Alcorn, the CEO of Mercy Ministries, with the news that twin baby girls were soon to be born and needed a good Christian home. Four months later our daughters, Catherine and Caroline, were born. Three years later we adopted our son, Christopher.

We all go through hard, challenging seasons. These times have also been coined the “midnight hour.” Paul and Silas had a midnight hour. After being flogged, beaten and stripped, they were thrown into an inner cell of a prison. With even their feet bound, it appeared all was lost; they weren’t getting out. But instead of feeling de-

feated by their circumstances, the Bible says that at the midnight hour, they lifted their voices and began to pray and sing hymns to God.

Can you imagine that? In what probably was the darkest hour in their life, they chose to worship God and have a grateful attitude. They chose to be thankful even though they had been beaten, flogged and mistreated. They put their focus on God, not on their circumstances.

And suddenly, an earthquake shook that prison. Suddenly, those chains broke and the door flew open. Paul and Silas were set free, not of their own accord, but by the supernatural power of God. Praise and thanksgiving bring about “suddenlies” in our lives!

It may be the midnight hour for you, the darkest time you’ve ever seen, but if you keep your focus on God and maintain a grateful attitude, you will see God move Heaven and earth for you. You will hear from heaven. But the key is to stay connected to God through prayer. Keep your trust in Him because He will strengthen you and bring you to victory.

God is looking throughout the whole earth for people He can richly bless and greatly strengthen. It’s a promise straight from the Bible. *Second Chronicles 16:9 KJV* says, “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him.”

Let that be you whenever you face tough times. Press in with your prayer and your praise. Remember, everyone else may be asleep in your midnight hour, but you can always count on God because the Bible says that He neither slumbers nor sleeps. He works the night shift. 🌸



LISA OSTEEN COMES

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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](http://lisacomes.com). Her most recent book is *You are Made for More*.

# The gift of HONOR

GIVE IT FREELY, AND YOU'LL BE PLEASED WITH THE RESULTS

By Colleen Rouse

**D**on't you love it when you nail the perfect gift for someone? I remember the Christmas I presented my "mother in love" with a ceramic rooster. Somehow, I had it in my mind she liked ceramic roosters, and when I found one with exquisite detail at an amazing price, I snatched it up, anticipating her excitement upon opening it.

However, she was less than thrilled. Naturally I spoke up, saying, "Wait, don't you like roosters?" She responded flatly, "No, I don't." Suddenly, the humor of the situation hit me, and I burst out laughing. To this day, it is one of our little inside family jokes.

Clearly, I was confused about what she considered to be an amazing gift, and since then, I've upped my gift-giving game.

As we find ourselves in the season of purchasing and presenting gifts, I want to call your attention to a "one size fits all" gift guaranteed to bless long after the wrapping paper is discarded and the tree is taken down. It will cost you more than you may realize but has far greater impact than you expect—the gift of honor.

Although a forgotten virtue in our modern society, it remains of utmost importance in the Kingdom of God. Honor is meant to be given freely and indiscriminately, despite age, status or even situation. It is a spiritual discipline and we must develop it. It is a cultivated response, requiring intentional practice. In doing so, we ourselves become honorable.

## Clothe yourself in humility

Although honor is an outward expression, it all begins inwardly. "Humility is precursor to honor." *Proverbs 18:12 MSG.*

You will be able to bestow honor on others only to the degree you are willing to clothe yourself in humility. Contemplate this for a moment. If bestowing honor has slipped from society, then it must be because humility, like other clothing, has gone out of style. It's time we bring it back, don't you agree?

This requires a paradigm shift in our thinking. Most would say that honor is a distinction that is earned; therefore, those who occupy the lower rungs of the social ladder do not qualify. For example, we respect the school principal but we fail to even acknowledge the janitor. Once you don the garment of humility, everyone becomes a candidate for honor. Humility is the costliest thing you will ever put on, but it is the most attractive thing you will ever wear. The next time you are dining out, show genuine interest in your servers and watch their response, since they are not used to customers noticing them.

## Place value on them

Don't misunderstand. Placing value is not about giving individuals something they do not have. Rather, it is acknowledging the value that heaven has given them. Be intentional about aligning the attitude of your heart with His.



I am struck by the example Jesus gave us in His interactions with others. Whether prostitutes or thieves, He consistently restored dignity and value to the lives of those on whom others looked down. *Matthew 26* describes the woman as a "known sinner" who bathed Jesus feet in tears and perfume. While those around Him scorned her, He restored her reputation with the statement that when the good news would be proclaimed, what she had done in that moment would become the new memory of her.

When we observe others through this same lens, it breaks us our tendency to allow behavior to determine value and instead allows love to determine value. This creates a freedom within us to continue to honor, even if what the other person does is displeasing to us. Think of the certain loved one in your life whose lifestyle is less than honorable, and ask the Lord to change the way you see them and value them.

## Communicate honor

Honor goes both ways. As parents, we should look for ways to honor our children, even when correcting them. I remember when my daughter, Lauren, 6 at the time, got into a spat with her friend on the way home. I attempted to settle it, but in doing so, I scolded my daughter and spoke gently to the other girl. While it seemed to resolve the situation, a moment later the Lord inquired of me, "Did you notice that you honored a stranger and dishonored your daughter?" My heart sank as I glanced at Lauren's dejected expression in the rear

view mirror.

I was reminded of the admonition in *2 Timothy 2:25 NKJV* that "in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth." To truly communicate honor, it must be imbedded in our communication at all times.

If we want correction to stick and repentance to be the result, we must approach others in a spirit of humility and not a spirit offense. As parents, we choose words and methods void of shame, keeping honor in tact. Think about this the next time you have to deal with negative behavior and see if it produces better results.

This holiday season will present many social gatherings that provide great opportunities for us to be generous in sharing the gift of honor. It's the perfect gift to give and the one time you will be excited if they return or even re-gift. 🌸



COLLEEN ROUSE  
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Colleen, along with her husband, Dennis, is co-founder and lead pastor of Victory World Church in Atlanta. Victory is a multicultural church of more than 115 nations and 13,000 attendees on a weekly basis. Colleen is heavily involved in leadership development with a specific focus on supporting women in the workplace. Her dedication to supporting career women led her to form THRIVE, an organization focused on empowering women in the workplace to thrive as disciples in every area of life.

# Bring JOY to your World

Ten ways to avoid holiday stress and savor the moments as they are

By Tammy Turnage

The south Mississippi heat was almost unbearable as I searched for an old wooden headboard from the storage room. It was one of those humid days of summer when, if you walked out the back door, the humid “steam” would hit you before your foot touched the pavement.

Even though the heat index had to be close to 100 degrees outside, I headed out and opened the old, creaky storage room door. The item I needed was past a pile of boxes in the back of the room. Last year, I spent an entire day organizing boxes we store out here. Pulling each box out, I had sorted items, tossed what wasn’t needed, donated bags of items to charity and put everything back in place.

Yet, somehow during the year, we had randomly tossed a “few” items in here and quickly it all needed organizing again. Moving a large storage bin aside, I glanced to the left and saw more than a dozen boxes neatly piled almost to the ceiling. Attached to each was a white index card revealing the contents: Christmas Village, Lights, Ornaments, Gift Boxes, Bows and Ribbon, to name a few.

I moved a few fall wreaths to the side and the thought quickly occurred to me, “It won’t be long before I’ll be in here to pulling all the Christmas boxes out to start decorating our home.” Just the thought of it made me tired.

We all seem to have an “ideal Christmas” pictured in our minds every time the calendar turns to December. It’s the one that we personally visualize, complete

with the “perfect” dinner, decorations and gifts. Then, we seem to struggle every day until Dec. 25 to make that “ideal Christmas” happen for our families. Just think of the stress that causes.

But year after year, I seem to do it. And in the past, trying to make our family’s “perfect” Christmas has left me longing for the 26th so I could collapse, pack up the decorations and finally rest. But in doing so, I’ve missed the joy. I’ve missed the joy of just being together; of decorating a “not so perfect” Christmas tree; of just putting a little homemade soup in the crockpot, grabbing my favorite hot cocoa and sitting by the fire just to enjoy the blessings of the present moment and the past year.

I remember a few years ago when we were living in a camper in our driveway because Hurricane Katrina had poured more than 5 feet of water into our home.

I remember when my in-laws’ house was destroyed by fire and they didn’t have a home for Christmas.

I remember how precious those Christmases were, and those are the Christmases my family most likely remembers the most. They were full of joy because all we really had was each other, and we found that’s all we needed. Yes, our joy was right there in the middle of it all.

You see, we have to look for the joy. We have to stop the craziness and the feeling that everything has to be “perfect” and look for it. The joy is there—sometimes in the smile on a neighbor’s face when we drop off a basket of homemade cookies, or in the music from little

“JOY is found when we look for it, pray for it.”

children learning their first Christmas hymn and singing it as loud as they can.

And joy is found during the beautiful candlelight Christmas Eve services at our churches, in reading the Christmas story to our families on Christmas Eve and in cozy moments wrapped up in an old quilt and watching a favorite Christmas movie by the fire.

Remember, very few people that have a “perfect Christmas.” We all struggle and face challenges, but it’s often in how we look at those challenges that makes such a difference. My Dad, at almost 90 years old and facing difficult health issues, gave me some amazing advice. He said, “I’ve learned to be happy wherever I am.”

I’ve always tried to remember that: to be happy wherever I am. No matter what is going on around me, to look for the joy.

Joy is found when we look for it, pray for it. And often it seems it’s the most beautiful and precious joy of all when everything around us is falling apart. We can be happy because we have an indescribable joy of knowing when the Christmas lights are packed away for another year. And we know that true joy is found not in having a “perfect” Christmas but in the hearts of those we love and in our Savior, whose birth we celebrate. This year, I wish you the most joyous Christmas ever. It’s there. You just have to look for it!

Ten tips for a joyous holiday

1. Pray for joy all season long. Pray to have patience and joy despite the endless tasks we have during November and December.
2. Make a list and check it over and over again. Write everything down and do as many things as you can early. Procrastination can cause unwelcome stress.
3. Don’t set unrealistic expectations for yourself or your family.
4. Sing Christmas carols. It’s really fun to sing while you are driving around town during the holiday season.

Keep a few Christmas CD’s in your car and sing with at your next traffic light.

5. Try something different this year. Who says things have to stay the same? Sometimes making “new traditions” brings fresh excitement to the Christmas season. Read local newspapers for upcoming concerts and events in your town and try something new.

6. Look around. Where can you volunteer this season? Use your time and talents to serve your church and community. It brings tremendous joy to others and to our hearts, too.

7. Spread Christmas joy all season long. Keep a few bags of homemade cookies in your car to share with others while you are running errands. Small, thoughtful gifts mean so much.

8. Remember, nothing is more important than those you love. Spend time with them.

9. When things don’t go as planned, laugh. Find humor in the midst of the season. It will cheer you up, and everyone else, too.

10. And most important of all, remember the most beautiful joy of all is found in Christ. Keep your heart, mind and Christmas focused on Him, and you will find the most joyous Christmas of all. 🌸



TAMMY TURNAGE  
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Tammy began studying the piano at 3 years of age and holds a degree in piano performance. A pianist, organist and vocalist, she has performed as a solo artist as well as in leading roles in theater productions. Tammy has recorded two piano CD’s, Classical Praise and Christmas Blessings. Making their home on the Mississippi Coast for over 30 years, Tammy and husband Kendall love spending time with daughters Maria, Kristen and son-in-law, Brian, and their two grandchildren, Summerlyn and Easton. Follow Tammy on her blog, Pinterest, Facebook and Twitter.

# Finding Thanksgiving

Take time to slow down and count your blessings

By Angela Wells

**T**he human experience is filled with ups and downs. Sometimes, it seems that engraved within God's design is the promise of times of great joy and days of lingering pain.

Our good times give us such great joy that we often forget that challenges can be so great and we lose sight of all the good and wonderful things God has given us.

No matter what, ladies, I believe that God wants us to prosper, to be blessed and to find abundant joy in every season and event in our lives. One of my favorite scriptures in the Word of God is *Jeremiah 29:11*, where God reminds us that despite the many disappointments in our lives, His desires for us prosperity and success. God wants us to have hope in our lives and in our future.

The holidays are such a festive, fun time with family and friends. As we enter this Thanksgiving and Christmas season, it is a great time for us to reflect on the many things that have taken place during the year. Some of us will be reminded that it was a time of filled

answered prayers and joy, while others may think of the challenges of a hard-fought with hope that things will get better.

As I look back just a few short years ago, I remember so clearly the year my precious grandmother Madea passed away only a week before Thanksgiving after a long battle with Alzheimer's and dementia. My grandmother was the matriarch and heart of my family.

Only a few years earlier, my father passed away of lung cancer right before Christmas. I can remember the pain, the heartache and the unending tears that flowed. But today, all of these years later, I feel differently. Today, I am thankful.

When the holiday season comes around, do I still cry sometimes and miss them tremendously? Absolutely, but now they are tears of joy as I remember the good times, the laughter and lessons that I have learned.

Today, I am thankful that I found Thanksgiving. God's desire for us is to have hope in our future; His



plan for us really is good, not evil. You see, in the sting of your disappointment and pain it is so important to look to the One that you can put your hope in. God never promised life would be perfect, but He did know that every experience would help us grow in our ability to find Thanksgiving in each season of our lives.

Ladies, we know that the holiday season brings fun, and the hustle and bustle begins. LOL. To find Thanksgiving, it is important that we first take the time to slow down. Slowing down allows us to reflect on the blessings in our lives and to find the things for which we are thankful.

I can assure you that even when life challenges you, taking time to find and remember what you're thankful for will also help you find joy. You can also take some time to journal your thoughts, have a meaningful conversation with a loved one or simply sit and be still. I remember God's word to Moses in one of his most challenging times, to "Be still and know that I am God."

When you take the time to be still, you also find God.

This holiday season, slow down and enjoy Thanksgiving and Christmas with family and friends and cherish each moment with them. You will find that God's grace is always amazing and His grace is always there right when you need it most.

Take the time to find Thanksgiving again. 🌸



ANGELA WELLS

Angela is a compassionate artist who radiates with the joy of the. Her love of life, joyful personality and enthusiasm to pursue her passion is contagious. Angela is an powerful vocalist who sings with emotion and a confident conviction. She has a genuine heart to sing and create music that not only entertains, but

moves your soul. Her music is powerful and uplifting with a message of hope, faith and endurance. Her heart's desire is to encourage others and inspire them to live life with their whole heart.



# 'Tis the season to *Love & Embrace*

Put family relationships at the center of your celebration

*By Joneal Kirby*

Families don't always get along, and the holiday seasons can test the best of us. God's way for our lives is to be filled with the attributes of His Spirit. For Christ-followers, to please Him, we are to be constantly working out our faith to match our talk with our walk. There's no better way to do that than in our family relationships. In-laws seem to get the roughest deal. I had my own to deal with.

In the early years of my marriage, my father-in-law worked for an overseas oil company. He traveled the world with my mother-in-law in tow. During our holidays, we often met them in some exotic country. Traveling to Indonesia, Singapore or Europe thrilled this sheltered Southern gal, who had never been more than a few hundred miles from home. That was something I had in common with my mother-in-law, ML.

ML was a small-town Southerner with no foreign travel experience until she and my father-in-law moved overseas. She embraced this new lifestyle with the eagerness of a child headed to Disneyworld. As a new bride with so many first-time challenges, I was amazed to see

how ML handled each new situation with joy, wonder and excitement. I was fascinated with the way she engaged with the locals, including many who didn't speak English.

She entertained her husband's business associates as easily as if she were on her home turf but without the conveniences of her stateside life. This wasn't Kansas, Toto. She shopped in open-air markets where local varieties of peculiar produce and unusual meats were displayed. Fish and other seafood of all kinds created unfamiliar aromas.

In this new world, I watched ML, and she didn't flinch. She handled it with good humor, pointing and nodding and shaking her head, using English and some foreign-sounding babble. That was how she selected the food to buy.

Seeing my in-laws live a foreign lifestyle taught me much about them. I saw how willingly they adjusted to the major events and the daily details. It wasn't easy, but ML made it look exciting, fun and enjoyable. As a brand new wife adjusting to married life, I watched my mother-

“It is the perfect season to be grateful and acknowledge the families we’ve been given and ones we’ve been born into”.

in-law be flexible, work to learn new things, and change and adapt.

That gave me a fresh view of my challenges as a wife. I saw her enthusiastic support and encouraging spirit of her husband. I observed her her struggles and knew of the success she felt when overcoming many of them; it was a joy to begin to love her and be loved by her. I knew I had her as both my friend and my mentor. This was the early development of a relationship that has never stopped.

Families are often separated by geography. But sometimes the separation can be because of internal family problems. One thing I learned from my own mother: Regardless of the distance or the reasons for it, you work hard to be together. Both she and Dad taught us that family closeness is a wonderful way to practice your faith. In a close family, you have opportunities to test the belief that God can help you handle anything.

Is peace possible? With God, the answer is yes. Does love mend all? Through Christ, we know it does. Do you need patience, forgiveness, mercy and grace? That’s what makes all the closeness possible.

As adults now with our own children and grandchildren, we embrace the understanding of each other’s choices and differences. Seriously, if we were going to get that turkey in the oven, decorate the tree or make the family talent show happen, we definitely have to learn to get along. The kitchen time helped us practice peace, love and patience.

Because of Mom’s blessing of putting her faith in us and in God at the center of our family, we could do it. We learned what love, grace and mercy truly look like. We live close. We work together. We raise our children

together. It’s a choice we have made. Our choices were to set aside immaturity and selfishness. We chose not to give in to unforgiving attitudes. Instead we chose to embrace love, compassion and understanding with one another.

*Romans 12:18* says, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” We are in a season of gratitude and joy. It’s a season for family. It is the perfect season to be grateful and acknowledge the families we’ve been given and ones we’ve been born into. This season is the time to pass on the tradition of “getting along” to your children and grandchildren.

I no longer have the blessing of being with Dad, who died in 2008, or my father-in-law, who passed in 2003. I miss them both so much. I am grateful my mother and my mother-in-law are still teaching, mentoring and loving my family and me. I know that I won’t have them forever. It’s time to embrace those you are related to.

The families of your blood as well as the family in faith are big reasons to celebrate—together. You know this is true: The world will know we belong to Christ best when we love one another as he loves us. This is the reason Christ came to earth, so that we may love God and one another with all our hearts. 🌸



**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.



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# GRACE AT WORK

Open your heart to the gift that can transform your life

By Laine Lawson Craft

When I think about the greatest gifts I've ever received, one stands out—the gift of grace. This might seem like a funny answer, but it wasn't until I was 38 years old that I knew what grace was. Interestingly, the grace in my life has changed and increased along with my journey, proving that it keeps giving year after year.

The dictionary defines grace as “a manifestation of favor, especially by a superior.” My first experience with grace came at a critical point in my life. I had been a church-going, God-believing person all of my life, but going through the motions was not cutting it anymore.

From this desperate place in my life I cried out to God, “God, if you are for real you have got to show up soon!” The very next Sunday, we visited a new church and the entire sermon was on the meaning of grace in a believer's life. That was the beginning of my search into the deepest places of my soul.

This grace taught me that God loved me just where I was. It didn't matter to God how much sin I was in or how much sin I had already lived in. All that mattered was that God loved me so deeply that He gave His only Son to save me from all of my sin.

You see, until this point in my life, I lived in self-condemnation. I thought there was no way I would ever be worthy enough to get to heaven. But God! He let me get so desperate for His presence that I left a church I had attended all my life to hear the amazing good news about grace.

My first experience of grace was learning that Jesus died for all of my sins—past, present and future. All I had to do was to love Him and receive His loving sacrifice—His death upon a cross for the exchange of my eternal life. Grace showed that He loved me as a sinner.

As I started to walk in the real path of a Christ follower, I began to see God's grace at work. He was giving me the ability to do things that I know I could not

do without Him in my life. I was able to reach others in a deeper place and with greater knowledge on how to help them. This was God's grace on my life. He was the ability far beyond anything I could accomplish on my own.

This revelation revealed the truth that I was lacking most of my life. Not only did the creator of the universe hand-knit me and form me into who I am, He loved me relentlessly and was giving me His abilities through my obedience and submission.

I am now learning about a new level of grace that lives deep within me. On most days, I feel like a shell that carries the spirit that God created me to be. I have truly surrendered my life and allowed God to move through me. I am not my own anymore.

God moves through me to reach the hurting, the lost, the desperate and the needy. It is through His power and knowledge that I travel each step throughout my journey. Sure, I mess up. Certainly, I sin every day. But that is what's so amazing about God's grace. As long as we seek Him first and surrender our will to Him daily, He will give us all the grace that is required and even into overflow. WHOA! What an incredible God we serve!

He knew we were sinners; that's why His only Son was born and died. And now we all have eternal life. All of this is available to us if we will just receive His gift of grace today. You won't receive any other gift that will keep giving to you every day, every month, for years to come. 🌸



**LAINA LAWSON CRAFT**  
Laine wears many hats: author; founder of *WHOA-women*; publisher of *Living Lively with Laine WHOAwomen* magazine; and host of an upcoming television program. Her passion is to bring broken parts back to life through the process of being, doing, and having a lively and abundant life. Laine and husband Steve have been married for more than 29 years and are blessed to have two sons and a daughter.

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