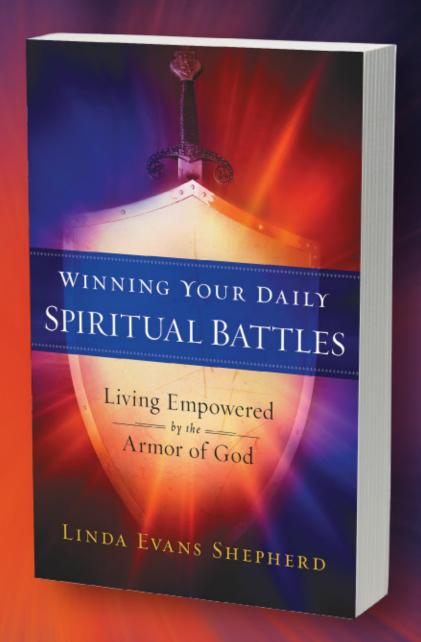
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2017 • VOL. 3, ISSUE 6 **LEADINGHEARTS.COM** 2016 Evangelical Press Cerrociation Cuvard of Vierit FOR CHRISTIAN WOMEN **THINGS TO KNOW** stage **CREATI** Kings, Kingdoms & the Steampunk Gospel

(cover photo: rebecca friedlander)

Don't keep losing the same battles.

God has provided the full armor.

It's time to learn how to use it.



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FROM THE PUBLISHER? AND THE STORY CONTINUES...

WHEN I WAS A KID, MY
FAMILY SPECIALIZED IN
SHARING THE FUNNY STORIES
OF OUR DAY AS WELL AS THE
STORIES OF OUR PAST AND

FAMILY HISTORY. My brother and I loved hearing the story of how my mom and dad met through Dad's letters sent to her from the Korean War front.

My uncle was my dad's best army buddy, and when Uncle Lenard showed Dad a photo of my beautiful mother, Dad wasted no time in writing her a letter. My brother and I loved the part of the story about how my mother wrote him back, then thought better of it. She wadded up her letter and threw it into the trash declaring, "To heck with men."

It was my grandmother and aunt who rescued the letter, smoothed it out, and sent it off to Dad without telling Mom what they'd done. And that was the beginning of a beautiful romance that resulted in the existence of us!

Every night, the storytelling continued. My brother and I would sit at the dinner table and beg our dad to tell us the adventures of his childhood, including tales of how his family's goat would butt through their screen door and chase him and his brothers out of their house.

We'd laugh uncontrollably when he'd get to the part where the goat would jump on the table and eat their dinner. Just imagine! After each telling, the two of us would plead, "Dad, tell us again."

My mom would spend hours with us kids, turning



the pages of a beautifully illustrated children's Bible, telling us the stories of God and His people.

I can remember looking at the painting of Moses holding God's Ten Commandments over his head, just before he smashed them to bits. I'd wonder how these people Moses had led into the desert from Egypt could have been so wicked to worship a golden calf instead of God Jehovah.

The Bible became vividly real to me as my mother would weave through the stories of the Word. There I met and understood why Baby Jesus was born in a manger and then grew up to die on the old rugged cross for my sins.

Today, I still love stories. I love to hear the stories of my friends, especially the stories of how God provided in a time of need or met them in a difficulty with a miracle.

And to think that each life is a story unto itself. That's why I'm so grateful that you are taking the time to read our stories in our **Storytellers** issue, so that the truths we've learned can become intertwined with your story and understanding of all things true.

That's what it's about, sharing the stories of our lives with one another. Then we can marvel, draw from each other's strengths, and grow in truth and understanding of our lives and our lives with God.

Thank you for joining us. Turn the page to continue the story. S?

Love,

LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD PUBLISHER, LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE

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EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN FOR LEADERSHIP

LEADING HEARTS?

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017

VOL. 3, ISSUE 6

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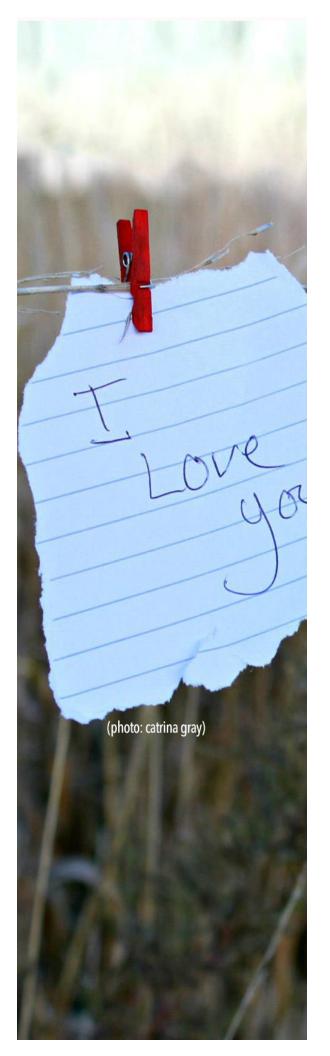


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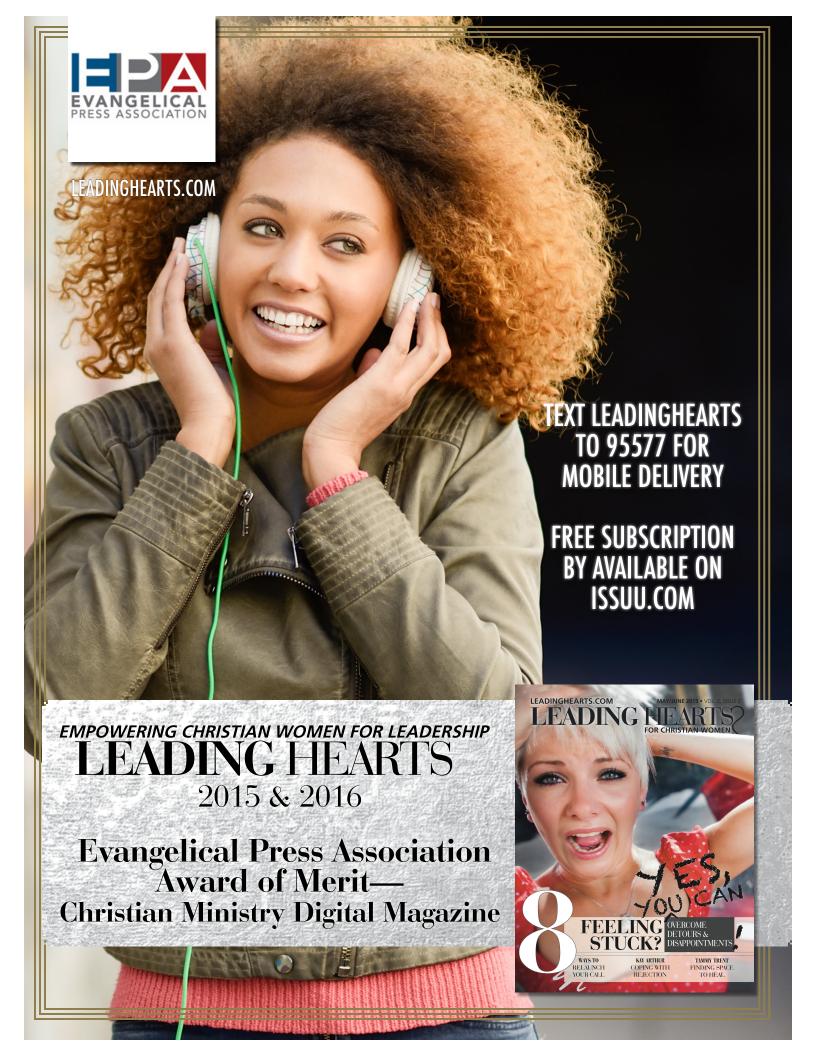
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FROM THE EDITOR? WRAPPED IN HIS FEATHERS

ONE OF THE GREATEST
MIRACLES IN MY DAD'S LIFE
HAPPENED IN THE LAST FEW
MONTHS THAT HE WAS ON

THIS EARTH. In one day, one heart attack took him from the place of being a very strong 71-year-old, 6'3" man to a man who was in need of constant care. This painful journey lasted for a year.

In fact, it was almost surreal seeing his legs that never healed because of diabetes complications. He slept in his "lifting recliner" because he could barely breathe.

He would cry out to Mom to intercede for him in the middle of the night. Cry out for his healing that never came this side of heaven.

On one of his most desperate days, he sat in the backyard of his house trying to pull every ounce of sunlight in to make his heavy mind feel better.

He closed his eyes and uttered this prayer: "God, are you still with me, in all this pain? Please let me know that You are still by my side."

He opened his eyes to find that a white dove had landed in the nearby tree. All of a sudden, a feeling of peace surrounded him.

Then he said, "God, if this is You, could You bring that dove down to me?"

As soon as he spoke the words, that white bird flew down to the seat beside him and walked right up into his palm.

That bird stayed in my father's hands until Dad released him to fly back up into the tree.

Then Dad prayed again, "God, could you let that bird stay here until Joyce comes home from work?"



Hours later, when my mother arrived, that bird again flew down from that tree. This time, it landed on the fence beside her, then gently climbed into her hands. Then, when Mom finally released it, the dove returned to the same spot, right in the tree.

Even though that prayer didn't take away Dad's pain or change his situation, over the course of the next week, the bird stayed perched in the tree. However in this dark pit of his final days, before a glorious healing, Dad felt the Comforter was there, in the midst of the excruciating struggles to his final place of complete rest. And even in that extended time of pain, God provided relational healing for our family.

This story reinforces the truth of Psalm 91:4: "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings, you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart" (NIV).

This is the kind of story I want to pass down to my children and my children's children, not just because it's a miracle from the past. And not just because it reminds us that God doesn't always answer prayers the way we would like.

It is a reminder that the God Who brought something as simple as a dove—the wrap of His feathers—into the middle of my father's pain, is the caring, attentive, comforting Father we serve.

I pray this issue of **Leading Hearts** helps you remember the stories of God's love and faithfulness, which in the very same way He lavishly pours out for you. And no matter how many generations pass, His story never changes. **S**

Peace!

AMBER WEIGAND-BUCKLEY EDITOR, LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE



There's no doubt that Christians are raising their game in the filmmaking industry, as their work is being credited with drawing family-friendly conscious patrons back to the box office.

The buzz surrounding this summer's romantic comedy, "The Matchbreaker," penned by Leading Hearts contributor Torry Martin and Marshal Younger and produced and directed by The Vetter Brothers, is no exception.

When an idealistic romantic (Wesley Elder) gets fired from his day job, he is offered a job by a girl's disapproving parents to break her up with her boyfriend. This "one-time" gig spreads through word-of-mouth, and he ends up becoming a professional match-breaker. However, he begins to fall for one of his clients (Christina Grimmie) and must balance his secret job with his love life.



Torry gave LH editor Amber Weigand-Buckley the exclusive on seeing the story come to life on the silver screen.



Q: As a single guy, where did you glean inspiration to co-pen the script for "The Matchbreaker?"

A: Filmmaker Caleb Vetter had approached my writing partner Marshal Younger and me with an already existing premise that he wanted us develop into a feature length screenplay as a work-for-hire. Thankfully, inspiration comes easy when you have a great premise to work with, which we did, and when you have a great writing partner like Marshal to work with, which I do! It's also amazing how much a paycheck inspired us both. Ha!

Q: How many years of scriptwriting did you have under your belt before the release of this movie?

A: Marshal and I started writing together over 15 years ago at Focus on the Family when we were both writing for the radio drama "Adventures in Odyssey." We then decided to form a screenwriting partnership and started working on screenplays together 9 years ago. We now have 11 completed screenplays that we've written together. I feel very fortunate to be able to write with someone as immensely talented as Marshal Younger.

Q: Tell me about the character you played— What did you do to plan for the role or did you know you were writing it for yourself?

A: Marshal and I knew in advance that I'd be playing the role of 'Tully' the landlord so we had a lot of fun writing that character. Personality wise, Tully and I are very similar which made playing the role easy for me. In fact, the only thing I did to "immerse" myself in the role was to bathe before filming.

Q: Is there anything in the making of "The Matchbreaker" film, besides making a film

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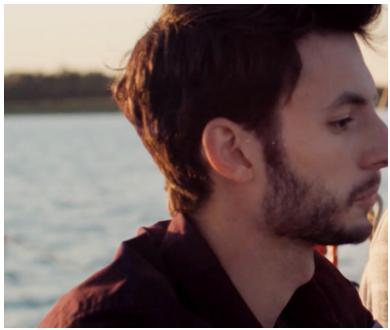
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released in theaters, that you were able to cross off "your bucket list?"

A: Just having the opportunity to work with Caleb and Cory Vetter alone was something I had on my bucket list. I love those two brothers. They're two incredibly talented filmmakers that I admire and believe in. Those guys are going far in the future!

Q: Tell me about working with the Vetter Brothers who brought the script to life. Were there moments that you thought tweaks they made weren't going to work and then were amazed how that collaborative process made the film better?

A: The sailboat scene where Veronica threatens to jump in the water to show her love for Ethan had the potential to be tricky. That scene was already funny just the way it was written, but the way it was directed added even more to the humor. The way it was acted by the talented Ashley Shelton (who played Veronica)



brought it to an even higher level. That gesture she uses when she tells Ethan they are soul mates is pure collaborative genius. It made a scene that was already funny even funnier.

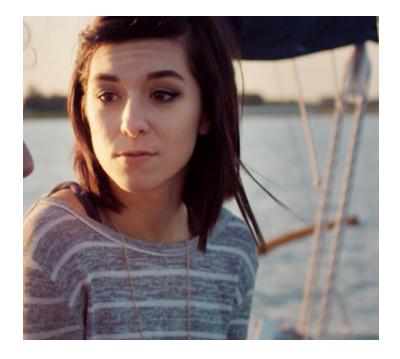
Q: Before the movie was released, we tragically lost your lead actress, music artist Christina Grimmie (who placed third in the season six of NBC's "The Voice"). Could you share a thought or inspiration or something she "left with you" that you think about to this day?

A: I only had one scene with Christina, so I only worked with her for one day. I think what impressed me most on that one day, though, was seeing how real her faith was and how she was so completely relatable and down to earth. In between shots she'd be making jokes or happily discussing anything from God to music to video games.

She was very respectful of others, very humble and very real. I think what she "left with me" was this feeling that what you have in your heart is far more important that what you have on your resume and that your character is far more important than your career.



{10.}



Q: Can you give me your perspective on why reaching both Christian and mainstream audience is important to you?

A: I think if you look at all of the screenplays that Marshal and I have written together, whether it be mainstream or faith-based, you'll see one unifier in all of them. They all teach something about God's love.

Sometimes that lesson is subtle and more quietly stated. Sometimes it's more blatant, depending on the genre and the selected audience. But we don't write with an agenda that we're hoping to push, we write it because that just comes out of us naturally because of who God is in us. His love lives in us. How can it not naturally flow out in everything we do?

Q: What one thing about love and

relationships do you hope your audience takes away from this movie?

A: We live in a society where if things are not perfect, people often give up. But love is never perfect. There are always bumps, flaws, and difficulties. Love goes beyond all of that and sees the good in people. Ultimately, this is an optimistic film, and that's where it gets its charm.

Q: What do you think is the best tip you can give someone on how to craft a great story that can translate to film?

A: Once you have a terrific premise, just fill the story up with characters that you would want to hang out with, that make you laugh, or that remind you of fascinating people that you know. S?

Get "The Matchbreaker" on DVD at www.thematchbreakermovie.com.









BY KAREN PORTER @KARENPORTER www.karenporter.com AS AN EDITOR AND PROFESSIONAL COACH FOR WRITERS AND SPEAKERS AND LEADERS, I HAVE DISCOVERED THAT STORY IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS.

Readers and listeners and followers love story. The books that impact lives are filled with story—and I don't mean fiction only. Nonfiction is successful when the reader hears the author's true stories and

sees how the principle or concept of the book has worked in the everyday events of the author's life.

Speakers, who are powerful and entertaining and create life-change in their audiences, use story to create rapport and connection with the listeners. And corporations, who draw in new customers and clients, do it by telling the story of the product or service they provide.

Story is the key to success for you as a leader. In fact, you may not be able to communicate your vision or goals without story.

Anthony de Mello said, "A lost coin is found by means of a candle; the deepest truth is found by means of a story." A story makes the information, facts, and figures come alive and infuses enthusiasm and excitement. If those you lead can see the results through a story, they will pursue the plan with passion.

Story is also one of the keys to healing. When my mother passed away, my grief was profound, but when the family sat around the table and told stories about our life with her, our mourning turned to joy as we remembered her laughter and kindnesses.

Isak Dinesen said, "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them." Telling the story of a hurtful or sad situation will put it into perspective and give you a new sense of direction for facing the future. Story breathes life into grief, pain, and burdens.

If you want to revitalize your ministry leadership, learn to communicate through story by first learning the structure of a story.

Every good story contains three basic elements:

- **Normal** describe the situation as it was.
- **Conflict** describe what interrupted the normal situation.
- **New Normal** describe the resolution of the conflict.

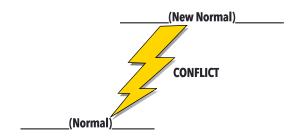
If you get this basic structure into your story, it will be a success. In the Bible, the story found in Mark 5 is a perfect example. Jesus went to the area known as the Gadarenes. There he found a man who "lived in the burial caves and could no longer be restrained, even with a chain" (Mark 5:3, NLT).

The man's "normal" was violent and harmful. Jesus arrived and confronted the evil spirits who demonized the man. The "conflict" in the story is the appearance of Jesus on the scene.

At the end of the story, the man's "new normal" is beautifully described: he was "sitting there fully clothed and perfectly sane" (Mark 5:15b, NLT).

The story structure is perfect, and we are inspired and amazed by Jesus.

Using story techniques will inspire and motivate and challenge others.



tips for GREAT story telling:

- Inject emotion. (How did you feel?)
- Keep the sequence in order. (Tell the story clearly so the audience can follow what happened.)
- **Prune the story.** (Take out the extra details that don't really matter to the main story.)
- Use pauses and facial expressions. (Pauses are powerful, and facial expressions become part of the story, too.) S?

5 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU TAKE YOUR STORY TO THE STAGE

TO THE OTHER SIDE OF PAIN AND BACK AGAIN



BY LINDA GOLDFARB @LINDAGOLDFARB

www.LivePowerfullyNow.org

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'LIFE EBBS AND FLOWS AS WE ENTER INTO SEASONS OF CHAOS, TRAGEDY, SUFFERING, AND HURT. Writers and speakers make a living out of sharing the seasons of life they've experienced. Yet as with everything, our talks have a time and season as well.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens... A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance... A time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away... A time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak. Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4, 7 NIV

You receive the phone call, the email, the online inquiry, "Are you available to speak on divorce to our singles-again group?"

You silently pray, Thank You, Lord, for Your provision. At once, panic hits!

"Wait... am I ready? Of course I'm ready to share. I've been seeking a sign from God for at least thirty days now. I need to get back out there. He won't give me anything I can't handle. Yes! I am ready!"

Did those words make you giggle or cringe?

As a divorce survivor, I'm familiar with the emotional pain single-again women can experience. Yet, through the years I've discovered, it's not our sisterhood-of-pain I need to share. It's not the commonality-of-scars they need to bond with. It's the hope-of-healing that only comes in our journey to the other side of pain.

The other side of pain is where God meets us, sits with us, and gently unravels our knots-of-suffering to the point where we not only see the light-of-hope, we experience His healing.

As a daughter of God, who has a ministry of speaking, I've experienced letting go, when my story is not audience ready. Letting go of the opportunity, fearing loss of income, loss of exposure, or loss of being relevant in the midst of my suffering.

I realize I'm singing to the choir and I know my pain may not be your pain. But our pain is understood by Jehovah-Rapha - The God Who Heals. Under His covering we step out and share our story of pain.

Here are some conditions to consider before answering that request to speak. Let's call them,

Keys to Communicating Your Story About _____ (fill in your pain).

Key 1 - Your heart has experienced healing — If you're not able to get through your story without breaking down into "uncontrollable" tears, you need more time. Shedding tears while sharing hurt is natural. Uncontrollable breakdowns distract from your message.

Key 2 - Your story has an element of humor — Sharing a difficult story can weigh an audience down. Be sure to insert appropriate uplifting or humorous aspects of your story. This allows your audience to take a breath.

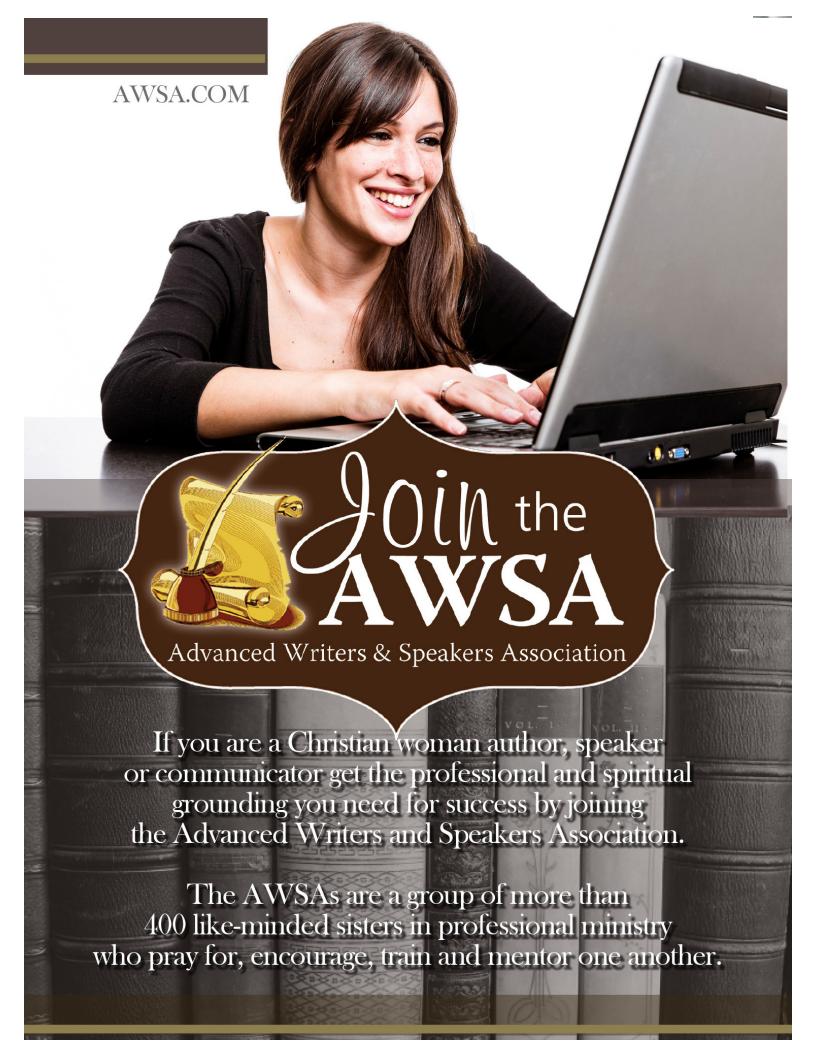
Key 3 - Your story connects to each personality — Speakers can always relate to those most like them. Sharing a difficult topic in a way that everyone can identify with makes your story memorable.

Key 4 - Your story offers instruction —

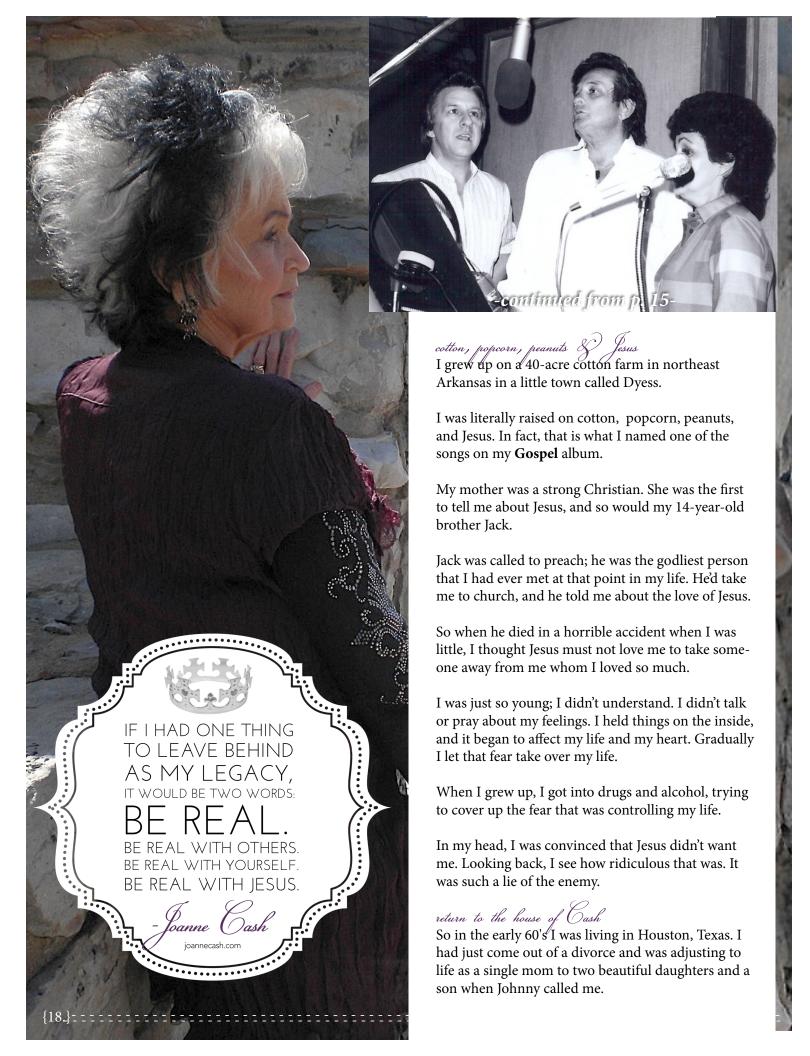
Action steps help our audience to take what we've shared and apply it with forward motion. Those who relate to your pain need to get up and move towards healing.

Key 5 - Your story reveals God's

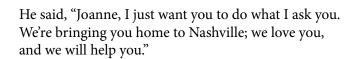
healing — Hope is the most important element when sharing stories of pain. Scripture... God's promises. Share those you used during your journey to the other side of pain and back again. S?











He told me to put what we needed in the car and that he would send a moving van. I didn't fully realize the extent of love and help they were extending to me.

It was during that time I began working for Johnny in his office—he had named it "The House of Cash." In the Bible you can read about the House of Joseph or the House of Paul—he called his office the House of Cash.

While I was there, one of my co-workers kept asking me to go to church. I later found out that she was a pastor's wife. In my head, I knew she didn't know my secret — that God didn't want me. So I didn't accept her invitation.

Shortly after that, we were flying back from a Cash family reunion in southern Arkansas when we ran into a hailstorm. There were five of us and the pilot in a one-engine, six-seater plane. It looked like we weren't going to make it.

It was one of the most horrible experiences I ever remember; we all thought we were going to die.

In that moment I cried out to God: "If You will love me and show me how to find You, I will give You all the rest of the days of my life." All of a sudden, like a jolt, we came out into the sunshine, and I knew Someone had heard my prayer.

A short time later the pilot landed the plane safely in a suburb of Nashville. When he landed, everyone was



silent. Johnny's face was as white as chalk, and so was the pilot's. When we got out of the plane, the pilot walked around it—it looked as if it had been beaten with a hammer. He shook his head and walked away.

So, the very next morning — Sunday, October 18, 1970 — I was at the church before the pastor's wife.

That day I received Christ. I can't even explain the feeling I felt. I felt a warmth from my feet all the way to the tips of my fingers. No one had to tell me I was saved and delivered. I was free. Since that day I haven't had drugs or a drop of alcohol.

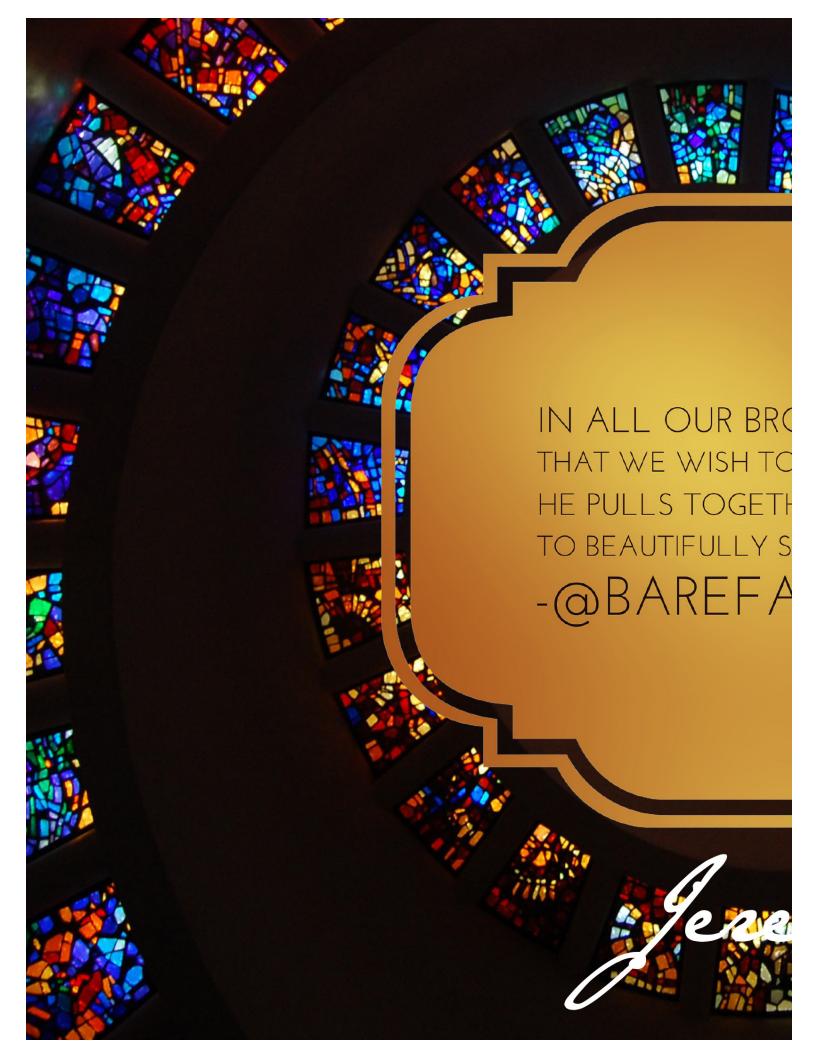
The youth leader in the service that Sunday was Harry Yates. This December we have spent 45 wonderful years married, and together we pastor the Nashville Cowboy Church..

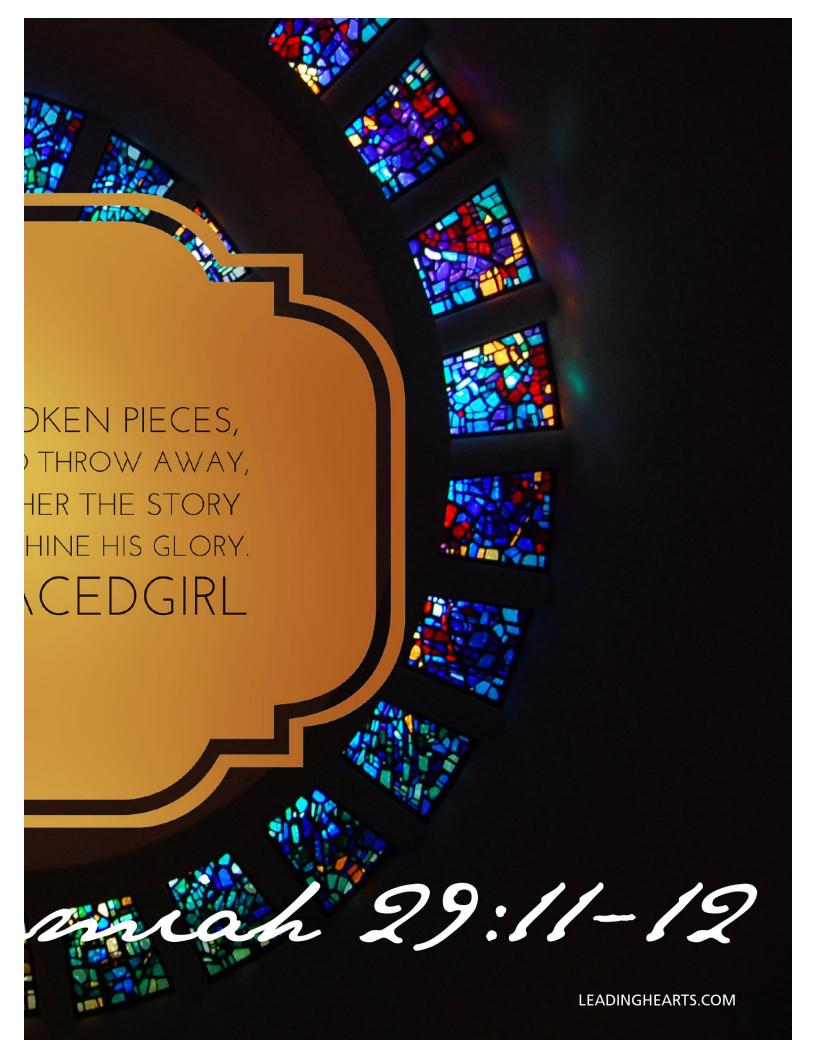
i am not Ashamed

Every Tuesday night for 16 years I've held a concert in the Opryland area. I start my concert by raising my hand and saying, "I am Joanne Cash; I'm saved, and I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ." I share it everywhere I go.

As Christians, we can be so afraid of offending others but not afraid of offending Jesus. Remember: **Stand up and Be Bold for Jesus**. S?

You can find Joanne's music and her feature-length documentary, "I Do Believe," and info about the Nashville Cowboy Church at her website: www.Joannecash.com. Every Sunday at 10 a.m. CST tune into www.NashvilleCowboychurch.com to watch the live stream of services.







THIS, OUR 37TH YEAR OF MARRIAGE, HAS BEEN BY FAR THE MOST CHALLENGING, INTENSE, AND EXHAUSTING YEAR OF OUR MARRIAGE — YET WE ARE ENDING THIS CALENDAR YEAR MORE IN LOVE.

We have endured some of the tough circumstances that have pulled other couples apart, yet for us, these storms pulled us together, like young lovers sharing one umbrella, cuddled up and cozy.

So in a spirit of authentic disclosure, some of the challenging circumstances have included:

- —a financial downturn caused primarily by extensive time spent caring for two aging parents (with a 20hour round trip each time we went to lend aid),
- —selling our home,
- —downsizing (selling, or donating 90 percent of our belongings), and
- —a move to a new community to run our ministry from a city much nearer Mom and Dad.

Many ask us, "Why not move them in with you, into your home?" For many families, this is a viable option. My mother-in-law, however, has struggled with various emotional and mental problems over our entire marriage. Currently, she is so gripped by fear that she refuses to leave her home. The crisis of elder care grew slowly and consistently over the years, so

we saw the storm clouds gathering.

This was the year of the "El Niño" downpour of crisis after crisis. Then came all the hard work of preparing our home for sale, selling our home (in and out of escrow three times), and finally packing and moving—all while running our ministry.

So how did we manage to write a love story in the middle of a life hurricane?

Tie Up for the Tornado: In the movie "Twister," the two lead characters are trying to outrun a tornado. They soon realize that will be impossible, so they dash into a pump house, tie themselves to each other with a rope, and then tie the rope to a pipe that goes deep into the ground. Securely attached to this deeply rooted pipe, they ride out the storm and live to tell about it.

I believe this is the advice reflected in Ecclesiastes 4:12, "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (NIV).

To weave our lives with God, we have a ministry and marriage meeting every Monday. (You can download our meeting worksheet free at **www.love-wise.com**.) We select a verse to study, then personalize it and pray for each other and our family. This format helps us memorize key truths that build and bless our marriage no matter what life sends our way. This weekly meeting binds our hearts to each other and gives us a unity of purpose.

Stack Up Sandbags of Sensitivity: Years ago we pastored a church located in a floodway. In an epic

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-continued from p. 23-

storm, we had to rally a troop of volunteers to fill and stack sandbags into a waist-high levy that protected the church.

In our book **The Secret Language of Successful Couples**, we share that the core need of a man is **SUCCESS** and the core need of a woman is **SECURITY**. This past year, we filled each other's sandbags. I focused on helping Bill succeed and feel successful; he focused on helping me feel secure.

He shored up our life when almost everything in my world was changing—including me, a menopause mama! One area of common ground that helped both of us was to work out and exercise together. Those happy endorphins released to give Bill a boost of energy to get more done, and that hormone release elevated my mood, so things didn't feel so bleak.

Board Up the Windows to Your Soul:

When billows roll, Satan loves to push that storm surge right into your heart, mind, and soul. If he can get lies in the cracks or through the windows and doors of your life and cause dissension, he has gained the foothold to press that wedge further and further between you and your mate.

A year ago, Bill came to me with the need to move. In my heart, I wanted to go and be of more help to my in-laws. Then the sheer volume of work—the MOUNTAIN of tasks—overwhelmed me and an inner anger began to build. I am glad I had memorized

verses like:

"I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth..." (Psalm 39:1, NIV).

I held my tongue and prayed God would scrub my mind of these negative thoughts that were so ugly I never wanted to say them—I didn't even want to be thinking them! God was faithful to "cleanse [me] from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

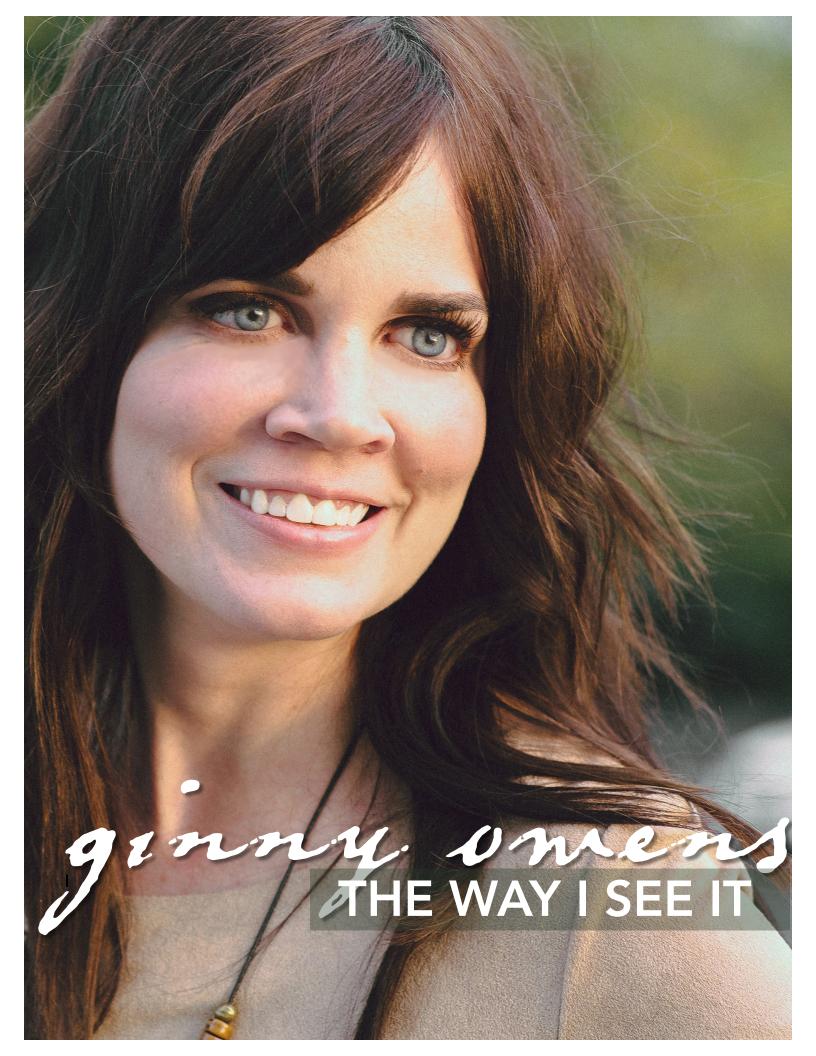
To better battle the evil one, I would begin each morning putting on the armor of God.

"Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:11, NIV).

Bill and I also prayed together each day claiming Christ's victory through His shed blood on the cross. We booted Satan out of our life and love by hammering down the boards of Scripture over our the windows of our hearts.

So next time the spiritual weather looks like a squall is on the horizon, look at the preparations you would make in a real hurricane or tropical storm, and follow similar steps in your spiritual life. When you do, you move your life under God's umbrella of care:

"Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield" (Psalm 5:12, NIV).



"KNOWN FOR HER
BEAUTIFUL ACOUSTIC
SOUND, POWERFUL
LYRICS AND CHRISTIAN
AND MAINSTREAM
SUCCESS, THE AWARDWINNING SINGERSONGWRITER GINNY
OWENS HAS MINISTERED
WITH HER SONGS FOR
NEARLY 20 YEARS.

However, with the release of her latest album, **Love be the Loudest**, Ginny's fans will be pleasantly surprised by its upbeat, pop influence and sound. As one who loves to try new things, Ginny says there were a few inspirations.

"As a musician, there's some amount of evolution that happens with every record because as you are writing, you are going to naturally grow and head some slightly new direction," she says.

A lover of pop music, she notes that probably like many, her workouts regularly include a vast array of music styles, new releases and top 40 hits. "I love the interesting rhythms, melodies and sound colors that I'm hearing," Ginny says. "But there comes a point where my brain does not need to handle any more

of this music. It's saying things that I don't think are good to fill my mind with and seems to value things that I don't value or think in a different way."

So being the songwriter she is, Ginny decided to challenge herself to write lyrics that have integrity, share a story, and partner those lyrics with fun, lighthearted melodies.

Ginny wrote and worked with six different producers, and collaborated with other artists, including Mike Weaver, Ellie Holcomb, Meredith Andrews, and All Sons & Daughters.

"Part of what is fun about music is just experimenting—playing in the creative sandbox and seeing what happens," she says. "It feels a little like wearing someone else's hat, but it's also very much me. It's what I love, and I'm glad I finally got to marry two things that I love—lyrics that say something and fun, pop music and melodies."

Also, new on the scene for Ginny: blogging. If you haven't already, you can see a lighter side of Ginny at ginnyowens.com/#blog. Among the topics, Ginny started doing a fun video series called "How I See It." "It has just been how I live life or do things as a blind person," she says. "I've been kind of amazed by the dialogue that spurred on. It really began to teach me how people respond to vulnerability by sharing themselves. I also began to realize how many questions people had that I hadn't answered."

Ginny's fans and followers know her story is not without struggle. She shares the difficulties of living with blindness, but with recent trials that could have taken her career or her life, again her faith prevailed.

"I just remember saying a couple of times to the Lord in prayer, 'I really want to learn more about surrender. I want to know what that means to trust you completely," she says. "I've learned that can be quite a scary prayer at times. A whole world of things can begin to unfold after praying that kind of prayer."

While touring during Christmas 2015, Ginny began to have a lot of pain and trouble singing. "I actually went to one vocal coach who said, 'You might have to have a shot in your vocal chords, and you may

-continued on p. 29-

BOCK FUN MACAZINE

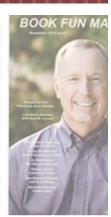
Where Book Fun Begins

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"One of the things that God has really pressed on my heart is that we don't have that much time. Our purpose here on earth is to let people know of heaven, to bring some heaven to earth and to communicate His love to the people around us, whatever that takes," Ginny says. "Often that might take some brokenness on our part to really hear His voice, but that is really what we are on this earth for."



BY JENN TAYLOR @JENNTAYLOR417 PROFILE CONTRIBUTOR



THE MOMS BEHIND THE MISSION

Kelli Stuart and Wendy Speake are on a mission to inspire fellow "Renaissance moms" to reconnect with living "life creative." They recently shared with **LH** how that mission morphed into their new book for creative woman on balancing work, art and family.

Q: What brought the two of you together to write Life Creative?

Kelli: Our story really begins back in 2001. We were both newly married, living in Texas and pursuing careers in the arts. We spent many hours sitting together, dreaming up ways we could partner together in each of our unique creative giftings. Wendy was an actress and writer, and I was a budding novelist and worship leader. We loved spurring each other on in these creative pursuits.

But then life happened. Each of us moved to another state and both were soon expecting our first babies. Between 2003 and 2010, our conversations shifted from art and creativity to motherhood, potty training and the exhaustion of raising small children.

In 2011, we gathered a few of our creative friends together in Northern California for an extended weekend of writing and photography and cooking. For the next five years, we gathered with the same intimate group of women and dared to reawaken the long-sleeping, dormant, deeply creative parts of our lives once again. It was around the table at those creative retreats the idea for Life Creative was born.

Q: Life Creative is a book written to encourage moms, but it is not your average parenting book on raising kids. Tell us about your new book and how its message is different.

Kelli:It's not a how-to, self-help book about raising children, but rather a love letter to artistic mothers. We begin by calling attention to the unique renaissance of art exploding in the world today, fueled in great part by artistic mothers and social media. In this Pinterest age of handcrafted children's parties, Instagram photos of beautifully decorated homes and blogs filled with poetry and prose, clearly we are in the midst of a brand new artistic renaissance — not one born in Italian cathedrals or Harlem jazz clubs, but rather in kitchens, nurseries and living rooms

around the world.

Q: Why do you think a woman feels like she must give up some of her own interests when she becomes a parent?

Wendy: It's simple math really. There are only 24 hours in a day, and children fill up nearly all those little minutes. The leftover spaces are few and far between, and when they present themselves there's another pull: simple self-care! Most moms would also like to lose that baby weight by walking on the elliptical machine out in the garage, and a shower would be a delightful extravagance as well!

Such small space is left over for a woman to indulge in the passions that once fueled her days. For the majority of creative women who become mothers, there are few afternoons at her easel; dinner parties with multiple courses are exchanged for simple suppers feeding baby as her own food gets cold, and slipping out the door to rehearse with the worship band at church requires all the planets aligning.

Q: What encouragement can you offer to the mom in what you describe as "the Dark Ages of motherhood," or for whom the art and creativity seem to have been lost?

Kelli: Hold on, sweet mom. It really is true that the days are long, but the years are short. The children need so much of you in the early years, but days are coming when you'll find yourself with more time in your days, and the inspiration will be there waiting for you. In the meantime, look for ways you can use your artistic gifts right where you are, inside the walls of your home with your children, your most beautiful creations.

Wendy: One of the earliest messages from the book is that everything begins at home, so start there. Color with your children, make up stories as you tuck them under their covers and bring your guitar out into the family room again. When there are opportunities in your local community that fit your skill set, pray about it, talk through it with your husband and see if you might take a few cautious steps beyond the confines of your home.

Q: It's a delicate task to balance art, faith and family. How can moms keep a

balanced perspective when life seems anything but balanced?

Kelli: Wendy and I begin by acknowledging balance is fluid concept! What looks like "balance" for one person will look entirely different for the next. And there's a reason for that — because balance is a myth. Finding balance is a bit like hunting for a unicorn. Maybe it's out there, but nobody has ever actually seen it; they've only heard it exists.

Wendy: Kelli was a friend long before she was a writing partner, and one of the things she has taught me is balance was never meant to be achieved in the course of one 24-hour day. Some days it's all house work; other days we spend the majority of it building Legos© on the floor. There are days for running errands and having play dates when we pick up a frozen pizza for dinner, and other days when we pull away to write, edit photos for a client or sell our wares at a local farmers market. In the midst of this very full life, something akin to balance can be found if you are intentional to love well and be gracious to yourself along the way.

Learn more about Life Creative at www.lifecreative.me, and join their community on Instagram (@lifecreative).



Look for your chance to in a free copy of Life Creative and more by signing up for the Leading Hearts newsletter at leadinghearts.com.



www.PenelopesTeaTime.com

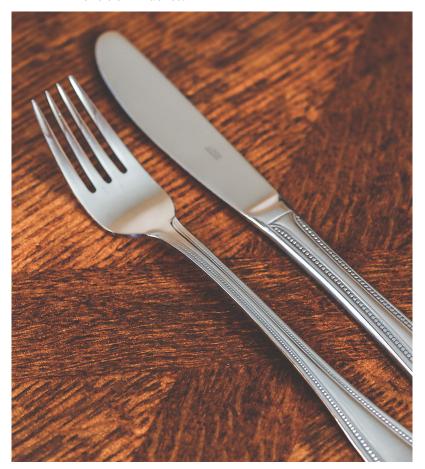
food for thought—

LIFE BYTES?

SHARING our TABLE

I LOVE THE QUOTE "IT'S NOT SO MUCH WHAT'S ON THE TABLE THAT MATTERS, BUT WHO'S IN THE CHAIRS."

Truly, the sharing of a meal is a wonderful and very fundamental experience. Jesus spent a great part of his ministry eating, not only with his disciples, but with sinners. Let's share our home and our table with those women God places in our circle of influence.



Many of my life's accomplishments have been the direct result of my mother's influence as we sat around our kitchen table. She came to the United States after World War II as a war bride and faced many days of loneliness and depression, but she was always very upbeat and positive with our family. We would play games, have tea parties, celebrate birth-days, eat boring British food (usually overcooked), and listen to her outlandish tales!

My father would come in from the fields to the kitchen table for lunch or dinner, and my brothers and I would sit in amazement as my mother told him some really exiting stories. Of course, most were made up, but I will never forget the laughter that erupted when my father finally caught on to the truth! Those are great memories around the table in our kitchen.

When I look back on those days, I wish I had asked my mother more questions. How did a girl educated in London feel about living on a ranch on the plains of South Dakota? How did it feel to not be able to go anywhere, as she didn't know how to drive? How did it feel to be far away from friends and family, with long-distance calls so expensive?

What I do know is she looked past the major distresses and focused on meeting her neighbors. She invited them to meals around that old oak table. She loved people and never failed to put on the kettle for a cup of tea when anyone showed up at our door.

Many years later, I do the same thing. I love people and love to entertain. I also love to hear the stories of their lives. Just last week, six of us from my Bible study group met for coffee at a local mall. We sat around a table and shared our stories.... Wow! What a treasure to hear how God is working in their

lives and the long road many had traveled.

One lady shared that it was very difficult for her to share, but what a joy she felt after telling us her story. If we don't share God's goodness and our stories with others, we miss out on a huge area of joy and blessings. No one can take away or discredit the reality of a changed life in Christ.

"Bless the food before us, the family and friends beside us, and the love between us!"

Not everyone has a pretty story to tell; most of us are either from dysfunctional homes or are part of one now. As I listen to the hearts of the women God brings into my path, I know that there are no "normal" families out there; we are all needy and wanting to find a friend who will support us and pray with us when the times are tough. My kids remind me of one of my favorite sayings: "normal is just a setting on my dryer, not an adjective for families."

"Show hospitality to one another without grumbling." (1 Peter 4:9, ESV)

Many times I have been reluctant to open my home because I am tired or too busy to fix a meal. I want to have everything "just so," and that can become a huge obstacle to serving others. Keep in mind that God gives us an opportunity to share His love and care when we take the time to listen to His voice.

Make room at your table for those who need a place to share. Put on the kettle, make a cup of tea, share a meal, and take time to listen. Hospitality is a gift that offers a place where others can be free to share and not feel pressured to change. It's love in action. It's contagious and shows others we value them and their stories. Hospitality can touch lives unlike any other gift. It goes so much further than we think.

This year, let's be open to His leading, to the opening of our front doors more often. Let's encourage others to listen to those who have a story to tell. Being available to listen to hurting hearts, to share in the joys and victories and cry with those who cry, makes our lives richer and gives us an opportunity to make introductions to the Savior.

Here is a quick and easy recipe for a meal that says "Welcome!" It can be put together at a moment's notice.



Open a package of pre-washed lettuce for a quick salad, and dinner is on the table. I make sure I always have the following ingredients for this soup in my pantry:

Chicken Tortilla Soup

8 cups of chicken broth

1 can of Mexican corn, drained

1 can of black beans, rinsed and drained

2 cans of cooked chicken or 4 cooked chicken breasts, chopped

2 cans of Ro*Tel® tomatoes

1 bunch of green onions chopped

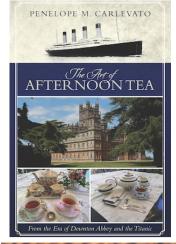
Salt and pepper to taste

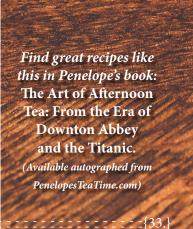
Place all the above into a pan and heat just to boiling, then simmer for 20 minutes.

Ladle into soup bowls and have the following ready to use as garnish to each bowl of soup:

1 bunch of cilantro, choppedTortilla chips1 cup grated Jack cheeseOptional: chopped avocados

Serves 6-8. S?







BY KAREN WHITING @KARENHWHITING

www.KarenWhiting.com

about time-

LIFE BYTES?

R. I. P. E. N. YOUR ILLUSTRATIONS



SO, I HAD THE MAKINGS OF A GREAT ILLUSTRATION.

I had a huge closet in one house that served many functions, but writing about it would have made people jealous and distracted them from a talk until something unusual happened. Hurricane Andrew hit our home and that night my five children and I slept and prayed there. We rejoiced that God gave us an inner sanctuary or protection. In contrast to all the damage, no one paid attention to the size.

The closet illustration became a good element within a story to connect with audiences who faced tragedies.

To help R. I. P. E. N. the elements of your illustrations or stories before you share them, use this checklist:

R—eliable Revelation promotes trust

The facts and information need to be believable. This gives you the authority to continue. Check facts. Even with personal experience, research what happened to others in similar situations.

I—nspiring Illustration engages senses and memoryHave a purpose for the illustration chosen. Make sure you flesh it out with descriptive verbs and action that tap

into the senses so others can engage in the experience.

P—owerful, Passionate Points give purpose to audience

Make sure the illustration fits the point you want to make. I tried using a monsoon and rising water to share the power of water, but it only showed the negative side. When I switched to the story of an ancestor harnessing water to build a gristmill it fit. I even used the water turning wheels in the imagery to inspire people to let prayer turn the wheels of their imagination.

E—ffective Equipment evokes an emotion or response

That prepares people to change or act upon your message. If they laugh or tear up at the right moments you have touched them. When I speak to kids I start with an opening line: I opened my mouth to yell for help, but blood gushed out instead of words. That gets them every time. I stop speaking and they clamor for more. I use that story or my daughter's tongue that needed stitches to teach how to write a good story that grabs attention. Other times, with moms I use a story that touches their hearts that reminds them of their own little ones.

N—aturally Navigate from story to Action

Natural Navigation easily directs your audience to the desired outcome because it flows from the story. Once you tell the story and get a great response, use it to steer your audience. Pull out parts or relate back to an image used to help them understand your main points. Build on the story to help them change or apply a truth in life.

If any element is missing or not fully developed, go back and work on that part. If the story or illustration doesn't fit, look for a better match. Your audience will appreciate a well-polished talk where everything fits together and flows to the hearts and minds of listeners. S?

THE BIG QUESTION



CYNTHIA L. SIMMONS @CYNTHIALSIMMONS

www.clsimmons.com

WHAT A THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUESTION. We need to

be mindful of shysters even today, so we have good reason to consider this. First, let's turn to Charles Colson for his opinion of conspiracies.

In 1972, he and twelve other powerful officials covered up the Watergate break-in. He discovered his participants couldn't keep their activities under wraps even for three weeks. Later, he said if you want to keep something secret, don't tell anyone. In contrast to those politicians who leaked their secrets, the disciples preached Jesus' resurrection for 40 years amidst imprisonment and torture.

Second, let's examine the disciples to see if they were clever organizers who could pull off a scam like this. In Matthew, Jesus gave them the authority to preach and cast out demons, but they weren't always successful. When they

approached Jesus for help with a possessed man, He reproved them for not having faith. Jesus often gave them the same reprimand. Remember how they reacted to a storm on the Sea of Galilee? They panicked and woke Jesus So he could save them from their fear of death.

Also, the disciples argued about who would sit on either side of Jesus in the Kingdom. Not good. Peter, who later became a leader, excelled at messing up. On the Mount

ynthia

of Transfiguration, Peter didn't grasp that Jesus was the focus—the Lamb of God. Caught up in the glory, Peter recommended they build three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Oops! Peter also rebuked the Savior when he predicted his death. On that occasion, Jesus responded with, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23, NIV). What a severe scolding!

After Jesus was arrested, Peter denied any knowledge of the Savior three times. Very sad! In addition, the disciples fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane after Jesus had asked them to watch and pray. Everyone but John fled

during the Crucifixion, huddling together, as if they feared for their lives. The chosen twelve expected Jesus to conquer Rome, so they often missed His spiritual lessons in His parables. Their behavior seemed selfish and weak. Later, they probably hated sharing their failures. However, after the Spirit came at Pentecost, the disciples changed. They preached Jesus' death and resurrection putting their lives in danger. All but one of the disciples died as a martyr, which reinforces their commitment.

I love what the Apostle John wrote shortly before his death: "We have

to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:2-3,

seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim NIV).



Instead of pulling the wool over our eyes, the Apostle John longed to share eternal life with others. Beautiful! I think we can conclude they were honest men. S?



HEALTHTRACKS?

Moderate "perfect" and "normal" are both products of the same mutant gene pool and do not exist in the general population. I have learned that perfection only occurs in print and media. It is a vapor of life that the media vainly tries to capture and preserve lest it quickly slip away. The actors whose lives look so perfect on screen are just that—actors playing a part. Someone tells them how they should feel, what they should say, and how they should respond within the confines of their characters. Who wants to live a confined, pre-scripted life?

Unfortunately, many of us women have written scripts for our own lives in our minds, daily striving to live out the "perfect" life. Those scripts are based on our own preconceived expectations of what we feel is required to be successful, fulfilled, and happy. When our striving fails to produce the results we want, we feel confused because life hasn't followed our scripts. These times of missing the mark lead to disappointment and test our faith—not just our faith in God, but also our faith in our own ability to script our perfect lives.

When you live your life as the lead character in "My Perfect Life," you set yourself up for frustration because you lose the real you within the role you are portraying. You lose your ability to accept your God-given individuality, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. You lose your ability to accept your imperfections as a part of your uniqueness. Once you accept the fact that you are not perfect and will never be perfect, you can then develop the confidence to embrace the freedom to live your best life.

In Pursuit of Excellence

Instead of pursuing an evasive level of perfection, we would save ourselves a lot of disappointment and discouragement if we pursued excellence.

Excellence goes beyond boundaries and limits. It allows for individualized levels of excelling and calls us to go beyond our past experiences into uncharted territory. Excellence calls us into a new place of freedom by surpassing our prior expectations. Ecclesiastes 9:10 encourages us to do whatever work we have before us with all of our strength.

Excellence will require an effort on your part, but the rewards are multi-factorial. It improves your self-

esteem, it builds your self-confidence, it ushers in positive feedback from others, and it leads to success. Excellence is an inward competition with yourself. There are no losers, only winners, since you are the only participant involved. It requires a desire to be better tomorrow as you apply what you have learned today. Excellence is matching your experience with your potential.

Freedom can be scary when you've become locked in bonds. Each new bend in life pulls and stretches you to be open to the possibility of happiness outside of your preplanned course. Can you be happy if you never reach your ideal body weight? Can peace replace guilt when you opt for takeout rather than cooking at home? Can expectation replace anxiety when there is an interruption in your daily schedule?

Living free to enjoy your best life is not synonymous with settling for less. It doesn't mean you should not dream. It is not an excuse to lose your vision or your desires for your future. It is exactly the opposite! It means being open to the possibility that God may have an even better plan than the one you scripted. When you spend your days holding out for everything to be perfect, you may end up with nothing. Let go of that perfectionist mindset and grab hold of the new thing God has for you.

"Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (Isaiah 43:19, ESV).

Breakthrough Steps—

What is something you've always wanted to begin, but have been holding back due to believing you have to get it perfect before you start? Today's a great day to spring forth! Make an outline for that book you've dreamed of writing. Start planning out that mission trip. Organize and pray through your journal entries to see where God may be leading you for your next adventure with Him. S?



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JUST 18 SUMMERS?



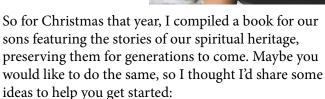
BY MICHELLE S. COX @MICHELLEINSPIRE

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TELL your CHILDREN

MY KIDS
LOVED
HEARING
STORIES
FROM WHEN
I WAS A
LITTLE GIRL.

I've loved sharing those memories with them (and now with my grandchildren), but several years ago, I realized that I hadn't shared all the family spiritual stories with my children—and if something happened to me, those stories would be lost forever.



- Share the stories of when you and your spouse asked Jesus into your hearts. And when your children meet Him, write down your memories of that day.
- Compile the stories from previous generations that have been passed down to you. Do you have



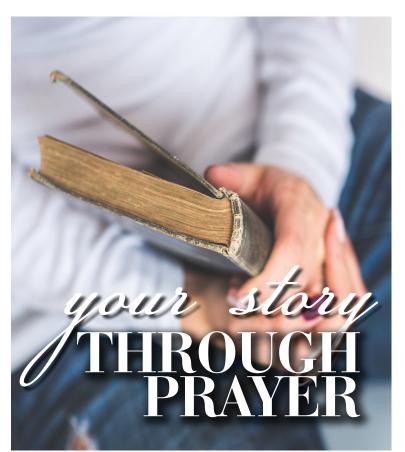
memories of a sweet praying grandmother? Was your great-grandfather involved in starting a church? Preserve those stories for your children and grandchildren.

- Choose a verse of blessing for each of your children. Write it down and explain why you chose that verse.
- Share stories of God's faithfulness. Tell how He provided financially when you didn't have the money to pay your bills. Or write down your memories of when someone in the family was sick and you prayed

desperate prayers that God answered.

• Write down your favorite verses and passages of Scripture. Tell why they are precious to you. My grandfather did that in his Bible, and I can't tell you what a treasure that is to me.

A good life lesson for all of us to remember is that we are writing the stories of our lives by how we live each day. Did we live them for God—and what stories will future generations tell about us someday? S?



THE STORY OF YOUR WALK WITH GOD IS TOLD THROUGH

YOUR WORDS—your words to God and His words back to you. Maybe your story started when you were a youngster learning your first Bible verse, "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Or maybe you first tried to talk to God in your awkward teen years, "Help me make the grade, get the guy, or find a real friend."

Or maybe you've never thought that God cared that much about your tiny life, so you never checked in with Him. Perhaps you were worried that if you tried to talk to God, you'd get the words wrong and make Him your enemy instead of a friend, so you shielded yourself from Him with silence.

Regardless, let me suggest some words that can help you build a beautiful story with God.

Introduce Yourself to God

If you haven't already, start by confessing: Jesus died on the cross for my sins! Lord, I stand before You forgiven for everything, ready to walk with You. I give You my whole life.

PRAYER CIRCLE?

Need a Little Help Here

When you find yourself in trouble, pray the prayer that never fails: Lord, help!

Jesus always hears and always answers with a yes, no, or later. So, take heart and do not become like the man who thought he could control God through his prayers. When he faced disappointments, he lost his faith because he didn't understand that he was God's child, not His boss.

Affirm Your Love and Faith

God is not a genie ready to grant your every wish. Instead, He is the King of Kings, Who happens to love you more than you've ever imagined. He's also your Lord and you should say so: I trust You, Lord. I know You are taking my troubles and turning them into seeds of miracles, even when I don't understand Your ways. You are my Provider, my Comforter, my Lord! Thank You! I praise Your Holy Name!

Find the Real Power

Jesus left His Holy Spirit to dwell in you. His Spirit comes into your life when you first offer Him your whole life through His forgiveness. Don't be afraid or reject His power. Instead, pray the prayer that the South African pastor, Andrew Murray, taught the students at the Moody Bible Institute in the late 1800's: More, more! More Holy Spirit!

Talk to God

Tell God what's on your heart and listen to what He has to say through His Word, the Bible. God's Holy Spirit will empower His Word to guide you, lead you, comfort you, instruct you, and remind you that you are His beloved. Reading God's Word will help you better understand how God's story entwines into your life.

Then the words in God's Word, as well as your words to God, will make a new story—your story, a beautiful story of hope, struggle, and victory in Jesus. —LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD **S**?

Linda is publisher of Leading Hearts Magazine. Her latest book is Winning Your Daily Spiritual Battles from Revel of Baker Publishing Group. GotToPray.com.



I'VE DISCOVERED SOMETHING RATHER DISTURBING ABOUT MYSELF: I'M A SALAD DRESSING WHINY-BABY.

It's not like I'm even all that into salad. I think we all know I'd rather have chocolate. Or coffee. Or chocolate mixed with coffee. But the other day I found myself with a salad that needed something that neither coffee nor chocolate could fix (though it took me several minutes to come to grips with that).

So there I sat trying all the salad dressings. All of them. I even mixed a few—like some sort of mad scientist. The first dressing was too tart. The next one, too sweet. Then the next one was just too... orange.

That's when I figured out that I was not so much a mad scientist. No. I was Goldilocks.

When did I become so dressing-spoiled? It doesn't even comfort me all that much that I'm not the only one. God's chosen people had wandered in the desert for 40 years because they had chosen not to trust the Lord. When they finally stood poised to enter the land of promise, instead of the "now you can all relax" message they might've expected, they got more of a "don't get too spoiled" warning.

"Be careful that you don't forget the LORD your God by failing to keep His command...When you eat and are full, and build beautiful houses to live in, and your herds and flocks grow large, and your silver and gold multiply, and everything else you have increases, be careful that your heart doesn't become proud and you

forget the LORD your God..." (Deuteronomy 8:11-14, HCSB).

In the verses just prior to these, the people are reminded to be diligent in their obedience to God because "the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land...a land of wheat, barley, vines, figs, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey" (Deuteronomy 8:7-8, HCSB).

Olive oil and honey? They were headed into the best salads with all the best dressings.

The entire chapter is full of "remembers" and "don't forgets." And it's not just the Israelites. It's so often in our times of greatest blessing even now that we forget our Lord God is the source of that blessing and that "every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17, HCSB).

Anytime we forget, the blessing loses its sweetness. Pride replaces recognition of His provision and our satisfaction in life sours.

When we catch ourselves going all Goldilocks-y, it should trigger our reminder to...well... "remember."

"You may say to yourself, 'My power and my own ability have gained this wealth for me,' but remember that the LORD your God gives you the power to gain wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17-18, HCSB).

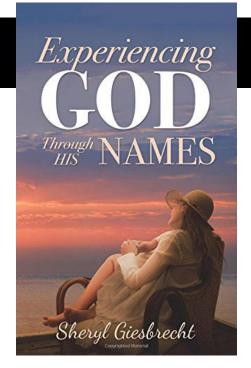
Remembering that every good blessing is from Him helps keep our obnoxious pride in check and r eminds us to lean on Him for everything. It reminds us to love, follow, trust and obey. And that adds blessing upon blessing—whatever we do, wherever we go—whatever is on the menu.

Meanwhile, I hope you'll excuse me. Salad is on the menu again here and I've decided to make my own dressing.

So now it appears I have to travel to a thousand islands. S?



BOOKS TO READ



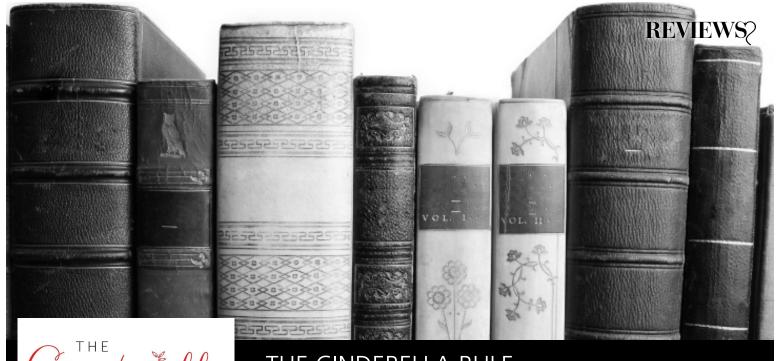
EXPERIENCING GOD THROUGH HIS NAMES by Sheryl Giesbrecht

Use This Book for Fresh Insight about God

Sheryl Giesbrecht teaches readers about 31 of the different names of God in the Bible. These short chapters are full of personal stories combined with deep insights. For example, Day 9 covers Jehovah Jireh or The Lord Will Provide. Giesbrecht writes, "Sometimes it seems God takes His time answering, but God is never late.... God will provide for every need we have, as we submit our needs to Him to meet them in His way, in His time" (page 43). Each chapter concludes with a short yet personal prayer emphasizing this particular name of God.

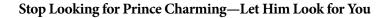
This is an ideal devotional tool to keep in your desk for a quick lunch boost or early in the morning or right before falling asleep. This book is loaded with valuable insights, and I highly recommend **Experiencing God Through His Names**. -W. *Terry Whalin*

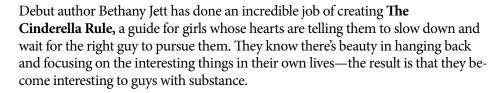
 $\{42.\}$



Cinderella RULE







We don't need more "rules" on dating. We sure don't need more lessons on the "games" that we can play to land a man. We need honesty. Refreshing, real, cleareyed honesty. **The Cinderella Rule** accomplishes this neatly, plus reading it feels a lot like sitting with the author in your favorite coffee shop. This is a comfortable read that allows you to absorb solid truth free from judgment and criticism.

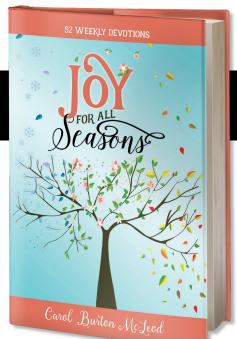
—Laura Anderson Kurk





Carol McLeod knows grief and depression first-hand, but more importantly, she knows the secret to moving through dark valleys where jubilant joy lights up our lives. In both poetic and practical ways,

Joy for All Seasons takes us from despair to delight using a simple plan proven to break our chains of emotional bondage. No matter what season you are in, you will benefit from reading this healing devotiona*l.* — *Anita Agers Brooks*





MUSIC REVIEWS

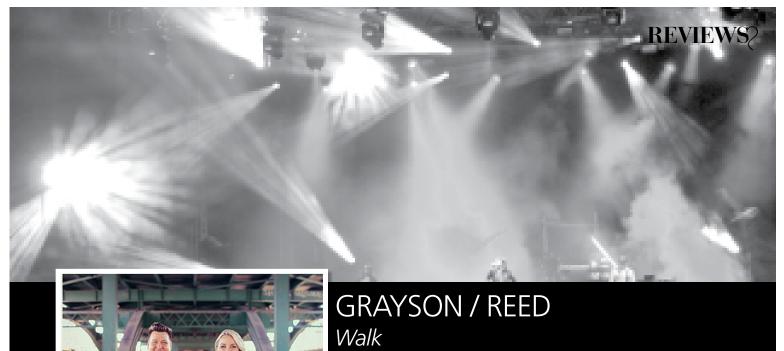


JONATHAN CAIN What God Wants To Hear

Jonathan Cain, keyboardist and rhythm guitarist for the band Journey, known for their popular hit "Don't Stop Believin," has released **What God Wants to Hear,** his first as a Christian solo artist. Jonathan, who still tours with Journey, created the album out of a return to the faith he had as a young boy before a tragic school fire in the third grade and other life challenges put his beliefs on rocky ground.

"Only God can take a mess and turn it into a message, a test into a testimony, a trial into a triumph, a victim into victory," Jonathan says.

The message, encased in a light pop-rock sound sometimes reminiscent of the '80s, goes beyond upbeat and positive to faith-filled and worshipful. This artist's beliefs are unmistakable, and with songs like the title track, "Deeper than Deep," "Rush Into Me," and more, it's evident Jonathan Cain wants to share the soul-saving truth with others.



The best part of Grayson Reed's first Centricity Music EP, Walk, is the highly successful radio single "Fight for You." This married vocal duo, formed of the union of Mike Grayson (Mikeschair) and Molly Reed (City Harbor), has put real marriage truth on the table in a way that resonates with listeners. You may hear yes! going off in your head as some of your own thoughts are echoed through the lyrics of the song.

"It's so unfortunate, but in today's culture, the days that it doesn't look like a movie—which are most days—people are like, 'Oh, this isn't right. We'll just run away. Let's not do this. I don't want to deal with it," Molly says. "But the reality of love and a God-ordained marriage is you

fight through those moments together, and you fight for that person and for their heart."

The other tracks are musically and vocally strong as well, as Mike and Molly's voices blend smoothly. This couple's decision to combine their God-given gifts to share hope with others seems promising so far.

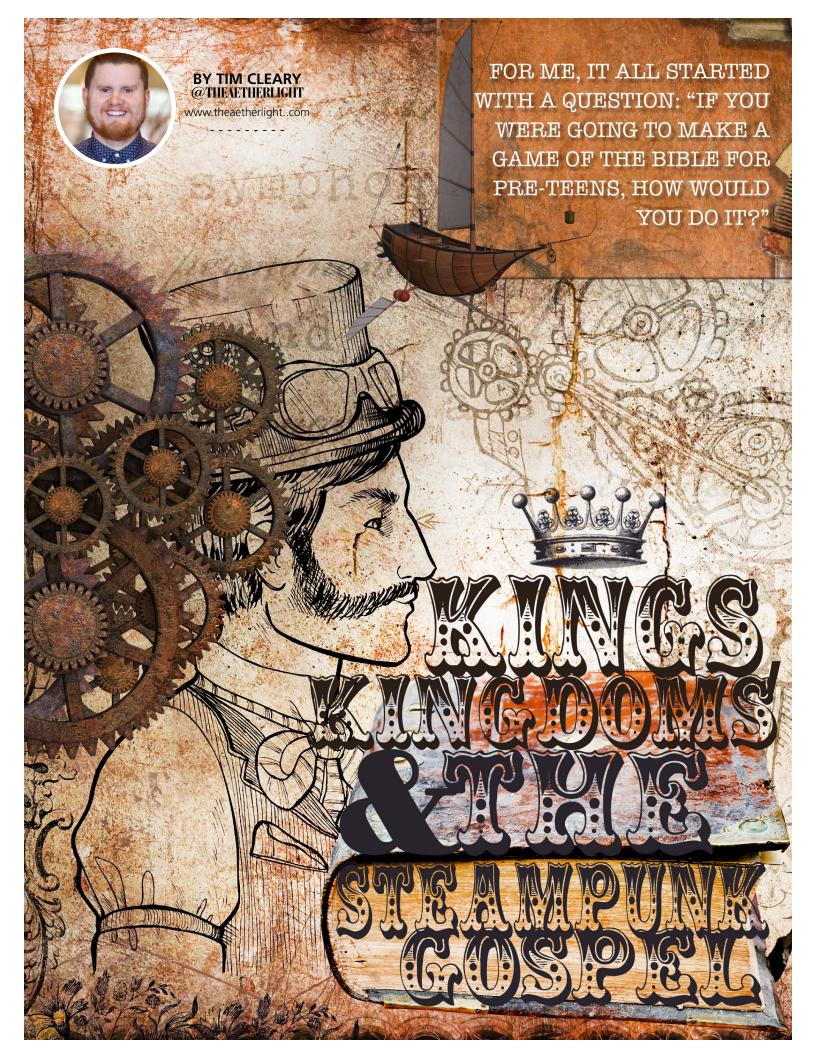


CHRIS QUILALA Split the Sky

Jesus Culture worship pastor Chris Quilala has released his debut solo album, Split the Sky, titled from a line in the second track "After My Heart."

Some people may find the album similar to other good worship music they have heard, and may like it for the effect music in this category can have. It can create a positive mindset for approaching the day— and even life itself. It has a way of centering the attitude and attention on God, bringing the listener to a place of peace to release some stress and find a sense of calm.

The unique instrumentation of these 12 worship tracks, described as "retro pop" and "futuristic soundscapes," are worth a listen — especially for those who figure there's no such thing as too much good worship music.





The answer was not nearly as simple as I'd have liked. As the world builder for **The Aetherlight** (www.theaetherlight..com), it began with story. It always begins with story. But that story had to carefully balance its theology and theatrics to take young people on a swashbuckling spiritual adventure. And I didn't know how to get there.

But I knew how to start.

It started with Lewis, with Tolkien (though he never meant for it to)—great imagery of a kingdom that was, is and forever will be made alive through fantasy. The perceived fiction somehow made the reality more approachable.

His writing introduced generations of families to the wonder of Christ through the character of Aslan and the scope of the battle for our souls, the king that would fight for them and the sacrifice that He would make.

But it was time to tell the story in a new way, one born of the old.

After all, the source material hadn't changed, just the people experiencing it and the medium in which it was being experienced.

Like Lewis, I needed an alternative story that would effectively carry the message.

High fantasy was the obvious choice, in the vein of those who went before — but it wasn't the best choice. The best choice, was steampunk.

While still fantasy, steampunk offered us a Victorian wonderland of costumes and color, gentlemen and ladies. It depicts a time when it was cool to be polite and pirates flew steam-powered airships in the sky.

You can imagine what type of adventure we were creating for our audience, one in which they wouldn't be distracted by cloaks, sand and sandals -but drawn in by cloaks, clockworks and pistols.

There is so much intrigue in the original biblical text — by telling it in a new way we could draw that intrigue out, bring it to the foreground.

Our hope is that our stories can be alternative enough to grab attention, yet ancient enough to feel eternal.

The Aetherlight: Chronicles of the Resistance: the game we created to engage preteens in the Bible looks like this:

The story of a Great Engineer, who having formed and filled the land, invites people to come and create within it. Who collaborates with his people in creating. Who himself hammers the final nail, cast with a crimson tint, a sign of the sacrifice that went into its crafting.

A usurper king, the Grand Emperor who, not content with his place as an apprentice, creates a self-propagating technology with no need for collaboration or upkeep. He offers it to the people and they are spellbound — because they are easily fooled. They no longer collaborate or create. The Emperor rules with propaganda and automaton armies. A rule laced in mistruth.

A hooded outlaw, the Scarlet Man, known by his cloak and his dual pistols, seems to be everywhere and nowhere, but he's drawing you into his story. And it is HIS story. You just don't know it yet. In fact, you're still unsure if he can be trusted at all.

You also meet Emily, the first 'breaker' in over 30 years, charged with destruction of all that is not of the Great Engineer and his Aethasia.

Melody, the manic, pixie seamstress who weaves story and song through her garments.

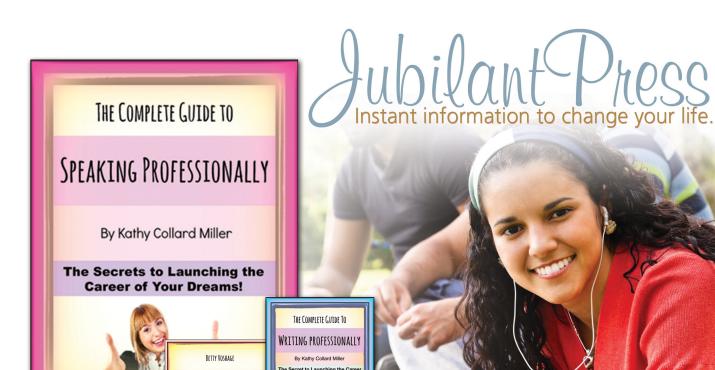
Davion, the boy general, Melody's brother and leader of the Urchins in Evercity and beyond.

Lukas, the bumbling chronicler of the Resistance and medic with an obsession for Engineer tech and the location of his cat.

These are just a snapshot of the characters that shape our story. And by 'our story' I'm referring to **The Aetherlight**, and the source material itself, the Bible.

That story is populated with characters who are intriguing, dynamic, compelling, as indeed are the characters who populate the pages of church history and Christian literature.

I challenge fellow creatives with a passion to translate the stories of the Bible to tell the alternative story, and to tell it well. S?



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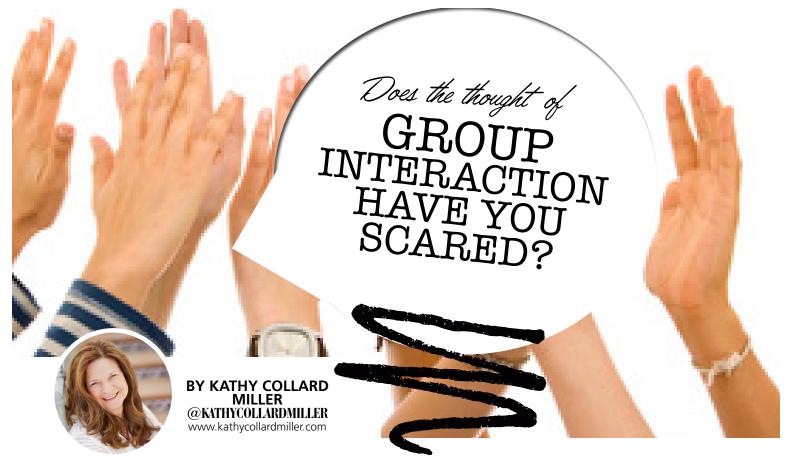
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EARLY IN MY SPEAKING
MINISTRY, I ATTENDED A
SEMINAR AND WAS IMPRESSED
WITH THE SPEAKERS' USE OF
GROUP INTERACTION. But the

thought of me using that tool was terrifying. If I let the audience ask questions, I might not know the answer. Or if I broke them up into small groups, they might never stop talking. Eventually, I stepped out of my comfort zone and invited audience participation.

Here are some advantages:

- 1. Learning takes place best when as many senses as possible are used. When an audience member asks questions or talks with others in a small group, they engage more of their attention.
- **2.** Sharing problems in a small group helps women know they are not alone. Satan loves to keep us bound by our secrets.
- **3.** Allowing questions from the audience or feedback from small group interaction lets us know if the audience is tracking our points.
- **4.** Allowing group discussion gives us a break to possibly reconsider the direction we're taking.
- **5.** Interaction keeps an audience alert, especially after a meal or in the evening.
- **6.** Group discussion bonds the group so they can get

to know each other. I often use a discussion question near the beginning of my talk to break the ice in the group.

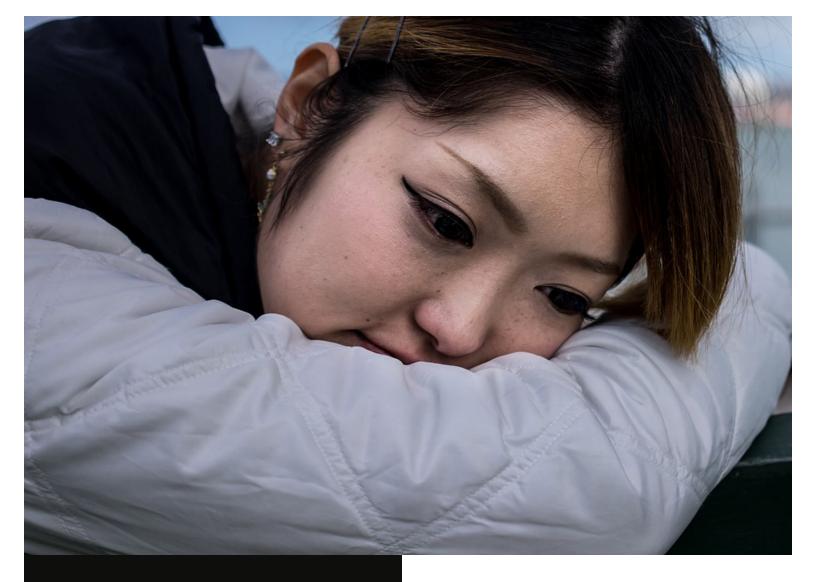
Here are some techniques for group interaction:

- 1. Prepare possible group questions beforehand.
- 2. Ask for their definition of a term you're using.
- **3.** Have groups brainstorm solutions for a problem.
- **4.** Ask for Bible verses that are meaningful to your topic.
- **5.** Ask a question someone can answer immediately. Or ask them to talk with the woman next to them. Or break the group into three to five women. Then ask for the results of their discussion.

The scariest part of involving the audience is getting back their attention. Here's the best technique I've found:

A minute before you want them to stop, tell them they have a minute left. After the minute, say, "If you can hear me, please clap once." One or two will comply; then pause two seconds. "If you can hear me, please clap twice." More will respond; then pause. "If you can hear me, please clap three times." By then they are focused again on you. Insert some humor by saying, "Congratulations! You're just a three-clap group!"

Haven't tried group interaction? I encourage you to try. It might not be as scary as you think. S?



ABOUT OUR SIN,
BUT BY EXPOSING
SKELETONS,
WE WILL FIND THEY

have no muscle TO HURT US ANY LONGER.

— Sharon Norris Elliott

ALL OF US HAVE DONE STUFF OF WHICH WE ARE ASHAMED. WE WERE PROBABLY QUITE GOOD AT PERFORMING THOSE SHAMEFUL DEEDS TOO.

In fact, I bet we spent time planning them, exhausted resources perfecting them, and expended energy performing them.

Thankfully (and hopefully), we put those days behind us once we had a real encounter with God. Still, unfortunately, after we commit ourselves to the Lord, there are times when we still sin, both unintentionally and willingly. We find ourselves in shame again; again in the position to ask for grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Then, in His awesome love, God forgives and restores, encourages us to go and



sin no more, and we are revived and move along our merry way.

Let's be encouraged today, though, not to forget from what and where God has brought us. The Psalmist says, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You" (Psalm 51:12-13, NKJV).

Notice that once his joy is restored and he's again uplifted by God's generous Spirit, he doesn't stop there. He speaks up to teach transgressors about God's ways. What ways are those? God's ways of dealing with sin.

You see, God taught this Psalmist something in what he went through. In the same way, God teaches us. When we sin against Him, He chastises us and lets us suffer some consequences. He wants us to learn and turn. Once we do, our first instinct is

to forget that shame and that pain. Our responsibility, though, is to turn that shame into the story that will teach others about the righteousness, goodness, mercy, and grace of God.

It's fabulous to face a temptation and come out victorious on the other side having resisted it. However, even when we fail our tests, God can get the glory from the testimony of what we've learned. We're not bragging about our sin, but by exposing skeletons, we will find they have no muscle to hurt us any longer.

Like the Psalmist, once restored to joy by God's generous Spirit, teach transgressors what God can do and watch as they are converted to Him. Turn shame into the story that will bring glory to God. Sp



BY SHARON NORRIS ELLIOTT @SANEWRITER

www.LifeThatMatters.net

 $\{51.\}$



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Eleanor Estes

Johann Wyss

N ANCIENT CHRISTIAN TALE

of BEAUTY & BRAVERY



features

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