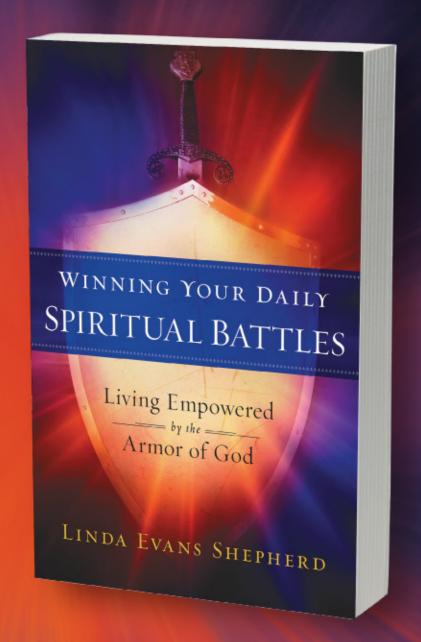


Don't keep losing the same battles.

God has provided the full armor.

It's time to learn how to use it.



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# FROM THE PUBLISHER? WHEN SEASONS CHANGE

I WAS A CHILD IN THE 60S. I
WATCHED MY FAMILY'S BLACK
AND WHITE TELEVISION TO
WITNESS THE BLASTOFF OF
THE FIRST MANNED ROCKET

TO THE MOON: I watched countless five o'clock news accounts of the war in Vietnam. I even remember when the Jesus people (unbathed and barefoot hippies) invaded my starched-collared downtown church.

I also remember the fallout when someone took a photo of our youth group in a prayer circle, with different races holding hands in prayer. I am thankful we've transitioned from that day to this, where the unity of races is encouraged.

But all that to say that I've heard and even believed a lot of the myths popular in the past. Myths about race, war, and God's view of me.

A lot has changed since I was a little girl. I've grown up. I've traveled through many seasons. I've seen myths dispelled by time, truth, love and maturity.

Today is no different. We as a church are entering into a brand new season heralded by surprises at the voting booths and even riots in our streets.

But let me remind everyone that even when values and norms change, even when the political climate feels uncertain, God is still God. He is still on his throne. We can still trust him.

He has given us an assignment to love Him with all of our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves. The list of neighbors I think Jesus was referring to



live, not only in our houses of worship but also in the houses of those who hold political and cultural beliefs quite different from our own.

Jesus's command to love our neighbors never means that we should diminish truth or who we are in Christ; it means we should show kindness, and express patience and peace to all.

It's going to take a lot of love to help us bust through the myths that we as neighbors believe about one another, but with God's help, we can reach across the aisle and barricades to clasp our hands in prayer. For when we love God and our neighbors, even in difficult seasons of change, we are in effect turning on the light of truth for this generation.

If you are praying for revival today, know it will only start when we learn that it is still okay to love our neighbors, even when we don't understand them or even when we feel afraid of them. Don't forget: perfect love casts out fear. So, if you feel afraid, ask God to gift you with a superabundance of His love.

Let's take this opportunity to pray together for this new season.

Dear Lord, turn on the light of your love in our lives so we can learn how to love our neighbors, even when they stand against much of what we believe and hold dear. Teach us how to practice the fruit of the Holy Spirit so that we can operate in an abundance of kindness, patience, and peace. And we also pray that your light of truth will shine on us, our country and our society in a way to help blind eyes see. Bring the fires of revival to this generation. In Jesus's name. Amen. S

Love,

LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD PUBLISHER, LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE

### EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN FOR LEADERSHIP

### **LEADING HEART**

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# CONTRIBERY STATES

8 I AM NOT ASHAMED

12 DON'T GIVE UP...
JUST GIVE IT OVER

15 NIKA MAPLES HUNTING FOR HOPE

22 HEART CONNECTORS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

26 LOVE & THE OUTCOME RECLAIMING JOY IN EVERY DAY

f 42 SEASON'S MEATINGS

49 HOSTESS HOW-TOS FOR WORKING WITH SPEAKERS

50 MEET CHILDREN'S AUTHOR LEE ANN MANCINI

this issue

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### every issue

#REALCHURCHladios

18 IN THE LEAD

**34** LIFEBYTES

**37** THE BIG QUESTION

**38 HEALTH TRACKS** 

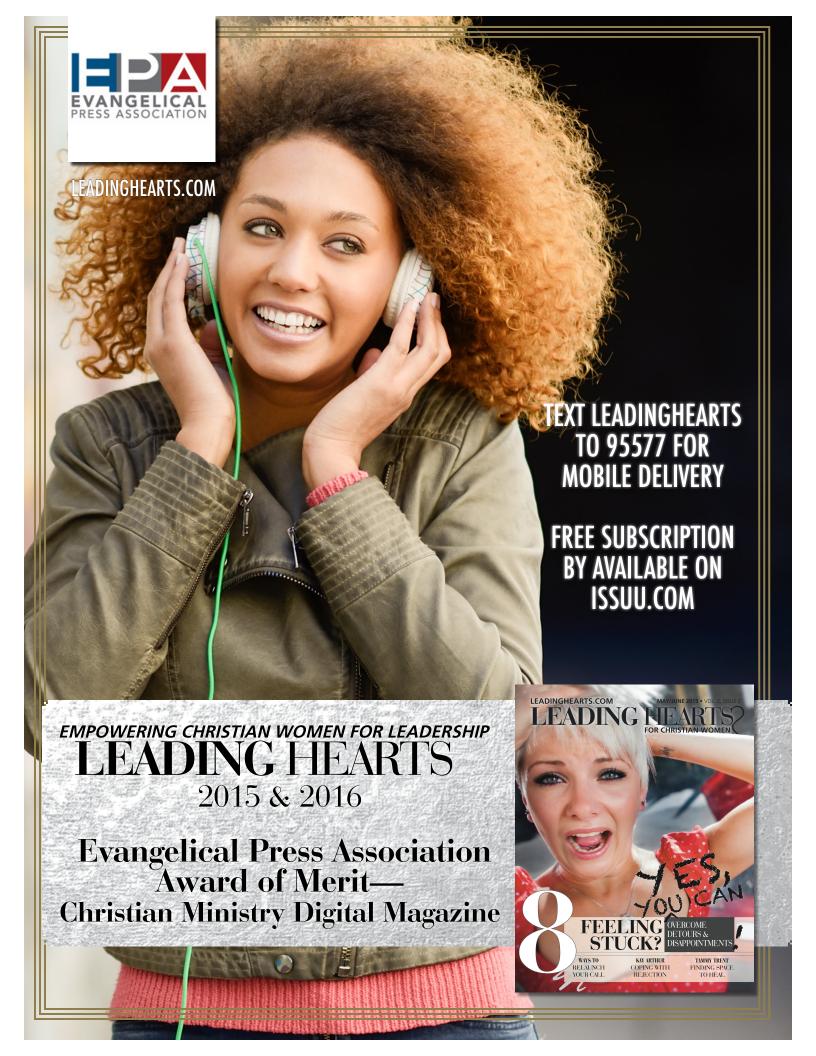
40 JUST 18 SUMMERS

**41 PRAYER CIRCLE** 

**44** REVIEWS

**52** TRUTH

HII DE



# FROM THE EDITOR? THE GRACE IN BROKEN TREES

IN MY NECK OF MISSOURI, WE HAVE A SAYING, IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE WEATHER, DON'T WORRY; IT WILL BE CHANGING TOMORROW.

You can probably tell because in this college town you often catch students wearing shorts with their sandals and socks on snow days.

My favorite part of living in Ozark Mountain Country is the color of fall—but not mid-fall. You know that part of fall when the orange and red are just at the top of the trees, and when the sun hits, you see that red burst next to the green topped by the blast of a blue sky—just. right. there.

But then, weeks later those leaves lose their sunlit ambiance in crinkled dead patches on the ground, and I'm just thinking to myself, "Someone's going to have to clean that up."

Ahhh, in winter when the snow is lightly falling, and you can imagine taking a horse-drawn sleigh through the field reminiscent of Anne Shirley's Avonlea.

Fast forward a month later, and you're angry to see the dirty slush icebergs still covering all the good spaces in the Walmart parking lot.

"Spring, why do those big green leaves have to steal your purple blossoms from my yard? COME ON!"

Do you know what I love about seasons? *They change*.

Do you know what I hate about seasons? *They change.* 

But the biggest blessings in our lives often come in the middle of seasons when we lose our footing or times of complete stuck. Seasons where we have no



other choice but to "pray a prayer of endurance." Because God knows it's completely out of our hands.

It's kind of like the season that brought my part of the country the Infamous Ice Storm of 2007. Most of the people in the city and surrounding area, like us, were without power for at least 14 days. We were suddenly facing something "we didn't sign up for."

I didn't expect our behemoth of an oak tree to come crashing down and take every tree in my garden with it. It created huge craters in my backyard and for a good four years we couldn't walk around back there for fear of breaking our ankles.

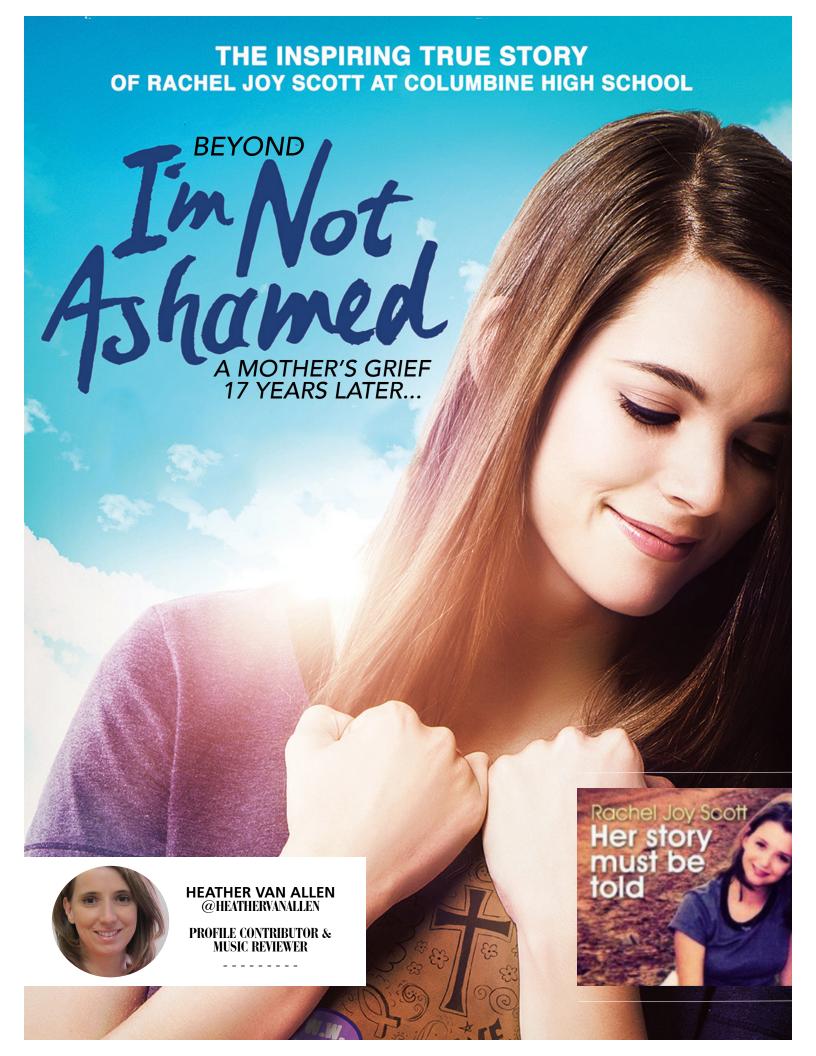
However, one of my greatest treasures came out of the Ice Storm of 2007—and that is is our beautiful Penelope Grace. Cause goodness knows crazy things happen in the struggle for survival.

Her name Penelope Grace: meaning "Weaver/ Faithful" Grace. That is just what she is to us, a sign of God's faithful hold wrapped in grace which is our weather resistant shelter in all seasons—that is our constant above all circumstance.(Be sure to take some time to check out Isaiah 25:4.)

May this issue of **Leading Hearts** give you encouragement in whatever season you find yourself and help you delight in the Lord's faithful love and presence which never "leaves," even when the trees change clothes.

Peace!

AMBER WEIGAND-BUCKLEY EDITOR, LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE



APRIL 20, 1999. RACHEL JOY SCOTT'S LIFE WAS AMONGST THOSE TAKEN ON THAT DARK DAY AT COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL (LITTLETON, COLORADO).



In the midst of deep grief, Beth Nimmo, Rachel's mother holds on to her faith in God and keeps her daughter's memory alive by sharing her story to bring hope to millions of people. Here, Beth shares how, through speaking events, the books, Rachel's Tears and The Journals of Rachel Scott, and now the film "I'm Not Ashamed," God is using Rachel's life to bring light out of the darkness and to bring healing to Beth and her family.

### **Rachel Left Us Her Story**

Her journey is penned in her journals — her writings and drawings. A pattern began to unfold,

showing that God was doing something unique in her heart. She wrote about a sense of a premature death more than once. God was preparing her for that day.

Every day, especially the first few years after Columbine, was a day-by-day existence. I would plan my day, and then wait to see if I would even accomplish anything I wanted to. But I have an awareness of God's presence, and a desire to be tuned in to whatever comes my way and be in a position to respond.

It's been a slow process, but sharing Rachel's story has brought our family healing and hope out of such a dark day. She gave us something worth living for and telling about. People are encouraged to know that there was a young girl, and she wasn't perfect. She wrote about all of her struggles and stuff kids go through —smoking, drinking, relationships — and she wrote about her dreams.

She was the "girl-next-door" trying to live out her faith in a very public way, along with the disappointment and the isolation she felt. Kids still connect to her today. The same pressures exist, and Rachel's story inspires and motivates kids to make life-changing decisions.

Kids who wanted to die who now want to live, girls who were cutters, who had eating disorders, and more, have decided to make life changes for the better. Kids who feel like they're all alone with their faith get the boldness and courage to do what they really want to do, which is live for Jesus.

### A Story That Should Be Told – In Film

I feel like the Lord spoke to my heart years ago that I needed to do a movie. I worked with Benny Proffitt, founder of First Priority. He and I had shared platforms in ministry, and we had the same vision for kids and how Rachel's story could impact a generation for the gospel.

We tried to start a film project a few years ago, but the timing wasn't right. We came back to it again, and we knew it was time to move forward.

-continued on p.10-



continued from p.9-

We started bringing a team together, and one by one we formed a collaboration with people that caught the vision that we had for this movie and committed to helping us make it.

The film can give young people courage to stand up for what they believe in, as they're watching a young girl and identifying with what she's going through and with her heart to serve God. But they need their parents and grandparents to be there for them, too, especially in this culture of social media, which is trying to redefine the individual and the family. My hope is that the film will inspire parents to re-engage.

### We Must Fight for Our Kids

Our voice needs to be the number one voice that they hear. We need to be the safe place they turn to when they get in trouble, or they're having problems. We need to rebuild the family, which is being torn apart so quickly today. I hope parents will come away from the movie understanding what their children are facing in public schools and will decide to engage with their children.

I didn't know what was going on in high school until after Columbine happened. I tried to be a good

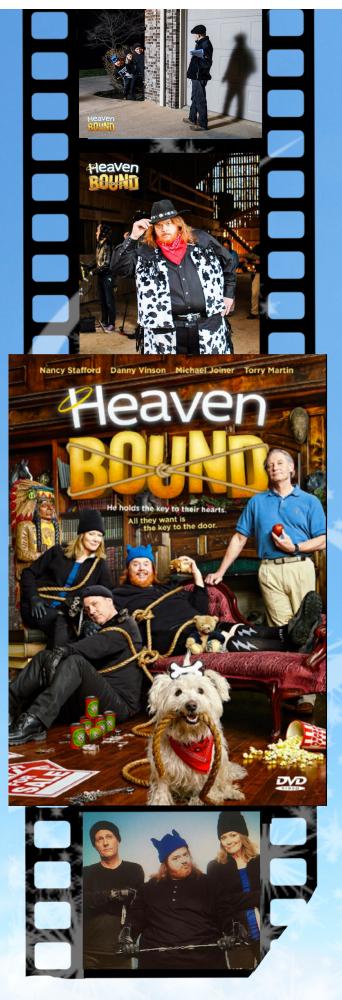
mom, but I was out of touch— so out of touch. I think a lot of parents are in the same place I was, and I got a rude awakening to what was really going on, and it has caused me to be proactive now, to encourage parents to get in there and find out what's going on.

Counteract the influences that you don't want your child to be experiencing by being a voice that's stronger than what they're hearing from everybody else. As parents and grandparents, if we can break down the walls, so children will trust us with their deepest feelings going on inside their hearts, we can be a refuge for them. I think kids want help, but sometimes they're afraid to ask for it.

### In The Lives She Touched - Rachel Lives On

I believe God allowed Rachel for this time and this season. He prepared her for it. He allowed her to be a witness of light and hope coming out of such a dark period of history, personally, but also for our country. Watching people respond to her in such a positive way, and knowing that even after death she's touching so many hearts – it's healing. S?

Watch the trailer and get behind the scenes footage at www.imnotashamedfilm.com





# THE TERM "FAITH-BASED COMEDY" IS OFTEN TREATED

AS AN OXYMORON. It has been all too rare that matters of faith combine with humor and levity. "Heaven Bound" is determined to challenge that notion.

The movie, distributed worldwide by Crown Entertainment, mixes valuable life lessons with hilarity in an off-the-wall premise that will make even the most somber Christian smile.

Broke and desperate, Ted Hoover (Michael Joiner, "Grace Card") and his wife Josie ("Nancy Stafford, "Matlock") plots to steal jewelry belonging to the deceased wife of the town's millionaire, Dr. Drake. Drake played by Danny Vinson, ("Walk the Line") plans on giving the jewelry to charity.

The robbery is fool-proof: break into the house, steal the jewels, and pay Dr. Drake back once they get back on their feet. Josie's slothful and annoying brother, Moochie (Torry Martin, "The Ultimate Legacy"), decides to tag along on the heist.

What they don't count on is Dr. Drake's sudden attack of spiritual conscience. Determined that God is answering his prayer, when Drake catches three burglars, his quest begins to transform their souls.

"Heaven Bound" is penned by Marshal Younger and Torry Martin, two of the writers of the popular audio drama "Adventures in Odyssey" (Focus on the Family), and directed by newcomer Gabe McCauley. The movie, produced by Torry Martin and Adam Drake, also co-stars Victoria Jackson ("Saturday Night Live").



In complete desperation I whispered, "God, I don't know who's right or who's wrong anymore, and it doesn't matter. Please heal my marriage!"

I've heard it said, people seldom change until the pain of staying the same exceeds the pain of change; that's exactly where I was. Desperate! Powerless! Hurting and in great need of God's help!

What happened next saved my marriage! That night, that fight, that singular prayer provided the invitation that ultimately transformed our marriage. Not sure why, but that night, after that fight, God showed up.

Ever experience a moment, where your physical body encountered the spiritual presence of God and a warm, blanket-like, feeling covered you head to toe? Ever experienced a peace that surpassed your human understanding? Has a thought, completely separate of your own, ever filled your mind so succinctly that you knew God spoke? As I lay on the floor, a completely hot mess, the Holy Spirit filled my thoughts with His, asking me three distinct questions:

Julie, will you entrust Greg to Me? Will you allow me to change the things in you that need changed and allow me to change in Greg the things that need changed in him? Will you love Greg as I have loved you?

### Each time I answered, "Yes, Lord."

That night, that fight, that moment alone crying and talking with God would change everything! That night, that fight, that singular encounter began the transformation of our marriage as God revealed...

## The Number 1 Secret to a Thriving Marriage!

"The key to having an incredible marriage hinges on one key element...our complete surrender to God; a surrender that's not reliant on ability or reasoning or even in putting faith in ourselves or our spouse, but a surrender putting our hope and faith in God alone."

When we truly surrender, God superimposes His

character on ours. He changes us. What we were powerless to do, He performs. Where we felt incapable, He shows He is able.

Most everyone wants a thriving marriage. Who wouldn't want intimacy and connection as God intended? But, most of us also struggle to know how to cultivate the environment needed for intimacy and connection to soar. The solution is found in surrender! But, how do we truly surrender to God? Here are a few practical thoughts of how that might look:

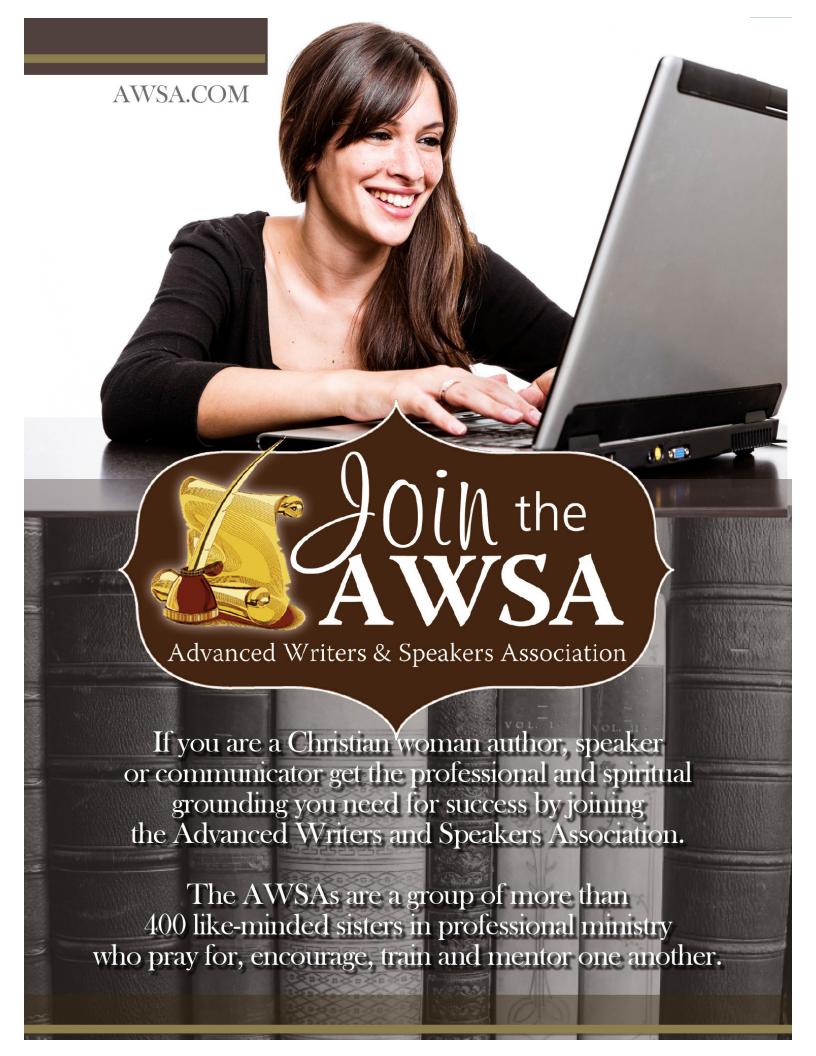
- 1. Invite God to be the center of your relationship. Offer simple prayers from the depths of your soul, like: "I give up. I need your help. Heal my marriage. Fill it with life."
- 2. Invite God's wisdom and to change your thinking. When confrontations arise, avoid giving your first knee jerk response; instead, ask God how you should respond.
- **3. Invite God to be God.** For me, I needed to stop playing my spouse's Holy Spirit. Ask God to change what you need to change and then allow Him to change your spouse where God sees they need to change. The truth is we can't change another person, but we can control our responses. We can submit our needs to God, and honor Him with our obedience.

### 4. Invite God to empower you to love, as Christ loved you. UNCONDITIONALLY!

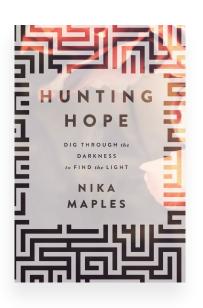
Our spouse won't always deserve our love, but God does. Thus, we do our acts as unto Him. And, when we serve and love, doing our acts of service as unto the Lord, God moves mountains and gives us favor with our spouse.

5. And, here's the BIGGIE. Invite God to fill you with His presence and empower you to prefer your spouse's needs over your own. Every moment, of every day, humbly ask for God's help to throw away the score card of how many times you've served vs. your spouse.

Galatians 6: 8-10 says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."







NIKA MAPLES BECAME A HOPE
HUNTER AFTER SUFFERING A
MASSIVE BRAINSTEM STROKE
THAT LEFT HER QUADRIPLEGIC
IN HER TWENTIES. DOCTORS
WARNED THAT SHE HAD AS
LITTLE AS 48 HOURS TO LIVE,
AND—IF SHE LIVED AT ALL—SHE
WOULD NEVER WALK OR TALK
AGAIN. THERE WAS NO HOPE ON
THE HORIZON. SO NIKA
STARTED TO HUNT FOR IT.

-continued on p. 16-



### -continued from p. 15-

LH: It's difficult to grasp that God allows—or maybe even causes—hard times in our life to accomplish His purposes. Why is this not inconsistent with His character?

First, let me clarify: Just because God allows something to happen doesn't mean He endorses it. Many times, He permits circumstances He hates, things that hurt Him to witness. If God is omniscient, then He knew about your catastrophe before it hit, and if He is omnipotent, then He had to have allowed it to happen.

The key to making peace with this idea is trusting His character. Faithfulness is His character. It is that simple. Sure, I could go on and on about Him based on my experiences. He has been better to me than my words could ever tell. But His character is not defined by our experience. The Book of Revelation says His name is Faithful and True. That's who He is. And because He is faithful and true, He can bring good from anything. If we could see or imagine that good right now, we wouldn't need God; we would be God.

Q: During hard times, why do fear and anxiety find God's people so easily?

God has an enemy who wants to discredit anything He has ever said. Satan will send fear and anxiety to our doorsteps, like terrible houseguests. The only way to combat fear and anxiety is to get to work, reorienting our thoughts around what God says instead of what we say or what the enemy says. Our perspective will change when we expose ourselves to the truth in the Word.

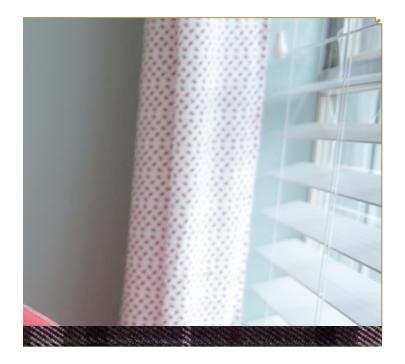
Jesus promises that His peace can flood our hearts in any situation, and in Philippians 4:6-8, He tells us how: We access peace through prayer. Jesus says His peace is a gift, and in John 14:27, He tells from where: We receive peace from the Holy Spirit. Through these verses, we see there are some steps we must take to activate the peace that is freely ours in Christ.

LH: How much does the fear of suffering have to do with control?

One of my favorite quotations is from theologian Alan Redpath: "There is nothing—no circumstance, no trouble, no testing—that can ever touch me until, first of all, it has gone past God and past Christ right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with a great purpose, which I may not understand at the moment."

Questions about suffering are questions about sovereignty. We want to be in control, the ones who decide what can be used for good in our lives. Either God is in control, or He isn't. If God is in control, then what we know about God is more important than what we know about our circumstances. For now, that may not lessen the ache, but we can rest to the degree that we are willing to rely on Him. That is how we hunt for hope. Jesus is hope. And if we let Him, He will always lead us to himself.

LH: Who is your favorite biblical example of a hope hunter?



I love Caleb! He was 40 years old when Moses asked him to be one of the 12 spies who scouted the Promised Land. The situation looked grim—there would be giants to defeat. Caleb didn't pretend they weren't there. He acknowledged them; he cooperated with God to adjust his perspective on that reality.

Then he had to face some darkness. He wandered 40 years in the wilderness with everyone else, even though he didn't do anything wrong. He was one of the faithful minority who had to suffer because of the unfaithful choices of others. Then my heart thrills when we see him again after they finally arrived in Canaan, when Joshua warned him there might be some battles to fight in the process. Caleb said, in effect, "Don't worry about me, I may be 85 years old, but I can still fight!"

LH: Why is obedience so critical during dark seasons? How does someone know what obedience looks like for them individually?

When I mention the essential power of obedience in hunting for hope, the person who is heavy-hearted today might say, "Look, Nika, I don't have the energy to hunt for hope. I can't muster the effort to pursue Christ right now. I am doing all I can do just to keep breathing."

I want to encourage you. James assures us: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (4:8, NKJV). But the picture of this is not one of equity; it's not "Hey, you take a few steps, and I'll take a few steps." No, the instant you lift your foot to take a step, He will cover the entire distance between you

IF GOD IS IN CONTROL, then what we know about GOD IS MORE IMPORTANT than what we know about OUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

for now, that may not lessen the ache...

### -NIKA MAPLES

nikamaples.com

before you even finish that first step.

The implicit message of the Bible is that God always does more than we do. We make it too hard. Invite Him to make "the next right step" known to you.

Q: What are some of the steps to becoming a hope hunter?

Meditating on Romans 8:24 led to a revolutionary discovery for me. It reads, "Hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?" (NIV). We've all heard people say that a situation or a person or something is hopeless. And then they are done. That's it. We have mistakenly thought that either we have hope or we don't. But this verse says something altogether different: if we see or sense hope, then that isn't hope at all! It's counterfeit hope, and that helps no one. So the real hope comes some other way. Apparently, when there is no hope for a situation, that is when we are in the position to find real hope.

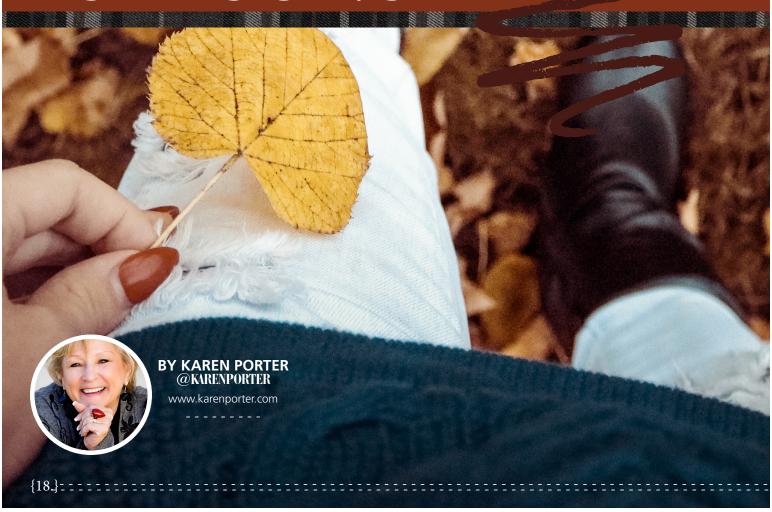
Paul explains this for us as well. In Romans 5:3-4, we read that we can "glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (NIV). Did you hear that? We don't start with a heart full of hope. No, we have to hunt for it, winding our way from suffering and hardship, through perseverance and into character before we get to hope. If we trust God, our hardship will wind its way to hope. Trust is where it all starts.

Learn more about Nika Maples and Hunting Hope by visiting www.nikamaples.com or following her on Facebook (nikamaples) or Twitter (@nikamaples).



# BRING MATHE SEASONS

EACH SEASON OF THE
YEAR IS FILLED WITH
UNIQUE FLAVOR AND
ACTIVITIES. IT IS HARD TO
PICK A FAVORITE, BUT
FALL MAY BE MINE.



Fall is the wonderful season when the leaves turn red, gold, yellow and rust creating gasp-worthy scenes across the country

I love bringing out the pumpkin, Indian corn, and sunflower decorations from my storage bin so I can fill my house with the colors of nature. I usually begin decorating in September in anticipation of Thanksgiving day—my favorite holiday. Thanksgiving is family time without the pressure to buy all the gifts of Christmas. Thanksgiving is the perfect end to the fall season.

### Life is full of seasons, too.

Sometimes when I coach an aspiring speaker or writer, I notice that they are in a season of life that might hinder their desires to become a professional communicator. They may need to wait until this season is over.

A young mom who has small children at home is in a season that passes all too quickly, and she may need to concentrate on the kids for a few years instead of pursuing a life on the road as a speaker. Sometimes it's hard for these passionate young moms to understand how fast those child-athome years will fly. There will still be plenty of time to develop your speaking or writing ministry.

Another kind of season is when we experience a tragedy or painful circumstances such as an illness, a deception, loss of a job, a natural disaster, or the loss of a loved one. We may need to live out this season of grief, pain, or disappointment before we can use the experience to help others. We need time for the Lord to help us overcome the pain.

No matter what season you face right now, consider some basic facts about seasons.

Seasons are Always Temporary. Winter will come after Fall, and Spring will emerge

Winter will come after Fall, and Spring will emerge from the coldest winter. It is the same with your life. The time you spend giving all you have to your children will pass much faster than you ever imagined. Use the time to instill in those children the love of Jesus. Use the season to grow spiritually with prayer and Bible study. If you are in a painful season that is filled with pain, emotionally or physically, it will also end. It is important for you to heal before you try to give healing words to others. I've often quoted a phrase from the Bible to help me remember that season's end. That phrase is, "This too shall pass."

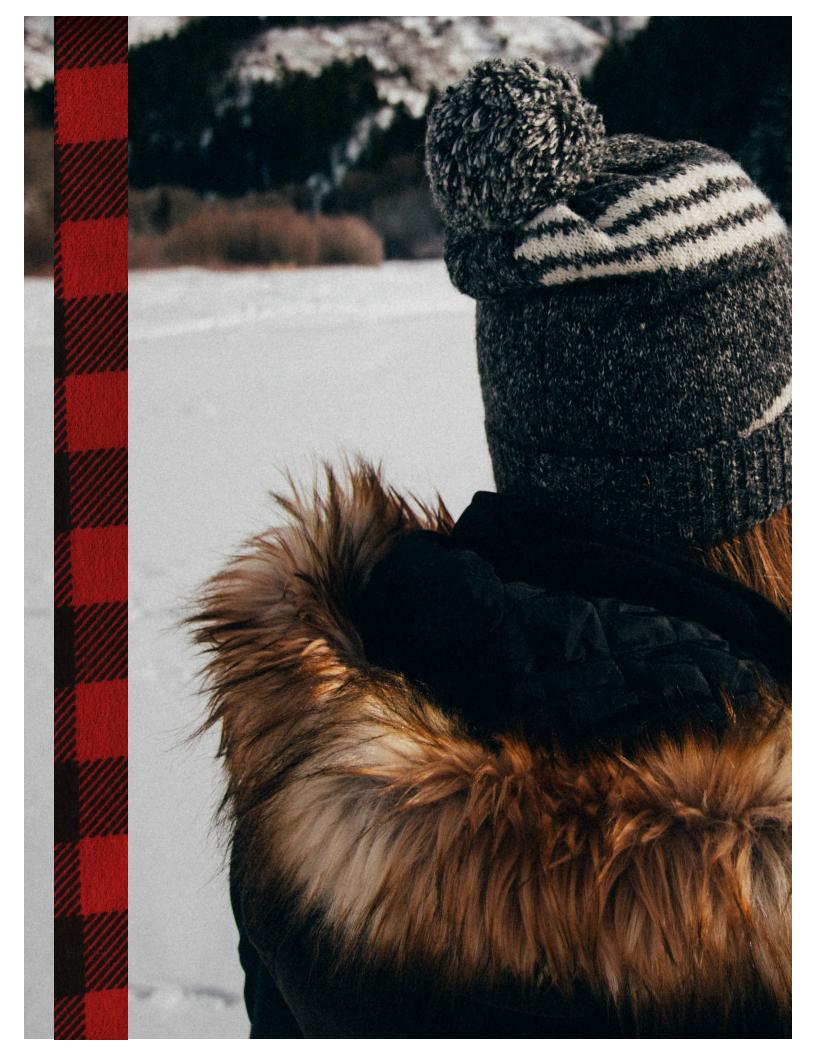
God plans only good for you and each season of your life is for your good. The season may feel lonely, but no matter whether you feel depressed or anxious and no matter if the season feels dark or shameful, God can and will bring good from the situation. As I look back on the loss of my executive position in a large company, I see how this painful experience was the beginning of a new and exciting and wonderful season of personal growth and creativity. (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18 and Philippians 4:11.)

God is on His throne, and He has promised you that the season you are in today will lead you to a new season of joy and peace.

"I will be your Good throughout your lifetime-until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you" (Isaiah 46:4 NLT).

### Let's Talk-

- 1) Name a season in your past.
- 2) How did that season affect you at the time and then how did it affect you after you transitioned out of it?
- 3) How did that season shape your spiritual walk with God?
- 4) Which season are you in at this very moment? S?



MAY EACH SEASON AGE ME IN WISDOM AND GRACE. LET LOVE BE MY CONSTANT, AND FAITH, MY COMPASS. -AMBER WEIGAND-BUCKLEY-

**Obarefaced**irl





### HOLIDAYS ARE THE SEASON FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY, A STRATEGIC TIME TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP BRIDGE TO ANOTHER'S HEART.

Here are a few examples of ways to connect heart to heart over the season:

☆ I (Pam) wrote, framed, then read my dad a "blessing" as a Christmas gift to help repair the damage to our relationship his drinking had caused. I prayed and asked God to show me one positive thing and then I wrote affirming words from that place of memory. (Read the blessing in 10 Best Decisions a Woman Can Make.)

"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven" (Psalm 32:1, NIV).

⚠ My husband, Bill instituted a weekly Bible study on Skype with our grown sons. They are spread over four states, yet long for close relationship. They all read the same book and call weekly (or monthly) to discuss a piece of what we have read. (They began with

-----

Uncommon by Tony Dungy, and will tackle 10 Best Decisions a Man Can Make next year).

"Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children" (Proverbs 17:6, NIV).

Robin selected three gifts that applauded each of her children's unique passions or personal calling. A unique, thoughtful gift accompanied by a personal letter of blessing can help children see themselves more clearly, more from heaven's point of view. (See 10 Best Decisions a Parent Can Make.)

"Train up a child in the way he should go" (according to his/her God-given bent, Proverbs 22:6, KJV).

no eyear when money was tight, I (Pam) made a simple paper angel for each preschooler of our extended family (including our three sons). We placed a chair in the center of the room and each person in the family, answered the question, "When I think about \_\_\_\_\_, what comes to mind is \_\_\_\_\_."

Each person gave a verbal blessing that was written down on that angel ornament, and each Christmas that ornament hangs on the tree. Many of the qualities people spoke out about were seeds of character that now, almost 20 years later, have fully blossomed in those now adult "kids" lives.

"The LORD remembers us and will bless us" (Psalm 115:12, NIV).

A Carl wrote a blessing, purchased a necklace and a tiara and "blessed" his Modern Day Princess daughter with a personalized prayer and gift. The power of words read aloud can change the course of a person's life. As he or she rereads a letter, they then "hear" your voice in their mind.

"The LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory" (Psalm 149:4, NIV).

Jeff apologized to his family and asked them to

-continued on p. 25-



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### -continued from p. 23-

forgive him for the past choices he had made that stressed and harmed them. A true apology can bring a marriage back from the brink, call a prodigal home, or repair a strained friendship. Remember when apologizing: no excuses, no rationalizing.

A heartfelt, "I was wrong. I am sorry. Please forgive me" has more power. A truly "contrite" heart can be felt and seen by those you are trying to rebuild with. An "I was wrong" can be a powerful gift! (See **Love**, **Honor & Forgive**.)

"These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit" (Isaiah 66:2, NIV).

Ilulie and Kent created a marriage mission and had the kids help design a family logo (or "seal" or "signet"). For help, see 10 Best Decisions a Couple Can Make or read and see examples from past issues of the ezine and blog)

"Seal it with the king's signet ring" (Esther 8:8, NIV).

If Jen and Steve, one in college and one a young adult, used 10 Best Decisions a Single Can Make to write life goals in eight major areas and gave a copy to their parents (so mom and dad would quit nagging and gain peace knowing their kids had "direction").

"HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER—which is the first commandment with a promise" (Ephesians 6:2, NIV).

For the newlyweds in the family, do what we did when we wrote 10 Best Decisions a Couple Can Make. Interview those in the family who have long lasting love. One of my (Pam's) most treasured possessions is an audio recording made one Christmas of my grandparents telling the story of how they fell in love and stayed happily married for 60 years.

"Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll" (Job 19:23, NIV).

Gina helped her newlywed kids lay a stronger foundation with the "Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti" DVD, a waffle maker, a pasta bowl, and server as a gift. (A less expensive version is the Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghettibook, some waffle mix and package of pasta. You can upscale it with gift certificates to Waffle House and a pasta dinner restaurant to accompany the book.

"Male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27, NIV).

A Sandra planned a rite of passage for her soon to be 13-year-old to welcome her into adolescence. (See **Got Teens?** for ways to mark the moments all through the teen years for both sons and daughters). If your child is near a transition (into kindergarten, junior high, high school, college or marriage, use this as a teachable moment.

Have your gift(s) reflect what is on the path ahead and prepare him or her to succeed by building into them wisdom.

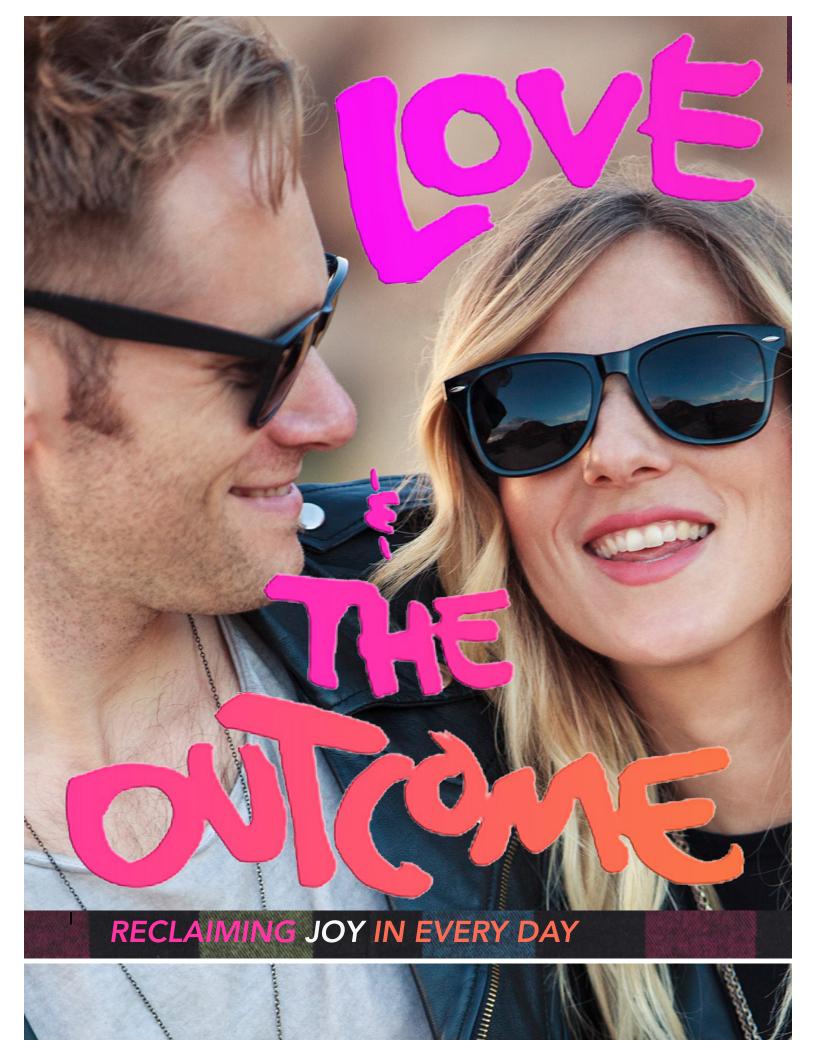
"Turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding" (Proverbs 2:2, NIV).

A Carolyn pulled several Farrel books, and a few others, off her shelf and scanned through the dinner and dialogue questions in the back of each book (or end of each chapter).

She used many of these questions for "conversation starters" for the holiday meals where extended family and guests would be present. Planning conversation topics can ease the newcomer or help open up that "hard to get talking" person in your hospitality circle.

"Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road" (Deuteronomy 6:7, NIV).

All these ideas will be more effective if you spend time while wrapping gifts, or cooking meals silently praying for each person you will be interacting with during your holiday celebrations.



"THESE ARE THE DAYS."
IT'S MORE THAN THE
TITLE TO THE CURRENT
LOVE AND THE OUTCOME
RELEASE: IT'S THE
LIFESTYLE OF CANADIAN
HUSBAND-AND-WIFE DUO
CHRIS RADEMAKER AND
JODI KING.

These days they are enjoying a time of celebration with their firstborn son, Milo, a new home in Tennessee and a new sophomore album that shares their happy times of praise.

But Jodi will tell you that their story has not been all joy. The couple experienced a lot of hard days, loss and letting go that occurred during their first record as Chris' mom passed away on their wedding anniversary.

"Watching my husband be transformed to be more like Jesus in the process of grieving the loss of his mom was an amazing process to witness," Jodi says. "He has allowed himself to grieve and miss her. That's not a fast process."

Chris and Jodi canceled all their shows for the next year on the day after because they needed time to grieve, cry, and just be in that place.

"Continuing to worship the Lord through it all is challenging —he would tell you that," she says. "Songs like 'He is with Us,' became a less of a statement and more of a question. We have wrestled

through those promises."

But now she says they can sing the songs in a new season of celebration, confident that the Lord's promises are true. "We can say that He is with us always. The life we have lived has not been long yet, but we have lived through a lot of seasons—a lot of grieving and a lot of celebrating. But it seems like you can't have one without the other."

Worship was the theme that got Chris and Jodi through their grief. Not the shouting and jumping because there were times when they couldn't even talk, but they still worshiped the Lord in silence.

"Honestly, our career has been a blessing. It requires us to remain in a state of worship. So, putting our worship above anything else has helped us. Singing these truths goes from your head to your heart."

They clung to the truths found in Psalms. "David was so real. He would curse the Lord, and in the same Psalm, he would say you are always with me, and you will never leave me. That's what the season of loss felt like for us," Jodi says. "It felt like yelling at the Lord, crying out to Him and praising Him all at the same time."

With a foundation in worship, Chris and Jodi transition from sorrow to a season of joy and thankfulness knowing their strength is in the Lord.

"If things were always good, and our songs were always having success on the charts— all those things that we think give us happiness— it wouldn't deepen our faith with the Lord at all. Through loss and hardship, our relationship with the Lord is deepened."

"There's a massive maple tree in our backyard. I look at it and just think, 'How many storms has this tree seen?' It just grows taller and stronger, and its roots grow deeper. I want to be like that," Jodi says.

-continued on p. 29-

# BOCK FUN MACAZINE

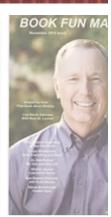
Where Book Fun Begins

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Today, being a new mom to Milo keeps Jodi grounded in the moment and finding the simple joys in life. "I know also watching him go through ups and downs, and being a constant in his life, is going to call me to a deeper place spiritually," she says. "I know my son is going to come to me on his roughest day. Unless I am rooted in the Lord, I don't have any of the answers. But the Lord is giving me what I need for him. I'm just going to be more dependent on the Lord."

Chris and Jodi are most excited to share the new season of joy with their fans. In the three years since their self-titled **Love and the Outcome** album, much has changed so the couple is looking forward to sharing new conversations on what the Lord has done.

"When we wrote 'Galaxies,' we were just reflecting on the fact that everything in life is a gift. Everything that we have from the Lord is a gift. We have not earned it. There is no way to earn these levels of success that are not even real and won't last. Milo is a gift. Our house is a gift," Jodi shares. "Just the reality that the Giver of great gifts, the Creator of the universe always has me in mind is so, so comforting and mind-blowing. So, that's Chris' favorite for sure."

And the title track, "These Are the Days" a favorite of Jodi's, almost didn't happen. At 70 songs deep into writing, they thought they had finished the album. So, they went for a walk as they switched from bandmode to husband-wife-mode.

are the days. These are the days that we'll never get back. We'll never forget these days." The simplistic beauty of these words brought a nine-months pregnant Jodi to tears. "I knew better not miss it in the busyness," Jodi says.

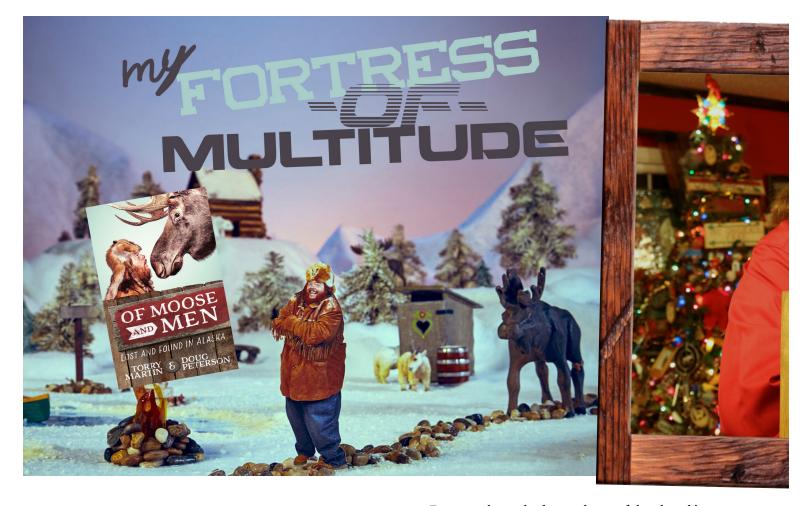
That moment she suggested the song should be the title track. "So the next day we wrote 'These are the Days' and it became sort of the theme that wrapped up the record in a beautiful way," she says.

Out of all the joy and sorrow, the couple has come out of this season knowing what the Lord is calling them to focus on personally as well as missionally. That message is at the heart of this record.

"God is Love, and we are the outcome," Jodi says. "I think what we always hope is that our friends and our fans will receive that they are a part of that mission and movement to be part of God's outcome in the world. Just by being who they are. We are human beings, not human doings."



BY JENN TAYLOR @JENNTAYLOR417 PROFILE CONTRIBUTOR



### CHRISTMAS WAS FAST APPROACHING, AND I WAS FEELING DOWN IN THE

**DUMPS.** I had no family in Alaska (it was just me and my best friend Rob) and no money for a trip back to my home state of Washington.

Christmas had always been a major deal in our house when I was growing up, and my parents went all out. Every Christmas, their log cabin was decked out in decorations and packed with happy people, so Christmas brought up bright memories. But this Christmas was looking to be pretty dark and dismal, stuck in my frozen Fortress of Solitude. Superman's famous headquarters, the Fortress of Solitude, is sometimes depicted as being in the middle of an arctic wasteland, but at least he had light—and heat vision to keep him warm.

At this time of the year, it was dark for much of the Alaskan day. The shortest day, December 21, saw about five and a half hours of light, with the sun rising at 10:14 a.m. and setting at 3:42 p.m.

Bottom line: It was depressing.

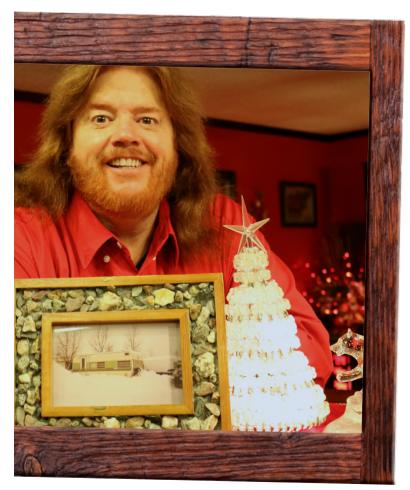
Fortunately, we had joined one of the church's home study groups, and as Christmas approached, Pat and Sylvia McGuire had invited the group out to their home. I will never forget walking up to the house and seeing at least two dozen Scandinavian ice candles, with flames flickering from inside hollowed-out circular blocks of ice.

I didn't own a good pair of boots, so I yanked off my soggy old tennis shoes and placed them next to a long line of wonderfully warm boots.

I then noticed that my right sock had a tiny hole near the toe, and I kept pulling on the end of the sock and tucking it under my toes, hoping no one would notice.

The house was so warm and toasty that I could no longer see my breath the way I could outdoors or in my camper. But it also took my breath away with its awe-inspiring beauty. The main living area rose up two floors and was topped by a cathedral ceiling. And in the center of the living room was the largest Christmas tree I had ever seen. It stood almost 14 feet tall, shooting all of the way up to the second-floor balcony.

When we went downstairs for hot chocolate, I



remember seeing at least 30 coffee cups hanging on display—each of them from a different place around the world where the family had visited. We had only three coffee cups in our camper—one for me, one for Rob, and one for Sam, my dog.

At that party. I prayed a very specific prayer. I asked that God would one day give me a beautiful house with a big Christmas tree and lots of friends who would rock the rafters with laughter. As a PS, I asked God if I could also have a kitchen like the McGuires', stocked with a multitude of coffee cups, which had come to symbolize hospitality and warmth to me.

That night as we trudged back into our cold little camper, I had to admit to a touch of envy. I was back in this cramped, 21-foot tin can, thumping my arms against my side and trying to stay warm while I waited for the stove to pump a little heat into the place. I was miserable, so I started praying about my plight—whining, actually. (Is there such a thing as sacred whining?)

And then it dawned on me. I looked out the window of our camper, and I realized that God had given us close to 495,000 acres of beautiful Alas-

kan wilderness, and it was all ours during the winter, when the campers were gone.

The moon shone on the fresh snow, and I recalled the nights when we could see the northern lights shimmering in the sky. God had hung those lights in the sky just for us—with their greens and reds and blues. The Christmas decorations that God provided rose higher than any Christmas tree down on earth, and I sensed more than ever God was in control.

When I turned away from the window of my camper, my eyes came to rest on the small, glowing Christmas tree sitting on our table—a light that my mother had sent to me as an early Christmas gift. My mom and grandma had made the light by putting crystal beads on safety pins, stringing them together in the shape of a tree, and then coiling Christmas lights inside.

This was a wonderful symbol of how God creates beauty in our lives by stringing together the most ordinary moments, like shaping a beautiful Christmas tree out of ordinary safety pins and beads. Everything connects. Viewed on their own, safety pins and moments from our lives might seem plain, but assembled together by the Master's hand, they become stunning.

This little light of mine kept my camper from feeling more dismal than it was. To this day, it's still the first decoration that I put out each Christmas when I start decorating for the holidays in September (the same month my mother sent me this Christmas tree light). I always put this light in a place of prominence to remind me of God's faithfulness and how He answered the prayer I said at the McGuire house.



Adapted excerpt of My
Fortress of Multitude
from Torry Martin and
Doug Peterson's hilarious new book, Of Moose
and Men—a look at finding
faith in the wilds of Alaska.
Of Moose and Men would
make an ideal Christmas
gift for him...or her...or
anybody, come to think of

it. So pick up some to put under the tree. For more details check out Torry Martin Comedy on Facebook. S?



### 1. Get some zip ties!!!

Before doing anything at all, make sure you have some zip ties! You can buy them anywhere and believe me; they will change your life when it comes to Christmas

tree decorating! I usually have at least 30-40 zip ties on hand for my Christmas tree, and I swear by them at Christmastime. Zip ties are easy to use and easy to take down. You'll be reading exactly how handy those little zip ties are below.

2. Weigh down your Christmas tree at the base. This will keep your tree from tipping over, no matter how many ornaments you put on it. I use two tube-socks that are each stuffed with 40 pounds of lead. You can use rocks or work-out weights as well. Just make sure the tree is steady, balanced and secure. You'll then lay your tree skirt over the weighted bottom of the tree to hide the weights from sight.

3. Check all of the lights. Replace any light bulbs that need swapped out now, BEFORE adding any decorations. If you don't know how to switch out the bulbs on a string of Christmas lights, just google it or look it up on YouTube. It's pretty easy and well worth the time it takes to do it correctly. Nothing is more annoying than having your tree completely decorated and having a string of lights go out on you. Argh!

4. Place the star correctly at the top of your tree. Do this first thing so you aren't knocking off ornaments and making a mess by attaching your tree topper last. Sometimes our tree toppers aren't very reliable or sturdy, though. So what I do is zip tie a small tree branch taken from a real tree outside and then attach the small branch right to the base of the tree topper itself. That way, it lifts my treetop star even higher, AND I can then secure the base of the tree topper branch directly onto the tree itself with another zip tie. That star will always be secure now! Remember to trim any excess zip-tie, so it stays looking neat.

5. Run an extension cord with five plug-ins straight up the entire

### length of your tree.

Attach it with zip ties too. (Are you seeing how handy these zip ties are?) That way you'll have plug-ins available all the way to the top of the tree. This is MUCH easier than running everything to the bottom of the tree and having a bunch of jumbled extension cords exposed and in the way.

6. Go BIG or go home. I like using larger size decorative items and filling my tree up completely. Have a big barren spot right in the middle of your tree?? Put a stuffed Santa or a

Teddy Bear in it to fill the space. It looks great, and it adds layers and depth to your ornaments to have a few larger items strategically placed throughout your tree. Those flimsy little wire hangers from the store might be good for a lot of your lighter weight ornaments, but if you're going to be putting anything big or heavy in your tree, you'll need to secure it to the actual branches with some sturdy zip ties. Zip tie, zip tie, ZIP TIE! You'll love them!



the following year. Last year I found some great floral poinsettia and holly arrangements that were 75 percent off so I bought them at a steal of a price and then made them a part of my tree decoration by staggering them and attaching them throughout the tree itself.

9. Use gift boxes for storage. I have a set of beautifully wrapped gift boxes with lids that I keep all of my ornaments stored in throughout the year. Then when it's time to decorate, I just take the ornaments out of the gift boxes and then place the

gift boxes themselves under the tree for decoration. It makes it super easy to take your tree down to when you put the decorations right back into the conveniently located gift boxes at the base of the tree.

10. If you have cats, place any feathered ornaments at the top of the tree. That way it'll be out of reach of a cat's paw and the temptation to play in the tree will be lessened for your curious kitty.

11. Find a remote control to turn your Christmas

your Christmas lights on and off. You can buy them after Christmas, in the sales. It's so nice to just press a button and have my Christmas tree come alive!

12. Use your Christmas decor to explain the importance of having a personal relationship with Jesus.

Let your kids know that if our roots are securely weighted down in Him, and that if God is truly at the tippy-top of your life—like a Christmas star on a tree—that we can then withstand anything the world might throw at us and we can bear much fruit. Or much ornaments as the case may be.

Find Torry's complete holiday decorating tutorial on the TORRY MARTIN YouTube channel.

### 7. Decorate.

Finally, it's time to start putting all the decorations on. And the thing that makes doing that go really, really fast is to separate your ornaments the year before. I do that by keeping all of my alike ornaments in the same zip-lock gallon storage bag when I take the tree down. By keeping the alike ornaments gathered together, you can also more easily space them out all around the tree, so you don't have clumps of all the same ornament in one place. This makes for an easier equal distribution of the same ornaments.

8. Don't be afraid to experiment! I usually like to go out shopping the day after Christmas to get some new items for my Christmas tree



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# food for thought-

LIFE BYTES?

# OPEN DOORS open HEARTS

THIS WEEK I HOSTED A
GOING-AWAY TEA FOR
A CO-WORKER. WE HAD
ENJOYED WORKING
TOGETHER FOR
SEVERAL YEARS AND
ALWAYS PLANNED ON
GETTING TOGETHER
"ONE OF THESE DAYS."



Well, that day never happened until it was time for her to move.

As we sat around the table and enjoyed our tea and scones, we regreted not making time earlier for fellowship. We talked about the people God had put into our lives we wanted to connect with, but didn't take the time.

We don't have to look far to find those who are lonely and needing a friend. So, how do we make the time to reach out to our neighbors and co-workers, especially when our world is so complex and we're all so busy?

My answer is very simple, but not always easy to accomplish. We have to make time for hospitality to happen, even if it is an impromtu get together. I suggest we pray and ask God who he wants us to invite for a meal or a cup of tea.

He always answers! When we pray about who will be a guest at our table, it includes Jesus being involved with the planning.

My ministry is tea related, so that is usually the direction I take when inviting others into our home. You may be the "casserole queen" or the "baking queen," so follow your heart and plan your next hospitality opportunity.

Probably my favorite bible story about hospitality is in Genesis 18: 1-18. Abraham sees three men by his tent door. He invites them in for a meal without any mention of payment or reward. When the guests are revealed as angels, Abraham and his wife Sarah are told their childless years are about to end, Sarah is going to have a baby at age 90 after being infertile her whole life!

They thought they were just providing a meal and drink to three hungry and tired men. The moral of this story is when we welcome a guest into our homes to sit at our dinnig table, we will often be the recipient of a blessing.

So often we focus on all the work it takes to have company, and we forget the many blessings of laughter, comfort, friendship and encouragement. Hospitality really has nothing to do with having a clean house, gourmet meals or being a "hostess with the mostess." It's about being a vessel for God's love to flow from Him to them.

"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels." (Hebrews 13:2, NIV)

Christmas is the perfect time, in fact a prime opportunity to open your home and share the real meaning of Christmas.

I have the date for my Neighborhood Christmas Tea on my calendar and will deliver the invitations Thanksgiving week.

I look through magazines and my recipe box for the menu planning, and I keep a journal to make sure I am on track and start getting things together early.

### Here are a few of my practical tips for you to begin an exciting new tradition:

- 1. Pray for guidance in who to invite.
- 2. Pray about the date, time and theme and put it on your calendar.
- 3. Plan in advance the invitations and the menu.
- 4. Ask a friend to be your co-hostess.
- 5. Invite your family to help. Husbands and children can help with the shopping, cleaning, guest list. Then on the day of your event they can greet guests when they arrive, hang up coats and serve at the party.
- 6. Bake or prepare food in advance and freeze.
- 7. Shop for non-perishables a few days before event.
- 8. Pick up fresh baked goods from your local bakery. You don't have to do all the cooking and baking.
- 9. The day before your party, buy flowers, do as much of the cooking as possible, set the table and get serving dishes and platters ready.
- 10. The day of the party, tidy the house, hang fresh towels in the bathroom and change into your party attire and ENJOY!

This favorite shortbread recipe is a wonderful addition for a Christmas Tea or Christmas party.

### **Chocolate Shortbread Bites**

1 cup flour

1/3 cup butter at room temperature

1/4 cup powdered sugar

2 eggs

1 oz. unsweetened chocolate, melted in microwave on defrost and cooled

1 cup sugar

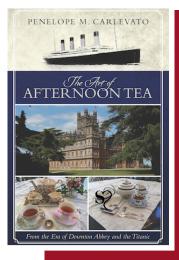
1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon vanilla



Combine the flour, butter and powdered sugar until mixed well. Press into an 8-inch, ungreased square baking dish and bake at 350°F for 20 minutes. Beat remaining ingredients together until fluffy. Pour this mixture over the hot cookie crust and bake for another 20 to 25 minutes or until set. Cool and cut into squares. These Shortbread Bites can be made ahead of time. Keep in an airtight container. Makes 16.



Find great receipes like this in Penelope's book: The Art of Afternoon Tea: From the Era of Downton Abbey and the Titanic.

(Available autographed from PenelopesTeaTime.com)



### BY KAREN WHITING @KARENHWHITING

www.KarenWhiting.com

# about time-

### LIFE BYTES?

# THE SEASONS F MINISTRY



### MINISTRIES TEND TO GO THROUGH SEASONS, from the bud-

ding freshness of new growth to cold winters of dying back. Identifying and understanding the seasons helps a ministry thrive from one season to another smoothly.

#### **SPRING**

In spring, enthusiasm is high, ideas are being generated, and everything seems fresh and exciting. It is a time of dreams and planting seeds. The structure is planned and relationships planted.

### Grab onto the ideas and enthusiasm of spring:

- Record reasons for enthusiasms.
- List all ideas generated, with benefits and hopes
- Write the ministry's mission statement and list Scriptures that support the ministry's vision.
- Delegate work and match up people's strengths to areas of service.

#### **SUMMER**

Summer is a time of tremendous growth, nurturing, and hard work with great hope and excitement. It is also a time when pests may move in to devour the crop; drought may come and dry up ideas, and work may unending.

### Make the most of the summer:

- Praise members for work, thank God for growth and record any results.
- Encourage one another to persist in hard work.

- Plan refreshing breaks from work.
- Water the group with prayer and God's word.
- Photograph and record the progress.

As work is completed and the harvest begins, the ministry moves into the season of harvest.

### **AUTUMN**

Autumn is a mixed time. There is joy in harvesting unless some blight has crushed the ministry. This can also be a time of falling off for workers when the brightness of joy fades, withers, and drifts away. Ideas may begin to grow cold, and members wane in enthusiasm. Laborers may feel worn and tired out.

### *Try these ideas in fall:*

- Display photos that show the joys of the harvest.
- Thank workers in a tangible way. Put notes of appreciation in the church bulletin, make certificates, or hold a banquet.
- Revisit ideas from spring not planted and choose one to nurture.
- Gather feedback from recipients of the ministry as testimonies to the impact. Distribute the testimonies to members.
- Celebrate! Hold a harvest festival or meeting to praise members and report on the returns of everyone's efforts.

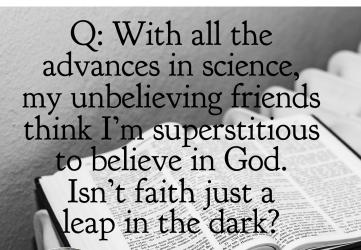
### WINTER

If no one steps in to move the ministry back to spring, it may enter the winter season where the ministry itself grows cold and lifeless. There is little visible growth. Winter is a time the land lays foul and rejuvenates itself. It's a season of resting for the worker, too. Outside storms can bring bitter cold and attendance can fall off.

### Revival ideas:

- Hold a retreat to pray and focus on God's vision.
- Take a short ministry break.
- Ask people to pray for the ministry.
- List benefits from spring with photos of the harvest. S





# THE BIG QUESTION

WITH

# Cynthia

disciples the first time the resurrected Jesus appeared. Of course, he scoffed about Jesus being alive. Dead men don't walk around. He wanted to see and put his hands into the nail prints. When the Savior visited again, Jesus offered His body for Thomas to examine. Thomas believed and cried out, "My Lord and my God."

Second, the chief priests wanted rid of Jesus and arranged for His murder. To their dismay, His disciples remained in Jerusalem and preached Jesus resurrected. Jewish leaders saw a new sect forming, but they couldn't produce the body of Jesus. His grave was empty. Instead, they imprisoned anyone who preached Jesus was Messiah.

You have to resort to force when facts aren't on your side.

Third, Paul was a well-educated Pharisee and not someone easily deceived. He lived in Jerusalem during these events and held the cloaks of the men who stoned Stephen, the first martyr. On the road to Damascus, Paul saw a vision of Jesus and converted. About five years later he testified the resurrected Christ "appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now" (1 Corinthians 15:5-6, NASB).

That's weighty. Five hundred witnesses! You only needed two witnesses to establish a fact in Jewish courts. At that time, a skeptic could chat with one of those eyewitnesses and verify the report.

You may come to eighty-five percent certainty, or maybe ninety. Faith bridges the gap between the evidence and one hundred percent. It's definitely not a leap in the dark. S?

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### THAT'S AN IMPORTANT

**QUESTION.** Nowadays we recall Indiana Jones in The Last Crusade. Harrison Ford had to locate the Holy Grail to save his father. A huge abyss stood between him and the cave he must enter, so he mumbled about believing as stepped out into nothingness.

Miraculously a transparent pathway appeared beneath him, and he crossed safely. That's Hollywood's idea of faith and has nothing to do with the Bible. Our faith is based on evidence.

Consider Luke, Paul's physician and the author of the third Gospel. He used his meticulous mind to lay out the "exact truth" after "investigating everything carefully from the beginning." Luke stated he had interviewed many eyewitnesses. That's powerful.

Also look at what Peter wrote about the Transfiguration, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we

were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16, ASV). Later Peter endured martyrdom for his testimony. I don't know of anyone who would embrace a lie that would cost his life.

A critic might say Luke and Peter wrote from prejudice, but let's look at three others: Thomas, the chief priests, and the Apostle Paul. First, Thomas wasn't with the





AS THE TEMPERATURE OUTSIDE DROPS, THE NUMBER OF RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS, COLDS, AND FLU RISES.

The increased stress associated with the holidays depletes our immune system and sets us on a course for a long disease-prone winter. When your immune system is weak, your body is vulnerable to viruses, allergies, and germs. The right lifestyle choices can have a dramatic impact on the strength of your immune system, so you don't miss out on the fun at holiday parties and events.

In any given year 10-20 percent of the population will become infected with the flu. Symptoms of the flu are very similar to those of the common cold; however, these two diseases are the result of different viruses. Both cause respiratory illnesses which bring fever, body aches, and cough. The common cold, however, tends to have more sinus involvement with a stuffy or a runny nose and is much milder than the flu. The flu is more likely to result in a progression to pneumonia or bronchitis which increases the mortality rate of this virus. The best defense against the common cold and the flu is an immune system ready to fight back.

Here are 12 immunity building life hacks to help keep you healthy this holiday season:

### 1. ENJOY AEROBIC EXERCISE-

Moderate aerobic exercise increases blood flow and circulation throughout the body, allowing infection-fighting cells easy access to the places they need

120 ENHER IMMUNITY BOOSTERS

to defend. Strenuous exercise, on the contrary, has been shown to release stress hormones and can blunt immune response.

#### 2. TRY PROBIOTICS-

There are good bacteria in your gut that help your body make T cells (a type of disease-fighting cells). You can increase the number of good bacteria inside of your gut by drinking kefir, eating yogurt, or taking a supplement with Lactobacillus and/or Bifidobacterium.

### 3. DE-STRESS-

Chronic stress releases an influx of stress hormones into your body. These hormones suppress the immune system. You can't completely remove stress from your life, but you can get better at managing it. Incorporate stress-busting activities like prayer, meditation, journaling, and relaxation into your schedule.

#### 4. INCREASE ZINC-

Zinc is a trace element that is required for immune cells to function properly. You can increase zinc by adding nuts, beans, fortified cereals, and lean meats to your diet. A half cup of cashews is almost a full day's supply of zinc.

### 5. COOK WITH GARLIC-

Garlic has been shown to have some infection-fighting properties, so the next time you make chili or soup this winter add some garlic to your ingredients for an extra immune boost.

## 6. LAUGH MORE-

Laughter is natural stress relief, and stress has a negative effect on the immune system. Anything you can do that decreases tension and stress is a healthy change.

### 7. GET ADEQUATE REST

The number of functioning T cells in the body has been shown to decrease in people who are sleepdeprived. Getting 6-8 hours a day will help keep your cell count optimized. The more T cell you have fighting on your behalf, the better chances you have

to fight off invading viruses.

### 8. AVOID HIGH FAT FOODS-

High-fat diets weaken the immune system and make your immune cells less effective at recognizing and attacking viruses. A low-fat diet is not just for heart health, but also immune health.

### 9. STAY HYDRATED-

Immune cells must have adequate circulation. Dehydration decreases the ability of your disease-fighting cells to reach their target quickly. Caffeinated and carbonated drinks can be tasty treats, but water is always the best first defense.

# 10. LIMIT OVERUSE OF ANTIBIOTICS-

Your immune systems works its best when it gets some on the job training. Do not run to the doctor at the first sign of a sniffle. Give yourself 48 hours to allow your body a chance to fight back. If you are not improving or if you develop high fevers proceed with a doctor's appointment.

## 11. SNACK ON FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

A diet high in antioxidants helps to keep your immune system strong. Try eating fruits and vegetables in a variety of colors. Some great choices include blueberries, strawberries, spinach, beets, peppers, red cabbage, pumpkin, and pineapple.

# 12. BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS-

People with a strong social network of friends and family have a stronger immunity than those who feel isolated and alone. Allow your holiday gatherings to become a part of your seasonal immunity building plan. 🥎



BY SAUNDRA DALTON **SMITH** @DRDALTONSMITH

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# HOLIDAY PRAYERS





#### BY EDIE MELSON @EDIEMELSON

www.EdieMelson.com

# AS ADULTS, MOST OF US HAVE COME TO EXPECT A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF STRESS AND STRUGGLE DURING THE

HOLIDAYS. Our to-do lists lengthen to epic proportions as we work to make this a meaningful time for those around us. We get caught up in expectations—real and imagined—and whether we admit it or not, it takes a toll on our families.

In the hectic blur of the season, we can overlook the fact that our kids—no matter how young they are—also feel some of the strain. From Halloween to Christmas, it seems that most of the year-end holidays are kid focused. It's easy to let that fact cloud us to what's really happening in their young lives. The changes in schedule, diet, and even our own stress, can increase their anxiety.

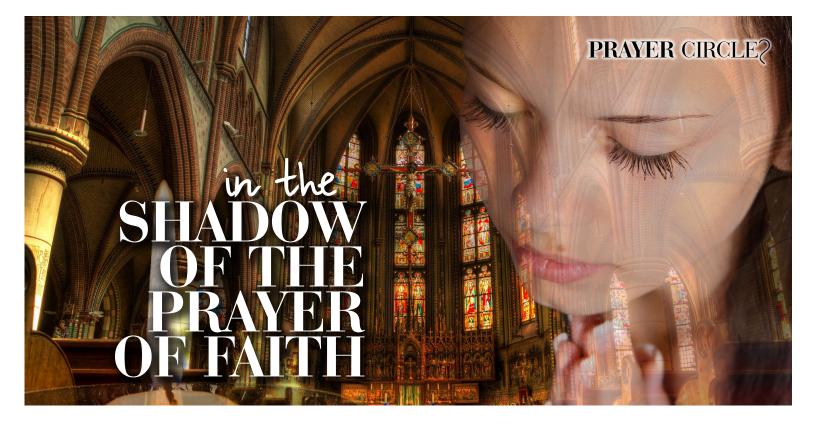
We can't always put a halt to the hectic happenings, but we can pray. And prayer is always the most powerful thing we can do. As we begin to round the final turn into the year-end, holiday home stretch, I'd like to share some of the ways and verses I pray for my kids during the holidays.

**1.** I pray that they keep their focus on what's important. This holiday season is based on celebrating the birth of Christ. Every day, I ask God to make sure this amazing gift doesn't get lost in the craziness. (Colossians 3:2)

- **2.** I ask God to give them a sense of balance. Every year, the holidays seem to get more frantic. We can combat this by praying for God to teach them balance. (Matthew 6:33)
- **3.** I pray for protection from the food they're eating. Let's face it, most of us tend to over-indulge during the holidays. It's even harder for our kids. They're bombarded with sweets and temptations from every side and at every gathering. (1 Corinthians 10:31)
- **4. I ask that they're protected from materialism.** We are a culture consumed with more. I truly believe the greatest gift we can offer our children is the ability to be content with less. (Philippians 4:11-12)
- 5. I pray for them to experience true joy, not just fleeting happiness.
- **6. I ask God to give them opportunities to serve others.** When we can take the focus off of ourselves, our perspective changes, and that's what I want for my kids. (1 Peter 4:10)
- **7. I pray for God to keep them from poor choices.** Anytime there are groups of children, the opportunity for mischief increases. I ask God to help them be wise. (James 1:15)
- **8.** I ask God to reveal Himself to them in a new way. I want my children to recognize God's voice and to be continually growing in their relationship with Him. (John 10:14)
- **9. I pray they'll finish the year strong.** Just because the holidays are just around the corner doesn't mean we can neglect our responsibilities. I pray they'll remain focused on school work and other commitments. (Philippians 3:14).

So often it feels like as parents we need to take a more active role in our children's lives. We look for opportunities to nurture, teach, and love them. These are all important aspects of raising our kids. But we need to remember that prayer isn't a last resort. It's the first line of defense when it comes to bringing up healthy kids.

 $\{40.\}$ 



# WHEN YOU PRAY THE PRAYER OF FAITH, HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT IT WORKED?

Do fireworks drip red rose pedals across the sky? Do purple butterflies dance to bright notes of joy?

Sometimes, yes. Faith can yield staggering miracles.

I know this is true because I've seen the cancer patient healed. I've seen lack met with a provision. I've even seen the crippled stand and walk.

But other times, I've seen God answer faithful prayers with rivers of heartache.

I was recently speaking with Janet Parshall on her Moody radio show "In the Market" when a caller expressed that she'd fought the good fight of faith for her daughter's life, and her daughter died from cancer anyway.

I understood this mother's heartbreak because I'd recently lost the good fight for my own precious daughter's life.

So as I join this mother in the valley of the shadow, I too feel the pain of loss. Though the pain is unwelcome, I realize that my pain is a direct connection to God. I mean, didn't He suffer the loss of his only Son? Because of the death (and resurrection) of

God's Son, Jesus, I know that my daughter still exists with Him, in the dimension of heaven that I am not yet able to experience or fully understand.

The other day I asked God what Laura was up to in heaven. I believe He whispered to my heart that she was learning to sing in a heavenly choir.

"Is this choir made up of other children who were also formerly disabled?" I asked.

My heart rang with these stunning words: "Linda, by the time you get to heaven and look back on your earthly life, you will see that you were all formerly disabled."

Somehow as I stand in the valley of the shadow, I have found hope and peace. I am learning, imperfectly most days, to hold on to God. I still cry, but I marvel at the beauty of trusting God, even through incredible loss.

Dear Lord, Whenever I have to walk through the valley of the shadow, please be with me and show me that true prayer of faith is trusting you, even when I don't get my prayers answered the way I'd hoped. For You are our Hope and Healer here on earth as well as in heaven In Jesus's name, Amen S?

To receive a free Prayer Toolbox filled with warfare prayers to pray over you and your loved ones, text **LEADINGHEARTS** to **95577.**—LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD



#### BY RHONDA RHEA @RHONDARIJEA

www.RhondaRhea.com



How can we be grown up about our "more" Jesus?

YOU KNOW HOW I CAN TELL WE'RE APPROACHING THE CHRISTMAS SEASON? I FIND MYSELF THUMBING THROUGH A CATALOG. A CATALOG. OF.

Potted meat. Pickled meat. Fried and dried and—maybe even poached meat. That just takes us to about page five. Then there's meat by the log. Meat in a bar. Meat on a stick. Meat in a jar. And okay, that might sound a little Dr. Seuss-ey-cutesy, but I get halfway through the catalog, and I have to tell you, I'm pretty much meated out.

MEAT.

So here we are, heading into the season in which we really can end up meeting ourselves coming and going. And clearly, we can also end up meating ourselves coming and going. More and more calories. More and more busyness. More.

There's wisdom in keeping an eye out for the "more." Sneaky clutter can fill our stomachs, our schedules—our lives. It's the kind of "more" that can steal our focus from what's important. It does it by rushing us to the busyness of what's immediate instead of waiting for the blessedness of what's vital.

We tend to think of ourselves as mature followers of Christ as long as we're not throwing big-baby fits. But maturity includes so much more than that. It includes making wise choices—with our resources, with our time, with our focus. Let's face it, some of us make more big-baby choices during the Thanksgiving and Christmas season than any other time of the year.

Eyes off our schedules and wants and everything fleshy. Eyes on Christ. It was because of selfish fleshliness that Paul said the Christians in Corinth couldn't have solid spiritual food.

"I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as babies in Christ...because you are still fleshly," (1 Corinthians 3:1, 3, HCSB). He said in verse 2, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food."

Put away the catalogs. No meat for these people.

Paul warns later in that same passage:

"No one should deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks he is wise in this age, he must become foolish so that he can become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." —1 Corinthians 3:18-19 (HCSB).

It's sad to get caught up in the busyness, thinking we're accomplishing works of value, then discover we've been foolishly lying to ourselves about what's important the whole time.

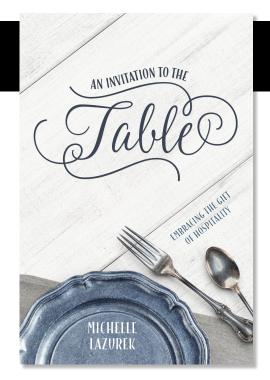
The wisdom we need is found only in Jesus. Time to put away that self-deceived baby stuff and sink our teeth into some meat. As we seek the Lord, He will give us the wisdom and direction we need to sort out our to-do's. It's only in Him that our choices can count. It's only in Him that we're able to identify the foolish temporary and then trade it for the will of God. We don't need that other kind of "more." We only need more Jesus.

That's exactly what will make our season...well... more. But more in every good way—in ways we can see and ways we can't. It's more than meets the eye, as it were.

You might even say, it's more than "meats" the eye. \$\gamma\$



# **BOOKS TO READ**



# AN INVITATION TO THE TABLE by Michelle Lazurek

Author Michelle Lazurek has experienced the grace of hospitality and passes along that blessing to others, so she knows her subject well. In **An Invitation to the Table**, she helps readers see that hospitality is not just entertaining in your home but entering into the lives of others wherever you may be, showing kindness and grace wherever there is need.

Rejected by her parents at age 20 because of her faith, a church family took in Michelle. After she married, she in turn took in a young woman who needed a home. While few of us may have opportunities to offer such extreme hospitality, we all can bless others every day. And that's being hospitable.

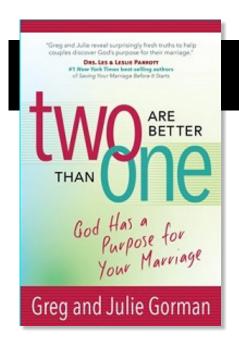
This is an important read for Christians because Lazurek offers a fresh take on a spiritual gift rarely emphasized in churches. Yet this gift offers unlimited opportunities for ministry to the ordinary person in the pew who may fail to realize his or her potential. — *Shirley Brosius* 

 $\{44.\}$ 



This is a treasure trove of wise encouragement coupled with very practical steps you can begin today. Working through the lists and applications here is like partnering with your very own Life Coach.

Poppy brings all her experiences, knowledge, faith commitment and stories together so that we are able to better discern the unique life God has for each of us. Don't just sit around; get a copy now and Go For It! — *Lucinda Secrest McDowell* 



MAKE YOUR LIFE COUNT FOR GOD

# TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE by Greg and Julie Gorman

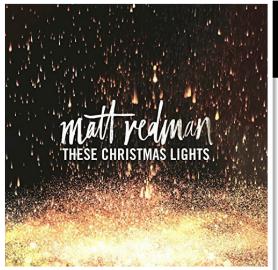
While there are shelves of marriage books, what makes **Two Are Better Than One**, stand out from the others? Greg and Julie Gorman's book provides the insights and truth so couples can understand God's purpose for their marriage.

As they write in the opening pages, "Couples who live for a greater purpose—together—thrive. They fundamentally understand that, unified in purpose, two are better than one."

Each chapter of this book is loaded with truth and insights. Plus couples can study the book in a group or as a couple using the study guide questions at the end of each chapter. Greg and Julie are excellent storytellers and teachers on this concept. The book is an easy read yet can help many couples grow their marriage. I highly recommend **Two Are Better Than One**.—*W. Terry Whalin* 



# MUSIC REVIEWS



# MATT REDMAN

These Christmas Lights

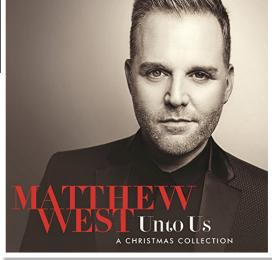
Worship-music artist Matt Redman presents his debut Christmas album, **These Christmas Lights** (released on October 21), featuring guest artists Natasha Bedingfield, Chris Tomlin and Tasha Cobbs. In true Matt Redman style, Christmas meets worship, the greatest focus of the season. Each track is fresh, even the classic carols, each of which Matt has revamped with a worshipful vertically-angled arrangement. Together, the 11 tracks reveal and celebrate God's love and grace for us shown through the birth of His Son.

"I don't want to just tell a story, I want to make sure that we put ourselves in the story too," Matt says reflecting on the creative process for

the album, a team effort involving a trip to the Holy Land – to some of the key places Jesus walked. Infused into each track is the story that we are part of, in that God's gift of Jesus is for our salvation, and for that reason we worship Him.

This Christmas, let us remember and celebrate who **These Christmas Lights** shine for.





# MATTHEW WEST Unto Us: A Christmas Collection

Award-winning musician and songwriter Matthew West has released his second full-length holiday album, **Unto Us: A Christmas Collection,** on October 21. The 10-track album features five original songs, along with five of his Christmas hits.

"Christmas is my favorite time of year, hands down!" Matthew says, and this is evident in the buoyancy of several of the songs. Matthew knows how to bring out the fun and joy of the season—the childlike wonder surrounding it—showing up on tracks such as, "A Christmas to Believe In," "Come On, Christmas" and the classic "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas."

Faith, as always in Matthew's music, is the top priority in this album, from the title track, which Matthew says turned in a worship direction, and continuing throughout the record. Lately known as a storyteller with his music, the new songs on this album he says are "a way for me to reconnect with the greatest story ever told —the birth of a Savior."

From Matthew West, Unto Us: A Christmas Collection, is one gift you can open before December 25.



# JODY MCBRAYER

# Christmastime

Jody McBrayer (formerly of Avalon) released **Christmastime**, his first holiday album, on October 21. The 11-track record includes several timeless classics and leads in with a new selection, "Imagine This Christmas."

Hearing traditional tunes like "O Come All Ye Faithful" and "What Child Is This," "Count Your Blessings Instead of Sheep" and "Christmas Time Is Here," embody the meaning of the season. The jazzy, mellow arrangements, filled with hope, are perfect for curling up with a blanket and a cup of cocoa or as a background for holiday gatherings with family and friends.





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# IF YOU FEEL NERVOUS THINKING OF WORKING WITH A SPEAKER AS IF SHE HAS ARRIVED AT SOME HIGHER LEVEL, BE COMFORTED.

She is just like you, complete with joys and struggles. The more comfortable you are as you approach her, the more you are co-laboring for God's glory

Here are some ideas:

- •Be responsive to her questions and needs. Give as much information about your group and the venue as you can, and answer all questions she asks.
- Be specific about your expectations. I recently heard of a speaker who arrived at an event and found out the group thought she would provide games, group activities, and other extras for the retreat. She thought she was only speaking. Also, don't expect your speaker to do everything the same as your previous speaker.
- Alert her of any specific theological points that might be different for your church. Maybe your church has a certain way they handle the invitation to

receive Christ. Or maybe you don't want her to make the invitation at all.

- Provide the schedule with her part in it with specific minute by minute detail. Don't make the schedule so full she ends up having to shorten her talk. Include wiggle room. If there are changes, alert her to them immediately.
- Provide anything needed if the event is being held at a venue like a retreat center, especially if the speaker flies in. I once arrived, and the event planner was shocked I hadn't brought my own sleeping bag and towels. Most speakers need a private bedroom and bathroom to be at their best.
- Don't expect every speaker to be equally available to the women at break times or meals. Some want one of the women to accompany her around; others don't. Some want to sit at all meals with the committee; others don't.

As you work with speakers it's important to remember, you should ask if they have any questions or needs along the way, don't assume. And be willing to track down the answer if you don't have it.

Communication is the key to cooperation and makes for a great service or event. S?



Meet Lee Ann Mancini.

Even with her extensive list of degrees and accomplishments, Lee Ann places great importance on the ministry closest to her heart–reaching children with the love of Jesus.

She is the award-winning author and publisher of an adorable aquatic collection of Christian children's books that are helping kids think through everyday life issues and make good choices.

As a mother of two, she started collecting tons of ideas for stories from her kids' growing up years. But after some setbacks she put publishing books on hold so she could do what was most important to her at the time—be a mom.

Leading Hearts had the opportunity to speak with our Advanced Writers and Speakers Association (AWSA) sister to get some insight into her publishing journey. Q: Doing children's books didn't come in the timing that you thought it was going to happen in. What did you see "divinely orchestrated" in your delay to get published?

I saw God's hand in all of this! Years ago, when I tried the mainstream publishing, I received rejection after rejection. I put the manuscripts away. Years later, after I received two masters in Biblical Theology, I felt the Holy Spirit prompting again and again to publish the stories. I took them out, rewrote them, found an illustrator, and then I was ready to publish them.

The timing was all in God's hands, as now there are many successful independent publishers. I now have the time and the funds to invest in this mission to bring little ones closer to Christ and to raise money for Christian children charities. Also, at the time I chose the editor, printer, graphic designer, and illustrator I didn't know that they are all strong Christians. This verifies it is God's mission!

Q: What do you consider as a unique quality of your books in comparison to other books in the Christian Children's marketplace?

We are instilling godly values and morals that last a lifetime. Ninety percent of a child's brain develops in the first five years of life. It is paramount that children learn to have respect, kindness, honesty, courage, perseverance, self-discipline, compassion, and most importantly, love!

A unique quality is that our characters pray to Jesus during difficult times, and they exhibit the fruit of the Spirit as they handle various situations that children face today. They are large books, which allow the illustrations to engage the child's imagination visually while the stories capture their hearts and minds. Also, there is a hidden Christian symbol on each page for the children to find and they love looking for it. Parents tell me their children read my books over and over. I always hear, "Your books are my child's favorite book!" As I researched more and more, I felt I was supposed to start my publishing company.

Q: Where do you get your ideas?

I try to address issues that children are facing today. Most of the stories came from experiences my children had when they were young, which are still relevant today.

#### Q: What's the best thing about being a writer?

The best thing about being a children's Christian author is seeing children's faces light up when they read the books or when I visit a school and read to them. I know these stories are planting seeds of love, compassion, and acceptance, and most importantly helping children to realize that Jesus is always there for them. I love to hear parents tell me that their little one prays to Jesus because their child saw one of my characters do the same.

# Q: What was one of the "best practices" you've incorporated into your writing process?

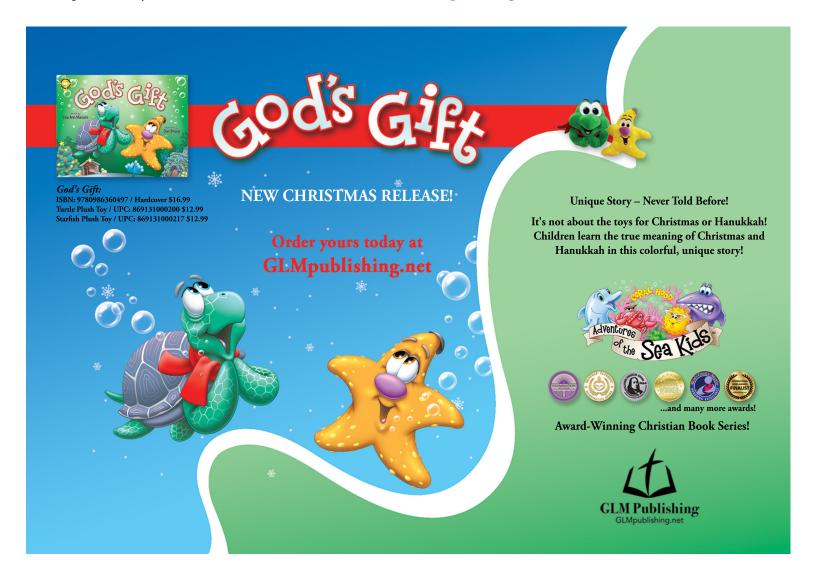
The best practice is asking the Holy Spirit to give me the message and guide me in the process. Secondly, I sent the material to teachers and asked them their opinion. They are the best advocates and critics who want products that help to build a strong foundation in Jesus while teaching love and acceptance. My books have an anti-bullying message portrayed through the actions of my characters.

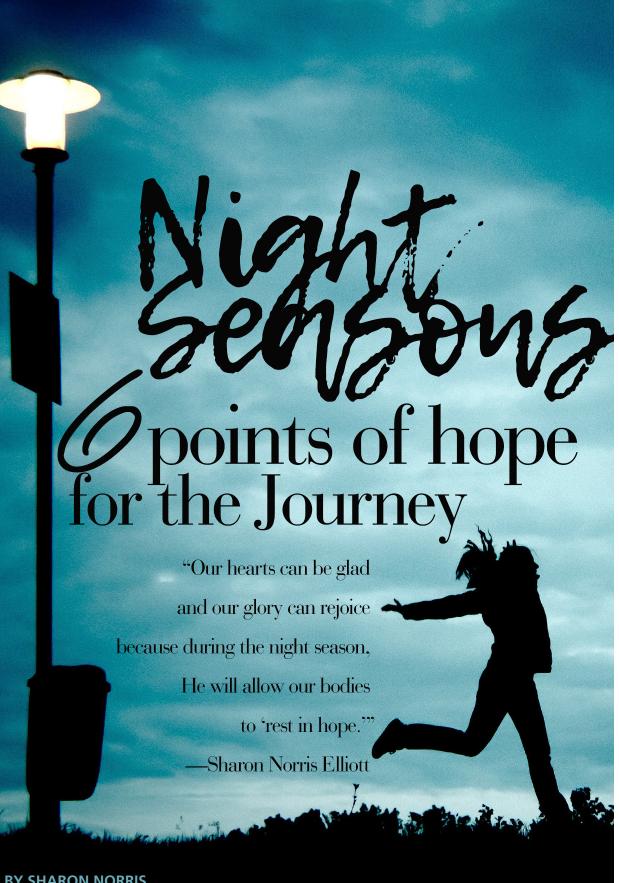
# Q: What is your favorite quote from your latest book, **God's Gift**?

My favorite quote from God's Gift:

"Christmas and Hanukkah are about celebrating the gift God has given to His children. It's not about how many presents are under the tree at Christmas or the many gifts for Hanukkah. God provides for those He loves. We should always love each other as God loves us. And we should love each other for our differences."

Hear more from Lee Ann on the latest edition of the Leading Hearts podcast. leadinghearts.com and find out more about her and her books at GLMpublishing.net.







# WE ALL GO THROUGH THEM: NIGHT SEASONS WHEN EVERYTHING AROUND US LOOKS BAD.

A job is hard to find, or it's a problem once you find it. A child is messing up, a spouse is unreasonable, a friend is cantankerous, the weather is uncomfortable, the car is making a funny noise, and you feel like you're coming down with a cold.

Unfortunately, night seasons can also consist of just one serious problem: a loved one facing a cancer diagnosis, a tragic house fire, a severe financial reversal, a grim physician's report.

What is the hope of the Christ-follower in the night seasons?

Psalm 16:7-11 (NIV) gives us six sure-fire points of hope from God that He lovingly supplies during night seasons. The passage says:

"I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.

I have set the Lord always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. –

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope.

For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

#### Did you see the points of hope?

First, there's comfort in realizing God gives us a prescription, medicine as it were, to handle our night season. The prescription is His counsel (verse 7). If we bless the Lord—that is, if we continue to

speak well of Him no matter what—we will find that our hearts will "hear" His instructions for how to endure our night season.

Second, as we keep the Lord before us (verse 8), He supplies us with spiritual pluck (courage) and poise (confidence). Knowing that God is as close as our right hand helps us stand and face the problems with grace.

Third, God supplies peace. Verse 9 says that our hearts can be glad and our glory can rejoice because during the night season, He will allow our bodies to "rest in hope." No losing sleep allowed; God's peace takes over.

The fourth point of hope is protection. When we go through night seasons, Satan figures we're weak, so he seeks to seize upon that opportunity and try to destroy us while we're down. But oh no, verse 10 tells us that God will not allow His holy ones to see corruption. (Even though this verse is a reference to Christ as the Holy One, since we are in Christ thanks to His death and resurrection, by extension, the verse can also apply to us.)

#### The fifth point of hope is a biggie—God's presence.

We may not be able to see all the way to the end of the problem, but God will give us enough light to see at least the bit of the path that we need to step onto next. That's all the strength we have anyhow, just enough for one step at a time. From where does that light come?

Verse 11 says it comes from His presence. The light is on the next step of my path because God is right beside me being my personal flashlight.

Finally, the sixth point of hope, also in verse 11, is God's promise of pleasures. Even though we're not out of the night season yet, being in God's presence places us close to Him. And we're on the side of His powerful, giving hand—the right hand, from which flows every good and perfect gift.

So during night seasons, receive God's prescription, pluck & poise, peace, protection, presence, and pleasures. And remember: seasons change.





meet linda

**LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD** @LINDASHEPHERD is publisher of **Leading Hearts** magazine. She is also a best-selling author, an in-demand speaker, and president of Right to the Heart ministries. She is founder of the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association (AWSA). She lives in Colorado with husband, Paul and son, Jimmy. www.Sheppro.com



# meet amber

**AMBER WEIGAND-BUCKLEY** @BAREFACEDGIRL is managing editor and art director for **Leading Hearts** magazine. She is a writer, speaker and multi-award winning editor, having spent 21 years in the magazine industry. When not working on **Leading Hearts**, she provides communications and social media support for non-profits and missionaries. She and her Brit-native husband Philip live in Missouri with their three daughters: Saffron, Imogen, and Penelope. www.barefacedgirl.com



**PAM FARREL** and her husband Bill are speakers and authors of 40 books including their newest: 7 Simple Skills for Success for Men. For more information visit www.LoveWise.com

**JULIE GORMAN** is John Maxwell Leadership Coach, author and encourager, who along with husband Greg recently released **Two Are Better Than One: God Has a Purpose for Your Marriage.** Find out more about their purpose-focused marriage movement at www.gormanleadership.com

**TORRY MARTIN** award-winning comedian/actor and author partnered with Doug Peterson to pen **Of Moose and Men**—a look at finding faith in the wilds of Alaska. Torry has also written for Focus on the Family's Adventures in Odyssey, co-written screenplays for several films, and appeared in many movies, including Hallmark's "The Ultimate Legacy." Doug is a Gold Medallion-winning author of over 60 books, including 42 for the popular "VeggieTales" series and four historical novels. www facebook.com/torrymartincomedy.

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