

2015-2016-2017 Evangelical Press Association Award of Merit

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017 | VOL. 4, ISSUE 5

# LEADING HEARTS

EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN FOR LEADERSHIP

- ♥ CHRISTMAS, UNSTUCK
- ♥ PRAYING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS
- ♥ THE MOST BEAUTIFUL UGLY CHRISTMAS ORNAMENT
- ♥ BREAK THE GIMME MINDSET
- ♥ KATHIE LEE GIFFORD  
ONE LITTLE GIANT

Candace  
Payne  
the

# Joy REBELLION



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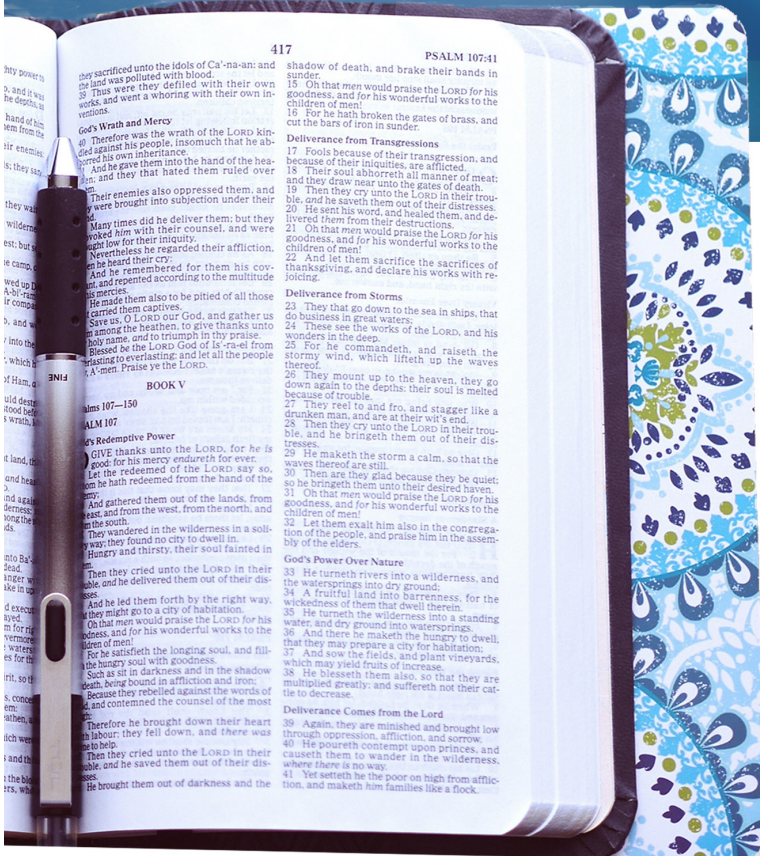
"Arise, Shine...  
the glory of the LORD  
rises upon you."

-Isaiah 60:1 (niv)



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FROM THE PUBLISHER  
*Linda Evans Shepherd*

## celebrate the chaos

IT WAS EASY TO FEEL THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS WHEN I WAS A CHILD. I LOVED THE BABE IN

THE MANGER, not to mention the strings of colored lights and the wonderful presents beneath my tree. It was there I found talking baby dolls, walkie-talkies and pink bicycles.

But when I grew up, I discovered Christmas joy could be tarnished by the cares of life, disappointments and even grief.

I know this because I haven't lived a fairy tale life. A car with broken brakes resulted in a crash that threw my then 18-month-old daughter into the freeway. That accident resulted in chaos and heartache. Everyone wanted me to pull my brain-damaged daughter's plug. "Let her go. She'll never be normal," they said. But I wouldn't listen. I told them, "She's still my daughter, injured or not, and I love her."

It was hard, truly hard, but I decided to accept my life's new normal of mothering a disabled child. That decision pushed me past the harshness of my difficulties and into real joy.

Sure, I could have chosen bitterness, but why? Why choose anger when it's possible to experience joy?

Yes, there is a remedy for the Holiday blues. You'll find it when you give your heavy heart to the Babe in the manger. After all, Jesus didn't stay a babe;

He grew up to become our Savior, the Lord of the All. The One who laid down His life for us so that we could be friends with God.

But how do you give Jesus your broken heart? And how would He view such a gift?

He would love it. Jesus is famous for carrying our burdens and griefs. He can turn heartache and difficulties into miracles, that is, when we trust Him with a no-matter-what resolve.

So, give Jesus your broken heart, your cares, your difficulties and burdens. Psalm 147:3 explains, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

He'll heal your broken heart when you give Him all the pieces.

Oh, and almost forgot. We at **Leading Hearts** have a Christmas gift for you. You can start off your new year with our all new Arise Daily devotionals, delivered daily to your inbox, starting January 1. Sign up now!

And Merry Christmas from all of us at **Leading Hearts** and AWSA, the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association. *LEH*

Love,  
LINDA EVANS SHEPHERD  
PUBLISHER, LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE





NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017 | VOL. 4, ISSUE 5

# LEADING HEARTS

EMPOWERING CHRISTIAN WOMEN FOR LEADERSHIP

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**LAYOUT EDITOR**..... Tom Young

**COPY EDITORS** ..... Julie Gillies & Tom Young

**ADVERTISING**..... Linda Evans Shepherd

**EDITORIAL SECRETARY**..... Aisha Cox

**CONTRIBUTORS** ..... Lisa Burns, Penelope Carlevato, Michelle S. Cox, Sharon Norris Elliott, Pam Farrel, Patricia Layton, Edie Melson, Karen Porter, Rhonda Rhea, Cynthia L. Simmons, Kelly Stigliano, Sandra Dalton Smith, Jennifer Taylor, Heather Van Allen and Karen H. Whiting.

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## *Information*

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Leading Hearts | PO Box 6421, Longmont, CO 80501

email: [lindareply@gmail.com](mailto:lindareply@gmail.com) fax inquiries: (303)678-0260

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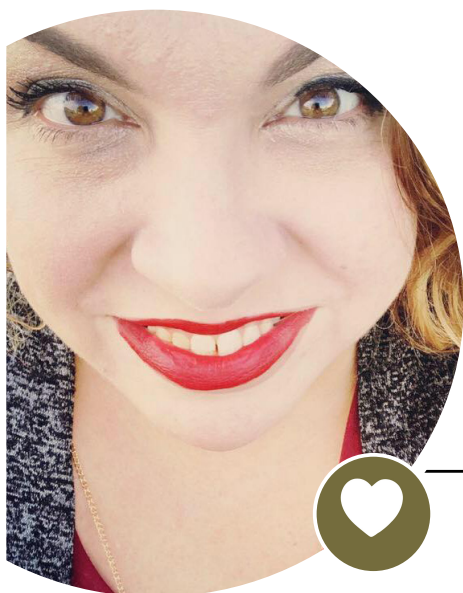


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FROM THE EDITOR  
*amber weigand-buckley*

## give it up for joy

IF YOU EVER WANT TO SEE LADIES HOLDING THEIR OWN IN A COMBAT SITUATION, JUST GO TO A BLACK FRIDAY SALE.

It's that time of the year when moms and their kids strategically case a store with walkie-talkies in hand, on a mission to grab 75 percent off items on the Christmas shopping list.

I'm sure I'm not the only one who's seen ladies strategically working to clear an entire section of shelving at the Bath and Body Works \$5 sale.

I just have a few question to ask, ladies. Who of you need a stash of 200 bottles of shower gel and lotion in one day? Are you storing up for the winter build-up of unpleasant smells?

Secondly, why do we allow the frenzy of the moment to steal the joy of the season? This goes far beyond just one holiday — it extends to our priorities and the way we do life.

Who are we going to celebrate more: the Giver of life or the giver of coupons? Who are we willing to walk over to get the great deal or opportunity that serves our agenda?

I have a challenge for the year ahead. Be determined to bring joy wherever you go. You'll quickly find that there's nothing natural about it — that's why you need that "whole lotta Jesus" with your side of coffee.

The only way to serve up JOY in a society that is caught on a hairpin trigger of angst and flying off the handle is to choose to be a "Joy Rebel."

As a Joy Rebel, you consciously allow God to overwrite your mind to see His priorities and place them first, no matter how overly patient or forgiving or even-tempered or kind you need to be in moments of frenzy. Choose to bring a spirit of joy, laughter and love, even if you feel severely wronged or treated harshly.

Instead of being quick to Facebook rant about horrible restaurant service, a spirit of Joy gives you the pause to pray for your server. It ALSO gives you the presence of mind to give him or her a better tip than YOU THINK he or she deserves.

The bottom line: as Christians, joy is not dependent upon our circumstance — it is the Fruit of the Spirit that we allow God to produce in our lives. We MUST be mindful of nurturing it.

James 1:2-3 says. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance" (NIV).

I hope this issue of **Leading Hearts** inspires you to be moved into an attitude of REBELLIOUS JOY. THE ULTIMATE GIFT you can give — to attract everyone you interact with to the source of it.

*AW*

Joy, Peace and Love be with you and yours,  
AMBER WEIGAND-BUCKLEY  
EDITOR, LEADING HEARTS MAGAZINE





# Candace Payne get your laugh on

HER JOYOUS LAUGH,  
COMBINED WITH AN ICONIC  
CHEWBACCA MASK on a simple  
Facebook video watched by nearly 200 million  
people, catapulted Candace Payne, “Chewbacca  
Mom,” into stardom with the most shared viral  
video on Facebook to date.

With such sad news engulfing the world today, it's  
certainly visible that her contagious humor was  
made for such a time as this.

What's funny and so wonderful is to hear Candace  
tell how God has written this into her story all  
along. It was a story much more than she could  
ask or think.

As she found herself at Facebook Headquarters,  
she asked for 10 minutes to herself so she could  
have some prayer time with God. She thought  
back to her younger years, and then God gave her  
a vision, a memory of herself at 4 years old.

“I would wait for commercials on the big, wooden  
console TV. When they would come on, I would  
turn down the volume knob, stand in front of my  
family and entertain them. I'd write songs, I'd do a  
skit or do something funny. As soon as the show  
came back on, I would go sit back in the corner  
with my notepad and start writing down things to  
do when the next commercial came on,” Candace  
said.

“It's long been that I've devised this quality about

me that wanted to make people laugh, bring joy or  
be fun. What God was really showing me was that  
He created me to bring fun to these spaces,” she  
said. “God has been writing this story all along.

It's not new. It's not a new season. It's destiny.  
It's these good works that He's been preparing  
all along that I really have been kind of ignoring.  
There's more freedom to be who I really am in  
this past year than I have ever experienced in my  
life. So, I really feel like all along this journey, He  
has just been winking at me, nodding at me and  
showing me how He created me to bring laughter  
and joy to the world.”

The viral video led Candace and her family  
to appearances on television shows, meeting  
celebrities and attending conventions. However,  
she said it's the moments that you won't see on a  
highlight reel that she will not forget.

“It's really watching my kids getting to experience  
the craziest things. We were at HasCon, and  
they gave us a greenroom so that we could rest  
in between interviews. I go downstairs to do one  
of the things and on my way back my husband  
texts, ‘No worries. We're having a Nerf war in the  
greenroom with Zach King [who is famous for his  
video shorts on YouTube],’” she said.

“He's phenomenal. I'm like that's a weird text,  
but I guess that's how we're rolling now. I walk  
into a greenroom and my kids are full on hiding  
behind couches and tray tables with granola bars  
and popcorn and they're having a Nerf war with  
someone that we've long loved on YouTube.”

**-continued on p. 10-**





"What God was really showing me was that He created me to bring fun to these spaces."

— Candace to *Leading Hearts*

-continued from p. 9-



The original joy-lifting mask, that now features the famous signatures of J.J. Abrams, James Corden and Peter Mayhew, is hidden away for protection, but Candace said they have a few masks around the Payne house – including one on the fireplace – to pull out for fun occasionally.

"I find if I'm having a lull in the day, I will just get it out and I'll eat with it," she said. "I'll just have it on when I'm eating; it makes sounds while I'm eating, and I'm amused."

In her book, ***Laugh It Up***, Candace opens up about struggles in her life, including extreme poverty, trauma and attempted suicide. "I think people feel as though if you've got joy or if you can laugh, then you've never experienced heartache, or you look at the world through rose-colored lenses and maybe you have this naivety about you. But there's a difference between being childlike and childish.

In all honesty, I feel like I am very childlike in my approach to life," Candace said. "It all spirals out of control so quickly, and it all starts with your thoughts. You will never know the person who is thinking that or harboring those thoughts in their mind. You may think that person is fine, and they may not be."

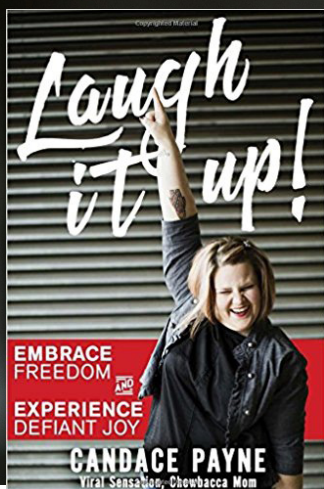
Candace encourages those battling with those thoughts now to just hold one second, then one minute, one hour, and one day.

"Sometimes it just takes making it through the night so that your mind can clear out your thoughts. Find somebody you can trust and share those thoughts. We need to be open, honest and vulnerable a whole lot more with the people around us. We need to say, 'I'm dealing with this. I'm thinking about this. Can you help me?' I don't think we do that enough," she said.

"But I really do feel that if we could just say to those who are already there and thinking those thoughts, just know that you've got a brighter future."

In her new book, she also personifies Joy. "If I were going to imagine Joy in that college room that night I tried to take my life, I could see her in the corner just rallying for me saying, 'You have no clue what lies ahead. Come on, make it through the night. Make it through the night, because I promise you that you're going to meet the man of your dreams. You're going to have two beautiful kids. You're going to have this viral video. It's going to be great, friend. Just make it through the night,'" Candace said.

"I feel that if people could grasp that — if they could just make it through whatever darkness they are walking through right now — there's joy ahead in your day."



## CANDACE'S GUARANTEED JOY-LIFTERS TODAY:

- A good taco.
- Compression socks for travel
- YouTube videos with pugs ... well, anything with pugs.

**Three things to bring you joy when you are down:**

### 1. Hold Out Hope.

"Everyone wants joy, but hope is the main thing. Joy is honestly a by-product, it's a result of something else," Candace said. "Even in Scripture, you see that consistently. Romans 15:13 says, 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (NIV).'"

### 2. Stop Comparing.

"We've heard it before, but comparison is the thief of joy," she said. "When you find yourself comparing, you are really missing the mark. You're not walking out with confidence who you are and who God has created you to be (and who the world needs you to be). They don't need somebody else. They don't need a carbon copy. They don't need your best imitation of anybody

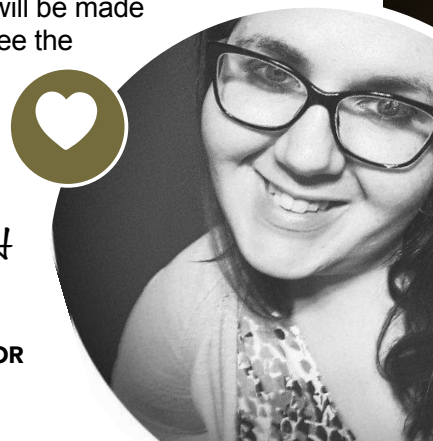
else. They are really waiting for you to step up and be who God created you to be."

### 3. Things Last for a Season.

"There are seasons that that come and go. Know that this may just be temporary," Candace said. "In our grief or sorrow moments, we forget that things could last a season, and that God ordained that. He allows us to lament so that we can grow and develop character. He wills us to suffer with Him. It's so good, because that's where we find that our true life, our true joy, is hidden. In Hebrews, it says that Christ saw the joy set before Him and He endured. To the disgrace of all men, He endured it. There's something to be learned about joy in our enduring seasons. Know that most of the time, it is just a season. It'll pass."

Candace thinks specifically of her neighbors in Houston affected by the hurricane. Seeing lines of people in social media posts. Not lines of people needing help but lines of volunteers coming to help. "That right there is when I say this is a season. This is a season when you will be made stronger, you will be made better, and you will see the beauty and joy of the human spirit if you will just lift up your eyes and know it won't last forever."

by *jenn taylor* <sup>LH</sup>  
PROFILE CONTRIBUTOR







by karen porter  
WWW.KARENPORTER.COM



THERE IS A LINE FROM AN OLD MOVIE THAT HAUNTS ME SOMETIMES. THE MOVIE WAS ABOUT A MAN WHO WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF A MID-LIFE CRISIS, which included all the typical signs like buying a sports car, quitting his stable job and changing his style of dress to young and hip. Then his father died, and suddenly all the family and friends and business associates turned to him as the new family leader. He said, "But, I don't want to be the daddy."

Sometimes, his feeling is exactly how we feel as leaders. We don't want to be the leader.

Being a leader is a calling. Leadership is also a skill we develop. It involves thinking big as we set goals. We have to see the overall objectives and break those ideas into smaller goals, motivating

others, as well as developing leadership skills in the people we lead.

People!

Dealing with people is a tough job. Each person has a different personality and brings strengths and weaknesses to the relationship in addition to personal background issues, stress and hang-ups. Add your own personality quirks and background twists to the mix, and nearly every relationship is a train wreck ready to happen. No wonder we feel overwhelmed and want to quit.

What is a leader to do when you'd rather hide?  
What does a leader do when you'd like to scream?

## Be sure you are healthy physically.

Schedule an appointment with your doctor for a general health screening. Consider taking supplements, such as magnesium and Vitamin D. Eat fruits, vegetables and lean meats. Add regular exercise to your weekly routine. When your body is healthy, your stress levels will level out.

Don't you realize that your body  
is the temple of the Holy Spirit,  
who lives in you?  
—1 Corinthians 6:19, NLT—

## Improve your spiritual health.

Are you reading the Bible in a devotional manner each day? Sometimes we spend all our time in the Bible preparing messages for speaking and writing rather than allowing time for God to speak through His Word.

Practice spiritual breathing using the Model Prayer: Inhale, Our Father. Exhale, who art in heaven. Inhale, Hallowed. Exhale, be your name. Consider going on a spiritual retreat where you will spend quiet time and hear from speakers who will challenge and inspire your spiritual growth.

"All growth that is not toward God is  
growing to decay."  
—George Macdonald—

## Take an inventory.

At the end of each month, I answer a series of questions while studying my calendar from the previous month. This self-inventory helps me stay on track in my personal goals and reminds me to treat others as I'd like to be treated.

Some of the questions in my monthly inventory include:

1. Have I struggled with a sense of pride this month?
2. Have I had any conversations this month where my words didn't match my actions?
3. Did I exaggerate or alter the facts to make myself look better?
4. Have I been completely loyal to my family, followers and organization this month?
5. What unhealthy indications of impatience have surfaced this month?
6. Have I treated each person as Jesus would treat them?

And let us consider  
how we may spur one another  
on toward love and good deeds.  
—Hebrews 10:24, NIV—

Leading isn't for wimps. We have those days when we want to quit and those days when we don't like our job or the people we work with. But with God's help and a few practical changes in health, spiritual growth, and reflection, we can lead and serve with joy. *AM*



# Christmas, unstuck

Trusting God When Tragedy Interrupts Tradition



by pat layton — [WWW.PATLAYTON.COM](http://WWW.PATLAYTON.COM)

IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN OUR FAMILY TRADITION TO CELEBRATE THANKSGIVING AROUND MY PARENTS' DINING ROOM TABLE.

With three younger sisters, each year another seat was added to accommodate our own growing families of spouses, children and now grandchildren. Traditions translate into legacies for future generations and offer us a little bit of consistency in an ever-changing world.

Thanksgiving of 2010 certainly challenged that sense of certainty and tradition.

Within hours of that year's celebration, my sister called me with the tragic news that our dad had suffered a fatal heart attack. Anyone who has experienced the loss of a parent knows there are no words to describe the collective emotions of a family to such a sudden passing.

The weeks that followed my dad's passing were like a thick fog, a viscous mixture of anger and grief. This wasn't fair. Every holiday season up to that point in my life had been one of joyful memory making — baking, shopping, decorating and celebrating the birth of Jesus.

Tragedy had interrupted tradition, and we were lost. In fact, every one of us needed to find our way to build a new tradition. We needed to trust God



and believe that His love would surround us. And it did, individually and in the most unexpected ways.

First, our middle son apologetically reaffirmed his previously set plans to visit his wife's family in North Georgia that Christmas. I assured him that it was perfectly okay, even while I cringed inwardly at the thought of their absence. The next call came from our oldest married son, sorrowfully stating that he just couldn't face Christmas without his beloved Pappa.

Their family was also headed to the mountains for Christmas camping. As the days went by and the grief deepened, my husband, youngest daughter and I began to realize that not only would our Christmas not have my dad, it would not include our two sons, two treasured daughters-in-love and our five grandchildren. I was overwhelmed.

After some passionate prayer and heartfelt discussions about leaving my mom during such a difficult time, my husband and I decided to join our sons and gather as a family at Vogel State Park in the North Georgia Mountains. I hesitantly approached my mom with the plan and invited her to come with us. She encouraged me, as I had encouraged my own children, to go where we needed to go to get through this year.

The entire car trip I was crying. I couldn't believe I was actually leaving my mom and sisters at such a sad time. Yet, at the same time, I felt God's peace filling my broken heart and reminding me to trust Him with my own grief as well as everyone else's.

In the days leading up to Christmas I started to see the new shape of things. God's own evergreen trees and brilliant stars filled every space with the sounds and scents of life. I began to surrender traditions I had so tightly held and slowly embraced what was new.

A roaring fireplace surrounded me, kids wandered nomadically in the beautiful state park and grown-ups chattered leisurely. No hustle and bustle. No lines. No malls. No crowds. No "to-do" lists. I felt a sense of hope that I continued to trust in the midst of this tragedy.

I called my mom from the campground several times each day to discover that God had also set her Christmas up quietly and tenderly with a few close friends and family members. It turned out that she needed a new tradition as well. She needed not to try to have the same Christmas she

had for over 50 years with my dad. God, in His good love and His tender ways, had given us all what we needed.

On Christmas Eve at the cabin, we brewed hot chocolate, roasted marshmallows and munched on cranberry muffins in front of our grandsons' "biggest fire in the world." Our middle son's family was set to join us the next day.

The cold got colder, and the stars lit up the park. It seemed perfect ... and then it was. Christmas morning, I woke up to smoldering fire embers and a deep chill. In need of firewood to fuel the hearth, my husband grabbed boots and a coat and trudged to the door.

He swung the front door open and gasped. Snow was pouring from the sky! The ground was covered and our grandsons were barreling down the winter white hill toward us in utter delight. Vogel State Park in the North Georgia Mountains was seeing her first snowfall in over 15 years! My tears mixed with the melting snowflakes and I thanked God for such a sweet miracle, our very first white Christmas.

PH

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Check out p. 41 for an overview of Pat's latest book, *A Woman's Quest to an Unstuck Christmas*.





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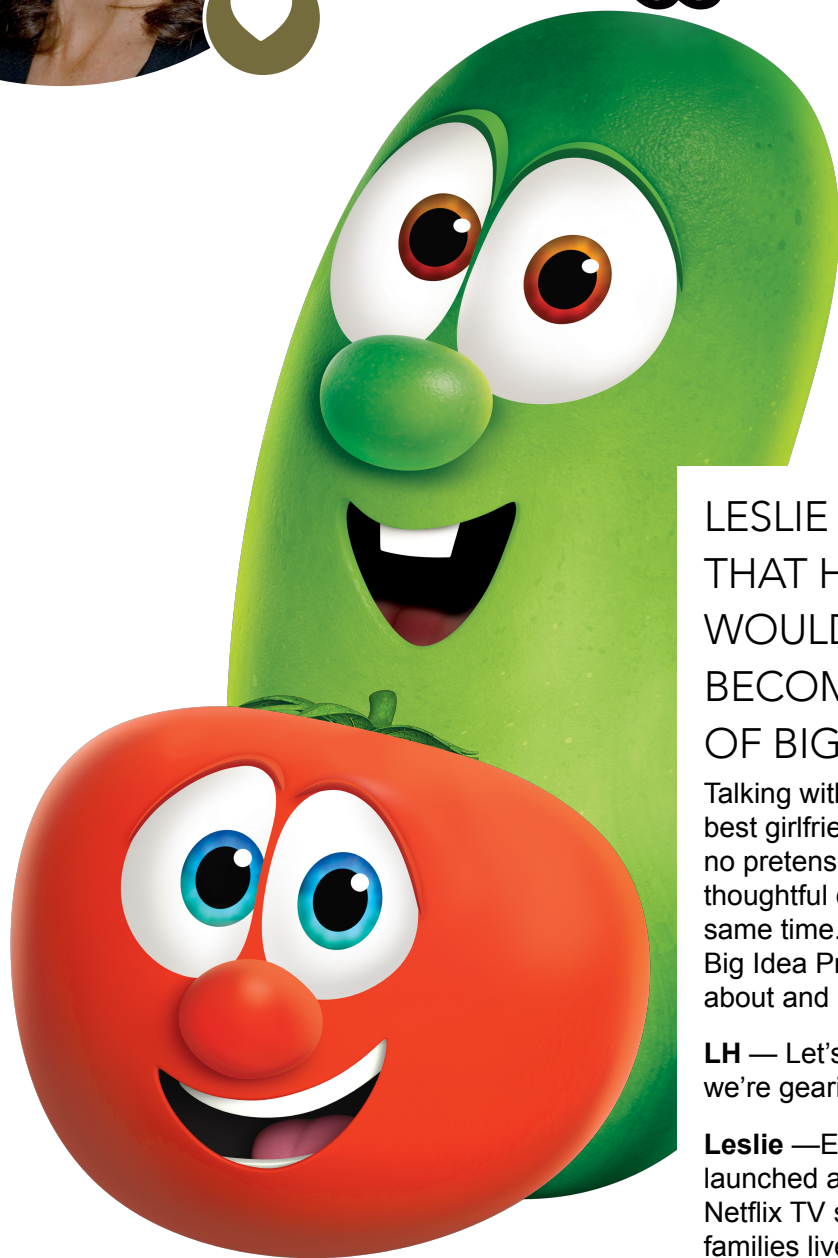
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# leslie ferrell

## *it's a veggie-full life*



LESLIE FERRELL HAD NO IDEA THAT HER SMALL BEGINNINGS WOULD POSITION HER TO BECOME GENERAL MANAGER OF BIG IDEA PRODUCTIONS.

Talking with her was like speaking to one of your best girlfriends. You know the type — there was no pretense. It seemed as if we jumped into thoughtful conversation and laughter, both at the same time. There were new things happening at Big Idea Productions that Leslie wanted to talk about and much to share about her journeys.

**LH** — Let's Talk about Veggie Tales! I hear that we're gearing up for a big move very soon!

**Leslie** — Exactly! In November 2014, we launched a cartoon version of **Veggie Tales** as a Netflix TV series. And we did it because today's families live life pretty much on the go most of the time. As parents you want to have access to the

**-continued on p. 18-**



**-continued from p. 17-**

content your kids see, when you want them to see it. We use many ways to view content — television, tablets, phones and computers. So, this was really a great opportunity for the brand. We're now in our third year with Netflix!

On September 15, we debuted 11 new episodes of **Veggie Tales**. Up to this point we've seen Larry and Bob in Pa Grape's store and in their local neighborhood, but now they make a big move to the city.

**LH** — That's great! A change of scenery for Larry and Bob. What was the thought process behind the change?

**Leslie** — Because so many families live in cities, we wanted to reflect what that's like. With moving Bob and Larry to the city, we see (1) how moving is change and things look different with change; (2) how Bob and Larry learn the lesson of trusting God when things are different; and (3) ultimately, we learn that wherever we are, wherever God takes us, He always makes His home in our hearts. We also see that He helps us adjust to the new and different places we may live. That's just

## REALCHURCHLADIES

one of the episodes! I think there's a lot for the kids to get excited about and enjoy in this series.

**LH** — Now, when you say they've moved to a big city, my mind automatically goes to the broader spectrum of diversity that we find there. A bigger city gives us more people and more opportunity for culture. How does Big Idea embrace the message of diversity?

**Leslie** — With children, we try to do a lot of repeat messaging, so we'll say God loves you and He made you very special. We discuss the fact that you can trust God, and that He uses the Bible to give us instruction on how to live. The Bible even tells us how to deal with the differences in people. We keep it simple. We talk about how some people have brown skin, some people have red hair, some people like blue dresses.

He wants us to care for people and to hold people with respect and dignity because He made them. We have always made *Veggie Tales* a series that is hopeful. We promote the view that God is in control. Does that mean that there aren't some disappointments? Things that hurt? The underlying answer to all of that is we want to help grow our kids to live biblically with the view that God is always there, and NOTHING takes Him by surprise.

**LH** — I would love for you to share some of your journey. What path did teenage Leslie see herself taking?

**Leslie** — I didn't come to Christ until the end of my college years. (I wasn't raised in a Christian home.) At the time, I was looking to go to law school, but during my last year of college my world was turned upside down in a wonderful way. There was a ministry on campus that was impacting students. I was confronted with a God who loved me, forgave my sins and wanted to know me personally. My experience with that ministry began to transform my life AND my dreams. I also met my husband during this time.

**LH** — Did you ever go back to your original plan of law school?

**Leslie** — No, I didn't. For the next 13 years we chose to give back and be a part of the college

ministry that had changed our lives.

I think the time spent working with college students was the start to growth in my leadership skills. Years later, I led a women's ministry in a four-state area in the Northwest, which built an even firmer foundation. I joined Big Idea in a mid-level manager role. I wasn't expecting to end up running the company! As is often the case in life, that was God's plan.

**LH** — Were there instrumental people who mentored you along the way?

**Leslie** — Much of my life has been influenced by mentors God has brought to me. They believed in me when, frankly, I didn't think there was a lot to believe in! I was surrounded by secure leaders who weren't threatened. Instead, they encouraged me to lean into my leadership skills. I think this is a challenge for women.

**LH** — How did you find an environment that would allow you to "lean into" your strengths?

**Leslie** — The church community often doesn't know what to do with women leaders. Many times, they don't have roles for women. So, unfortunately, the church doesn't get to benefit. Women leaders end up going elsewhere.

**LH** — What can we do to promote change in this area?

**Leslie** — We need to be providing mentorship. We need to be the voice that whispers and challenges. We all learn from each other. Women have unique skill sets when leading with vulnerability and nurturing. We can use those characteristics with our colleagues, those we mentor, women we're leading in a Bible study, whatever! That vulnerability piece is a gift that we can give each other. Be a leader. Speak up. Ask God to create opportunities for you to be a change agent, both in and outside the church. *LH*

by *Lisa Burns*  
PROFILE CONTRIBUTOR





# The Most Beautiful ugly christmas ornament



by *kelly j. stigliano* — [WWW.KELLYSTIGLIANO.COM](http://WWW.KELLYSTIGLIANO.COM)

## MY COMPANY ASSIGNED ME

**TO GRETIS MORRIS' CASE.** I was to prepare her meals, do light housekeeping and just keep her company. She lived in what is commonly called a mother-in-law suite, which was attached to her daughter's house in Columbus, Ohio. Gretis' daughter and son-in-law took good care of her, but because they both taught full-time, they needed someone to come in one day each week to help.

Mrs. Morris accepted me as family almost immediately. A native of West Virginia, she often spoke of her home there and the friends she had made throughout her 78 years of life.

Through her stories, I felt the warmth and friendship of her small Appalachian community through the very lean years and the joy of prosperity in the occasional windfall. The camaraderie in the “holler” village she described rivaled that of Walnut Grove in the Little House series.

When the company through which I worked demanded more of my time, I had to quit. My contract stated that I couldn’t work independently for any of their clients and receive payment. I spoke with Mrs. Morris and decided I wanted to continue to help her without charging. I would come when she called to say she needed me.

My grandmother had died 11 years earlier on December 15, and Mrs. Morris became my new Gramma. My children occasionally accompanied me to her house, and she loved them as if they were her grandchildren. My children’s grandparents lived several hours away, so her kindness filled the emptiness in their lives.

We had great times together. I repotted her houseplants, cleaned her house, rearranged her pantry, changed her bedding, plucked her chin hairs and listened to her stories of a hard life in the hills of Appalachia. Without my being aware, through her quiet lessons, I learned about living, marriage and parenting.

Each Christmas, we exchanged gifts. She bought me the same gifts she bought her daughters: a nightshirt, floral slip-on sneakers, and potholders. I adored each one, and the gifts made me feel like I was part of the family.

One Christmas, Mrs. Morris sent a wrapped gift home with me. At home, I opened my package and found, alongside the gift, a little ball of white tissue paper containing an old, faded pink glass tree ornament. It was quite ugly. It was scratched and tried its ugly best to resemble a small pinecone. I thought, surely this is a mistake.

When I spoke with her next, I asked her if she knew she had put an ornament inside the box.

“Oh, I just thought you’d like to have it.”

I thanked her for it and put it away. *Maybe I’ll use it next Christmas*, I said to myself.

Another year passed. One chilly winter week Mrs. Morris didn’t call. She sometimes missed a week, but when I didn’t receive a call after the second week, I became concerned. I phoned her daughter and she said that Gretis was in the hospital and “they don’t expect her to live.”

When I went to the hospital to visit her, she smiled weakly at me. With eyes half opened, she thanked me for coming.

It was December and I told her that I thought the best way to spend Christmas was with the Christ child himself. She smiled and nodded.

Three days later, on December 15, my second Gramma, died. She took her to her hometown of Clendenin, West Virginia, to be buried.

After her death, I didn’t feel like decorating for Christmas, but pushed myself to do so. When I finally got to my tree ornaments I saw that ugly old pink pinecone. As I held it in my hand and stared at it, I thought of the many Christmases it had seen in the mountains of West Virginia — happy Christmases with family; stressful Christmases swallowed up in want. Suddenly, I realized what a special gift Mrs. Morris had given me. I saw it as the most beautiful ornament I’d ever laid eyes on and carefully placed it at the top of our tree, close to the trunk so it wouldn’t fall.

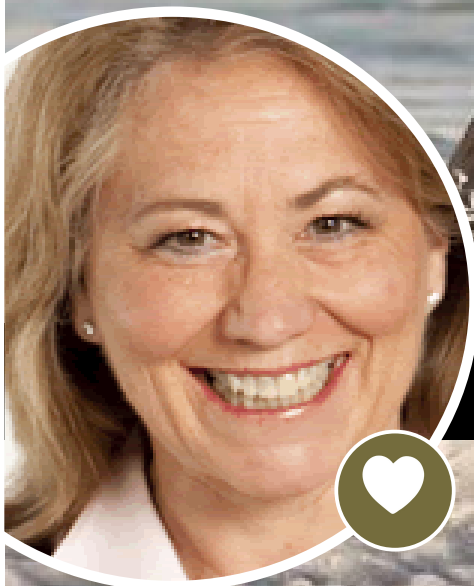
It has become my most treasured decoration. Each year I carefully unwrap it and fondly remember Mrs. Morris as I place it on the tree. That old pink ornament glistens in the soft glow of the twinkling lights. It shines down on our family as we celebrate the birth of Christ together. It encourages me to let the love of God shine through me as it did through Mrs. Morris.

Season after season, I reflect on the life lessons Mrs. Morris passed on to me. I know that with God’s help it is possible to remain strong and loving through all of life’s trials.

Each Christmas I pray that, in the year to come, I will touch at least one life the way she touched mine. It is clearly the most beautiful ornament on our tree!

LN





by *pam farrel* — [WWW.LOVE-WISE.COM](http://WWW.LOVE-WISE.COM)

# Happily Ever Laughter

## the joy of togetherness

WE WERE INTERVIEWED BY  
A MAGAZINE ON HOW TO  
KEEP THE FUN AND LAUGHS

IN MARRIAGE. We didn't realize how much we have invested in this area until we were approached as "experts" in finding fun!

In **52 Ways To Wow Your Husband: Put a Smile on His Face**, I share many ways to raise fun a little higher on your marriage to-do list. Here are a few:

**BE A PAL:** What did you do with friends while growing up? Maybe you enjoyed things like bike rides, skateboarding, water or snow skiing, jet skiing, camping, rock climbing, hiking, board games, dancing, kite flying, Frisbee® throwing or miniature golfing. Anything you loved when you were young could bring some fun back into your love life today.

**BE PREPARED:** Observe and write down what makes your man smile, chuckle, laugh and roll on the floor in stitches. Get some things on hand to serve as ticklers to your mate's funny bone: Joke books, the Sunday comics, squirt guns, silly string, whoopee cushions — you are getting the picture. Put a few things in your desk drawer that could help lighten the load of your mate by providing comic relief. I know this sounds like an oxymoron, but stock up so you can be spontaneous. If you are prepared, you can seize the moment! And a spontaneous attitude has its payoff.

**BE PROACTIVE:** Schedule in fun like you would dentist or doctor appointments. If you have light at the end of your responsibility tunnel, the daily load is easier to bear. Every day, do something that will make your man laugh. Or amp it up and

email, text, call, or send him humor all day long the day of your big LOL date. Bond with laughter on an LOL date: a musical comedy, visit a comedy club or Improv performance or rent a comedic video or DVR a clean comedy special.

A benefit of being the cruise director of your hubby's fun is that his heart will look forward to seeing you and spending time with you because your face will be equated with words like fun, party, celebration and relaxation.

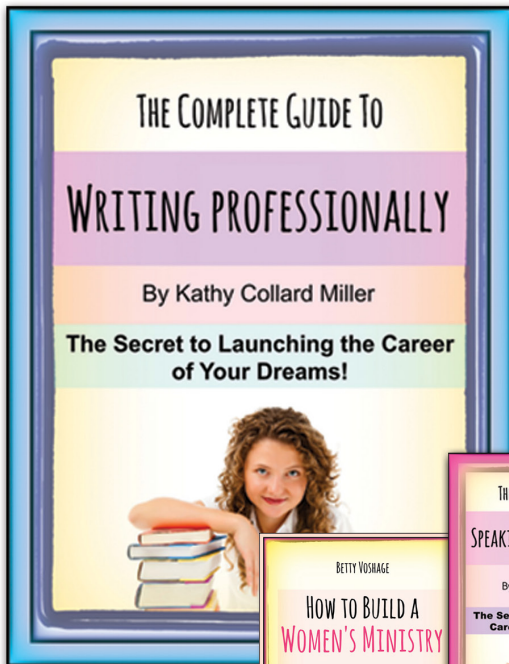
**BE A PARROT:** This bird is known for repeating things she hears. Make it your goal to remember those humorous things you see, things you say, jokes and stories you hear, signs, billboards and bumper stickers you read. Some of our best laughs are when we run in from a lunch, a trip or a meeting with a joke or story "you just have to hear." If you need, write these down or use the recorder on your smartphone to help you remember the punch lines.

**BE PERSISTENT:** Some seasons of life are just STRESSFUL! It is during these times you most need to cultivate fun, humor and laughter in your marriage. During one very difficult transition when responsibilities were high, and money was low, Bill and I developed the joke walk. We have taken prayer walks nearly daily over our 38-year marriage, but during the lean times when there was little to no money for dates, we cultivated humor by taking walks and simply telling each other jokes (found on the internet, in joke books from the library, or from cute kid quotes). While writing my book, **Red-Hot Romance Tips for Women**, I interviewed creativity specialist and award-winning songwriter Dave Clark and asked for a simple

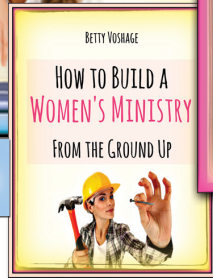
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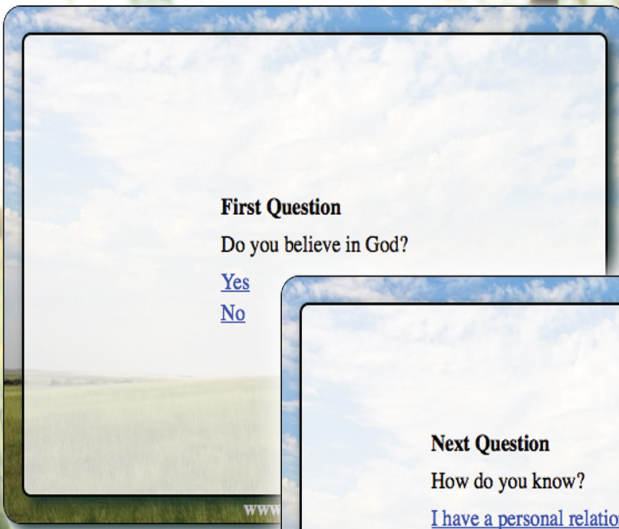
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example of how to plan a creative date:

Sometimes, romance is more about being willing to break some patterns. I'm always looking for new ways to drive against the flow of traffic. One thing that comes to mind that is always fun is to dress up in fancy clothes and map out a progressive dinner of fast food restaurants. (e.g., salad at Arby's, McDonald's for fries, Wendy's for chicken sandwich, etc. It's not about the food anyway; the romance is in the adventure. (The fancy clothes are to make people wonder what you're up to.)

Humor is good for our bodies — and for our relationships. Paul McGhee, Ph.D., says, "Your sense of humor is one of the most powerful tools you have to make certain that your daily mood and emotional state support good health." Here are a few of the many physical benefits:

- **Laughter relaxes the whole body.** A good, hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes.
- **Laughter boosts the immune system.** Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving your resistance to disease.

- **Laughter triggers the release of endorphins,** the body's natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.

- **Laughter protects the heart.** Laughter improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect you against a heart attack and other cardiovascular problems.

A cheerful heart is good medicine (Proverbs 17:22, NIV).

Go play! You bond with the one you laugh with, so let your home and your marriage be fun-filled. *PH*

*Pam and Bill Farrel are co-directors of Love-Wise. They have recently taken a big proactive step to keep joy in their life while caring for aging parents. The Farrels downsized and now live on a boat docked in southern California. Their daily "happy hour" is when they kayak over to pick up their mail and enjoy a seaside lunch, where you will often see them swapping funny stories. You can find joy for your love journey in books penned by the Farrels, like bestselling **Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti**.*



A close-up portrait of Kathie Lee Gifford. She has voluminous, wavy blonde hair and is smiling warmly at the camera. Her right hand is resting under her chin. She is wearing a dark red, long-sleeved top. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

Kathie Lee  
Gifford   
by LH staff

# what is your stone & how will you use it? one little giant

"WE ALL HAD BEEN TAUGHT THAT THE MIRACLE WAS THAT A YOUNG BOY TOOK DOWN A GIANT. BUT IN REALITY, IN THOSE DAYS, ANY SHEPHERD WAS EXPERIENCED IN KILLING BIG ANIMALS THAT THREATENED THE FLOCK.

"Just as the Lord had prepared David for that one moment, we realized that God has already given each of us a stone to use. That's the real miracle. The question then becomes 'What is our stone and how will we use it?'" Kathie Lee shared.

The project stems from a life-changing trip Gifford took to Israel with her husband, legendary football star and sports commentator, Frank Gifford, before he passed in 2015.

"***The Little Giant*** is dedicated to my late husband, Frank. It's no coincidence that he had a special place in his heart for giants since he played for the New York Giants for 12 years. But more than that, when Frank and I left Israel, we each took a small stone with us and committed to using them, however the Lord would lead. This project is the fulfillment of that promise."

In September, Kathie Lee unveiled ***The Little Giant***, a new recording which shares the story of David and Goliath in a contemporary way, while still embracing its timeless truth.

Regis Philbin (as Jesse) and Broadway notables Aidan Gemme (as David) and Gregg Edelman (as King Saul/Goliath), among others, joined voices with the celebrated television and Broadway personality who assumed the role of the fun-loving ewe, Sheeba.

The 30-minute album, inspired by the true story of how a young boy overcame a giant, is a compilation of 13 new tunes produced by multi-platinum selling David Pomeranz and co-written by Kathie Lee.

Click the play button below to get Kathie Lee's behind the scenes peek at the project birthed from a couple of small stones. *LH*



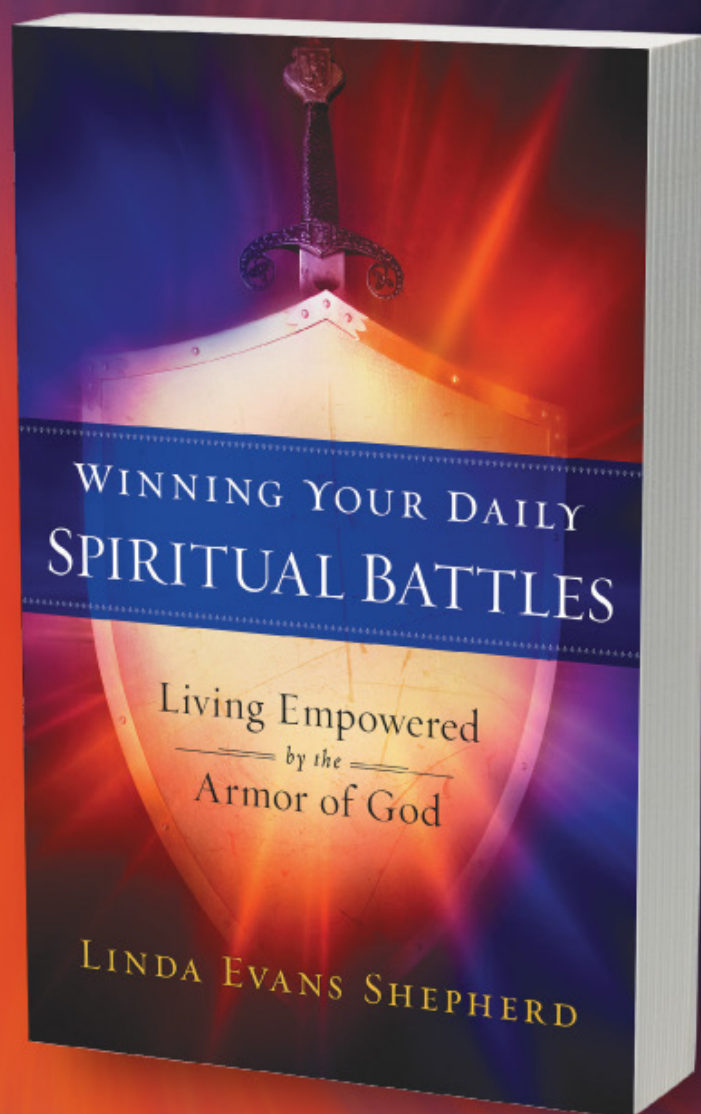
Find out more about Kathie Lee's  
**The Little Giant** album at  
[www.kathieleegifford.com](http://www.kathieleegifford.com)



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how to use it.



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## the big question

Q: I recently saw an article about finding the historical Jesus which claimed Jesus wasn't born on December 25th. Does this invalidate our faith?



with *cynthia l. simmons*  
WWW.CLSIMMONS.COM

### ACTUALLY, YOU BROUGHT UP TWO ISSUES.

The first relates to the validity behind the movement to find the historical Jesus.

In 1985, New Testament scholar Robert Funk began the Jesus Seminar because he refused to believe in miracles and didn't trust the Gospels. Instead, he looked for sources outside the Bible to explain the human behind what he considered a mythical person.

He used several sources written hundreds of years after the death of Christ. The length of time between the event and the recorded story lends a greater tendency toward legend.

On the other hand, writers of the four Gospels interviewed eyewitnesses and penned their ancient biographies in the early years after Jesus ascended. John was the last, dating earlier than A.D. 90. This enhances their reliability.

In comparison to the historical Jesus movement, Christians believe the Bible, which states God can

overcome the forces of nature when interacting with man. C.S. Lewis commented the Scriptures have the feel of reality. When people saw Jesus heal someone, they displayed appropriate reactions like awe and fear, yet animals didn't talk nor did trees walk. Plus, the authors depicted real people who had faults and weakness. Even Jesus, the only sinless man, had normal emotions we can all relate to.

The second subject you questioned was the date of Christ's birth, but no one can be certain of that. Gospel authors cared more about the timing of the Crucifixion and Resurrection since redemption forms the center of our faith. However, many intellectuals have guessed.

My favorite theory of the many proposed bases the date on the Crucifixion. Early scholars thought great events happened on the same day, so in A.D. 200, Tertullian of Carthage calculated the exact time of Christ's death. He placed the Conception on the same day, March 25, so nine months later, the Nativity would have occurred on December 25.

The Eastern Orthodox Church chose a day in April, so they celebrate Christmas on January 6, hence the twelve days of Christmas from December 25 to January 6.

In summary, we have strong evidence the Gospels present our Lord accurately, since writers wrote soon after the events occurred. As John the Baptist declared, Jesus was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

The exact moment of His birth may always remain a mystery, but we can celebrate His birth because He brought hope to the world. This holiday season, rejoice in the angel's good tidings. *LN*





## SERVING THE LEAST OF THESE

by *penelope carlevato*

WWW.PENELOPECARLEVATO.COM



CHRISTMAS LIGHTS AND DECORATIONS — EVERY YEAR THEY JUST SEEM TO APPEAR IN THE STORES EARLIER THAN THE YEAR BEFORE. However, I began the holiday season not to be controlled by the commercialism that surrounds our nation and do something a bit different — to focus on being the hands and feet of Jesus to the growing number of people whose only Christmas plans are survival.

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.” Proverbs 19:17, ESV

The homeless aren't just those living on the streets or in their cars. It includes those who are not “home” during the holiday season — men and women serving in the military, those away from

family because of incarceration, or those temporarily living in a Ronald McDonald House with a terminally ill child.

Maybe, like our family, you had the unpleasant task of moving a family member to an assisted living facility or a memory care unit. All of these situations translate into being “homeless” in different ways for the holidays.

As we reach out to others with our time and love, I pray one of the following ideas might spark a new tradition which includes bringing some Christmas joy to the homeless.

1. Christmas morning as a family or small group, distribute warm Breakfast Burritos and coffee to the homeless. A good idea to also bring coats and blankets to give away.
2. Adopt a family through a church program, police department or business offering a Christmas tree with names of families who need help.
3. For children of inmates, create a “Gift Store” at your church where the child can shop and buy presents for their families.
4. Go to a nursing home and give small gift packages of tissues, lotion, soaps to those who have no family or family close by.
5. Serve meals at a local homeless shelter and be involved in the decorating the facility and then visiting with the homeless.
6. Cook meals for families living at a Ronald McDonald House. As they are away from home, home-cooked meals are valued.
7. Wrap individual gift packets of small toiletries, socks, scarves, hats and a flashlight to



give out when a homeless shelter is having a mealtime. Don't forget some feminine hygiene products for the women.

**8.** For those military men and women away from home, send Christmas cards with a personal note of encouragement. Invite a military person home for a meal. Join the Marine Recruit Christmas Letter Project who meet with injured recruits at Marine Boot Camp in San Diego on Christmas morning.

**9.** In place of gifts to family and friends, make a donation to a homeless shelter.

**10.** Join forces with a well-established organization or homeless shelter in your area to volunteer your time. They will be able to guide you in helping those and making a difference.

While this is a very short list of things you can do to give the homeless joy during the Christmas season, it might give you a different slant on how you celebrate your "Perfect Christmas."

## BREAKFAST BURRITOS

These burritos can be made ahead, wrapped in foil and heated before delivery. They stay crisper if you use the tortillas that need cooked before assembly.

¼ cup chopped onion

½ cup butter, oil or cooking spray

4 cups cooked and chopped potatoes

12 eggs, slightly beaten

1 teaspoon garlic powder

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon pepper

2 cans (4 ounces each) chopped mild green chilis (drained)

1 can black beans, drained and rinsed

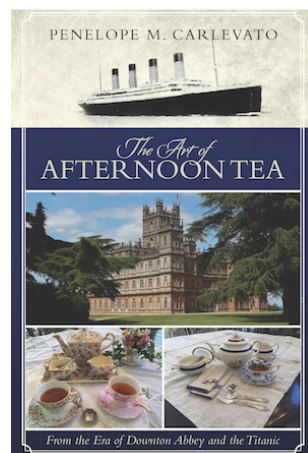
12 tortillas – uncooked

2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

In a large frying pan, sauté onions until clear and tender. Add the potatoes and mix with the onions. Combine the eggs and seasonings and pour over the potato/onion mixture. Cook and stir gently until eggs are cooked, then stir in the green chilies. Let sit for 15 to 20 minutes, then drain any excess liquid from the eggs. Stir the beans into the eggs. Fry tortillas on both sides on medium hot griddle using the butter, oil or cooking spray.

Fill each tortilla with ½ to ¾ cup of egg mixture and top with 2 tablespoons of cheese. Fold the bottom end of the tortilla over the filling, then fold each side over the filling. Finish by folding the top edge tightly over both side folds. Place the burrito with edges down in a square of foil and cover tightly.

Refrigerate until reheating and ready to deliver. To warm burrito, heat in 250° F oven for 20 minutes. Keep burritos warm, and transfer in an insulated container. *PH*



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## WHAT MATTERS MOST

by karen whiting  
WWW.KARENWHITING.COM



### WHAT REALLY MATTERS AT CHRISTMAS IS JESUS AND PEOPLE. All we do should involve both.

#### Praying Spirit

Pray for the people you will shop for and the people working in the stores. Pray that your smile and wishing others a Blessed Christmas will touch their hearts. Don't let rude drivers or other shoppers upset your day. Instead, pray for him or her to have peace.

#### Focus on Jesus

For just a few minutes each day of the season, focus on Jesus and the Nativity. Read Luke 1 and 2 and Matthew 1 and 2 early in the month to remember Jesus is the reason we celebrate.

#### Be Loving

Jesus asked us to love one another and sent the Holy Spirit to nurture the fruit of the Spirit in us (love, joy, patience, self-control, and more).

Each morning, ask God to show you a way to bless one person that day. It might be making a treat for a neighbor, an encouraging word, doing chores for a family member or passing a gift certificate out to a frazzled mom.

#### Be Gracious

Rude, hurtful or otherwise difficult people are hurting and need love more than anyone.

- Extend grace by forgiving them. Respond with grace. If they make cutting remarks, thank them for sharing what's in their heart.
- If someone gives you something you don't like, smile and say, "Thanks for the thought and time that went into gifting me."
- Do something proactive for each difficult person. Hand them a Christmas card with a note that you are praying for them, or serve them in some small way.
- Pray for anyone who causes a bump in the day, and ask God to heal their hurts.

#### Avoid the Time Crunch

- Ease busy days by cooking double on slower days and freezing the extra. Stock up on ingredients for quick meals.
- Decline some stressful activities.
- Make wrapping gifts easy with gift bags, or use a big pillowcase for each child's gifts.
- Participate in a cookie swap so you only bake a few types of goodies.
- Pick up gift cards to cover names you remember at the last minute or to have something for anyone who gifts you unexpectedly.
- Hang a tiny ornament on your purse as a reminder of the reason for the season.

Mostly, be mindful of your time, and ask God to guide you through each day.

PH





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# AVOIDING THE ALL OR NOTHING TRAP

by edie melson

WWW.EDIEMELSON.COM



## WHEN DOING MINISTRY LIKE WRITING OR SPEAKING,

we must connect in a meaningful way with those we serve. And hate it or love it, social media plays a major role in building that connection. Like any other relationship, social media requires consistency. It's not enough to build online connections when we have a book or event. Connecting online is an ongoing aspect of the lifestyle we've been called to.

All too often, I see writers get caught in a downward spiral of "all or nothing" social media. This cycle can leave us drained, frustrated and convinced that connecting online isn't for us.

### The Trap of Too Much Time Spent

This part of the cycle usually begins when someone is learning a new platform or way of approaching social media. Over the course of a few days or weeks, they'll spend hours at a time online. At the outset, this investment of time reaps results, and that taste of victory spurs them on. But true platform building

with social media cannot be rushed.

Here are just a few reasons it takes time to gain real traction:

- When we follow someone, it takes time for them to find that we followed them and follow us back.
- Not everyone is online at the same time. So, a concentrated burst of updates within a few hours will net us fewer views than a few updates over the course of 24 hours.
- Everyone manages social media differently. Some only look for new followers once or twice a week.

Beyond the downside of the issues mentioned above, there is also the very real issue of user burn-out when we spend that much time online. After that first heady rush of victory building online connections, there's very little movement on the momentum front, and frustration begins to take over.

The reason is simple. A strong online presence is built through the consistency of small repeated bites of time. Spending only 10 minutes a day, four to five days a week, will get you much further than spending a 2-hour stretch every week or so.

### Stop the Cycle

- Set a time limit — and stick to it. Anything more than 30 minutes a day and our return on investment drops off drastically.
- Set goals — reasonable goals.
- Take on a single platform at a time. Get it established before tackling another.
- Use a scheduling program like Hootsuite or Buffer to multiply your exposure and limit the time you spend.

Always take the long view and remember that consistency is the only key that unlocks social media success. *LM*





by *sandra dalton smith*  
WWW.ICHOOSEMYBESTLIFE.COM



I AM PASSIONATE ABOUT GOING AFTER ALL GOD HAS FOR YOU AND ME. JEREMIAH 29:11 DECLARES GOD'S GOOD PLAN FOR EACH OF US.

We serve the God of abundance, and He is a great gift giver. But there are times I have to remind myself that God is not obligated to meet all my wants and desires. After all, He is God, and in His sovereignty, He knows better than I what my best life looks like.

So, in our pursuit of God's best, let us not wander into an entitlement mindset. The entitlement mindset is one which declares, "I deserve this!" It is rooted in the need to fill the emptiness in our lives with idols. These space fillers can be unhealthy relationships, material possessions, titles

or accolades. This mindset moves us away from a heart of gratitude and causes us to step over into the dangerous ground of pride, greed and envy.

One way to tell if you have slipped into an entitlement mindset is to honestly evaluate your response to the following statements:

- When I hear of someone being blessed with something I've prayed for, I think, *That should have been me.*
- I often find it hard to celebrate the success of others because their success makes me feel uncomfortable.
- I spend more time talking about (or complaining about) what I don't have rather than talking about the blessings which are in my life.
- When I feel empty, alone or unhappy, one way I can make myself feel better is to go buy something even if it doesn't fit my budget.
- If others would help me more, I would be further ahead in my career, goals and dreams.

- I often resist making plans for my future because if God wants to bless me, He can just do it without my help.
- Why should I have to work hard to get ahead when others just have good things fall in their lap?

The entitlement mindset will keep you in a place of mental bondage. It prevents you from being able to find contentment and peace in the process of working with God. It's easy to get frustrated when you hear of how God is blessing others, often with the very things you have been praying about. Avoid allowing a calloused attitude to arise in this place of unmet desire.

Keep your heart soft. Stay in a place of gratitude. Seek first God's presence and become reacquainted with His ways. Practice being happy for the blessings others receive, and soon you will genuinely be happy about their successes. You will no longer see their accomplishments as a threat to your success, but rather as examples of God's grace in each journey.

Ask God to guide your steps daily. Be alert to the enemy's plans to sidetrack your progress by keeping you busy with things which lead you away from God's best. Embrace the process, and move into the success God has for you. Your journey may have more hills and valleys than the next woman, but that's what makes every individual story interesting.

Gain an understanding of the need to co-labor with God. Yes, God could fulfill every dream or goal you have without your lifting a finger. It could happen, but chances are far better that you are going to have to persist through some resistance. You will be required to stretch and grow in your faith and your knowledge of who He is in your life. Just look at the Israelites. Their journey to the Promised Land took them straight through the wilderness. It was here that they had to learn to trust God for daily bread and to be thankful for it. Don't waste time complaining, or you may find yourself going around the same mountain year after year.

## BREAK THE ENTITLEMENT MINDSET

### 1. Develop an attitude of gratitude.

Begin each day thanking God for all that He has given you: your family, your health, His promises in the Word of God, mercy, grace and another day to be thankful. Look for opportunities to thank people for their work and the blessing they have given you.

### 2. Be a giver.

Make an effort to look for opportunities you can give to others rather than focusing on what you think you deserve from others. Liberally give the good gifts of compliments, smiles and thanking people for their work.

### 3. Recognize entitlement syndrome.

You won't have to try hard to hear friends, co-workers, or even your own children whining about what they deserve. Purpose in your heart to be one who directs others back to focusing more on the blessings than what they don't have.

### 4. Cultivate more intimacy with God.

What if your greatest desire was to be in God's presence? Make time to read his Word. Be a good steward of your time. Spend time in His word and dedicate time to prayer. The one thing you do deserve is more of God in your life.

### 5. Evaluate your work ethic.

When you hear yourself saying you deserve something, stop and ask yourself why you think you deserve it. Be responsible in your dealings, and do your work with excellence.

Break free from the entitlement mindset of "I deserve," and begin living in the empowerment of a mindset which declares "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20, NIV). *SH*





JUST18SUMMERS

by michelle s. coy

WWW.JUST18SUMMERS.COM

## decked out & stressed out

THE GLOSSY MAGAZINE IMAGES, THE PINTEREST IDEAS AND FACEBOOK POSTS FROM FRIENDS SHARING THEIR GORGEOUS CHRISTMAS DÉCOR INSPIRED ME.

My planning began. Why, before I was done, my house would look like North Pole Central! My family would have the perfect Christmas, and I would sail through those days with joy and delight.

I tried. Oh, how I tried. But I basically plodded my way through the Christmas season with unrealistic expectations in a fog of exhaustion.

I snapped at my family because I was stressed. And I missed the most important moments of the holidays: celebrating the birth of Jesus and spending time and making memories with my family.

By fine-tuning your expectations, you'll be more rested, you'll actually enjoy the holidays, and you'll have more time for what's truly important: celebrating the reason for the season.

So, maybe what I've learned will help you avoid the Christmas-has-gotta-be-perfect bandwagon.

**1. First, ask your family what traditions, foods or decorations are important to them.** Keep those things and don't worry about everything else.

**2. Instead of trying to do all the tasks by yourself, let your family help you.** Sure, the garland might be a little lopsided, but they'll have memories of doing it with you.

**3. Invite them to make cookies with you.** (Store-bought dough is fine!) Those will be priceless memories someday.

**4. Gather as a family and put together a Christmas puzzle.**

**5. Drink hot chocolate and sing carols together.**

**6. Cozy up together in front of the tree and enjoy the beautiful ambiance.**

*"I basically plodded my way through the Christmas season with unrealistic expectations in a fog of exhaustion."*

**7. Let one of the older children tell the Christmas story to the younger ones using the pieces of the Nativity set.**

Make it a time of joy for your family, not a time of exhausting over-activity. You'll be so glad you did!

SH



PRAYERCIRCLE  
by Linda Evans Shepherd  
WWW.GOTTOPRAY.COM

# praying through the holidays

**IS YOUR WORST HOLIDAY FEAR THE IDEA OF YOUR** dining table filled with relatives who act as opposing political commentators? Family get-togethers can be stressful enough, but with our culture fueled by hate, misunderstanding and inflammatory rhetoric, it can be downright nerve-wracking.

What will happen when your opinionated relatives sit down together? Instead of fretting over the worst-case scenarios, here are ten prayer strategies to help heal holiday hostilities.

1. Remember the reason for the season. Actually it's not so much about football or pumpkin pie. It's about gratitude and the celebration of the birth of the Christ child. Thank God for your blessings and for sending the Christ child not only for you, but for all those in your realm of holiday-influence.
2. Every person at your office party, on your Christmas card list and at your holiday table is a person Jesus loved enough to die for. Ask God to give you the ability to love them like He does.
3. If you are hosting or attending a get-together, pray in advance. Ask for God's love and peace to permeate the atmosphere.
4. Pray over the room and each chair, from the dining table to the recliners, which will be used by those attending. Pray the chairs will be seated with peace and pray in the name of Jesus against the spirit of anger and hate.

5. Pray for your own attitude and ask God to give you the strength to brush aside hurts or offenses that could trigger an angry response from you. Make the decision to react in peace, no matter how tempting it is to defend your hurt feelings or bruised toes.

6. Pray for an attitude of forgiveness to rule your time with your loved ones.

7. If rough topics do come up, pray that God will give you and others strategies to redirect the conversation.

8. If you are offended, push past your grudges and ask God to show you what He wants to accomplish in your relationship with the one who offended you.

9. Thank God for this opportunity to have time to spend with family and friends. Tell those in your holiday party how glad you are to see them, and let them know how much you love them.

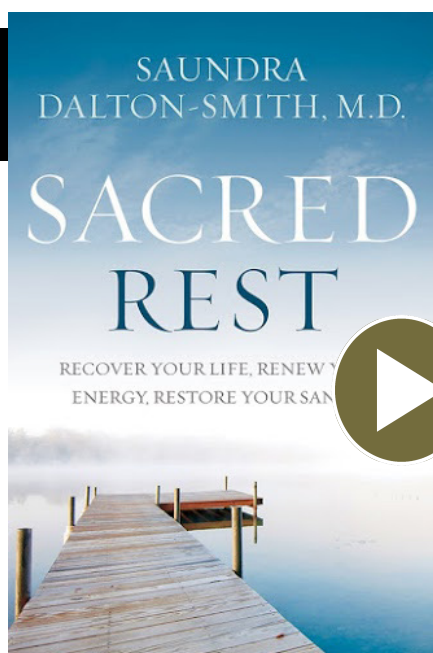
10. Banish the politics and other provoking topics from your table, and open your time together with a sweet prayer of love, forgiveness, gratitude and joy. Pray that the real reason of Christmas will enter into every heart.

It is only when we let Christ shine in us that friends and loved ones can see our Savior. Push the politics aside, and let Jesus shine into every holiday gathering. People may not remember who won the argument at the table, but they will remember whether or not you made them feel loved. *EH*





# BOOKSTOREAD



## SACRED REST

by Sandra Dalton-Smith, M. D.

"Once you get a taste of a well-rested life, nothing else will satisfy." That quote is a nibble of the masterpiece you will feast on in Sandra-Dalton Smith's book **Sacred Rest**.

Through a well-balanced weaving of her life's stories, substantiated research and an inspired selection of Scriptures, Sandra has created a perfect mix for challenging each reader to find their place of rest.

I highly recommend this book, as it's chock full of practical tips. You'll want to buy ten more for your family and friends, or use it for a book club or Bible study. —Heidi McLaughlin, international speaker and author of **Restless for More**, **Sand to Pearls**, and **Beauty Unleashed**



## WORDS TO LIVE BY

by Linda Gilden & Dalene Parker

The average person uses tens of thousands of words a week. Can you imagine concentrating on one word for an entire week?

**Words To Live By** by Linda Gilden & Dalene Parker presents common words in a refreshing new way. By meditating on one action word a week, readers optimize their understanding and application of each word's value and power.

**Words To Live By** is no mere flip-calendar advice. It propels readers into proactive living using active verbs as launch pads. Focusing on one transformative word per week allows for soaking when we are accustomed to sipping truth. — Cynthia Ruchti, speaker and author of *Tattered and Mended: The Art of Healing the Wounded Soul*



## A WOMAN'S QUEST TO AN UNSTUCK CHRISTMAS

by Pat Layton

The season between Thanksgiving and Christmas can be the busiest time of the year.

Instead of being a time for peace and enjoyment of the greatest story ever told, the birth of Jesus, if we aren't careful this holiday season becomes more like the DEATH of PEACE!

I loved **A Woman's Quest to an Unstuck Christmas** from the get-go! Pat so beautifully lays out a daily devotional with insightful, thought-provoking content to lead you closer to an unstuck Christmas! That means you'll be looking for blessings and to bless others during the holiday season.

This is an interactive book where you can pour your heart out and glean from Pat ideas to make this the best Christmas ever! —Rhonda Fellows





by heather van allen  
LH STAFF REVIEWER



# MUSICREVIEWS



## BRANDON HEATH

### Faith Hope Love Repeat

Soulful pop style, smooth vocals and honest lyrics come together to form ***Faith Hope Love Repeat***, the sixth studio album from singer/songwriter Brandon Heath.

The array of tracks on the album, crafted out of Brandon's life, include popular radio hit "Whole Heart," upbeat energy blast "Got the Love" and the sweet title track, expressing thoughts about impending first-time fatherhood.

The creative process bringing the project together also involved and helped Brandon push through a great struggle in his life.

"On this record, it was therapeutic writing songs about faith and overcoming this giant obstacle of mine that is fear," Brandon said. "I believe it's just the voice of the enemy that I hear at night. It limits me in many different capacities in life, including creativity. So it really takes faith to push through a lot of that."

Perhaps listeners, in their own troubled times, will also find some therapy in ***Faith Hope Love Repeat***.



## SARA GROVES

### Abide With Me

Remember the classic hymns you – or your parents, or your parents' parents – sang in church growing up? Songwriter/vocalist Sara Groves has brought a selection of treasured church classics to renewed vibrancy on her thirteenth studio album, ***Abide With Me***.

Recorded in a 105-year-old church, ***Abide With Me*** includes familiar songs, "Fairiest Lord Jesus," "Praise to the Lord," "Tis So Sweet" and more. While Sara weaves in her own creative innovations, musically and vocally, into several of the tracks on the album, the basic melodies of most of the

classic hymns hold true to the originals. The piano also comes through strongly on several tracks, adding to the traditional, timeless quality of the album.

Even listeners less familiar with the older hymns can still find comfort and encouragement in, and find themselves drawn into worship by, them, especially with the melodious lilt of Sara's voice delivering the eternal truths contained in the lyrics.



## SKILLET

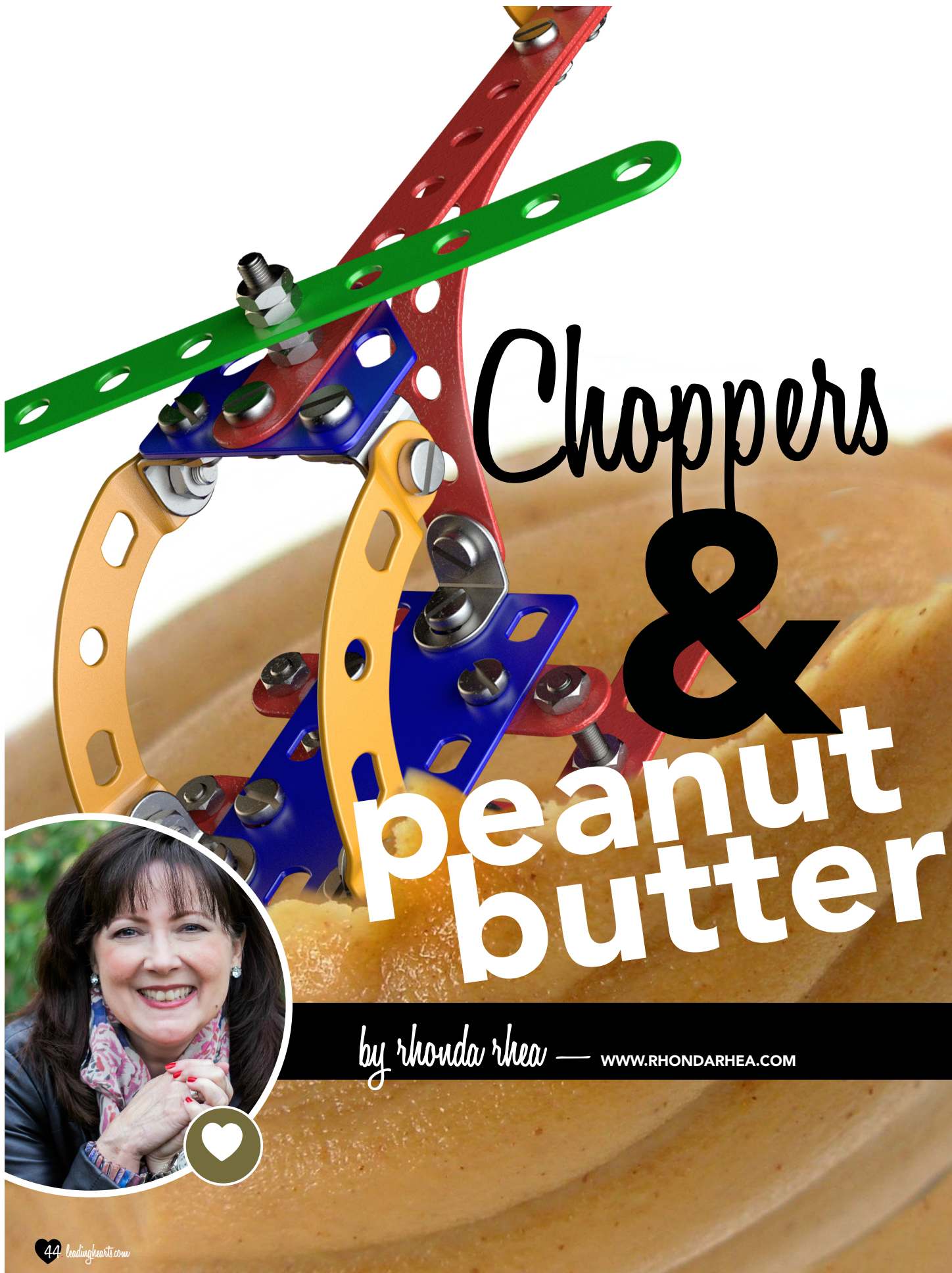
### Unleashed Beyond

Critically acclaimed, popular band Skillet is as explosive as ever with ***Unleashed Beyond***, a deluxe edition of their 2016 release, ***Unleashed***. The album adds eight bonus tracks, including five new songs — including one featuring Lacey Sturm — plus remixes of two of the originally-released tracks and the film version of "Stars" (featured on "The Shack").

With ***Unleashed Beyond***, Skillet continues to show their style versatility through a musically diverse selection, including the hard-rock, guitar-driven "Feel Invincible," the empowering radio hit "Lions" and the smooth, mellow and beautifully worshipful "Stars," among a full list of attention-holding songs.

Skillet is unabashed in expressing faith and have constantly done so with their high-energy music that finds a way to connect with and reach a wide array of fans from various walks of life without compromising their message. ***Unleashed Beyond*** is no exception.





# Choppers & peanut butter



by rhonda rhea — [WWW.RHONDARHEA.COM](http://WWW.RHONDARHEA.COM)

## HOW MANY BATTERIES DOES IT TAKE TO POWER THE AVERAGE AMERICAN POST-CHRISTMAS PLAYTIME?

If I were to make a joke out of that question, it would probably include a clever play on words — maybe something about lithium ion versus lead oxide. No doubt we'd all get a big charge out of it. (A "charge"? Really? That's all I could come up with there?)

At my house, we continue to buy batteries by the boatload around Christmastime — even now that my kids are grown. Most of the batteries are for my husband. He still gets toys for Christmas. I would tease him about that, except that I buy him most of the toys. And also, I like toys.

I cannot even count the number of batteries we drained the year Richie got the remote-controlled helicopter. One of my favorite incidents that year was when he was still trying to learn how to fly it. Where's an anti-torque pedal when you need one? He accidentally landed it right smack-dab in a big bowl of strawberry preserves. Unexpected. And so funny! Also, new invention: jelly-copter.

A friend pointed out that all he needs to do now is learn how to land in the peanut butter. Then he'll be able to make a sandwich without ever getting out of his chair.

On the other hand, it's not nearly so funny when life is feeling out of control and we find ourselves landing in something sticky. But we're told in 1 Peter 4:12 that it shouldn't be so unexpected.

"Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you" (HCSB).

Wouldn't it be nice if we never experienced those out-of-control-feeling moments — if we didn't have to struggle through the sticky? Our "someday" will be without difficult surprises. But in our here and now, living in a sin-cursed world makes a fiery ordeal a very common part of the journey.

We tend to think our suffering is unique. But for the most part, it's not. Peter's "don't be surprised" is in the present imperative form — a command. The command is to stop it. Stop thinking this is unusual. Sometimes when we've been closely following Christ, our inclination is to be offended by a trial, to wonder, "What did I do to deserve this?"

One paraphrase puts it this way:

"Friends, when life gets really difficult, don't jump to the conclusion that God isn't on the job" (MSG).

In those moments when life is the stickiest, we can look at the difficulty as some kind of punishment or crushing defeat — even the absence of God working (which many people do) — or we can see it for what it really is. It's the result of living in a fallen world, and sometimes it's also a part of a refining process the Lord wants to use to conform us to the image of Christ.

We have instructions in just how we should respond in the very next verse.

"Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of the Messiah, so that you may also rejoice with great joy at the revelation of His glory" (1 Peter 4:13, HCSB).

As the Holy Spirit works in us, we truly can find ourselves rejoicing, all by His limitless power, even in the stickiest trials.

And that's our glorious charge. Batteries not included. Or needed. *PH*





# A QUESTION OF FAITH

Divided by loss. United by faith.

PURE FILM DISTRIBUTION AND SUPER HOME ENTERTAINMENT PRESENT A QUESTION OF FAITH CASTING BY ROBERT L. JONES, C. THOMAS HOWELL, JR. STARRING LAURENCE FISHBURNE, JESSICA ALBA, AND PETER SARAFIN. WRITTEN BY JAMES M. HANCOCK. PRODUCED BY JAMES M. HANCOCK AND JAMES M. HANCOCK. DIRECTED BY JAMES M. HANCOCK. CASTING BY ROBERT L. JONES, C. THOMAS HOWELL, JR. STARRING LAURENCE FISHBURNE, JESSICA ALBA, AND PETER SARAFIN. WRITTEN BY JAMES M. HANCOCK. PRODUCED BY JAMES M. HANCOCK AND JAMES M. HANCOCK. DIRECTED BY JAMES M. HANCOCK.



#AQUESTIONOFFAITH [AQUESTIONOFFAITH.COM](http://AQUESTIONOFFAITH.COM)  
IN THEATERS **SEPTEMBER 29**

PURE FILM





## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

with  
angela white

FILM PRODUCER

"A QUESTION OF FAITH"

### THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER 2017 WILL BE ONE TO REMEMBER FOR FILM PRODUCER ANGELA WHITE.

It was the culmination of many months of hard work when the film opened on the 29th to audiences across the country. ***A Question of Faith*** is a beautiful story revolving around three families, from three different cultures, who are all struck by tragedy, and what they encounter through their faith in God.

At the moment I caught up with Angela, she was in Washington D.C. where her film ***A Question of Faith*** was to be shown on Capitol Hill. "We have a very important screening tonight, and the funny thing is that this entire project truly has been ALL about faith. From the beginning of this endeavor, I



really didn't know how we were going to get here. We didn't have the money to get here! We raised enough money to shoot this film and basically sell it. The first plan was that it would be for television. But by HIS grace we are here in D.C. and getting ready to be the first faith-based film to screen for the members of Congress on Capitol Hill.

While there have been films of faith that have been screened for members of Congress in D.C. movie theatres, this one is being seen right here on the Hill!"

White, a lifelong Democrat, says the film has helped to cross the political aisle, with both Republicans and Democrats supporting this film's message. "To be here today ... well, only God could have done this. I never would have foreseen that the film would have brought us to this point. In a few hours, I will be talking to people who lead our country about the current day themes and issues that are in this film."

Angela, as the film's producer, said that finding the right storyline, one that will resonate with people, can be a challenge, but find the right storyline she did. "I had a friend that told me about this great script writer. This particular script had won in a few screenwriting festivals.

When I first read the script, I realized that I wasn't quite ready to do a faith-based film. People don't realize that it's a genre that is hard to get into. There aren't a lot of filmmakers that do this." As an African-American female, White felt that the storyline needing some adjusting, "When I finally did speak with this screenplay writer I said I love

**-continued on p. 49-**





# BOOK FUN MAGAZINE

Where Book Fun Begins

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### -continued from p. 47-

your script, but, I want a multicultural story, not an African-American story. There have already been stories like that.

Present in the script at the time were the social themes of texting and driving, along with organ donation, and we wanted to add the issue of racial reconciliation. Believe it or not, we started shooting September 11, 2016, not knowing where we would be in our nation with racial unrest we're seeing."

The film features acting veterans like Richard T. Jones (Tyler Perry's *Why Did I Get Married*, *Judging Amy*), Kim Fields (*Facts of Life*, *Living Single*), C. Thomas Howell (*The Amazing Spiderman*, *E.T.*) and Jaci Velasquez (*I'm Not Ashamed*, Platinum Christian Recording Artist), among others.

Angela said that the ability of the cast to relay their characters with vulnerability and sincerity was key. "All of the cast are parents, which was intentional. They had to understand this journey of what do you really do when something happens to your child. They had to think of their own children to get through the scenes."

Jaci Velasquez said that the theme of faith, and even more so, forgiveness, was key in helping her to say yes to the project. "How does it all work when tragedy strikes. It's like we can either run

from God and be mad at Him, or we can run to Him. Because during those times we need Him more than ever. In those situations, no one would blame us if we ran and blamed God or were angry with Him. It was how they framed this story and the element of forgiveness that got me. I just think the forgiveness aspect of the film is such a powerful thing.

With every screening of the film, Angela is amazed at the impact she sees on the audiences.

"I watch as viewers respond with tears. We have had so many sign up to be organ donors. We've interacted with people who have had loved ones that were hit as a result of texting and driving. I'm meeting people whose lives have been impacted with the message of this film. This is the first time I've experienced something like that. So this film has been a testament even to myself on how to trust God and put my own faith in Him.

There's even more good news to come in the New Year. For those who missed ***A Question of Faith*** in theatres, the DVD is set to be released January 2, 2018. *LB*

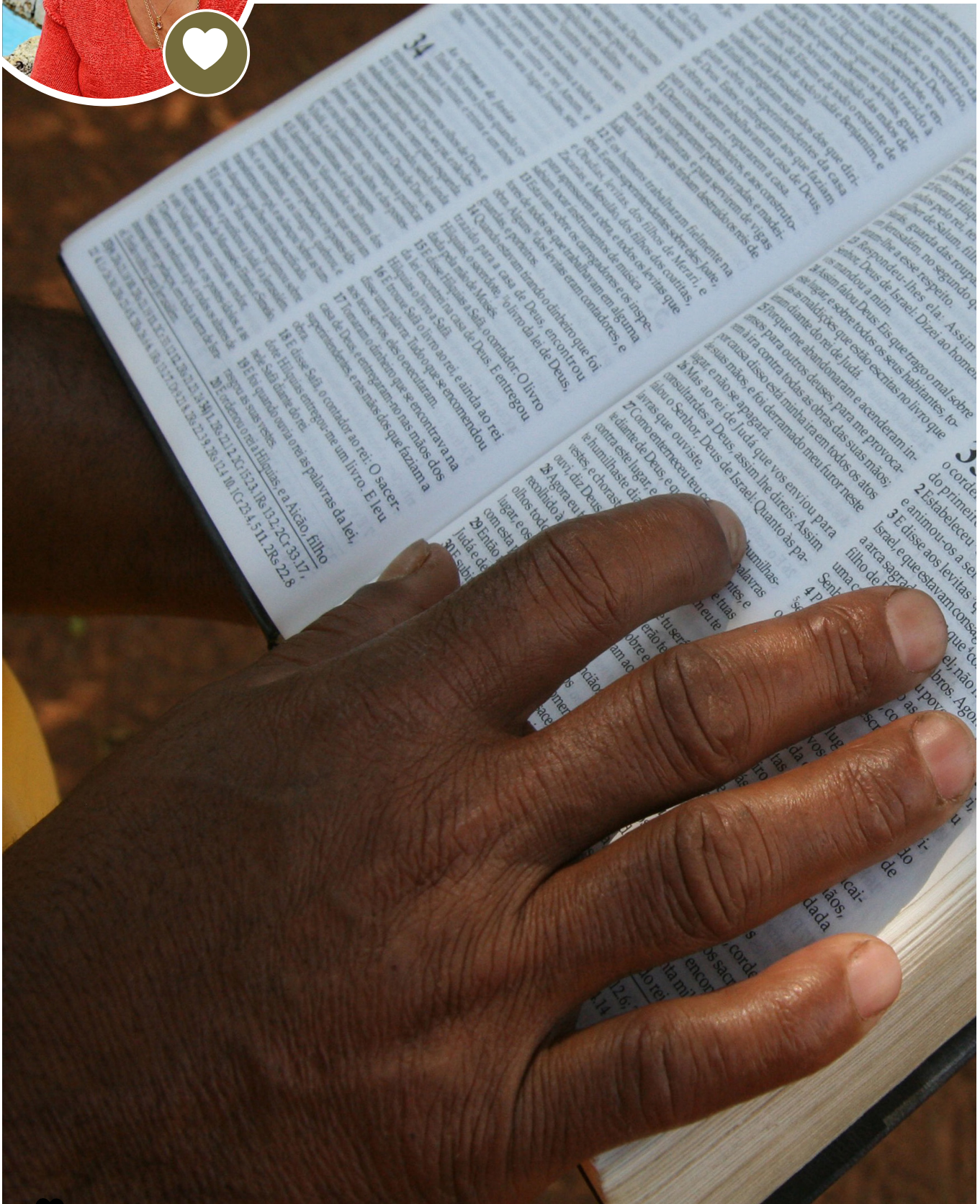
by *lisa burnes*  
PROFILE CONTRIBUTOR







by sharon elliott  
WWW.LIFETHATMATTERS.COM



# lasting imprints

ON JULY 20, 1992, MY DADDY DIED. HE HAD LIVED FOR SEVERAL YEARS WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE THAT HAD STOLEN HIS PRECIOUS MEMORIES. He remained a sweet old man, though. Neither Mom nor we children had any intention of placing him in a convalescent facility as long as we were well able to care for him. I often tell people that he stayed with us, not because he knew us, but just because we were nice people.

Even though he no longer recognized his earthly family, he never forgot anything about the Bible. In fact, he would go into the back bedroom every afternoon and teach a Bible lesson to the imaginary people he had started to see.

My only explanation for this phenomenon is that memories of life events are held somewhere in the brain, and Alzheimer's effects the brain; but knowledge of the Word of God is housed in the renewed spirit where no disease can enter.

Eventually, several strokes took Daddy's life. At his funeral, my brother, sister, and I spoke his eulogy. As I stood to say my words, I remember being struck by one overwhelming revelation: my daddy had lived his entire life for one moment. That moment had happened four days before when he entered into face-to-face presence with the Word — Jesus Christ the Savior.

Daddy had treasured Him and emulated Him before us. He had raised us to trust and believe in Jesus and shared Him with his congregations. The

"Word [that] was made flesh" stood before Daddy and welcomed him to the place He had prepared for him. (See John 1:14 and 14:2.)

Whenever I think of him, I see once again how my daddy's life imitated Christ's. Our wonderful Savior lived His entire life for the moment of His death. Oh, but what an efficacious death was His! His death satisfied God's wrath against sin. His death takes away the sting of our deaths. Christians actually celebrate the death of our leader because His death crashed through the barrier that kept us from God the Father.

Now here's the most exciting news of all: once the penalty for sin was paid, Jesus no longer needed to stay dead, so He rose!

Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.  
—Hebrews 7:25, NKJV—

And Jesus has passed that "rising" on to us as well.

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.  
—Romans 6:4, NKJV—

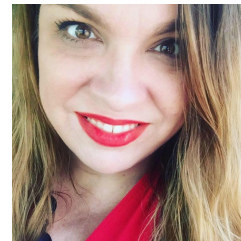
In the hard times of our world today, when we are tempted to fear that danger and death are lurking around every corner, may we have a renewed commitment to live our lives with purpose: to live for our one moment. *PH*





*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.Shepro.com](http://www.Shepro.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 23 years in the magazine industry. In her full-time, Amber provides branding, graphic design and communications and support for authors, nonprofits and missionaries. She and her Brit-native husband, Philip, live in Missouri with their three daughters: Saffron, Imogen and Penelope. [www.barefacedgirl.com](http://www.barefacedgirl.com)



# MEET OUR Contributors

## features

LISA BURNS is an arts and entertainment contributor to **Leading Hearts**. She currently works in many areas of production planning and as an entertainment and vocal coach. She is married to Randy, a pastoral counselor. They parent five amazing humans.

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](http://www.LoveWise.com)

PAT LAYTON is a passionate and inspiring leader who, during her 25 years in full-time ministry has founded a variety of ministries, including a pregnancy care center, an adoption center, an abstinence program and a national women's conference. [www.PatLayton.net](http://www.PatLayton.net)

EDIE MELSON—author, editor and blogger—is a leading professional within the writing industry, as well as a popular instructor and mentor. Her heart to help others define and reach their dreams has connected her with people across the country. [www.EdieMelson.com](http://www.EdieMelson.com)

KAREN PORTER is an international speaker, the author of six books, and a successful business woman. She is president of Advanced Writers and Speakers Association, serves on several boards, and coaches aspiring writers and speakers. She and her husband, George, own Bold Vision Books, a Christian publishing company. [www.KarenPorter.com](http://www.KarenPorter.com)

RHONDA RHEA is an author, humor columnist, and TV personality. She lives in the St. Louis area with her pastor-hubs and has five grown children. [www.RhondaRhea.com](http://www.RhondaRhea.com)

KELLYJ. STIGLIANO has been speaking to women's groups, teenagers and teachers since 1987. She currently speaks throughout the Southwest. Her articles have appeared in numerous magazines and books. [www.KellyStigliano.com](http://www.KellyStigliano.com)

PENELOPE CARLEVATO is the author of **The Art of Afternoon Tea: from the Era of Downton Abbey and the Titanic** as well as **Tea on the Titanic** and **First Class Etiquette**. She speaks on hospitality, historical entertaining, and etiquette and manners for all ages and all occasions. Penelope lives in the Denver area and is the grandmother of 11. [www.PenelopeCarlevato.com](http://www.PenelopeCarlevato.com)

MICHELLE S. COX is an author, speaker, and the creator of the Just 18 Summers parenting resources and products. Visit her parenting blog [www.just18summers.com](http://www.just18summers.com) and on Facebook [www.facebook.com/just18summers](http://www.facebook.com/just18summers).

SHARON NORRIS ELLIOTT's engaging, yet challenging, messages touch hearts and tickle the funny bones of her audiences, making her a popular, sought-after speaker. She and husband, James, enjoy their empty nest in Southern California. [www.lifethatmatters.net](http://www.lifethatmatters.net)

CYNTHIA L. SIMMONS is an author and speaker as well as radio host and producer of **Heart of the Matter Radio**. During each broadcast, Cynthia takes an in-depth look at issues women face in our complex culture. She and husband, Ray, have five grown children. [www.clsimmons.com](http://www.clsimmons.com)

SAUNDRA DALTON SMITH is an internal medicine physician, author and speaker. She shares with audiences nationwide on the topics of eliminating limiting emotions, breaking free from mental bondage, and helps others see God's plan for them to live free in Christ. She is the founder of I Choose My Best Life, a movement to renew hope in a generation where depression, stress, and fear are peaking. [www.ichoosemybestlife.com](http://www.ichoosemybestlife.com)

JENNIFER TAYLOR is a music reviewer and profile contributor for **Leading Hearts** magazine.

HEATHER VAN ALLEN is a music reviewer and profile contributor for **Leading Hearts** magazine.

KAREN WHITING is an international speaker, former television host, and author of more than 20 books. She's led and worked in ministries for many years. [www.KarenWhiting.com](http://www.KarenWhiting.com)

## columns



Advanced Writers & Speakers Association

[www.AWSA.com](http://www.AWSA.com)



LEADINGHEARTS.COM

HAVE A VERY  
**Merry Christmas**

*Silent  
Night*

MAY THE GOD

***OF HOPE***

FILL YOU WITH

***all joy***

AND PEACE AS YOU  
TRUST IN HIM,

**SO THAT YOU MAY  
OVERFLOW**

***WITH HOPE BY***

***the power***

**OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

*-Romans 15:13 (niv)*

*from*

**LEADINGHEARTS**

and the Advanced Writers & Speakers Association

