

**LIVING LOVED**

*“ . . . he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
he will carry them in his bosom . . . ”  
– Isaiah 40:11*

# **LIVING LOVED**

**RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING  
TO GOD**

Laurice Shafer

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For God,  
who pursues friendship with me.  
For my husband, John,  
who lives the growth process with me.  
For my family,  
who accommodates my changing.  
For two writers' critique groups,  
who, with gentleness and persistence,  
encouraged and taught me to write.  
And for Tim Lale,  
who guided the book's content,  
organization, and structure.



## ***I'M GRATEFUL . . .***

*. . . dear Lord, that You've cared enough about me to persist in calling me to accept Your gifts. For years, I've had head knowledge of You. Outwardly, I seemed to be managing life, but in reality my heart knew something was missing. Basically, I thought I could take care of my life on my own. Now, I know I'm in need of restoration. I've recognized the many ways that You have used to be my friend. I am grateful for the following and more.*

I'm grateful for . . . Scripture. For the testimony of others, verbal and written. For programs that have contributed to my recovery. Most of all, for God's Holy Spirit Who has guided my spiritual journey.

Also, I am grateful for the Christian 12-Step program at my church and for the seminar "Binding the Wounds" presented by Drs. Ron and Nancy Rockey. In the hands of my awesome God, both programs have given me insight into who I am and encouraged me to allow God to heal my heart from much of the hurt that "simply living" brings.

Most communities provide 12-Step groups. The Rockeys can be reached through their internet website at [itsfixable.com](http://itsfixable.com).





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## HEART CRY

*Show me* God working in your life;  
let me see you on your knees when trouble hits,  
on your knees when joy abounds.  
Let me see you living *your confidence* in  
His loving care.

I want to know how to believe,  
*how* to be His.

Tell me that He listens to you  
and shares with you.  
Let me hear the cheerful note in your voice;  
the sureness that you are guided,  
remembered by God.

I want to believe He will whisper  
in *my* ear.

Help me know!  
Live visibly your commitment –  
trusting Him with your heart,  
your survival,  
able to say,  
“Even though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

God holds *you* fast in His arms – I must believe –  
so *I* can hope.

*God, are You there –  
Do you care?  
I need to know!*



# INTRODUCTION

## BACK THEN

Until second grade, my life felt secure and safe. I spent those first seven years in the warm heart of Orange County, California. Like many parents today, mine were busy with work and school. My dad tried everything from medicine to cosmetology, and my mother went into nursing school. Grandma often took care of my sister and me. Good memories attend those years—I lived in a cocoon of love and safety.

When I was seven, my uncle was injured while building a new wing of the family nursing home business. Daddy was needed in Idaho to help complete the job. He took me and went north. I entered a strange world of cold weather and of unknown people and places. When my sister and mother finally joined us, I had disappeared into the larger context of extended family. Soon, difficulties in my grandparents' marriage

involving church members pushed my parents away from their religious connections.

But they sent me to church and church school. Committed to continuing my Christian education, at 13 I chose to attend a small parochial high school in Montana.

I remember sitting in a “Week of Prayer” meeting my junior year. I listened, puzzled, to a visiting pastor.

“Just let go and let God.” The speaker sounded as if he thought I knew what he meant.

“How do I do that?” I questioned myself. I was too shy to ask. Or too afraid. After all, I was a spiritual leader on the campus—spiritual vice president of the student body, the girl’s club, and my class organization. I had even been elected “Courtesy Queen.” I was supposed to know how.

For many years into my adult life, I continued to be afraid to ask, “How do I do that?” Instead, I struggled to live as a Christian, spiraling downward into discouragement and disappointment. When I expected to be married for life, divorce became a reality. I couldn’t keep myself sinless. My health deteriorated. I couldn’t really take care of myself financially. And I began to see my lack of beauty on the inside. Finding myself at the bottom—emotionally, physically, and spiritually—I began to hear God’s answer to my question—“How do I do that?”



Accepting God's word, trusting that He will do what He says, believing that He has me in His view and finds me of great interest, that He needs me—all these and more have been part of the process of "letting God" act personally in my life. Learning "how" has been a journey of discovery.

Most of us are very private about our spiritual lives. We share recipes, give details of how we fixed our cars, what we did on our vacations, how our romances are going. Just about everything in life gets talked about—except the nitty-gritty of our personal experience with God. If the subject of the spiritual life does come up, people become vague, fall into clichés, or use euphemistic words to describe it. Usually, they talk in terms of activities—Bible study, prayer, church attendance, tithe paying, witness—rather than interaction with the Person.

Many of us need to be shown what this means. Throughout my life I have watched to see how people talk and work together. I have valued books that helped me visualize how things are done, how people interact. As a child I always wanted to know the private details—like where the bathrooms were in ancient castles. Recently I found a children's pop-up book that gave me that answer.

But I haven't seen a pop-up book that describes the process of coming to know God. Nor have I heard or seen anyone close to me discuss-

ing or demonstrating the practical realities of a friendship with God. He had to do it for me Himself. His answer to my question: "How do I do that?"

**I do it for you, Laurie. You simply respond.**

## CHAPTER 1

# LAURIE, I KNOW AND SEE YOU

“Hearken to me, O house of Jacob,  
all the remnant of the house of Israel,  
who have been borne by me from your birth,  
carried from the womb;  
even to your old age I am He,  
and to gray hairs I will carry you.  
I have made, and I will bear;  
I will carry and will save.”

—Isaiah 46:3-4

***YOU'RE REALLY THERE!***

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**F**rom the “wondering” days in high school, I went on to college and promptly forgot the question I had asked God. College was excitement and freedom! In the first year, I fell in love with the art of writing and changed my major from pre-med to English. Then I took newswriting and journalism, plunging into work on the college newspaper.

I began my junior year with joy—I was totally involved in my love for writing. As managing editor of my college’s student newspaper, my life and thoughts centered in news stories, headlines, and layout.

However within two months, I became desperately ill. When I recovered, I no longer had energy to cover school, work, and extra-curricular activities. Finally, I went home.

When I returned to school a year later, I struggled to maintain my grades—work and extra-curricular activities weren’t possible. At the end of my senior year, Mom came to help me finish course work so that I could graduate with my class.

A skeleton outline of the next few years of my life includes teaching high school, marriage, and the birth of my son, Michael.

Having said “I do,” I focused my life on my husband. In courtship, his face had lit up when I was with him. I’d felt special. Once we were married, he no longer “lit up” for me. So I worked to get him to “light up.” My well-being and value seemed to depend on his opinion. Instead of ap-

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proving, he became critical. I gained weight in response. He disliked the weight.

I hid from the negative input by going further and further inside, so much so that my mother and sister complained that I was becoming a “zombie.” To them that meant I was going around in a daze. It was a comment I didn’t understand, because inside I felt a great deal of emotion—sadness, despair, fear.

I continued the desperate effort to survive—physically handle the duties of wife, mother, and a job—and keep my marriage intact. Then I discovered my husband’s affair with a neighborhood friend. I was stunned at his breach of commitment.

After ten years of marriage we divorced. The place he left vacant was hugely empty—not only had I lost my spouse, but I’d lost the person I’d put in God’s place. I was without direction.

After the divorce, I asked for and received a transfer of my job with the State of Idaho to be closer to my mother and sister. They provided a sense of family. My son Michael and I were living on our own and I was taking care of us—physically and financially.

Emotionally and spiritually I struggled. My sense of worth and value seemed irreparably smashed. I needed someone to approve and affirm me. I was desperate to find a husband, to re-establish my worth and value in the only way I knew—by having a man love me.

For years I had viewed God as a distant Uncle—a benevolent Uncle—but One I’d never met face to face. I knew He wished me well. But I believed that He expected me to take care of myself. Granted, He had put into place the means of my salvation, including an eventual home in heaven. However, I didn’t expect (or see) Him to be interested in me as an individual. When I’d meet the occasional person who believed that God was her close, intimate Friend, I’d quickly stuff deep inside my slight, wistful de-

sire for the same relationship and then congratulate myself on my strong independence.

## **PARKING PLACES**

A friend and I were enjoying lunch in our favorite restaurant. "Can you believe she thinks that God finds parking places for her!" I said with a laugh. Disbelief over a story shared at coffee break earlier that morning had set us off.

"No," she replied. "God expects us to find our own parking places." Her tone was firm.

I nodded my head in agreement. I was independent, taking care of myself. I'd been on my own with my small son for about three years. And I was managing. But even as I nodded, a sense of discomfort and disloyalty flickered around the edges of my conscious thought.

As I drove away from the restaurant, I thought about what I had said. Even though I'd grown up thinking that I was "to do my part" in order to receive God's blessings, I was also taught to love Him and respect Him. Somehow, that verbal statement and laughter seemed offensive. Hoping God would not zap me, I shoved the disquiet down and got back to work.

Over the next few years the incident kept cropping up in my mind. My words appeared to be a challenge to God. Parking places opened up

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right in front of me. At first I was surprised. Then I began to watch. I found that when I felt anxiety about a tight schedule, a parking place was there waiting for me. When I had plenty of time, I walked farther.

“Is God doing this?” I’d ask myself. A quiet contentment and sense of being pampered warmed me each time I parked in a spot that normally would have been filled. A simple thing maybe—making room for me to park—but one that taught me to watch and see what God might be doing, and to begin to expect His hand in my life.

*Thank you, God, for challenging me  
to see what You do.*



The social work elements of my job for the State of Idaho gave me joy; I chose to go back to school to get my master’s in that field. Midway through I met John.

## **SLIP SLIDIN’ AWAY**

My hand tucked into John’s arm, we stood in the doorway of the sanctuary, watching our wedding attendants walk down the aisle. A second marriage for both of us, we’d chosen to go down the aisle together. Joy lit my soul. Five years past



divorce from my first husband, I would again be married. I was loved.

“Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had well-nigh slipped. For I was envious . . .”  
—Psalms 73:1-3

Superimposed on that moment was an almost chaotic collage of memories. My mind drifted from the sanctuary entrance to pictures from my past. I knew I had been devastated by di-

vorce. But I didn't understand the strong drive I'd felt to prove that I was lovable. I did things I'd never considered doing before. The struggle between my religious values and my need to be loved by a man almost destroyed me.

My beliefs about fidelity and commitment in marriage had been shattered. I had clung to the few things that seemed to me unthinkable to let go—my membership in the church of my birth, my desire to honor God, my action of paying a faithful tithe. I took myself and five-year-old son Michael to church as many times as I could get us there.

But I found my true support in the close camaraderie of my work unit. We were a mismatched group of Christian and non-Christian, drinker and non-drinker, drug user and non-drug user. Some married, some single, some having

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affairs. Most of us were in our 20's or 30's. We supported each other at work and partied together later. For the first time, I experienced what I believed was acceptance and intimacy.

On weekends, I would get up in front of the church to lead out in the program. Then, during the week, I slipped into the back of bars to be with my group, choosing a non-alcoholic drink. I didn't spend too much time worrying about the fact that conversation became stupid after a number of drinks. These people wanted me. They seemed tolerant of my different beliefs and welcomed my presence. I wanted to be with them.

I remember sitting on a stool in the bar with a fellow worker. The song "Slip Slidin' Away" by Paul Simon was playing in the background. I hummed the words, "You know the nearer your destination, The more you're slip slidin' away."

"Don't listen to that philosophy," he said. "It will take you down." And he sipped his drink.

I sat dumbfounded. I was the religious one, but in order to belong with this group, I was willingly sliding into a lifestyle that was taking me away from God. The warning was useful but took me a while to heed.

My "group" lived pretty much as the world did. Although not talked about, we understood that many of the singles among us had sexual interaction with their current dating partner. Because I so desperately wanted to believe that I

was lovable, that someone wanted me, I longed for romantic relationships.

The struggle between my need for being valued by “a man” and for being faithful to the moral standards I’d held all my life was fierce. I searched the Bible for permission to indulge in fornication. Just in case, I started birth control. Finally, I submitted to God.

*Lord, I prayed, I am willing to be single the rest of my life. I will be content with the love of my family and my child. I choose to be your person, pure and faithful to You.*

As I prayed, the burden lifted. I knew I had chosen a different course than the one I had followed for the last five years. I was committed to God. I didn’t expect it to be easy. I knew I still had a desperate need to find value in the fact that I was loved by a man. However, I determined to cling to God and find my value in Him.

About that same time, our pastor asked John and me to work together teaching a Bible study group. Over the phone we talked and planned each week’s lesson. It was an interesting situation. John, due to his wife’s death, was single. He was attractive and a member of my own church. But his bereavement was too recent, and I had determined to turn my mind away from romantic involvements. Except for class, I avoided him. I didn’t want to appear interested and I wanted to protect my feelings. One day I left the class so

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quickly that he chased me across the church parking lot to talk.

In spite of my resolution, I was drawn to him. The phone calls became a nightly habit. Along with planning for our class we talked about our personal, daily lives. As our friendship deepened, I learned to appreciate the whole man. The first time we dated, we both knew we would marry. The electric current between us was intense. But more than that, our hearts were filled with each other.

I looked at the fact of John in my life as a gift of love from God. On my own, I had not been able to replace what divorce had cost me.

As I leaned against him in the doorway to the sanctuary, warmth and love flowed between us. A tingling of awe filled me as I thought of the personal attention God had given me. When I quit trying to fill my emptiness and chose to surrender to Him, He responded by putting a hedge around me in the form of John. I was safe, and no need for human relationship could turn me from my commitment to God.

The music changed, signaling the time for John and me to walk down the aisle. My hand, clinging to John's arm, came into focus. I was back in the present, about to be married. Music signaled our turn. We stepped out together.

*Laurie, I Know And See You*

*Thank you for the gift of surrender.*



John had four children aged 10 through 19. I had one, aged nine. My son, Michael, was ecstatic at the thought of three brothers and a sister. John's children, still grieving their mother's death, did not look forward to the change.

At first, when I realized John's children did not want their mother replaced and didn't see a need for me, I felt crushed. John supported me through this new pain. I learned to give the children space and respect their feelings.

Eventually, we began to meld our two families together. Life was busy. Life was good.

I wasn't prepared for the blow when it came.

## **KICKING AND SCREAMING**

The Idaho school in which John had been teaching fifth and sixth grades chose to cut a position due to a drop in student population. In February he'd been asked to meet with the school board. When he arrived, they told him that after much "deliberation" they had decided that his position was the one they needed to eliminate. And that was that—no job for the coming school year.

We owned the property and house we lived in; our children's grandparents lived nearby; and we all had friends we didn't want to leave. My job was there. Most important, this was home.

And it felt like being fired.

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We still had four months of the current school year to get through. We cried and tried to analyze why this had happened. Because of the sense of being expendable and not wanted, we found it difficult continuing in the school's social life. We escaped by leaving on weekends to visit friends and lick our wounds. We held hands in the car and bravely sang, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able . . ."

Right away, John sent résumés to schools with openings. But, before they could respond, he received a request to interview at a school in Missoula, Montana – not one where he'd sent a résumé.

We drove to the interview through winter's last blast of snow and ice. About 30 miles from our destination, the car began to act up and died – to us, a fitting response to our current situation. We went on to Missoula in a tow truck.

In spite of our dismal introduction to Missoula, John accepted the offered position before he left the interview.

"We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."  
– Romans 8:28

We went home to finish the school year and prepare to move. We put the house up for sale. Our two older sons chose not to move with us at that time. We endured a farewell party

given by the school and took with us a quilt signed by all the people "who didn't want us." It was a bad, sad time of our lives. We did not see any good coming out of it. But now, within a short time of being in Missoula, we saw some "light."

Our thirteen-year-old daughter Carrie was born with a malformed vertebra in her spine that pinched the nerves to her right leg, interfering with muscle development and twisting her foot. Walking was difficult. Along with that, as she grew, her spine began curving into an "S" shape.

We listened carefully as Carrie's new doctor described the treatment he proposed. He ended with a comment that shocked us.

"I'm the only doctor between Denver and Seattle who is working with this procedure."

John and I looked at each other, light beginning to illuminate the extremely trying circumstances that had led us to this office.

"Carrie's scoliosis is quite progressed," the doctor continued, "but we still have time to utilize this treatment. She's not yet to the point of needing a rod to stabilize her spine."

He turned to Carrie. "I'll put a small tattoo right here," and he touched a spot on her side. "That will help you know where to attach the wires."

Carrie nodded. "I hate the Boston brace," she said, referring to the huge body brace she had

worn for a couple of years. She paused a moment. I knew she was thinking of the teasing she'd gotten from schoolmates because of the bulky brace under her jeans and shirt.

"I can use the Scolatron while I'm sleeping?"

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution?"  
—Romans 8:32, 35

She waited for the doctor's answer.

"Yes," he nodded.

"I'm willing to try it." She smiled.

Later that evening when we were alone in our bedroom, John and I approached the "light" that had begun to dawn.

"Carrie needed this move," I said.

"I am seeing that," he replied.

"We didn't even know that there were other options for treating her scoliosis." I paused. I felt shy about what I wanted to say.

John said it for me. "God planned it."

"Well," I sighed, "I'm glad we're here and I am very grateful for this doctor. I was so afraid Carrie would have to have surgery to stop the curvature."

John shook his head. "God looked ahead for us and prepared a place."



*Laurie, I Know And See You*

“Who would have thought this move was part of God’s plan—a miracle in our lives,” I mused. “I mean . . . we approached it kicking and screaming.”

“We did,” he agreed. “We protested the whole way here.”

*Dear Lord, I am glad to be able to say  
I am beginning to have a sense of Your thoughtfulness  
and provision for my needs,  
and of the long-range planning You do for my welfare,  
for the welfare of my family.  
Thank you!*

☺

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## **CHAPTER 2**

# **LET'S GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER!**

“For now we see in a mirror dimly,  
but then face to face.  
Now I know in part;  
then I shall understand fully,  
even as I have been fully understood.”

–1 Corinthians 13:12

***CAN WE REALLY BE FRIENDS?***

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**O**ur new location was lonely. No family or friends lived within 200 miles. John, as principal and head teacher, enjoyed his new school and students, but I didn't seem to have a place. I was lonely.

When we'd first moved to Missoula, I'd thought I would find a job in my field of social work. However, each time I dressed to go look for work, I'd get as far as the front porch. Then panic would hit me, and I'd turn around and go back inside. Looking for work scared me. John's job loss and my own work experiences had anchored me in fear.

To avoid the emotional pain and its accompanying depression, I buried myself in reading. I turned away from everything in my life except what I found in the pages of my romance novels. Living my life through the characters in the novels felt safe.

## **ONE ON ONE**

My husband taught grades 5-8 in the small elementary school. In the mornings I hurried through my household chores, eager to get back to my romance novel. I lived in the lives of the book's characters, not in my own. That way, I didn't have to face finding a "real" job or the

loneliness of our new situation. In the afternoons I assisted the teacher who taught grades 1-4.

“And this is eternal life,  
that they know thee  
the only true God,  
and Jesus Christ whom  
thou has sent.”  
—John 17:3

One day in April of that first year, I ran out of novels, and I began to panic. I *needed* a book in hand. For me it was a matter of emotional sur-

vival. So I picked up an inspirational autobiography, Evelyn Christenson’s book, *Lord, Change Me!*

The writer told of her call from God to spend more time with Him, to read His Word, and to pray. She chose to do so, asking Him to stop her whenever she came to something in Scripture He wanted to say to her. And He did stop her.

When I read her experience, a great longing welled up in me. I had taken sixteen years of Bible classes and knew a lot of key doctrinal texts by memory. I knew the books of the Bible in order. I could quickly find any text reference and knew about God. But I didn’t know the God of the Bible. My heart yearned for personal closeness to God, but I didn’t know how to find it.

I flung my book down and challenged God: *Okay, I’ll try it, but will You speak to me?* After a moment, I again picked up Evelyn Christenson’s book, *Lord, Change Me!* and carefully smoothed the rumpled pages. My outburst had come as I

read about the way in which God spoke to her through Scripture. Laying the book down gently this time, I scrunched down in bed.

*Lord, I can pick up my Bible and read it . . . Then in anguish of disbelief, I cried out, But, will You do for me what You did for her? Will You stop me as I read? Will You say something to me?*

As tears dried on my cheeks, I determined to try . . . and wondered how many pages I would have to read before He stopped me – if He did.

*I shudder – what if I hadn't tried – I could have missed Your voice in Scripture.*



Trusting is difficult for me. To begin with, my interaction with God through His Word was a process of checking Him out. Would He really be there? Would He keep meeting me in Scripture? Could I trust that He'd *always* be there?

## FIRST DATE

Trembling, I pulled the covers up over my shoulders and then stared. What had I just done? Sunshine dappled the wall. My eyes saw, but my mind focused in awe on my question: *I can do it, but will You?* I had challenged God to prove Himself to me.

The words sounded bold and desperate. For a minute everything seemed to stop, then I felt a

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hushed waiting, an expectancy hovering in the room, as a small beginning of hope seeped through my being.

"Well, then," I said to myself. My eyes focused on the sunshine, the tumbled bed, and the bookshelf that held my ten-year-old but brand-new Bible.

"OK," I continued, "I'm going to do it."

Sitting up, I pulled the covers aside and slid my feet to the floor. My hand reached for my Bible. Clutching it, I scrounged for a notebook and pen and then climbed back into bed.

"Now what?" I muttered. "H-m-m." I thought a minute. "I may as well start with Colossians 3, as Evelyn Christenson described in her book."

In reverence I opened the Book to Colossians 3, feeling that same fear and excited anticipation I'd felt many years before when I'd waited for my first date to pick me up. Would He come?

I closed my eyes and whispered, *God, stop me when I read a Bible verse You want me to listen to.*

My eyes went to the first verse and I read, "If then you have been raised with Christ, **seek the things that are above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth**" (emphasis indicates the words that God stopped me on).

I tried reading verse 3, "For you have. . ." but found myself back to "**seek the things that are**



**above . . . Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."** Each time I tried to move on I would see and hear these words again.

Excitement broke the bonds I'd tightly wrapped it in.

*Lord, I breathed. You are here! You are stopping me as I asked. You are doing it!*

*Now, what do You want me to understand?*

"Morning by morning  
he wakens,  
he wakens my ear to hear as  
those who are taught.  
The Lord GOD has  
opened my ear,  
and I was not rebellious,  
I turned not backward."  
— Isaiah 50:4-5

I wrote the words from Colossians 3:1, 2 in my notebook. "Seek . . ." Then my mind supplied the words and music from a scripture song I'd learned as a child: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteous-

ness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33, KJV).

In awe I whispered, *You want me to spend time with You first, to get to know You.*

I read God's words again, **seek the things that are above**, thought about them, and wrote my response in my notebook. I knew God had answered my challenge . . . immediately. He was encouraging me to continue to meet Him in His Word.

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The next day I read a few more verses. Before I began, I again prayed, *Please, Holy Spirit, stop me when I need to listen.* And He did.

In verse 8 of the same chapter, I found, **“But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander . . .”**

I could not get away from those words. I had never seen myself as anything but a caring, kind, loyal, supportive, helpful person. Yet God apparently did not agree. Like a knife these words cut into my heart. I saw their truth. He was right.

I had been angry at the unfairness of our circumstances—we had moved away from all that was familiar and supportive. In my mind I had constructed numerous punishments for those who had hurt us.

Finally, I submitted. *OK, Lord, I give up. I am guilty of these things. Please forgive me and change my heart. Thank you.*

I wrote of what had happened to us, of my feelings about those events, and of my desire to be free of them. Hurt and pain left me. I was free to go on.

Farther down I read, **“Put on, then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved . . .”** God had stopped me again—this time in verses 12-15. He showed me His desire for my character: **Put on, then . . . compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, for-**

**giving each other . . . And above all these put on love . . . And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts . . . And be thankful.**

He brought me back to this chapter again and again. I began to pray for these characteristics, not realizing how much God would have to change me to produce them.

Since that time, I have continued to read the Bible with that same prayer—*Please, stop me when I need to listen.*

The Holy Spirit has been faithful. He has stopped me at many verses in the years since that beginning experience. From that first date, I've counted on Him. He is my steady Date.

*Scripture by Scripture, You wooed me.*

*Thank you.*



Things were getting better for me. The lower-grades teacher had resigned, and I'd taken her place. I loved getting up each morning, eager to hurry over to school. I rejoiced daily for my privilege of teaching these children.

Then, during a spring outdoors-education camping trip, John's bladder quit functioning. We got him to a doctor and through many tests. No diagnosis resulted. The problem appeared to recede and I sighed in relief. We were going to be OK, I thought.

John started the next year well, but was soon hospitalized for kidney stones. Then, a bad reaction to a pain medication gave him hallucinations. Both of us were out of school for a period of time, as he required my constant at-

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tention until the drug reaction ended. Finally, it did, but he continued to have increasing bladder difficulties.

During the kidney-stone episode, a home-schooling mother covered the classrooms. John and I had used a variety of methods in teaching reading, according to each child's need. The substitute believed that phonics was the only correct method to use. While we were gone, she began to promote her viewpoint. Division and discontent began rumbling through the board and parent groups. We came back to an adversarial situation. After several months of trying to meet the needs and demands of diverse groups, we both realized we needed to resign.

We applied for a transfer to another school and received it. Starting over again, I felt some of the previous depression. My time with God became even more essential to me. But I was running into difficulties with it, too.

## BELIEVING THE MASK

*I'm angry!* I wrote to God in my journal. I tilted the pen up and then wrote again. *This is scary!*

I said to myself, "How could I be angry about the words Jesus said?"

"What He said doesn't make sense to me!" I continued to journal. "His answers seem so out of context . . . as if He deliberately misunderstood the questions asked."

I couldn't believe that I would react that way to Jesus' words. And yet, in honesty, I had to admit I did. I was frustrated, and I desperately wanted to understand what He meant.

*Lord, help me!* My prayer was answered with a prompting to read *The Desire of Ages*, a commentary on Jesus' life as recorded in the gospels, and to read each Bible reference before, during, and after I read a chapter.

Slowly, I began to understand that Jesus stepped over or around conventional expectations to address the real issue in each person's heart. He went beyond the "mask." He met each person's real question or need.

The people He spoke to were used to covering their real interest or need with some face-saving question or comment. As I began to see what they were doing, I recognized my own tendency to carefully choose my words, at the same time longing for someone to see through my mask to my need.

And I remembered the first time I put on the mask.

Darkness surrounded the ski lodge and my heart. Thirteen years old, I was a freshman in boarding high school. Inside, in the light, I'd felt painfully lonely, even though I was surrounded by a hundred classmates. The darkness outside beckoned, promising relief, a cloak for my hurting heart. I went out and threw myself down. Feeling like a child, I began to move my arms in the snow, making angel wings.

Suddenly, the door burst open and a senior boy stepped out.

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“Well, look who’s here,” he said, laughing. “What’s the matter, Low Pockets? We too much for you?”

Even though I’d gone outside to hide in the darkness, light from all the windows had spotlighted me as I lay in the snow. Embarrassed, I scrambled to my feet and darted past him, back into the crowd.

As I went I mumbled, “I just like to make snow angels.” I couldn’t let him know my pain and loneliness.

Laughing still, he tromped off down the hill.

“For I know the plans I have  
for you, says the LORD, plans  
for welfare and  
not for evil,  
to give you a future  
and a hope.”  
—Jeremiah 29:11

Humiliated, I vowed no one would ever see my pain again. For years I practiced, making sure they didn’t.

Now, as I recognized the issue of hiding my feelings, I

began to work on it. Understanding came slowly. When I looked at Jesus and His words, I knew I’d become so accustomed to putting on a mask that I had believed my own fabrication.

As I read the gospels and wrote in my journal, anger drained. I was able to read and be open to the Spirit’s guiding. He led me into deeper knowledge of God through His Son, Jesus Christ. I became able to participate with the Bible charac-

*Let's Get To Know Each Other*

ters as they interacted with Jesus, gaining life-changing insight about God's interest in me.

*It is so good to be known . . . and still loved.*



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### **CHAPTER 3**

## **YOU ARE SAFE WITH ME, LAURIE**

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,  
will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and  
my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.'"

—Psalms 91:1-2

*MAYBE I CAN TRUST YOU*

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**I**n our new location, I again needed to find work, but this time I didn't feel the emotional trauma I'd felt with the previous move. Finally, I took a part-time job at the local community college. I also began teaching with John in his school. It seemed inevitable that life got too busy and stress built.

The stories in this section describe God's "hanging out" with me while I went about making a living, dealing with whatever problems arose, facing life's injuries, and feeling responsible for our well-being. He waited and watched for opportunities to make His ongoing presence real and to demonstrate His ability to care for us. We'd been in our new location for almost a year when John's illness flared. Fear for survival became my front-burner issue.

The fear was familiar. As a single mom, I had been really scared about my ability to survive. At that time, I had discovered inside myself a ferocious determination to make sure Michael and I would be all right. And I had managed to care for us.

After I married John, my awareness of this fear receded. It became more subtle but had not gone away. As each crisis threatened, I manipulated circumstances in order to hang onto control of our well-being.

## THE SECURITY SCRAMBLE

One night, John shared with me his concern. Due to his health, he might not be able to continue teaching. An elementary school teacher cannot safely leave his classroom for frequent bathroom breaks. John's illness, not yet identified as interstitial cystitis, could without warning send him to the bathroom five times in thirty minutes. We went to bed with heaviness in our hearts. In the morning we got up and went to school without discussing the situation. I clung to a determination that somehow he'd manage.

After school, I straightened my classroom, feeling a sense of pride and joy in it. Even though the children and I started and ended the day in the main classroom, grades 1-4 spent most of their day downstairs with me working on their curriculum. I loved this room. When I finished cleaning, I went upstairs to find John.

He was sitting slumped at his desk, hands holding his head. I stared at him. Fear took hold of my heart and slung it into panic. Knowing he was in trouble, I had still urged him to continue. We had three children still in our care.

He looked up at me. "I can't do it any longer," he said.

We couldn't survive without his job. Frantic, my mind searched for the answer. I had to figure

out a way to keep our family's income and security intact.

"What if grades one to four and I stay in your classroom?" I asked. "I'd be there to supervise when a 'bathroom rush' hits."

John answered slowly. "Maybe that would work."

We elected to try bringing my group upstairs, and it worked for a time. Then the pain began to wear on him and we knew he would need to resign. But I couldn't just let go of this income, this security.

"What if I take over the whole classroom?" I asked. I had gone to summer school when he had. My credentials were current.

"I'll talk to the board about it," he said. He sighed.

John resigned, and they gave me the position. A school board member whose college degree included a strong math emphasis agreed to come in each morning. I felt exultant. I had come through again, managing to keep us secure.

After the first few weeks of that next school year, my aide told me, "I think you're going to be the best teacher we've ever had."

"And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything."  
—2 Corinthians 9:8

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I glowed.

However, as the year went along, I found myself needing to be absent to take John to out-of-town hospitals for diagnosis and painful treatments. John's spirits were low, and he needed encouragement. Then Carrie came home from school, bringing with her books and assignments to be done at home. Mononucleosis had put her into the hospital and weakened her. The depression encircling her and John widened its arms, bringing me into its grip.

The school children responded to my despair, acting out their protest. Classroom discipline became a struggle. I couldn't seem to get through all the classwork with students each day. Going to school became difficult.

I wrote in my journal: *Panic is persisting for a short, intense time each morning when I wake up. Oh, God, please control this panic.*

Then my thoughts continued, *I've got to take care of us.*

I'd cry *Help us, God*, but did not expect Him to do so. I still believed it was up to me. Finally, I began to recognize that when I went to God with my panic, He would quiet the emotional turmoil inside me. Daily I asked and God responded. Then I could dress and go to school. And I was grateful. But I didn't ask Him to be our Provider. After all, wasn't that my job?

*You Are Safe With Me, Laurie*

*Father, thank you for joining me in my agony  
and for giving me strength  
to face each day.*



## STEPPING INTO GOD'S CARE

As I thought about our financial security, I wondered what made it so difficult for me to trust. Memories from my life showed me that life often erodes ability to trust.

As a first grader I had stood in front of a beloved teacher, red-faced and tearful, listening to the accusation of a third-grade boy. "She kissed me."

He was right. I had.

I remember thinking of the three third-grade girls who had huddled around me. "Go!" they had said. "Go, kiss him now." And they had giggled.

They were older. I thought they were wonderful. I thought what they said was commandment and must be obeyed. I wasn't prepared for the boy's anger or the terror I felt as I fled from that anger.

He had chased me around the school grounds. Finally, I had gone to the teacher for protection. He was right on my heels. The teacher had reprimanded me and given me the equivalent of "time

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out." Mortification colored my whole world. And I learned that I had misplaced my trust and love.

Six months later, I woke alone on a train. The train was stopped. People were milling around, getting on and off. My father was nowhere in sight. I got off. In my seven-year-old brain, I thought Daddy was lost and I needed to find him.

I knew we were on our way north to help his family. I knew my life had changed and my mother had disappeared. Daddy was all I had left. I looked along the loading platform, through the train station, and out its front door, but I couldn't find him. Finally, I went back to our seat. When he returned, I didn't tell him what had happened or how I felt. But the terror of that event stayed with me.

I didn't know at the time that our family had broken up temporarily to meet an emergency in my grandparents' nursing home business. While my father took me with him, my mother went into the nurses' dorm to finish her school semester. And my sister went to live with a nearby aunt.

When Mom reappeared, we lived in various rooms of the new construction. We eventually did live in our own home, but our lives centered around nursing home activities, and I never regained a sense of intimate family.



Many years later, about ten years into marriage with my first husband, Ken, another blow to trust fell.

“How are you and Ken doing?” my neighbor and good friend Nicole asked.

“I think we have a good marriage,” I answered. “We love each other.” I didn’t wonder why she asked.

In my mind, I acknowledged that our relationship felt empty and wondered what I could do to enrich it. But I had no sense of its ending.

On that same day Ken and I went to look at new homes, and Nicole went with us. I’m not sure how it happened, but I

“I will instruct you and  
teach you the way you  
should go;  
I will counsel you  
with My eye upon you.”  
— Psalm 32:8

found myself riding in the back seat of our car while she rode in the front with Ken. Because I wasn’t looking for unfaithfulness or was extremely naïve, I didn’t see it as a clue.

Another neighbor had to come to me and say, “I think you need to know that I discovered Nicole and Ken in my kitchen in a ‘heated’ embrace.” My heart plummeted. Fear raced through me. I had expected our marriage to endure, that we would work together in commitment.

When I confronted Ken, he punched a hole in our living-room wall with his fist and said, “We

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may as well get a divorce” with an emphasis of finality. I was not used to violence—I felt threatened by his frustration and anger. Fear clutched the broken pieces of my heart, attempting to keep out the intense physical pain that comes with major relationship breaks.

“I don’t think I ever loved you,” he added.

I learned I couldn’t trust the promises of the person closest to me.

Trust-breaking events did not belong only to the past.

I was still teaching in John’s place, and going with him to see doctors who might know what was wrong. Finally, we had a diagnosis for his illness – interstitial cystitis.

“There is no known cure,” the doctor said and then laughed. “The treatments are worse than the disease.”

Depression deepened in me, and I knew I could no longer cover the requirements of my multi-grade classroom and meet the needs of my husband and those of my daughter, who was still at home recovering from her illness.

I needed a break. I went home, a thousand miles, to visit Mom and see a doctor. The doctor described my depression as “situational.” He prescribed medication and recommended that I change jobs. I talked on the phone with John and then began to share with my mother.

"I think I'm going to resign," I told her. "I'll finish this year, but I can't continue teaching."

She didn't wait to hear my plan, but burst out in panic. "Who will take care of your family?"

I shriveled inside. I knew what she feared. My sister, just separated from her husband, was living nearby without any income. Mom was single, and although her income was good, she was already taking care of my sister. She couldn't give additional support.

Later, as John and I discussed our plans, I told him, "Mom is afraid that she will have to take care of us and she can't handle that thought. We can't move near her . . ." I stopped long enough to quiet the tears that threatened, "or let her see our need."

I had learned that my circumstances could become too much even for someone who loved me. Distance seemed safer.

Eventually, I had to ask God to take care of us. I turned in my resignation for the end of the school year. Knowing I would soon be done and we'd be going back to the Northwest helped.

We chose to move to College Place, Washington, almost two hundred miles from Mom but familiar to both of us. We arrived at our destination with the biggest U-Haul available. We had stuffed it with as many of our belongings as we could get in it, leaving the rest behind. I drove the moving truck because I could handle the bounc-

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ing. John drove our Ford Escort. We stopped at the boarding high school to attend Carrie's graduation, and then both she and Michael came with us.

"Where are we going to live?" Michael asked.

John and I looked at each other. We had one more month of my regular salary available and then we'd be on John's medical retirement.

"We'll find someplace," I said.

*God, help us.* I had been praying this throughout the weeks since we'd first decided I would resign. I had clung to His promise in Hebrews 13:5-6. "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, '**I will never fail you nor forsake you.**' Hence we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.'"

Until we found work, we would have a \$400-a-month medical retirement to cover rent and utilities and a few basic food items. We needed to find a place to rent immediately—in two days the U-Haul had to be turned in. We needed some miracles of God's grace.

God did step in. On that first day we found a small house with a rental price we could manage. Within the first week, Michael found a dishwashing job and then a welding job. John took over the dishwashing job. Carrie started work at "The Scoop," an ice-cream establishment connected to

*You Are Safe With Me, Laurie*

the local college she'd be attending. Eventually, I found a job at a book bindery.

I knew that no maneuvering of mine had made all this fall into place. God had met all our needs. He had provided for us. Stepping into His care *was* safe.

*Thank you for answering my cry for help.*

*Thank you for the courage to ask.*



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## CHAPTER 4

# I'LL NEVER LEAVE YOU, LAURIE

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be  
in dread of them: for it is the LORD your God who  
goes with you;  
he will not fail you or forsake you.”

– Deuteronomy 31:6

*EVEN WHEN I FORGET?*

*Living Loved*



**F**inding that we were managing to pay rent and buy food, I breathed in relief. I could stop taking my antidepressant medication, I thought, and get on with life. And I did. However, over-whelming depression, tucked away until I felt safe enough to unpack it, had come with me in the move.

### **SQUANDERING THE GIFT**

This depression went everywhere with me. At work in the bindery, I'd sit on my high stool surrounded by magazines that were to be "collated" and bound into books for different professional offices and schools. Tears flowed.

My work station, a three-sided cubicle with my back making the fourth side, became a sanctuary. Workroom noise and that sanctuary masked my tears. As I put the magazines together, I attempted to lift my spirits by singing choruses from childhood—"Jesus loves me, this I know" or "He's able, He's able, I know He's able . . ."

Finally, I went back to the psychologist who had told me my depression was due to my situation. He gave me another prescription for antidepressant medication.

“In three to four weeks, you should be feeling better, more able to manage,” he said.

I still didn’t want to take the pills and asked how I’d know if I no longer needed them.

“Well,” he said, looking at me strangely, “You should need them for at least six months, if not longer.” He laughed a little. “If you don’t, you might feel lethargic or anxious—or get a rash. You’ll know!”

I began taking the pills.

Two weeks later I sat reading during my worship time. Suddenly, words on the page vibrated with neon energy. They seemed directed toward me—compelling me to answer their question.

**“Wilt thou be made whole?”** (John 5:6, KJV).

Jesus had asked these words of the man who had been crippled for thirty-eight years. Now He was asking them of me.

I looked at the words again. **“Wilt thou be made whole?”** They still vibrated with energy. I knew He was asking me if I would let Him make me well. I knew He would not ask without purpose. And I accepted joyfully.

*Yes, Lord!* I whispered. Awe filled me. And then . . . within days, I became jittery and knew it was time to back off the antidepressant medica-

tion. It was a joyful time. I began to make good nutritional choices. I walked. I improved. I felt truly wonderful.

With hope, I looked for professional work and accepted a social work position in a nursing home. But paperwork took so much of the day that actually getting time with each person became more and more difficult. Slowly through the next few months my hours per day crept up until I often worked 10 to 14 hours each day, with still more to do. I quit walking. I quit preparing nutritious food. I stopped getting enough sleep. And I stopped spending my daily time with Jesus. Depression slipped back into my life.

"I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned' . . ."  
– Luke 15:18, 20

Within a year and a half, I again quit for "health reasons." I felt relief to be out of the situation but sad that I had given up health in order to comply with government regulations and still serve the nursing home residents.

Desperately, I returned to seeking God daily. No words on a page lit up with neon energy, offering an instant miracle. But I did see God's mercy and forgiveness. He drew me back into relationship with Him. He walked beside me in all that I had to face. And I knew His goodness. Gratitude filled me.

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*Oh, Lord, I still long to receive  
instant miracles. But more than that  
I treasure the “coming to know You better.”*



John had gone back to school, working on a two-year degree in computer technology. After graduation, he stayed on at the school as a part-time instructor, teaching computer literacy and a few other basic courses. I took a half-time job teaching kindergarten for one year, then went back into social work—this time as a hospice social worker. Although I started with half-time, my hours soon stretched to full-time.

God had given me much evidence of His ability to provide for the needs of my family. Mainly, I trusted Him to take care of us. But I discovered that I still needed a plan, something tucked away as a backup.

## **THE SECURITY SCRAMBLE CONTINUES**

“Dad, you should write a book on the best bathrooms in the northwest,” quipped Michael.

“Yeah,” Carrie chimed in. “You could describe what kind of gullies to look for and which sagebrush works best.”

John’s interstitial cystitis still controlled much of our lives. He had just climbed back into the car after his sixth stop during the last hour. He preferred McDonald’s, as no one there told him he had to be a customer in order to use the bathroom

and the bathrooms were normally clean. However, McDonald's does not put a restaurant every two or three miles, so our traveling had become quite limited. We went when we needed to meet family obligations. Otherwise, we stayed home. Pain and frequent stops were affecting John and the rest of us.

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”  
—Philippians 4:19, 20

“Do you think we'll ever go camping again?” I'm afraid I was whining.

“I can't handle the camp set-up,” he replied. “If we had a little camper that didn't take any effort . . .” His voice trailed off. “Preferably, with a bathroom,” he added fervently.

One Sunday I said, “You know, we could have a good time just going to look at campers.”

“We can't afford it,” John said flatly.

But the idea wouldn't go away. We talked about the kind of camper that would be best.

“I think it needs a bathroom,” I suggested.

“That would be great!” His enthusiasm was growing.

“OK, let's go look. Then, when we have the money, we'll know what we want,” I urged.

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He reluctantly agreed. "I guess we can look, but you know we'd have to find one for under \$5,000."

Later that day we stood looking at a small motor home. "This is cute," I said. "Try the door. Let's look inside."

John reached for the handle. It turned easily, and we climbed in.

"Oh," I breathed. Spread out before me was a small room with a kitchen, table and benches, bed above the truck cab, and a door that must lead . . . to a *bathroom*. The truck cab had two bucket seats with enough space between them for climbing back into the living area.

John opened the small door. Not only did it contain a toilet, but also a shower. "This is great! When you are driving, we wouldn't even have to stop. I could just climb into the back, use the bathroom, and return to my seat."

No more agonizing waits until he could find a "potty stop."

"Wow!" he said. He poked through the cupboards and drawers. "Look—refrigerator, stove—all the comforts of home. We could live in this!"

Those words, "We could live in this!" echoed in my head. As I watched the enthusiasm grow in his expression, my need for a backup, for a "security blanket," kicked in. I often played the "what-if" game—the what-if-we-couldn't-pay-the-rent, what-would-we-do? kind of thing.

*Oh, Lord, this would be so perfect. Could we try to buy it . . . if it's under \$5,000?* I asked. At the thought, excitement pushed against my chest.

A week later I peeked outside for the tenth time. Our motor home sat in the driveway—not new, but beautiful. Joy and excitement filled me.

John came and stood beside me. “It’s a miracle, you know, that we got it along with an air conditioning unit for under \$5,000,” he commented.

“I know,” I replied. “And that the credit union was willing to give us the loan,” I added.

Over the next couple of years we went camping and took trips without fear of metropolitan areas where there is no sagebrush. We truly enjoyed using the camper.

One day my mother called. She’d been watching a morning news program that featured a doctor who was dealing with John’s condition through back surgery. Enthusiastically, she offered to send us to California to see the doctor. We talked about her offer and decided to accept. I arranged for vacation time, and we flew to California. After tests, the doctor stated that John had back damage affecting the nerves connected to the bladder and that surgery should give him relief. We scheduled the surgery.

John’s bladder improved, and the distances between “potty stops” lengthened. Trips became more normal. The camper, old when we bought it, was be-

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ginning to need repairs. Because his health was better, we didn't always use it to travel.

As I'm the one who pays the bills, I began to look at that monthly amount going out for the camper. God seemed to be telling me that it was time to let it go.

At the thought of not having it, fear surged. *We may still need it*, I told Him.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart . . . In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."  
—Proverbs 3:5, 6

I didn't want to say out loud to God, or anyone, that the camper represented security to me. If I lost my job, if John lost his, if for some reason we had no place to go, we could live in the camper. Finally, God convinced me that I was putting my dependence on an inanimate object.

*You're right, Lord*, I acknowledged. *I believe You can care for me, for us.*

I thought about all the ways in which He did so, and I remembered His great love for me.

*I do know that You take care of us. Lord; help me believe.*

I shared with John my conviction that it was time to sell and about my hesitancy to do so. We discussed the fact that we believed it was originally a gift from God. Finally, I brought up an-



other concern of mine. "Will we have to give up camping?" I asked.

He thought for a while. "No, I don't think so. I can handle putting up a tent."

"And we could get a portable potty," I put in. I hated to give up that comfort.

We agreed that we were willing to sell it, but we also wanted confirmation from God that this is what He wanted us to do. After all, as He had made it possible for us to have it in the first place, we couldn't lightly discard it. We asked Him to provide a buyer.

"Mom!" Carrie, who had recently moved into an apartment of her own, was visiting for a few days. "A man stopped by to ask about the camper. He saw the ad in the newspaper and was really interested."

I looked at her in bewilderment. "Ad in the

newspaper? We haven't advertised."

"Oh . . . well I told him you would be home

at noon and that he could come by then to look at it."

*God, is this from You?* I asked and then rushed to call John. "If someone is going to look at the camper, we need to clean it out," I told him.

"We can do that," he said. "I'll be right home."

"Ask, and it will be given  
you . . . For everyone who asks  
receives."  
—Matthew 7:7-8

*Living Loved*

We got it cleaned out, but no one showed up at noon. We decided that Carrie must have misunderstood. Later that afternoon, a truck stopped in front of the house. Two men climbed out. They seemed headed for our door. A thrill of anxiety went through me.

"John" I called. "Come answer the door."

"I didn't hear the doorbell," he said, coming into the living room.

"I know, but I think it's going to ring. Carrie, is this the man who was here?"

She peeked out the window. "Yup . . . They're not coming to the door. They're headed toward the camper."

"Go out," I urged John. He looked at me and lifted his eyebrows, but went out the door.

Ten minutes later, he was back in the house. "He's got cash with him. I've got to take it over to the credit union to pay off the loan and get the camper released to him." He went out the door then stuck his head back in. "There's going to be enough left to get a tent and a potty." He grinned.

*Father, when I relinquish control of our safety . . .  
sometimes I feel like I am stepping off a cliff.  
But when I do, I find myself stepping into  
the safety of Your loving care.*



At times life seems ironic. Within a few years of our moving to someplace "other than home," my sister and her

son had moved in with us while she went to school. Then my mother and father (back together after 20-plus years of separation and divorce) moved to be near us.

Over the years our family had grown. We now had four daughters-in-law and four grandchildren, all boys. Michael and his wife and son, Alex, lived near us.

Life seemed pretty good – John still worked part-time at the local community college and loved it. He slowly gained strength and endurance. And his income allowed us to do some fun things, as well as making it simpler to pay bills each month.

## THAT WHICH SATISFIES

I felt uneasy as I showed my parents the box of ornate eating utensils. Due to my discomfort, I hadn't taken it out of its box yet. "I never wanted silver," I said. "But I don't have enough spoons. . . and my stuff is so mismatched. I wish good stainless steel wasn't so expensive. This was actually cheaper." I heard my voice trail off in frustration.

I'd talked for years of the day when I could buy quality stainless steel. Now I felt I needed to explain my reasons for buying something so different than I'd dreamed of having.

"Well, it does feel good in your hand," Mom said. "And if you like it . . ."

"I'm surprised that I'm OK with it," I replied, "but I don't think we'll ever be able to get a de-

cent set of stainless steel at today's prices. This silver set was really cheap."

My father lay sprawled on the couch in our living room, apparently ignoring the conversation. Suddenly he heaved himself into an upright position. "Does anyone want to hear what I think?"

Surprised, I turned to him. "What do you think?"

"If it won't go in the dishwasher, what good is it?" Then he turned to Mom, who had been signaling him from a position slightly behind me. "What? You think I should keep my mouth shut?" And he flopped back to his after-lunch position.

That evening, I began to realize how much his words had had an impact on me. I sat and thought about the purchase. He was right for more reasons than the dishwasher. The new cutlery wasn't my style. I could hear myself forever explaining about having ornate silver on my table. Also, I had observed that the silver plating was not smooth. Several of the pieces had pits or sharp edges. Over the coming years, as I set the table, I knew I would fuss about accepting a substitute for what I really wanted. I took some of the pieces out of the box again and looked at them, then put them back.

"I think I'll return the silverware," I told my husband.

"I wondered about that," he said. "And I agree with you."

"Maybe, we could find some spoons that aren't too bad a price," I said. "After all, that's what we're so short of."

At the store the next morning, John took the box containing the silver to the clerk while I wandered over to the 50-percent-off table. When I'd looked before, all the stainless had been much more than we could afford.

Absentmindedly, I read the contents of the box of stainless steel sitting on the table before me. It contained a twelve-place set with twelve extra teaspoons. Surprised, I looked at the pattern.

It was simple and looked heavy enough for my requirements. I had difficulty holding and using extremely thin forks and spoons. All the less expensive stainless steel seemed lightweight and hurt my hands. I fumbled with the box lid, trying to get a piece out to see if it really did meet my need.

My husband came up beside me. "How much is that?"

I looked and discovered that it was the same price as the silver we had returned. Excited now, we both worked at getting the box open. Sure enough, it was solid, heavy enough, simple but beautiful.

"Let's get it!" he said.

*Living Loved*

Bumping along in the pickup on the way home, I held the precious box carefully and thanked God for my purchase. "I'm so pleased with it!" I said for about the fifth time.

My mind turned to the Bible verses I'd read that morning: "Why do you spend your money for that which . . . does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2).

I knew I would have always regretted buying the silver, settling for less than the "best" for me. I thought of the context of Isaiah's words. Somehow, for me, they seemed appropriate.

Another scripture popped into my thoughts. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Proverbs 16:25).

*How easy, Lord, I thought, to choose or settle for something less than the best.*

I remembered the many years I'd been OK

"Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, And your labor for that which does not satisfy? . . . Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live . . ."  
— Isaiah 55:2-3

with knowing about God rather than knowing God. Accepting less than the best—not knowing God personally—could have kept me from accepting His salvation *and* led me in the way of

death.

That thought seemed stark to me, but I remembered Jesus' words when the five foolish

virgins attempted to go into the wedding feast: "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you" (Matthew 25:12). And again, His words, "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven . . . On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers' " (Matthew 7:21-23, emphasis mine). I know that Jesus invites people to come to Him in personal relationship, and to not be satisfied with just knowing *about* Him. Salvation is a gift of relationship.

And I am grateful that God intervened in my life and led me to know Him personally. With a chuckle, I heard my dad's words again, "If it won't go in the dishwasher, what good is it?"

The spiritual analogy was clear to me: If my knowledge doesn't lead me to know God, what good is it? Seek the Lord while he may be found. (Isaiah 55:6) echoed in my ear.

Still clutching my box, I knew it held an even greater treasure than knives, forks, and spoons. I knew that in the future as I set my table, I would remember that I could have settled for "something less." Something less in my housekeeping needs, and something less in my spiritual needs.

*Thank you, God! I am so glad You are revealing Yourself to me. Satisfaction nestled in my heart.*

*Living Loved*

*Father, Thank you for giving me what  
I really wanted.*





## CHAPTER 5

# LAURIE, I'LL JUST TURN ON THE LIGHT

“For it is . . . God who said,  
‘Let light shine out of darkness,’  
who has shone in our hearts to give  
the light of the knowledge of the glory of God  
in the face of Christ.

—2 Corinthians 4:6

*OH, I SEE YOU!*

*Living Loved*

**I** was astounded when I discovered Psalm 22. God, I thought, You placed this here so that when You came in the Person of Jesus You would find preparation for what You were facing. Just as You encourage me to look to Scripture, You also searched it for guidance. And You put it here so that I could see not only prophecy regarding the events of Your life on earth, but proof that You knew the emotional pain, as well as physical pain, that You would face . . . before it happened.

Knowing ahead of time what is coming seems worse than simply being caught in the event without pre-knowledge. I'm grateful I don't know my future on earth. However, I do find scripture that prepares me for what I am facing. When I do, I am awed.

God gave me evidence of Himself in my physical world and relationships. He taught me to hear His voice and to treasure His presence. Then He began in me what Alcoholics Anonymous calls "A Fearless Moral Inventory" where I discovered and dealt with many angers, resentments, and personal character defects. I felt some emotional relief, but continued to have health problems.

A pattern began to emerge in my physical and emotional well-being. Just as I started to think I was feeling better, thinking clearly, and experiencing energy, then fatigue, sore throat with temperature, and chest congestion took over. Along with this came anxiety, depression, fearfulness, and memory difficulties. Then, in about four to six months

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I'd start feeling better again. The doctor described this as a pattern for chronic fatigue.

When I asked about treatment, he said, "We treat symptoms." Since then I've learned that chronic fatigue is a diagnosis that includes a lot of symptoms. And it hasn't always had a respectable reputation. A broken leg is easier for people to understand and sympathize with.

I continued to enjoy my work for hospice. I loved each of the nurses and the patients and their families. There is an awesome and powerful sense of usefulness in helping someone face death and then die. I was hooked. Once again I gave all of my energy to work. Five years before, I had begun with half-time hours at hospice. Now I was stretched to full-time. I was again totally depleted and struggling under deep depression. Each day, I came home and flopped, doing nothing more. I still hadn't learned to keep balance in my life. I needed help.

## HEALING

A crisis opened the door for healing.

I stood in the doctor's office in front of a rotating carousel filled with pamphlets, I reached for one on anxiety, thinking it might be a useful summary to use with my hospice patients and their families. As I read the description, I recognized myself.

Tears flowed. At that moment the nurse called me to get the allergy prescription I'd come for. I turned to her. She looked at my face and took me to a patient room. The doctor came in.

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"What's going on, Laurie?" he asked.

"I just found myself in one of your pamphlets." I shoved the description of generalized anxiety disorder in front of him.

He looked at it for a minute and then at me. "Tell me why you think this is you."

"My daughter, do not despise the LORD's discipline  
or be weary of his reproof,  
for the LORD reproves her whom he loves,  
as a father the daughter in whom he delights."  
—Paraphrase of Proverbs 3:11

"I can't sleep at night. So tired. Muscle tension. Irritability. I worry about everything." I showed him what I had read. I told him what was happening to my ability to function at work. "I don't think I can manage to cover my forgetfulness and

mistakes anymore," I admitted. "I feel like a little girl who can't handle life."

"We'll get you started on antidepressant and anti-anxiety medications," he said. "I'll see you in a month to see how you're doing."

Even though I had dealt with previous depressions by taking pills, I hadn't wanted to do so. Some inner voice always said, "You don't need those! You can handle everything yourself." However, this time I took the prescription and almost ran to the pharmacy.

I'd heard about "hitting bottom" and knew I'd fallen hard. "Can I get up?" I wondered.

A friend invited me to a Christian 12-Step group. "It's a mix of problems," she said. "Some of us are alcoholics, some with drug problems, and a lot with childhood issues we've never resolved."

I accepted her invitation and found, for the first time in my life, I could share what was happening to me and how I was feeling. Group members simply listened, not giving me advice. That was a major gift.

Each week a new step was presented and discussed. I listened and began to see what these steps could do in my life. For instance, the first one brought relief in that it allowed me to acknowledge that my life was out of control and I couldn't manage it.

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."  
—John 10:10

Within a few days of beginning the medication, my sister said, "I like you on these pills. You're more fun!"

I was more fun for myself. Muscle tension melted away. My sense of humor popped to the surface. But even more of my memory disappeared. I had been so used to keeping track of everything through sheer willpower, concentration, body tension, and mental control, that I found myself at a loss without those tools. Double and triple appointments at the same hour floored

*Laurie, I'll Just turn on the light*

me. I'd begin in a chart, get distracted, and, finding it days later, wonder who had been messing with my charts.

At a follow-up appointment, I asked this doctor the same question I'd asked the psychologist years before. "Will I always need to take medication?"

He said, "Yes." And then he paused. "Well, no. Not if you change your lifestyle." He talked of learning to understand the roots of my behavior, of my anxiety. He encouraged me to attend the seminar he was recommending. And he wrote a prescription to start the lifestyle change.

I went to the seminar and began to look at my life in order to discover the beginnings of my pain. I learned tools that helped me identify non-useful behaviors. I found that I didn't have to keep doing the same things and getting the same painful results. Twelve-Step principles worked well with this new knowledge. I took time each morning during my daily worship time to journal about events and feelings.

That terrified little girl inside of me began to hope.

*Thank you, God!*

*I'm beginning to see that "hitting bottom" isn't a bad thing. It is an opportunity to see my real condition and get help!*

☺

*Living Loved*

At work we hired two additional social workers on a part-time basis, and I dropped my hours to three-quarter time. Soon the new social workers were enthusiastically taking their share of the patient and grief-recovery caseloads. My medications were doing their job—I didn't feel as desperate.

## LISTENING

One of our family stories centers on John's ability to tune everyone out. For example, Glen, our second son would wave his hand wildly from the couch where he sprawled and call, "Mr. Shafer, Mr. Shafer!" From long experience he knew the best route to getting his father's attention. My husband was more likely to hear his school children call "Mr. Shafer" than to hear a quiet "Dad" from one of our kids.

Occasionally, when I really wanted John's attention, I resorted to the same method, calling out, "Mr. Shafer, Mr. Shafer." And it usually worked. We had laughed at John's absorption in whatever currently had his attention.

However, I wasn't aware that *I* tuned anyone out until God used illness to get me into conversation with Him. Even though, with use of medication, I was pulling things together at work, I knew my difficulties weren't over. I still wasn't thinking clearly. I still used elaborate routines to



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make up for my poor memory. Again and again, someone would call to cancel an appointment and I would realize I had scheduled two people for the same time.

“And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.”  
— Isaiah 30:21

I associated this stress, along with a permanent sense of sadness and grief, with five years of hospice social work and grief counseling. Weariness ruled.

One day at work I took a short break. I sat thinking, slumped in despair.

*What shall I do?* My heart cried.

An answer came clearly: **Quit.**

Startled, I questioned, *What?*

The answer came again. **I said, quit!**

“We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.”  
— Romans 8:28

No one was present. I hadn't talked out loud. I repeated the directions in my head. “Quit.” Was I going crazy, or could God be speaking to me? I went over and over what I had heard, praying for protection and a right response. Finally, I was convinced that God had given me a specific direction—**Quit.**

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I asked, *When?* Not breathing, I waited.

The answer came clearly – **Now.**

On my own I would never quit. Throughout my life, I have clung to financial security. My identity has been wrapped up in who I was as a worker. But to disobey God was unthinkable. I went home to face John with the story.

Then I had to tell my boss, parents, children, and friends that I was quitting with no expectation of another job or the income it would provide. In choosing to obey, I stepped out into a trust relationship with God I'd never experienced before.

Beginning to believe He wanted to talk to me, I began listening for Him.

*Thank you, God! I know I can trust You to speak loudly enough to get my attention.*



I began to discover that not only did God want me to listen to His directions, He wanted me to listen to His sharing about His hopes and plans, His joy and anticipation, His pain and sorrow.

## TRAPPED

"I'm afraid," my friend said.

She lay in bed, slowly reaching her hand to find an itch on her nose.

*Laurie, I'll Just turn on the light*

Only a few months had passed since she had shared with me that she was ill. "I don't know how long it will take . . ." She paused and swallowed. "But the doctor said to think in terms of months."

I nodded, unable to picture that happening. She was vital and alive. Denial filled me. My mind numb, I had no words of comfort.

The next time I visited, even though she greeted me at her front door, her disease was more evident.

"Hi," she said. "Thank you for coming."

She motioned me to a seat and walked awkwardly to a recliner that raised and lowered to help her get up and sit down. Her movements were limited. The speed of her deterioration shocked me.

Now, on today's visit, the "think in terms of months" advice her doctor had given was real to me. She could not move herself in the bed. She was barely able to lift her arm. Soon, I knew, she would not even be able to scratch her nose. And breathing would become too difficult to manage. She would die.

*God, this is horrible. And I don't know what to say for comfort.*

**Just be here, Laurie. Walk through it with her.**

*OK. But I don't understand.*

**I do.**

*Living Loved*

Suddenly, my mind filled with a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross, unable to move or take care of any of his human needs, crying out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).

*You do understand*, I whispered to Him in awe. I sat quietly with my friend and thought about what God had just shown me. I had always looked at Jesus’ death in terms of the salvation it meant to me.

Hesitantly, I approached Him in my thoughts. *And now I understand better what You went through. O God, please forgive me for reading the words of Your suffering only in terms of what it means to me . . . without understanding or feeling compassion for You.*

**Thank you for caring.**

I reached for my friend’s hand and held it.

“Want me to scratch your nose?” I asked.

“Yes.” Her voice was weak—not much lung power available.

I took one of the clean, dry washcloths lying on her dresser and gently rubbed her nose.

*Thank you, Lord, for sharing with me!  
For giving me a glimpse of Your reality.*



That spring two events were matters of family celebration. First, Hannah was born in the early part of May—our fifth grandchild and only girl. Then, our son Michael graduated from college. Families gather to rejoice over such

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accomplishments. However, broken relationships due to divorce don't quit causing pain when the judge signs the decree. As long as children are involved there is potential for hurt. I knew that Michael's birth father would want to come to see the baby and for the graduation.

## VISITING RIGHTS

I looked at him, my son, tall and strong. A surge of joy spread through me.

"Michael, I've got some ideas about graduation day. Do you think a picnic would work for your dad and his family?" I was trying to think of a way we could all be together and comfortable.

"Mom . . ." He paused. "I've already got it planned. I want to have dinner with you and this side of the family on Saturday. Sunday, after graduation, Dana and I and the kids will eat with my dad at a restaurant. I'd rather not have the two sides of my family together." He was firm.

I was floored. I wasn't invited to celebrate with him on his graduation day. I was excluded.

I stared at him, my heart cracking. Quickly I gathered its pieces together and replied, "Oh . . . OK." I thought a minute. "Is it all right if I come to the graduation service?" I knew his father and stepmother with their children were driving 300 miles to attend his graduation.

"Sure. I'll be sitting with the other graduates. I can handle that." He gave me a hug.

*Living Loved*

I watched as he and Dana and the kids left, my mind wandering back through the years, searching for the reason for Michael's fear. I found it. Memory of a meal when Michael was nine haunted me, and apparently Michael, too.

His father had met us at a restaurant in order to return Michael to me after a short visit. While we were eating, Ken had looked at me out of the side of his eyes, licked his lips, and then proposed a change in custody. He couched the "offer" in words that assured me he was attempting to help and do me a favor.

"No!" I said without any hesitation. That single word sounded my determination to keep my child from being ripped from me. In today's world, where commitment and vows do not hold, I had no intention of giving him up. My son could trust that he was not negotiable.

The atmosphere immediately tensed. I remember Michael sitting there, next to his dad, watching me. The muscle in his father's jaw twitched, a familiar signal. He was angry but controlling it. While we had been married, that sign would have driven me to placate and please him. But I stayed firm.

And I was furious that he would bring it up in front of Michael, springing it on me. Again I recognized his attempt to manipulate me into giving him his way. Many times in our marriage I had

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left my needs unmet (and thereby those of my child) in order to keep harmony.

As I thought of that long-ago meal, I found myself crying. Agony spread throughout my body. I understood Michael's dread of his father and me being together at a meal.

"I was ready to be sought  
by those who did  
not ask for me;  
I was ready to be found  
by those who  
did not seek me.  
I said, "Here am I,  
here am I."  
—Isaiah 65:1

*Oh, God, I need  
Your help on this. I'm  
glad Michael told me  
what he needed. I can  
comply. But I hurt so  
much.*

I thought about not being able to celebrate with Michael. "I can do this for him," I determined.

"Inside, I'll be kicking and screaming. Outside, I'll smile and cooperate." I twisted my face into a wry smile, practicing.

*Oh, God, I look to You for comfort.*

**Laurie, I lost my visiting rights in Eden. Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me (Isaiah 1:2).**

Shock reverberated throughout me.

I thought of God waiting patiently for me to invite Him. He had to have my permission in order to spend time with me or visit me. He couldn't restore me to His family or give me my inheritance unless I accepted . . . even though He had died in order to have "visiting rights." As I

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thought about the restrictions God has accepted in order to give me freedom, my mind moved to future scenes – at world’s end.

And I heard His agony resound throughout the earth as He finally relinquished those who chose to leave Him, who chose to say “NO” to His offer of salvation.

I heard His agony in earth’s chaos: “And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the earth . . . every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; and great hailstones, heavy as a hundredweight dropped” (Rev. 16:18, 20, 21).

As God shared His sorrow with me, I drew closer to Him. I knew He understood the pain I felt in this short separation from the son I loved.

*Lord, I forget that You feel.  
I think of my own emotions, expecting  
You to provide comfort.  
Thank You for sharing with me.  
When it’s time for You to wipe away my tears,  
may I wipe away Yours? And may I bring  
You comfort and joy now.*

☺



## CHAPTER 6

# WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

“I will instruct you and teach you  
the way you should go;  
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.  
Be not like a horse or a mule,  
without understanding,  
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,  
else it will not keep with you.”

— Psalm 32:8-9

*WILL I EVER GET THIS RIGHT?*

*Living Loved*

I thought to myself: "Just because I no longer work for a salary doesn't mean I should give up being productive and significant, does it?" I could hear the rebellion and anger in my thoughts.

My B.A. degree had been in journalism. I decided to use it. I threw myself into writing. I determined that this time at home would be a "sabbatical," a time to be productive in a different way. I enjoyed describing my time off that way, as prestige seemed to go with the words.

I joined a writer's club and began attending a critique group. I tried to write "my story" but found that I couldn't go anywhere with it. I tried to write a book of wisdom for my children. That didn't work either. I tried to write about what God was teaching me every morning.

I sent one article off and received a rejection back. I knew I wasn't ready emotionally to face that. My official writing went into storage. But I continued journaling each morning with God.

Along with my desperate effort to prove myself valuable as a writer, I tried to explain our circumstances to myself and plan for dealing with our deteriorating financial situation. My full-time income was gone. John still worked part-time at the community college and his income varied—\$700 to \$1500 per month. In 1998 that met about half of our needs.

The following story began early in this period. Time and again I'd set it aside because I knew I wasn't thinking

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clearly. Even though I finished it much later, after God had given me additional understanding, the struggle it represents began within two months after I quit my job at hospice.

## **BIT AND BRIDLE**

“We need to talk,” I said.

John and I were lying side by side in bed, before the worship and prayer time we habitually share before sleep. Side by side, but with a visible gulf between us. Finances were the issue.

“You think the stress over our financial situation caused you to get sick,” I stated, accusation strong in my tightly controlled voice. My inner self screamed, “What’s wrong with your faith? Why didn’t you say something to me sooner?” and “I don’t like your being sick!” I felt fear and anger heading toward panic.

“I’m sorry I said anything,” John answered and pulled his covers closer under his chin. “I didn’t know you would take it personally.”

“I’m not taking it personally,” I replied, again through tight lips and from an even tighter chest. Then, “Why didn’t you tell me sooner? I thought we were agreed.”

The dialogue went on. No matter what I said, he answered calmly and with patience. It all came back to the fact that he had told me, at least a

month before, he felt he needed to do something to deal with our obvious lack of adequate income. I had asked him to wait, to see what God would provide.

I was looking for a miracle to back my strong conviction that it would be better to lose all that we had than to go further into debt. He believed that he would honor God more by arranging to cover our expenses and hope for an increase in his income. No miracle had yet appeared. Our situation was awkward, close to being desperate, and he was sicker with this bug than I'd ever seen him.

I couldn't find any way to make the blame stick to John. I tried putting it on God, but that didn't work either. After all, I was the one who had quit my job.

*It's my fault, I thought. But how? I cried to God. I did what You asked!*

Slowly, I began to get an inkling. Could my sureness of being right blind me to the truth? Was I right in thinking that the principle of not borrowing money, not going into debt, was an absolute requirement of God? Or was I wrong?

Anger flooded through me. I don't like being wrong. Surely I could find something in the Bible that would back me in my righteous stance! I would do a Bible search using my computer.

The next morning, I took the mouse and attempted to begin my Bible search. The cursor

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wandered a half-inch in any direction from where it had rested, but would go no further. Each time I tried, it behaved the same way. I would have to learn to function with key-strokes only. Trauma!

*Lord, why is this happening? Help me! I'm trying to find out what You want me to do.*

Frustrated, but determined, I picked up my Bible. Surely I could find what I needed to show John.

**Laurie, I've given you the Bible as a guide, not as a club.**

*Oh! . . . I've been so sure I knew what You expected of us that I haven't looked at Your Word for guidance—only for proof! I understood but still resisted doing what God was asking of me.*

*Finally, I submitted. I'm willing to look with an open mind, Lord.*

Painstakingly, I thumbed my way through the Bible, looking up money, debt, borrower, lender—whatever I could think of that might be related. I discovered that God told the Israelites to borrow from the Egyptians before they left Egypt. He also made provision for indebtedness to be cancelled with His seven-year and Jubilee plan. He stated His dislike of usury—charging interest—when someone needed financial help. He did warn that the borrower was a slave to the lender (Proverbs 22:7), but I found no “Thou shalt not borrow.” The closest I came was Paul’s cau-

tion to "Owe no man anything but love," but the context emphasis was on love.

Picking up my pen, I started my prayer. *Oh, Lord God, King of the Universe.* I knew I needed a very big God. I continued writing. *We don't have or aren't aware of having resources to pay our debts or living expenses. To us the idea of indebtedness is heavy. Should we increase it to pay for now? Or . . . we can wait to pay loans, credit cards, and vehicles. This would bring dishonor to Your name? . . . Or?*

The agony of the struggle crushed me. I had always tried to be honorable, honest. I turned back to my Bible.

Psalm 22. This is personal to Jesus' experience on Calvary. "Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is none to help" (verse 11).

Again I wrote and prayed in my journal. *Compared to Your situation, mine is small. But I know You understand facing something difficult.*

Psalm 25. "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies" (verse 10). I read on, paraphrasing as I went—Who is the woman that fears or adores the LORD? Her will He instruct in the way that she should choose. She herself shall abide in prosperity, and her children shall possess the land" (verses 12, 13).

*My chest is so tight, my eyes aflood with tears.*

Psalm 32. "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you" (verse 8).

*Living Loved*

*God, help! You aren't blind. You know exactly what's up with me. I just see confusion and distress.*

More from Psalm 32. "Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not keep with you" (verse 9).

As I read this, my mind flashed to my struggle with the computer's cursor. *Is there a connection, Lord?* I turned back to my dilemma. *OK, I'm going in circles here. What do I really understand?*

With a sigh, I began to write: *Only as I willingly choose to hear and accept Your counsel and guidance, can You lead me. You don't force me with "bit and bridle." But I have held stubbornly to my belief and attempted to impose it on John. Please, Thy will be done in our lives, in my life.*

The long struggle was done. Idly I moved the computer mouse on its pad. Startled, I sat up. Now, the mouse and cursor responded to my hand. The cursor went where I moved it, no longer clinging to its own position. No force was needed to receive obedience from it. I got the lesson.

*Thank you for returning the curser to me as a tool. But even more, thank you for bringing me to You, willingly ready to follow Your lead, accept Your counsel, obey Your instruction.*

Financially, there was no immediate answer. But as I look back at that time, I recognize that God never left us. Each month we paid our bills —



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sometimes with credit card money, sometimes with gifts from family, friends, or the church, but most of the time with the money God gave us through John's employment.

*One other thing, Lord.*

*Thank you for teaching me to be open  
to You for guidance and to recognize my habit of  
seeing issues only from my own perspective.*



That same summer friends put their travel trailer next to our house and used our office as a base for providing counseling services. Their house had been sold, but they weren't ready to move into another. When they did move to a location five hours north of us, Judith asked me to provide ongoing counseling for some of her clients. During the next one and a half years, I continued with that counseling practice, which provided much needed money for groceries.

## **THE BLACK HOLE**

"You'll need the oven." I heard the flatness in my voice.

Outside calm, inside cringing, I thought, *Oh, no! I wish I'd known what Judith was planning.* My house guest stood waiting with a cookie sheet filled with garlic bread. Reluctantly, I reached to turn the oven to broil, then opened the door. A horror of blackened craters, tunnels, and caverns covered the bottom sur-

face. I had been staring at the mess for three years—feeling helpless. My oven was a black hole into which I continued to shove roasts, cookies, bread, and apple crisps. I knew it needed to be cleaned. And I was ashamed.

“Create in me a clean heart,  
O God, and put a new  
and right spirit  
within me.”  
—Psalms 51:10

When I bought the stove, I hopefully selected the one with self-cleaning ability. For a long time I watched to see when

my oven would need to “self-clean.” As long as I watched its beautiful gray surface, I was careful and it stayed clean. Then a few spots appeared on the bottom.

*Not enough to use all that electric power for cleaning,* I thought.

Finally, I forgot to watch. One day my sister cleaned it for me while I was at work. “It was dirty,” she said.

Three years had gone by since then. The oven long ago had lost its shine. I had given up protecting it, and the crust continued to build. Each time I opened the door, I’d sigh, “Someday, I’ll have to deal with this. I wish I knew how.” Finally, I looked for the instructions and couldn’t find them.

As my friend pushed the pan of garlic bread into the oven, I said, “I suppose I’ll clean it sometime soon. But I’ve got to find the instructions.”

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She thought for a moment. "I'd like to clean it for you to say thank you for all the days you've housed and fed us."

Her approach was gentle. It was a real offer, not begrudged. She added, "I like to clean ovens. It's something I do well."

My friend cleaned the oven in a few short steps, discussing with me along the way what my preferences were. She showed me how it was done, using tools I had in my kitchen. Now, each time I open the oven to insert a bread pan or a peach pie, a shiny, *clean* interior greets me! I am grateful.

*What a great friend, Lord!  
She reminds me of You.*



### **IF I HOLD MY MOUTH JUST RIGHT . . .**

Still reeling from losing my identity as a productive worker and the impact it had on our lives and finances, my thoughts were not always rational. God stayed with me, directing my learning. In the process I discovered my insistence that life *must* make sense—no matter if my explanation didn't. Also, I wasn't willing to trust God when I couldn't see through to the outcome.

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The lifestyle seminar had taught me some useful tools. One phrase, “what was then is now,” I learned to turn around to “what is now was then.” Discovering that some current behavior is uncomfortable and non-productive, I’d search for past situations where I’d felt a similar emotion. For example, I became aware of my belief that I could make something happen through exerting my will-power. As I looked at this part of my character, scenes from my past paraded before me.

Baby legs kicked and arms flailed. His mouth worked. Cereal smeared across his chin and cheek where I had landed his last spoonful. I looked at the small plastic airplane bowl of baby mush in my hand. It was no longer safe sitting on his tray.

“You want more?” I asked, smiling brightly, eager to see his response.

Baby sounds responded. More energetic legs and arms. His left eyebrow rose as if to say, “But of course, Mom.”

“OK, here comes.” I dipped a spoon and then began the flight pattern from bowl to mouth. “Perfect landing! You did a good job.”

More bites. With each one I noticed that every time I had the spoon to his mouth, mine prepared to receive the bite. My lips moved as if they were cleaning the spoon of its food.

“What is this?” I thought. “Do I think I can do it for him?” And I’d practice holding my mouth still.

Later, I ran into this phenomenon when I worked as an aide in a nursing home. Part of my duties included feeding patients who couldn’t feed themselves. Again I found my mouth going through the motions of taking the bite.

Again I thought, “What is this? Do I think I can do it for him?”

With effort I held my mouth still as the patient accepted the food, pulling it off the spoon with his mouth and teeth. But while I controlled my mouth motions, I noticed a great deal of body tension. My mind was visualizing him through each step of the eating process.

Related to this is my apparent belief that if I put enough thought and body tension into something I think needs to happen, it will. For instance, my husband loves to teach. On weekends as he stands in front of his Bible study group, excitement and emotion spill over in eye and nose moisture. I appreciate his enthusiasm for teaching . . . and I want him to use his hanky. Sitting listening, I suddenly realize that I’m experiencing a great deal of physical tension while my mind says over and over, “Use your hanky. Use your hanky,” as if I could somehow get the message to him by thinking harder and tensing up.

But it gets worse. When the preacher starts talking about something I think may offend a

“Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as his counselor has instructed him? Whom did he consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?”  
— Isaiah 40:13-14

family member who has chosen this week to attend, out of many months of non-attendance, I find myself bringing in the bigger guns.

*Lord, fix it, I cry,*  
body tension rising dramatically as I

attempt to will that the preacher’s words be useful to my loved one.

Through the years these kinds of experiences have evolved into a joke between my husband and me. I’d say, “Well, if I hold my mouth just right . . .” We both understood what I meant—surely everything would work the way I wanted it to if I could just figure out the right combination of events or activities . . . if I just thought hard enough . . . or, if I held my mouth just right.

The ultimate demonstration of this special mind-warp, this need to control, came the Christmas after I had quit full-time employment. I felt scared. My husband’s chronic illness had only recently been resolved, and he didn’t yet have full-time work. I looked for understanding of the

“why” this was happening to us. I felt that surely the world was ending.

Christmas approached and Christmas trees cost money. We'd been given a second-hand plastic tree. “No fresh, green tree with its wonderful aroma this year.” I moaned. With a sigh I set up the artificial tree. I put on lights, our old-fashioned ornaments, and curly ribbon from last year's packages for a garland. I put small pine cones in the red wicker sleigh and set it on the mantel. Somehow none of these activities held the joy they had in the past. Life was too serious.

As Christmas came and then was gone, I clung to my sense of the world ending. It became to me an answer to my questions of “why?” And if the world were ending, I would no longer need my Christmas ornaments. I would make some gesture that would symbolize my determination to hold on to this answer.

“I think I'm just going to throw away our Christmas stuff,” I told John on New Year's Day.

He looked at me in shock. “Why?”

Seeing the disbelief in his eyes, I found it difficult to put my thoughts into words. Even to me they sounded crazy. However, I stubbornly held onto my precious explanation of the chaos in my life. Jesus' coming would solve all my problems.

“Well,” I said, “I think Jesus is coming soon. We won't need these things. Why keep them?”

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“No.” His tone was definite. “We can’t afford to replace them.”

Quietly, I put the decorations back in their boxes. He carried them downstairs to storage. But throughout that year I found myself willing Jesus to hurry up and come. I looked for signs that my belief was real. I felt the familiar body tension increasing. My mind focused and concentrated, directing God to hurry up and make it happen.

One day in my morning worship and journaling time, I recognized my inside tension and got a vision of myself “holding my mouth just right” as I had many years before when I fed the baby. I remembered the other instances of wanting something so badly, something out of my control, that I exerted tremendous mental effort toward it happening, as if I could conjure it out of nothing.

Suddenly, familiar words echoed in my mind. “What is this? Do I think I can do it for Him?” And I realized that I didn’t trust God to be in charge of the timing of the end of the world and Jesus’ second coming. I needed it now. My world was so out of control and scary, I’d actually been “holding my mouth just right” in an effort to make it happen.

Stunned, I simply sat for many minutes, piecing together what had been happening inside me. I had gone over the deep end scrambling for security. If this world couldn’t be controlled, then the new one would have to be available.



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*I'm sorry, I whispered. I have felt so unsafe, Father. I haven't really trusted You to take care of me. Even more, I insisted You meet my expectations, do it my way.*

Fear had driven me to cling irrationally to Jesus' return as my solution. I had convinced myself I wouldn't need my Christmas decorations. The small child in me exerted my will power to make it happen. Throwing away my Christmas ornaments would have been the ultimate if-I-hold-my-mouth-just-right attempt to control my world.

Several Christmases have gone by since then, and I have gladly used our ornaments and decorations. Some sanity has been restored. A great deal of ability to trust God for my well-being is in place.

And when I hear in my ear, **I am coming soon, Laurie**, I rejoice.

Then I check to make sure that I'm *not* "holding my mouth just right."

*Life is already "more abundant!"  
I'm beginning to welcome the pain of growth and  
recovery, freeing me from hurtful ways  
of thinking and doing.*



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## CHAPTER 7

# WITH LOVING KINDNESS, LAURIE

And have you forgotten the exhortation  
which addresses you as sons?—

“My son, do not regard lightly  
the discipline of the Lord,  
nor lose courage  
when you are punished by him.

For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and  
chastises every son whom he receives.”

—Hebrews 12:5-6

***LORD, THIS HURTS!***

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**T**o me fall and winter are a time for life review and “getting something done.” I don’t wait for the New Year to begin projects. Having given up on making a splash as a writer, I turned to serious thoughts of survival. I had created a den—in the sense of bear or wolf—out of a small, half-room upstairs, where I felt safe, comforted, and insulated.

I crowded in a couch and a large, soft armchair along with my desk, computer and printer, bookcase, and lamp. I hung pictures on the wall. I had originally prepared this room to support my “writing,” but when that effort seemed misguided I used it to lick my wounds (as any rational bear or wolf might).

I “hunkered-in” for the winter and addressed God regarding my situation. And He got serious about showing me myself. Acknowledging the ugliness of my inward being wasn’t easy. I like to think of myself as kind and considerate.

## **EVEN A CAT**

Benjamin immediately got up on my lap. I had just settled into my private prayer corner, a big

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overstuffed chair. I knew he'd come—he always did.

He jumped onto my lap and rubbed his face against my hand, pen, and then the wire binder on my journal. By experience, I knew he would demand the scratching of his ears and chin to his satisfaction. A short chuck under the chin and a brief rub of his ears, back, and tail wouldn't do. If I didn't keep at it until he was satisfied, he'd bite my pen and chew on the wire binder of my journal, all the while standing on top of my books.

Benjamin had been traumatized by small children when he was a tiny kitten. They had played with him as if he were a stuffed toy, flinging him into the air and against the wall.

We knew his history when he came to us. I knew he didn't like being held and if I did hold him, I knew he would disappear as soon as I released him.

This morning a familiar surge of impatience and anger rushed through me.

"Let's get this over with," I said. And I picked him up to cuddle closely, pet, and scratch. His look cried, "Trapped!" And he was, closely held until I decided to let him go. I was in charge, not him. Soon he would disappear and I would be free to get on with my Bible study and prayer.

As I held him, my mind turned to God.

*With Loving Kindness, Laurie*

I heard myself saying, *You wouldn't do this to me. You always wait for my permission. You don't force me.*

I let Benjamin go. Immediately, he jumped down and disappeared from the room.

A picture of my sister, younger than me, crying because I'd hurt her, popped into my mind.

At an early age, by ten for sure, I was deep into a life-long addiction to reading romance novels. Even as a child, I had found life empty, lonely, and boring. When I was reading, I felt alive and involved in relationship. I knew the characters in the stories intimately. I felt

"The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee."  
—Jeremiah 31:3 KJV

their emotions and lived their experiences. I wanted to be in my book, living with my fictional friends.

"Laurie, play with me," Susan would say. I knew she wouldn't give up if I just ignored her. Reluctantly, I'd put down my book. And the process of meeting her need began. I'd play—rough—so that soon she was hurt, crying, and going away. Left alone, I'd be free to dive right back into my books.

Now, in my overstuffed chair, free to read the Bible and write, I cried instead.

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*Oh, God, I'm still doing it, I wrote, using physical power or strength to get what I want, regardless of the hurt I inflict on one of Your creatures. The ugliness of the emotions which had surged through me before I pulled Benjamin into my arms was still fresh.*

*Lord, I open my heart to You. Please come in and change me.*

**I'm here, Child.**

*You do not force me to do Your will.  
Instead, You treat me with loving kindness and I am  
drawn by Your love to come closer to You.*



The winter was a time of intense learning. I found myself identifying with different Bible characters and responding to Jesus, not necessarily as they did, but from my own heart needs.

## PARALYZED

*“Daughter, your sins are forgiven you.”*

Awake at 3 a.m., I kept hearing Jesus' words. Originally, they had been spoken to the paralytic of Mark 2:1-12. I had looked at this story and Jesus' words by attempting to identify with the paralytic, feel his feelings, think his thoughts.



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*God, I thought, I understand the relief the paralytic must have felt. Thank you for the forgiveness You've given me.*

I thought of past, secret indulgences—secret because I hadn't wanted anybody to know I was eating the bag of cookies I'd brought home for the family or that I was using my bathroom breaks at work to read a story I just couldn't let alone. For years I had carefully hidden the kinds of videos I rented.

*I'm so grateful, I told Him, to be free from those addictions.*

**Laurie, look again,** He instructed.

In my middle-of-the night, wide-awake mind, I was again at the feet of Jesus on my mat. Suddenly, I no longer just identified with the paralytic, I was the paralytic.

*God, I cried, I've been paralyzed most of my life. Tears soaked my pillow.*

I realized I've always been afraid to start new

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”  
—II Timothy 1:7 KJV

jobs, meet new people, put my work or myself into a position of being examined. Many other fears pushed into my mind—fear of death, illness, or financial re-

verses. The small things of daily life such as cleaning house, making meals, doing the bills, getting birthday gifts made or purchased and *sent*—these have always appeared fearful mountains to climb.

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“Fear paralyzes,” rang in my mind. It was another principle I’d learned in the lifestyle-change seminar I’d attended. I knew what had triggered my thinking. As I had been exploring the story of the paralytic over the last several days, I became aware of many people watching the paralytic— influential people, neighbors, and friends. As the paralytic, I sensed my fear of them.

*Oh . . . I breathed to God in prayer. I base everything I do in life on what I think people looking on will believe or feel about me. My choices are driven by fear. And I am afraid to let them know the real me.*

My thoughts whirled. I have spent so much energy making sure that others think well of me, I am drained. And . . . I often fail to care for the details of my personal life, to care for my own family.

*I am the paralytic, I confessed.*

As I lay in bed, it seemed that Jesus reached down to me and said, **Laurie, My daughter, your sins are forgiven. You don’t need to be afraid. I am with you. Fear will no longer paralyze you.**

As the paralytic did, lying blissfully at Jesus’ feet, I felt peace.

*Thank You, dear Jesus, for showing me myself  
through the paralytic’s story.*



During this intense time of being under God’s microscope, I found Psalms 51. Day after day, God returned me

*With Loving Kindness, Laurie*

to it, giving me hope. The Psalm clearly stated God's desires for me.

It convicted me of my sinful state while promising cleansing—a "clean heart" and a "new and right spirit." While the concepts in this Psalm became a permanent part of my thinking, a list of my ugly characteristics grew in my Bible's margin. I became very aware of the character filth I carried. As I wrote each one down, I took them to God, humbly asking Him to remove them.

Understanding of what I was asking didn't come easily.

## RAGS

My four-year-old grandson, Alex, recently moved with his parents to a new home about 200 miles away from us. He took my heart with him. Before he moved, he had christened us Grandma and Boppa Lego. We have a huge box of Lego's, obviously impressive to Alex from earliest years. He called his other grandparents Grandma and Boppa Faraway. Now we were "faraway," too. (Tears usually accompany this thought.)

In order to help him adjust to being away from his adoring grandparents . . . or to help me with my grief, I decided to write and send him short stories about when Grandma and Grandpa were little.

I began the story:

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A very long time ago when Grandma Lego was a little girl about eight years old, she had a dog named Rags.

Why do you think she called him Rags?

You're right!

When Rags was sleeping on the floor, he looked like a pile of rags. He was black in places. He was white in places. He even had a few places that were brown. And he was very, very shaggy.

Rags liked dirt. He liked it so much that he flopped on the ground. He rolled onto his back. He rolled and rolled in the dirt. He wiggled so hard in the dirt that he . . . well you guess.

You're right again!

Rags had dirt all over him. He was dirty. The white places were dirty. The black places were dirty. And when he shook his shaggy hair, dirt flew all about.

You are right! He was filthy!

My mind flitted from the story to my morning worship and Psalm 51:7. "Purge me with hyssop,

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and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

I had written in response:

*Let me look out through these  
tattered, filthy rags and  
see Your righteousness;  
cover me with the pure, white  
linen of Your salvation.*

*Then I may come into Your Presence  
and worship You, my God, my refuge.*

As I reread my words—*Let me look out through these tattered, filthy rags*—I saw my warped understanding of God. I had pictured myself with my dog, buried under a life-time pile of filthy rags, peering out at God and pleading with Him to

cover my filth with His righteousness. God’s Spirit quickly convicted me of my blindness to the gift Jesus offers.

“A new heart  
I will give you, and  
a new spirit I will  
put within you.”  
—Ezekiel 36:26

Psalm 51 says, “According to thy abundant

mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!” (verses 1 & 2, emphasis mine.)

Still at my computer, I bowed my head. *God, I’ve been looking out through my filthy rags to see Your righteousness. Clutching my rags to me. How*

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*useless and silly! I've asked You to cover my sins and You are telling me You want to make me clean, **to remove the filth** and clothe me in luxurious, pure garments of white (Zechariah 3:4 and Revelation 3:5). Thank you, God, for this truth. Please keep teaching me wisdom. Amen.*

Finishing my confession and plea, I heard, **"I will not remember your sins" (Isaiah 43:25). "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses" (Ezekiel 36:25). You are free!**

Joy filled me. I smiled and went on with my story for Alex.

*I love it, Lord, when You turn on the light.  
Please clean me up. Thank You!*



About a year after I quit my job with hospice, John found a full-time job. Praising God, he again worked in a church school setting, this time with high school students. He taught half-time and supervised the school's computer network and other technological systems.

During the year of extremely low income, we had attempted to keep current on our bills by using our credit cards. That meant that most of John's earnings were already ear-marked for a bill. The extra income I earned with counseling made a difference in what I could buy at the grocery or how far we could go in the car. As I hung ornaments on the tree my second Christmas of being and working at home, I remembered the chaos of the previous year and its emotional pain. I knew I had come into a quieter, peaceful time. Under God's direction, I had been working steadily

*With Loving Kindness, Laurie*

on character development. Behaviors that for years had distressed my life and interactions with others were beginning to drop off.

From time to time something I'd written about in my morning journal time with God carried such an intense significance to me that I felt compelled to write a story connected to it. This desire to return to writing didn't let me go. As my counseling practice slowed, my commitment to write for God grew. By the third Christmas, I had written about 20 stories and begun to share them with others. Each of the short stories revolved around God's desire to be involved personally in my life.

## WHO AM I?

There are so many ways we answer this question.

"I'm a school teacher,"

John might say.

"I'm a counselor," I'd explain. "I have a practice in my home office."

But these answers only tell what we do. Who I am in my core is totally another thing.

Traffic sounds increased. I heard the just-before-eight, morning rush and felt a breeze tickle across my feet. I sat curled in my red chair. My Bible lay open on my lap. Pen in hand, journal dated, I waited to hear from God.

I had just finished reading Psalms 51 again. And He had stopped me at the words, "**For I**

"He who trusts in his riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf."  
— Proverbs 11:28

**know my transgressions.”** And I did know. At least I knew what God had pointed out to me this morning.

But I didn't start to write. Instead I poked around inside me. I couldn't feel much softness or submission. Flatness, numbness, closed doors controlled my heart and mind. My chest muscles felt tight. From experience I knew these characteristics signaled anger and an underlying fear. Now some people know they are angry and can say, "I am angry!" However, I usually have to figure it out and then acknowledge that "yes indeed" I am angry.

I knew I had to start writing to break through the barrier. At this point simply writing any words would help. So, I sat in my chair and wrote, "I don't know what to do."

"O LORD of hosts,  
blessed is the man who  
trusts in thee!"  
— Psalm 84:12

Then I stopped to listen. Deep inside a mournful, little girl's cry sounded, *What's to become of me?* Feelings poured through me—anger, fear, sadness, hurt, a sense of being exposed and naked. And I knew they were connected to my no longer earning money.

God, I cried, *this isn't fair. I've already dealt with this!* Two and a half years before I'd given up my full-time position and its income. I had chosen to be obedient to God's direction to quit my job. I had chosen to trust Him with our survival.



*With Loving Kindness, Laurie*

“Trust in the LORD  
with all your heart,  
and do not rely on  
your own insight.

In all your ways  
acknowledge him,  
and he will make  
straight your paths.

Be not wise in  
your own eyes;  
fear the LORD, and  
turn away from evil.

It will be healing  
to your flesh  
and refreshment  
to your bones.”

—Proverbs 3:5-8

*Why is this issue back?* I questioned.

I thought back over my working life. At seven I was washing dishes, carrying trays, and feeding patients in our family-owned nursing home. I had worked and earned since that time. It was the one thing I knew how to do.

In fact, even though I had quit my job, I was still earning something each month through the small counseling business I operated out of my home.

This small income had been very useful to us, buying groceries when John’s part-time income didn’t stretch. However, now that he was working full-time, I was earning less and less.

“It’s like my income was manna from God and now that yours has increased, mine is drying up,” I remembered telling John recently. Anxiety had trickled through me as I spoke that thought.

Coming back to my current question, I wrote:  
*Why is this struggle back?*

Suddenly, I understood. Again, God had turned the light on.

*Living Loved*

*I'm confused about who I am!*

**Yes, Laurie.**

I groaned, then felt anger rush into my heart again. *So who am I, Lord? You tell me.* Belligerent tones swirled in my head.

**Laurie.** I heard gentleness in His voice. **You are my child—protected and cared for by Me.** I wrote down these thoughts as He gave them to me. Thinking about their beauty, I melted inside—gentleness and calm replaced the anger.

I wrote: *Oh, God, I see it. I have placed more belief and value on my position as an earning, contributing person than on my real identity. Even my small income encouraged this. I've been able to say, "I do counseling out of my home," and thereby hang on to some significance.* I sighed.

*I am Your child! Help me to know in my heart that You give me my real worth and value.*

But it wasn't over. This belief—that my value is connected to work and earning—was deeply entrenched. As I wrote about letting go of my identity as a wage-earning person, panic and fear took over. Tears pushed their way out. I was willing to be surrendered to God in this, but my whole being seemed turned inside out. I gulped for air and tried to hang on to calmness. I didn't want the emotional pain it seemed to require. As I tried to squelch the feelings, sharp, stinging bumps broke out on my stomach. I looked.

*With Loving Kindness, Laurie*

“Oh,” I groaned. “Shingles!” I’d seen them a number of times on my hospice patients. I understood these to be a reaction to my stress and emotional state.

*God, please. I get the picture. My ability to earn is my sole identity. And I am afraid to let go.*

**Laurie, let Me be Supreme in your life.**

*That’s what I want, God. I don’t want anything separating me from You. Please make it so.*

**You are my dearly beloved child.**

I felt the panic subside. Calm brought a sureness of my value. The stinging on my stomach subsided. When I looked, I saw the discolored spots where the “shingles” had been. I believed I was seeing a miracle—shingles don’t usually just go away. But the bigger miracle was in the assurance from God—**You are My dearly beloved child.** My identity, my real self, is that of the King’s daughter.

*That’s who I am! My heart sang in joy.*

As I thought about this experience, I knew that at some point in the future I might forget the resources available to a daughter of the King and again attempt to take back responsibility for our financial safety and security. I also knew that God would be faithful, reminding me that I’d given Him control of my life, that I’d chosen to trust Him. I was committed to depending on Him.

*Living Loved*

*Oh, God, I'm beginning to enjoy being Your child! Not  
having to produce or perform in order to be loved –  
Wow! I love You back!*



## **CHAPTER 8**

# **TASTE THE JOY OF BEING IN ME**

“O taste and see that the LORD is good! Happy is  
the man who takes refuge in him!”

– Psalms 34:8

***THIS IS EXCITING!***

*Living Loved*

**G**od taught me also that there is more to relationship with Him than His providing for *my* needs, *my* comfort, *my* growth. Every relationship that is of any value is a sharing relationship—I'll tell you about me and listen as you tell me about you. As God intervened in the circumstances of my personal life, He showed me that He knew—understood—*my* feelings and situation. As I read in Scripture, I discovered God wanted me to *hear* Him, to *listen* to Him as He shared his feelings and hopes.

Fibromyalgia added itself to my list of health problems. This produced pain in the muscles throughout my body. Physical activity became more difficult. Because my muscles were not fit, it became easier to injure myself. One day I hurt my foot. Soon, I began to realize that even though the bruise in my foot was healed, I didn't walk normally any more. This scared me. I felt like a cripple. My physical problems became all-consuming. I desperately longed to return to good health.

## **I WILL PLANT YOUR FOOT**

For weeks I had been experiencing increasing pain in my lower right back. It was not the familiar, fibromyalgia pain. I had tried grim en-

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duration, muscle-relaxing baths, taking more than one type of pain medication at the same time, and releasing muscles via trigger points. Each of these had helped some. But the pain recurred and intensified.

As it became more prominent – with me more of the time, affecting my choice of clothing and activity – I had noticed that my right foot was turning to the outside at each step. So I tried to make my foot plant itself firmly and solidly in a correct position. I couldn't do it. And the pain in my back continued to intensify. I thought they were connected.

“When I thought, ‘My  
foot slips,’  
thy steadfast love,  
O LORD,  
held me up.”  
– Psalm 94:18

I knew I should see a doctor, but I floundered with indecision. We did not have the money for all I envisioned – office calls, consultations, X-rays, surgery, etc. I could just live with it, I had thought.

Then came a night of unbearable pain. Tears slid down my cheeks. Panic grew.

And I had prayed, *Okay, God, I don't know what to do. Nothing is working. I can't think. I can't sleep. Please remove this pain or give me the ability to endure.*

Then, quieted, I slipped into sleep.



I woke up relaxed and comfortable and I thanked God. *Thank you, Lord, for this relief.* And I snuggled in bed, reveling in the sense of ease and comfort I felt. Joy in being God's child, in receiving His blessing, filled me with blissful peace. A miracle had taken place.

As I got up, I realized that I was still free from pain. I went to my prayer chair rejoicing. My morning followed normal patterns, most of my attention on study, thinking, and writing. The appreciation of pain-relief soon became a vague memory.

Later in the morning, when I stopped at the dryer to move some laundry, I stepped down on my right foot. Suddenly I noticed that I stepped

correctly, no turn to the outside. I tried it again. Still correct. My body was not twisting out of alignment.

"This is a miracle!" I thought. Joy flooded through me. Jumbles of praise Bible verses ran through my head—*thanksgiving and honor and glory are due You, O Lord!*

I walked down the hall, each time my foot stepping correctly. For several days, I checked my

"He will not let your foot be moved,  
he who keeps you will not slumber . . .  
The LORD will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life."  
— Psalm 121:3, 7

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foot position each time I got up and walked. I'd think, "I've got to plant it right."

**Laurie, before I fixed it, you couldn't do it for yourself. You still need Me to step correctly.**

Then humility and reality hit me. And I thanked Him all over again.

However, I got more used to the miracle being real and began to not think of it. Then one morning as I walked down the hall, I realized that my foot was still planting itself correctly. I broke into internal cheers.

*Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! I always want to remember this miracle.*

And You said—wistfully, I thought—**What about my greater miracle? Your salvation. Do you always want to remember it? Does it still fill you with joy, excitement, and thanksgiving?**

Humbled, I said quietly, *Yes, Lord.*

Once again, God helped me see the situation from His perspective.

Although the pain of fibromyalgia is chronic and I still have to deal with it in varying intensities, the pain related to my twisting foot has not returned. And God continues to plant my foot in right position.

*Oh, Father, I often take for granted what  
you do for me. Help me!*



*Taste The Joy Of Being In Me*

A first child, I grew up feeling responsible for my sister's well-being. I also held the role of mediator and peace bringer in the family. My job was to make sure things went well for the rest. My sister's job was to entertain and provide friendship to my mother.

When I realized what motivated me to perform for my family, I understood the resentment I'd carried for years. I had put every ounce of energy into trying to earn love from others and never managed to feel successful. Included in this burden was the necessity of covering up who I really was. If my family knew my thoughts and feelings, they'd know I wasn't perfect and, then, wouldn't love me . . . or would they?

As I began to understand the unconditional quality of God's love for me, I recognized that attempting to earn love from others wasn't useful. I became more able to say "no" and then to say "yes" because I wanted to. Resentments began to melt away.

### **THAT'S MY JOB!**

"I'll call," I said. "After all, that's my job." My sister and mother sat back in their chairs.

Susan laughed. "It is, isn't it," she agreed.

Without resentment I went to the pay phone to call my dad. We had expected him to join us at the mall for lunch and he wasn't there. Fifteen minutes had gone by while we waited and talked about whether or not he was coming. Each had contributed the information about how hungry we were, but no one moved to solve the problem.

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We didn't say, but I know each of us was thinking: "Wonder if he's okay. Did he have an accident?" My father's health was deteriorating. We weren't sure his mind was clear or that he should still be driving.

This time, with a sense of freedom, even joy, I chose to provide the solution. My sister's acknowledgement that often I am the one expected

"I can do all things in  
him who  
strengthens me."  
—Philippians 4:13

to make things work for the family helped. Bringing the hidden dynamics of family interactions into the open provided some healing.

I walked to the phone, mentally leaping into the air, reaching to the sky, and shouting, "Yes!"

*Father, You've done it! I thought. I made a choice to do this, without feeling resentment or martyrdom. And it would have been all right to just sit and watch events evolve. Thank you.*

Mentally, I reviewed scenes from the years in which a compulsion within drove me to "fix things" for my family. At one time (I was still a child) I had even gone so far as to think that my going to church when other family members weren't, could magically save them.

Over the last several years God has been bringing this issue to me in my journaling. Piece by piece, I've written about each memory He gave me and the emotions connected to it. As I

*Taste The Joy Of Being In Me*

wrote and accepted God's counsel, I received additional emotional healing and freedom.

Today, I saw the need that would normally have caused me to step in and "fix." But I did not feel the compulsion. No resentment or sense of martyrdom plagued me. Instead, I laughed. And *chose* to take action.

*I'm free! And kicking up my heels!*

*Thanks!*



Often, it is only as I look back that I can see the growth God has given me. When I first became conscious of His personal interest in me, I felt awe. Then, He and I went through a time of getting to know each other. While this process was taking place, He was also changing my relationships with other people. Each time I recognized an improvement, I again experienced a thrill. As one of His special gifts, God made me able to risk being vulnerable to another human being, my husband John.

## **YOU WANT ME!**

### **TWO YEARS AGO**

I saw John glance at the wood pile. A look of shock flickered across his face.

"Oh," I said, and grinned at him. "Alex found the rose and was playing with it. He put it there."

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I went over and picked the long-stemmed, plastic rose up, putting it back in its place of honor.

John nodded, relief and understanding bringing his laugh. "For a minute I thought you'd thrown it there." The "rose" was significant to both of us. The first time John and I attended a marriage-support seminar, we were sent home with the rose and directions. Offering the rose meant: "Let's talk. This is important to me. I may get emotional."

Before "the rose", John and I had usually talked about the organizing of our lives and family. Occasionally, we stopped long enough to discuss our ideas and thoughts. Emotions and feelings were too scary. They meant emotional pain to both of us.

When one of us picked up "the rose" and handed it to the other, it signaled that not only would we be sharing feelings and emotions, but we would also communicate openly without any hidden agendas. It covenanted that we would continue to talk, to listen, until we were both satisfied that the "delicate" subject had been covered, that neither one of us still wanted to say something but were afraid to do so.

When we first talked, we weren't sure we'd come out of the discussion intact as a married couple. Scary! However, we did.

The process became essential. We experienced acceptance and love. No subject or feeling needed

to be hidden from the other. Intimacy came. And we rejoiced in it.

#### **TWO WEEKS AGO**

I leaned against a hardware store counter. John and a friend were buying materials for a project. As I watched John, he looked up, looked into my eyes, and did something with his eyes and face that signaled me he knew I was there, he was glad I was there, he was remembering me, he loved me, and he wanted me. I'd never seen him do it before, but . . . Wow! A warm glow went throughout my body and put a smile in my brain.

The next day I sat on the couch, listening as John talked on the phone. It was a long conversation. He looked up and at me. He winked, a twinkle in his eye. Again that sense of being special, of belonging, of being wanted flooded through me. I knew there would be time for us to sit down together and talk.

This is a new experience in our relationship. Both of us have been addicted to work. Habitually we have put the job and the people at the job first. When we married, we had said, "Next to God, our relationship to each other is first." However, we often did not celebrate our wedding anniversary – lack of money, too tired to be creative, or just plain not remembering. Birthday gifts seldom happened, neither did Christmas gifts. If the job or a friend needed attention, they got priority.

So, I'm still savoring and treasuring those two moments of special attention. They were gifts just for me while he was "working." I knew our intimacy had deepened.

Those love signals from John were God prompted, not something I had demanded. I believe they were possible because we had begun the journey of talking to each other. We had picked up the "Rose of Dialogue" and dared to share.

"I have loved you  
with an everlasting  
love; therefore I have  
continued my  
faithfulness  
to you."  
—Jeremiah 31:3

#### TWO DAYS AGO

Time for the quantum leap. I sat in my red chair talking with God. I had been struggling with the doubt and confusion I so easily fall into in my spiritual life. I was reading

Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart . . ."

My Bible open on my lap, I wrote in my journal, *God, I am sorry I am so slow to understand and to believe. Truly trusting another person to really care for me has been an ongoing battle. And I haven't easily trusted You to really care for me, either. But You do!*

I paused in my writing, filled with awe. I was indeed believing that God loves me.

With increasing delight, the realization struck me again. *You love me. You want me!*



**I do, Laurie.**

Joyous emotion flooded me. My mind's eye saw me standing in the "vast throng" before the throne of God (Revelation 7:9). As I looked at Jesus, He lifted His head, looked into my eyes, and did something with His eyes and face that signaled me He knew I was there, He was glad I was there, He was remembering me, He loved me, and He wanted me.

My heart said His heart would break if I weren't in that throng. A rush of love and desire to bring Him happiness flowed through me. Standing there among millions of people, I knew there would be time for us to sit down together and talk.

*Father, You really do want me!* I breathed out thanksgiving. Understanding flooded through me. Years of feeling second best, of not being the right person, of insignificance crumbled from me. I felt precious.

*May my presence continue  
to bring You joy, Lord, as Yours does me.*



*Living Loved*

## CHAPTER 9

# LAURIE, EXPECT ME TO GIVE MY PRESENCE

“If you then, who are evil,  
know how to give good gifts to your children,  
how much more will your Father  
who is in heaven give good things  
to those who ask him!”

– Matthew 7:11

“Thou hast given him his heart’s desire,  
and hast not withheld the request of his lips.  
. . . thou dost make him glad with the  
joy of thy presence.”

– Psalms 21:2, 6

*MY HEART THRILLS!*

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**H**istorically, I have thought of God and things related to Him as sacredly serious, believing that if something were “frivolous” or related to the world’s activities that God would frown. I didn’t expect Him to be interested in Christmas with its surrounding gifts and merriment. Instead, I’ve always hurried through the commercial part of Christmas, putting up shields, hoping God wouldn’t notice our joining in the world’s celebrations. Guilt lurked.

Another element of discomfort—due to finances, John and I find Christmas time difficult. We love our children and grandchildren. We want them to know we love them. And we want to gift them.

It has been a long time since we have been able to go Christmas shopping and truly have money to buy gifts to give. Each year we struggle to think of something we can do to meet our need to give them gifts—something that would please them and say, “You are loved.”

The next three stories describe the “gifts of learning” that God gave me one Christmas season.

## HANDPICKED

Warm candlelight glowed. The fragrant scent of holiday and green trees still teased my senses as I walked into the dark and climbed into my

pickup. Driving down the almost invisible country lane, I thought about the candle party.

I had gone because Arline invited me. I knew I wouldn't buy. It was simple—no money. While sitting and enjoying the candles, I had listened to a description of their merit and true value. I knew that anyone buying one of those candles would not be disappointed. Almost unconsciously, I had begun choosing gifts for my children. Quickly, I had brushed the ideas aside—it was possible I wouldn't be giving any gifts this Christmas.

My thoughts returned to the dark farm lane I was driving on. The darkness suited me, an appropriate cloak for the wistfulness I felt. I knew my children would understand. However, understanding does not blot out the heart-yearning to receive a gift of love. Or to give one.

**Why don't you give a candle party?** A voice inside my head spoke. I recognized it as God's voice.

*I can't do that!* I responded in panic. I remembered past attempts at sales parties. I'd think, "Oh, they won't want to come" and so didn't ask. Or I'd tell them, "Just come, but don't buy." And the party was always pitiful and embarrassing.

*No. I can't do it,* I said.

**I'll do it with you,** He encouraged.

Excitement leapt within me. *You will?*

**Yes.**

Maybe I *could* do a party and earn enough to give beautiful gifts to my children.

*I'll do it*, I whispered.

When I got home, I called the house I'd just left, knowing they were still there, enjoying, choosing, and buying. "I'll book a party for you," I told Arline. (She would get credit for my doing so.) "Schedule me soon!"

I had one week. I invited family members, thinking relationship would carry some weight. My mother did agree to come.

I called close friends who I thought would come just because they loved me. I left messages on answering machines. Finally, I got one response. "I'll come, but I can't buy."

To the instigator of this whole thing I said, *Lord, I should just cancel. This isn't working!*

**I'm helping you**, He replied. **Why don't you take your catalog with you to physical therapy?**

I went for physical therapy at least twice a week as it helped with the fibromyalgia pain.

*Okay*, I agreed.

I thought, "I'll just carry it with me and maybe someone will notice and ask to order something."

No one "just noticed." Finally, I realized that I would have to ask. I came home with two orders. Encouraged, I called another friend.

"Come and bring your children," I said.

"I'd love to come!"

Wow! Three people were coming to my party.

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Another friend thought she could come.

On the day of the party, I double-checked with Arline. I had expected her to attend mine in reciprocation, but she didn't think she could make it. However, I was committed. The party would happen. I would survive.

At the last minute she called and said, "I'm coming." That made a total of five women and five children.

All along I had felt the gentle urging from God. **I'm here. I asked you to do this. Everything's fine.** I had peace as I finished preparing.

I arranged cookies on a tray. Made the punch. Pushed the table over to make a play area for the children in the dining room. Donna, the candle representative, came and set up her beautiful candles and their holders around my living room.

*Lord, I mused, this seems an unusual thing for You to be interested in. I mean, You are helping me with the commercial part of Christmas.*

**I like to give beautiful gifts, too,** He said. And I thought of the myriad colors in flowers. I thought of the hills, trees, and streams. I thought of Jesus.

As my first guest arrived, I felt happy anticipation. This party was happening. The outcome was up to God.

The candles were lit. The demonstrations given. Holiday scents drifted through the room. Talk and good cheer swirled around. Children



delighted in cookies and punch. My guests got out their order blanks, cheerfully choosing what they wanted. Each one bought something.

“Oh,” said Donna, “I have someone who isn’t going to give a party as planned who wants to put a couple of orders in your party.”

“Sure!” I rejoiced. I knew that God’s hand was in this party and felt joy in watching Him host it. When everything was counted and totaled, I had enough credit for five beautiful gifts.

A sweet contentment flowed through me. It was truly delightful to have gifts for my children. As I pondered what God had done for me this Christmas, I realized the gift of His presence.

Even more, I understood the truth in His promise, “I’ll be with you always. Even unto the end of the world (paraphrase of Matthew 28:20).”

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
—Romans 6:23

Then I remembered His greatest gift—life eternal through Jesus.

*With the attention You give to the details of my life, Lord, I don’t have to worry about the big events.*

A smile warmer than the candlelight lit my face as a thought struck me. Each gift I would be giving to my children this Christmas was especially provided for them by God.

Handpicked, so to speak.

*Living Loved*

*Wow! You are the Gift-Giver.*



For two plus years, I had been working on the lifestyle changes my doctor had recommended. This involved major effort in character development. As God led me in the process of facing myself, I felt encouraged to write about the experience. Words flowed. It was a time of joy. God was involved and seemed to enjoy promoting creativity in me.

I wanted to share the story of their gifts with my children as a part of their Christmas gift. I got excited about self-publishing and talked to God about putting the story into book form. A green light from Him sent me scurrying to get my “book” finished for Christmas.

## SIGNATURE

I watched, almost without breathing, as the master copy of my book chugged its way out of the printer. The cover came through. Everything was in place. Then the next set of two pages began to show.

“Oh, no!” I thought. “Something’s wrong! The graphics! Where’d those boxes come from?” I hadn’t put three little gift boxes anywhere in the document.

I reached to abort the print. Then I heard, **Wait. See how the rest goes.**

My hand froze. “Okay,” I agreed, then I reassured myself, “maybe the rest will be right.”

And I waited. When all the pages had been printed, I picked them up and carefully put the sets back-to-back for the copy work that would produce my first (self) published book. Everything slid into place in the right order. When I reached the picture of Jesus, I saw the outline of three gift boxes showing through the paper beside His head.

As tears trickled down my face, the phone rang. I glanced at the clock—4 a.m. It was so early in the morning, I knew it had to be my husband calling. I could share this miracle with him.

“Hi,” I whispered, my mood one of awe and growing joy. “I think I’m discovering a miracle,” I told him. I didn’t say anymore, wondering what he would think.

“What’s happening?” he asked.

“Well,” I told it slowly. “I just put the master copies of the book together. They contain a graphic I didn’t put in the book.”

He was silent on the other end of the phone.

“Three little gift boxes appeared on the last page. It was supposed to be a blank page,” I said.

I heard the excitement in his voice. “You think God put them there?”

“I know He did! I’ve rechecked my page on the computer. It’s blank. But the graphic is perfect and in an excellent spot.”

*Living Loved*

I sat holding the tiny book. It contained the details of God's interest in our giving gifts to each other. In it I had said,

*Lord, this seems an unusual thing for You to be interested in. I mean, You are helping me with the commercial part of Christmas.*

**I like to give beautiful gifts, too,** He said.

And I thought of the myriad colors in flowers. I thought of the hills, trees, and streams. I thought of Jesus.

The three small gift boxes on a page that was intended to be blank spoke to me of God's desire and ability to personally involve Himself in the details of my life. I saw in them a symbol of the presence of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. As I told John of this additional miracle, I looked at the Three Gift Boxes. I *knew*. God not only published this book. He put His signature in it.

*Thank you for  
Your affirming love.*



I'm a person who likes to see the end from the beginning. I like my "ducks" all lined up in a row. I resist follow-

*Laurie, Expect Me To Give my Presence*

ing directions without knowing the whole picture. I fret and become anxious. However, my behavior doesn't keep God from sharing His viewpoint.

## THE REAL GIFT

The sewing machine purred to a stop. I clipped the threads that held the pajama pants to the machine.

"There," I murmured to myself. "One set done and four to go." I smiled at the soft flannel in my hands. The pajamas looked good. Then I looked at the next set, cut out and ready to be sewn. Satisfaction melted into a puddle of tiredness.

I longed to see our children and grandchildren, to be with them at Christmas time. But I knew I wouldn't, and the date to mail packages to arrive on time had disappeared three days ago. I shook my head—I was sewing long and late hours, as if I could somehow make it all happen as I pictured it should.

Hands, full of pajama, dropped to my lap.

*God, I thought, this seems really strange to me.*

Getting ready for Christmas this year had been a struggle. A two-fold dilemma—no cash flow and no idea flow—had kept me from an early solution to Christmas gifts.

*But, I thought, You provided me with gifts for our five children; You told me You liked to give gifts.*

*Living Loved*

I thought of the beautiful candles and their containers ready to give the children. I thought of the Christmas story printed in a small booklet, ready to include in their packages. I knew God had blessed me with these gifts. He'd also given me the idea of making pajamas for our grandchildren.

*So, why is Christmas only two days away and I haven't even finished sewing? Why all the interruptions?*

First, I had received a call to provide support to a battered and broken woman.

*Why me, Lord?* I'd asked. And I struggled and fussed about the time it was taking.

Then, I continued to do all the regularly scheduled parts of my life—bill paying, physical therapy appointments, lunch daily for my mom and dad, the extra shopping trips to help extended family be ready for their Christmas.

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child . . . and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”  
—Matthew 1:23 KJV

*This seems really strange to me. I repeated. I'm not going to have these pajamas ready by Christmas and obviously not under their trees. I don't understand.*

**Laurie, the 25th doesn't mean anything to me.**

*Laurie, Expect Me To Give my Presence*

I sat, stunned. I'd long known that Christ wasn't born on December 25. We . . . mankind . . . had picked that date to celebrate His birthday, not Him.

Tentatively, I approached Him. *What am I missing? I know You gave me gifts and gift ideas for our family.*

I sat and thought, allowing God to lead my musing. *Okay. You approve of giving gifts of love to family and friends. Help me understand.*

**Emmanuel.**

*Emmanuel?* I echoed.

*God with us?* I wondered.

"God with us." I spoke out loud and laughed.

Pictures of Jesus crowded into my mind—lying in a manger near Joseph and Mary, building alongside Joseph in the carpenter shop, worshipping in the temple, teaching beside the lake, curled sleeping in the fishing boat, experiencing anguish and pain, being with us. God with us! Yes, Christmas celebrates God with us.

*But how does that help me understand Your giving me gifts to give, but not the time to get them there by Christmas?* I asked.

**I want you to take the gifts and go be with your children. The real gift is being there.**

I traced the route on the map in my mind—at least a thousand miles long. I hesitated, thinking of what that meant to us in time and money.

Then I realized, Jesus was sent all the way from heaven to be with us.

*Living Loved*

*Lord, your trip covered so many miles, and cost a lot more! I sat thinking of all God gave in the Gift of Jesus.*

Turning once again to the trip we'd be taking to see our kids, I began mentally looking for ways to accomplish it. As I thought of the gasoline cost, I sighed.

Then I heard, **You will have the money.**

And we did. An unexpected payment for a computer consultation job John had done several months earlier arrived in the mail.

And we went. True joy—being with each of our children and their families!

*Dear Jesus, when I discovered that  
the deep-seated hunger – my desire to go  
and be with my children – is a need You share with  
me, I found myself drawing closer to You.  
The knowledge that You passionately desire  
to be with me, with us, gives me courage  
to seek You with all my heart.*

☺



## CHAPTER 10

# THE BATTLE'S MINE, LAURIE, AND I'VE WON

"I have said this to you, that in me  
you may have peace. In the world  
you have tribulation; but be of good cheer,  
I have overcome the world."

—John 16:33

***THIS WILL TAKE A LIFETIME!***

*Living Loved*

**T**his was a time of rejoicing for both John and me. He continued to enjoy his work, going off each morning with eagerness for the day. I appreciated God's persistence in untangling me from my need to produce an income. I trusted Him to provide it as needed.

Interesting to me, He did give me a temporary job that enabled another social worker to take maternity leave. I found that the income I earned basically supported the extra costs we incurred due to my working. And I became painfully aware that I still needed God's direct supervision in order to accomplish the tasks in this job.

Also, I worked a few hours each week for my neighbor, keeping his business details entered on his computer. This second job didn't increase our expense and did meet a financial need, but it took energy and time from my writing. God showed me the right time to give it up and concentrate on writing.

I wrote steadily, producing two to three stories a month. I took each one to my writing group for critique. I learned to appreciate their input and to improve what I had written. Each story I wrote represented my awareness of God's direct intervention in my life to bring me wholeness. Although emotional pain is not something I seek, I've learned to appreciate it as a signal that if I'll let Him, God is ready to take the next step in my healing.

*Living Loved*

By this time, John and I had been involved in recovery groups for three years. We attended a weekly Christian 12-Step group, which operated much as Alcoholics Anonymous groups do. Also, we worked with others to bring character developing seminars to our area. We learned that attention to who we are as individuals brings emotional healing and ability to give God first place in our lives. We began to see changes in ourselves and in our relationships. Basically, in Christian terminology, God led us in the sanctification process.

## **ANOTHER ROSE OF DIALOGUE**

Water poured in a cascade from the colander and spilled on the counter all around our small vegetable prep sink. John held the colander about two feet above the tiny sink, pouring water over the potatoes he'd just grated for hash browns.

"Whoops!" he said.

I tossed him a towel. "Why don't you do that in the regular sink?" I asked, and started to clear it out so he could. My voice, growling from the congestion in my chest, was edged with irritation. I watched as he moved over to the big sink. Again he held the colander about two feet above the sink and began to pour water into it.

I pushed in. "Here," I said, "put it down in the sink and use the spray hose to rinse them."

"Why don't I just get out of here and let you do it?" His eyebrows went up as his voice rose.

I was tired from two weeks of flu and didn't even want to be in the kitchen helping make breakfast. And I knew I wasn't being diplomatic. When I'm sick, I don't seem to have the ability to sound pleasant or to use more than the most basic words. I knew I sounded bossy. I knew he didn't like to be told what to do. And I didn't like to be told I was going to be left to "do it yourself." Instantly, I felt hurt and anger. Rage, much stronger than this situation warranted, filled my heart.

I fled the room. I felt shame, because I knew I hadn't been gracious. I felt fear. What had promised to be a joyous Sunday morning activity had disappeared in emotional flare-up. I sat in my seat by the window, pulling my Bible and journal onto my lap.

Go back and talk. I recognized God's voice.

I put my devotional materials down and answered Him. *Okay. I should have had my worship time sooner, but You're right. Now I need to stay in dialogue with John.*

In the past, an incident such as we had just experienced would have produced a miserable day for both of us, possibly two or three days. John would usually choose to go on about his business, neither acknowledging any wrong action nor acting as if there were any problem. I would become silent—doing what was needed, speaking civilly, both emotionally frozen and seething with rage.

*Living Loved*

The events and the hurt would repeat in my mind, making me crazy. I'd hope John would notice how hurt I was and ask me about it. I'd want to talk, yet wouldn't be able to move past my frozen heart to begin. We both would wait it out until time or some other reason would bring us together in a seemingly normal relationship. Occasionally, my constant, desperate mental review of "what happened" would drive me to talk.

And when I did, John would always apologize in such a way that I knew he would never intentionally hurt my feelings, that he'd not been upset over what had happened, and that I had been the only one wrong or upset. Wrong in the way I spoke, wrong in what I did, wrong in holding so tightly to my hurt. I'd enjoy the relief of crying and temporary closeness. But I'd also resent having to be the one to say "There is a problem." And . . . resent finding it to be my problem.

However, over the past couple of years, John and I had grown emotionally and spiritually. We knew those old patterns of behavior were destructive. We had learned to trust each other to stay in a discussion until we both understood the roots of our reactions. And learned to be honest about our feelings.

So, I stood in the kitchen doorway, looking at him as he finished rinsing the potatoes. I sighed. The sooner we did the work, the sooner our joy in each other would come back. I took down the

"Rose of Dialogue" from the top of the wall clock and held it out to him. This rose is a symbol of our commitment to dialogue, to talk, until we are both satisfied.

"Hey," I said, waving the rose. "Let's figure out what happened."

"Okay," he agreed."

"I understand that you don't like being instructed," I started. "I know how my voice sounded . . . I'm sorry. But how am I going to share information or give suggestions . . ."

My voice trailed off.

"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD." –  
Isaiah 1:18

"When I was a kid," he shared, "things never worked out very well when my mom and I were in the kitchen together." He paused. "I got in her way or didn't do it right."

"Maybe I shouldn't be in the kitchen then?" I paused for a moment, then said, "But we like to work together getting meals."

"And you're not my mom," he added. "I just need to remember that."

"Maybe I do, too. I can be okay with you doing it your way."

I thought about what had happened. "I know I sounded frustrated and understand why you reacted as you did. But I don't understand why the words 'do it yourself' caused such a reaction in me."

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“H-m-m-m.” I went on into the kitchen, closer to him. “I saw myself being ‘left’ to do by myself. That idea—those words—brought instant rage and hurt to me.”

Suddenly, I recognized that the emotional impact of “being left to take care of by myself” went clear back to near the end of my first marriage.

For now we see in a  
mirror dimly,  
but then face to face. Now I  
know in part;  
then I shall understand fully,  
even as I have been  
fully understood.  
—1 Corinthians 13:12

When I had suggested a second baby, my husband agreed and then added, “As long as you know that you will be taking care of it by yourself.” I thought he meant that he’d be

too busy. But soon after, he moved out and we divorced. And I *was* left to care for our son by myself.

As John and I had already shared about this part of my life, a simple explanation filled him in on my thoughts.

“Your words, ‘do it yourself,’ triggered all the pain I felt when I heard the words, ‘You can have another baby as long as you realize you’ll be taking care of it by yourself.’ ”

I sagged against the kitchen counter. Anger and hurt drained from me. I laid the rose on the



*The Battle's Mine, Laurie And I've Won*

counter. John turned and put his arms around me, hugging me close.

Breakfast was good and joyful. We had once again tested our commitment to face disruptions in our relationship as quickly as possible by talking, sharing, and gaining understanding about who we are and how we came to be.

We were back on track.

*Lord, learning to talk is a great blessing.  
Believing I'm safe when I do is a gift  
only You can give. Knowing and being known  
is an inalienable right of the heavenly kingdom. Here,  
it is a miraculous gift and privilege.  
Thank you for bestowing it in our lives.*

☺

We continued to make trips to see our children and their growing families. They were spread in a circle around us, from four to nine hours away. As a parent, I'd like to think I'm a fount of wisdom. However, I often find myself learning from my children and even my grandchildren.

## GROWING UP SLOWLY

Hannah clutched the dice tightly in her fist. Blue eyes challenged me with her determination. I looked at my granddaughter's golden curls and soft baby cheeks. I reached my hand out to her.

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“Hannah,” I spoke softly. “You want to play this game with us. We want you to play. We need the dice so Alex can have his turn.”

Her little jaw held firm.

“Give it to me, Hannah.” Alex’ voice was soft and cajoling, but I knew that unless she gave him the dice soon, he’d resort to seven-year-old tactics of force and loud cries of outrage.

Small fist still clutched tightly. I thought about being two and a half. I thought about being fifty-seven.

It’s funny about growing up. Sometimes you save part of it until you are fifty-seven. I’ve only recently realized how attached I am to possessions.

While Grandpa tried his luck with Hannah, my mind slipped to a recent discovery about my own growing up.

When I was nineteen, my parents took me shopping for a bed. The choice was mine. They encouraged me to get a double bed with a matching dresser and mirror. I found one that I still find delightful. Solid cherry wood with a light finish (toward mahogany), it curved gracefully suggesting France, romance, and riches to me. I treasured that bedroom set. It was heirloom and love. It said to me: “You have value.”

I finished college and began my first year of teaching. The bed set went with me. Through one marriage and my single parenting years, I hauled

it around. At times it seemed too small and got tucked away in storage or placed in a guest-room. Even then, my heart cherished it.

When I married John, we used it for a short time. I soon discovered that my new daughter Carrie needed a room of her own. So we moved her into the bedroom and my "heirloom" bed, with the dresser and mirror, and we slept in the living room until we could add a room for us.

From that point on Carrie used the bed and dresser, but I lovingly watched over it, still thinking of it as my own. When she was sixteen, we had no money to get her a gift. To me, turning sixteen is an important birthday. I wanted to give her something significant. The only thing I had that I thought would tell her I loved her was the bed and dresser.

I talked with John. I agonized about giving it up. Finally, I made the decision. I would give "my" bedroom set to her. She was my daughter. My "heirloom" should be hers.

Recently, Carrie got married and the bed was too small. As her husband had a king-size bed, she no longer needed "my" bed.

Do not lay up for your  
selves treasures on earth . . .  
but lay up for yourselves  
treasures in heaven . . . For  
where your treasure is,  
there will your heart be also.  
—Matthew 6:19-21

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“I think I’ll give it to Yvonne,” she told me as we worked on wedding plans. “She needs a bed.”

My heart lurched. How could she! She was discarding my heirloom.

And I heard myself saying, “Oh, don’t separate the pieces. If you don’t want it, I’ll take it. I’ll keep it for you. Maybe you’ll have a house some time where you could use it.”

When we arrived to help Carrie move her belongings into her fiancé’s house, she told me, “I’m sending the bed home with you, as well as the dresser and mirror. You may as well have them all.

I welcomed my “heirloom” home with a small prickling of guilt. Somehow, I couldn’t get comfortable with Carrie’s returning it to me. I felt reproved. And I couldn’t get comfortable accepting it. I thought I had given it to her. But now I realized I’d never truly relinquished it. She wasn’t free to use or discard according to her own preferences and needs. My heart clutched too tightly. Sadness over my inability to let go settled on me.

That was a year and a half before and I was still struggling over it.

My mind focused back on the current struggle. Grandpa encouraged Hannah to relinquish the dice. As I watched her tiny fist clutching tightly, I recognized my heart clutching tightly to my precious bedroom set. Even though I had gone through emotional agony (similar to the

physical pain of giving birth) to become able to give the set to Carrie, I now knew I had never cut the umbilical cord.

I watched Hannah's daddy approach. She heard him and turned, gave him a swift smile, and handed the dice to Alex. Daddy picked her up, cuddling her against him. They settled in the rocking chair together. No fuss. No tears.

Longing filled me and I prayed:  
*Father, please completely remove from me this possessiveness, this unwillingness to let things go out of my control.*

"Like a baby you will be nursed and held in my arms and bounced on my knees. I will comfort you as a father comforts his child."  
—based on Isaiah 66:12-13,  
New Century Version

Hannah rocked in her daddy's lap, no longer desiring the dice. A smile began in my heart and spread to my eyes and face. I, too, have a Daddy who will pick me up, hold me close, and confirm my worth and value. I don't need "heirloom stuff" to comfort me.

This day I choose to cut the umbilical cord from my heart to belongings and to be comforted instead by my Father.

*Hannah reminded me that I have clutched tightly to my belongings, refusing to let them go.*

*She also taught me that when You, the Father, come in,*

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*I don't need the "stuff" and  
can cheerfully let it go.*



Neither John nor I had grown up playing table games. In fact I remember avoiding social situations in which they were the planned entertainment.

However, finding we liked playing table games with our grandchildren, we began spending time with friends who did enjoy them. We played a "speed" Scrabble game which let each person work on his own word maze. Then we learned how to play "Mexican Train" with a set of Dominoes. Both John and I liked these games and began to play more often. With no more children at home, we had long evenings to fill. Finding it a good, quiet way to interact, we often got out the Scrabble game or some Dominoes.

### **LORD, HELP ME GET . . . OUCH!**

John reached over and put his last Domino tile at the end of my chain. He looked up and smiled.

"I can't believe it," he said. "That's the fourth game in a row that I've won."

"Well, you can't ever complain again about not winning," I teased, trying to smile. The trouble was, I like to win. I can handle a turn at losing, but not a run of doing so.

"I feel like a little girl who wants to kick and scream if she doesn't get to win once in awhile," I told him. And again smiled, hoping he wouldn't know how true my statement was. I've learned

that it's better to say how I'm feeling rather than to tuck it way inside to smolder. The effort did help to ease my frustration.

We turned the tiles over and stirred them. I drew 16, as did he.

I found myself praying, *Lord, help me get the right tiles . . .* Ouch! I couldn't believe what I had just done; I had asked God to help me win against John.

*Father, I tried again, I'm in desperate straits here. I can't ask You to help me beat John. But I'm miserable. I need a new attitude. Please give me that.*

The fifth game went fast. Again, John placed his last tile. I had one left. I could have gone out in one more turn. My smile was weak.

"Wow! Five in a row," I said.

"I can't believe I'm still winning," he replied and smiled sheepishly. "But I like it!"

"I can't believe it either." I heard the slight edge in my voice.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."  
—John 15:12-13

During the sixth game, each time I came close to being out of tiles, the game turned and I found myself drawing more, ones I couldn't easily use. Down inside the desire to win struggled with my desire to

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simply enjoy the game. I was beginning to see the strength of my competitive spirit, my desire to win against someone I love. I made a decision.

*Lord, I'm willing to lose each game, never win again. Please, I want to be free of this kind of thinking.*

I arranged the new tiles. I thought of what I had just prayed. Knowing my past patterns, a small sniggle of conscience made me wonder if I were bargaining with God in hope He would help me win.

**No, Laurie, you're not.**

*Oh, good! I love the way God knows my innermost being!*

As I played my next turn and heard another whimper from my I-gotta-win monster, I approached God again. *Okay. I want victory over this terrible need to win. I want joy in someone else's good fortune.*

John laid down two tiles during his next turn. This was the third time in a row he'd been able to do that. He was down to three tiles and I still had seven.

*I'm serious, Lord. This has become important to me. I am entirely willing to cheerfully play games and never win another. You be in charge. I want victory over this ugly need to win. Please!*

The game went back and forth. We continued to draw tiles until there were only a few left on the table. I began to make choices that I thought



might help him win rather than allow me to do so. I found myself enjoying the game more.

*You know, Father, maybe I could cheerfully play games, not winning, the rest of my life.*

I had nine tiles in front of me not played when John put his last one down. He'd won again.

"Do you want to quit?" he asked.

"No." I smiled. "Seven in a row would be great for you. The perfect number. Wouldn't it be great if you could do it."

As I listened to my words and tone, I recognized that, deep down inside of me, God had put joy in the place of my ugly need to win.

The seventh game went smoothly. Most of the time it looked as if either one of us could win. Then John put two tiles down at once and it was done. I had enjoyed the game.

"You did it!" I shared in his enjoyment. Inside me peace reigned.

*You did it!* My thoughts shouted to God. *Thank you.*

**You are welcome.** I felt the warmth of His smile.

Awe for God's power filled me. While John and I had developed strategies, laid down our tiles, and attempted to win the "Mexican Train" version of Dominoes, God had struggled to defeat my need to win. And He won!

*Father, it is good to go into battle at  
Your side knowing You'll win in my favor!*

*Living Loved*

## CHAPTER 11

# BE ENCOURAGED!

“ . . . fear not, for I am with you,  
be not dismayed, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with my  
victorious right hand . . .  
For I, the LORD your God,  
hold your right hand;  
it is I who say to you,  
'Fear not, I will help you.' ”

— Isaiah 41:10, 13

***THANK YOU!***

*Living Loved*

*Be Encouraged!*

**O**ccasionally, right in the midst of a time of success, old behaviors take control and I find myself misbehaving. God has used these moments in my life to instruct and encourage me.

### **LOVING *ME***

The seminar was over. Most of my responsibilities were done. With a sigh of pleasure, I sank into one of the seats, ready to spend a few moments of relaxed time with the speaker. I had looked forward to this time all day.

“Laurie, may I talk to you for a moment?” I looked up. One of the seminar participants stood looking at me tentatively. Her voice shook a little.

“Sure,” I smiled and got up. We went a small distance from those who lingered after the weekend-long event.

“You probably didn’t mean to,” she started, “but when you cut me off, you hurt my feelings.” An incident from earlier in the day while I was

carrying the portable microphone to participants popped back into my memory. I knew what was coming. I had been wrong in what I did.

She continued, "I felt hurt and angry when I raised my hand to ask a question and you ignored me. You shut me off."

"... for the LORD reproves her  
whom He loves,  
as a father the daughter in  
whom He delights."  
Paraphrase  
—Proverbs 3:12

She was right. In an effort to follow the speaker's request that we take no more questions and get on with the

seminar, I had ignored her. The fact that the other person carrying a mike went ahead and took another question from a seminar participant increased her sense of being overlooked.

I listened carefully as she told more of how she felt. I answered her questions truthfully. At the same time, I poked around my own emotions in amazement. I knew my guilt. I was able to acknowledge it to her. I didn't feel the normal sting of criticism or the urge to justify. I cared about her hurt and expressed that concern.

When she gave me a hug, a symbol of continuing relationship, I knew we had survived a potentially hurtful, relationship-breaking situation. Watching her go out of the auditorium, I spoke to my Father. *You keep reminding me that I need to deal*

*Be Encouraged!*

*with this issue of being so focused on a goal that I overlook someone's feelings in my attempt to accomplish it.*

*I thought for a minute. Then wonder filled me.*

*But this time I am not traumatized by being caught behaving badly, I told Him.*

*I checked inside again, only lightness and freedom from pain! Where was the guilt?*

*You've shown me I was wrong. What do You want me to do now?*

**Laurie, I want you to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19). I just helped you love yourself.**

And He had. All my life I have dreaded being caught in the wrong. In the past, criticism of my actions and self had sent me into days and weeks of mortification—agonizing over my wrongness, resenting the person who had pointed it out, and not wanting to have any future contact with them.

This time, even though my actions were ugly and wrong, I had accepted the criticism calmly. I felt conviction that never again did I want to subject another person to my lack of consideration. But I didn't hate myself. Nor did I have to hate the other person in order to be justified. I felt corrected and loved. I felt forgiven, by her and God. I felt peace.

“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.”  
—Proverbs 2:7

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I had loved myself by giving myself permission to be imperfect.

*Lord, it's painful to get a look at myself  
through others' eyes.*

*But, it's awesome to acknowledge  
wrongness without agonizing . . . to fall  
and still be loved.*

*Please keep winning the victory in me.*



When I was a little girl, my dad often took the family for a ride. In the late 40's and early 50's there were still rural roads in Orange County, California. The one we especially loved we called the "Whoop de Whoop" road. It was long, straight, and filled with enough up and downs that we felt as if we were flying each time we topped a hill and started down into the dip. I also remember as a child liking the sensation of a roller coaster. I didn't scream (even then I held in emotions), but I enjoyed the heady sensation of swooping as the roller coaster topped the climb and hurtled down and around!

Sometimes I feel as if I am on a different kind of roller coaster—an emotional one. When I opened the door to God's healing hand, He steadfastly brought issues to my attention, giving me ability to face and understand them in my life. Relief and healing followed. Although I've always dreaded emotional pain, I began to welcome each issue as it became apparent, because I knew God's hand was in it and that He'd bring me safely through. He'd give me another piece of freedom!

God knew I longed for intimate relationships, that I couldn't show my love, and had difficulty believing He or anyone loved me. Even when I faced the fact that I looked



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at my life through the fog of failure, wanted the best for myself, and often chose to handle things myself, God continued to love me.

Two years before, God had confronted me with the fact that “fear paralyzes.” At that time He gave me tools to deal with fear when it came up. More recently, I learned that not only did He want to free me from fear, but He wanted me to see events as He saw them. Although, “Failure” dips back to the time of the stories of Chapter Three, my understanding that God’s perspective of events might be different than mine is more recent.

## FAILURE

When God prompted me to look at the sense of failure that colored all my activities, I got out my old journals. As I skimmed them, the story and the horror again became vivid. I stopped to read the journal entry from a March 1 of many years ago.

*I had written: Panic is persisting for a short, intense time each morning when I wake up. Oh, God, please control this. I think I am so “occupied” with panic that this is not the time to spend with You. However, I can’t do without the time with you. Please heal me.*

I allowed my mind to revisit that sad, awful, shameful time – those painful memories.

In my mind I watched as four boys raced through the flats and up the hill. I had sighed, then turned my head to keep the other children in

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view. The littlest ones played on the slope beside me. The three girls of my small, rural one-room school chose as their personalities directed: The oldest was out ahead of the boys. One settled beside me with a book. The other played by herself in the stream trickle at our feet.

Teacher in a multi-grade school, I knew I would accomplish no more in school today. Guilt gnawed at the edges of my mind. It was spring and there was so much course work to complete before school let out. However, the empty prairie that spread out from our rural school building was a sanctuary to me and the kids.

Gentle warmth bathed my tight muscles and I relaxed. Out here the kids naturally separated into their comfort groups. No teasing or persecuting of each other. No violent outbursts of anger. No resistance to schoolwork. They were free. As was I.

Each day we got through was one day closer to true freedom. I was looking forward in both dread and anticipation to when the school year would be over.

As I watched the children exploring the area around the school, I thought about this school year and teaching. Each morning when I woke, anxiety hit my stomach. A cloud of dread spread throughout my brain and over my body. Fear grabbed my heart and sent it racing. Although the stars still shone in the sky, I'd know I had to get

*Be Encouraged!*

up. Leaving John sleeping, I'd slide out of bed, wrap my robe around me, and head for the living room, where I'd cuddle in a quilt with my Bible and journal. Each day I faced this mountain-climb over depression and anxiety before I could go to school.

Failure. I had started the school year with such hope. I loved teaching. I had enjoyed the years I'd spent as support teacher to my husband who reveled in small, one or two room schools with several grades needing to be taught simultaneously. I took the younger children, created an area or room of our own, and did school. Discipline had

"I am the vine,  
you are the branches.  
He who abides in me,  
and I in him, he it is that  
bears much fruit, for apart  
from me  
you can do nothing."  
—John 15:5

not been a problem. Recess with the bigger kids went well under my husband's direction. He met with the parents and the board members. I simply planned, met with my children, and we learned.

Health is so fragile. When we had noticed the changes in my husband's health, we compensated. I had stayed in his classroom in order to provide adult supervision when he had to be out of the room. That seemed to work.

*Living Loved*

When he became too ill to continue teaching, I thought "I can do it." And the school board seemed to agree. They hired me. Our income and medical coverage continued. We were okay, I had thought.

However, I was pulled between meeting his medical needs and the tremendous increase in work load that became mine. I found that the discipline he'd seemed to apply naturally, did not come naturally to me. I had believed that people, including children, should just want to do what was right and good and choose to do it. When I discovered some of my school children choosing to disrupt and disturb the classroom, I was dismayed. And I didn't know what to do.

Panic took over and the kids sensed it. They do not respect a teacher who is panicked and they do not give allowance for circumstances. Also, I found that the school board and parent group were watching to see if I could manage. I have always needed to please others, to be approved. All of these thoughts had gone through my mind that warm, spring afternoon years ago. Fear, underlying the panic, had become intense.

The peace of that prairie afternoon had not fixed my situation or rid me of my fear. It had provided only a short respite.

I remember hearing a shout and looking up. I had then checked my watch and waved the children into the classroom. The brief interlude on the

hillside ended. I had sighed. Somehow we would get through the weeks until school was out.

Back to my journal, I read the March 10 of that year: *This is awful! I felt like I was bleeding inside by the time I got through board meeting. I see myself in their eyes as terribly inadequate. Oh, God, I am hurting. I am angry. Am I supposed to stick this out?*

I thought about those words and the memories connected to them. After going through a careful decision process with God and my husband, I had chosen to turn in my resignation. Then we had been faced with getting ourselves home—more than a thousand miles away—and

“. . . but he said to me,  
'My grace is sufficient  
for you, for my power  
is made perfect  
in weakness.' ”  
—2 Corinthians 12:9

finding a way to support ourselves and the two children still living with us. Survival had become a major issue. And I had been stricken to my core with the knowledge that I had failed.

I turned from my review of those events to look at my current sense of failure. I had forgotten how really awful my last year of teaching with its shame of failure had been. I realized that since then that same feeling of shame had attacked me in each new job I had attempted.

*Living Loved*

Yet as I read, I also noticed that I was not feeling all those old emotions. I was reading objectively.

*God, am I just numb?* I asked.

**No, Laurie.** Then He went on. **I've taken the sting out of those memories. Now let's talk about failure or perspective.**

*I would like to be able to do something successfully.*

**You didn't fail. You were strong in Me. You do not need to be ashamed.**

Puzzled, I pondered His words.

*I know that day by day You helped me. I grew in You throughout that year.*

**You did not fail.**

Stunned, I sat with the old journal in front of me. What did He mean, **"You did not fail."**

*I didn't fail?*

**No, Laurie, you didn't fail.**

*Lord, when I started with You this morning, I was thinking that I probably needed to face my failure, accept it . . . You know – deal with it. And You tell me I didn't fail. What do You mean?*

**You did what I asked you to do.**

I heard the incredulous tone of my voice. *Are we talking about my school?*

**Yes, Laurie. You did good things for the children and that was your responsibility.**

*I didn't fail.*

**No, Laurie, you didn't fail.**

*Wow! I thought. You have a different criteria for success and failure than I've been using.*

*Be Encouraged!*

Slowly, my mind absorbed what He was saying to me. As He spoke to my heart, giving me understanding, I began to see my experience differently.

**You held tightly to Me in love and accepted My strength,** He said.

*There was no other way.*

**You helped Julie take charge of her education and move on to her goal.**

*"Oh!"* This perception startled me.

**You helped Joe find his talent and believe in his ability.**

**You noticed each child as a person and provided nurture to as many as would accept it.**

*I did?*

**Yes!**

**You taught for Me.**

**And that was the first time you let go of financial security and chose to trust Me to provide for you.**

I heard the pleasure in His voice.

**You remained in Me.**

Love, that of a child looking up at her Father who has just said, "This is my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased," warmed me.

**My memories of that time are good!**

I heard joy in His voice.

And I began to understand that God's reality is much bigger than mine.

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*I'm willing to see it the way You do, Lord.*

*I want to see it as You do.*

*Make me able, please.*





## **CHAPTER 12**

# **LET GO, LAURIE**

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.”

– Proverbs 3:5-6, NKJV

*I DIDN'T KNOW  
I WAS HOLDING ON*

*Living Loved*

One time I had taken a lower grade Bible class outside to look at God's nature and find a lesson for life. Each of the children dutifully found something to illustrate a parable. Except one little boy, who simply ran around enjoying being out of the classroom and free. Finally, I pinned him down. I wanted to get the "class work" done so we could all run around free. He quickly looked around and spotted a dandelion.

"Jesus is strong like a lion and He's dandy!" he chirped.

And we were all free to run. Since then, I've liked learning from nature's elements. I can smell freedom at the end of the lesson.

## **THE DRAGON, ALIAS CONTROL**

We live in a 70-year-old house with steep, narrow stairs. Bare wood and dust bunnies. I am afraid of those stairs. I had watched my daughter-in-law start down them with an armload of bedding. She slid the whole length on her back, ending with a thud at the bottom. Her son and I had watched, terrified. There had been nothing we

could do. The fact that she arrived at the bottom without major damage did not calm my fear.

“Okay, let’s get the old washer and dryer down the stairs and out of the house,” John said.

“Are you sure I can help you?” My tone was tentative because the stairs scared me.

“No problem,” he said. “You’ll guide and I’ll handle the ropes.”

The “ropes” meant the block and tackle he’d rigged to get the new laundry set upstairs. I’d talked him into having our neighbor help with them. I didn’t understand how a block and tackle works and I knew I didn’t want to be at the bottom of the stairs under either the washer or dryer. The new machines were now installed and the old ones were in the way. But this time, the neighbor wasn’t available.

“Why are we going to use the block and tackle?” I asked.

“For safety.” He didn’t tell me anything else, expecting me to understand and trust.

“Okay,” I agreed. Uneasiness and fear lurked, but I chose to trust him.

We put cardboard under the dryer to act as a skid as it came down the stairs. (“Skid” wasn’t a word I liked in that context.) I helped tie ropes around the machine and John attached them to his block and tackle set-up.

“You get below the dryer on the stairs and pull it down,” he directed.

I squeezed between it and the doorpost and stationed myself a couple of steps below the dryer. Grabbing onto the cardboard skid, I tugged. The dryer moved a little. Soon I had it at the angle of the stairs. Each time I pulled on it, it slid a little further down the stairs. It went fast or slow according to how hard I pulled. It stayed in control even though all I was doing was backing down the stairs, gently pulling and guiding.

“And your ears shall hear  
a word behind you, saying,  
‘This is the way, walk in it,’  
when you turn to the right or  
when you turn to the left.”  
—Isaiah 30:21

I couldn’t see beyond the dryer to where John was nor did I understand the technical details. Because I

didn’t understand how it worked nor did I fully trust, I stayed tense, trying to be prepared for something to go wrong. Nothing happened except that the dryer soon sat at the bottom of the stairs.

“Okay, now for the heavy one.” He referred to the washer.

We repeated the process. Even though I had seen it successfully happen once, I still didn’t feel safe. Instead, I felt unsure and fearful. I had reluctantly trusted John that we could safely do this.

While I stepped backward down the stairs guiding the washer, I thought about the strangeness of being able to handle, on a stairway, something heavy and potentially dangerous. I thought about my unwillingness to trust someone else. I did not have control of what happened. I didn't even understand how it was going to work. And I recognized that this unwillingness to trust someone else influences my whole life, even my relationship with God.

Not trusting, I have heard myself saying to God, with doubt in my tone, *Okay, I'll do it the way You say*. Then, fearfully and timidly I begin. I can't see what He's doing but, as I take each step, what needs to happen, does.

"I am the good shepherd;  
I know my own and my own  
know me . . . My sheep hear  
my voice, and I know them,  
and they follow me."  
—John 10:14, 27

Most of my life I have needed to be in control of the people and situations around me in order to feel safe. Knowing my inner being, God has provided many trust-building experiences. And I am grateful. I am now able to let go of control a good share of the time.

However, slowly backing down our stairs, I recognized an area in which I still wasn't trusting God: When I can't see the outcome or understand

*Let Go, Laurie*

the process, I question whether or not the directions He gives me are really from Him.

As we finished getting the washer and dryer to the curb with a "Take Me!!! I'm Free!!!" sign on them, I determined to face the distrust which interfered in my relationship with God. After all, even though I couldn't see John beyond the machines in the stairwell, I knew his voice when he directed me, I trusted enough to do as he said, and I believed in his ability to choose wisely to meet our need and his strength to accomplish the task. I also knew God's voice and I wanted to trust His input to me.

With Bible and journal in hand, I began the painful process of facing myself.

*Lord, I want to look honestly at the difficulty I have in accurately hearing Your conversation with me.*

**Good!** I heard His approval whisper in my ear.

My Bible open to Isaiah 46, I read verses 8-11:

Remember this and consider, recall  
it to mind, you transgressors, re-  
member the former things of old;  
for I am God, and there is no other; I  
am God, and there is none like me,  
declaring the end from the begin-  
ning and from ancient times things

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not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose' . . . I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

I knew these words referred to big issues and situations, possibly spanning centuries. But I also knew that God had promised to "instruct" and teach" me. He said "**I will counsel you with my eye upon you**" (Psalms 32:8). Therefore, any word He spoke would be true and trustworthy.

My mind kept returning to these words, "**I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass . . .**"

I wrote in my journal: *You've always kept Your word to me. And yet . . . Father, I must distress you when I continually question whether or not I have correctly heard your direction to me.*

*What is my problem?* I heard my inner wail.

I thought back over the years since I'd first recognized God's voice speaking "behind my ear." At the beginning I'd worried about Satan giving me input that I would mistakenly think was God.

*But You've taken care of that,* I murmured to Him, a smile coming into my heart. And I turned to some of the verses that God had given me in assurance of His ability to protect our conversations.



*Let Go, Laurie*

Because you have made the Lord  
your refuge, the Most High your  
habitation, no evil shall befall you,  
no scourge come near your tent. For  
he will give his angels charge of you  
to guard you in all your ways  
(Psalms 91:9-11).

Because she cleaves to me in love,  
I will deliver her; I will protect her,  
because she knows my name  
(Psalms 91:14, paraphrased).

*Lord, I really do trust You to guard what I think,  
say, or write to You. Satan is no match for Your  
power!*

I reread the verses and wrote them in my  
journal. Then, with a sigh, I continued to be open  
to God's Holy Spirit and conviction.

**Laurie, you worry about yourself.**

*Myself?*

**Yes, you worry that you are putting your own  
words in my mouth. That's a lot of control and  
power, Laurie.**

*Oh . . .*

Suddenly, I thought of all the rules I had made  
to govern conversation with God, attempting to  
make sure they were real. One by one, I wrote  
them down:

1) Originally, I had thought of the  
principal that of course what God

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said must agree with scripture. But, I could question my understanding of scripture. So that one wasn't sure.

2) I began to think that if He used my name, that identified the words as His part of the conversation. But realized that was an artificial restriction.

**I like to use your name, Laurie.**

*I'm glad You do! And wow! . . . You initiated that comment, I didn't.*

3) Then I determined to relax and not insist on an answer—who had control was definitely an issue before I learned that.

4) When I complained that things didn't always work out the way I thought God said they would, He pointed out that my view was different than His and promised to never leave me with a wrong understanding. So, I decided I could relax and trust Him to correct my understanding. But, as I looked at my prayer experience, I realized that He'd been correcting me all along. So this wasn't new.

Continuing in conversation with God, I wrote: *Father, I can see that I've treated You much like I've treated other people in my life – with suspicion and distrust. I am sorry and would like to be different.*

In my journal I wrote: "Two things I know – I tend to doubt myself . . . which has spilled over into all my relationships . . . and I know God can

"I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it."  
– Isaiah 46:11

handle even the big things. So, this doubt I experience when He speaks to me really says I am not trusting Him to

be alert, present, and able to control in my life because . . . He couldn't possibly be personally interested in me."

*Oh God . . . It's not about what You can do, it's about what I think of myself!*

I had more thinking and writing to do. I opened my journal and wrote:

When I am trying to control the experience of talking with God (because I think if I'm in control I am safe), I begin to feel fear and doubt and to question and become unsure of His voice (because I doubt myself).

It goes deeper! I feel fearful when He makes a promise or gives

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direction because . . . human promises are often not kept.

I stopped, stunned by the next thought that came: *And, if You should not keep a promise . . . then what would happen to me?* I felt fear as I whispered this acknowledgement to Him.

If my God should fail to keep His promise . . . how could I continue to live? This is a core fear! And I had been meeting this fear with one of my “life commandments” or rules of living: It is safer, then, to avoid receiving a specific promise than to risk it not being fulfilled.

However, this fear comes from my experiences with other human beings—not from anything God has or hasn’t done.

I listed the things I know about God:

- He is always present
- Personally interested in me
- Trustworthy, not capricious
- Loving and kind
- Wanting to give me good gifts
- Desperate to save me
- Looking to bless me, not punish

As I finished the list, I realized the truth . . . and whispered it to Him: *I want above all things to stay in relationship with You, to talk to You, to listen*

*Let Go, Laurie*

*to You, to hear Your voice. I can and will trust You. I am willing for You to be in control. Make me able.*

**I will, Laurie.**

*Thank You for allowing this fear to surface.*



To win the victories He wanted in my life, God began to reach even into my dreams. He'd already used several other approaches to wipe out major character defects, with good success. In my experience, character defects are like the onion, coming with many layers. Or like a cancer that pops up again and again throughout a body.

## DREAM THERAPY

“Well, if you wanted to go to Hawaii bad enough, you'd go to work and earn the money to do it!”

“Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life.”  
— Proverbs 4:23

In my dream my sister Susan then turned her shoulder to me and went on talking to our cousin Claudia. I was silenced. The other shoe had dropped. I had wondered when someone would tell me to go to work. Misery heavy enough to tighten my chest woke me up. I rubbed

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my hand across my chest muscles. They were still tight. That part hadn't been just in the dream.

A voice in my head said that I had deserved my sister's shot about my going to work. The voice was familiar – it was mine. Three years had passed since I'd quit my job and lost its regular income. This was not the first and probably not the last time I'd sink into feeling guilty or pitying myself.

We were no longer able to do many things. Vacations and trips which took money fell into the "probably can't do" category. Occasionally, my mom would include us in her plans, paying for our costs. But I knew she found covering those trips stressful due to the added expense. And we felt like the proverbial "poor relatives." At gut level, I kept expecting to hear from my family that I should find a job.

Also, I felt guilt for being ill, my reason for not working. I sensed that my family didn't know what to do or think about my illness. It wasn't as tangible as cancer or a broken leg.

As I thought about the dream, I knew I had been filled with envy that Susan and Mother could and did plan a vacation together. Daddy was going, too. Knowing I didn't have the money or (as my "poor, itty-bitty self" suggested) they didn't want me along, they had planned and arranged for the trip without even mentioning it to me. In my dream, I had raged to my sister about

their lack of consideration for me. Waking up, I knew that *reality* existed only in the “poor me” thoughts.

*Oh, God, I prayed, I thought I was over that kind of thinking. I don't want to keep stubbing my toe on this.*

I turned over and wrapped myself around John's back, needing comfort. He continued to sleep peacefully.

My thoughts turned back to God. *I suspect You sent this dream for a reason*, I accused.

**Yes, Laurie.**

It had been too real to think otherwise. And it hit on some major emotional struggles in my life.

*You know I can't change the way I think . . . I am willing that You give me new thinking . . . Oh, I thought I'd already dealt with this—this shame I feel for not working!* My voice echoed through my head in anguish.

**Bring it to Me.**

*Okay.*

I knew He meant that we'd talk about it in my morning quiet time with Him. Warmth from John's back and comfort from God drifted through me. Soon I slept again.

In the morning I sat in my chair before our dining room window. Sun filtered through the Diana lace curtains. My Bible sat on my lap, ready to be opened. I'd filled in the date at the top of the page of my journal.

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*Father, please guide my reading. Make me hear and understand. Through Your Holy Spirit stop me when I need to listen.*

I picked up my Bible and opened it. It was Proverbs 4:20-27 again. I'd been reading these verses for over a week. They were filled with meaning for me. As I was already very familiar with them, I wondered how something new would get my attention.

**Go ahead and read, Laurie. I'm here.**

From past experience I knew God could and would stop me at the words He wanted me to hear. I began to read. I reached verse 26: **"Take heed to the path of your feet, then all your ways will be sure."** The Holy Spirit stopped me and I focused on this verse.

"Take heed . . ." I thought.

*So the dream was to help me "take heed."*

I wrote in my journal: *If my feet are being planted by You in the right places, I will be in right places . . . I will be safe . . . If my feet are planting themselves, I could step into the muck and mire of self-pity . . . Could I be attempting to do this myself?*

**Yes, Laurie. You put yourself in the driver's seat again. You can't keep yourself from falling into old thinking patterns. Please, let me drive!**

I knew I wanted Him to be in charge, to drive. "When had I taken over?" I wondered. I thought of the last several weeks and my longing to be able to go on vacation, to do something fun.



When I began to think of ways to make that happen—talk my mom into taking us, or be well enough to find a job that would fund it—discontent began to rule in my life, crowding God out.

Imperceptibly, I had begun to resent the path or place God had given me. I wanted a “way” that would give me those things I desired. And resentment, anger, and envy had crept into my heart.

Convicted, I bowed my head. *Lord, forgive me.*

**I have, child.**

*Please, I do want you in charge of my life. I want to be doing Your will for me.* I knew my surrender was accepted.

A song filled my heart—“There is joy, joy . . .” —my own version of an old gospel hymn. Suddenly, the original words burst forth.

“There is *power*,  
*power*, wonder  
working power in  
the blood of the  
Lamb . . .” I  
stopped in

“ . . . but he was wounded for  
our transgressions, he was  
bruised for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastise-  
ment that made us whole.”  
—Isaiah 53:5

amazement. I hadn’t sung that song correctly in years.

I realized that God had put these words in my mouth because, to answer my morning’s prayer, Jesus’ blood is required. He died to cleanse me

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from my sin. Envyng others' blessings, clinging to my wounded heart and sense of being excluded, and placing too much value on what others think definitely qualified as sin.

**Would you be free of your burden of sin?**

More words from the song—I knew they were God's—flowed into my conscious mind.

*Yes, dear Lord, yes.*

**Would you o'er evil a victory win?**

*Again, yes!*

Then I thought I heard God singing with me.

*There's wonderful power in the blood. There's power, power, wonder working power, in the blood of the Lamb! There is power, power, wonder working power, in the precious blood of the Lamb!*

*Thank you for meeting me even  
in my dreams to free me from  
feeling sorry for myself.*



## CHAPTER 13

# YOU CAN'T KEEP ME FROM LOVING YOU!

“But God shows his love for us  
in that while we were yet sinners  
Christ died for us.”

—Romans 5:8

*NOT EVEN WHEN I'M  
REALLY BAD?*

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*You Can't Keep Me From Loving You!*

**I**ncidents from my past haunt me each time I look at my selfishness, my desire to have the biggest and best for myself.

Philippians 2:5-6 describes Jesus and His expectation for us this way: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." I've wondered, "How did Jesus do that?"

### **THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST**

As a little girl, I hated the bedtime story that told of the child who had to have the very best and biggest. Finally, tired of his (or her) behavior, his mother decided to teach him a lesson. She did so by making sure that whatever biggest and best piece he might choose had something terribly – but invisible – wrong with it. And when he picked the biggest and best for himself, he found that it was awful.

In the story, *he* learned that he shouldn't always take the best for himself. *I* learned that it

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wasn't okay with other people for me to want the best. I hid my desire, hoping no one would find out about me. But I continued to want the best, the biggest, for myself. I struggled with how to keep it and still look good.

"Breakfast is ready. Come and get yours," I called.

I'd dished up our plates and now waited for my husband to come and pick one. I knew which one I wanted. There's always something about one piece of toast that's better or this banana

"... and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you.'"  
—Hebrews 13:5

doesn't have any bruises or it is bigger. As I waited, I hoped that he would pick the one I didn't want.

And because his heart is genuinely interested in benefiting me, if he can identify the lesser one he'll take it. But I can't just hand it to him—that would be selfish. And so I sit in the stew of my conflict—will I graciously give him the best? Only if I have to.

My sister, after many years of ignoring God and even doubting His existence, came to believe

*You Can't Keep Me From Loving You!*

in Him with a simple faith. Rather than rejoicing, I was miserable.

*God, I am in such pain. I'm jealous. I have served You faithfully all my life. Why haven't You given me the faith You've just given Susan.*

I began counting the many ways in which she had ignored God. She'd quit going to church. She had said she wasn't sure she believed in Him . . . Now, since she'd read her Bible, she suddenly had this miraculous faith!

*And You give her what she asks for. Why don't You do it for me? I want that kind of relationship with You!*

“. . . for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.”  
— Philippians 4:11

“I am so excited,” Donna beamed. “My best friend will be here tomorrow.”

“That's great!” I responded, and thought—  
“What about me. I want to be your best friend.”

“What about this spot?” John asked.

Inside I agonized, wanting the very best spot, afraid if I didn't take this one, someone else would get it . . . but still, there might be a better place.

“Drive clear through the camp ground,” I told him. “There might be a better campsite.”

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John started to go on. "Wait," I said. "I'll put a chair there so if we want to come back, we can still have it."

"But many that are first  
will be last, and the last  
first."  
—Matthew 19:30

My Bible lay open to Matthew 19. I had just read Jesus' comment to His disciples about how difficult it was for a rich man to enter heaven.

Jesus began explaining, but Peter wasn't listening. He hadn't gotten any further than Jesus' promise to the young man, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (verse 21).

Peter, anxiously, I think, said, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?" (verse 27). Peter wanted the biggest and the best.

I knew Jesus looked at Peter compassionately. I marveled that He didn't scold him for being selfish. Instead He responded to Peter's need. "Truly, I say to you, in the new world . . . you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones" (verse 28).

*Lord Jesus . . . I approached Him tentatively. I am aware of the greed and jealousy in my heart.*

**Laurie, you are mine.**



*You Can't Keep Me From Loving You!*

Tears started. I was finally being honest with God about the struggle with selfishness I experienced daily. He wasn't scolding me. Instead, just as He did for Peter 2,000 years ago, He went straight to my real issue.

**Laurie, you are mine. You can't keep me from loving you. I know who you are and I love you.**

*Even though I want the best and biggest for myself?*

**Yes.** He gave me a moment to think. **Would you like me to change that for you?**

*Oh please do! Make me more like You.*

The following summer we went on another camping trip.

"Do you want to drive on around and see if we can find a nicer spot?" John asked.

"I like this one," I replied. Inside I felt wonder and awe for the joy of knowing that I truly did not need to look and be sure that we had not missed the very best campsite.

*You're doing it, God! Thank you.*

**With Me all things are possible!**

*God, You loved me even  
when I wanted the best for myself!  
Thank you!*



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At times a sense of restlessness takes over in me. I feel discontented. Something seems to be missing. In the old days, I'd find myself picking a fight with John in order to initiate contact and closeness. After all, asking forgiveness and being loved and comforted did provide attention and a sense of connection. Eventually, I learned that I could get that attention by asking for it. Even so, it is difficult to find and take time for each other.

## MAYBE TOMORROW

"Not gone on vacation yet?" One of John's co-workers joked.

"Us? Not us!" I said into the phone, bitterness edging my voice. "This summer has been too busy for John and me to get away." I wanted sympathy. Gaining control of my tone, I finished the conversation and sighed as I hung up.

Discontent and restlessness eat away at my happiness. I long for what I don't have. This time I wanted a whole week of vacation—one in which John and I played and did things for ourselves. And we *had* reserved one week for some "us" time during which I hoped to connect with John. Work had taken so much of his time for months. And now it was taking the promised vacation.

I had pictured a week on the Oregon coast . . . walking on the beach, eating in unique restaurants, sifting through the specialty shops tucked into every nook and cranny of our favorite beach

town's main street. We would watch people, read a book, sleep in. We would be together.

My husband teaches at a high school where he also administers the school's network of computers, a year-round job. By Thursday evening before our departure, problems loomed. The school's new server (a powerful machine through which all the 120 computer work-stations of the school operated) had balked at installation.

"When do you think we'll go?" I had asked for reassurance.

"Well, if we got away by Sunday or Monday, we'd still have time for a short visit to the coast." He'd looked glum.

Monday and Tuesday had passed when I asked again. "When do you think we'll go?"

"Maybe tomorrow," he said.

It was soon obvious – we weren't going to the beach. But John still talked of getting away, for at least a short break.

Right after my bitter-toned phone conversation, John came home with a smile. "It's working! We're going tomorrow."

Tomorrow! *One day of the week left with a weekend tacked on. That doesn't count, does it?* I muttered to God. *This isn't fair!*

"Where?" I asked aloud. "Anything we had planned is too far."

"Let's go to Wallowa Lake!"

“Really?” Hope surged. I had a short dream of a honeymoon type weekend—cute resort room, beautiful blue lake, Alps-style mountains rising into a blue sky. Then I realized that this was August and Wallowa Lake was just plain booked even a year ahead for this month.

I hesitated.

**Go ahead. I’ll be there.**

My first reaction was surprise as I hadn’t mentioned the proposed vacation to God. I didn’t want Him telling me we shouldn’t use our time and money that way. It took me a moment to respond. *Thank you!* I acknowledged His encouragement.

And I added to myself. “After enjoying the day, we can come back home if needed.”

August’s blue sky stretched before us as we began the two-and-a-half-hour drive. I glanced out the back window and noticed the storage container of basic camping gear tucked in its place in the pickup truck bed.

May he grant you your  
heart’s desire,  
and fulfill  
all your plans!  
—Psalm 20:4

“It seems strange not to have the rest of our camping stuff with us,” I mused aloud.

John smiled. “We’re really on vacation! It will be a change to stay in a motel.”

Uneasiness gnawed at me, but I nodded in agreement. Maybe we'd find a motel room. As we got close to the lake, congestion mounted. People and cars crowded everywhere.

"Wow, look at this traffic!" John exclaimed when we drove into Joseph, Oregon. "Well, let's see about getting a room."

We began checking out motels.

"They've got a single for tonight only," he reported on the first one.

"Nothing," he said when he returned to the car at the next motel. "They've been booked for this weekend for months. They said everyone in town was booked."

"Well, let's go on to the lake," I encouraged. "Maybe we'll get a miracle and exactly the right room will be available."

And I thought, *God, you encouraged us to go ahead. Do You have a miracle waiting?*

As we drove around the lake, each resort sported a "No Vacancy" sign.

"We do have the tent," I said hesitantly.

"Do you want to check the campground?" John asked. He pulled the truck into a line of vehicles waiting to enter the state park.

"I'm going to the restroom while we wait." He got out and I slid into the driver's seat.

As I watched John walk across the lawn, I prayed, *God, give us some direction. You encouraged me to agree to come. Should we try to stay here? And*

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*what will we do for bedding?* We had the basic camping gear, but not the quilts, pans, and food items.

I waited quietly for His answer while I watched the campers ahead of me in line slowly checking into the campground. A long line of vehicles had already filled in behind us.

**Laurie, go to the Lostine River canyon. There we can be together.**

*To camp?*

**Yes. You can get sleeping bags for what it would have cost you to stay two nights here.**

*You want us to buy sleeping bags?* I heard the incredulous tone in my voice.

**Yes, Laurie.**

I sat stunned. God was again encouraging an action I had assumed He'd disapprove—spending money for something fun. I watched for John and wondered how I'd bring up the idea. I felt shy telling him about my conversation with God.

“Do you really want to try to stay here?” I asked when he opened the truck door.

John looked at me. “What are you thinking? And no, I'm not set on here.” He climbed in and I turned the truck around and headed out and away from the lake.

“Let's see if we could find a spot on the Lostine River.”

*You Can't Keep Me From Loving You!*

"What would we do for bedding? That's higher and colder."

"What do you think of buying sleeping bags?" I asked. "I've been praying . . . and it wouldn't cost any more than a motel."

He got excited. "I like that! Then I wouldn't have to load and unload that pile of quilts each time we go camping."

Two days later I sat with my feet on the picnic table bench. I'd been writing in my journal and talking with God—something I wouldn't have taken time for in the people-crowded environment around Wallowa Lake.

Now I turned to John and shared what I'd discovered. "You know . . . I think this is a watershed weekend."

"Watershed?"

"Yep." I nodded. I knew he wasn't asking me to explain the concept of a mountainous area funneling water to various rivers.

"This weekend is totally different from what we had planned for our vacation or even the short weekend. Instead of busily trying to see and do everything, we've talked to each other. We've sat quietly by a stream, slept a lot, eaten simply, and walked up two mountain trails. And we've discovered that we like walking up mountains."

I stopped to let him take it in. "God planned a restful weekend for us to simply be with Him and each other, and we liked it. I feel content . . . And

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He's given us new direction: We're both agreed to work on fitness so that we can continue climbing mountains."

"You're right." He nodded. "This is a watershed weekend . . . Pun intended." He gazed at the swiftly descending stream at our feet.

He went back to his book and I to my conversation with God.

I knew that if we'd followed our original plan, our old habits would have left us longing for something. We'd have spent money on a round of eating in restaurants, on books to entertain ourselves, and then struggled with finding a decent video to watch. We would have come out of the experience tired, discontented, and unsatisfied. And we would have worried about the money we had spent.

God had provided a better way. I turned back to the Bible verses He'd given me for today.

"Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward" (Isaiah 50:4-5).

*Thank you for opening my ears, making me hear, and giving me ability to obey.*

**You are welcome. I like this time together, too.**

I knew He smiled. And so did I.



*You Can't Keep Me From Loving You!*

*The peace and simplicity of this weekend  
was awesome. Wow! Being close  
to John and to You  
met my need.*



*Living Loved*

## CHAPTER 14

# COME, BABY, ABIDE IN ME

“Abide in me . . . He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

—John 15:4-5

*SURELY I CAN DO SOMETHING  
MYSELF!*

*Living Loved*

*Come, Baby, Abide in me*

**A**s a child I needed someone to share my feelings with. I needed to be able to run to someone I trusted with my hurts and fears. Someone who would say, “Tell me about it,” and open their arms, tucking me onto their lap where I could safely share my sorrow and cry . . . my joy and laugh.

I don’t remember doing that. Surely I must have as a small child. But if I did, I didn’t retain the ability to do so. What I do remember is being lonely, by myself, inside myself.

## LOVE’S INTENSITY

Many years ago shortly after divorce from my first husband, I remember trying to prepare Michael for a visit with his father. Divorced less than a year, I was determined that Michael not lose relationship with his Dad. I wondered—how do you tell a child that you love him and expect him to believe it while you send him off, even when it is to his father?

My five-year-old son sat in the front seat beside me.

“Michael, it’s important that you spend time with your dad . . .”

“I don’t want to talk about it.” He emphasized each word with a bounce of his head against the seat.

“Okay.” I sighed.

I glanced over at him. My heart melted in pain and love. He still stared straight ahead, bouncing his head slightly. I sighed again. Emotions scared him, just as they did me.

“I’ll have to be careful,” I thought. I knew he felt the hurt of our family’s breaking up. My explanations seemed to increase his pain. The whole thing *didn’t* make sense. It was too big, heavy, and scary for a 33-year-old woman. What would it do to a four-year-old?

At the same time that I made the conscious decision to be careful what I chose to explain to Michael, unconsciously I squelched emotional expression of my love for him. I feared he would say, “I don’t want to hear it.” As I had been practicing emotional numbness for years, it was easy to do.

I chose to live in the physical world rather than the emotional one. At times my love would push and scream to be recognized and expressed. I simply controlled it more tightly.

*Come, Baby, Abide in me*

Years later when Alex, Michael's son was born, I lived within a few blocks and willingly agreed to take care of him while his parents went to work. Each evening I held him close, talked to him, sang to him, told him I loved him – a baby is safe.

As he got bigger, we played together. We counted matchbox cars and lined them up in parking lots on my lap. We talked to each other on play telephones. We conversed with Ralph, the puppet dog. Eventually, we built many stories with the Lego's. And I found myself feeling the same intense love I felt for his father. Out of long habit I tried to squelch it. Love's intensity had become scary to me.

"As the Father has  
loved me, so have  
I loved you."  
—John 15:9

"Grandma Lego . . ."

I looked at Alex as he sat securely tucked into his seat belt between Boppa and me. "I'm your favorite person, aren't I?" On his face, a shining, smug smile played.

Caught! I wasn't able to say, "Yes, Alex, I love you as big as the sky and as wide as the ocean." Instead, I floundered.

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“I mean,” he said, “except for God.” He paused and looked at John. “And Boppa,” he added.

I don’t remember what I said then. But I carried away with me a sense that, because of my tightly clutched emotions, I had failed to affirm this child whom I dearly loved. I wondered how love could be so intense and still stay tightly closed in my heart.

Inside me, fear said that strong love-feelings are not safe. I didn’t like to feel fear, and pushed it, and my emotional response to love, away. But God didn’t leave me imprisoned in this misery. He wove together seemingly unrelated events to

“For God so loved the world,  
that he gave his only begotten  
Son that whosoever believeth  
in him should not perish, but  
have everlasting life.”  
—John 3:16 KJV

give healing. He demonstrated Himself as a loving, expressive Parent.

First, He gave me Isaiah 66. I spent weeks going back to this chapter

during my morning worship time. I was fascinated with these verses: “Like babies you will be nursed and held in my arms and bounced on my knees. I will comfort you as a mother comforts her child” (Isaiah 66:12, 13 NCV). Each time I read them, I saw myself as the baby on God’s knee. He was playing with me, talking to me, singing to me, comforting me when I hurt.



Then, not long ago, my attention was directed, by a speaker in our women's group, to John 3 and Nicodemus' story. As she read Jesus' words, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God," (verse 3), I thought of their beauty. To me being born again has always been a symbol of God's power to change my life when I willingly surrender myself to Him.

"You must go through God's womb to be born again." Our speaker was fervently illustrating the significance she found in these verses.

I sat stunned. She had just changed being "born again" from a symbol to a reality for me. As I accepted Jesus as my Savior, I *had* gone through God's womb and am His child, cradled in His arms, bounced on His knee, comforted. He has demonstrated His love for me. He is in the process of nurturing and growing me. He is giving me ability to trust Him. I am His child and He loves me!

On the way home from the seminar, my mind whirled with the meaning in all this.

Suddenly, I heard Him whisper in my ear. **Laurie, you are my birth child. I created you. I love you intensely. I love you more than you love Michael or Alex. Don't be afraid of your love. Your love is as it should be. Enjoy!**

He had just fitted the last piece of the puzzle together for me. He gifted me with freedom to

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feel my love and to tell my love. *Thank you, I whispered back. In Your strength I will.*

As I continued my drive home, pictures played themselves across my mind's eye: Alex, on my lap, tucked close under the comforter. Alex teaching me his latest song from school. Me standing in the aisle so he'd be sure to see me when he performed in the Christmas program. Alex camping out with Boppa and me. Joy in his presence writing itself across my face. All along I had been demonstrating to him that I loved him.

Now I was free to enjoy that love. Pulling into our driveway, I felt *love's intensity* surging up . . . and I allowed it to be there.

Sitting at the table in the next day's sunlight, I wrote on a postcard: "Dear Alex, I miss you a lot. I love you as big as the sky and as wide as the ocean."

*Oh, Lord, thank you for giving me  
the courage to love.*



Somewhere along the way in my childhood I came to believe that my ideas would be judged wrong. Rather than risk negative responses, I chose to keep my ideas and opinions to myself. That habit carried over to my relationship with God. To begin with, I tried to hide my underlying thoughts or fears from Him because I was afraid that He'd find me unacceptable. Now, it seems incredible that when I first talked to Him, I'd only bring out "company" thoughts – those I had screened to be acceptable.

## OUT OF CONTEXT

I glanced out the window. Even through the darkness I could see trees whipping in the wind. The glass rattled in its frame. I drew one afghan close about my knees and wrapped the other around my shoulders. It was 4:15 a.m.

I was up early in the morning, taking advantage of the quiet house for Bible study and writing. Now I looked at the Bible in my hands. I wondered what I would read today. I was about to do something I don't admit to anyone—continue my guided tour of the Bible with God as the Tour Director. I simply open the Bible expecting Him to make sure I'm at the right place for today.

Bowing my head, I prayed: *I am glad to be up with You this morning, Lord. Please open my Bible to where You plan for me to read. Open my heart to Your Holy Spirit that I may hear Your voice guiding me.*

Opening my eyes and my Bible, I found myself looking at Job.

"Job again," I thought, a mixture of fear and joy filling me.

For me, Job represented severe trials and suffering. For as long as I can remember I have feared that some awful disease, accident, or even death would leap out at me from its pages. It had

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a “boogyman” or “monster under the bed” effect on me. But over the last several months I had been facing these fears under God’s guidance and becoming much less fearful.

As I quickly skipped over the fear and clung to the joy, I assured myself, “at least I’m no longer afraid to find myself in Job.”

*Thank you, Lord, that I can be glad to see the book of Job.*

I picked up my pen and wrote Job 13-14 underneath the day’s date at the top of my journal page. My eyes dropped down through the Bible verses.

“Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with thee, and thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass, look

“Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.”  
—Psalms 51:6

away from him, and desist, that he may enjoy, like a hireling, his day” (Job 14:5-6).

I stopped to consider what was happening here, I looked back at the context, and then forward. I heard the passion in Job’s voice.

“Job is picking a fight with God,” I thought. And I recognized the need underlying Job’s words. It had a familiar ring—just like when I have picked a fight with John in order to have a

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few moments of emotional contact with him. “H-m-m-m . . .” my thoughts trailed off with a question.

**Not these verses, Laurie.** I knew God was urging me on.

*Okay.* I read on down the page, stopping again.

“ . . . that thou wouldest appoint me *a set time* and remember me!” (verse 13, emphasis mine). Fear began to quiver deep in my soul. Here it was again—the dread of facing death. These words were in the context of Job’s plea for God to get on with it and give him rest in death.

*Is this it, Lord?* I asked for reassurance that God was stopping me here, not my fear.

**Yes, Laurie.**

*Surely, You aren’t telling me I’m dying?* I decided I had to be honest with Him about what fear was in my heart.

As I faced the fact that once again I was looking at “death” verses, I searched my soul for my confidence in God’s loving care and trust in His will for me. Finally, I remembered to trust Him with my life.

Then, I heard His whisper, **Take it out of context, Laurie.**

*Oh . . . okay.* I looked again.

The words “a set time” were significant to me in the context of my own recent thinking. I be-

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lieve with all my heart that Jesus is coming soon. But as I think of that event, I wonder: *When, Lord?*

I catch myself doing that and then I repeat the information I've known from childhood – no man knows the day nor the hour when the Son of Man will come (based on Matthew 25:13). I repeat it because I want to be sure that God knows that I've heard His word on this and that I'm not stepping over the line into presumption. (I have to laugh at the mental gymnastics I go through in my conversations with God.)

I paused, reaching for honesty. *I think part of what I need to acknowledge is that I have been bugging You about the when of Your coming. Do You want me to stop thinking about the when?*

**No, Laurie.**

His answer startled me. *You want me to think of it?* I heard the astonishment echoing in my head.

**Yes, Laurie.**

I had been feeling guilty for trespassing on forbidden territory and now He was saying it was okay.

*Then, a lot of us must be thinking of the when,* I mused on paper.

**It's time, Laurie, to think of My soon coming!**

I heard the joy in His voice. And the joy began dawning in me. I wrote – *It's okay to think about the "soon-ness" and to expect, hope, and wonder! Wow!*

Thoughts of Job flooded back into my mind with his strong words: "For I know that my Re-

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deemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25-27).

I heard the triumph and joy in those words—"my eyes shall behold."

*Soon, You'll be calling Job to wake up, I whispered in awe.*

A song came into my mouth—"He's coming! He's coming! I know He's coming, I know my Lord is coming to get me soon!"

God's "out of context" fit the context of my thinking. Again and again He shows me that He knows my deepest thoughts. I am glad I am opening them to Him, trusting Him to respect my thoughts and feelings!

*Please continue to teach me to be honest  
with You and with myself. And thank you for loving me  
even when I was secretive.*



Because I have so long expected people to become disgusted with me and then reject me when I haven't done things the way I think they want them, trusting God to continue loving me no matter how I behave is a new experience. My old habits of keeping a tight check on myself are strong.

## **YES, LORD, I'LL TAKE CARE OF IT**

Hello!" Mom's voice came through the phone lines bright and clear.

"You're feeling better!" I exclaimed.

"Well, yes," she said. "I didn't wake up with a headache and I do feel better." For the last three days she had been miserable. "What are you doing today?" she asked.

"It's a regular Wednesday," I replied. "I've got two group meetings." I paused. My husband and I were planning on leaving the next day for a trip and I needed to pick up some underwear. Maybe she'd come with me to the store.

"I've got to go to Emporium." I paused. "Do you want to go with me?"

"Oh, is going to the Emporium a regular part of your Wednesday?" she quipped.

"No, Mom," I felt some impatience.

"I've got to go to Shopko to pick up some stuff for your Dad, but I don't want to look around Emporium."

"Okay," I responded. "I'll go by myself. Looks like we'll each be doing our own thing. Talk to you later."

I thought I'd stayed calm, but as I hung up, I commented to John, "Mom's too perky for me."

As I said the words, I felt irritation rise in me. She'd really gotten me with her cute comment



about a trip to the Emporium being a regular part of my Wednesdays.

**Laurie, listen to your words and tone of voice.**

I brushed His words away with—*That wasn't a nice comment about my mother. I'm sorry.* The irritation lingered. But the day was too busy to worry about it.

Later, John filled the jug with water while I put in drops of indoor plant fertilizer. Then I filled my jug. In companionable silence we scurried to get the plants watered. I checked the African violets. They were dry.

"I'll water the African violets," I said as I passed him. I returned to the kitchen where I switched to the fertilizer I use for them. As I went back into the living room, I saw John coming from the window where the violets sat.

"Did you just water the African violets?" I asked.

"Yes." He dumped the rest of his water into a nearby plant.

"I told you I would water them," my voice rose in irritation. "They take a different kind of fertilizer."

"I thought you told me to water them," he replied calmly. "Hopefully, I haven't killed them."

**Laurie, you both don't hear well.**

In response to His admonition, I crammed down the irritation.

It was getting late in the day and I still hadn't managed to get over to say good-bye to my parents.

"Let's go visit my folks," I said to John when we had finished supper. "We have time for a short visit don't we?"

I didn't call before we left because they were always home this time of the evening. As we pulled up to their house, my sister's car was there, but my parent's van was gone.

"Oh dear," I sighed. "Mom and Susan have gone somewhere. Well, we'll visit with Daddy."

"And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left."  
— Isaiah 30:21

Infirm, he seldom went anywhere.

Opening the door with our key, we went in. The house was quiet and dim. Daddy wasn't sitting in his chair. John and I looked through the house. No one.

"They've gone out to eat without us." My voice was flat.

"You think so?" John asked.

"Yep!" I felt left out. However, I knew that my feelings came from a longstanding sense of competition with my sister for attention.

*Lord, I don't want to be irritated about this. Help me please.* I went into the TV room and sat down.

"Let's just wait awhile for them to come home. I would like to say good-bye."

"OK," John replied.

Half an hour later, Susan, Daddy, and Mom came in the back door.

"You weren't home when I drove by," was Susan's greeting.

Her comment told me she thought I might have a reaction to being left out. I tried to tell myself that I didn't.

"Oh," I replied, "when did you drive by?"

"About 6 p.m."

"I was there. John got home a little after six so the truck was probably still gone." My voice was calm, but I could feel my irritation taking over.

"You didn't call," I added, squashing my feelings.

"No, I just figured you were out doing one of your things." She sat down on the couch and picked up a magazine.

At that point Mom came into the living room, looking all pleased and flustered. "Have you been here long?" she asked.

"About 30 minutes," I said.

"Oh, I'm glad you waited," she responded. "We went out to the airport to eat."

She and Susan talked about the circumstances that had kept them from including us in the fam-

ily outing. I'm willing to admit I felt real anger smoldering inside.

*Keep me calm, please. 'Let me not be ashamed.'* I prayed.

Susan got up, saying, "I've got to go home to bed." She looked at me and jiggled her fingers. "Bye favorite child." And she went out the door. I sat, stunned.

We visited for a few minutes; then, saying we needed to finish our packing, we left. Getting into the

"I am the vine, and  
you are the branches.  
He who abides in me, and  
I in him, he it is that  
bears much fruit,  
for apart from me  
you can do nothing."  
— John 15:5

truck, I slammed the door. Anger had control. "You won't believe what Susan's parting words were," I sputtered to John and told him.

"That seems strange," he commented.

After a few blocks, I whined, "I wish I could just feel okay inside. I don't want to be irritated and angry. But I can't make myself feel differently."

*Oh, God, I prayed, give me right feelings. I'm so tired of feeling this way.*

I thought about the day. Overall it had been good. We'd had time for worship this morning. I'd had my private prayer time. John and I were both beginning to have a sense of holiday. A family crisis was taking us to California, but the sur-

rounding trip would be joyful for us. Still, all day long, pockets of irritation had kept appearing. I'd struggled to maintain cheerfulness, but could see that I was wearing down.

**Laurie, you've been carrying the burden on your own.**

*I thought I was listening to You, hearing that I should not allow the negative thoughts and feelings. I've been fighting them all day, Lord.*

**I know. You've been fighting them in your own strength. Each time I approached you to help, you said, "Okay, Lord," squelched your feelings, and took charge.**

*Oh, Lord, you're right. Again I reviewed my day. Sure enough I had received prompting from Him. And sure*

*enough, I had immediately taken on the job of making myself have better thoughts.*

**Laurie, I will guide you continually** (based on Isaiah 58:11).

*I could have simply brought each situation to you and trusted you to give me right feelings. I forgot. I'm sorry.*

As I examined my heart, I knew I hadn't just forgotten. I'd gotten cocky. For the last several days I had been practicing listening to God's voice as He directed my day. The first two days

"Unto thee, O LORD, do I lift  
up my soul.  
O my God, I trust in thee:  
let me not be ashamed."  
—Psalm 25:1, KJV

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had been almost euphoric as I rested in God's care. I'd felt elated and excited to understand that I could truly ask Him to give me right words and right thinking and find Him doing so.

However, today, my old habit of tension and worry had slipped back into place. There had been opportunity throughout the day to trust God's control or to become uptight and irritable. I had turned my attention away from God to getting ready to go.

**You will hear my voice behind you . . .** (based on Isaiah 30:21). His promise of continuing guidance rang comfortingly in my ear. I knew He wouldn't give up on me. He loved me, period.

*I so easily slip into taking charge, Lord. However, I don't like being there. Please keep me listening and responding. I want to hear Your voice and follow Your direction.*

☺

## CHAPTER 15

# LAURIE, YOU ARE MY BELOVED

“I have called you by name, you are mine . . . Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you . . .”

Isaiah 43:1-4

“We love, because he first loved us.”

—1 John 4:19

***I FEEL CHERISHED!***

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**A**n easier, more assured relationship had developed between John and me. I trusted that he would love me. That meant I didn't have to hide myself from him. I knew he would see my behaviors and hear my words through his choice to love me. I was able to believe this because of God's consistent love.

Outwardly, nothing seemed to change in our personal lives. John went to work each day with enthusiasm to tackle whatever current computer crisis might be happening. I continued to write, take my work to critique, and allow God to continue His healing process in me.

Our daughter, Carrie, and her husband moved to San Diego, California. We made a trip to visit them and found that it was a wonderful place to vacation.

When Carrie discovered she was pregnant, she called. "Mom, I want you to be here. Be in the delivery room with us," she said. That invitation represented great privilege to me and I glowed inside. I would be there. We would be there.

Often, it is only in looking back that I begin to see how events shape my life and thoughts. For some reason I have few memories from my childhood and not many from adulthood. And I seem to remember the hurtful things rather than the lovely. God has shown me the value of being willing to look at the past. Now, as I become aware of current behaviors, I willingly search my history for events that give me clues to my present feelings and choices.

## **MAKE THAT GORGEOUS!**

Recently, I felt compelled to face the roots of my struggle with appearance. Journal in hand, I paused to explore the memories connected to my body and its weight.

Not all memories are bad. Some are good.

Halfway down the “bunny hill” I fell. “Oh, no!” I cried to myself. What will he think? I look like a klutz.” Immediately, I tried to untangle my skis. I glanced up to see if he were looking. He was. I got up quickly.

John came back up the hill to me, a smile on his face. “I wish I could fall as gracefully as you. You’re not hurt?”

I shook my head “no,” my face red. I couldn’t decide if I were blushing from embarrassment over the fall or John’s compliment. I had never viewed myself as graceful. I looked at him in wonderment. “He thinks I’m graceful!” I told myself.

We continued on down the “bunny hill” together. On the way back up for another practice ski run, I managed to grab the tow-rope and stay upright as we were pulled along to the top.

We had met when I was 37 and he 41. Within a few months, we both knew we would marry. Some of the details of our courtship are burned into my memory. The “bunny hill” is one of those details. Precious detail to someone who had always felt awkward, unlovely, and not acceptable.

Shortly after we married, I panicked. I had been through one marriage—one that I had expected to last for eternity. Now I was married again, supposedly trusting myself to my husband. However, I didn’t trust. And I wanted to quickly get past the disappointment, the abandonment. So I ate. Many times I stopped at the bakery to buy six cookies and six doughnuts and drove around the corner to cram them down before anyone saw me. I ate peanut butter and raisin sandwiches late at night. I ate to keep up with my tall husband and even taller children. I gained 67 pounds. Surely, that would be enough to send him running.

He continued to look at me with love. “I really appreciate you,” he’d say.

“Why?” I’d respond, anger tightly held behind my question. “How could he?” I’d think. “I’m fat and ugly.” Then I’d wait for his response, sure that at some point he’d not be able to answer.

“This time because you fit so well in my arms.” And he’d cuddle me close.

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"I'm really overweight," I'd comment trying the direct, frontal attack.

"I know you'd like to be slimmer," he'd say.

"How do you feel about my weight?" I'd get even more direct.

"Well, I know you'll feel better when you've lost some weight." A smile . . . "I want you around for a long time." Then he'd come close to pat my hip. "Feels good to me," he'd add.

I have never managed to trap him into an admission of disgust for my weight or appearance.

Simple words can inflict so much pain. Some stay seared in our memories. Walking home from the library when I was about eleven, some teenage boys drove by in a car and pointed at me. "Wow! Look at those big calves!" And they laughed as they went on down the street. I went home to ask and found that "calves" refer to a part of the leg.

When looking at old pictures with my mother, I heard more than once, "You had nice, shapely legs when you were little." The implication I heard was "but now you don't." I don't know when I began looking at little girls' legs, trying to decide if they'd grow up with pretty ones. I de-

cided that if they were stick-thin, they would have a chance.

Returning from a visit to my grandmother, during which puberty struck, my cousin met me with "Oh, Laurie! You used to be so cute! I wanted to introduce you to some kids I just met. And now you're fat!" I knew I was no longer acceptable.

I thought about my first husband. After we separated, I searched and found an apartment as far away from where we'd lived as I could get. It was only after I'd moved in that I discovered I had to drive right by the building he started his police shift from. Somehow, I'd always connected him to the police station downtown. He'd never shown me his workplace or taken me to any function connected to work.

As I tried to figure out how I could have been so ignorant and made such a mistake, my own mind explained it to me. My weight gain from birthing our baby embarrassed him. I told myself: "He wanted the prestige of a good-looking wife."

Now, I wrote in my journal about the hurt and rejection I felt connected to that incident. I knew that writing about it would help lift the burden. Then, I began writing about each of the memories and my feelings connected to them. When I finished, my thoughts returned to John who will-

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ingly and proudly takes me with him everywhere. The possibility that he truly found me attractive grabbed onto hope.

And then my thoughts went to God. "He finds me valuable and attractive, enough to persistently court me and to die for me," I marveled.

**I've drawn you with an everlasting love.**

*Thank you, Lord. I don't have to be slim to be loved. You love me and see me as beautiful.*

**Make that gorgeous!** He replied.

I blushed – And I wrote it in my journal.

So I began the process of coming to believe I am lovable just as I am. First, my mind believed. Five days later, God got to my heart.

I sat in the dim auditorium, on the back row. The seminar speakers turned to face each other.

"I have a question for you," he said. "I've never asked you about this before. It's hard."

"Okay," she replied. She didn't know what he was going to bring up.

They had been doing seminars for years and often one or the other saved an issue to discuss in front of the participants. By this method they demonstrated talking about potentially hurtful subjects in an honest and truthful manner. They also demonstrated getting through that discussion with their relationship intact, their intimacy deepened.

“What do you think about my belly?” he said.

Many times they had shared with seminar participants his need to have food immediately available and the anger he’d felt through the years when there was a delay or someone else controlled the when and what of his eating. We knew he carried emergency stores. There was no question that he was overweight.

We waited, breaths held. As he spoke, I felt akin to him. In fact, it was as if he spoke for me. She looked at him. Finally, she began the careful, skirting-of-the-issue I’d heard for years from John. She talked about his health and her desire to have many years with him.

“I know you love me,” he said. “What do you think about my belly?”

“You mean this?” she reached over and with her hand touched his rounded belly.

“Yes.”

“It doesn’t bother me,” she said.

All carefulness and tact were gone. She went straight to his issue. He believed her. We believed her. As they spoke, God had whispered in my ear, **Laurie, listen and believe.**

And I knew that God had taken a hand in answering my questions regarding John’s physical reception of me. The speaker’s words described so well my insecurity. Behind them were all my failed efforts toward losing weight and gaining fitness, my emotional reasons for gaining and

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hanging onto weight, my fear that deep down John really despised me.

As I listened, I heard it as if John were saying to me, "It doesn't bother me." And I became willing to believe. The sense of acceptance I had experienced on the "bunny hill" was real. Tears fell. Finally, I knew. With John I am safe. I am loved. I am permanent in his heart.

I saw in John's consistent, persistent, steadfast choice through the years to love me, a representation of God's love and thoughts toward me: "If you do not know, O fairest among women . . . Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful" (Song of Solomon 1:8, 15).

**Laurie, I will not forsake you.**

*With You, dear Lord I am safe. You won't leave me for someone more beautiful. Thank you for reaching into my heart with this truth.*

"I had the weirdest experience on the trip home," John said.

"Tell me about it."

I tucked the phone more securely against my ear to listen. We were many miles apart. I was in California waiting for a grandchild to be born. He had called to say that he'd arrived safely home.

"Out on the road driving, I'd think of something I wanted to tell you and turn to where you should have been sitting." He was quiet a minute.



*Lauri, You Are My Beloved*

“Or I’d reach over to pat your leg and you weren’t there.”

“I’ve missed you, too,” I told him

“I love you, Laurice Eileen,” he said.

Because of God’s intervention in my life, I was able to believe him. My heart filled with warmth, *knowing* I am loved.

*Thank you, Lord, for loving me,  
for finding me beautiful.*



Most of our marriage John and I have done things together. We don’t normally choose to be separated. This practice seemed positive to me until I realized that I feared being apart from him.

I know the dark side of what motivated me—I felt incomplete when he was gone. I felt lonely and miserable. For years, he was my security. In my previous marriage I had taken this to the extent of putting my husband in God’s position for adoration and worship. I saw that mistake and didn’t want to make it again. I chose to put God first. As I grew in relationship with God, I was able to give John freedom. And found freedom for my self.

## THE GOOD THINGS

“H-m-m-m,” I said out loud, as I wandered around the kitchen.

I wanted “something good.” In my family that usually means food. I pulled the “ice cream” out

of the fridge. It was Soy Delicious, chocolate flavored, and with only three grams of fat. Best of all, it was sweetened with a fruit sweetener, one my system could handle. I cut a banana into the bottom of the bowl and spooned the Soy Delicious on top. I'll add almonds, I thought happily. I use raw almonds with no added fat for roasting, so I knew I could consider them a health food.

John was gone for a weekend men's retreat. Normally, when he's gone I use my "deprivation" as an excuse to dive into some of life's pleasures that I've turned into addictions. This time I had chosen carefully what I would eat, read, and watch. I felt righteous about my choices.

Feeling a contented anticipation, I hummed as I carried the dessert bowl out to the living room. Curling up on the couch, I pulled the comforter over my lap and hit the play button on the VCR control. The film's title, *Anne of Green Gables*, scrolled across the screen.

Later that evening I headed for bed, my righteous feeling slipping a little. I shrugged the oppression off. It was still reasonably early. As I settled in bed, the light off, I hoped to drop right into sleep. But I couldn't.

"Look what you've done," my thoughts accused. "You've eaten a big dessert. And you watched several hours of a video. You were going to behave this weekend."

“Yes, but,” I argued back, “I chose good things.”

“Oh? What about the chocolate?”

I was silenced. Chocolate is one of my addictions. Sleep did eventually come.

When I had encouraged John to go to the men’s retreat, I’d done so with a positive attitude—much different than I’d ever faced his being gone before. I had chosen to have a retreat of my own, attempting to spend more quiet time with God.

I had identified two other goals for the weekend: to cheerfully do those things John normally did and to control my tendency to “reward” myself for being good (or comfort my deprivation) with “treats” from which I normally abstained. Along with going to bed at a reasonable hour (I pushed it a little – it was 11:30 p.m.), I had eaten foods acceptable to my health, watched a family movie, and read a spiritually uplifting book—Philip Yancey’s *I Was Just Wondering*.

The chapter titled, “The Problem Of Pleasure,” seemed related to my unease. While I was eating, reading, and watching a video, I enjoyed. But as soon as I stopped, I became uneasy with my behavior.

The next morning I got up to spend my time with God. I found promises in Isaiah 46 that encouraged me: “Hearken to me, [Laurie], I have

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made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save . . . I will accomplish all my purpose" (verses 3-10).

Looking up from my Bible, I gazed through the window—content to sit, enjoy being with God, and to think. My mind returned to yesterday and the "pleasure" I'd hoped to have. *You give us many good gifts, but I don't really know how to enjoy them*, I told God.

**I like to give good gifts. I made you with special ability to enjoy them.**

*Ability to enjoy? . . . Oh . . . Eyes. Ears. Taste. Smell. Touch. And feelings! . . . Okay, I have been making a mistake common to many Christians, I admitted.*

I began to write. *You've given me taste buds to enjoy my food. You've given me eyes that see, even in color, a mind that thinks and imagines, a body to use in activity. And I have abused these gifts by attaching guilt and a sense of sin to any pleasure that utilizes my senses. Wow!*

I sat stunned.

Picking up Yancey's book again, I reread: "We Christians have a choice. We can present ourselves as uptight bores who sacrificially forfeit half the fun of life by limiting our indulgence in sex, food, and other sensual pleasure. Or we can set about enjoying pleasure to the fullest, *which means enjoying it in the way the Creator intended . . . [with] moderation*" (p. 36, emphasis mine). As

Solomon states in Ecclesiastes – all is vanity when one uses God’s good gifts in excess.

I knew Yancey was not encouraging perversion or promiscuity. That isn’t his point or my issue. The point for me – as long as I equate enjoyment and pleasure with sin and evil, I will not be able to enjoy God’s gifts.

“. . . and I will accomplish  
all my purpose.”  
– Isaiah 46:10

In this arena, two things happen to me. First, I find myself caught in a cycle – abstinence broken with over-indulgence. Despair results. I clobber myself with my “sinfulness,” eventually think I’ve done enough penance and am surely accepted by God, and determine to abstain and be good. Until . . . some trigger event comes along and I think I deserve a “treat.” The treat only feels good while I’m indulging and then I’m back to despair. I’ve repeated this cycle again and again throughout my life.

Second, I try to control my use of the “treat.” If I find a dessert that is healthy. If I choose to read only those books that uplift. If I watch movies that do not use profane or rude words, that do not portray perverted sexuality, or glorify violence and destruction. Then, surely, I can enjoy the “treat.” But I can’t.

*Lord, I’m helpless, I prayed. You’ll have to teach me how to enjoy Your gifts, I whispered to God.*

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Again I stared out the window.

**I've already begun.**

Suddenly, I did notice the winter beauty of the three, giant sycamore trees in my neighbor's yard. Their branches reached far into the sky. Right before my eyes God's natural beauty beckoned me to appreciate, and I could in good conscience enjoy. This awareness of beauty in God's creation spoke promise to me – God will restore my ability to find pleasure in the use of all my senses – to enjoy the taste of something sweet, to find a story delightful, to feel delight in a gift of time, to simply be.

*I feel as if Your gifts to me  
have been wrapped and tied with a ribbon  
– a ribbon of freedom to be and do –  
accepted, appreciated, loved, wooed, and won.  
I look forward to running with You through  
a field of grass and flowers in heaven . . .  
chasing, tumbling, exulting in health,  
strength, and fellowship . . .  
beauty everywhere I look.*

☺

I have always loved the black and white picture that becomes different depending on whether I look at the black or the white. One way I see a vase. The other, I see profiles of a man and woman looking at each other.

Sometimes, in healing my heart, God does something as simple as encouraging me to look at an event with a slightly different focus.

## THE BETTER CHOICE

"I'm not going to talk long," John said. "I'm using the outside phone and snow is falling on me." It was the last day of the retreat.

"Let not your heart  
envy . . . but continue in  
the fear of the LORD  
all the day."  
—Proverbs 23:17

I pictured him leaning against the building with the phone to his ear. He was at the lodge where 21 years before we'd become engaged to marry. That weekend, too, had included snow—beautiful, crisp snow. I remember catching the large flakes on my hand and discovering they consisted of two, three, or maybe more snow flakes linked together. I pictured John in that kind of snowfall.

We were quiet a moment, listening to each other breathe. "It's snowing there?" What I really meant was: It's snowing, and you are there without me.

"Yes," he responded. "Yesterday, I watched it double and triple flake."

I braved the words. "And you're there without me!"

"I was thinking of that, too," he said. A moment longer we listened to our breathing, remembering ourselves in that setting together.

"Well, enjoy!" I encouraged.

We said good-bye. I sat with the cordless phone in my hand thinking of him so far away in the snow. Without me. Tears filled my eyes. My attitude about being home alone and taking care of John's weekend responsibilities had been good

"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."  
—Romans 12:2

to this point. Now I felt the bite of envy, the pangs of being cheated.

But, it was Sunday morning and not long before he would be back. I didn't want to lose the good attitude I'd experienced. So I went to God.

*Oh, God, I don't want to take this path. I chose to encourage John to go on this men's retreat. I'm glad he wanted to. Please give me right thinking.*

**Laurie, be happy for John's treat, including the snow.**

*Oh! So simple, Lord. I can choose to be happy! I sat quietly, as joy and delight for John's privilege washed over me.*

*What a satisfying exchange for envy! Thank you.*

Putting the phone back in its charger, I hummed a tune, thinking of the words—"You can have the joy bells ringing in your heart . . ."



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*Today, You showed me what a simple, little change  
in my choice of thinking can make!  
I can think of someone else's blessing with joy.  
And find myself with life-giving, positive,  
healing thoughts.*



I did go into the delivery room with Carrie and Johnathan. The baby came too rapidly, causing his heart rate to drop. Carrie and the baby were in crisis. The doctor and two more nurses rushed into the room. Within a few seconds from them being wheeled away for an emergency "C-section," Evan Xavier was born.

## HOME HUNGER

My daughter, Carrie, leaned against the wall at the head of her bed while I sat at the bottom. When she was little, the positions had been reversed. Now she was a married adult with a baby. She cradled six-day-old Evan as he contentedly nursed.

"How are *you* doing?" she asked.

I had just finished asking about and listening to how her night had gone.

"I know you miss Dad," Carrie continued.

Tears pushed at my eyes. I *was* lonesome for him. He had driven me from Washington State to San Diego, California, to be with Carrie for the

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birth of her first child. He lingered for a few days, hoping the baby would come and then drove home to return to work.

Yes, I was lonesome for him. And I missed my home environment. My own room and bed. My own office space and computer. The familiar routines of homemaking and working. The long spaces of quiet, good for thinking and writing. My friends. My mother and my sister.

However, I wouldn't have chosen to give up this special time with my daughter and son-in-law. Going through labor and delivery with them, holding and talking to newborn Evan, helping in their home – these experiences were all precious.

At the same time I hungered for home.

"Bottom-line – I'm doing well," I told Carrie. Still, tears burned my eyes and choked my throat. So I waited a minute before going on. "I do miss him."

She reached over and patted me. "Being out of your own space, trying to fit into someone else's isn't easy."

I never cease to wonder at the wisdom my daughter displays. She went right to the heart of my distress. Encouraged by her understanding, I decided to share with her what I'd learned in my early morning Bible study and prayer time.

"I was thinking and talking with God this morning about this very thing . . . I knew I was panicking . . . I finally figured out how much I

depend on having control, as I do in my own home, to feel secure.”

Carrie lifted Evan to her shoulder and gently patted his back.

“I want to be here.” I continued. “We both know that.” A small burp escaped from the baby.

While Carrie positioned Evan to continue nursing, I thought about the panic. I’d experienced it before.

Many of our family members live at a distance and we visit them two or three times a year. After a short time

“Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am.”  
John 17:24

of being out of my own home, tension builds in me and panic sets in. In the past I’ve chosen to cut visits short. In panic I’ve bolted, run away. Now I understood the reason. As a visitor, I needed to fit in with someone else’s habits, routines, house rules – with no space of my own.

*Lord, I prayed, bolting is one more way in which I hang onto control. I truly want You to be in charge. As You directed me, I’m staying here until John comes back to get me.*

I thought about the effort staying took. Slowly, a new understanding of Jesus’ gift to me filled my mind.

*Lord, You stayed on earth for the duration! No home or space of Your own. Fitting into someone else’s*

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*lifestyle. You didn't go home until You accomplished Your purpose. You must have hungered for home.*

**At times, Laurie, I ached to go home. But more than My being home, I wanted you to be there with me.**

*And I must do the same thing You did – go to the Father for comfort and strength.*

**It's the only way.**

“You want to take him and burp him?” Carrie asked, calling me back from my private conversation with God.

“Yes!” Joy flooded through me.

I sent a fleeting message to my Father. *No question – being here, caring for my daughter and her baby is definitely worth my discomfort and stress.*

I reached for Evan and held him against my shoulder. Happiness filled my heart as I gently stroked and patted his back. *I'll get through this fine!*

**Yes, Laurie, you will. When I stayed for the duration, I felt joy, too.**

**And soon I will have you home with Me!**

I heard the exultation in His voice.

*You keep surprising me, Lord. You share my experience. You know my heart and I'm coming to know Yours.*

☺

As a grandparent I find myself remembering when I held my own small baby. I remember the weariness and the

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joy. Back then I didn't have time to sit and think, letting God lead my thoughts.

## **IN THE CROOK OF GOD'S ARM**

At 5 AM Carrie brought the baby to me. "I just fed him. He's a little sleepy," she said.

As I gazed at Evan Xavier, two miniature fingers went into his tiny mouth. They had wiggled out of the tightly wrapped receiving blanket. I nestled him in the crook of my arm and looked at him with wonder.

Precious baby grandson!

Since his birth, I'd watched his mother and father holding their firstborn close, the awed expressions never leaving their faces.

"He's so beautiful," his mother crooned.

"You are wonderful," his father spoke into little ears.

Their fingers stroked his cheek. Hands soothed and rubbed his back. Breast feedings and diaper changes were done at the slightest suggestion of need. A slight discoloration on a garment, and Evan went into a new outfit.

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As I cradled Evan in my arms, Carrie smiled. I could tell she was enjoying the picture of *her* son in her mother's arms. She turned and went back to her bedroom. Evan opened his eyes and looked at me. His intent gaze stayed on my face. I couldn't look away. I knew this was a special time of bonding for him and me. Finally, his eyes began to close and he slept.

Realizing that Evan was going to continue sleeping, I carefully arranged the couch pillow beside me as a desk. I had been up since 4 AM to be sure to have time with God before Carrie brought the baby to me, but I wanted more time. I checked to make sure Evan wasn't disturbed and then picked up my journal.

Earlier, I had written to God, *Help me to understand and connect with You in whatever way You choose.*

Then I'd opened my Bible, letting Him show me the pages He wanted for this day – Isaiah 40:9 headed the page. As I read through the verses, He had stopped me at these words: "Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings."

Taking my journal I wrote – *in other words, make sure you can be heard.* Thinking about these words, I realized that I am a Christian, a part of Zion.

*I'd have to say something in order to be heard, Lord.* The thought was scary and exhilarating at the same time.

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**Yes, you would, Laurie.** I heard God's voice in my heart.

*But what would I say?*

**You are My child, Laurie.**

I glanced down at Evan still asleep in the crook of my left arm. A warm feeling of connection flooded through me.

*Oh, Lord, I am! I am Your child!*

**As Evan Xavier is the focus of his Mom and Dad . . . again God spoke to my heart . . . I look at you.**

*You give me complete attention! Your eyes are focusing on me as mine were on Evan!*

I rejoiced in God's love. A smile, intense with belonging, spread across my face.

I had to write in my journal: *I felt drawn into Your circle of love, Father, when You said, "You are My child, Laurie." As if I were held in the crook of Your arm. Seeing love for me in Your face, nothing outside that range of focus mattered.*

I stopped writing and sat wrapped in the receiving blankets of God's love—warmth and connection touching each inch of me. Then I heard His voice again.

**Tell them of your own experience with Me. Tell them—I hunger for close friendship with My children. Tell them to ". . . simply respond."**

*I will, Lord.*



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## **THE TODDLER**

**Here, little one,  
Try!**

*Hold me close.  
Don't let me go!*

**Listen child,  
I've held you next to My heart,  
Nestled in the crook of My arm since you were born.  
This place is always yours.  
But think.  
Please understand.  
There are things to try,  
Places to explore, a person to become.  
Go on, I'm here.  
I'm always here, close beside you.**

*These steps are scary.  
Are You still there?  
I need to know –  
Are You still there?*

**Yes, child, at your fingertips,  
At your heart's door.**

*It is getting easier to walk.  
Are you still there?*

**Always.**

*Watch me, Daddy,  
See what I can do!*

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## EPILOGUE

### RIGHT NOW

Simply responding to God—all the previous pages and stories of this book illustrate how this has looked in my life. I have been an infant in need of God’s parenting. My place was on His lap, cuddled against His chest or in the crook of His arm. He’s bounced me on His knee, looked me fully in the eyes, filled me with the knowledge that I am His and He is mine. Now I’m wondering how “responding” will look in the future.

A trip to San Diego to visit Carrie, Johnathan, and Evan gave me a glimpse. We found Evan, at 14 months, full of toddler energy. As I watched him play and interact with his parents and with John and me, I began to see more of my future with God.

I still laugh at memories of Evan’s “play.” Once he opened the cupboard door where his books and a few toys were stored. Pulling most of them out, he created a ramp and started to climb, using this unstable, makeshift ramp and the cupboard shelves to reach the top of the cupboard where the kitty sat watching him. Before he could

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be in danger, Carrie swooped him into her arms, saying “You want to see Kitty?” She tucked him on her hip and guided his hands in a gentle petting of the cat. Then she took one of the books from his pile and sat on the floor with him to “read” and listen (as it was a talking book).

Another time Evan used me as his ladder. He cuddled into my knees and attempted to boost himself up onto my lap. Pleased by the attention, I reached for him and hauled him up. He snuggled for a second and then continued toward his goal—the couch arm. Up he went and over the edge . . . to sprawl—except Grandpa was on the mattress serving as our bed for the visit and located at that end of the couch. Evan “flew” off the couch arm with Grandpa’s help, landing safely on Grandpa’s chest. He giggled, scooted down, and came around to me for another assisted climb and jump.

Another time, Evan found the couch cushions and exercised his developing muscles by pulling them off onto the floor. When he accomplished the task, he clapped his hands and said “Good job, Evan!” Probably only a fond parent or impressed grandparent could decipher his words, but it was obvious that he felt free to tackle the task and appreciate his accomplishment.

We went to the animal park where Evan walked, explored, and then slept in his stroller, always under the vigilant eyes of his parents.

*Epilogue*

Evan felt safe and free to play and explore in his environment. He walked, ran, climbed, and tumbled. He trusted that he could do so safely. If his interest turned to something that would hurt him, one of his parents gently took him away from the danger.

I know that some children are fearful, clinging to their parent, always looking to see if what they are doing is okay – approved by the parent. I recognize my old self in those children. For years my approach to life included looking to see if I was okay and approved.

I've spent the last five years as an infant cradled in God's arms. This time of infancy with God as my Parent has been a time of learning to trust His goodwill toward me – His plans for good and not for evil.

*Right now* it is time to step into being a toddler. I've learned that I am free to live and move about within my environment. I'm beginning to walk, run, climb, and tumble, trusting that God – my Parent – will indeed keep me safe. I am "living loved."

*Living Loved*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**L**aurice E. Shafer, author, teacher, and counselor, has used her writing skills through the years to engage her listeners' emotions in a subject, encouraging them to find and understand their own feelings and needs. Early in her life she recognized that "something" was missing. This drew her to helping others with their emotional traumas. She says that only as she began connecting to God on an emotional level did she find relief for her own wounds. Reading of others experiences and actively seeking God in His Word encouraged her to become open to His healing hand in her life. A hospice social worker for several years, she provided grief support to patients and their family members. For the last five years, with her husband John, she's organized and participated in seminars and groups that promote finding God's healing for life's traumas and hurts. She lives and writes in Southeast Washington State.

