

Parenting with Purpose

One Christian Single Mother's Story of Triumph in
Motherhood

By

Michele Morgan

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ISBN: 1-4033-0679-6

A Note from the Author

As I begin to write this book I was inspired by the love that I have for my children. I believed that I loved them more than life itself until I realized that life Himself loves them more than I. Not only will you be entertained as you read through the pages, but you will also glean from valuable lessons learned by one single parent family struggling for survival to get to first base and finally sliding into home plate.

For many of you this book will be proof positive that you can make it through a divorce situation. You do not need to know that you are not in it alone. You already know that. You need to know that there is hope, that your situation is not hopeless and you can have victory in the mist of your circumstance. I want you to understand that if one family can make it through, then so can you.

You will not find a formula on the following pages of how to, but what you will find are solid biblically based answers to questions that almost every parent will encounter during the lifetime of his or her child. For example, what does a parent do when their child (ren) comes to them with very real needs and there is no money to supply those needs? Or how can a parent be everywhere all the time to protect their children from dangers? Answers to these and other poignant questions await you as you read on. I have found that God has given us His Word and if we will follow what He says, He promises success every time. This is the only Way that I have used that works.

Although I know this to be true, that the Word of God has the answer to all easy and difficult questions, the hard part for me was to be quite long enough to hear what God was trying to tell me. Follow me on the next few pages and learn how I got the cotton out of my ears to hear God clearly in my situation and then rose above it to soar onto new heights.

These lessons of faith and love were imperative for me to learn if I was to survive and succeed. Since the beginning of my long climb up Faith Mountain I have learned that everyone who desires to succeed at fulfilling God's will for his or her life must also learn this lesson, regardless of their circumstance. Because God is not a God *of* circumstance but *is* God despite circumstance, anyone can not only learn to survive but can learn to be a success in a divorced situation because once you determine to make the climb, God will see to it that you finish. It is another demonstration of His love for the climber.

Whether you believe in God or not does not prove or disprove His existence. God Is. He says it this way, I AM. (Exodus 3:14) You will not be able to deny as you read this book that God has come and made His home with this family and can do the same with you and yours.

Why am I taking time to tell you my story? An even better question, why should you take time to read it? Because God's love and mercy is infinite, He will often demonstrate in one person's life His mighty hand of deliverance. Through that deliverance, humility comes and with humility a heart to see that others too have the same chance to rise above. As a single parent for over sixteen years with more than enough odds against me, God has proved over and over that He out weights all odds.

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Introduction

Putting Our Lives Back Together

Gen. 1:1

In the Beginning, GOD . . .

For the third time I gasped for air, finding it hard to breathe in the dark pit I found myself in. Trying to remember how I fell in, I gasped again, this time the air seemed thinner than before. The lack of oxygen was hindering my memory and I wasn't able to think clearly. How could I get out of this horrible place? Fear set in, as the thought of dying here was overwhelming.

At twenty-five years old, I had two preschool children and an automotive retail business, which my father had helped me acquire. Although the business helped me maintain an income, the debt from borrowing the money for it was huge.

In the middle of this I found myself a single parent. Never would I have thought that I would be divorced, stigmatized and ostracized. My parents had been married for over 20 years when a divorce finished their relationship and it altered my life as a teenager. I pledged that I never would find myself in the same situation. When my own marriage became rocky, I fought hard against the idea of divorce. I determined I would stay married at any cost. This decision proved to be costly. My determination or stubbornness affected my life and the lives of my children. After each traumatic event, which took place over a four year span, I began to question what was the right thing to do.

One miraculous morning, my husband awoke, packed his bags and left. My pride wanted to stop him but the wiser part of me said, "Let him go."

I let him go.

Now alone, I groped, trying to find my way and stumbling more than once. I was more hurt and bitter than I realized. Instead of being relieved, I began to feel sorry for myself and this influenced my actions and the decisions I made. The path I followed was not pleasant or smooth, it seemed there were rocks everywhere, and I tried to climb over them all. These rocks represented various sins that I continually committed.

For example, in trying to get ahead, I became dishonest in my business dealings and I reached out for love and affection in all of the wrong areas with all the wrong people. Each time I tried to climb, the fall became harder and harder. Little did I realize that I was setting myself up for the hardest fall of all.

I was raised in a Christian home, going to church and doing what was right. Rarely, though were principles taught as to what to do when you grow up and your circumstances overwhelm you. Studying my Bible was something I did regularly but I simply couldn't seem to put into action what I read. What would it take to rescue me from my self-pity and selfishness? Falling was getting harder and harder but there seemed to be no escape.

At a point of utter distress, I cried, "God show me your love in a way that I have never experienced before." I wanted to hunger for God, not for a man. In the evening at the end of a very long day, and after the children were in bed, I began to study the Bible in a way I never had before-- never needed to before. I desperately sought an answer to escape my misery.

Years earlier, a Sunday school teacher had said that every answer to any question could be found in the Bible. I took her at her word and began to dig. My consistent

digging began to uncover a hard object. The more I dug the bigger it got. It appeared to be another rock. But this Rock caused me to rise instead of fall, to have a desire to do right instead of doing something because I wanted to.

This Rock was restoring the love and innocence of my childhood. This Rock was causing a love to come into my heart so that I could love again. This Rock changed my focus from me to God. I was rediscovering Jesus, the Rock. Now with my sights in a different direction, my utmost concern was not myself, but my children. I vowed to God to raise them according to his Word and direction. I trusted him to take care of me. God had once again revealed to me His Son, Jesus, as the Rock of my Salvation.

I will never forget the evening I made that vow. Boldness had been stirring in me all day. I had been able to say no to people who had enticed me in wrong directions in the past. Nothing seemed to matter anymore except to do the right thing. I became more aware of my responsibility to my little girls. Their future rested in my hands because God had entrusted them to me. Was I going to let them down again because my focus had been on me-me-me instead of them? Did I not care enough about them to forego personal pleasures to ensure their well being?

At the end of the day I retreated to my office, closed the door, pleaded to God with tears of commitment, I pledged to God to put my energies into my children and their needs instead of my own wants. With his blessing, they would honor him in all they did. Standing there, shocked at the words I had just spoken, I knew they had come from deep within me with the help of someone else, because those words were bigger than I.

I was now on the right path, and I had a strange sensation that if I ever tried to veer off again that large loving arm would safely guide me back on track. I was

experiencing a love from my Heavenly Father in a depth that I had never felt before. Every day I read His love letter to me, the Bible, and every day I gained more understanding; not only who God was but also who I was in God. I began to talk to God again, asking Him what to do in every situation.

Nothing was too small for Him. I had “proven” to myself that my own compass was warped, and until I could regain confidence in it I had to follow God’s. Little did I realize that as I allowed myself to follow His Divine compass, it was replacing my own.

The morning after making this vow to God concerning my children, my perspective on things changed dramatically. God began to tell me what I needed to do to get back on track with His plan. I knew I needed to sell my business and move back to the town where my parents were. Before, I would have been too embarrassed to go back, ashamed that I had failed in my own marriage, yet I needed their help. I also knew that I desperately needed fellowship with other people who loved God.

My mother, a constant voice in my life at this time, had been strongly urging me to go with her to church with her. All she talked about was the Holy Spirit and how much I needed Him. In defiance, still proud in too many areas, I declared, “I have the Holy Spirit.” But because I so desperately needed fellowship, I relented one Sunday morning, not realizing, but hoping, that it would change my life and my girls’ lives. I will never forget the first Sunday that I walked through the double doors of that church. We were late arriving and the service had already begun. The whole church was singing praises to God when we walked in and it sounded like a heavenly angelic choir. The atmosphere was permeated with the love of God. I knew that I was home. Whatever it would take to get here every Sunday, the sacrifices would have to be made, because my family

desperately needed what this church had to give. For the next year and a half my girls and I drove 60 miles one way to be fed the Word of God and this started the restoration in our lives, individually and as a family.

Lessons of Love That I Learned

1. To let go and let God, He will pick me up.
2. To look for God in His Word, the Bible.
3. That love is proved through commitment.
4. To learn to follow Jesus.
5. To learn God's timing.
6. To link up with a church family.

CHAPTER 1

Healing In the Mighty Arms of God

Psalm 23

The Lord is my Shepherd;
I shall not want,
He maketh me to lie down in
green pastures;
He leads me beside the still
waters.

He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of
righteousness
For His name's sake.

“What is that pitiful sight all slumped over on the front row?” I am sure some asked Sunday after Sunday. They were talking about me. My slumping was due to weariness and weeping. Why was I on the front row of the church instead of the back if I was looking so forlorn? My spiritual appetite had become insatiable. I had starved it for years and now it was time to regain lost ground. The weariness came from a tough work schedule and the tears were God’s way of washing me clean from the inside out. As I was being restored, my girls were in their class making friends and learning how to love others through the love of God.

Not many days before, when I was still living to fulfill only my own ambitions and desires, my children were all too familiar with a mom that did not have time for them because of a schedule that weeded them out. During the day they were at school. Once off the bus and home in our apartment above the business, I kept an eye on them periodically. The evening would come, then supper, bathes, and to bed. Day after day our

lives slipped by. Our drives to and from church, that 60 mile journey, was an excellent time for us to talk and work through difficult questions. This journey took us to a church in the town where I grew up. I hoped a time would come when we would move back there. Most of my family was still there. Presently we were living in an apartment above the business and it provided no yard for the girls to play outside. My heart began to yearn for a home with a yard. To be able to smell cut grass in the summer, chicken on the grill, bread in the oven, and have no one knocking at the door needing me for business, was a dream that I hoped would soon come true.

On Sunday afternoons we looked all over the county for just the right home. The realtors all knew our names. The rest of the day was spent visiting family until the church service began in the evening. One Sunday as we were driving to see family, I noticed a home I had not seen before. As we stopped to look at the newly semi-constructed home, both the girls and I got excited. It seemed to be exactly what we had been looking for and the interior had not yet been decorated, which meant that we could pick out the decor. Immediately we contacted the builder and he instructed me as to what to do next. All of this was happening in the mist of a buy-out for my business. The importance of doing all of these transactions in the right order was imperative because of the transfer of funds. All I knew to rely on was logic, what seemed the right thing to do at the right time. But this was not always the way of God. I realized that I had to listen to my heart and not let my head overrule the decisions that the Lord was showing me. I wanted to sell the business, buy a house, move back home, take some time off, and then maybe go back to work. This order of events seemed perfectly logical to me. But the Lord's order was a little different. I thought I had a buyer and I agreed to stay for a month to train the new owners. During

this time I bought the house back home and put my girls in school in the same location where we were now living. Day after day I drove the long drive to work, knowing that it was one less day that I would have to do it. Unexpectedly the deal fell through. The would-be owner backed out due to an unsuccessful attempt to borrow the needed money for the buy-out. Now what was I to do? I thought I had heard the Lord tell me to buy the house and move. But He had not warned me of this dilemma. For another two and a half months I made the drive and prayed continuously that the Lord send me a buyer; and He did. This time I was a little smarter and the deal went smoother. The new owner had experience in the automotive business and did not need me to stay and train. I was finally going home.

Lessons on Love That I Learned

1. To hunger for the things of God; He will satisfy.
2. To hold on because God answers prayers.
3. To harmonize with God's plan.
4. To hold God's hand will bring about God's plan.

Chapter 2

God Has A Definite Plan for Each Life

Ephesians 2:10

For we are His workmanship
created in Christ Jesus
for good works,
which God prepared beforehand that
we should walk in them.

The light had come at the end of a very long tunnel. It had been as if my hands had been tied and yet I still had to walk through without the ability to maneuver. For almost ten years I had been in the retail business while raising my two children; or what I called raising. It really turned out to be chaining them. They had no freedoms to be themselves; I demanded they remain within the limits that I set for them because of the work strain that I was under. I did not know that there was a peace and a rest that I could have even in stressful situations. I only knew that stressful situations caused me to set boundaries in my household that bound us from that peace and rest. Ultimately I was trying to control every situation so that nothing could get out of hand and cause more stress, but not until I trusted God to move in my situations did the peace come.

After I sold the business our lives began to change. My girls were now eight and ten years old; old enough to dress themselves yet immature enough to fuss with each other. All of their young lives they had spent their after school time with me, or in close proximity. Once off the school bus, they went up the stairs to the apartment to do school work and rest. Now that we had moved and I was working, this time for my family in a

family-owned business, I had yet another decision to make about after school arrangements for my girls.

Many people today put their children in daycare and let someone else tend to them. I admit that for a short time, without a choice, I thought, I put both girls in an after school daycare. But one day I picked up my youngest from school and she shared with me her assignments for the next day. Her “gifted” teacher had assigned a lesson that centered on the horoscope. I was horrified! It was at that point that I realized I had to do something to assure that my children were taught what they needed and not garbage. This was not the only instance that I had faced within the school, it was just the one that caused me to take action. Again, here was another decision that I had to make.

It was the end of springtime and summer was on the way. Because I had some time to decide where they would go to school, my focus was set on the warm weather and travel. For the nine or ten years that we had been a family of three, we had never taken a vacation together. Previously the thought of traveling very far with two children did not appeal to me. We were still trying to conquer the petty arguments that popped up more often than I liked. When I played the part of referee it seemed that the playing field got hotter, frustration set in, and not much was accomplished that was positive. I began to analyze the situation. I asked myself some very simple questions. At what point did the arguments start? At what point did I need to get involved? Once involved, how could I handle the situation most effectively to solve the argument? These were simple questions but they needed answers that required some thought. I simply asked the Lord what to do, as I had become accustomed to do. He told me to allow my girls to work out their differences while I remained on the sidelines. From that vantage point I was to gently

instruct the proper character or attitude that they should maintain. If at any point it got out of hand. I was to step in, with the right character and attitude, and arbitrate. I was realizing that in everything that I do with my children I was teaching. How I reacted was how they would react. How I answered would be how they would answer. The importance of character became a primary issue in our household and it still is today.

So off we went to Tulsa, Oklahoma, to a Christian family conference. For ten and half-hours we rode and talked and rode and slept. The challenges were different because the three of us had never been off together for a week in a hotel. I must admit I was hesitant to embark on the trip, but I knew God was with us and despite the rough spots, again it would be a learning experience. During that trip I began to appreciate my children for who they were. Because there was no work to attend to I was relaxed and the atmosphere was one of fun instead of fussing. That week God spoke to our hearts and gave us direction in our lives. He helped us to love one another more deeply and confirmed that the three of us had been put together for a purpose. We knew that in time the whole of that plan and purpose would be revealed to us. Once back home I was determined not to let things get “back to normal.” I did not want us to be “normal.” God had pulled me out of a pit, saved me from death and hell, not to live normal!

I threw off the argument that all children fuss and fight and set out to keep that same atmosphere of fun and relaxation we had experienced on vacation. Easy? Oh, no. Little did I realize that I would be the one that would have to change as an example for my girls to follow.

Perhaps one of the hardest areas for me as a single parent was that of providing for my children everything they needed and some of their wants. As they grew older their

eyes were opened to things of interest and their wants went from a Coke to a coat, from juice to a jam box, and from milk to money. One particular day it seemed as if they had asked me for everything including the moon. I cried out to God that night, feeling sorry for myself that I was having to play Mom and Dad. I distinctly remember His answer to me, "Just be Mom and let me be their Father." Wow! God would be Father to my children, and with that role He became provider also. The next morning I shared with Abby and Sarah what God had said to me. From that point on when they had a need and came to me, I directed them to God their Father. It was wonderful. No longer was the burden on me. Jesus tells us in the Bible to take his yoke upon us, for His burden is light and His way is easy. Because I was willing to yield to God's ways my life as a parent was getting easier and easier.

In turn, Abby and Sarah were learning to look to God not a person, to meet all of their needs. Yes, God chooses to channel His goods through people sometimes but He is the ultimate source of our supply. Every time we sat down to eat we would say the blessing over our food and in that blessing we would say, "Thank you, Father God, You are our Source for everything." I realized that His supply house never runs out and He requires no money in exchange for His goods, just love and obedience. We would soon learn that not only does God meet our need but He wants to supply us with enough to help meet the needs of others too.

Lessons on Love That I Learned

1. That God is a God of Peace.
2. To cast my cares on Him, He cares for me.
3. To ask God, He will answer.
4. That who we are shines through in the tough times.
5. To follow Christ and be an example.
6. That God wants to be my Father and a Father to my children.
7. To let God be my Source of supply.

CHAPTER 3

Home Schooling

I can do *all* things through

Christ

Who strengthens

Me.

Philippians 4:13

With the end of summer approaching, my girls' education was on my mind. Each day I searched the heart of God for an answer. My time in reading the Bible had become my lifeblood; God was talking to me about my life and my girls' lives. But I was not getting an answer concerning their school situation and the time was running out, or so I thought. One morning I was reading in Deuteronomy 6 and I read these words in verse seven; "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. Something began to happen in my heart concerning teaching my children. I had taught by example before, doing something while someone else watched, but not by oral instruction. Nervous and excited, I began to inquire about home schooling materials and techniques. Numerous variables existed that would have to be worked out for this to be an option: number one, I worked during the day, number two, I was not sure I was qualified to do the job, and number three, I was not sure that my girls would want to do this?

When I approached my family, whom I worked for, with the plan God had given me for my daughters' education, they were hesitant but accommodating. They allowed me to bring my girls to work so they were able to work on their assignments throughout the day. The curriculum we used was a self-motivating type that did not require me to

“teach,” but to check their work and motivate them forward. Again God worked in our lives in spite of circumstances, eliminating every obstacle that might impede His plan. As time went by, I could sense that God was up to yet another change.

My parents brought me up to appreciate hard work. They always had my brother and sisters and I sharing the responsibilities around the house. I knew that if I did what they said there would be rewards and if I did not there would be consequences. The work ethic was strongly ingrained in my thinking so much so that I believed that meeting my needs was contingent upon how many hours of work I did in a week.

It was about October 1991, when the Lord began to talk to me about quitting my job and staying at home with my girls to finish their year of school and listen to what He would have me do next. At first panic set in! How would we exist if I did not work? How would I feed my children? What would my family think? God is so merciful and patient with me. He knows that everything comes from Him, but sometimes it takes me a little longer to realize that *my* strength is not my source of supply. I especially had to learn this lesson. God had given me an incredible supply of strength and I had come to rely on that strength for many of my needs. If I were to fulfill the will of God for my life and direct my girls on their divine path, I would have to totally depend on God’s strength and trust Him to meet our every need. I was about to learn that God was truly my Source and that His supply house never runs empty.

In January 1992, we embarked on our newest adventure in God. Obeying God in what He puts in our hearts is probably one of the most rewarding things a person can do. I did not say easy, but it is definitely rewarding. For the next nine months my girls and I stayed at home - learning, exercising, playing, studying, and really getting to know each

other for the first time since they were born. Every morning as they worked on their assignments with my assistance, I had time to read and study the Bible. In the afternoons after lunch, we would go to the park in our neighborhood and exercise - the girls would bike while I jogged. Evenings would bring us together playing basketball, indoor games, or watching television. All of those questions I had in the beginning diminished as each day faded. God is so faithful. Time after time there was food on our table, clothes in the closets, money for bills, and gas in the car. How? Sometimes things were provided through a friend, sometimes checks came in the mail, and sometimes through a temporary job, but I always knew it was by the hand of God. He was taking care of us. As spring ended and summer approached, again it felt as if God was up to something. What would be next?

Abby and Sarah were now eleven and nine years old. God was about to reveal to me as a mother that I was not in this thing alone. It was just another day and we were on our way to the park to exercise and play. I had warned the girls to stay directly in front of me and not to venture off too far, but before I reached the park they were both out of sight. I hastened my pace and as I reached the top of the hill I could see Sarah's bike parked on the other side of the bridge. But where was Sarah? As I looked closer, I could see that she had climbed to the outside of the bridge and was about halfway across. All at once several things ran through my mind: she does not have enough footing, it is a long way down, there is nothing but rock below, I am too far away to help, and I should not scream at her. I began to pray in the Spirit as I ran toward her. And then it happened - her feet slipped off the bridge! I was still a distance away from her, but I yelled for her to hold on, regain her footing, and start walking towards the embankment. She was able to

do that and she reached the embankment by the time I got to her. All of this must have happened in seconds, but it seemed like hours. When I approached her I asked that question every parent asks in a time of crisis, “What were you doing?” Naturally I was more shook than she was over what “could have happened.” She and I each learned a very valuable lesson that day. She learned not to listen to the voice that would tell her to do something that could hurt her. God showed me that night, while I was praying and thanking Him again for saving her, that He had provided a very large angel for her protection and at the moment of need that angel was positioned under her, holding her feet so she could not fall. God loved my Sarah more than I and would always be there to protect her even when the circumstance was out of my control. God was in control. At that moment, as a mother, I relinquished all to Him.

Our church family had become so precious to us. Time after time they came through for us in areas of need without our asking. It was as if there were angels whispering in their ears. We began to visit with other families and make friends. One of those friends became very precious to us. Her name is Kara and she is also a single girl about eight years younger than I and had never been married. About the time that we met, she had just made a commitment in her life to serve God no matter what it took. Kara became our roommate and for the next four years God would take us, Kara, Abby, Sarah, and I, on some very exciting adventures with Him.

Lessons on Love That I Learned

1. To seek God diligently and I will find Him.
2. That God uses obstacles to His advantage, so should I.
3. That God is a God of change.
4. That my strength comes from the Lord.
5. That God is my source of supply.
6. To obey God.
7. To be open to the will of God.

Prioritizing

*There is **one** body and **one** Spirit,
just as you were called in **one** hope of your calling;
one Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism;
one God and Father of all,
who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
Ephesians 4:4-6*

For nearly a year and a half our family had enjoyed our new home filled with fine furnishings and little treasures. It had been so much fun to decorate our home- pick out draperies and floor tile, match furnishings and then enjoy the nice things of life. We openly shared our new possession with others, hosting gatherings for singles, Bible studies, and family cookouts. About December of our second year in our home, the Lord asked me to do something that I had not anticipated. He asked me to put my home up for sale. Now, not only had I become attached to the comfort of our surroundings, but also I lived very close to my immediate family and did not realize just how attached I had become to their attention.

Again I pondered on what my family would think and if Abby and Sarah would agree with me on this newest direction. After spending some time praying, not whether to do it but how to break the news, we talked. I knew I must obey God, but I needed the Holy Spirit to help me convey that to them so they too would desire to obey. Of course their biggest concern was making new friends, but I assured them that God would send them more friends and we would come back often to visit. Amazingly they trusted me and consented with joy. Because my confidence was in God, they in turn placed their confidence in me.

Kara had moved in with us before the beginning of the summer and she and I had become prayer warriors. We prayed about everything, especially our families; that they would love us and understand that we were simply trying to obey God. Funny thing though, our families wanted us to obey God but not room together.

It was just too much for them at first, for a white woman and a young black girl to be in the same house. My family remained silent yet spoke with their eyes, but Kara's family was quite vocal. As time went on, our example as friends became a testimony to many who witnessed our relationship. All we were doing was obeying God.

The "For Sale" sign went up; our families were shaken; but we breathed a sigh of relief. Yet that was just the beginning of a long list of things "to do" that the Lord had given me. Since we had been in this home we had collected numerous "things" that I had set my affections on. Without realizing it, I had prioritized belongings and if Abby or Sarah accidentally wrecked something I became furious. One rainy afternoon while the girls were playing inside and I was studying, I went in their rooms to check on them and found that one of them had spilled green finger paint on the white carpet. I was livid! After I finished chastising them, the Lord politely chastised me. He told me that He did not come to the earth to live, die, and be raised for "things," but for people. He explained to me that I had been given these two girls to teach and train up in the way He wanted them to go, and if I would only ask Him how to act in every situation, He would equip me to be the best mother they could have. For years I had trained myself to react. Jesus was teaching me through reading the Bible that the way to respond was to act according to the Word of God not react according to whatever emotion was evident at the time. From that moment forward I knew that my relationship with my daughters was far more important

than any “thing” in my life. Every collectable in the house was sold, I kept only the necessities. As each antique piece left the driveway God assured me that I would receive back 100 fold in this lifetime.

All the energy and effort that I had put in collecting things God gently redirected into teaching and training my children. Because I had yielded my will to God, He had the right to speak into my life and expect results. I wish I could say that I was quick to move on all of His suggestions, because I was not at first. But He just loved me and showed me how precious my girls were. As I in turn loved them with the love He loved me with they became more and more secure in that love and restoration was taking place in our lives day by day.

Lessons on Love That I Learned

1. Not to lay up treasures on the earth, but in heaven.
2. To place all my confidence in God.
3. That we are all One in Christ.
4. Not to react, but to act according to God’s Word.
5. For God so loved the world that He gave . . . so I can give.

CHAPTER 5

Change with Direction

*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*

The search for another place to live had begun. The direction that I had from God was that it would be a place that was close to our church. Presently we were about 20 minutes away and with two children 20 minutes often turned into 40 minutes, and we were always late. Most of the decisions that I made I first discussed with Abby and Sarah. They were very much a part of this family and I knew if I had their agreement everything would go smoother. The procedure went something like this: God spoke to me about change; then I sat down with my girls and discussed what God said; we prayed about it; and then agreed to obey. I found that if I just tried to implement the change that God was showing me I ran into resistance on their part because they did not understand what was going on or why.

Even when both girls were infants I never talked baby talk to them. Perhaps this was because they were the only “people” that I spent any amount of time with. I believe that laid the foundation for good communication during their preschool and elementary years.

I carried this same procedure into the home. If I needed them to help me with chores or other jobs, they were more willing if I could map it out ahead of time rather than being spontaneous. Now they had regular chores that they attended to and they knew

what they were and the time frame in which they had to do them, but anything above that they appreciated knowing ahead of time. Their little minds thought it through and then decided to do it.

Did it always go that smoothly? Oh no, there were several times that Mom had to overrule their objections. We were both learning a very important principle. Whenever they were not obedient, I would cry out to the Lord in frustration, asking Him what I could do to get them to obey. Do you know what He told me? Now the Lord did not speak audibly to me but it was just as effective.

He said and I quote, “Your children will be just as obedient to you as you are obedient to Me.” I said, “But God, I thought I was obedient to you.” He showed me areas in my life that He had been asking me to change and rearrange and I had been putting it off until a better day. Well, that better day had arrived and I began to make the adjustments in my life knowing now that the changes would bring about obedience in my children. Why? Because children learn by example and the closer my walk with the Lord, the closer they were drawn to Him.

Not very long after that I began to realize that very soon my girls would have to make a decision of their own to follow Jesus. Up until now they were walking with Him holding onto my coattail, so to speak. And I too would have to decide to go on with God even if one or both of them turned away. That was very difficult to face, but it made me realize how much I loved God and how much I depended on Him to woo my girls into His arms. It was at this point that I realized how important my example was for them to follow. If I was walking toward righteousness then it was more likely that they too would follow.

Alas the test came! One Sunday as we were traveling to church, Abby and Sarah began to argue. As I sat there trying to decide whether to get involved or let them work it out, the Lord said to me, “Will you follow me even if they do not?” Tears began to stream down my face because I knew the question required an answer. “Yes, Lord, I will follow you even if they do not, but please assure me that they will.”

I was pouring everything that I was into my children, praying for a return that would bring rewards in this lifetime. I knew God’s Word said that if I raised them up in the way they should go that when they grew old they would not depart from it. That was all I needed. I had God’s Word on it. My part was to remain steadfast and focused on the right path. I knew that I could not venture from it, moving to the left or right, seeking pleasures or desires of my own. A funny thing was beginning to happen. As I remained fixed on Jesus, my pleasure and desires were to please Him. I felt assured that I was being upheld by His hand and would not falter very far. This covenant commitment was forming in my heart and would be the foundation for God’s plan in my life and ultimately my girls’ lives.

Our next home was a townhouse near the reservoir about three miles from our church. Our old home sold and we moved in the summer of 1993. Kara had left her old job and I had been home schooling Abby and Sarah. All of us knew that a new thing was on the horizon.

Lessons on Love That I Learned

1. That open communication is essential to a healthy relationship.

2. That obedience to God in my life brings about obedience from others.
3. Salvation is a personal issue: it is a commitment from the heart.
4. God's Word is the only truth that does not change.
5. To have single vision for Jesus and He will sustain me.

CHAPTER 6

God Disciplines His Children, So Should We

Psalm 46:10

Be still and know that I am God . . .

Have you ever noticed that God has a sense of humor? When you think there should be evidence of what you are hoping for, God says to be still. When you are certain that it is time, God says be still. When you are convinced that you are to do a certain thing NOW, God says be still and know that I AM God.

As Kara, Abby, Sarah and I settled into our townhouse, we were sure that our stay in this location would be short. The girls were ten and twelve, Kara was twenty-six, and I was... uh, oh well... anyway, we were one happy family, for a while. When God reveals a plan we should be quick to obey, not weighing consequences or outcomes, just trusting God in those areas. When we do, it is much easier to continue in His will because He constantly proves Himself even when He seems to be silent.

Kara had grown up with siblings but was the youngest of several children, and by the time she was a teenager her brothers and sisters were gone from home. Her newly acquired family was a challenge for her, and I know that if she could write in this space she would say that surely her time with us was a stretch in her personality and character that was not always easy. Likewise, having a fourth person to consider made us appreciate her company and not take her for granted. On more than one occasion we both laughed at each other and realized that God was preparing us for mates because of the insights He gave us in being together.

Probably the most challenging area was disciplining Abby and Sarah. I searched for a way to be consistent and see some results. Having someone in the house made me more aware of the small things that needed to be corrected that otherwise I might have

allowed to slip. I wanted my relationship with my girls to be excellent in every way and if this was to be, every area had to be attended to in a godly manner. I shared this desire with another single mom and she gave me a book by Gary Smalley, *The Key to Your Child's Heart*. In this book I got an idea that worked for us- a family contract.

My girls and I sat down and together and we wrote the outline for discipline in our home. They helped to set the perimeters. Once the foundation was set, the Lord gave me a plan.

On the following pages is a copy of this contract revised. As the girls grew changes were made and areas added, such as driving guidelines and curfews.

None of this “plan” was effective without the proper method of administration, God’s love. Often I found myself getting so angry and wanting to lash out with words of restriction. When I did, they were always ineffective. All they accomplished was to put a rift in my relationship with my children and my Lord. Time after time I repented to God for doing it wrong. I meant what I said to them, but I did not say it the right way. As we prayed together as a family and I shared with them from my heart what I felt like God was saying to us, I witnessed a softening in their behavior and in mine.

We all realized that we needed change in a lot of areas of our lives and we would have been overwhelmed with it all if we had not learned that it is the Holy Spirit in us that brings about change for God’s glory. Our part is acknowledging that change is needed and allowing the Holy Spirit to do it. It is a work done by the Spirit of God, God gets the glory and ultimately can lift us up because we are lifting Him up.

The family is God's idea and He has chosen to work through generations. What He was revealing to me He wanted me to pass on to my children. As each day went by we were becoming knit together with a stronger and thicker chord than ever before.

I could not expect Abby and Sarah to do a certain thing a certain way and then I deny the expectation and either do it differently or not at all. God expected from me more than what I expected from my children. My words and my deeds had to match. Otherwise I was sending mixed signals to them and they imitated back to me those mixed signals.

As I spent more time judging myself, I spent less time fussing at them because they were watching me and imitating the corrected me. Thus my children's obedience to me was in direct proportion to my obedience to God.

God is the author of authority in all realms. I was learning that there is an order to His authority and when it is followed there is peace and order within the group. In our family group, God was the ultimate authority. I received instruction from Him, implemented it in my life, and then passed it on to my children. Then they in turn had to choose to obey or suffer the consequences of disobedience. With the focus on God as the authority, every element of competition among them as siblings disappeared. God did not design the family unit for one sibling to be in charge of the other. When an strong-willed child tries to rule over another the authority within the family is out of balance and unity is impossible until right authority is reestablished.

AGREEMENT ON DISCIPLINE:

Most important is that all discipline is administered in love, using the Word of God and following up with actions that display love.

1st offense: Arguing among one another and or being unkind to one another. Consequence: No TV or phone for three days.

(This was the most common offense.)

2nd offense: Disobedience towards Mom in any area of instruction, whether small or large. Consequence: Forbidden to go to the next youth event at church or any other activity planned.

(This happened about once or twice a month.)

3rd offense: Doing something behind my back, knowing fully that it is wrong and in direct opposition to what God's Word says.

Consequence: Spanking.

(This was rare but very effective when used.)

Signed: _____

Dated: _____

Our pastor had been preaching about Christian education for months preparing the people for the newest vision, a church school. The school would be a four-day-a-week school, kindergarten through sixth grade. It settled deep in my heart that somehow my

girls and I were to be a part of this new adventure. As summer ended, Kara and I went in for an interview as teachers. The school was not accredited yet so the teachers that the school hired did not have to be certified. Two weeks before the school year was to begin we were hired and set out to study and plan for the upcoming weeks. Sarah was able to attend the church school but Abby was one grade above what the school was offering, so for the next year she attended another Christian school about 20 miles away. It was an awkward year in many ways, but I was learning that stretching in God meant preparation for something bigger.

Not only was I learning to discipline my own children in a godly manner, now I had a classroom of other parents' children. Other children were tugging on the love that I had for my own children. Do I have that much love? Was it really important how I reacted with every child? In the classroom setting God showed me His boundless love for me. It would need to be this same love that I loved these children with to get the results that I desired in them. Again God was causing me to go outside of myself, rather die to self, and pull on Him completely.

After the first year I thought I had learned it all, yet God said, "Do it again." For another year I taught the same grades. Realizing that I still had a lot to learn, I grew tremendously that next year. Both of my girls were in the school now, the school had added a grade to keep the children. Being able to see my children every day and know what they were being taught, who was teaching them, and how they were progressing, blessed me beyond expression. Because of the close relationship each teacher was able to have with the students, they learned faster than usual. At home, the girls and I would go over their homework together, which allowed me to become familiar with the upper grade

curriculum. Sarah had been in a combined fifth/sixth grade class the year before and had excelled to the point of skipping the sixth and advancing to the seventh. Abby was in the eighth. I expected a change in the upcoming year, but was not sure what it would be.

As the year came to an end, God put it in my heart to go back to school and get a masters in Christian education. I learned of such a program in Tulsa, OK, on the Oral Roberts University campus. When the teaching assignments were given for the upcoming year once again my girls would have mom as a teacher.

While I was on the campus of ORU that summer, my pastor called with my teaching assignment for the upcoming fall. When I had left for summer school I was willing to teach whatever position needed to be filled. Supposing that it would be an elementary position, I was shocked when he asked me to teach the ninth grade. Little did I know the fear and intimidation that I would have to work through in the near future. I would have my oldest daughter Abby as a student and I would teach Sarah physical education.

No one told me that one of the worst fears an adult can have is the intimidation of teenagers. I had developed a relationship with my own daughters to the point of friendship, so intimidation had no place, but other teenagers could be challenging. I was bound and determined not to accept the statement that the worst years of parenthood are the teenage years of your child. My belief was just the opposite. Now my daughters are at an age where we can converse about important matters. I treated them like young adults, with all the respect and responsibility. But the other students in the class were not familiar with this, and their actions and words challenged the very core of my faith.

I had to take a step back and look long and hard not to be moved by the overt disrespect I received. Then the Holy Spirit spoke to me and it all became so clear. I had been focusing on trying not to be Mom to Abby and yet expecting her to excel in the classroom. Instead the Holy Spirit had me duplicate the same relationship with the other students that I had with my daughters, one of respect, trust, and love- expecting the same from all of them. At midterm the students who would not conform left the school and we were on our way to making a difference in the lives of the ones who remained.

Through all of this my girls watched how I reacted to the other students and continually encouraged me in my endeavor to be the best teacher they had. There were times when it would have been easier for them to side with friends, but they never left my side. They were my best cheerleaders. The friendship that we had established when they were young and nurtured as they were growing was now blooming into a solid relationship that would be able to weather through any storms that might come our way.

One such incident at school proved this to be true. The setting was World History class, ninth and tenth grades combined. The students had prepared to teach sections from their text orally in front of the class from an outline. As one of the students was discussing the section on the Crusades or Holy Wars, another student asked a question as to whether the Crusades were the will of God. This started a short discussion, leading to the Bible to see what God had to say about it. Immediately another student who did not believe that we should mix our studies and the Bible began to attack me verbally. Unsuccessful attempts to silence her resulted in removing her from the classroom, but not before I forcefully spoke some words that I later regretted. As she stomped to the office to continue to speak her opinion, I asked the class to remain seated and quiet until I

returned. After a meeting with her, her father, and the pastor of the church where the school was located, I finally returned to my classroom. Of course the class hour had elapsed and the students had gone to their next class but there was still a student in the room. It was my Sarah. When I walked in the room and saw her I broke into tears. She had waited until I came back to comfort and encourage me. I was so thankful for her that day.

Lessons on Love That I Learned

1. To wait on God. It is easier to catch up than to mess up and clean up.
2. That all things work together for good to them that love God.
3. To write the vision and make it plain.
4. That stretching in God means growth in the spirit.
5. To receive God's love, and to give God's love.
6. God teaches me line upon line, one step at a time.
7. God has not given me a spirit of fear but of love, power and a sound mind.
8. That relationships are God's idea.

Chapter 7

The Door Is Open, Walk Through

Isaiah 43:18,19

*Do **not** remember the **former** things
Nor consider the things of **old**.
Behold, I will do a **new** thing,
Now it shall spring forth; shall you not now it?
I will even make a road in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.*

The year had been nineteen hundred and eighty-nine when God had rescued us out of a miry pit- one of strife and misery. Now seven years later there was barely a scar left of the past. Over those seven years God restored my family one-day at a time bringing us to a place of complete restoration. We were learning so much from attending a strong Bible-believing Spirit-filled church. Our involvement in the church brought about an even faster growth in our lives.

I want to share a few revelations that God showed me that greatly helped me parent and raise my children to respect me and respect themselves and others.

When we moved back home seven years ago, we had a very negative identity of who we were. I thought so low of myself because of things I had done and my girls were depressed because of what had happened in their lives. But God showed us His merciful forgiveness, He restored our lives and we began to see who we were in Him. We learned that the church is the body of Christ and we are a part of His body.

Jesus became so real to us as we spent time reading the Bible, praying, and going to church. I fell in love with Him and His ways, wanting to know Him more. The presence of Jesus at times was so real in the spiritual I felt as if I could reach out and touch Him in the natural. He was becoming my “husband,” one I could depend on for all my needs. As I spent time with Him everyday I realized that He wanted to tell me all that

I needed and wanted to know about everything. All I had to do was listen. He was showing His love for my girls and me.

Then one day as I was leaving the church and walking down the steps, I heard the Lord ask me in my spirit, “Do you love me more than anything else?” My heart almost broke. I knew from reading the Bible that He had asked that same question to Peter, one of His disciples. The Lord showed me at that moment that to have a love for anything or anyone else that was bigger than the love I had for Him was spiritual adultery. He said that He is a jealous God and wanted my love completely. I gave it to Him.

It was this love that I began to pour out in the lives of my girls more than ever before. I stopped looking at them the way they were, in all their silliness, and began to see them as God sees them. My heart changed from demanding from them to serving them. As I practiced a servant’s heart on my children I began to see a change in them. They began to see themselves as God sees them. They began to see each other the way God sees them and they began to see me the way God sees me. Our family life became fuller because we were no longer directed by circumstances or behavior, but by God’s spirit of love for one another.

As a single parent, God is my source of everything that I need; physically, spiritually, emotionally, and financially. I do not have to work three jobs, parent, and try to rest in-between, to make ends meet. God meets my ends and all that is in between, but I must trust Him to do it. There were times when I thought that I must work more to provide more, but if I had followed through with that plan I would never have been home, and consequently I would have turned around one day and my girls would be grown up. We would have been strangers to one another. God’s Word tells me that I have not

because I ask not. I begin to ask God what to ask for, thanked Him ahead of time, believing that I received it when I prayed because that is faith, because without faith I knew that it was impossible to please God. He has never failed to meet our need and He never will because He gives us His Word.

My part in this is to trust Him and allow my spoken words to be the same as His words. I could not moan and complain and then expect God to put food on my table because my negative would be canceling out God's positive. God chooses to work through my words and I had to be sure that mine were words that He could agree with. As I was praying one day the Lord told me that He would be faithful to give me whatever I asked if I would speak by the Spirit of God instead of by my head. Wow! It was at this point that I pleaded with God to teach me to know what to pray and what to ask for.

As I watched Abby and Sarah grow up I began to ask God about their future and what my part was in it. I was amazed at what God began to reveal about each daughter. Because children are individual, God has different callings for their lives. Again I was assured that God had given Abby and Sarah specifically to me and me to them.

The younger years had been basic training, but as we entered into the adolescent years we were involved in intensive field training, preparing for their future. God began to show me how to plan for them strategically so that His plan for their lives could unfold.

We took notebook and pen and begin to write down the things that God was saying about each of us. From time to time we would read them. This helped us to see the direction that we were going and stay on the path that God had etched out.

God is a God of second chances, a God of new beginnings. In God, there is no old all things are new. When Abby, Sarah, and I accepted Jesus as the Lord of our lives we

became brand new in Him and every day became a new day. We no longer looked back to what we were or what we used to do, but we looked forward to where we were going and who we are in Him.

With this heavenly perspective, an awesome future began to unfold.

Lessons on Love That I Learned

1. To take one day at a time.
2. God redeems my lost time.
3. God loves me completely and wants me to love Him the same way.
4. Serve God, serve others, and serve my children.
5. There is no end in God, only beginnings.
6. I have not because I ask not. ASK!
7. Plan for my child's future in God.

Chapter 8

Testimonials

*All your children will be taught
of the Lord,
and great will be the peace of them.
Isaiah 54:13*

The time has come where I must let you hear from the two most important people in my life, my daughters. Abby's name means *joy* and she is truly just that. Sarah's name means *princess* and she is graced with the attributes of such a lady. Here is an excerpt of their stories from their notebooks.

Sarah: Obviously, the ideal household is the one with both a mother and a father. But in some situations the Father God is the replacement for one of the parental roles. I grew up in a single parent family with my Mom. I knew no different, therefore I was always content. Sure, there are bumps along the way, but no way of life is completely smooth. Most of my friends lived with both parents and I did not really see a big difference in our lifestyles. I enjoyed a wonderful childhood. Perhaps, I carried more responsibility during my young adult years than most of my peers, but the only effect I see from that is that it built character in me that will last a lifetime. I know that the joy in my life is not due to my mom, my sister, or me; our Heavenly Father is the only one that is worthy of any honor or praise. No matter what your circumstances or situation, if you completely put your faith in God, you will lack no good thing. Be patient, take it day by day, step by step, and God will bring you up out of the place of despair.

Abby: Many people today look at single parent families and feel sorry for them. I am sure there are many people who looked at us that way. All throughout my childhood I never saw our family as being anything other than all I needed. Even though my mom was not married, everything was okay. I was never insecure about not having a man in the house. I think that a lot of my security came from God's embrace and some came from

my mom's. We were never starved for love or attention, and we always had fun with mom.

Once we moved from the small town we were living in and started going to our new church, life seemed to get harder. At my new school, kids made fun of me for being a Christian; no one had ever done that at my old school. I was really okay with that though, because I knew that God did not want me to be around them. In spite of that, God gave me good friends at church that I could hang out with and be myself. I look back now and I see how God protected me from their influence. As I got older, my relationship with God began to grow and flourish. When my friends and I got together we did not just talk about guys and paint our fingernails. We began to really get interested in what God was going to do in all of our lives. I had a great youth group that I could bring unsaved friends to. Our youth group was "cool" so I was proud to bring my friends. Life at home was not always perfect because we are human, but as the three of us kept walking forward in God's love and grace, more and more God was teaching us how to be a "complete" family with the Father God as the Head.

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Well there you have it, as the old saying goes, the proof is in the pudding.

### Lessons on Love I Learned

1. My children learn primarily by example.
2. To turn my stumbling blocks into stepping stones.
3. My joy comes from being in the presence of God.
4. God gives me strength to overcome opposition.
5. God wants to be my Father God.

6. I need to get to know God.





