

Endorsements

We all have a story and a journey where we work out who we are and in particular who God is for us. And, how we can know Him and walk in His ways.

No one's story would fit neatly into a made for TV format where the happy ending falls tidily between the last set of commercials and the program credits. Stories are messy affairs and journeys have an up and down quality to them that might make a seasoned sailor seasick! If our stories are to be authentic then they cannot be homogenous. The glory of God's love is seen in the mess we create and the beauty of His own good nature as He pursues us with His loving-kindness.

Carol's story is not for the fainthearted, nor is it for the plastic Christian who is easily offended by chaos, confusion and human turmoil.

For us to be consistent in God's love we must encounter Him in all of our personal disarray. Our predicaments never put God off from being the epitome of our loving attention. His affection and passion for us shines through our story making it into an epic of grace and mercy.

Carol is a brave woman who has endured much. Her writing reveals her courage, backlit by the incredible passion that God has for her personally. She has prevailed in awful circumstances because the Lord never let go of her and she learned to cling on to His love and goodness.

I recommend this book to you wholeheartedly. I hope you find yourself on her journey. Like Carol, I hope you rewrite the story of your life in the beauty of how God sees you. A wise person would use this book as a catalyst for his or her own upgrade.

Graham Cooke
Author, speaker
www.brilliantbookhouse.com
www.brilliantperspectives.com

“There’s nothing more encouraging to me than when someone is willing to share the story of their journey of brokenness to discovering grace. Carol writes with a ruthless and raw honesty combined with a sincere faith in Christ that will give hope to the broken heart.”

Derek Levendusky,
Author, worship leader,
Lead pastor of GraceLife Church
www.dereklevendusky.com.

I love how God brings people into my life. There are no coincidences with God so I must assume that meeting Carol DuPre’ was no accident. I didn’t know her while she was going through some of her darkest times. I’ve only begun to know her as she’s come out the other end, having traveled through a twisted and hazardous tunnel and into the light of Jesus. Carol’s story is a testimony to the healing love of God, who comforts us and soothes us and helps us grow. She makes herself totally vulnerable and at the same time there’s a bit of mischief in her that inspires a laugh or two! Come along side her and see how the Lord has restored her heart and soul. You’ll come to love her as I do.

Ethel M. Chadwick
Host of Bagels and Blessings Radio Show
Rochester, NY
www.bagelsandblessings.com

When does expressing your truest self, created in God, become rebellion? When does questioning the standards of a community become borderline insanity? When does being the scapegoat for the guilt of others become acceptable?

When control and legalistic adherence to the rules, for the sake of Christ, of course, define your Christian

experience. Carol DuPre', in her authentically raw, and often witty book, "Broken," blows the whistle on a form of Christianity that she bought hook, line, and sinker, one which would cause years of profound grief and pain.

But as graphic as the gory details are, even more, Carol lifts us up to a higher plane as she paints a gloriously beautiful picture of Love Himself, hearing her cry and coming to her aid. In her journey to truth and wholeness, Carol makes a startling discovery.... the approval she desperately sought through the traditions of men, was already hers in the arms of her God. This is a poignant and immensely significant book for any sincere Christian to read.

Maryann Ehmann, author, speaker, spiritual and
business coach and mentor.
MaryannEhmann.com;
haveievertoldyou.com

There is a Redeemer. Carol DuPre' has indeed carried a pregnancy to full term and brought forth life in the delivery of her words here. In the process, the Consummate Midwife, The Spirit of God, has birthed Carol with the truth of who she is in her inward parts.

I have known Carol for many years. I am absolutely verklempt * at what Papa God has done, what He is doing, and what He shall yet do.

Carol's journey into wholeness is a catalyst. Her bravery will reap the rewards of freedom for others.

As the song says, "...You're not broken anymore, you're not captive anymore. I love you. Mercy is yours...." (Aaron Keyes, "Not Guilty Anymore." See p. 318.)

Christine O'Riley, RN
(Obstetrics and Women's Health)
Loved daughter of Papa God
Friend of Carol DuPre'

* "Verklempt" is a Yiddish word meaning being so impacted by something that takes your breath away that you cannot even speak to describe it. Often it refers to being emotionally overwhelmed in a very good way...such as ... when we experience something amazing beyond words.

Broken

a pastor's wife shares her story

Carol DuPré



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Our prayer at Olive Press is that we may help make the Word of Adonai fully known, that it spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere. We hope our books help open people's eyes so they will turn from darkness to Light and from the power of the adversary to God and to trust in **ישוע** Yeshua (Jesus). (From II Thess. 3:1; Col. 1:25; Acts 26:18,15 NRSV and CJB, the *Complete Jewish Bible*) May this book in particular help bring Yeshua's bruised and battered sheep back into His fold.

In honor to God, pronouns referring to the Trinity are capitalized, satan's names are not. But not all Bible versions do this and legally must be printed as they are.

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BROKEN A Pastor's Wife Tells Her Story

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“A woman's strength isn't just how much she can handle before she breaks. It's also about how much she can handle after she's broken.”

From Facebook, author unknown

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Prologue

There is no way this story could be told until now. Until now, the hurt, confusion, anger and complete lack of mercy would have gushed from every word. It would have hit you square in the eye and all you would have seen is what I lacked, how much growing I still needed to do, and very little of what He has done for my soul.

If certain couples waited for their relationship to be perfectly in order before they married, they might not marry at all. If they waited for their finances to flourish before they had a child, they might remain childless. If I wait until I am totally healed and healthy in my head before I tell my story, the story would never be told because part of my healing may come with the telling, and my very need for healing is also part of the story. None of us have arrived.

Walking with Christ is a process. Like any relationship, there are a number of “things” that have to be worked out. The fact that any head butting that happens is with my head alone and He never moves His is what makes this walk such a challenge.

“I am the Lord, I change not,” is His response to my whiny, *“Work with me on this, will You?”*

It is all about the grace factor. Our shortcomings will show up as sure as the sun will set tonight. What we do about facing them determines the direction we take and the transformation we make.

He’s all about change. I’m all about Him.

It makes for a good start and a better finish.

INTRODUCTION

Where To Start

A memoir that sits in your head and never makes it to paper, or nowadays, the web, doesn't automatically become a book. It is, as they say, an idea waiting to happen; but as long as it only simmers in the mind, it remains dead in the water. No one will know what has really taken place in your life. People desire the tangible, legible, hold-in-your-hand, touch-it truth. Or else they will just imagine what really happened and it might actually be far from reality.

I admit it—I'm struggling to take the words soaring in my head and connect them to paper. The process allows all the awful times to come to life again. I'm forced to section it together in bite-size pieces. And, if I use my words to bring life to a sad story, will it again give life to the sadness in my own heart and keep my healing at bay?

Too much in one day and all that darkness comes back and I have to mentally and emotionally start my recovery from scratch. I've already written chapter after chapter about what happened and how I reacted to it and how the Lord stuck it out with me and where I am today with the experience, yet a lot of it still doesn't make sense because I'm still waiting for the ending.

You'll get it when I've got it.

Of one simple thing I am sure:

He told me to tell you my story.

He told me to make sure He was mentioned in every chapter. He didn't need to be named or given a title or a reference point because the readers would know He was there.

And then He said He'll take care of the rest of it—and me, junk included.

I know I'm just putting a book together, but it all sounds eerily familiar to the Christian walk, doesn't it?

This desire to tell you about what happened wars with this voice in my head that says I'm gossiping. I haven't yet arrived at a place where my heart and my mind are in sync and utterly pure. Isn't that supposed to be the criteria for sharing? I fear some of that negativity might spill out into the language and the story-telling experience will reek with bitterness and bad attitude. Therefore, I assume I must wait until I get *there*.

But I may never get *there* and this might *never* get written.

It's sort of like cleaning the house before the maid arrives, or "cleaning up your act" before you ask Jesus to come into your heart. I'm trying to clean myself up first, in order to have the right to tell you what happened.

Or does the fact that it *happened* to me **give** me the right to tell it?

My intentions are good but they are also sometimes religious, and that's exactly what I'm trying to get away from. When you've been immersed in legalism, you think like that. It's that double-minded man thingy.

These are the kinds of things I struggle with, the thoughts I carry, forgetting that it's really all about Him.

Will I ever arrive?

Maybe not. Maybe the war that ensues is part of the plan. Maybe that's what we are all about—a people on the go who never really get *there*, but spend our whole life trying.

I'll start by asking the question no really mature Christian person is supposed to ask:

“Why me?”

These things just don't happen to ordinary people. But we're extraordinary people, remember? A peculiar people. We've made a word like *peculiar* into *weird, strange, abnormal* when it's really more like *uncharacteristic, astonishing, unique*.

When we make a decision to follow after Jesus, the rest of the decisions after that aren't necessarily our own. Nor are they necessarily fully embraced. But, ah yes, they ARE peculiar.

In my case, they were never embraced at all. I'm still not sure if I have ever put my arms around anything that's happened to me over the last few years, the years that have elapsed since the Awakening (**my** title), but the Lord knows I've tried. When you have been broken for years, in one form or another, you find it hard to embrace anything but your sanity.

Oh, yeah, and He took that, too. Chapter 7.

Don't you dare read ahead.

What happened to me in my story, sitting at the point-of-impact in a church split, a wretched divorce, and a 21st century excommunication, is comparable to a bus crashing through a guardrail and hurtling down a steep embankment. We were all in this together, we were all sitting in different places on the bus and we all succumbed to varying degrees of injury. In my vignettes, I often refer to the experience as a bus crash.

These vignettes were written at various times along this journey; they are not necessarily chronological or theme-connected, which is why there is a timeline included at the end of the book. They were birthed out of unusual and sometimes grueling periods of depression and confusion. The better ones sprang forth out of victory transcending from an awareness of a heavenly Father caring immensely for His daughter. Each vignette tells its own story and while some of the themes and messages may overlap in the telling, they all point to a bigger theme and a much bigger story.

It is a story I am compelled to tell you for the simple reason that someone has to tell it. So many tales in church get shoved under the carpet. Lumpy carpets can lead to casualties if you're not careful. To make the walk a lot less treacherous, I'm going to rip up that carpeting and reveal some of what's been hidden underneath.

PREVIEW

Hello

The light on my phone machine was blinking on and off. Someone named Private Caller had left a message. I was about to be slammed.

The caller told me that everything bad that happened to me was because “God doesn’t sleep,” that He knows what’s going on and everything wrong I ever did or said in my life was coming back to me and offering me the miserable life I deserved.

She concluded the call by telling me that I was the “rottenest person in the whole world,” and she hoped I would go on to lead a lonely and empty life.

For the most part, from where I was at emotionally at the time, she was dead-on right.

Broken

The guest speaker was a charismatic man from the Vineyard Ministries. It took a lot of persuasion to bring him to our church because our pastor was, among other things, in disagreement with their casual style of dress. One of the elders convinced our pastor that the man might be safe, reminding him that this man was originally from this general area and didn’t get back home very often and so he agreed to let the speaker lead one of the week-end church services.

I knew the man personally and I knew he was safe.

He began by introducing himself through his testimony and his connection to the area and somewhere in the middle of describing himself, made the simple statement that he came from a “broken home.”

He did? I never realized that about the man. How sad.

Until I remembered that the man was my younger brother.

I had never used that phrase before—*broken home*—and it alarmed me to see myself that way: that I, too, had come from that same “broken home.” Our parents had been divorced for decades and I was trying my best not to look at the situation in terms of brokenness, because that might imply that something in my past was irreparable or that maybe I, too, was broken. And that my brokenness, in many ways, may have contributed to my own broken-down marriage with the pastor who did not agree with the Vineyard style of dress, the one who nervously allowed his brother-in-law to steal the pulpit for just this one small service, the one who would soon divorce me for *Cruel and Inhumane Treatment* because he couldn’t sue me for abandonment or adultery.

The one who was **really** broken himself.

Like me.

Like all of us.

Stark Naked

The pastor's wife is naked wherever she goes. She lives in a glass house with glass closets, glass bedrooms and glass bathrooms. Every wandering eye follows her as she goes about living a life that is no different than anyone else's except that she is expected to be more perfect, which isn't even a possibility. You can't be more than perfect without crossing the line, once again, into imperfection.

I once read that a pastor's wife is scrutinized far more than the pastor. If she's okay, then she's being treated right. I wasn't okay and I didn't know why.

The wife of the pastor is often expected to *perform* in a certain way. Performing is acting. I didn't like to pretend; I yearned to be real.

She is asked to *conform* a lot. I didn't like the idea of having to imitate someone else or conform to someone else's expectation; I yearned to be myself.

None of these things help a pastor's wife, or anyone else for that matter, towards *transformation*, which is what is supposed to happen if we are, indeed, in Christ. Transformation is the wonderful side product of hanging out with the King.

I made a decision to hang out with the King, but it required walking away from what and who I knew. It demanded I finally be real and it began to expose someone I missed and hadn't recognized in a long time. The real me.

Recently, Father told me I wasn't naked any more. I began to understand that I was only transforming for an audience of one. I was fully clothed and I didn't have to fake a thing or cover up unattractive body parts. I could be myself and if there was anything that needed transforming, and of course there was, He would kindly point it out and we would deal with it—in His way and in His timing.

I looked forward to that because I missed being me.

It's taking us a long time to find all of me, but I'm definitely in there and I am definitely coming out. The real me might have been one of those lumps shoved under the carpet.

Except for authors mentioned, the only real names used in this book are in the Joy, Grace, and Sharon stories.

Section One

BREAK IN

*"The thief does not come except to steal
and to kill and to destroy..." John 10:10*

Chapter One

MY YOUNG LIFE

Family

My father was a POW from World War II and unlike many of his fellow veterans, told his version of the story over and over to anyone who would listen. That included me, his firstborn and only daughter, who grew up believing Dad had to be some kind of war hero. He never told me, or anyone else for that matter, that his own father had already battered and bruised him long before that fateful day his plane was shot down over Germany. The prison camp held him for four long months, but it was the timing that saved him—1945—and he returned home to marry my Mom faster than you can say “Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder.”

Dad never knew how to vent all the pain mounting inside of him, so he took it out on the kids he fathered and unfortunately, I became his first whipping post.

My parents were very young when they married and when I was just two years old, my father went to live with a friend and my mother went to live with her sister. It marked the beginning of multiple separations that led, years later, to divorce. That first time they broke up, my parents left me for two years with my sixty-year-old grandmother who did her best to make me feel wanted.

Still, and it is my only memory of this age, I would climb onto the sofa in the living room, peer out the front window and cry for my daddy and mommy to come home.

Section Two

BREAK OUT

*"...I will break his yoke from your neck
and will burst your bonds..."*

Jeremiah 30:8b

The first crazy happened before The Awakening.* I can firmly attest to the fact that something in the spirit realm was taking over me and it wasn't the Holy Spirit. I had no idea what was happening; my ability to function as a normal human being was diminishing and nobody had the right solution outside of the Blame Game and/or my need for strong medication. I wasn't playing that game and I wasn't taking that pill.

My fight to overcome the takeover, using Scripture, had begun.

* (To be described shortly. Huh-uh, no peeking ahead!)

Toilet Training

My battle against insanity began in 2002. If you were to use the bathroom in my house then, you would have been showered with Scripture. It was not my intention to save the world; at this point in my life, I was the one who needed rescuing. I taped empowering Scripture verses where I would be forced to see and read them, and that included next to the toilet—one of the few places where I was able to be still. Truth is, I was doing everything humanly possible to keep from going over the edge. I wasn't even certain where that edge existed or what was on the other side of it that I was trying desperately not to fall into. I just knew it had something to do with hell and I knew the devil wasn't fond of the Word of God, which is why I went around taping Scripture verses all over the house.

The world and the church were telling me I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. The Lord was showing me that I was on the verge of a breakthrough.

During that same time period, I was given a CD of the written Word spoken over and over again, which might sound a tad boring, except that it was interspersed with song and jammed with an anointing. I played it repeatedly every day, speaking aloud alongside the woman whose voice spoke the Word, believing its power would crush my enemy.

And since the book was highly in vogue at that time, I resolved to pray *The Prayer of Jabez* daily, believing it sounded safe enough. I had no idea then what I was really saying nor that the “enlarge my territory” part would soon become my albatross.

The combination of these three actions was explosive and the power behind it was not my own. I had just mixed a lethal cocktail and the enemy had no choice but to drink, choke, and die.

Unfortunately, the devil resolved to take me with him and, for a brief period of time, I was able to glimpse what exactly WAS waiting for me on the other side of that edge.

I was right; it *was* hell.

It was right after seeing a vision of hell that a lady came into my kitchen and opened up the way to see heaven.

Chapter Five

The Awakening

Suddenly

I called her “the lady in the kitchen,” because I didn’t want anyone to know who it was that came to me that day—May 16, 2003, not that I remember it perfectly.... She told me just one thing that set me free in an instant. I suppose it was one of those “suddenlies” I had read about in Scripture. You can’t psyche yourself up for a suddenly or put it on your calendar. They not only come unannounced, but they almost always come at around 11:59.

It was a pajama day and I was at the very edge of a nervous breakdown. It was nearly noon, so I suppose it WAS 11:59. She came to my door, and seeing her unnerved me; she rarely came to my house. She was one of the “rebellious” women in the church, the one whose husband was removed from the eldership because of her unruly nature. So she became “the lady in the kitchen” because the source, I had been told, was important to consider, and I didn’t want to tell anyone that God had used *her* to set me free. According to them, He only uses the “called” and the “qualified.”

The “lady in the kitchen” used to be my roommate, right about the time I got engaged. We were polar opposite in personality, but we bounced gently off each other with our differences. I think what I learned from her then that has stayed with me, even to this day, is how to keep a house clean and tidy. It was pre-pastor’s wife training, I suppose.

Over the years, our relationship cooled as we became separated by our new responsibilities. She married and had four children in a row; while I married, struggled with infertility and wished I'd had her loins. When our paths did cross, it was usually about her frustration with the direction the church was going. After a while, she rarely spoke to me directly but I got wind of her complaints, usually through a common friend. I was, after all, the senior pastor's wife now and I suppose that put me on an unapproachable plane. I'm sure it did make me unreachable; I had fallen into the entitlement trap and it had me by the tongue. My ears, on the other hand, picked up all the buzz.

She wasn't the only one who questioned the decision-making in the church. I also suppose, with hindsight, some of her concerns were genuine, but some of them to me were unfounded. There were astounding manifestations of the power of God in our Women's Advances but she always seemed to find fault with the experiences. I knew them to be genuine and real and often wondered why she held back. She seemed frightened by something I didn't fully understand back then. I felt it best to just avoid her, for the most part, and let her husband deal with it. We did that a lot.

After her husband became an elder, she had access to a lot more of the details of the inner workings of the church leadership, so then her complaints became more on target, but I was warned to stay clear of her and that was easy enough to do. I was now the proud and happy mother of a newly adopted baby girl and had enough to occupy my time and thoughts.

The church had grown tremendously and the multiple visitors who came to our home to preach in our church were

taking up all of my time. I put our relationship on the back burner and never thought much about her until her husband was asked to step down as an elder. Apparently, her tongue had gotten the best of her, she was quickly labeled a Jezebel (our overgrown phrase of the decade), and I just went along with it because I only knew her complaints to be rather harsh. She actually did have something worthwhile, maybe even invaluable, to say to us, but she lacked the grace to say it with discretion and we lacked the discretion to hear it with grace.

I peeked at her through the kitchen window and debated the idea of even answering the doorbell. Surely anything that brought *her* to my home could not be "of the Lord."

Through the half opened door, she said she wanted to tell me something, and that she believed the Lord had sent her. She said she was aware of something very bad going on inside me and maybe she could help. I don't remember anything about how she said this or what her face was saying, except that she seemed firm about it and I didn't know how to be mean.

And I was desperate.

I invited her into my kitchen and we sat down at the table. She spoke first, looking directly at me, as I cried into my hands, wishing I could disappear and wondering if this dark place I was in was taking me somewhere worse than where the Prozac I stopped taking only two weeks ago had taken me.

She only spoke four words to me and from that day on, I was never the same.

"It's NOT your fault."

Lord and I would be able to see Him as He was, and not how someone interpreted Him to be.

And, I was about to discover grace again.

Or, maybe even, for the very first time.

* James 1:27 (NRSV) *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

Over The Top

I was so high in the Spirit I would have to define myself as being as drunk as the people in the second chapter of Acts. I make no apologies for the high I was on or the way I acted. Deliverance from death should resonate out of every pore. Did Mary and Martha scream aloud when their brother came back to life? I would think so. I would hope so.

Jesus asked the people around Lazarus to unwrap the bindings that encircled his body. The lady in the kitchen was asked to unwrap the ones that circled my mind. You are, at the very least, supposed to throw a party over things like that.

But no one threw anything, except maybe they threw me—under the bus. The elders and the pastors and my daughter and my husband saw that something happened to me but they were unable to see that what was released from me still entombed them.

So, yes, now I did for sure appear crazy and it was crazy wonderful.

2 Cor. 5:7*

I had never really lost my faith. I had just misplaced it.

I knew it was somewhere in the “house” and I had to think long and hard about where I last had it and what I might have done with it without thinking.

I wasted a lot of time searching in vain.

I had it all along, on top of my head and right next to my missing glasses.

For a time, I couldn't see well and everything was blurry; but then I put them both back where they belonged and things cleared up a lot.

*2 COR. 5:7 (KJV) *For we walk by faith, not by sight.*

The Ladies Room

I heard about the Tuesday morning women's meeting long before I ever attended it. When someone in leadership says, “*No you can't go,*” you want to believe you are being protected somehow against something that would be *harmful* to your spirit. The idea that it might actually *free* your spirit was never intimidated, so I stayed clear of the meetings. I was given this warning: “*It was started by a rebellious woman and has no church backing. No man is involved with it and because women can get off track without pastoral guidance, it can get into cult-like activity.*”

Es-Courting

Following my suddenly, I began to journal every day, communing with the Lord every morning at the breakfast table became a regular part of my waking hours, usually between 6 and 7 in the morning. The Bible finally had something to say! I began to experience powerful revelations about who God really was and what it was that kept me from really knowing Him. Every revelation was saturated with the love of the Lord. I called it Java with Jehovah in the Tent of Meeting. I read that somewhere, so I stole it.

It was something more than just a devotional time. It was HIS devotion to me—revealing truths as only HE can—gently and firmly and supernaturally. If He tells me He is the truth, He is telling me about His nature, His character, His essence. He told me, much to my chagrin, that I was in an unhealthy church environment and an unhealthy marriage and I put my hands to my ears and said *lalalalala* and begged Him to change everything around me so that I could stay—stay at my church, stay in this marriage, and stay in this house and just wait for everything to change around me. Then it would all be happily-ever-after again. I was, after all, a pastor's wife in a born-again, spirit-filled church—had been for nearly three decades—and I loved the calling right up to this moment and wanted it to continue.

Except that nothing around me was changing. I had to watch my family and my friends and my church and my world be pulled away so that I could heal and I could change. I did not understand it at the time and it took years for me to understand this was an act of love.

So while the great divide took place, somebody had to be at fault and the choice was unanimous. I was new to all this communing with God and came across to many as finally having gone over the edge. I was labeled insane and as long as I was labeled, I was, I thought, doomed for life.

There was nothing brave in me that had the stamina to walk willingly away from what and who I loved. There was nothing martyr-like about my character that I was offering to the Lord in the same silent fashion as Mary's ponderings. There was no strength within my own self that enabled me to stand in the truth of what was being revealed to me, morning after morning at my breakfast table.

But He made it nearly impossible for me to go back, or backwards, and while my feet sometimes dragged as He drew me to Himself, I had no choice but to trust the Lord to remove me from where I would not grow and take me to a place where the healing could begin.

For a very long time, my heart did not follow my feet, so He just wooed me for a while till my heart caught up.

Do You Love Me?

I was not at all happy with the idea that God would allow me to live in deception for such a long time. I had assumed I was following Him as best I knew how and had expected Him to take me into the Land of His-Perfect-Will-For-My-Life. At the time, I made absolutely no connection between my walk

with God and the mass of Israelites dragging out a road trip that should have taken days and not years. I continued to look at the same side of the same mountain before I realized I had nailed my foot to the floor and was traveling around in circles.

My real struggle was not so much believing God was opening my eyes of understanding, but discovering I had lived over three decades in a place of ignorance. I had come to learn about the Sadducees and Pharisees and knew without question that Jesus was talking about Jewish Rabbis, Catholic priests and Presbyterian ministers. Now everything the Lord was opening up to me was confirming that I was *one of them*, that I had spent the better part of my life serving God in a church atmosphere that mirrored those Pharisees I'd so easily judged, the very ones Jesus was constantly rebuking.

"Do you love me?" Jesus asks.

Peter, the *Everyman* of the New Testament, pretty much screwed up his response. He had to hear the question three times and never really understood the implication. It grieved Peter to think that *"Yes, Lord,"* was insufficient.

What did Jesus want to hear from Peter that Peter didn't grasp?

"You know all things," Peter tells him. *"You know that I love you."*

I can hear Peter making a mental list of all the good things he had done since he joined the inner circle. It took a death and resurrection to begin the understanding process.

The same thing happened to Much-Afraid in *Hinds' Feet on High Places*.^{*} The Great Shepherd asks her:

"Do you love me enough to trust me...even if everything in the wide world seemed to say that I was deceiving you...all along?"

"Would it be that she could never trust...Him again...to know that she had been deceived by one she was certain could not deceive?"

"Much-Afraid looks directly into his face: '...if you can deceive me, you may...I must love you as long as I continue to exist. I cannot live without loving you.'"

He has asked me the same question and more than once. Like Peter, I mentally list my attributes.

Come on, God. I've got history with You.

I poured out my life for You.

I was the pastor's wife and I counseled the flock and cleaned church toilets and entertained Godly people in my home. I stayed faithful to my husband and went to all the services and took notes at Bible Studies. I did the nursery gig and even taught junior church, which You personally know I hated but no one else would do it. For decades, I changed diapers on babies who are now married with children. I said the sinner's prayer and meant it. Why would You allow me to stay ignorant for so long?"

My answer has to be the same one Much-Afraid gave the great Shepherd:

"Of course I love you; even if I, too, have been allowed to live in deception. I cannot live without loving you."

^{*} *Hinds' Feet on High Places* by Hannah Hurnard, first published in 1955, republished by many different companies today

Section Four

Break Through

*"...I have broken the bands of your yoke and
made you walk upright." Leviticus 26:13b*

Failure To Thrive

I watch the woman stroke her fingertips along the area and I am acutely aware of how gentle her touch is. Her fingers sway softly from side to side, and then up and down and she is concentrating intently on the area where her fingers are moving. Her eyes anticipate a response.

I know she is just holding an iPod, but I find myself wondering if someone would please touch me as gently as she is touching this small instrument that has become our world's latest form of communication.

To touch, I want to believe, is communication, but if I tell you I want someone to touch me, you might not understand. It's been perverted so much, I fear we've forgotten what kind of touch I'm talking about and just how pure and necessary it really is. Our schools forbid it, but children still need it. Babies fail to thrive without it and sometimes they die from lack of it.

I, too, have been slowly dying since the bus crash.

Hug me, stroke my arm, shake my hand, pat my back, give me a high-five. I want to feel skin again. All I crave is what I no longer get.

Please someone, just touch me.

When no one does, I save up a little cash and allow myself a professional body massage. I weep through the entire thirty minutes.

"That's okay," the woman tells me. "It happens a lot."

Chapter Eight

In Desperate Need

Stolen Sheep

A few weeks into the bus crash recovery, I started trying to attend church again. However, due to that horrible letter, I was not usually welcomed with warm greetings at a lot of the area congregations. I finally found a small quiet church that greeted me as if I were just a normal person so I began attending services there. I spent most of the time comparing their services to the ones I was used to and the rest of the time I just cried a lot. There were a few families in that church that used to attend mine. All of them left for the same reason—leadership control—and all of them were in various stages of healing.

But they were healing.

I got up the nerve to meet with the pastor and just laid out matter-of-factly to him all I had experienced with the Lord and how it got me to this place. I'm sure I also cried, as I could not tell the story without crying. Actually, nothing much has changed in the telling, even to this day, except the intensity of the cry. Lately, it is often just a whimper. And while the professionals were calling it PTSD, I only knew it to be excruciating grief.

I remember that he listened politely to me and said I would be welcomed at his church. I went home a little more at peace. I sucked in any form of kindness anyone expressed to me and he was kind.

That's when it happened. That's when I went into panic-mode and lost a good night's sleep. The pastor of that church was going to call up my pastors and report to them what I had just told him in that meeting. I knew that because that's what

pastors do. They tell on the flock. It shows you are out of order when you bare your soul like that to another pastor, and you must be reported and confronted and punished. It's an unwritten rule among pastors and shows your concern and your caring; you have no right stealing or counseling other pastors' sheep.

I tried with all my might to be brave and met the pastor head-on and asked him if he had told them about our conversation and he looked at me with such bewilderment and said, "Why would I?" I explained what we believed, based on all I knew, and the dear man just looked at me in a gentle way and simply said, "These are men who love God and I respect that. But as for reporting you to them, well, we just have different ways of dealing with situations and I can't understand or explain to you why they do that. It's nothing I would do or think to do."

I stayed and worshipped there for a few more weeks. The church carries good memories for me, even now, and while it was not home, it did allow the early stages of healing to happen.

Meat And Milk

The first time I realized I had to be gracious instead of right, I threw a hissy-fit.

I wrote in my journal. "How do I move past it and pretend I'm just fine? I'M NOT FINE! What did YOU do? You either turned your cheek, knocked a table over or went to the Cross. *I'd like to slap a cheek, turn over a table, and then go to the Cross and ask You for forgiveness.*"

I was new at living alone, new at hearing the Lord for myself and new at the business of deflecting nasty rumors being told about me, and handling complete and utter rejection by everyone I loved.

So I began searching the Word for vindication Scriptures.

The vindication Scriptures are a great reference point when you decide to be your own avenger. They stir up your juices and put arrows on your anger. They direct the arrows into the heart of the enemy and, if you aim just right, they can destroy your enemy.

I grabbed my Bible and sat on my backyard deck, the Bible in one hand and my morning coffee in the other. I read Psalm 35 out loud, raising my voice and putting emphasis on the parts I wanted the Lord to be especially attuned to.

“Stir up Yourself, and awake to my vindication.”

“They opened their mouth wide against me and said, ‘Aha, aha’...this you have seen, O Lord; so *do not keep silence.*”

“Vindicate me...according to your righteousness...let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion...let them be clothed with shame and dishonor.”

I went back into the kitchen to refill my coffee mug and brought it out to the deck. The wind had turned the page of my opened Bible and my eyes instantly fell where it had opened, on Psalm 37:10.

“For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more.”

I was sure He was seeing things my way and searched for the “bring fire out of heaven” stuff. I was a mature Christian woman, feeding, I was confident, on the meat of the Word and

learning to apply the written Word where it would do the most good, or, in actuality, do what I wanted it to do.

The Lord had reminded me of one thing—my enemies were indeed wicked.

Didn’t the Lord just tell me that?

Whose wind blew that page, anyway?

The Lord quickly pulled this verse out of my memory bank, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord (Romans 12:19).

The arrows of my words were never arrows at all, but boomerangs. Within a matter of just an hour or two, my words were coming straight back and hitting me dead center in the heart. The impact forced me to my knees as I was reminded it was the Lord who does the vindicating, that I was making the very judgments I sought to condemn others for making, which might make ME the one with the wicked thinking.

I crawled back to my journal and sheepishly wrote,

“Does this mean hang in there, MYOB*, *and stop playing judge?*”

“*What do YOU think?*” He asked.

I repented, wiping away tiny droplets of milk from the corners of my mouth.

* Mind Your Own Business

said carried my heart into a place where I only knew grace and I only saw Jesus.

I began to like what I saw. I began to like Who I saw. I even began to like myself again.

While Graham might have been sent here for a variety of reasons, one of them surely was me.

An English Lesson, Part 1

Every moment spent in my car was another opportunity to listen to a Graham Cooke message. My friend had introduced me to him when my husband and I were still living together in the same house and pretending to the world that all was well with ours. Nobody knew we were living on two different levels of that Gingerbread house.

I used every opportunity I could to get away; it's not like running *from*, but hiding *in*. Listening to Graham's preaching was my hiding place, like a balm for my ears. The messages on those tapes caused a Great Exchange: truths I longed to hear were replacing lies I'd been led to believe.

Truth, however it comes, is welcoming and heart-warming and there was a time when truth felt so wonderful and so good and so liberating that I actually felt guilty about soaking in it. A liberated spirit is a soaring spirit.

So I listened to a lot of Graham and let my spirit soar. It literally took years for many of these truths to manifest; it had taken years for the lies to take root. I had made my soil fertile for all the wrong seeds.

An English Lesson, Part 2

I was doing the Graham Cooke exchange, caught up in a message about how the Lord was there to fill up those places within us that needed what we lacked. I was driving on a main highway and Graham was preaching to an auditorium-filled crowd. He asked each of them to close their eyes and I was so caught up in the message that I pulled over and parked in the first available parking lot. Graham has a way of making you listen and realize that maybe, just maybe, God has something to say to you that might be life-changing.

Graham asked his audience to consider whatever it was they had need of and believe God to supply that need with Himself. My lack-list was long and He could be just about anything to me at that point and a need would be met.

"I want you to close your eyes and ask the Lord what it is He intends to be for you and to you," we were instructed, *"And then I want you to allow Him to empty your mind and listen for the answer."*

Have you ever sat perfectly still and tried to clear your mind out of the thinking process and into a place of what I suppose they call true meditation?

"Okay, so now I'm not driving so I don't have to concentrate on the road."

"Good. Now I'm in the parking lot, the car is turned off and there's no one around looking at me and making me uncomfortable."

"Okay, so let me see what it is I need? I need affection, I need acceptance, I need money, I need... Wait. I need too much. If I go

It was late afternoon when I pushed myself out the door to get the mail. My eye caught something red that appeared to be floating on my front lawn. My lawn was at its ugly stage—soggy and brown and void of life.

That was like my heart, as well, except not the soggy part. My heart was parched.

The object that caught my eye was a balloon, still filled with some degree of helium, making it dance around the front yard with the gentle breeze. It was shaped like a heart. White letters spelled out the words I LOVE YOU in its center.

It made no difference that it might have been a leftover from February. It arrived, I can only believe, at my house, at this time, on this very grey day, by divine design.

As I walked back into the house, embracing the balloon, water trickled into my hardened soil and tiny buds exploded under my feet.

Transplant

“Lord, my life is shit!”

I was shocked at my own words. I was addressing God. I was standing at my front door, and it was opened, and the neighborhood encircled me because I lived in the middle house on a cul-de-sac so I was always surrounded by something.

I call Him Lord or Daddy or Father when I talk. Sometimes Papa, since I read *The Shack*. * But we do talk. And it was my voice that was the loudest that day.

Most days, it is, anyway. He’s a whisperer. We humans all have little voices, if you were to compare them to, say, thunder claps, so I raise mine just a bit and believe that my every word is heard through all the other sounds in the universe. Like in the movie, *God Almighty*. He pulls out my words amid the clang of other sounds and other voices. He hears only *my* voice and listens intently. What I have to say is *that* important to Him and since I was relearning us as a couple, I was not sure how best to approach Him.

I was trying to tell Him what my true feelings were about the direction my life had taken and it took a lot for me to use that word. Maybe it’s normal vocabulary for someone else’s mouth, but it just didn’t normally have place in mine.

But then things have changed. I’ve changed. This day, it was a perfect word to use and it spoke with clarity and it spoke with boldness and it spoke well of my life.

I shut up long enough to let Him talk and He gave me a new perspective on life.

“Have you ever thought seriously about what you call ‘shit’ before today? Or about what the grossest thing to come out of ANY body is used for?”

Not really.

“It’s used for fertilizer, honey. It helps things to grow faster and better. It is sweetness coming out of stench; it is renewal coming out of repulsion. It is life coming out of death.

“I’m going to take your life and plant it in another garden and you will see it grow. First the natural and then the spiritual.”

The following week, I found a wallpaper border in a clearance bin that appeared to be a series of attractive and colorful

I'll repeat a Scripture verse, anytime. But don't tell me what to do when I don't know what I'm about to do.

Is that unhealthy? Who cares? It's safe and safe is what I need.

Foot Fetish

You know the footsteps story—the one set of footprints in the sand are all you see because it's Jesus who carried you through the hard times.

A few years ago, a new set of prints made its way on the internet. This time, there were two pairs of footprints, one somewhat larger in size than the other, both zigzagging their way across the computer screen. We were told the larger set belonged to Jesus and the other set of footprints were your own and the two of you were dancing.

I have a vision, too. I see a pair of footprints walking along the sands of what I can only assume is that same bit of ground—except this time, I am positive the sands are those of a desert and not a beach. Behind these ever-moving-forward footprints are two horizontal stripes, approximately eight inches apart and running the entire length of the desert floor.

“Lord, what is that?” my quivering voice asked.

“Carol, that's Me, dragging you through the last several years of your life.”

The Other Tuesday Morning

My Tuesday morning group is expecting great things from me. It has nothing to do with my gifts or my talents or my calling; it has nothing to do with me. They expect great things from everybody.

I've been woven into a roomful of Godly women who meet on a Tuesday morning in a living room far too small for the number of women who show up, making fellowship ultra-cozy. Each of these women embrace the new face and the new crisis and the new girl on the block and they don't ask her what church she goes to or stick a thermometer in her mouth to gauge her spiritual temperature.

All the while, these same women never forget the ones who have been there, year after year, decade after decade, extending the same love and courtesy to them, showing the world around them what I have come to believe is the true meaning of church.

The women are a rare collection of Body parts, YOUR Body parts, Lord, used these last three decades to bandage broken bodies, pour oil into raw and flaming wounds, locate the key to the prison door, and reawaken the hearts religion nearly destroyed.

And always, always reminding each other of their worth and value.

I see Jesus when I come to these meetings and, if nothing else, this might actually be a rare peek into His feminine side.