

FINDING YOUR VOICE

THE SOUND OF ETERNITY WOVEN INTO YOU

ROBIN SMIT

TWS PUBLISHING

Copyright © 2025 by Robin Smit

All rights reserved.

Published by TWS Publishing

Lodi, CA

www.thewriterssociety.online

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

NO AI TRAINING: Without in any way limiting the author's [and publisher's] exclusive rights under copyright, any use of this publication to train generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to generate text is expressly prohibited. The author reserves all rights to license uses of this work for generative AI training and development of machine learning language models.

Each contributing author retains full intellectual rights to their individual chapter(s) and may use their material in future works. TWS Publishing has been granted permission to include their work in this compilation.

ISBN paperback: 978-1-966818-14-4

For the brave.

For the quiet ones who found their sound.

For the next generation.

For the legacy we speak into being.

For you.

CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Foreword	ix
Introduction	xi
PART ONE	
THE SILENCING	
Finding Your Voice: The Expression of the True You <i>Catherine Toon</i>	3
The Silent Voice That Speaks <i>Amanda Stoneman</i>	13
The Sound from the Quiet <i>Cindy Quarles</i>	17
A Journey Through the Silence <i>Davina Winn</i>	23
The Silence Was Never Holy <i>Shanda Miller</i>	33
Catching My Breath, Restoring My Voice <i>Lisa Wentworth Couture</i>	41
Releasing the Weight of Silence <i>Melissa McCreery</i>	57
PART TWO	
THE AWAKENING	
Your Voice Was Always Yours <i>Brooke Waters</i>	63
Someone Needs to Hear What You Have to Say <i>Cindy Buck</i>	69
How I Found My Voice <i>Cheryl Young Smith</i>	75
At Last, I Sound Like Myself <i>Dr. Rachael Cannon</i>	81
Questions and Echoes <i>Jessica Boudreaux</i>	97
Finding Your Voice in Sacred Co-Union <i>Tehilla Luttig</i>	103
From Insecurity to the Secret Place <i>Traci Vanderbush</i>	113

PART THREE
THE LEGACY

Baking Pies	121
<i>Lori Zenker</i>	
Phenomenal Voice	127
<i>Dr. Tony Robinson</i>	
The Conversation Within	131
<i>Lydia du Toit</i>	
Swan Song	137
<i>Nicole Weaver</i>	
A Voice That Speaks Life	141
<i>Robin Smit</i>	
From Concrete to Compassion: A Landscape of Love's Unfolding	153
<i>Felicia Murr</i>	
Also by the authors	163
About the Publisher	167

PREFACE

Some of my favorite books to publish are the ones that bring multiple voices together—and *Finding Your Voice* is no exception. There's something sacred about watching people step into the unknown, side by side, courageously offering their stories, their revelations, and their truth.

I've had the honor of working with best-selling authors and with those who never imagined they'd see their words in print. Whether you're holding a chapter written by someone with a dozen titles to their name or by someone writing publicly for the first time, you'll find one thing in common: every voice in this book reflects the journey they've walked and the grace they've discovered along the way.

You'll recognize moments of boldness, seasons of becoming, and whispers of grace tucked into each page. These writers didn't hold back—and their honesty may just stir something familiar in you too.

What makes this book even more special is the presence of generational voices. Two chapters were written by mothers and their daughters—my own daughter, Nicole, and also Lyda du Toit and her daughter Tehilla Luttig. That's not just powerful; it's legacy in motion.

This book isn't just a collection of stories—it's a shared declaration that every voice matters. And as you read, I hope you'll be reminded that yours does too.

—ROBIN SMIT

PUBLISHER, TWS PUBLISHING

FOREWORD

INTRODUCTION

I am the son of a widow, the brother to a sister, a husband, and the father of two daughters. For almost thirty years I have been surrounded by “femaleness.” It has been a fascinating learning experience for me and one thing, in particular, that I have learned is, watching a person begin to find their own unique voice is like watching an art masterpiece come to life.

In our time together as husband and wife I’ve watched in Holy wonder as my best friend journeyed with Jesus to find her voice. From a shy unsure “whisperer” to a lioness roaring alongside the Lion of the Tribe of Judah I’ve cheered on and celebrated alongside my wife as she found her voice.

The book you hold in your hand is not a treatise or a formula to be followed, rather it is a collection of personal testimonies, written and shared to inspire you, the reader, to search for your voice. The authors of this book have many wonderful things to say and they believe that is true of you as well.

Your voice, your true voice, is unique and personal and it matters for

the world. And finding it is a life-long journey with Jesus in his face-to-face relationship with the Father in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

If you think you have found your voice already... read on. In the following pages you may just discover a new inflection, a more comfortable cadence, renewed purpose, or a burden to help another find theirs.

If you're a man keep reading brother. Though the authors of each chapter are women it was not the intention to exclude you. You too must find your voice in concert with the Lord. Your words have enormous power and influence too and this book can help you discover how Jesus would speak through you to help heal the broken and build his kingdom on Earth.

This little book is an easy read and offers an honest look at the experiences of the various authors. I think you will find this book fascinating, and inspiring. I hope the words, "If they can do it so can I," will ring in the deepest places of your being. I pray that any fear and insecurity that may have stolen your voice will be trampled under the feet of Jesus as he leads you, walks ahead of you, and treads down the rough places.

It is good to read broadly, study, listen, and avail ourselves to the teaching of Saints past and mentors present but we must develop the boldness necessary to express ourselves in our own original voice. We must resist the lie that we have nothing original to say and that to parrot others is what gives our voice its value. Jesus has already spoken through the Saints, he is already speaking through your mentor, he wants to now speak through YOU.

I can assure you that it is the will of the most Holy and undivided Trinity that you find your true voice. Jesus is the Word made flesh and he always does what he is... so, as the Word, he is speaking always and through you as you learn to hear and sing along. He is the whisper, the cry, the shout, and the roar within you seeking expression through the beauty of you.

Finding Your Voice is another seminal offering from The Writer's Society wherein you will see that discovering what it means to find your own unique voice is not about learning to deliver a soliloquy or sing a solo. There is healing and wisdom in your true voice. In every syllable of your authentic voice there is, insight, strength, and comfort. Your voice is bold, meek, controversial, and Christlike. Your original voice carries with it the ancient refrains of love, laughter, and unbounded joy. It is not a solo, it's a concert, a holy quartet harmonizing with the Father, Son, and holy Spirit.

May you find it, use it, and be a blessing to others... in Jesus name.

BILL WINN, MPS

LEAD PASTOR GRACE COMMUNION HANOVER, DEAN FOR ACADEMICS AT
GGG, AUTHOR OF UNCLE PINK DIRT-N-ALL, HOST OF THE GOOD DIRT
WITH BILL WINN, AMATEUR JACKWAGON.

PART ONE
THE SILENCING

When voices are stolen or buried...

FINDING YOUR VOICE: THE EXPRESSION OF THE TRUE YOU

CATHERINE TOON

WHAT IF YOUR VOICE ISN'T SOMETHING YOU DISCOVER OUT THERE, BUT something you remember from within?

What if your voice is the sound of eternity echoing through time—the voice of God/Love, expressed uniquely as you?

Finding your voice is not merely about sound, speech, cadence, or content. It is the sacred unveiling of who you truly are; intimacy between God and you in expression. Your authentic voice represents your identity and message manifesting through articulation. It is not something external to be earned or fought for. Nor is it something to be put on the market or exploited.

It is holy—your being, expressed. Your voice is your heart, soul, and spirit testifying, “This is who I am. This is who God crafted me to be, and I have something life-giving to say.” Your voice is holy.

THE SOUND OF INTIMACY

Think about this: When you're close to someone—*really* close—you can recognize their voice without effort. One syllable, one breath, and you

know it's them. There's a presence that inhabits the sound waves, announcing their being. This is how it is with God.

Jesus said, "My sheep know My voice" (John 10:27). But what if the voice you hear sounds a lot like yours? Beloved, that's not confusion; that's union. Your spirit and His are One (1 Cor. 6:17). When God speaks through you, it naturally flows through your unique cadence, dialect, and personhood.

This is not imitation. This is incarnation.

So, when God whispers, "Hi, it's Me," in the depths of your being, don't brush it off as merely your imagination. Don't look for fireworks or thunder. Most often, it's in the still small voice—the frequency of Love vibrating within your essence (1 Kings 19:12). And here's a fascinating truth: learning to discern God's voice helps you discover your own!

WHO YOU ARE AND WHOSE YOU ARE

To find your voice, you must first know who you are on a deeper level than many of us do. There is no condemnation in this. We live in a very *noisy* world. And often our internal world can be loud, chaotic, painful, and confusing. Sometimes we hesitate to dig that deep because we are afraid of who we will find "down there," particularly when shame, whether from life experiences or religious conditioning, has distorted our self-perception.

To know ourselves begins with knowing Who God is and how He sees us: fully known, perfectly complete, intrinsically approved of, and utterly adored. We are His, of Him, and lovely because we are His Love creation.

God is Love. And Love expresses Himself through you—not as a carbon copy of someone else (who needs that?), but in the beautiful, unreplicable flavor of you. Your voice stems from who you are in your eternal union with God!

We are told that we are “as Christ is in this world” (1 John 4:17). But that Christ-in-you reality is not generic. It is filtered through your God-crafted essence: your culture, your personality, your story, your unique perspective, and so on.

That means your voice carries the fragrance of heaven with the accent of you. But to express it, you must love and embrace the you that God made, crafted, cherishes, and glories over, AND you must dare to speak! You have a message filtered through your authentic you-ness that the world needs. When you let fear or insecurity silence you, despite Holy Spirit's leading, you allow fear to be Lord instead of God. Pushing through the learning curve—even doing it badly until you do it well—deeply pleases God because it is YOU in brave expression!

So many live silenced by shame, abuse, and lies of unworthiness and insignificance. Others resort to shouting, hoping that by drowning out other voices, they might validate their existence and compensate for feelings of insignificance or inferiority. But the voice of Truth doesn't come from force—it flows from freedom. When you know you're accepted and intrinsically loved, you don't need to scream to be heard. You speak because you *are*.

And your voice has weight. Think of Jesus, acting in His Son of Man/human dimension. He knew His Father and His Father's approval so intimately that when He spoke, He astonished the crowds because of the authority and weight His words carried—unlike the religious scholars who were not operating from a place of intimacy and sonship (Matt. 7:28–29).

THE SYMPHONY OF SONS AND DAUGHTERS

We live in a highly competitive world clamoring to be heard. But your voice is not meant to compete; it's meant to complete.

When each son and daughter of God releases their authentic sound, we become a divine symphony—a heavenly orchestra resonating throughout the earth realm. Scripture says all creation is groaning,

waiting (can you feel it?) for the revealing and unveiling of the sons and daughters of God (Romans 8:19–21). Your voice, born of intimacy, shaped in surrender to the One Who crafted you is a sound creation is longing to hear. Not a copy. Not an echo. But a clarion call.

Your voice may whisper. It may shout. It may be a melody or a movement, a poem or a protest. Whatever it is, it matters. Because the frequency of your voice was encoded with divine purpose before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4; 2:10).

RECLAIMING THE VOICE THAT WAS SILENCED

If your voice feels silenced, know this: you may feel disempowered and broken, but you are in glorious process (Rom. 8:29–30; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 2:13). If your voice was stolen or silenced, your voice is all the more valuable, powerful, and *needed!*

Maybe trauma muted you. Maybe shame choked you. Maybe cultural bigotry or religious distortion taught you that silence was godly.

If you are a woman who has felt silenced by scripture, you are not alone and there is clarity and freedom available. And if you are a man who has been drawn to powerful, anointed women's voices but felt unsure, afraid, or even guilty about honoring those voices or inviting them to speak, you too are not alone. You've likely wrestled with a narrative that distorted scripture and pitted devotion against inclusion. But God is not divided. He's inviting all of us—men and women—to honor the Christ in one another and release the fullness of His voice through every vessel He chooses.

TACKLING THE MISOGYNISTIC ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: SILENCING WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Scriptures such as 1 Timothy 2:11–14 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–36 have long been stumbling blocks for women—and for men who desire to receive from, release, and celebrate their voices.

Let's begin with 1 Timothy 2:11–14:

A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But **I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man**, but to **remain quiet**. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a wrongdoer.

(NASB, *emphasis added*)

At face value, this appears to bar women from teaching or having authority. However, a nuanced historical and contextual understanding of Paul's letter to Timothy reveals deeper insights. Paul was addressing Timothy as he oversaw the church in Ephesus—a region steeped in Gnostic heresy. These false doctrines elevated Eve above Adam, propagating the idea that she brought wisdom through her interaction with the serpent. Viewed in this historical context, Paul's instruction wasn't a universal mandate for all women across all cultures and time periods. Rather, it was a targeted correction addressing a specific group of women who were promoting theologically dangerous teachings. Furthermore, the Greek word used for “authority” here is *authentēō*, a rare word implying domination or even violence—hardly the word for healthy spiritual leadership.

Additionally, in Titus 1:10–11, Paul similarly commands certain men to be silenced for corrupt teachings. His rebukes are not gender-specific; they are *falsehood* and *unhealthy leadership*-specific, just as they should be.

Now let's address 1 Corinthians 14:34–36:

³⁴ **the women are to keep silent in the churches**; for they are **not permitted to speak**, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. ³⁵ If they **desire to learn anything**, let them **ask their own husbands**

at home; for it is ^[a]improper for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶ Or was it from you that the word of God first went out? Or has it come to you only?
(NASB, ^[a]disgraceful, *emphasis added*)

Yet just chapters and verses earlier, Paul affirms all (including women) praying and prophesying in church (1 Cor. 11:5, 1 Cor. 14:21). This is not merely *allowing* women to speak—it's *sanctioning* them to speak *for God* with divine authority!

So, which is it? Are women permitted to speak in the church or not?

One compelling resolution to this seeming contradiction emerges when we examine the passage within its historical context. In verses 34–35, Paul appears to be quoting—*not endorsing*—the Corinthians' own restrictive views that they had previously communicated to him in a letter.

The Corinthians' problematic assertions included:

- The claim that women's silence was standard practice for all churches of the saints
- The insistence that women must remain completely silent in church
- The prohibition against women speaking in any capacity
- The directive that women seeking knowledge should only consult their husbands privately at home
- The declaration that women speaking in church was improper or disgraceful

Then in verses 36–38, Paul forcefully refutes these ideas:

**Or was it from you that the word of God first went out?
Or has it come to you only?³⁷ If anyone thinks that
he is a prophet or **spiritual**, let him recognize that the
things which I write to you are **the Lord's****

commandment. ³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize this, ^[a]he is not recognized.

(emphasis added)

Ouch—can you feel the sting of it?!

Paul was addressing and correcting a harmful cultural mindset specific to the Corinthian church, not establishing a universal mandate silencing women across all churches, throughout all cultures, and for all time.

In Romans 16, we see Paul’s affirmation and support for women in ministry. Paul praises Junia as “outstanding among the apostles,” commends Phoebe the deaconess, and applauds Priscilla, even placing her name first before her husband (scandalous). He honors Tryphena, Tryphosa, and others as co-laborers.

This is not a man bent on squelching and silencing women; this is a leader championing and calling *both* genders to rise in the fullness of their calling.

So, daughters of God—find your authentic voice! Speak freely, boldly, and passionately with the authority heaven has given you.

And sons of God—honor and receive from women's voices with openness and respect, even as you exercise your own calling.

Heaven is harmonized when we all rise together.

DIVINE WHISPERS TO ENCOURAGE YOUR VOICE

- Your voice may not be the loudest—but it can release life for someone who desperately needs it.
- Your voice may tremble—but it can ring with truth.
- Your voice is not for approval—but from alignment with the One Who matters most.
- Your voice may not be for everyone—but it’s for someone.

So, speak. Speak not to perform, but to release.

Speak not to impress, but to liberate.

Speak from the place of oneness, of holy wholeness, of unveiled belovedness.

“TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE”—A KINGDOM REFRAME

Shakespeare wrote, “To thine own self be true.” And in Christ, we echo back: “To my new creation self be true.” Not the self, shaped by shame or pain, but the self who is redeemed, reconciled, and radiant in Christ.

When you are true to *that* self, you’re never false to another. Because you are a living letter from God (2 Cor. 3:3)—a voice of Love in a world aching to remember the sound of heaven.

So, I bless you today to find your voice—the one etched in eternity and whispered into the earth when God said, “Let there be...” and you were.

You are not too much. You are not behind. You are not disqualified.

You are loved. And your voice is needed.

So speak, beautiful one.

The world is listening.

CATHERINE TOON, MD, IS A RETIRED PHYSICIAN TURNED AUTHOR, SPEAKER, MENTORING COACH, AND PODCASTER WHO IS PASSIONATE ABOUT RESTORING WHOLENESS, UNVEILING IDENTITY, AND IGNITING DESTINY THROUGH ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD’S EXTRAVAGANT LOVE. HER BOOKS INCLUDE THE *MARKED BY LOVE* COLLECTION, *HOW TO HEAR GOD*, *RARE & BEAUTIFUL TREASURES*, AND *GOD, MALE & FEMALE?*. SHE HOSTS THE *PERSPECTIVES WITH CATHERINE TOON* PODCAST, SERVES ON FACULTY AT GLOBAL GRACE SEMINARY, AND APPEARS ON THE GRACE AWAKENING

NETWORK. KNOWN FOR HER FRESH, SPIRIT-BREATHED VOICE, CATHERINE HAS HELPED THOUSANDS EXPERIENCE LIFE-TRANSFORMING INTIMACY WITH GOD.

SHE LIVES IN COLORADO WITH HER BELOVED HUSBAND, BRIAN, AND THEIR THREE AMAZING CHILDREN.

THE SILENT VOICE THAT SPEAKS

AMANDA STONEMAN

I stand silently to listen for the one I love, waiting as long as it takes for the Lord to rescue me. For God alone has become my Savior. He alone is my safe place; his wrap-around presence always protects me. For he is my champion defender; there's no risk of failure with God. So why would I let worry paralyze me, even when troubles multiply around me?"

—Psalm 62:1-2 TPT

BAREFOOT IN THE GRASS WITH A WATER CUP, A BACKPACK, AND A GOOD book. You sit there, reading. Nature edges closer. Fresh-cut blades drift across the pages, and small insects crawl over your fingers like it's their altar too. Somehow, your presence has summoned creation. Stillness speaks. No words have passed your lips, but your soul begins to settle—after a day of asking, *Will this chaos ever relent?*

As you are reading, your imagination takes flight. You are lying in a field of luscious green grass, staring up at the clouds. The world has faded away, and you are at complete rest, enjoying the flow of the

clouds and the grass gently swaying in the wind. As you look at the clouds, they form shapes and patterns, and though no words are spoken, you are fully present in God's creation. This field is your safe place. The sights, sounds, and smells are treasures you will carry with you for the rest of your life. In this moment, there is no worry or fear. You are fully experiencing the Kingdom—the silent voice that speaks.

We often rush out of this childlike bliss, eager to become adults. But once you are an adult, that bliss seems so far away. Now, you're facing the challenges of life: marriage, family, friendships, ministry, bills, sickness, loss, and the list continues. You're bombarded with advice, and your brain and mind scream for it to stop. Then, while doing something as simple as a daily chore, the memory of our Father's beautiful world floods your mind—days spent lying in the grass, under the sun, watching the clouds. No words are spoken, but the silence speaks louder than the noise of the world. Rest, My child—take it in.

It's no wonder Jesus pointed us back to this kind of trust—this quiet, effortless receiving.

Luke 18:17 Mirror Translation: "In fact, this is the very reason why so many struggle to consciously access the dimension of the kingdom of God! They seem to be trapped in a religious, adult mind of performance and self-doubt, having forgotten what it's like to live in childlike trust and receive the blessing of the kingdom as effortlessly as breathing."

I remember doing this in the summers as a child. My imagination was free to roam, but I didn't realize that God was speaking to me through His creation during those moments. Growing up in a large family, quiet time was rare. But it wasn't just quiet I was yearning for—it was to be noticed, to be seen for who I was. I couldn't wait to grow up, to be in control of my own life, to do what I wanted without rules, regulations, and the opinions of others. I wanted to be recognized for what I could bring to the table. But, needless to say, being an adult isn't

always what we build it up to be in our minds, which is why we're told to renew our minds.¹

*"Temptations and contradictions come in different shapes, sizes, and intervals; their intention is always to suck you into their energy field. However, my friends, your joy in who you know you are leads you out triumphantly every time. Here is the secret: joy is not something you have to fake, it is the fruit of what your faith knows to be true about you, know that the proof of faith results in a persuasion that remains constant in contradiction."*²

Let's return to that field of succulent green grass. The clouds, once fluffy and white with space between them, are now shifting. What was soft and airy has turned into a flat sheet of gray, deepening as the shades of gray grow darker. The clouds seem to roll in, and the distant rumble of thunder reaches your ears. As you continue to lie there, the voices of nature rise again. What do you hear? The floodwaters of worry or the steady rhythm of your breath? Floodwaters carry fear and anxiety, while breath—His breath—is the very name of God, YHWH³, bringing life and freedom to your body. He is always speaking through you and to you. The field you've been enjoying hasn't changed; only the conditions around it have. Close your eyes and breathe. Listen for His silent voice. What is He saying?

Again, God speaks—not through thunder, but through silence. We are part of creation, not above it. Sometimes what we need isn't a fix, but

1. Romans 12:2

2. James 1:2-3 The Mirror Translation

3. From Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*: "The name YHWH was considered so sacred it was not spoken, but only breathed. Many scholars and mystics have noted that the four letters—Yod, He, Vav, He—mimic the sound of inhaling and exhaling. The sound of breathing is the sound of the Name. Thus, the name of God becomes the first, last, and most natural word that crosses our lips—our very breath becomes our prayer."

an hour in the grass. To listen again to the birds of the air, the plants of the field, and the Light who holds them all together.

This silent voice—the worship of creation—is what we hear when we're still. "Let the skies sing for joy! Let the earth join in the chorus. Let the oceans thunder and fields echo the ecstatic praise until every swaying tree of every forest joins in, lifting up their songs of joyous praise to him!⁴"

AMANDA STONEMAN IS A BEST-SELLING AUTHOR, WIFE, MOTHER, AND A STUDENT OF THEOLOGY AT GLOBAL GRACE SEMINARY. SHE LIVES WITH HER HUSBAND, BRIAN, AND THEIR THREE BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS ON THEIR FAMILY RANCH IN NORTHEAST OHIO. AMANDA CONTINUES TO WRITE, DRAWING FROM HER LIFE EXPERIENCES AND SPIRITUAL REVELATIONS TO ENCOURAGE AND EQUIP OTHERS. YOU CAN CONNECT WITH HER ON FACEBOOK AT ONE HEART LIVING OR REACH HER DIRECTLY AT ONEHEARTCOACH@GMAIL.COM.

4. Psalm 96:11-12 The Passion Translation

THE SOUND FROM THE QUIET

CINDY QUARLES

ECHOES, PARROTS, AND VENTRILOQUISTS

ECHOES FASCINATED ME AS A CHILD. STANDING ON A RIDGE AND SHOUTING into the expanse, my voice returned to me in multiple waves, each resonating ripple fading into an eerie silence. It's no wonder that for the ancients, sound reverberating from rocks and canyons with no apparent source was a supernatural phenomenon. Though intriguing, echoes do not actually originate from spirits within the rock walls and canyon floor, as it may seem; rather, they are simply sound waves bouncing off these surfaces, repeating the sound projected to them.

Parrots are just as remarkable as echoes—and enormously entertaining to boot! They can mimic human speech, with some having a vocabulary of up to two thousand words. Who among us hasn't yowled with laughter as one of them incessantly imitates annoying household noises or recites embarrassing phrases in polite company, all with perfect diction and a straight face? Some scientists believe parrots may even possess a cognitive understanding of language, but undoubtedly, they cannot think through a concept and articulate it intelligently. They can only repeat what they hear.

Ventriloquism is akin to magic. A person can actually make their voice sound as though it is coming from a distant spot in the room or from a puppet nearby. Ventriloquists have been staples in the entertainment industry for years, featuring performers like Edgar Bergen and his sidekick dummy, Charlie McCarthy, or Shari Lewis with her sweet little Lamb Chop. No matter how funny and lifelike Charlie was, or how adorable and realistic Lamb Chop appeared, their voices were not their own. Their movements and words belonged to their handlers.

GENUINE ARTIFICIAL

Do you remember the character Mr. Haney from the old TV show “Green Acres?” He was the shyster salesman who occasionally came around peddling “jen-u-wine artificial gold watches” and such. He had a certain charm and was lovable in his way, but you knew not to buy anything he was selling. Sadly, there are many “genuine artificial” sounds echoing throughout the church world. Kids and older adults alike, fresh out of Bible colleges, parrot their beloved founder or favorite instructor, repeating what they’ve heard along with the corresponding Bible verse, yet unable to express real contemplation from within. Graduates of denominational seminaries (the “preacher factory,” as they’re amusingly referred to by some) often resemble a ventriloquist’s puppet, controlled in action and speech by their institutions. In contrast, a true, genuine voice emerges from the secret place, hidden and intimate, simple yet profound, arising from the heart.

For many years, I was part of that man-made construct, repeating what I had heard without much thought to the validity of what I was saying, training others to do the same. When questioned, I found that much of what I held to was indefensible, with gaping holes in the logic, held together by nonsensical religious patchwork. Eventually, I found my voice – not the parroting of another, or an echo of someone else’s sound, but my unique sound, resonating from deep within.

FINDING THE VOICE WITHIN

Refreshingly, there are many authentic voices coming forth, sounds resonating from the source within, free from religious restrictions or manufactured doctrines. What distinguishes an authentic voice from the metaphorical mimicking parrot, echoing noise, or ventriloquist's dummy?

The Bible college from which I graduated rarely, if ever, took a scholarly approach to scripture in any shape, form, or fashion. Many, it seems, are similar in that respect. In my experience, the entire curriculum was based on one man's revelation of the grace and unconditional love of God. A good and right revelation, for sure, and a credible place from which to launch. However, even that, as good as it is, can be limiting if a box is drawn and followers are discouraged from venturing outside the lines. Rarely, if ever, did we go beyond the plain, surface reading of scripture. There was no critical thinking, little conversation, and scarcely any questioning of the material or lectures. We were not encouraged to ponder and reflect.

Miraculously, I broke free of those confinements. Exposed to a more scholarly approach to scripture, I was off to the races! I began to ask God tough questions. I read widely, trusting the Holy Spirit within to lead and guide me into all truth. I was fearless about where I sought information and perspectives, far beyond previously approved boundaries. Eventually, I found a group of grace-based, Christ-centered, Trinitarian theologians under whom I studied and earned a master's in theological studies. This may not be the route for everyone, but it was the best thing I've ever done for myself. It was here that I found my voice.

Hold on, I'm not saying you have to do the same to find yours. Let me share what I consider the most valuable gift I received from my professors that doesn't require pursuing a degree. It's for everyone; anyone can do it. Jesus did it. David did it. Paul, I'm sure, did this. Some call it contemplation; others refer to it as meditation. Don

Keathley talks about “taking that to the back porch and thinking about it for a while.” Whatever you call it, everyone does it, and we’re actually quite adept at it.

Consider this: Let’s say you are worried about one of your children. Your sweet boy or girl is beginning to associate with the wrong crowd. They are using language you didn’t teach them and frequenting places that you would not approve. As you ruminate on this, you imagine all the implications of the lifestyle your precious one is moving toward. You envision a late-night call every parent hopes to never receive. Your chest tightens as you picture the love of your heart ten years down the line in a prison cell, terrified, sobbing, surrounded by the worst of the worst.

What is that? Most would call it worry, imagining the worst, and so on. That is true. It can also be referred to as contemplation, meditation, or “taking it to the back porch and thinking about it.” My point is that anyone can contemplate a situation, envisioning all its implications and thinking deeply about it. This is reflection and meditation, and anyone can do it! It doesn’t require a degree in anything! A child can do this, and they do it quite well and quite often. We call it daydreaming, and all of us do it. What you contemplate is what matters. The same kind of deep thought and consideration can be applied to scripture, the nature of God revealed in Jesus Christ, His faithfulness, love, eternity, infinitude, an idea He has given you, a business solution you are looking for ... the list is endless. You get to choose.

Throughout my studies, this is the most valuable lesson I’ve gained. My professors required it of me. I was asked to take all the information, insights, and perspectives I’d discovered on a subject and write about it. They wanted to hear my voice on it. The only way to avoid parroting a lecture, echoing (plagiarizing) a book, or being swayed by popular opinion—and my professors were sure to call me out on it if I did—was to sit, get quiet, go inward, commune with God, and deeply reflect on the subject. Ask questions. What are the

implications? What is inferred? Think it through to its logical conclusion. Do this with anything. God the Holy Spirit within you is right there in the middle of it with you, bringing clarity and understanding. Get still, get quiet, and listen. Make it a habit. From here, your voice emerges, clear and true.

It was here that I found mine. Not mimicking noise, not bouncing sound waves from another source, not someone else's voice speaking through me, but my sound, resonating from the quiet deep within, authentic and unique. It is my voice, and I like the sound.

CYNTHIA (CINDY) QUARLES IS PASSIONATE ABOUT THE AMAZING MESSAGE THAT HAS COME TO THE WORLD IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST AND LOVES TO WRITE AND TEACH THAT MESSAGE. SHE GRADUATED FROM CHARIS BIBLE COLLEGE CHICAGO, WHERE SHE SERVED AS DIRECTOR FOR NINE YEARS, AND HOLDS A MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES DEGREE FROM GRACE COMMUNION SEMINARY. SHE AUTHORED A BOOK TITLED *THE GOD OF COVENANT*, RE-RELEASED IN JANUARY 2024 BY TWS PUBLISHING. CINDY SERVES WITH THE PASTORAL TEAM AT THRIVE CHURCH IN CAMDEN, AR, WHERE SHE TEACHES REGULARLY.

SHE AND WILL, HER HUSBAND OF 52 YEARS, HAVE TWO WONDERFUL SONS AND DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW, AS WELL AS FOUR BEAUTIFUL GRANDCHILDREN.

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE SILENCE

DAVINA WINN

CHOOSING THE SILENCE

THE FIRST DEFINITIVE MEMORY I HAVE OF SOMEONE SUPPRESSING MY VOICE occurred when I was eleven or twelve—that awkward middle school age when fitting in feels like a daily struggle. I vividly remember sitting down at family dinner after church service, sharing my dislike for a certain girl in our congregation who I believed had wronged me. Though I can't recall her specific offense or my exact words, I distinctly remember my mother's subtle yet disapproving response. "You don't really mean that," she said from across the table, her voice carrying quiet undertones of unmistakable disappointment at my perceived lack of Christian compassion.

Immediately, Thumper's famous words echoed in my mind: "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." My young mind struggled to reconcile these conflicting messages. The truth was, in that moment, I did mean what I said—those were my genuine feelings—yet, as my mother suggested, they were “wrong” and I shouldn't have expressed them. I was not being nice; therefore, I concluded, *I* was not nice. And if I wasn't nice, I was somehow fundamentally bad.

As guilt washed over me, I made myself a silent promise: from now on, I would only speak “nice” things. But how could I know for certain what qualified as nice? The solution seemed obvious—a *lightbulb moment*—I would speak as little as possible and bury all the “bad” feelings so deeply that even I couldn't access them. If I kept my mouth shut, I eliminated any chance of saying something unkind. I concluded that my authentic feelings were unwelcome, so I vowed to make myself small and quiet, hoping this self-imposed silence would somehow diminish the shame I felt.

BORN INTO THE SILENCE

I share this story not to cast my mother in a negative light. She remains one of the most genuinely caring, generous, and principled women of faith I know. She has always put others before herself. She was simply navigating motherhood the best she could with the tools she had been given.

My mother grew up on her family's farm in rural Canada alongside her parents and older sister and faced numerous hardships and health challenges from birth. Born with a cleft upper lip and palate, she couldn't nurse from a bottle, forcing my grandmother to feed her with an eyedropper for six weeks. Her parents eventually took her by train to see a specialist in Winnipeg, the closest major city, 200 miles away. While the first surgery was successful and allowed her to eat more normally, she needed a second operation before her second birthday. After this procedure, she caught a severe cold after being left unclothed near an open window in March, extending her hospital stay to seven weeks. By age six, she had already endured both chickenpox and a case of measles so severe that it permanently damaged her vision.

When my mother was only twenty, tragedy struck her family during a road trip with her parents. While driving through Kansas en route to a required religious assembly in California, her father suffered a fatal heart attack. He was rushed to a hospital in Marysville, Kansas, where

he passed away. With no time to process her grief, my mother quietly buried her sorrow as she arranged my grandfather's burial and coordinated the journey home for herself and my grandmother. The distance from home necessitated they bury him there in Kansas. My mother survived by focusing on immediate practical concerns rather than her emotional pain. This sudden loss became a defining moment in her life as she and my grandmother were forced to navigate profound grief far from familiar surroundings.

My maternal grandmother's life had been similarly shaped by early loss. Her father died of influenza when she was just four years old. Without the family breadwinner, she assumed many adult responsibilities, helping her mother care for younger siblings while still a child herself. This premature exposure to loss, poverty, and sacrifice molded her into an emotionally reserved woman who viewed feelings as impractical distractions from essential work. Consequently, she cultivated a family dynamic where joy was muffled, sadness was internalized, and suffering became a burden to bear in silence rather than be expressed.

BREAKING THE SILENCE

As you can see, emotional detachment and quiet endurance have been woven deeply into the tapestry of my family story. The women in my family have consistently struggled to express themselves openly. In my mother's lineage, women were conditioned to view outspokenness as both selfish and inappropriate; a belief that silently passed from one generation to the next. The role of women was shaped largely by the legalistic religious system they adhered to, which demanded a life of service and selfless care for others. In this environment, complaints were prohibited, and silence was revered as the ultimate expression of strength.

Again, I share all of this not to condemn but to acknowledge both their stories and my own. Our narratives are simultaneously messy *and* beautiful. We all carry baggage passed down through generations, but

the real key to our healing lies in our willingness to open our suitcases and carefully examine everything we've been unknowingly dragging around our entire lives.

I have heard many well-meaning Christians misuse the commandment, "Honor your father and mother" (Exodus 20:12), as a way to discourage people from examining their childhood experiences deeply, fearing such examination would expose family secrets and bring shame upon the family name. Yet speaking honestly about painful family dynamics isn't dishonor; it can be a courageous first step toward transformation. True honoring of our parents includes telling the truth, setting healthy boundaries, and breaking destructive cycles. After all, what parent wouldn't want their legacy to be their child's healing? I certainly want that for my daughters.

Another scripture frequently quoted by those who believe "good" Christians should remain silent about childhood trauma comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians:

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8 NIV).

Notice, though, how the verse begins, "*Whatever is true ...*"—not whatever is pleasing, polite, or comfortable. The order here is significant: truth functions as the cornerstone for all the virtues that follow. Without truth as our foundation, none of the other virtues can be authentic. It is impossible to build a solid spiritual life based on lies and deception.

Philippians 4:8 doesn't invite us to skip over pain in favor of beauty—it challenges us to walk through truth toward authentic healing. Only after truth is fully acknowledged can we begin to reframe our stories with the Holy Spirit's redemptive insight.

This biblical approach safeguards us from two common spiritual pitfalls: ignoring pain to preserve a false sense of peace (denial) and acknowledging truth without any hope of redemption (bitterness). Instead, it offers a balanced, Spirit-led framework: first, honestly confront the truth, and then, intentionally meditate on what is right, good, and worthy of praise as God transforms that truth through His redemptive love.

REDEEMING THE SILENCE

Transformation can happen across generations when we choose the hard and holy work of healing instead of allowing damaging family patterns to continue unchallenged. When we speak the truth about family wounds or generational baggage, we are not violating Scripture—we are fulfilling its deepest intentions. Honesty is not dishonor. Naming brokenness is not betrayal. These acts of courage constitute the first necessary steps toward genuine healing and wholeness.

Your courage to speak truth may be the key that finally unlocks the generational chains binding your family for decades.

What does speaking the truth look like? Of course, this process will look a little different for each individual, but it invariably begins with acknowledging and identifying those family relationship patterns our ancestors have accumulated as “emotional baggage” over generations.

At birth, each of us inherits a metaphorical suitcase—larger than life and packed full of generational expectations, beliefs, values, and behavioral patterns handed down through our forebears. These inherited family characteristics fundamentally shape how we view relationships, manage stress, and navigate life's difficulties. Naming and methodically unpacking this emotional and spiritual baggage isn't meant to disgrace our ancestors; rather, it represents a profound act of healing for ourselves and future generations.

If you're like most of us, your generational suitcase is heavy and crammed full of stuff! Jesus, however, provides our remedy: "Come to

Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30 NKJV). Jesus' words speak directly to the weary and overwhelmed—not merely offering temporary relief, but providing life-changing guidance under His gentle direction. He presents a yoke [a wooden harness for oxen, symbolizing cooperation, partnership, and discipleship] perfectly fitted to each individual, designed not to burden but to facilitate deep, soul-level rest as we co-labor with Him—because He *is* perfect rest embodied.

UNPACKING THE SILENCE

Now let's pause a moment. I want to invite you to imagine Jesus asking you to rest and sit with Him. He smiles gently and motions toward the suitcase you've been dragging behind you—overpacked, overstuffed, wobbly with age, and impossibly heavy. Its surface is dirty, covered in scratches, the clasps barely holding together under pressure from all the things stuffed inside. At first, you're confused by His gesture because this burden has become such an intrinsic part of your identity that most of the time, you forget it's even there.

For a brief moment, you look back at your baggage and hesitate. But the expression on Jesus' face is so loving and so kind, and His eyes convey such profound gentleness, that you finally give in. As you slowly hand over the suitcase to Him, it suddenly bursts open from the accumulated pressure of being so full, scattering contents everywhere. Your emotions instantly turn to guilt, shame, and embarrassment. *When did it get like this? How could I have let it get so bad?*

But Jesus just smiles fondly as He surveys all the contents of your suitcase. It's as though He already knows what's in there, and appreciates the complex family story behind each item. His eyes convey both joy and sorrow at the remembering.

Together, you and Jesus begin to examine the emotional baggage that has been weighing down your soul. As you carefully gather the scattered items from your suitcase and hand each one to Jesus, He transfers the item from one hand to the other as if He's manually judging the heaviness of each piece. Eventually, He lays the item off to the side in the pile designated for burdens you were never meant to carry.

With each item surrendered, an extraordinary lightness spreads throughout your entire being as your overstuffed suitcase gradually empties. A wave of unexpected joy rises within you, catching in your throat. As each burden is set aside, you notice your inner voice, so long muffled, growing stronger and more distinct. The shame that once defined you dissolves, replaced by an expanding sense of release and hope that seems poised to burst forth at any moment.

As Jesus places the last item to the side, He gestures toward the now-empty suitcase. Only one thing remains inside: a single pale-gray feather from a dove—delicate, yet somehow shimmering against the worn interior.

He looks up, His eyes meeting yours, and says with infinite gentleness, "My dear child, you carried more than you were ever meant to." There is no judgment in His voice—only profound tenderness.

"You were faithful. So faithful. But you were never meant to prove your worth. You are, and have always been, so precious to Me."

He carefully places the glowing feather in your open palm, His touch gentle yet assured.

"This is what I leave you. Peace. Not the peace of the world, which is merely the absence of conflict—but *My* peace: *My Shalom*. This is My wholeness and completeness that I continually impart to you; the spiritual, emotional, and relational harmony that blossoms when you awaken to your inclusion in the intimate love and life that I share with our Heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit."

Jesus continues, His voice resonant with conviction: "My treasured one, before the world began, your precious soul was fashioned for unfettered grace—to move in divine rhythm with the eternal melody that already pulses within your being. You're here now, at this precise moment, for such a time as this. Your story matters because nobody else has lived your life but you. You see things others don't. It's okay to speak up. It's okay to be brave."

As Jesus gently lifts your chin, His eyes brimming with infinite compassion, He says, "It's time to honor your voice with truth."

Jesus carefully folds your fingers over the delicate feather and speaks with the quiet authority that created the cosmos, "This feather is your reminder: You are free. You are light. You are Mine."

SELAH IN THE SILENCE

"Be still, and know that I am God..." Psalm 46:10

I invite you now to take a moment and pause:

- Close your eyes.
- Breathe slowly.
- Let these words become the rhythm of your heart.

Breath Prayer to Release and Receive:

Exhale: *I release what is not mine...*

Inhale: *I receive Your peace, O Lord.*

- Repeat this breath prayer three times, slowly.
- Let your body soften. Let your mind settle. Let your spirit open.

Journaling Reflection:

If you feel led, meditate on the questions below and write your thoughts in your journal. Let the Holy Spirit guide you gently and lovingly.

1. What would it look like for Jesus to empty your suitcase?
2. What do you notice? (Images, memories, sensations)
3. What do you feel? (Emotionally, physically, spiritually)
4. What do you hear? (Words, scriptures, impressions)
5. What is Jesus specifically saying to you?

Blessing:

There is no shame. There is no guilt. There is no condemnation. Your voice is sacred. Your story is valuable. You were made for truth, wholeness, and freedom. You have been set free. So, walk in peace. Speak in love. Enjoy your freedom. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit love you and delight in you beyond your wildest dreams.

DAVINA WINN GREW UP IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. SHE GRADUATED FROM AMBASSADOR UNIVERSITY WITH A B.S. IN FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCE AND A MINOR IN THEOLOGY. IT WAS AT COLLEGE THAT DAVINA MET THE LOVE OF HER LIFE, **BILL WINN**. THEY HAVE BEEN MARRIED FOR TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS, AND TOGETHER THEY HAVE TWO BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS. TOGETHER, THEY PASTOR THE GRACE COMMUNION HANOVER CONGREGATION IN VIRGINIA. DAVINA CURRENTLY SERVES AS THE WOMEN'S MINISTRY AND YOUTH SUNDAY SCHOOL COORDINATOR. DAVINA RECEIVED HER CERTIFICATE IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FROM PAX CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN 2023 AND IS CURRENTLY PURSUING HER MASTER OF DIVINITY IN CHRISTIAN COUNSELING AND COACHING FROM GLOBAL GRACE SEMINARY.

THE SILENCE WAS NEVER HOLY

SHANDA MILLER

“SHUT UP!” “BE QUIET!” “YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO PREACH!”

These were just a few of the phrases I heard growing up. This was incredibly frustrating for me as a child because I had a voice, and I wanted to use it. I couldn't understand why God would give me a strong desire to speak, if I wasn't allowed to do it.

I grew up in a very noisy home. There was constant turmoil, and if you wanted to get a word in you had to scream for it. But that didn't mean it came without a cost. My strong, willful spirit got me into quite a bit of trouble. I was seen as a small, pathetic girl who couldn't possibly have a worthwhile thought in her head. My voice was constantly silenced, and I was too little to do anything about it.

My father was a hard-working coal miner, and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. They both had a strong work ethic, and that was very important to them.

That may have been the only thing they had in common, besides the fact that they both brought horrible childhood trauma into their marriage. My father was physically and verbally abused as a child. My mother was raped repeatedly by my biological grandfather, who didn't

stop until she was 17 years old. My grandfather physically abused my grandmother and some of the other children too. You could say that my grandfather silenced my mother.

My father was an alcoholic, and my mother wanted free of him. When she finally mustered up the courage to leave him, my father shot her and another man, leaving them both in critical condition.

Unfortunately, I—along with my two little sisters—was there to see it all. I was only seven at the time. My five-year-old sister grabbed our nine-month-old baby sister in her car seat and ran to a nearby house for help, while I stayed to try and help my mother. I ran around the truck to where they were, trying to stop my father. I climbed on the back of that belligerent man and yanked out every strand of hair I could grab from his head.

But, once again, I was thrown to the ground and silenced.

The gun had jammed after three shots, so he decided to use the butt of the gun to beat her. I still remember the twanging noise it made as it struck her skull. That sound was all I could hear in that moment.

You can read more about that day and everything that followed in my book, *God, I Forgive You*.

The men in my family—and especially our church—ruled over their women. They kept them at home and constantly subdued. Many of the men in my church would return home after service and abuse their wives and children. Both of my grandfathers were heavily involved in the church. One was a kind preacher. The other was a deacon who beat my grandmother and chased the children with corn cutters.

Needless to say, my mother jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire. Like most women of their time, they were simply expected to stay quiet.

As I grew up, I understood that I wasn't allowed to do anything outside of what my husband permitted when it came to the Church. If

I wanted to speak or share anything at all, I had to preface it by stating that I was speaking on his behalf—before I spoke another word.

There were no women speakers in my church for as far back as I can remember. That's just how it was. We were deeply steeped in religion, and anytime a woman had something to say, there was extreme pushback. And of course, they would use the Scriptures to keep us in our place.

“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”

— 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 (NKJV)

That was the verse that Christians in our denomination were quick to throw out. It practically leapt from their mouths anytime a woman dared to speak. After all, we were all taught to honor our husbands, pastors, and God.

But why did they always stop there? Why didn't they keep reading? Paul wasn't silencing women—he was responding to a letter the church had written to him concerning all of these things. Let's read on, shall we?

“Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it only you that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.”

—1 Corinthians 14:36 (NKJV)

That was Paul's actual answer.

If we were to put it in letter form, it might look something like this:

Dear Paul,

Are women allowed to speak in church?

Dear church of Corinth,

“Do you actually think that you were the starting point for the Word of God going forth? Were you the only ones it was sent to? I don’t think so! If anyone considers himself to be a prophet or spiritual person, let him discern that what I’m writing to you carries the Lord’s authority. And if anyone continues not to recognize this, he should not be recognized!”—1 Corinthians 14:36 TPT)

It was a rebuke to the men, not a silencing of the women. Jesus absolutely loves women and has no intention of quieting the so-called “weaker” sex.

Let’s take a look at a few women who found their voice.

1. Deborah (*Judges 4-5*) – A great prophet and judge of Israel, she led the nation both spiritually and politically.
2. Miriam (*Exodus 15:20*) – The sister of Moses, she led the Israelite women in worship.
3. Priscilla (*Acts 18:24-26*) – Along with her husband, Aquila, she taught Apollos and played an early role in church teaching.
4. Phoebe (*Romans 16:1-2*) – Paul refers to Phoebe as a deacon of the church and commends her leadership and service.
5. Mary Magdalene (*John 20:17-18*) – Often referred to as the apostle to the apostles, she was the first to announce the risen Christ.

These are just a few of the remarkable women in the Bible who not only found their voice, but whose voices were ordained and honored by God.

Finding your voice means so much more than just being heard. It's about self-discovery. We peel back layers of self-doubt to uncover who we truly are. It's about getting emotionally honest so we can express what—and how—we really feel.

Finding our voice is also about passion. Our voice is often tied to what sets our soul ablaze—that's why people tend to raise their voice as their passion starts to pour out. But just as important as passion is self-control. I tell my husband that I pray for meekness.

*“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth.” —
Matthew 5:5 (NKJV)*

Some people think being meek means staying quiet or shrinking back—but that couldn't be further from the truth. The Greek word for meek is *praus*, and it's often described as strength under control. Paul even includes *praus* in Galatians 5:23 as one of the fruits of the Spirit. That means this kind of self-control isn't something we muster up on our own—it's produced by the Spirit working in us. Isn't that powerful? Who wouldn't want that? Imagine how different the world would be if more people let the Spirit guide their strength instead of letting it run wild. There are plenty of things we *could* do in our own strength that might cause damage if we're not careful. That's why this matters. Learning to control your strength is a key part of learning to use your voice wisely.

Your identity is of the utmost importance—because if you don't know who you are, you won't know how to live or, better yet, how to rest in who you are.

Let's look at the lion. A lion acts like a lion at all times. He can chase a gazelle and miss it four out of five times, and he's not going to hang his head, do a walk of shame, or complain that he's bad at being a lion. He doesn't have identity issues—nothing can convince him he's anything else.

We are the only species that struggles to know who—and Whose—we are. We are the only ones with an identity crisis.

While children are discovering who they are—learning their personality, temperament, and character, they often throw tantrums. During their lack of identity, their voice is loud and out of control, and they demand to be heard.

It goes without saying that just because we have a voice, doesn't mean we have truly found it. A lack of self-control is also an indicator that we don't yet know how to use the voice we do have.

Growing up in my home, chaos erupted constantly. Voices were loud, but none were truly heard. Screaming was the only way I knew to communicate with my family. My identity had been hijacked, and I had no idea how to get it back.

Confidence in identity plays a major role in maturity. For me, it was one of the hardest challenges. I was constantly being told who to be, how to feel, and how to behave. I got so frustrated with everyone else's expectations that I decided to ask Jesus what *He* wanted from me.

I felt Him whisper one word into my spirit: *holiness*.

At first, I thought that meant to behave and try your best to be perfect. But can you imagine the angels in heaven singing to God, "He behaves. He behaves. He behaves"? That's not what He was after. He was telling me to be *single-minded*. I can't have sweet words coming out of one side of my mouth, and bitter ones out of the other.

"Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so." — James 3:10 (NKJV)

Once again, I needed my strength under control—and the only way I was ever going to look like my Father was by spending more time with Him. Many of us are just now discovering who we are in Christ. But

it's never too late, and God works quantum quick. It can happen in the blink of an eye.

As we find our voice, we'll realize not everyone will agree with us—and that's OK. If someone disagrees with you, it doesn't change the fact that you are a child of God. And so are they.

I've heard Chris Blackeby say (I'm paraphrasing) that you are a son of God no matter what. You could go to prison and guess what? That would make you ... wait for it ... *still* a son of God. HOW AMAZING IS THAT?! That is the best news ever—and there's nothing we can do, or not do, to change it.

When we are standing firm in our identity, our true voice will not only be heard—it's seen with the tenacity of Christ. Confidence isn't something we automatically have; it's something we build by embracing and expressing our authentic voice.

When we step into our full identity with boldness and determination, we are finally free to be the person God always intended us to be. Sometimes we try to suppress our temperament or personality because it's not like anyone else's. But that's the beauty about identity—like fingerprints, no two are alike.

God intentionally made you exactly the way you are, with no mistake.

Today is the perfect day to embrace your beautiful, true self. I pray that you have the confidence to step into your unique calling—just as Jesus did—and discover the fullness of your voice and potential. I pray this over you right now: that you are healing from the inside out. I speak eternal life into you as you advance and spring into this new season. I declare happiness and pure joy over you.

*"The Lord, your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."
— Zephaniah 3:17 (NKJV)*

The Hebrew word for *rejoice* means to twirl violently. God is dancing, singing, and twirling around you! How wonderful is that?!

I can say this with confidence: You are God's favorite. All you have to do is believe it.

SHANDA MILLER IS A SPEAKER, AUTHOR, AND PASTORAL COUNSELOR WITH A PASSION FOR HELPING OTHERS HEAL, FIND THEIR VOICE, AND STEP BOLDLY INTO THEIR GOD-GIVEN IDENTITY. DRAWING FROM HER PERSONAL STORY OF TRAUMA, RESILIENCE, AND REDEMPTION, SHE BRINGS SCRIPTURAL INSIGHT, EMOTIONAL HONESTY, AND SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT TO EVERY MESSAGE. SHANDA IS THE AUTHOR OF *GOD, I FORGIVE YOU*.

CATCHING MY BREATH, RESTORING MY VOICE

LISA WENTWORTH COUTURE

TO SET THE STAGE FOR THIS STORY, I NEED TO JOURNEY BACK ACROSS THE rugged landscape of my life—to the place where everything began to break. I won't recount every dark detail, though there are many. But I will trace the path to where the silence took root. Because understanding the root of our wound matters. It matters because remembering how bad things got only magnifies the glory of the freedom in Christ I experience today.

There's a verse from the Psalms that has echoed through my soul again and again since coming to know Jesus:

*"I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse
on the work of thy hands." Psalm 143:5 KJV*

Much of the last 15 years have been spent musing—reflecting on the grace and goodness of Christ. My story is filled with twists and turns, heart wrenching events that tried to bury me. But the greater story is about a God who refuses to leave us in bondage. That same God—who I call Abba—is fully committed to us. His love reaches in with His

beautiful arm of love, strength, and perseverance even in the hardest places.

I won't lie—I gave it some thought before settling in my heart what I want to write. Shame and irrelevance tried to stop me.

But I believe freedom begins when we are free to tell our story—through raw and honest authenticity.

Being genuine never came easily to me; it felt too scary, too risky. People might leave if they saw the dark things. But I felt a real tender nudge whisper, "*Share your story,*" when it came to putting the pen to paper with my contribution to *Finding Your Voice*.

God is reforming His church. And part of that reformation, I believe, involves shedding the shiny happy people façade and choosing to be real.

This is not about ruminating on the junk, or staying stuck—identifying with the lesser things. We are redeemed, made new creations and free in Christ.

But there's something beautiful about our humanity in Christ—stories that are raw, real, and worth hearing. Stories that didn't come wrapped in perfect paper.

The temptation is to bury them. After all, we don't live there anymore, right?

That's true.

But what about the hidden ones? The ones yet to hear? The ones still hiding behind masks? And let's be honest—quite often they're sitting right inside the church.

So, I followed that unction to share a little about my past—pivotal parts of my testimony. Events that impacted my life and also kept me stuck for many years. I hope it blesses you to see the goodness of God, and His plan for reconciliation.

So, I am going to be real, raw and vulnerable—and I give you permission to be that too as you read. I won't dive into every detail. But what I do share is meant to offer hope. To encourage freedom. To help you find your voice and become all that God designed us to be: innocent and pure, holy and loved, by Him.

I hope you'll be touched by His grace, sense His presence, and let Him remind you of what's always been true. It is the nature of God's will to restore and redeem all of that was ever stolen. No one is left out.

If you know me, you have probably heard me say, "It's so important to go back." Not to get stuck there. Not identify with the muck of pain or to relive the trauma—but to let the sacred Whisper of the Spirit call to remembrance how far things had drifted. To be reminded of His rescue. His resurrection.

Resurrection from both destruction done to me, and destruction I brought upon myself.

Oh, how destructive we are when we live under the shadow of a distorted identity—trapped in cycles of inherited trauma, generational dysfunction, and the aching search for love in all the wrong places.

I know that terrain intimately.

But I will never forget the moment His divine light pierced one of the most hidden corners of my soul. A breath escaped me. A veil lifted. And buried truth surfaced: "I don't remember a time in my childhood in which I ever felt safe."

When those words left my lips, I collapsed into tears. Something broke.

But not in a way that brought distress—this was something *holy* breaking. It was as if Jesus Himself had reached down into the depths of all that pain, to reveal a truth about something I had long suppressed... and to draw me closer into the arms of His Love.

It was the beginning of deeper healing. The beginning of freedom.

Let me go back...

I was the only girl in a family of five children. That might not sound extraordinary, but in my story, it came with a particular kind of weight. My mother had longed for a daughter. After three sons, I was her miracle baby girl. She still tells a funny story about the day I was born—back in the era when women were heavily sedated during labor. Right after delivering me, dazed and still under the fog of medication, she asked the nurse, “Is *he* being circumcised?” The nurse chuckled kindly and replied, “Oh Marilyn, you had a girl!”

We laugh about it now, but even that moment reveals the depth of her longing—how hope and disbelief collided. That desire I now realize was rooted in pain and regret. Her life hadn’t turned out the way she imagined. And that disappointment shaped the way I was parented from the beginning.

From the start, I was entered into baby contests—and I won. It seemed sweet and harmless. But looking back, I see an invisible pressure being borne. A launchpad for a life shaped by performance. I was the only girl. The miracle. The answer to her prayers. And with that came a weight I didn’t know how to carry—the burden of fulfilling someone else’s dreams.

I believe this was a classic case of a parent wanting to relive life through her child. My mom had known so much loss and wanted something good. But as a little girl, I often felt like her Kewpie doll—dressed in cute outfits, hair in pigtails, made to shine on the outside, while feeling lost on the inside.

The reality of my world was that I was surrounded by brothers who didn’t seem to love me. I was ignored, invalidated, and often felt invisible. All I wanted was to feel loved by them. I craved emotional connection with my mom—real warmth and the safety of being known. But what I felt instead was pressure. I had become the “trophy child.”

To be clear, I believe my mother loved me the only way she knew how. Beneath her own dysfunctions and unhealed wounds, she did the best she could. But trauma unaddressed becomes trauma passed down. I've since learned of painful things she endured growing up. There was so much she carried into motherhood, and I have deep compassion for her now. But those cycles don't stop unless someone confronts them. That, too, is grace.

My mother likely never realized she placed pressure on me. I think she genuinely believed she was doing well—loving me, celebrating me. In a healthy family system, maybe she would have been right. But ours wasn't healthy. Alcohol abuse, constant relational strife between my parents, emotional chaos—it all defined our day-to-day. And in the middle of it, my mom saw me as the little girl who fulfilled her dream and brought her happiness.

What I needed was a mother who felt emotionally connected, who was safe, who didn't need me to make her happy. Both my parents had their own unresolved "stuff." My dad struggled with alcohol, and my mom leaned heavily on emotional dependency—especially on me.

Meanwhile, still in the fragile innocence of my early childhood, something far darker was unfolding. A close family member began to abuse me—not in a sexual way, but in a physical manner, that was both violent and torturous. The method was suffocation, in the privacy of my own bedroom—the weapon my own pillow. Strange, I know. But the best I have been able to make sense of it, is simply this: there was a desire to cause me great pain. To punish me in some way. This abuse was ritualistic, repeated, and terrifying. And if I had to give this season of my life a title, it would be: *"I can't breathe!"*

For those who understand trauma, dissociative amnesia is a well-known protective response. My brain did what it had to do—erased the details, pushing the memories into a space where, even now after so much healing, I still struggle to piece them together. I believe this is God's grace. Because remembering too much, too soon, could have had devastating effects on my ability to stay sane.

But I do remember internalizing every bit of the pain. As a small, fragile girl, I was haunted by a relentless sequence of questions: “*Why was he doing this? Why did he hate me? What did I do to deserve this?*” I absorbed the pain so deeply, it stole my voice.

But our bodies keep score. Though my mind buried the memories, my body bore their weight. I lived in survival mode for decades. The memories stayed lodged in my cells, my body and soul carrying the trauma—while my true voice remained paralyzed. It wasn’t gone, but it was silenced, suffocated if you will. Trapped with words, and nowhere safe to release them.

This is the heinousness of abuse. It isolates you. It steals your voice. It leaves you to figure out, in the dark, *what the hell happened*. I call it the *silent scream*—because it’s there, carrying enormous emotional energy, but locked away with no pathway for expression. Cognitively disconnected from the details, my soul was still fractured. And my body? Psychologically haunted.

The abuse eventually stopped. I am convinced it was the grace of God. But the effects remained, woven into the fabric of my being. To feel safe again, I threw myself into the roles I thought I was born for. I became an overachiever. A perfectionist. I loved to dress up. I was driven and obsessed with how I looked—wanting to hold everything together on the outside, while living with unbearable turmoil within. I compensated for my inner prison by controlling everything externally. If I could master my surroundings, maybe I could quiet the chaos within my soul.

I became that trophy child. Two of my older brothers had dropped out of school, and another tragically lost his life in a car accident. I was only ten when it happened. That loss shattered what little hope I had left for goodness in my world. It devastated my family—and, as you can imagine, it changed my parents. The pressure on me seemed to increase after that, adding a stifling layer of over-protectiveness. My parents turned less to each other, and more to unhealthy ways of

coping. My dad turned to alcohol. My mom turned to me as a source of comfort.

Unhealthy coping breeds unhealthy actions.

I'll never forget a moment when I was only eleven. My dad, under the influence of alcohol, sat me on his lap like dads do. Only this time, he looked into my eyes, and said, with what felt like a rare moment of clarity, *"I need help, Lisa."*

His drinking problem was exposed in that one moment. For me, these words were more than overwhelming—they planted a lie. A lie that said my purpose was to carry the weight of his pain... to fix him.

There was no space to express my own needs. And now, in this defining moment, the burden shifted even more heavily onto my small shoulders. I was the one who needed rescue. But my silent scream had nowhere to go.

Can I pause for a moment here? Despite all that heaviness, I can now look back and can see the hand of God on my life. My story was marked by distortion and my soul in need of deep healing, but even in the turmoil, I was also persevering. It's hard to explain but God since has shown me His hand was always on me—even in the chaos and abuse.

I became the girl who buried herself in school. Academics became my refuge—my escape. I excelled, becoming the first in my family to earn a distinction, scoring 95 and higher in all my classes, a scholastic bar that few reached. My achievements brought my mom so much joy, but it also fueled the pressure to perform. I was her pride and joy. On the surface, that might seem admirable—but inside, I needed so much more.

I needed someone to know what had happened to me. I needed the safety of my mother to express the pain I carried. I needed to be seen—not just as a bright shining student or perfect little girl, or be the source

of her emotional comfort. I needed someone to see *me*—the hurting girl behind the accomplishments. Someone to hear my voice, to validate me, to love me apart from performance and outer world success.

But I wore a mask. And with time, that mask got thicker. Behind it I was suffocating, in silence.

The abuse had stolen something sacred—my voice. My bedroom, the place that should have been safest, had become a battleground. I remember whispering to myself in the dark, haunted by constant “whys,” longing to speak out but too afraid to tell anyone. Pain swallowed me. Shame further silenced me. I began to show signs of deep stress, harming myself in ways I won’t go into here. But the terror had handcuffed my voice. I blamed myself. And so, I sank deeper into performing.

In high school I met my first true love—or at least, what love looked like to a fifteen-year-old girl carrying desperation. He was nineteen. For the first time, I felt wanted. He really liked me. My innocence was fragile, my body still disconnected, my heart aching for something I couldn’t define—but I know now it was love.

I gave myself to him—not because I was ready, not because I fully understood love, but because I thought *this* was what love was supposed to be.

Soon after, I found out I was pregnant. Panic took hold of me. My breath locked in a cage. It was terrifying. I was overwhelmed by this reality. It’s a strange thing, although I was engaging in the very act that leads to pregnancy, I was completely shocked that it had happened. Looking back now, after receiving so much grace and healing, I feel such a deep compassion for young women who find themselves in that place. I don’t say that to remove responsibility, but to say I understand. In our blindness, we make choices—and beneath those choices is often a deeper root.

We told our parents almost immediately. Both his mother and mine, advised an abortion. His mom, a nurse, tried to rationalize the

decision. I still remember her holding her thumb and index finger together, saying, “*Lisa, it’s the size of a baby shrimp.*” That was her belief. I’ve forgiven her. But I knew—even at fifteen—she wasn’t just stating facts; but was trying to persuade me it was nothing. I was scared.

My mom also advocated for abortion. She was convinced my future would be ruined if I went through with the pregnancy. “*You’re too young,*” she said, pointing to college and everything that would be lost.

My father stayed quiet—not because he didn’t care, but because I believe he felt he didn’t have the right to influence my decision.

Standing in the middle of all those voices was a frightened little girl. Deep down, I knew there was a life inside of me. I didn’t want to abort my baby. But I had no voice—or so it felt—and certainly no options were offered. I seemed like I had no choice.

I was fifteen. Utterly alone.

And so, I did the unthinkable. We drove to Newton, Massachusetts, to Planned Parenthood. The room was cold and sterile—and so were the people. I remember that clearly. No one asked how I was feeling. There was no tenderness, no conversation, no alternatives. No space for hesitation. No moment of reflection given. No reassurance. No one acknowledged what was about to happen.

I lay on the table, alone. My boyfriend waited outside. When the procedure was over, the sound of it—the sound of *the end*—seared into my soul. Even today, although Jesus has healed my heart, it still hurts to talk about it. That moment marked me. Life had left my body, and it felt like a part of *me* died too.

The weight of it was crushing. Regret hit me immediately. That day only deepened the fractures in my already shattered soul. As we drove home, my mind swirled with emotions too complex and tangled to name—but I felt paralyzed. Then, trying to move past it or avoid the pain, my boyfriend casually asked, “*Do you want to get an ice cream?*”

Ice cream?

My whole world felt dark. A life had ended. And mine felt crushed and broken.

No one talked about it. Not once. It was as if nothing had happened. We swept the entire experience under the rug. Maybe that was the only way to cope—but the silence was suffocating. It became another grave for my voice.

And yet, somehow I kept going. I persevered. That too, was God's grace. Even in the wreckage—even in my self-destruction—He refused to let go. He carried me, even when I couldn't see it.

Back to school, I pressed harder into performance—joining the debate team, running for student council, earning the Daughters of the American Revolution Good Citizenship Award. In my senior year, I became editor of the high school newspaper, which was later recognized by Columbia University as the National High School Newspaper of the Year. I graduated as Salutatorian of the class of 1981—leaving high school with accolades and achievements, but still running. Still chasing perfection. Still hiding the tomb within me.

Looking back, I see becoming editor as a holy interruption. Even in my pain, God was drawing out the gift He had placed within me long before trauma ever touched my life. He was nurturing my voice in hidden ways, planting seeds of purpose in the soil of suffering. People told me I had a gift for writing. They saw the spark before I could. I hadn't yet found the freedom in Christ that would meet me in the future—but this was a foreshadowing. A whisper of my voice that would one day rise.

After high school, I pursued fashion merchandising in Boston. Moving into the city marked the beginning of a new chapter, yet the silence came with me. I remember one night getting lost on the subway. I was like a little girl again—afraid to ask anyone for help. I stepped off at a vaguely familiar stop, realizing I had no money to start the journey.

Disoriented, and terrified, I began walking. But somehow, I found my way home. Looking back, I know now: He was with me. That moment became a picture of how I lived my life—lost, silent, too scared to ask for what I needed. Still voiceless.

I eventually graduated with the highest of honors, even receiving a recommendation that I could be a CEO one day. I moved back home and soon met the man I would marry. At 32, I became a mother—a gift I never felt worthy of. But God who is rich in mercy never held my decision to abort my first child against me. More grace. More of His kindness revealed.

On the outside I continued to function—successful, well-behaved, dependable, competent. But inside, I was shackled by silence. Unable to be my true, authentic self. My 17-year marriage became, in many ways, just another layer of that struggle. I wore the thick mask of a strong woman—always composed, always performing. No one really knew me. Certainly not my husband. I carried a deep loneliness. My heart ached to be seen, to be known, to be free. To breathe again. But every time I edged toward any vulnerability, my pain wrapped itself around my throat like a suffocating noose.

And then everything fell apart.

At 45, my marriage ended abruptly. The life I had built—the only thing that had ever felt remotely safe—crumbled. My son was just fourteen. And due to unusual circumstances, I had to leave my home. I had to start over.

It was here, in the wreckage, that God began to reach me. My heart was shattered, and for the first time, I surrendered to His grace. He wasn't speaking through judgment. He wasn't shaming me. He was calling to me in love—sweet, rescuing, healing love. I call it His “woo.” That gentle persuasion. That perfect love.

It felt like honey—warm, thick, golden. Liquid compassion flowing through the raw, hidden, traumatized places within me. Coating every

wound. Filling every hollow place. Pulling together the fractured pieces of my soul.

He was drawing me close and revealing Himself not as a distant deity, but as my Father. My Healer. My Lover. My Truth-teller. The Good Shepherd of my soul.

This was the beginning of healing.

This was when the scream I had buried deep inside—the cry to be seen, to be heard, to be fought for—finally began to rise from the ashes. I could feel the pieces of myself coming back together, piece by piece, after a lifetime of being shattered.

There is so much I could say about what came next—financial strain, parenting challenges, the heartbreak of seventeen years unraveling.

But this was the pivotal season—where everything began to change.

My world grew brighter. My eyes started opening to truth. Out of the ashes, something miraculous was happening: the veil was thinning. And for the first time, I was tasting true freedom. Not the fleeting, circumstantial kind the world offers—but Gospel freedom. The kind that rebuilds you. The kind that transforms you from the inside out.

God's heart wasn't just to meet my temporal needs—though He has, time and time again. His heart was to send His Son Jesus to us. And it was Christ who as a mirror, was reflecting my true image. Not broken. Not damaged goods. But loved. Whole. Molded gently by the Master Potter. Tenderly and truthfully, He was restoring me into the healed, radiant daughter I had always been.

“And my God will supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

—Philippians 4:19 (NIV)

And He did.

The healing ran deep. Like a Great Physician with surgical precision, Jesus began dismantling every wall I had built to survive. Breath by breath, He restored my soul. Breath by breath, He returned my voice—the voice that had been stolen all those years ago.

The voice once suffocated by trauma and fear, began to rise again. His presence, His Word, His love—became real to me. Tangible. Alive.

And the masks I had worn for so long... they began to fall.

“Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity.”

—1 Corinthians 13:12 (NLT)

With every encounter, Jesus revealed what had always been true. I was not defined by what had happened to me. This is who our God is. He is moved by compassion. He sees beyond our choices to the aching “why” behind them. He looks past the wreckage. And with perfect love, He heals the brokenhearted and binds up every wound.

Like a surgeon with gentle, skillful hands, He went deep. He dismantled the guilt and shame that had weighed me down for years.

And He set me free.

He didn’t just want to mend my heart—He wanted to restore it and reveal my voice.

For all the years I believed I was a lost little girl. But I wasn’t lost to Him—only blind. The real me had simply been buried beneath layers of lies, trauma, and pain. And Jesus... He was calling me forth. Including my voice. He would not let it remain buried in that grave of self-condemnation and silent suffering.

He led me to healing from childhood abuse—teaching me the liberating power of forgiveness, even toward my abuser. And at 48, after decades of guilt and shame over the abortion, it was His Voice

that tenderly said, “*This is the way, walk in it.*” That Voice led me to a pregnancy care center where I entered a beautiful healing program called *Forgiven And Set Free*.

There, the guilt I had carried was washed away by grace and forgiveness. Jesus showed me He cares deeply for the unborn—for their silent scream. But He also cares just as deeply for the mothers whose voice has been silenced by shame. He sees beyond the decision. Yes, unborn babies matter to Him, but so does the mother. So do I.

Jesus overturned every dark lie I believed. Every dysfunctional pattern I had picked up in the chaos of generational family brokenness that tried to steal from my life. Even the perfectionism—just a mask of self-protection. And gently, He began to show me I was safe with Him. That in Christ, I had the freedom to be fully and authentically myself.

And that included my voice.

My true voice. The kind, brave, loving voice. The voice that speaks beauty and truth. That brings healing to others because it has been healed. That tells the story not just of survival, but of resurrection. Bearing the witness of eternal truths.

That voice—*my* voice—was once suffocated under the weight of abuse, shame, and perfectionism. But breath by breath, His love stirred it to life. Christ placed His hands upon my soul and whispered: “*Live.*”

The Gospel of Jesus Christ doesn’t just forgive our sin.

It restores our dignity.

It returns breath to our lungs.

It awakens us to life and calls forth the radiance of who we truly are.

Today, I live in freedom. I have found my voice in knowing how deeply I am loved. Jesus has redeemed the years the locusts tried to steal, not just by healing my wounds, but by *calling me forth*. And with that came a passion to see others awakened—especially women whose voices have long been silenced.

Silenced by trauma. By systems of patriarchy and religion. By teachings that told us to stay small, stay hidden, stay quiet.

But it is *for freedom* that Christ has set us free. Free to speak. Free to rise. Free to live in our divine, Christ-like design.

Today I believe this is a clarion call straight from the Holy Spirit! So let me speak to every silenced heart:

You are free to be free.

Be still. Listen. His voice is rising within you.

His voice is safety. His voice is truth.

His voice calls you out of the shadows—out from under whatever has kept you from living as the one He created you to be.

Whether it's childhood chaos, past decisions, or inherited pain—

today is your day to rise.

Let Him breathe life into your lungs. Let Him resurrect your voice.

You have a word that needs to be spoken.

To anyone who has felt muted, erased, or unheard—

Christ refuses to let your voice remain buried.

From the ashes of trauma, He raises prophets.

From the prisons of shame, He calls forth poets, preachers, storytellers, and healers.

Voices long silenced—now awakened. Now alive.

We are free to be free.

Now live.

LISA WENTWORTH COUTURE CARRIES AN UNCOMPROMISING PASSION TO PROCLAIM THE SIMPLE GOSPEL – THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD’S ACCEPTANCE AND THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION. ROOTED IN THE NEW COVENANT AND THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST, HER VOICE IS IDENTITY-DRIVEN AND GROUNDED DEEPLY IN LOVE. LISA IS A WRITER, MENTOR, AND ONE-ON-ONE COACH WHO DELIGHTS IN REVEALING THE GOODNESS OF ABBA AS SHE HAS

PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED IT – THE GOODNESS THAT LEADS TO TRUE FREEDOM. HER LIFE’S MISSION IS TO MAKE KNOWN THE LIBERATING LOVE OF JESUS, A LOVE THAT TRANSFORMS, RESTORES AND FREES.

SHE CAN BE FOUND ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM UNDER THE NAME LISA WENTWORTH COUTURE, AND REACHED DIRECTLY AT LISA@GANTV.COM.

RELEASING THE WEIGHT OF SILENCE

MELISSA MCCRERY

Poetic Prelude

*I was born with a whisper woven in my bones—
a truth too wild to be caged or stoned.
They dressed me in silence, called it divine,
wrapped it in scripture, and said it was mine.
But my soul remembered what my mouth forgot—
a voice forged in fire, truth that could not be taught.
I bent. I broke. I swallowed the ache—
but you cannot bury what heaven will not forsake.
So I rose from the hush with a roar in my chest—
not to please, not to prove, but to disturb false rest.
I speak not just for me—but for every girl
still trying to breathe beneath what she was told to be.*

A Memoir Chapter on Finding My Voice

I DON'T REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I STAYED SILENT TO STAY SAFE. BUT I

know that by the time I could form words, I already knew which ones not to say.

In my father's house, silence was currency. Obedience was rewarded—disagreement, if you even dared, was punished. He was a man of rules and an intimidating presence. What he said was law, and what he didn't say spoke just as loud. I learned early how to read the room and how to measure the temperature of a man's mood by the weight of his footsteps in the hallway.

There were no invitations to speak my mind—only expectations to fall in line. Little girls were to be seen if necessary but never heard. So I did what many little girls do when their voice feels dangerous: I disappeared. Not physically. Just emotionally.

I turned into a painfully shy child. I learned how to be polite, smile at the right moments, nod instead of ask, and keep myself small and pleasant. It was praised. I was called "mature for my age," "easy," "a good girl." But inside, I was splitting in two—quiet on the outside, burning on the inside.

When my stepfather came into my life, things got complicated in a different way. He was loud, confrontational, unapologetically blunt. My shyness frustrated him. He saw it as weakness—a dangerous liability in a world that would chew me up and spit me out. So he pushed. He baited me into fights. He poked the quiet until it bled.

Dinner became a battlefield. My mother often left the table in tears.

But he kept going, insisting he was doing it for my own good.

And then, one night, something broke open in me. I don't remember what the fight was about. But I remember standing up from the table, fists clenched, chest heaving, words flying out of me like fire. I don't even know what I said—only that I *finally said it*. Unfiltered. Unapologetic. But terrified.

It was the first time I heard my voice roar. And once it came out, there was no putting it back in. That night marked a turning point. I had

found the doorway back to myself. Not through gentleness—but through what I now consider a sacred eruption.

But here's what no one tells you: the world doesn't always welcome a woman who speaks like that. Especially not in church. Especially not in business. Especially not in rooms where power is dressed as politeness for women.

I tried to live aligned. I tried to use my voice for good. But the moment I stopped being agreeable, things shifted. I became "intense," "too much," "difficult." I was told to tone it down. I was told I needed healing and to pray it away. To be softer, quieter, easier to digest.

But I had already tasted freedom. And once you've tasted freedom, silence starts to feel like a slow kind of death. So I kept speaking.

Sometimes with confidence. Sometimes with a shaking voice.

But always with truth.

Because I had learned the cost of silence—and it was too high to pay again.

Finding my voice didn't happen all at once. It was layered. Messy.

There were years I overcompensated—mistaking volume for power.

There were seasons when I went quiet again—trying to stay palatable, to belong, to stay loved.

But eventually, I came home to something deeper: My voice isn't a weapon. It isn't a brand. It isn't even a message. It's my essence made audible.

It's the sound of my integrity. It's the sound of my freedom, and these two things are the core values I will lay my life down for.

My voice has become the echo of a girl who survived being silenced—and now speaks for them all.

If you've ever been told to quiet down to be accepted...
If you've ever swallowed your truth to keep the peace...
If you've ever wondered whether your voice was too much...

Hear me:

Your voice is not too much.
Your truth is not too loud.
Your presence is not too big.
The world needs the sound only *you* can make.
Let it rise.
Let it be messy.
Let it set others free.

Because when one person reclaims their voice—

They don't just heal their past, they open the gate for generations to come.

MELISSA McCRERY IS A BEST-SELLING AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND GUIDE FOR WOMEN NAVIGATING IDENTITY SHIFTS AND SOUL-LED REINVENTION. THROUGH HER SIGNATURE PROGRAMS AND COACHING, SHE HELPS WOMEN DISMANTLE INHERITED ROLES, RECLAIM THEIR INNER AUTHORITY, AND REBUILD A LIFE THAT TRULY FITS. THIS CHAPTER IS PART OF HER ONGOING WORK TO NAME WHAT WAS ONCE UNSPOKEN AND TO OFFER LANGUAGE FOR THEIR BECOMING.

PART TWO
THE AWAKENING

The journey back to your true voice...

YOUR VOICE WAS ALWAYS YOURS

BROOKE WATERS

I ALWAYS KNEW I HAD A VOICE.

It wasn't a matter of whether I had something to say—it was a matter of whether I had permission to say it.

From the time I was young, I sensed this tension: I would speak up, and people would push back. I'd stand for something I believed in, and the room would go cold. I'd call out what was wrong or unjust, and I would be told I needed "proof" or "evidence" to back up what I felt deep in my gut was true. The message wasn't that I was voiceless; the message was that I needed someone else to approve, to agree, to validate my knowing.

I learned early that using my voice came at a cost.

I remember one clear example from when I was in fourth or fifth grade. A boy in our class was being picked on, erasers hurled at him, his name mocked, his very presence made a target. And I couldn't stand it. I got up from my seat, marched to the front of the class, and said, "If you're going to pick on someone, pick on me."

Guess what they did? They started throwing erasers at me.

It was humiliating. I'm sure the boy felt embarrassed; I felt the sting of literal objects hitting my body. But even then, I knew—this is what it means to stand up. Even if no one comes with you. Even if everyone around you disagrees.

What I didn't have language for at the time, but know now, is that there was something deeper at play. My confidence in speaking up, in using my voice, wasn't something I had to earn or force myself into. It was *union*. It was the Spirit alive in me, even when I didn't know to call it that. The Trinity had always been my companion, my anchoring force, the quiet knowing inside that didn't demand outside validation.

This is why I can say today:

Your voice is not something you earn or prove—it's an expression of the wholeness you already carry.

The voice you're longing to find is already inside you. It's not built by applause or permission; it's grounded in your identity, in your union with God. And when you start using your voice, you step into the freedom of being fully who you were created to be.

WOUNDED REACTION VS. INNER KNOWING

Now, I know the next question: how do I tell the difference between speaking from true inner knowing or just reacting out of hurt or pain?

Here's what I've learned:

- **Wounded reaction** tends to move us away from connection. It raises the walls, throws up the spiritual Heisman, and says, "Stay back." It is defensive, separating, self-protective.
- **Inner knowing**, on the other hand, moves us *toward* connection and reconciliation. Even when it's uncomfortable or hard, it is grounded in truth, clarity, and wholeness. It doesn't

come from a need to win or punish; it comes from a desire to walk in alignment with who you are.

You can ask yourself:

- *Is what I'm about to say moving me closer to connection or pushing me away from it?*
- *Am I speaking because I need to defend myself, or because I know this is true and aligned with my identity?*

THE VOICE OF THE MOTHER HEART OF GOD

There is something sacred about the mothering voice—the nurturing, tender, protective, fierce heart of God expressed through women. And yet, throughout history, the mother heart has been silenced, dismissed, mocked, or minimized. We have been taught to believe that nurturing is “less than,” that softness is weakness, that feminine wisdom should take a back seat to masculine authority.

But the world is aching for the voice of the mother heart of God.

We need the voices that call us home, that hold the space, that say, “You are safe here.” We need the voices that fiercely protect and fiercely nurture, that refuse to let the vulnerable be trampled. We need the women who stand up and say, “Not on my watch”—and not because they’re loud or aggressive, but because they carry the heartbeat of heaven’s compassion.

For too long, the mothering voice has been looked down upon. We’ve been told to shrink, to soften, to support from the sidelines, to not get too big or too bold or too clear. But that is a lie. The feminine expression of God’s heart is indispensable in the kingdom. And when you reclaim your voice, you are not just reclaiming your personal power—you are stepping into the divine echo of the mothering love of God.

THE FREEDOM TO BE WHO YOU ARE

Friend, I want you to hear me clearly:

You don't need the world to agree with you for your voice to matter.

You don't need external validation to know what's right for you.

You don't need a perfect moment or the right audience to start speaking from your true self.

You were created whole. You were created in union. And your voice is part of that wholeness.

There will be moments when using your voice costs you—where people misunderstand, reject, or even attack what you say. But that doesn't take away the freedom you've been given. The freedom to stand in what you know is right. The freedom to live as the person you were made to be.

ENCOUNTER MOMENT

Take a quiet moment now. Close your eyes, place your hands over your heart, and breathe. Ask God:

Where have I been waiting for permission to use my voice?

Sit in that space. Let whatever rises come gently, without judgment.

Then ask:

What do You say about my voice?

Listen. Write it down.

You don't need to do this perfectly. You don't need to perform. Just come as you are. Let your voice start rising from the inside out.

CLOSING AFFIRMATION

I am free to be who I was created to be, and my voice is part of that freedom.

Say it again. Let it soak in.

Your voice matters because *you* matter. And you don't have to wait another day to begin living from that truth.

BROOKE WATERS IS A COACH, AUTHOR, AND THE FOUNDER OF PATH TO WHOLENESS. SHE HELPS PEOPLE COME BACK TO WHO THEY TRULY ARE — VOICE AND ALL. HER WORK IS ABOUT LIVING ANCHORED IN YOUR IDENTITY, FREE FROM THE NOISE OF PERFORMING, PLEASING, OR PROVING. BROOKE CREATES SPACES WHERE YOU GET TO PROCESS, HEAL, AND SHOW UP AS THE REAL YOU. SHE LIVES IN FLORIDA WITH HER HUSBAND AND FIVE KIDS, BELIEVES WHOLENESS WAS ALWAYS YOURS, AND IS HERE FOR THE BRAVE, MESSY, BEAUTIFUL WORK OF BECOMING.

SOMEONE NEEDS TO HEAR WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY

CINDY BUCK

MY HEART LONGS TO WRITE WITH AUTHENTICITY AND IN HONESTY. BUT right now, it feels like I've lost my voice somewhere in the middle of all the healing and heartache. I've struggled with writing this chapter. How do I speak about finding my voice, when it feels like it's gone quiet? When life is messy and my passion has grown dim?

I remember well a dear friend speaking into my life during a season like this. I was wrestling with a message I felt God had asked me to share. Actually, I was throwing a bit of a fit—in a southern twang sort of way—because the topic was abundance, and that was not my experience at the time!

“Someone here needs to hear what you have to say,” my friend said. “Just be yourself.”

Oh, I was myself alright. I started my message with, “I don't know how this is going to turn out, 'cause God and I aren't exactly on speaking terms right now. I'm a bit upset He asked me to speak about abundance when my life feels anything but.”

To my surprise, it was received by many as one of the best messages

I've ever given—raw and real. Only one person rebuked me. "How could I treat God in that way?" they asked.

Because someone needed to hear what I had to say.

While writing my book, *ABIDE: Always Beautiful In Daddy's Eyes*, I ran into a similar struggle. It was that chapter titled "Sin." That's where most people tend to set the book aside. That's the part where I'm told I'm in error—that what I wrote isn't what Scripture says.

But when the Father gives you something—a word, a revelation that has never crossed your mind and yet lands so deeply it could only be from Him—it's not easy to lay it down. It burns within you. What I had been taught my entire life didn't line up with what He was showing me. I wasn't born into sin.

I remember asking Robin Smit and the others in my TWS writing group, "Is this true? Am I hearing the truth? If the Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world—and that was before I was born—then that means I was born without sin? Could it be that original sin is a lie?"

"Sometimes I think, 'I will say nothing about the Lord or His message, but then his message burns like fire inside me. It gives me pain in my mind and my body. I cannot keep his message to myself. I have to speak it.'"

(Jeremiah 20:9, EasyEnglish Bible)

I know that feeling. When His truth starts burning in you, you can't keep it quiet—even if it costs you something.

God intimately poured the message of His finished work into my heart over a period of three and a half years. He told me, "Just study my word. And listen to Me." No outside books. No extra voices. He wanted me to feast on Him—the Word Himself. And it truly became the most incredible three and a half years of my life.

During that season, He opened the door for prison ministry. And I'd take what He was teaching me and turn around and speak it out, almost as soon as I heard it. I was finding my voice. I couldn't contain the joy that I felt as I shared His truth. Faith comes by hearing, and I was hearing it—every Thursday, week after week, after week.

Now if I told you it's all been bliss ever since, I'd be lying. As time went on, the rejection of close friends and others around me got so unbearable, God and I finally sat down and had quite the conversation.

“Are you crazy, Lord? Why would you give me this incredible message? You know me. Me, out of all people on the face of the earth—me? The one who is sensitive to criticism and rejection? Why would You do this to me? Are You trying to take me out?”

Yes, I can be a bit dramatic at times.

We lived in North Carolina for seven and a half years. We have four beautiful grand-babies, and they're the reason we eventually made our way back to Michigan, where we live now.

While we were still in North Carolina, I hosted a small conference. I had my message prepared and written out ahead of time—which, if you know me, you know that never happens. He gives me a verse or two, maybe a story, and He finishes it when I get up there. What I love about that is—it's one of the ways I always know it's Him. But this message was different.

The conference was called *Flourish*, and I had built a whole message around an acronym for the word. This girl was ready!

Just before the women went to have lunch in their southern kind of way, a woman named Sunshine came up to me and said, “There are a lot of women here with father issues.” And right then I knew. My heavenly Father was nudging me to speak about my earthly father—and I was not having it.

I had never spoken about my relationship with my father. Not to

anyone. I still feel the same feeling I had as I wrestled with God. Please don't make me do this, Jesus. I can't do this. I won't do this.

While they were all back there enjoying that wonderful southern cooking, I was sitting on the floor, literally begging God to change His mind.

But He won.

So I set my carefully prepared message aside and shared the story of growing up with a father who I knew didn't like me—and who later admitted he didn't know why.

In the second row was a woman I didn't know at the time. But later, we became beautiful friends. As I spoke, she started sobbing.

I later found out that her relationship with her dad was similar to mine—and hearing my story brought healing to some deep wounds she carried. When God told me I had to tell my story, when He told me to be transparent, I cringed. But that day—and many times since—I've learned this: there is power in vulnerability. There is power in your story. There is power in your voice—your authentic self, no matter how raw. The real you is worth knowing. And your voice carries a gift—it releases healing to the people around you.

You are always beautiful in your Daddy's eyes. Even on your off days... your off months... your off years. Still beautiful.

When we struggle to find our voices, His voice remains. Our past and present do not disqualify our voice. Whatever you do, don't run away and hide in those seasons. Run to Him. I'm learning to do the same, one step at a time.

Find the courage to speak out your story. Speak the truths that He's revealed to you—because someone needs to hear what you have to say. Have the courage to walk through the hard stuff—the pain, the discouragement, the rejection—and still speak. Encourage yourself and the people around you to step fully into all the Father has for them. Know that He knows you. He is aware of your every waking moment.

Know that you are precious to Him and deeply loved. He holds you by the right hand. You're not alone in this! Grab hold of Him, and let His fire burn within you.

"His spiritual seed shall serve Him. Future generations will hear from us about the wonders of the victorious Lord. His generation yet to be born (that's you) will glorify Him. And all will declare, 'It is finished.'"

(Psalm 22:30–31 TPT, emphasis mine)

So, come on—step back out into the world with me. Be you. And be the voice that your world needs to hear. And just remember—your voice is still here. Even on the days it feels buried, it's not gone. It's waiting for you to speak.

CINDY BUCK IS THE FOUNDER OF **ABIDE** MINISTRIES AND TRAVELS BOTH LOCALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY, SHARING THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS, GOD'S RADICAL GRACE, AND THE REST WE FIND IN HIS FINISHED WORK. SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT AWAKENING MEN AND WOMEN TO ALL THAT GOD HAS DONE FOR THEM IN CHRIST—AND WHO THEY TRULY ARE BECAUSE OF IT.

SHE'S BEEN MARRIED TO HER BEST FRIEND, **BRIAN**, FOR 33 YEARS AND CURRENTLY THEY RESIDE IN **NEWAYGO, MICHIGAN**. THEY HAVE THREE SONS—**BLAKE, BRENNAN, AND JUSTIN**. **BLAKE** IS MARRIED TO **CINDY'S** BELOVED DAUGHTER-IN-LOVE, **CHEYENNE**, AND TOGETHER THEY'VE GIVEN HER THE JOY OF FOUR BEAUTIFUL GRANDCHILDREN: **RYDER, MILA, IVY, AND THIA**.

HER LIFE AND MINISTRY ARE DRIVEN BY THE CONVICTION THAT EVERY PERSON HAS BEEN CREATED FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS—AND IT IS HER DEEP DESIRE TO SEE ALL OF GOD'S DREAMS COME TRUE FOR YOU.

HOW I FOUND MY VOICE

CHERYL YOUNG SMITH

ON THE FIRST PAGES OF MY BOOK, *TO LOVE AGAIN: REFLECTIONS OF A Redeemed Heart*, I share that each of us has a story to tell. I share mine to encourage you—that even after all you have been through, Jesus wants to teach you to love again. He loves you more than you can imagine. He'll teach you forgiveness and compassion. His presence will bring joy and peace, even to your darkest memories.

Before Christ came into my life in March of 1983, one day in particular stands out. My husband had left me and was with another woman. I was pregnant, already raising two daughters, and had no one to confide in. I felt backed into a corner, pressured to make a living. I confided in our pediatrician, and he gave me the address of a clinic in Corpus Christi, Texas.

When I arrived, they were able to see me right away. They gave me information about the procedure, referring to the pregnancy as tissue that would be removed. It was dark. I was afraid. I walked out of the examination room before the doctor ever came in.

But the next day, I felt I had no other choice. In my heart and mind, it

was the only way. By now, I was beginning to think of it as ‘just tissue’... not an actual life.

They explained it as similar to a D&C—a brief surgical procedure to remove tissue from the uterus. But what I underwent was a D&E—dismemberment and extraction—though at the time, no one explained what that meant. It was the darkest day of my life. I was numb and afraid, and my conscience kicked in. Something wasn’t right. I felt empty and angry—angry at myself, at my circumstances, and at who I had become. It was that day—the *darkest day*—that I began to grope for the truth... for the LIGHT. I didn’t want to live. My life felt so broken. But Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had a plan—to give me a future and a hope.

His love has consoled
 my heart, as I gave Him each day of my life,
 As I gave Him my heartaches, my sorrow, my strife.
 He tore down the prison—voices of trauma,
 and the barriers that were there.
 He frees me, unyokes me—my burdens He bears,
 so I can love again.

*All of it—just to know JESUS CHRIST... and to LOVE
 AGAIN.*

In my poem, *The Mannequin*, she gathered her past—carrying the weight of her own shame—and offered it up to Him. A woman who saw herself as broken, marred, and stained cried out, “Heal me... make me beautiful again.”

His love began to awaken the truth of who I really was. What had been buried under shame and self-condemnation was being brought into the light. He stirred me by His Spirit and began teaching me how to be a vessel of His healing and love.

I discovered peace and purpose in serving God through various ministries. I became involved with WEBA (Women Exploited by Abortion), offering support and understanding to those in vulnerable situations. I shared my testimony, shedding light on the truth about abortion clinics and advocating for the value of every human life. It was my way of making my voice count—especially for Jesus, who had been the steadfast source of strength throughout my journey.

Later, I moved to Houston. It was time to embrace change and walk away from the shadows of my past. That season became a turning point—my first steps into a deeper understanding of myself and a more intimate relationship with my Father in heaven.

God knew exactly what I needed. That's when I met Percine—a woman of deep wisdom and even deeper faith. A true sister after His heart. She inspired me, nurtured my spiritual growth, and helped me find both structure and clarity. Her connection with the Holy Spirit ran deep, and she opened her home to me while I waited to hear God's next steps for my life.

In her presence, I found a sense of belonging. The missing pieces of my soul began coming back together. I was loved without judgment, supported without reservation, and given a safe space to share both my struggles and my victories. Through her guidance—and our shared love for God's Word—I found the strength to overcome the wounds of my past. God truly knew what I needed: sisters who would walk beside me with unwavering love and spiritual nourishment. I found the courage to face my past honestly... and step into my future.

I found my voice!

One morning, God granted me a vision of Jesus on the cross. In the vision, I gazed up at Him and He looked at me with love and compassion. His words echoed through my entire being,

“I died that you might LIVE.”

In that moment, I felt the weight of His sacrifice and the endless depth of His love for me. Then Jesus showed me three traumatic events that had scarred my life: the pain of being molested at eight years old, the beating by an abusive ex-husband, and the heart-wrenching experience of my abortion.

In this vision, Jesus became the nurse holding my baby—now whole and complete! My heart swelled with grief and gratitude as He showed me my son. I named him Brian. His love and reassurance washed over me as He spoke, *“In this life, I give you blessings. I am holding your baby now. When you come into My Kingdom, you will know the love of your son—and your son will know the love of his mother.”*

The weight of my past traumas lifted. In its place, a deep peace settled over me. I realized that God had taken the broken fragments of my life and was creating something beautiful. It was the moment I understood—God wasn’t wasting any part of my story. Every trial, every wound, every scar was being woven into something redemptive. He touched the deepest places of my pain with His grace, and I began to see: what had once been broken was now becoming beautiful. My mess was no longer something to hide... it had become a message—one of hope, healing, and restoration.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit raised me with resurrection power. They gave me a voice of victory... a voice of freedom.

The rest of my story? That once-silenced voice began to carry hope into the darkest places. I began speaking in homes for battered women and volunteering weekly as a chaplain at Harris County Jail—until the day I was invited to serve full-time, ministering to women inmates.

From April 1992 to July 2002, I served as the Women’s Staff Chaplain at Harris County Jail—the third-largest jail in the nation—with 65 volunteer chaplains ministering one day a week. Through that ministry, my voice—restored and redeemed—spoke life into thousands of women longing for the same hope I had found.

And now, my voice continues—whether in quiet conversations, ministry moments, or the pages I’ve written. Every part of it points back to His love... and the freedom to love again.

CHERYL YOUNG SMITH, FORMERLY KNOWN AS CHAPLAIN CHERYL ARCHER, IS THE FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF MANNEQUIN MINISTRIES, A 501 (C) (3) NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO SUPPORTING BROKEN AND ABUSED WOMEN. A LICENSED AND ORDAINED MINISTER, SHE SERVED AS THE WOMEN’S STAFF CHAPLAIN AT HARRIS COUNTY JAIL IN HOUSTON FOR TEN YEARS, WHERE SHE BECAME KNOWN TO MANY AS CHAPLAIN CHERYL ARCHER. HER HEART HAS ALWAYS BEEN FOR WOMEN IN JAILS AND PRISONS, HELPING THEM FIND FREEDOM AND HEALING THROUGH GOD’S LOVE AND SALVATION.

CHERYL NOW RESIDES IN BANDERA, TEXAS, WITH HER HUSBAND, BISHOP MALCOLM SMITH, AND CONTINUES HER WORK WITH WOMEN AND FORMER PRISONERS, OFFERING HOPE, RESTORATION, AND THE MESSAGE OF GOD’S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.

AT LAST, I SOUND LIKE MYSELF

DR. RACHAEL CANNON

FOR MANY YEARS, I TRIED TO GET TO WHERE I'VE ALWAYS BEEN.

I was a drug addict for 25 years. My grandfather was a pastor, and my father is a pastor. I was on the stage singing solos in my mother's womb. I was raised on the front row of church. From 5 to 17, I attended church six days a week (Sunday services and Christian school Monday through Friday).

I had heard about God my whole life, but seldom heard about His unconditional love. As a result, I developed a distorted view of God. Because I was a sinner who couldn't seem to get my act right, I felt doomed to hell, so I gave up on having a relationship with Him. I tried to enjoy my life, but the internal separation I felt was such misery that I began to use drugs and alcohol to numb the pain.

I was arrested for the first time at 19. Over the next 23 years, I was arrested seven more times. I spent time in every county jail surrounding my hometown, Birmingham, Alabama.

At 42, my criminal record included eight felony drug charges, a federal drug trafficking indictment, and several misdemeanors, all related to drugs. I had gone through four rehabs, yet I was still addicted. I had

tried nearly every church in Birmingham, attended most AA's, participated in Celebrate Recovery, and had numerous Christian counseling sessions. I had accountability partners, small groups, and well-meaning older ladies in the church who wanted to mentor me. I was homeless, without a car, and weighed in at 100 lbs. I was suicidal. I was gay. I wanted someone, anyone, to love me, but I had no idea what love truly was. I fell for anyone who showed me the slightest inkling of attention.

I had withdrawals every day from 29 to 42. I was addicted to opiates, speed, downers, and sleeping pills. I smoked weed, snorted coke, and drank vodka first thing in the morning to function. It was not a good life. I felt dead. I wanted to die.

For 25 years, each day repeated itself. I woke up angry to be alive and craving a drug fix. If I couldn't get drugs, I couldn't function. It was like a horror version of Groundhog Day. I was trapped in a loop. I was depressed and anxious. I was in hell, and no one, despite all their efforts or mine, seemed able to rescue me from the torment.

I was madder than hell at God. I had tried to do everything I learned in the pews, but none of it had worked. I said the sinner's prayer, begged for forgiveness, and asked Jesus to come into my heart (a lot). None of it worked. Some nights, I would lie awake in bed, listen to praise and worship music, and cry my eyes out. I would get so mad that I would cuss God out. *Where are you? Where is the God these songs are all about? Why won't you help me? I hate you.* And the expletives would roll ... (Years later, I was telling my story, and a friend pointed out that even my cussing God out was faith. Ahahaha.)

In March 2016, I heard from a friend about a woman who was coming to give her testimony at a local church. I was utterly done with church, but I ended up going to hear this lady. I was high on kratom and Xanax. I sat in the fourth row, and my mom was with me. (She's a big churchgoer, so if I wanted to make her think I was *doing good*, I would attend church with her.)

Dawn Adkins stood up to share her testimony. It was beautiful. She was glowing and happy. She talked about how God had set her free from drugs and mentioned that she had a home for women like me. She laughed a lot! She seemed to be her true self. I wanted that. I felt something I hadn't felt in a long time—a hopeful feeling.

On the car ride home with my mother. I said *Mama. I'm dying.* And she said, *I know you are. I don't know what to do to help you anymore.*

My family tried to help me in every way imaginable. It was common for them not to hear from me for days or weeks. It was typical for me to avoid them, unless I needed something. It was normal for me to show up at family functions under the influence and stir up a ruckus. It was typical for me to come over with the agenda of asking for money.

Mom and I cried together, holding hands. I remember saying, *"I don't want to die."*

The next day, I woke up and used drugs to function. Then, I texted the person who invited me to hear Dawn speak. I said, *"I've got to have what that lady's got, and I'll do whatever it takes."*

Seconds later, my friend called me. He said, *"Rachael, I'm sitting with Dawn at my dining room table. She says, If you are serious, she would love for you to be a daughter in her women's home."*

I said, *"Yes,"* but I was scared as hell. Three days later, I was sitting in the front seat of Dawn's car, heading to her discipleship home.

I said, *"I'm going to be sick from withdrawals. I just took my last pill. It will probably wear off in about two hours."*

She placed her hand on my shoulder and soothingly said, *"Rachael, you don't have to suffer anymore because Jesus Christ already suffered for you."*

When she said that, I felt a weight lift off me.

I expected to be sick, throwing up from withdrawals, and overall miserable. (Withdrawals from opiates are like a severe case of the flu.)

Since I was quitting cold turkey, I was prepared for the worst. But to my surprise, the withdrawals never came. I never felt the drugs, alcohol, or nicotine leave my system. In that single moment, I was immediately freed from my addictions and never experienced withdrawal symptoms. That truly meant something to me! The next day, I felt so light that I jumped up and down. For the first time in my life, not only did I feel free, but I knew I was free.

I stayed at the women's home for a year and a half. It was one of the best times of my life. Dawn believed in me. She taught me how to live again and loved me so much. It was there that I met my Abba. It was like meeting for the first time the Man who had held my whole life together with His love. Day by day, He changed my mind about Himself, myself, and others. I began to believe that God loved me very much.

One of the first things Abba said to me was, *"Forget everything you think you know about Me and let Me love you."*

The first time I saw His face, it changed my life. The way He looked at me and the beams of love streaming from His eyes into mine were transcendent. He leaned down and kissed me on the forehead, on the nose, and then right on the lips. And Abba said, *"You don't kiss other people's babies on the lips. You are Mine."* His love is my life, my whole life.

Dawn introduced me to prison ministry. She moved to Texas and said, *"Rachael, I need someone to help me with my Florida prison ministry. You should apply to volunteer."*

I replied, *"I can't. I have a felony pending in Alabama."*

She said, *"God doesn't care about that. You're supposed to be in the prisons."* So, I applied. To my surprise, my background check cleared! Two times a month, I led worship and preached the message for the Sunday services at Lowell Correctional for over a hundred female inmates. I also taught classes to the five women on Florida's Life Row (notice the

name change!). I knew from the moment I stepped through the prison doors that I was meant to be there.

I saw so many miracles. I didn't even know what the prophetic or words of knowledge were until they started happening. I didn't believe in being slain in the Spirit until it happened to a woman during a service. Ahahaha. It was amazing and so much fun. I wasn't even ordained by any church. I was just a girl who had been set free and felt the ravishing love of my Father. Love had possessed me with an intent to distribute! I couldn't help but spread this irresistible love and newfound freedom. Years later, I learned that I was out of order, according to the church's understanding of ministry, I hadn't been trained and appropriately ordained— Hehe, Oops!

In 2017, I returned to Birmingham after the discipleship and became involved in a local church that hosted a small Bible college. In 2020, when COVID hit, I finished my Ph.D. in theology and transformed my dissertation into my first book, *Drink Deep, The Story of the Woman at the Well*. After studying the conversation between St. Photini and Jesus, I began to question the purpose of the church. Suddenly, things seemed ridiculous to me. We gathered every Sunday, repeating the same actions and expecting different outcomes, but nothing and no one was *changing*.

After COVID, the church pastors ordained me, and I took a position on staff at the Bible college. I had many questions, and no one seemed to have the answers. I had to be cautious when asking questions. If I held a different opinion from the leadership, it landed me in hot water. (Back then, I tried very hard to act like *Little Goody Two-Shoes*.) After a while, the sermons and teachings no longer felt like Good News to me. I began to sense an undertow of condemnation, accusation, and judgment. Each Sunday, there was a sermon on behavior, an altar call to repent for the behavior discussed, and a promise to do better with God's help, of course. I was so confused. My smile began to fade, and that's when I knew things were changing for me. I started to wonder what we were waiting for to happen. I remember thinking, *I'm not*

Jewish. I'm not waiting for the Messiah. He's here (I tap my fingers to my chest).

As I look back now, I continue to lay all the blame for my questioning on St. Photini. (I know she smiles when I say this.) She met the Lord and experienced an instant awakening. She didn't pray the sinner's prayer, no pastors laid hands on her, she didn't go forward to an altar for deliverance, she didn't attend Bible college to be ordained, and she didn't join a church or stop to serve. She met the Lord and took off running, filled with revelatory excitement and so noticeably different that the town followed her to Jesus!

When I realized that the Bible college staff used their behavior as a standard for measurement and success, I felt unnerved. It sounded like this to me: if so-and-so's worship was not extravagant, they didn't speak in tongues or wave flags, or they didn't fall out when the pastors touched them, then they needed deliverance to get with our program. If the congregation or students did not act like *us*, we needed to fix them. Our responsibility was to cast out whatever *demon* stopped them from being like us. (I cringe at this now, but it was part of my awakening.) Everything that was not like *us* was labeled *demonic* and criticized. Oh dear, what a mess! A mess I wanted out of.

Twice, I attempted to resign from my position, but the pastors insisted I couldn't. At that point, due to my church-going indoctrination, leaving the church was not an option; there must have been something within me that the Lord wanted to deal with. Looking back, I realize I was trying so hard to be good. For years, during my addiction, I had acted out so badly. Now I was determined to be good, to clean myself up, and to make myself more likable.

I was miserable, so I fasted, which only added to my misery. This went on for several months. I cried out to God. I engaged in spiritual warfare, spoke in tongues very loudly, quoted verses, had Sozo prayer, repeated my *Who I Am's in Christ*, put on the armor of God, prayed that no weapon formed against me would prosper, prayed a hedge of protection from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet,

bound and loosed, cast out the devil, anointed myself with oil, reached out to Dawn, and soaked 24/7. Yet I was still incredibly confused, unhappy, and exhausted. I searched myself to uncover the root of whatever they believed I needed to fix. I confessed every sin I had ever committed, even those I hadn't, just to be safe. I broke soul ties and strongholds, but I remained deeply confused, unhappy, and still couldn't seem to get with the program. Because of the shame I felt and because I was in leadership, I felt like I couldn't share with anyone. I humbled myself to a speck of dust, tried hard to emulate Jesus, and flew under the religious radar. The fire I once had in my voice was agonizingly snuffed out. All the work I was doing was not working.

I felt lost. I didn't want to attend church anymore, but I loved God. I felt let down. I couldn't get a breakthrough, and none of my strategies for a breakthrough were helping me. I gradually started to withdraw from my responsibilities.

All the while, the Christianese teachings and phrases haunted me. *Stay plugged in, write a gratitude list, don't get offended, offense is the bait of Satan, get to the root, deal with your pride, find the unforgiveness, serve more, get a mentor...* The list goes on and on.

Finally, the pastor *agreed to let me step down* from the college staff while continuing to attend the church. He told me I was making a huge mistake and that I would regret quitting. I faced the cold shoulder, but I kept showing up, religiously. The pastor wouldn't speak to me, the staff ignored me, and I moved from the front row to the back. They stopped handing me the microphone and mentioning my name from the pulpit. I had gone from poster child to outcast. It was honestly so strange and quite painful. I began to withdraw. I was right in the midst of a rude awakening, but I didn't know it.

One Sunday, we had a sermon about the spirit of Jezebel (one of the pastor's favorite messages). I felt waves of guilt lash at the congregation. At the end of the message, an altar call was given, and if you felt you had a Jezebel spirit, you could go forward, and the pastor

would deliver you. (This was a regular teaching and practice at the college and church on Sunday mornings.)

Well, everyone went forward except for me and this other guy. I asked Papa if I had a Jezebel. He said, *“Naw, and none of these other folks do either. This is a show of control. This is not My love. This is not Good News.”*

About two weeks later, the pastor and the college pastor asked to meet with me and informed me that I should not return to the church. I was devastated. I asked what I had done wrong, and the pastor said I had no honor for him and no fruit to show. I felt utterly confused. I sobbed and begged to come back, promising to work on myself more, but I was expelled on March 16, 2022.

When I got in my car, I called my sister and told her what had happened. I said, *“They just kicked me out, but I think I can convince them to let me stay.”*

She said, *“Oh, Rae, just be done with them. They don’t want you!”*

It hit me like a ton of bricks. I never went back to that church. I felt as if I had lost 300 friends in a single day.

Later, I heard some things the pastors told the church members and the students about me. They defrocked me (revoked my ordination). They *humbly admitted* that they had promoted me too soon, that the Lord was dealing with me, and that I wasn’t ready for ministry yet. The Bible college students unexpectedly showed up at my door to do outreach and evangelize me. I found myself on the receiving end of what I had been trained to do, and it felt horrible. I wasn’t backsliding. I was awakening! I wish someone had told me that. But nobody knew, not even me.

I tried attending other local churches to stay *plugged in*, but nothing satisfied me. They all sounded the same. The sermons focused on behavior, repenting for either doing or not doing that behavior, and promising to be more like Jesus, with God’s help. I couldn’t find what I was looking for in the local church.

For six months, I woke up crying every morning. I'd call my sister or mom and dad, and they would listen to me, remind me of how wonderful I was, and what a miracle Abba had done in my life. Just like in my addiction, my family surrounded me, cried with me, and loved me. Slowly, I began to talk about what had happened. I had been subtly trained to keep quiet by verses like, *Touch not my anointed and do my prophets no harm. Don't gossip. Turn the other cheek. Don't get offended. Pray for your enemies.* The list of misused Scriptures is long and reaches back to my front row lineage. These misaligned Bible verses kept me silent through fear and guilt for years. *Red Flag emoji goes here!*

I started doing something different. I took long walks in the parks. I found fish to feed in the ponds and streams. I noticed a pattern. My family had always supported me. I began to enjoy them without trying to do ministry on everybody. I learned to listen, to hear for enjoyment, and to love. I got a library card and frequented the high fantasy section. I fell in love with lyrical prose and words that transported me. I went to the beach. I stopped following mainstream Christian media and got Netflix.

One night, I binge-watched Netflix, and the next morning, I woke up feeling so drunk and lavished in love. I thought, *Lord, I didn't even worship, pray, or read a Christian book last night.* He said, *Exactly! The lavishment of the ravishment was never something to be earned. My presence is in you, but you've been taught to work it up. Enjoy My love!*

Something fabulous happened ... the less I tried to work up the Presence, the more effortless my awareness of His indwelling became, leading to pure enjoyment. The bliss that followed felt like healing oil for my callused hands, aching back, and *carrot-and-stick* routine. I began to appreciate the beauty of creation and people. It was truly a *stop-and-smell-the-roses* experience. In my religiosity, I had walked through so many rose gardens and had been trained to look for thorns rather than enjoy the beauty. Once I stopped to smell the roses, I bloomed.

On May 25, 2022, I purchased *The Mirror Study Bible* on Amazon. I felt like a rebel since my former pastor had prohibited this Bible. All I can say is, WOW! *The Mirror Bible* opened my eyes. Thank you, Pastor, for referring me to it.

Reading *The Mirror Study Bible*, *The Romance of the Ages*, I finally understood what all the fuss was about. It turns out that I had never truly heard the Gospel before. After all my years in church, Christian school, Bible college, multiple faith-based rehabs, and all those nights of soaking and deliverance, I had only encountered the *Do-It-Yourself* version of salvation—a confusing mix of grace/gift and legalism/reward. It's no wonder that my thoughts were clouded with confusion and judgment. I would dare say that legalism is at the root of all confusion.

I laughed and cried as I found myself within the Triune love story. It was as if someone had turned on the lights. And when the day dawned in my understanding, what I saw took my breath away in amazement. God had been holding me (and everyone else) in Christ Jesus all along. I had been in a lifelong relationship with Him; I just didn't know it. I experienced a spiritual awakening, left religion, and began to enjoy my union with God.

It was amazing. Years of condemnation, accusation, and trying to be somebody melted off of me. Suddenly, I was no longer stuck in the loop of trying to get to the root or jump through the legal hoops of the church. The incredible thing about *The Mirror* was how easy it was to understand the Good News. The News was so good that I began experiencing instant relief and joy.

The Mirror helped me to distinguish the Voice of Abba. Between fear and love, control and freedom, the opinion of men and the opinion of God, the shadow and the substance, the old and the new, the irrelevant and what is relevant, between the separation mentality and the union mentality, between the law of works and grace by faith, between *Do-It-Yourself* and what God has done, between self-righteousness and God's righteousness by faith, and between words of toxic poison and words

of life. I could go on and on. The whole point is to know the difference between the two voices.

Getting expelled from religion did wonders for my life. It was gruesome, painful, and one of the most beautiful experiences I have lived to share. And share it, I gladly shall. Now you know why I am so thankful to be alive. At the slightest thought of my freedom from addiction and the self-mutilation of controlling religion, I am gone! The joy of this freedom is very dear to me. Because I lived the agonizing lie of separation for so darn long, the truth of our union is my daily bliss.

Sitting on my couch after my exodus, I never thought I would write again. I couldn't write Christianese, and books on behavior seemed pointless to me. I also didn't feel the need to convince anyone of anything. One day, I felt the urge to write, and I discovered my authentic voice. I had been journaling my awakening and hearing the whispering words of love from the depths of my being. From my journal, I wrote *The Year I Learned to Fly* (November 2022).

I met some family friends for lunch and shared a bit about what I was working on. Since I was no longer in a small group or attending the local church, my Christian friends thought I was in a precarious situation, on the verge of backsliding or returning to addiction. My first experience of sharing my voice was unpleasant. I was grilled for two hours at a pizza place. I found myself in an argument I couldn't win. It mainly centered on my new understanding that Scripture may contain certain mistranslations, and the meanings of words might differ from what we had been led to believe. Boy, this ruffled some major feathers. I was surprised at their rigidity, even when the truth was as clear as day. They told me they had attended *Systematic Theology* so they were sure they knew what they knew. They were closed to any new possibilities or translations. They recommended that I attend the *Systematic Theology* class at the local Baptist church. They told me I couldn't write a book like *The Year I Learned to Fly*. But it was too late. I was almost finished, and their religious, *you can't do that*, told me I was on the right track. I wasn't afraid of their beliefs now that I

had my own. I had already been burned at the stake and inflamed by love. I had nothing to lose.

The proof was the irrepressible joy that had seeped into my life from being so effortlessly loved by Abba. I had to set my voice free in words on pages. I had no publisher and nothing to prove. I just had a feeling, and I went with it. I wasn't expecting people to read it. I had few friends. I wrote it because I couldn't help but write it. I wrote because I wanted to. I wrote because it made me very happy.

In January 2023, I joined the *Mirror Word Zoom Bible Study*, which takes place on Wednesday nights. I met Dr. Patrick and Pamela Emery and instantly fell in love with them the first evening we met. Patrick was teaching the book of Hebrews, and I remember laughing throughout the lesson. I had never heard anyone teach the Bible like that before. After the teaching segment, we broke into small groups on Zoom. (What? No altar call... haha). Everyone had a chance to share. I shared a bit of my story, and to my surprise, people listened without judgment. I encountered people from around the world who had also been kicked out of church, or had politely excused themselves (ahaha). I remember feeling such relief, realizing that I wasn't alone and had found a safe place to share. For some people, the exodus is indeed the beginning of an awakening.

When I went to bed, I giggled, teary-eyed from the message I'd heard and the instant camaraderie and unconditional love I felt from these people. I even got up in the middle of the night to check my Bible, making sure that what I had heard Patrick teach was really there. Ahaha. It was! It was almost too good to be true.

These Good News and grace-filled people are love fanatics. They love others without judgment. I can't brag enough about these Mirror Zoom folks. I never thought I would go to church again or find *church family*, and all I can say is, WOW! This is exactly what I was looking for. These people are kin. Since God is the Father of the human race, doesn't that make us all kin? Perhaps there are zero degrees of separation.

Remember all the questions I had that no one could answer? I found a place to ask them without being raked over the coals of religion. I realize that everyone in my life has played a role in my awakening, and I am incredibly grateful for that. I like who I am! I love the Good News!

In May 2023, I moved to Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. Abba has opened the prison doors for me to teach weekly classes in three county jails in the Florida Panhandle. I teach the curriculum I write weekly, called *The Love Class: God Is All About You*. I've fallen in love with these little lilies growing in the greenhouse of the county jail. Hence, my nonprofit jail and prison charity is *Greenhouse Lilies*.

I walk freely through the prison doors. I show them my mugshot and say, *Look, I'm one of us. I'm here to remind you how wonderful you are if you've forgotten. I'm here to show you that you haven't blown it. I'm here to remind you that Abba is very fond of you; so fond of you that He has chosen you for His home.*

One of my favorite things to do is to go to jail. I would have laughed if you had ever told me the time I served in jail would serve me. I'm laughing right now while writing this (haha). My top Google search is Jails near me. My nonprofit raises my salary each year and keeps me on the road. I lovingly tell my darling donors, *Thank you for sending me to jail*. I never thought I would have a career going to jail to share the love of Abba. I put a new twist on *Jailbird*. This one little bird is putting thousands to flight!

TWS, The Writer's Society, published my third book, *Lambs & Lilies: Musings of Likeness Redeemed and Innocence Restored*. In July 2024, TWS published *The Heart of the Lily: Volume One and Two*. And, at the end of 2025, I hope to share *The Agape Trilogy: Book One, The Enjoyment of Being So Loved*.

And now my loves, allow me to invigorate your voice...

In being so loved by the Trinity, the Bride of Christ discovered her

voice, her authentic cadence, and her own language. She is no longer bankrupt in her identity. She is Love's child. She is not disoriented or confused. The divine sweetness of God's love permeates her thoughts.

She is rich and right. She is free and safe. She is steady and solvent. She is green and full of life. Her inner voice is opulent with Triune affection and affirmation, which effortlessly overflows everywhere she goes. She is nourished and nurtured by Love from within. And she's not scared.

This love of exceptional wonder has flowed through her mind, making her thoughts so lush. She possesses a strong sense of being loved for no reason except that she's God's daughter, which is all the reason enough. She experiences a consciousness of union that enriches her thoughts, moment by rapturous moment. Her pure heart, once critical and aligned with others' belittling comments, is now sure and constant. Love fills her soul with thoughts of likeness redeemed and innocence restored, and the oneness of Love, oh, the oneness of Love. In the temple of her sacred spirit, Christ has made His home - yesterday, today, and forever. It is simple, it is beautiful, and it is habitual. She is guided by the still, small voice far more compelling than human opinions. Her thoughts that once condemned her now only endorse her goodness.

She is the voice of ecstatic love. The love of God enflames her soul and sets her wits afire. Her language is fresh and exploratory. She writes about our Triune Godhead, who dwells so sweetly within us and longs to be uniquely expressed through our voices. Her voice is like the sound of many waters gathered together in one ginormous ocean of Love. She speaks in ha-ha's, giggles, wow's, and whoa's. She leaves open space for responsive enjoyment. She pens bucolic beauties with ample invitation to come and rest within the luscious green pastures of the Shepherd's love and affection.

She writes like her. She sounds like herself. Her voice is unlike anyone

else's. She's finally found her niche, and she's good at being her. She's learning to whittle a word down to its very essence. Her words have journeys and hidden trails for excursions into union. Each character reveals the unbreakable, all-inclusive Trinitarian-human relationship.

She invents her own words. Her dialect is woozy and romantical. Her pen points to love and is easily understood in every language. Her writing is meditational; her voice, medicinal.

She's a canticle. She's a cannon. She's a calligrapher of agape. She's a little lamb and a lily. She imparts halos of restored innocence to encircle the subconscious. She infuses the sensation of being so freaking loved into her lines. She's fruitful with love and laughter. She writes repetitively because she loves to hear Love's echo in the words, Love's echo in the words. She writes to capture the intense feelings of being doted on by Abba. She gets so high on the witty love of God, who so wittedly, willingly included Himself in the human race; that's the real inclusion. Her saintly syllables are scandalous. They're rated for euphoric ecstasy! Read and feel buoyant and bliss-full.

God so loves us, His darling children, His darling children. The Trinity is obsessed with us knowing our inseparability. May these words ignite an inner love song. May these words be like poetic therapy for drooping branchlings. May you see yourself as innocent and united to the Vine because that's how He sees you. Oh, the Vine is so sweet, and we grapes are delicious. May you feel inspired to be true to yourself. And may you live free from the four-walled coffin of control to discover how beautifully precious you truly are. We need your voice, my darling friend.

Now, go lucid, lovely words, to the weary and unsatisfied. Go, as a great wave of awakening, and soothe their souls from within. Go, lullaby voice, and whisper to these darlings how our Abba so loves us. Tell them their small frames are heavenly, full of love, life, and laughter. Go, Triune pages, as a reminder of humanity's likeness

redeemed and innocence restored. Go, like a balm of greasy grace to minds stuck in the loop of legalities and obligations. Go, as couriers of acquittal, and lay all the blame on God for this loving union. Go, like skeleton keys, and unlock the vocal cords of Oneness.

Go, shiny, happy Bride, and always only highlight the unbreakability of our Triplet-ness.

DR. RACHAEL CANNON IS FROM SANTA ROSA BEACH, FLORIDA. SHE IS THE AUTHOR OF *DRINK DEEP, THE STORY OF THE WOMAN AT THE WELL; THE YEAR I LEARNED TO FLY; LAMBS & LILIES; AND THE HEART OF THE LILY: VOLUME ONE AND TWO*. RACHAEL FOUNDED *GREENHOUSE LILIES* (2018), A NON-PROFIT JAIL AND PRISON CHARITY.
WWW.GREENHOUSELILIES.COM

QUESTIONS AND ECHOES

JESSICA BOUDREAUX

I STRUGGLED TO KNOW HOW—OR EVEN WHERE—TO BEGIN WRITING FOR this project. One of my best friends encouraged me to start with the same words I used to start the message I sent her when I most desperately needed encouragement. So, here it is.

I feel like I should probably go ahead and say that this chapter will likely be disappointing, and I probably need to apologize for that ahead of time.

But the truth is—that is not true.

And since we are talking about voices, and learning to find our own, it is worth pointing out that there *is* a voice that speaks behind those negative words. A voice that doesn't speak truth. It is the voice of lies—the voice of the deceiver, and the accuser, whose work has always been to prevent us from knowing and hearing and speaking Truth.

And for me, that battle with the voice of lies is deeply personal.

As a woman living in rural Alabama, I often feel like my voice—whatever that even is—does not matter as much as the voices around me that are not female. And certainly, it seems to follow, that my voice

must also be less credible and less authoritative than those non-female voices as well.

So, while I tend to believe my voice is, somehow less than, or not enough, I also have a strong tendency to rebel against it on principle. What a strange tension that is!

In different seasons of my life, I've tried to prove that I am worthy of being heard—that my thoughts and opinions have value. I have tried various ways of fighting against those things I have grown up being taught. I tried more education, more assertiveness, more volume, more enthusiasm, more everything. But to make a very long story short, none of it ever worked out in a positive kind of way for me, or helped my voice be heard. In fact, I feel in many instances, the more I tried to be heard, the more my voice has been ignored.

In the middle of the general chaos and confusion of life, as well as those feelings of voicelessness, I was ordained and called into ministry. A few years ago, the Voice that perpetually calls me to follow Him led me to serve His Church in the unofficial position of interim pastor in a local congregation.

At the time, I thought I had finally found my voice—though I still doubted it every Sunday as I walked to the pulpit. When that season ended just a few months ago, I was forced (or rather, blessed, if I'm being honest) to re-evaluate everything I thought I knew about myself, my calling, and my voice.

As it turned out, God was leading me to serve His Church in a new capacity—as laity, within a Christian community that largely believes preaching and pastoring are not roles meant for women. “Women are to be silent in church,” we read in one Bible verse—and in my part of the world, many churches take that very much to heart.

So, when I was invited to write about voices, and ministry, and living authentically for this book, it caused me to question so many things—starting with whether I am even qualified to write about finding my voice. Since I am not sure I am even entitled to have one.

But I continued to think about it. And the more I meditated on those questions, the more it seemed that answering one gave birth to at least two more questions of their own. And each coming with a unique set of insecurities and fears and musings.

Here are some of the questions that plague my heart— and maybe the hearts of many others, too:

What does it mean to find my voice? Have I found it? If I have, is it really *my* voice—or someone else's? What do I even hope my voice will speak? And who will have ears to hear what is said, if I do happen to find both my voice and the words to speak with it?

How can I be true to my calling, and stay faithful to what Jesus has given me to do when it seems like I am not allowed to have a voice? How do I bear fruit in the seemingly fruitless and barren places He has led me into?

Is teaching a dozen elementary school girls for one hour on Wednesday nights —over pizza and cookies—about missionaries and the importance of sharing the Gospel *really* doing enough for the Kingdom? Is my blog of poetry and prose an authentic offering that might be helpful and edifying? Or is it just a poorly disguised form of pride and pretense?

And what is the difference between selling out to complacency, and following the guidance divinely given through Jeremiah's voice to those exiles in Babylon. "Build houses and dwell in them! Plant gardens and eat their fruit! Have families and enjoy life! Seek the peace of the land while you are in this unexpected place!"

I have a deep belief that the stories in Scriptures are really the stories of our own lives—chapters and verses filled with new lenses to help us see what we should be doing, and what we should not be doing. They show us who God is—and who He is not. They remind us of who we are, whose we are, and who we were never meant to be.

So, where I have finally landed in my contemplations of life, voice, and voicelessness, is this question: How have others in the Bible navigated the ever-elusive journey of finding their voice?

Beginnings always begin at the beginning—everyone has a first word. And God is no exception. Jesus is the Word of God. The First Word, the Final Word, and Every Word In Between. He is everything that the Father has to say to us... and about us.

And every word must be conveyed somehow—the Word *must* find a voice to bear it.

Of the many examples in Scripture, my heart is drawn to two people in Jesus' life—two women whose voices help me understand what it might mean to find my own. A voice specifically created for me before the world began—meant to bear the Word into the world.

The two Marys—Mary, the Mother of God, and Mary of Magdala. Both were socially silenced, yet their voices speak with power, drawing me in through their witness and their devotion to giving voice to the Gospel.

One Mary's body became the voice that brought forth the Word. The other Mary's life became the expression of the Word.

When the Word became flesh and dwelled among us, He was born into something that He had been living in the fullest reality of since eternity past. Relationship. He has always existed face-to-face with the Father in the unity of the Spirit—and that did not change when He came to dwell in our midst.

The Mother of God's amen to the way of God—to the Way God chose to reconcile humanity to Himself—was the voice that birthed and released the Word into a darkened world. It speaks louder than any pulpit could.

And the amen of the other Mary—her voice poured out in a fragrant oil and frantic cries of Resurrection to all humanity—still proclaims the Gospel more powerfully than even the most skilled theologian.

How many questions did the Marys carry? How many insecurities, doubts, fears—and how many moments of being silenced? I wonder how often they second-guessed the value of their voices spoken not with sermons but through their lives. Did they ever compare themselves to Peter, wondering if his public words carried more meaning than their quiet witness?

Did Mary and Mary ever feel a little like I do—as they witnessed the disciples writing their Gospel stories, while they quietly lived those same stories through their caring for and serving others?

My current job has me answering the phone all day long. Each time I answer the phone, I say something along the lines of, “Thank you for calling. How can I help you?”

At first, I struggled with it—arguing with the Spirit that this couldn’t possibly be how I was called to serve the Lord. But in time, I was given a little Light for my path.

These very words I repeat all day long encompass and give voice to all the law and the prophets. Here I am—to serve, rather than be served. *Here I am—to love the stranger, the one who might be my enemy, the one who is always my neighbor. Here I am, to enter, if only for a moment, into relationship with another: a beloved child of the Most High God, wonderfully and fearfully made, and called by His Name.* And because the two of us are gathered in His Name—whether we realize it or not—my physical voice becomes something more. It becomes a metaphysical Voice, announcing (and maybe even unveiling) the Presence of the Word, who is always present with us.

So, as all those things wrap into one—my inadequacies, my feelings of insignificance, and my perceived silence—I am beginning to learn a new thing. Like the two Marys, I am coming to realize that it is our lives, lived in relationship with one another, that becomes the voice I am called to carry. A life that speaks forth the Word in every moment with every image bearer I encounter. A life lived so loudly and wordlessly, overflowing with the Word that even the deaf can hear that

they are called Beloved—delighted in, and made for life in seamless union within the joyful dance of eternal bliss and love shared by the Holy Trinity.

I have often thought that the Word had taken all my words away. But I think the bigger truth is—He has become the only Word I want to speak.

In all I say and do, and in everything I am, I am more and more convinced that it is the ordinary things—the common moments, the shared experiences—that express the true sound of the Word. And it is there, in that place, and that place alone, that I find my own voice.

So for now, my hope and prayer is that whatever my voice sounds like, may it always echo Him—He who is Himself the Divine Amen. And as Jesus is always coming to meet us, to speak Himself in our hearts, our lives, and our relationships, may I, too, be found being His voice whenever I speak... whether in words, or actions, or silence, or stillness—in the presence of others.

JESSICA BOUDREAUX IS THE MOTHER OF TWO TEENAGE DAUGHTERS AND LIVES IN A RURAL COMMUNITY ON THE ALABAMA GULF COAST. SHE IS AN ORDAINED DEACON IN THE COMMUNION OF EVANGELICAL EPISCOPAL CHURCHES AND HAS BEEN DEEPLY SHAPED BY NEOMONASTIC PRAYER RHYTHMS AND PRACTICES, THOUGH SHE CURRENTLY SERVES IN A CHURCH OUTSIDE THAT DENOMINATION. JESSICA IS PURSUING HER MA IN THEOLOGY AND CULTURE AT ST. STEPHEN'S UNIVERSITY. SHE SHARES HER THEOLOGY-CENTERED POETRY AND REFLECTIONS ON HER SUBSTACK BLOG, "SUDDENLY SACRAMENTAL."

FINDING YOUR VOICE IN SACRED CO-UNION

TEHILLA LUTTIG

THAT SOFT “SHH ...”

That soft “shh, shh, shh ...”

It can be comforting, or terrifying, depending on who’s holding you.

A baby draped over a mother’s shoulder might feel soothed or silenced. It depends on how safe the parent feels in their own body. Sometimes, that “shh” is calm, like white noise. Other times, it carries fear, a warning, a shutdown.

Even before we find our own voice, someone else’s voice is already shaping it.

And when you mix that early imprint with patriarchy’s influence—on religion, on society, on how women are taught to show up—you get the perfect recipe for the quiet suffering so many carry:

Women silently drowning in the words they felt they could never share.

As a licensed couples counselor with over two decades of experience, I

get asked this one often—especially by women who want to honor their faith but also feel like they’re disappearing in the process:

What does the Bible really mean about submission and leadership in marriage?

WHEN SCRIPTURE HURTS INSTEAD OF HEALS

Scripture can be the key to freedom, or the key to a dungeon.

It depends who’s reading it, and from where. What lens. What translation. What century. As society changed and patriarchal norms hardened, women’s voices were slowly draped in silence.

There was a time when women who were outspoken, different, too much ... were burned alive as witches.

That’s how threatening a woman with a voice was.

Still is, sometimes.

An angry man? He’s just angry. A boy being a boy.

An angry woman? She’s a problem. A bitch.”

And don’t get me wrong, men are suffering too.

They were raised by patriarchy, not by safe, solid masculinity.

Many of them are confused, isolated, and lost.

Trying to work harder in an economy that feels insatiable.

Trying to hold it all, provide for a family, and still feeling like they’re falling behind.

Thank God He says:

“In Him we live and move and have our being.”

Not our doing.

Our being.

BEFORE WE ARGUE OVER ROLES, LET'S LOOK AT THE WORDS

Before we get into the “he said, she said,” let’s pause and look at what the original Hebrew and Greek words actually meant.

Because words like “submit,” “head,” and “authority” have been used to silence and control, but they were never meant to.

This isn’t about twisting Scripture to fit modern thinking, it’s about untwisting what was already misread, mistranslated, or misused.

“Head” (Greek: *kephalē*)

When Paul wrote that the husband is the “head” of the wife (Ephesians 5), the word *kephalē* was used.

In Greek, *kephalē* doesn’t mean boss or ruler.

It means source, like the headwaters of a river.

A fig tree can’t produce grapes.

A vine doesn’t grow olives.

The fruit always reveals the source.

So the question isn’t, “How much authority does he have?”

The question is, “What flows from him?”

Is it safety, or sharpness?

Is it peace, or pressure?

Biblical headship isn’t about being in charge.

It’s about taking responsibility for what grows around you, because of what’s growing in you.

“Submit” (Greek: *hypotassō*)

The word submit in Ephesians 5:22 has also been used out of context.

Most people don't realize that the verse before it - Ephesians 5:21 - says:

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

That's mutual submission.

It's not about hierarchy, it's about humility.

About making space for each other. Yielding, not because of weakness, but because of love.

Also, in Greek grammar, the verb "submit" in verse 22 doesn't even appear - it's carried over from verse 21. The original text literally says:

"Submitting to one another ... wives to your husbands ..."

It was a continuation, not a command.

"Helper" (Hebrew: *ezer kenegdo*)

In Genesis, when God says He will make a "helper" for Adam, the Hebrew word is *ezer kenegdo*.

This doesn't mean assistant or sidekick.

Ezer is used over 20 times in the Old Testament, most often to describe God Himself as Israel's rescuer, protector, and strength in battle.

Kenegdo means "corresponding to" or "alongside" - a partner, not beneath or behind.

Eve wasn't created to serve Adam.

She was created to stand beside him as an equal, carrying strength that reflected God.

“LOVE LIKE CHRIST” (EPHESIANS 5:25)

When husbands are called to love their wives “like Christ loved the church,” this isn’t soft romance—it’s sacrificial leadership.

Christ:

- Washed feet
- Healed the outcast
- Restored identity
- Laid down power to lift others up

He didn’t dominate.

So when we talk about headship in marriage, it’s not a right; it’s a responsibility.

Not authority over, but servanthood for.

They Don’t Want to Lead. They Want to Feel Safe.

Most women I know don’t want to lead.

They’re not trying to take over.

They’re not power-hungry.

They’re just tired.

And yet, many of these same women come across as controlling. Because when you don’t feel safe, you grab the wheel. You overfunction. You try to carry what’s being dropped. Or they hope if they perform enough they will finally be seen and supported

But what were they really craving?

Is someone who sees the whole picture and says:

“I’ve got this. I’ve got us.”

Leadership in a home doesn’t mean making every decision.

It doesn't mean sitting at the head of a quiet and obedient table.

It means being aware of the people you love, and helping create an environment where everyone can breathe.

It means being the kind of presence someone can build with, not around.

As his *ezer*, she longs to co-create, not compete.

TWO VERSIONS OF “NOT LEADING”

Sometimes a husband steps back.

Other times, he steps over.

I've seen both.

There's the man who opts out; disconnected, focused on work or hobbies, assuming everything's fine unless there's a fire. He doesn't mean harm, but he's emotionally unavailable. He's not above, he's just away.

Then there's the man who steps in, but from the wrong place. He believes leadership means being in charge. He quotes Scripture without understanding the heart of it. He's present, but overpowering. He's not listening. He's leading from above, not beside.

In both cases, the woman often feels unseen.

One is lonely because he's gone.

The other is lonely because he's right there, but she's not safe with him.

Leadership without awareness isn't leadership at all.

WHAT IF IT LOOKED LIKE “I'VE GOT YOU”?

When a woman is full of emotion, the most powerful thing her husband can do

is not to fix her, or flee, or crumble.

It's to stand there—grounded, open-hearted, and present—and say with his posture:

“It's okay. I can hold this. I can hold you.”

It's the kind of strength that doesn't collapse in the face of emotion—it softens toward it.

It says, “You're safe here. Even in your intensity. I'm not afraid of your heart.”

That's leadership too.

That kind of strength isn't domination.

It's devotion.

So What Now?

Many wives are controlling everything at home—not because they want to, but because they feel like they have to.

And they're exhausted.

Many husbands feel helpless.

Like nothing they do is ever quite right.

They tell themselves things must be fine, or that she just needs space, because that's what they would want if the roles were reversed.

This doesn't describe every couple. But it describes enough.

Most of us weren't taught how to feel safe in our emotions.

Boys were told to hide them.

Girls were told they were too much.

And women? Even they learned to silence themselves, pleasing and performing because it wasn't safe to be honest.

But here's the truth:

We need to feel safe with our emotions—both of us.

And we need to stop waiting for things to magically fix themselves.

Because marriage isn't just something you hope stays together.

It's something you build together.

So take the risk.

Choose discomfort over quiet resentment.

Talk.

Pause.

Get external help if you need it—therapy, coaching, support.

Raise the standard so your relationship can grow to meet it.

And if it doesn't, that's still okay.

But you can't keep drowning in your own self-abandonment and call it holy.

God didn't ask you to disappear in the name of submission.

He says you are His masterpiece.

He knew you before your parents even knew you were coming.

He knows your heart.

And He knows the light your presence and your voice bring to the world.

He's not waiting for you to fit the mold.

He's inviting you to remember who you are.

And so are we.

We're all eagerly waiting for you to remember your voice.

Closing Prayer

God,

Thank You for the voice You've placed inside me.

The one that didn't come to echo, but to awaken.

*The one that trembles, not because it's weak,
but because it carries weight.*

I bless this voice now.

I bless the words that flow from fire and softness.

The words that some will love, and others won't.

I bless them anyway.

I bless the part of me that still wants to be the good daughter.

*The one who fears being misunderstood,
misquoted,*

or misaligned with the ones who raised her.

And I bless the part of me that knows:

I was never meant to be just a reflection.

I was meant to be a revelation.

I bless the tension between loyalty and liberation.

And I choose both.

I choose to rise in love, not rebellion.

*May my voice serve not just the legacy I come from,
but the liberation I'm called to lead.*

Let the women who need these words find them.

Let them feel You between the syllables.

*Let them remember who they are, not because I taught them,
but because I said it like I meant it.*

And if my truth offends—

Let it be the kind that breaks chains, not hearts.

Let it be holy.

Let it be whole.

Amen.

TEHILLA LUTTIG IS A LICENSED MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR TURNED INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIP AND IDENTITY COACH. SHE SPECIALIZES IN HELPING HIGH-ACHIEVING CHRISTIAN WOMEN HEAL FROM PEOPLE-PLEASING, PERFECTIONISM, AND PATTERNS OF SELF-ABANDONMENT. WITH OVER 15 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AND A HEART FOR BOTH DEEP PSYCHOLOGY AND GOD'S GRACE, SHE WEAVES TOGETHER BRAIN-BASED TOOLS AND FAITH-ROOTED TRUTH TO HELP WOMEN BUILD RELATIONSHIPS THAT FEEL SAFE, HONEST, AND SACRED.

TEHILLA IS THE CREATOR OF THE HAPPILY EVER AFTER METHOD AND IS PASSIONATE ABOUT HELPING INDIVIDUALS AND COUPLES THRIVE IN LOVE AND LIFE. SHE LIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA WITH HER HUSBAND AND TWO CHILDREN.

FROM INSECURITY TO THE SECRET PLACE

TRACI VANDERBUSH

“DON’T EVER CALL ME ONTO THE PLATFORM,” I TOLD MY PASTOR-HUSBAND shortly after we graduated from Bible school and entered ministry at a small church. I was a woman who allowed insecurity, perfectionism, and the judgment of others to silence me for years. If you’ve ever battled any of those things, you may have felt the weight of invisibility and the challenge to find your voice.

Though my desire was to reach people and transform lives with the message of Jesus, I was terrified of public speaking. My husband, Bill, had already unknowingly traumatized me once by telling his college drama teacher I’d step in for an ill actor, leaving me, with no acting experience, just three hours to prepare before the play! My well-meaning guy called to excitedly inform me that I’d be acting in front of 400 people that evening. With my heart pounding, I dug through my closet to find an outfit that would work for the unexpected gig. I wanted to cry because I was sure I’d wreck the whole show. When it came time to step onto the stage, I thought I might die right there, but somehow, that whole experience pushed me into a mode I never would’ve known had I said, “No”. I found a strength to do something I

didn't think I could do. That was Round One in my journey toward finding my voice.

Round Two came when my dear, sweet husband signed me up for two ministry events that put me in front of an audience. Once again, I found myself on stage; one as a damsel in distress in the Old West, and the other was as a mime on the Choctaw reservation in Oklahoma. Little by little, I was pushed out of my comfort zone by a man who believed in me. The problem was that I didn't believe in me. My self-consciousness was way over the top. I lamented to the Lord, "I'll look like a fool or make a mistake." I kept feeling the nudge to step out, but I'd remind God, "I'll be judged." That's when I heard Him say, "So was I." That really struck me, yet I still begged Him to keep me behind the scenes where I had confidence in being the silent wife of the pastor who spent her time serving, organizing, orchestrating, and planning events.

While serving as youth pastors, Bill repeatedly declared, "I'd never be a Senior Pastor." God laughed. At the age of twenty-five, he was thrust into the role he'd long protested. I found myself trying to fill the shoes of the previous Senior Pastor's wife who put on lavish, beautiful events; a woman who spoke eloquently and confidently in front of crowds. Still, I told my husband, "Don't ever call me onto the platform." I was happy to take the reins on organization, scheduling, and event-planning, however. Anything but the stage.

When it came time for the annual church mission's banquet, I decided that, instead of abiding by the previous tradition of indulging in an expensive menu fit for a king, we'd do something different. It just didn't make sense to me to dress up and feast together in the presence of mural-sized posters with images of starving children on them. It hurt my soul. This mission's banquet would be different, compelling, and eye-opening. While everyone was home, putting on their dresses and suit jackets, I set up the buffet tables with a brilliant menu: rice, beans, and tortillas. We would eat like royalty, at least in the eyes of an Ethiopian child. Some guests loved the idea, but I

overheard comments in the buffet line like: "This is ridiculous. I waited all day for dinner, and this is what we get?" *Yes, sir. That's what you get.* A few grumpy little attitudes assured me that I never wanted to speak in front of the congregation. If I was judged for my choice of menu, surely, I'd be judged for anything that came out of my mouth. So, I stayed silent for the most part. Over a decade, to be precise.

After we left that position, the Father gently began chipping away at my walls, peeling away layer after layer. It's funny how we get through one layer and think we've arrived. If only we knew how many layers remain for God to unravel and pry our stubborn little fingers from, we'd begin to understand the empowerment found in surrender, and we'd allow Him to take it all. To be honest, it wasn't until He led me outside the walls of the church, beyond the bubble I'd created for myself, that I found the freedom to let go of the image I was trying to project. Within the walls, I felt like a creature under a microscope, whose movements were being monitored and analyzed. I worked hard to be worthy, accepted, and good enough. But it was never God keeping me cloistered. It was people. Actually ... it was me. *My own insecurity held me captive and diminished my voice.* What exactly was it that I was trying to live up to? What had I done for all those years that God never told me to do? How many moments of intimacy with the Father had I filled with things to impress the people we served? In trying to live up to perceived expectations, my fears silenced the voice God had given me.

Then came Round Three, which was the biggest challenge yet. When I came to a place of learning the heart of God, and when I learned to find my identity in Christ and not in others, and when I embraced the flow of the Holy Spirit, not human expectations, something began to shift. I began to find my voice! It didn't come easily at first. God had to force me onto the stage. Bill had just finished ministering at a church in New Jersey and someone asked him if his wife would be interested in speaking to the women's group in the future. He said, "Of course. I'm sure she would!" That vote of confidence led to me being invited to

speak at a women's conference. My "yes" came from feeling obligated, but also out of fear of disappointing God.

I had to push through the anxiety of feeling like I'd wreck the session, but I was glad that someone else would be carrying the conference to pull it out of a potential nose-dive; so I thought. A short time before the event, I received a phone call from the organizer to outline the agenda. In the conversation, I discovered there were no other speakers. I was the one and only speaker for, not just Friday night, but also two Saturday morning sessions, and an afternoon session. Not wanting to appear shocked by the revelation, I pretended I was fully capable to deliver.

I hung up the phone and cried. And lamented. I angrily asked my husband, "What did you get me into?" He believed in me, but I wasn't that confident in my ability. That's when he said something that really struck me and lifted off another layer of performance mentality. *"It's not about you. You're there to help people. If you love your message and you love the audience, you have nothing to worry about."* In the moment, I was allowing fear to move me to anger, but I knew he was right. Examination of my heart and my why; the keys to letting the Holy Spirit move through me, being merely a conduit of His love, was where the burden began to lift. It wasn't me speaking. It was God.

If you've observed the modern Christian world, you might notice people on platforms who share the same mannerisms and styles. You can flip through radio stations and you'll immediately recognize the Christian station within the first four musical notes. We've developed a way, a sound, and a formula for success; yet I don't believe it's necessarily success in the eyes of God. There's nothing wrong with looking up to someone and taking cues from their achievements, but if we fall into the trap of the Chameleon Effect, we and those we minister to will miss out on the individuality of God's unique imprint on us. The Chameleon Effect is when we mimic or adopt the gestures, mannerisms, or facial expressions of people around us. I admit that I've done this, often subconsciously.

In preparation for speaking at the conference, I began watching videos and messages by successful women ministers. *I don't want to ruin this event. I must study!* But I was looking in the wrong place. I finally shut it all down and went into my virtual prayer closet to fully submit as a mouthpiece for the Father. *What do You want to say?* I began to write as several messages came to me. Scripture after Scripture flowed like gifts in a river of life. Then came a ridiculous idea from the Holy Spirit: "Traci, do you remember when you were a little girl and you crawled under the dining table during family holidays? Do you remember the comfort you felt as loving adults surrounded you, making you feel safe? That's where I want the women to go." I knew I was being directed to set up a long table with a tablecloth and place settings, complete with the warmth of candlelight. I honestly struggled with the instruction from God because I held a fear of being judged for having such a silly idea. But I went with the plan anyway.

The bathroom stall at the church became my prayer room before each session. That's where I learned just how holy a bathroom could be; a sacred space where I lifted my hands in surrender, asking God to fill my mouth with His words. And He didn't disappoint. The faithful Father of souls showed up in each session and surprised me with His goodness. When it came time to invite the women to crawl under the dining table for time in the Secret Place, one-by-one they wept, laughed, wailed, and received healing as the Father met them there. The experience left me in awe.

Had I tried to copy or imitate someone else, that specific unique encounter would likely not have happened. I didn't need to seek success, especially from anyone other than the Holy Spirit. As my friend, Pastor Renee Evans of Bethel Austin recently shared, "Success is not a fruit of the Spirit." That statement struck me. Success is something everyone desires, but it often requires performance. God is not interested in performance. "I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies ..." He declared in Amos 5:21 (NKJV). And in Matthew 15:8, the Father observes, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with *their* lips, But

their heart is far from Me.” Many throughout history have placed selfish ambition above God’s voice, and in doing so, ultimately lost their voice.

As we minister and find our voice in this world, may we not fall into methods, systems, and agendas, but rest in the Secret Place with the One who formed us with His very hands, the One who shared his own breath to make us alive. When we abide in the reality of union with God, as Jesus mentioned in John 14:20, and we know our identity as beloved, there we find our voice. When Jesus said, “On that day you will know that *I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I in you,*” He was speaking the truth of our present reality of being seated in heavenly places with Him. Now, from that position, you have a voice. In keeping your heart and mind in alignment with His, you have a voice that’s more powerful than anything you could generate on your own.

A heart humbled in His presence is met with power. A voice surrendered to His is met with rest. And together, power and rest give voice to the heartbeat of the Father which is the message that changes everything. Remain in Him because, in Him is where you find your voice.

TRACI VANDERBUSH IS A SCRIPTURIENT WITH A PASSION FOR RELEASING BOOKS AND SCREENPLAYS THAT INFUSE THE READER WITH HOPE AND THE REALITY OF REDEMPTION. SHE TRAVELS AND SPEAKS ALONGSIDE HER HUSBAND, **BILL**. TRACI CONSIDERS HER MOST REWARDING ROLES TO BE WIFE AND MOTHER.

PART THREE
THE LEGACY

Let your voice shape generations...

BAKING PIES

LORI ZENKER

“TRADITIONALLY, THE PASTOR’S WIFE BAKES ALL THE PIES FOR OUR CHURCH Christmas dinner.”

Fifty pairs of eyes turned around in their pews to look at me.

I shifted the baby to the other shoulder, “I’m really sorry, but um... I don’t exactly know how to bake pies.”

There were audible gasps and nervous laughter as heads turned back to the women’s leader at the front of the church.

My face burned, and I wondered how I could get out of there.

“Mommeee!” my two year old pushed himself past the other legs sitting in my row, dragging one of the pull toys from the church nursery.

The baby squirmed in my arms, she was going to be hungry very soon.

“Well, okay then”, the leader said, looking around the room.

“We will just have to find someone else to make our Christmas desserts.”

As the meeting ended, Mrs. Anderson, the women's leader, found me as I was stuffing the baby and 2-year-old into their snowsuits.

"We haven't had a pastor's wife with young children for a very long time," she frowned at my son pulling his boots off and throwing them across the foyer. "It's going to take some time to get used to it."

"I'm really sorry, I could probably try, but I don't think I could bake a pie to save my life!"

"Well, you are coming to the Christmas dinner, right." It didn't sound like a question.

I looked over at my husband, the pastor, deeply engrossed in a conversation with a scowling couple. He was going to be here for a while.

Grabbing the baby car seat, the busting-open Winnie the Pooh diaper bag, and the two kids, I headed out the door to wait in the car for him.

Why do I always feel so guilty when I say no? Why do I have to give an explanation!?

Why can't I just say what I want to, and leave it at that?

I would like to think that after the past 30 years, I've gotten better at finding my squashed down voice. As a kid, I had opinions, questions and things to say—but that wasn't tolerated in my traditional home or our Mennonite offshoot church.

Everyone seemed to hold the same beliefs and views and especially as a girl, you inherited the beliefs and opinions given to you by parents, relatives, and leaders around you, without question.

One day in church kids group, I did the craft different from the teacher's instructions. I really liked how it turned out, but when the teacher saw it, she scolded me, "You always have to do things different don't you Lori!" I didn't care, I liked my picture better my own way.

A little spark ignited that day as I realized there were actually things I could do my own way.

As a teenager, I went on many mission trips with different groups. The theology I was taught was very different from what I'd grown up with. If I asked a question, or refused to participate in something I didn't like to do, like strange charismatic dances or prayers, I was automatically a "rebel" and told I needed to repent and get right with God. And if I said something they didn't agree with, I needed deliverance from some sort of spirit.

I struggled to find my voice between what I wanted to say, and being the "good Christian girl" everyone expected.

Somehow, I ended up as a pastor's wife, and my voice had gotten very squashed by this time. It was all about following God wherever He led the pastor. That meant we worked in 8 different churches in the first part of our marriage.

I wish I'd used my voice to say "No, I'm not moving again!" instead of "Okay, we're in a new church what do we believe now?"

After settling down a bit, I found myself with 3 little kids, a husband who was extremely busy, and a very needy congregation.

How could I say no to the steady stream of people who would show up at my door wanting coffee and a visit (sometimes walking in our house without knocking)? What could I say when they needed me to help with events, lead groups, play the piano, clean the church, look after their kids, and be available all hours of the day? All without complaining, saying no, and especially not standing up for myself when someone was upset with the pastor and vented to me. How could I ask my pastor husband to be home more often to help with the kids when there were so many people needing him?

After all, we were doing this for God, right? And all of this was my sacrifice.

Of course, as a pastor's wife I play the piano, and have lead worship (although sometimes grudgingly) for many years. I have put on a fake happy face and sang songs about God's love, while dealing with deep anguish over issues plaguing my family. I have hidden pain, pretended all was well, and smiled through it all because that's what was expected.

And then everything changed. I began to disengage from all I'd been taught. I started to question things out loud (not just in my head).

I felt like I had been living in a large walnut with all the other church people, and I had found a crack, crawled my way out of the nut, and realized "Wow! There is a great new world out here, God is in it, and He is very different from what I'd been taught."

Sometimes I go to church, and sometimes I stay home and drink coffee or go for a walk. Sometimes I believe and sometimes I don't. Our church now is not very demanding of me, and I usually only help with the things I want to. I have given myself the gift to say NO to things I don't want to do, and I usually don't feel guilty about it anymore.

When I lead worship, I've been finding new songs; songs that are more honest, that speak of loving others, of inclusion and even God as She.

Just like when I was a kid, art has become a way for me to express my voice and opinions. I've done many pieces that show in art form—things I can't say out loud.

I've done some public art in my community, on the sides of buildings and banners, where I share my voice. I have a painting called, "The Light in All of Us" in a downtown LGBTQ+ friendly space. It shows a group of LGBTQ+ people each with a spark of light inside. The light travels through each one as they unite together.

I have a person I love very much who is transgender and although I can't speak of them to everyone, I want to show that they are loved by God and connected to us all.

I have done art pieces to voice my ideas on community and inclusion with many different types of groups, and I love that I can inspire love through art. My voice certainly isn't as squashed as it once was, and I'm learning to say what I think, without feeling guilty.

I still can't bake a pie to save my life, but I make a pretty delicious cheesecake!

LORI ZENKER LIVES WITH HER FAMILY IN AN OLD HOUSE IN SMALL TOWN ONTARIO CANADA. WHEN SHE ISN'T WRITING, OR DOING ART, SHE LOVES TO PADDLE AROUND IN HER KAYAK.

PHENOMENAL VOICE

DR. TONY ROBINSON

I DIDN'T FIND MY VOICE STANDING ON A STAGE, BEHIND A PULPIT, OR holding a microphone.

It didn't come loud, bold, or with applause.

It came quietly, in a kitchen, when everything felt like it was falling apart.

I remember it like yesterday.

It was one of those days when everything felt broken.

I was overwhelmed, insignificant, disappointed, and hopeless.

If I'm honest, it wasn't just one day. It was three long days of discouragement after months of significant difficulties.

I had taken my eyes off the Father, away from Truth, and I was tired, dry, and empty.

Somewhere in that self-imposed slump, I found myself sitting at my kitchen table with a much-needed cup of coffee, having a conversation with a phenomenal woman.

The funny thing was, she didn't even know she was phenomenal.
And although I've known her my entire life, I didn't know it either.
The conversation that day was hard. I was angry, hurt, and exhausted.
I poured out my heart, disappointment spilling over like hot water.
She sat silently, listening. No judgment. No interruptions. Just presence.
She waited until I ran out of words.
Then, with a deep breath, she began to speak.
She spoke with a clarity, wisdom, and authority that I think surprised both of us.
Every time I talked about what was going wrong, she brought me back to what was still right.
For every negative, she gave me two truths.
I wanted to whine, but she pointed me to worship.
I wanted to steep in pity, but she pushed me toward praise.
She reminded me who I was.
She challenged me to think higher, to live rooted in the mind of Christ, and to believe again.
She looked me in the eye and said, "You have to choose. Either God is faithful, or He's not. What are you going to believe? What are you going to agree with?"
She called me to shake off the lies, rise into my identity as a beloved daughter, and sit in the authority I've been given.
And then she did something bold.
She told me to quit tripping and step my game up.
I stared at her, stunned. Who was this woman?

There was a time when she would have steeped the tea and poured the pot at my pity parties. But now, she was shifting atmospheres with her words.

She started telling me her story of pain and process, of dry places where wellsprings somehow still flowed.

She reminded me of the trials that shaped her, the grace that carried her, and the Spirit that led her. She spoke honestly about weakness and how, in each moment, the Father gently led her back to Truth.

The more she spoke, the more things shifted.

She sounded different. She was different.

And the more she shared, the more I wanted to understand what made her phenomenal.

I looked it up.

“Phenomenal” means extraordinary, unusual, not normal. Peculiar.

Now that was a word I knew:

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people ... ” (1 Peter 2:9)

And then it clicked.

What made her phenomenal wasn't her strength.

It was Jesus. His grace. His Spirit.

She had awakened to the finished work of the Cross. It was an unveiling of her union with Him. She had not arrived. She had simply yielded.

And then, I saw it. Clear as day.

This woman wasn't just someone I knew.

She was me. And like David, I was encouraging myself in the truth.

I sat there, undone. Weeping.

Because for the first time in a long time, I saw myself clearly.

Not the tired me. Not the grieving me.

Not the version of me trying to hold everything together.

But the me who understands that the Father has called her into freedom.

The unfettered, unbound, unapologetically free me.

This is the mystery. This is the miracle. This is me.

And this is the sound of my voice, found in union, formed in love,
forever one.

DR. TONY ROBINSON IS A GLOBAL STRATEGIST, MINISTER, AND DREAM ARCHITECT WHO HELPS OTHERS BREAK LIMITING BELIEFS, EMBRACE THEIR TRUE IDENTITY, AND PURSUE THE LIFE GOD INTENDED. WITH OVER 30 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE, SHE EMPOWERS WOMEN TO WALK FULLY IN THEIR GOD-GIVEN PURPOSE. A PROUD MOTHER OF FOUR, DR. TONY CALLS LAS VEGAS HOME.

THE CONVERSATION WITHIN

LYDIA DU TOIT

PUTTING TOGETHER SOME THOUGHTS FOR THIS CHAPTER IN THE BOOK, *Finding Your Voice*, has been so much fun. I found it intriguing to consider all the tributaries that have flowed into my life, beautifully contributing to *Lydia's* voice.

One of the most pivotal truths for me was realizing that I have a voice that no one else has. Actually, my voice is not just a voice; it is a conversation, so deep and continual, that it has become me!

My first impressions were of my mum putting us to bed or holding me when I was a little child. She would whisper words and sentences in my ears that were our own language, just for us. She would carry on talking, and it beautifully forced me to find a voice in this conversation that one couldn't reason with. It's a voice deeper than words and conclusions—it's a voice of your spirit—and that became my safe place. During that time, we lived in tents and caravans, traveling with my Pappa wherever his work would take him. Remote areas with no other homes—no running water, no electricity, no shelter from storms and snow—just us. I never knew that we were actually very poor and disadvantaged—we were just completely content. So much of my imagination for children's stories was triggered there. Wow, our

imaginations in stories and plays that we would do for entertainment could make movies. Lots of hard work but lots of fun and togetherness. Being sensitive to one another, hearing in one another's voices maybe fear or anger, and being able to just be there for each other with hope and faith and love. I knew that my siblings too heard that voice, and now I get excited thinking about how that voice inside them is alive and there all the time.

Only later did I realize it was the Holy Spirit in communion with my spirit, having conversations with me. The amazing reality is that we are partaking in a conversation that has been face to face with God from before time was. The Word in the beginning, face to face with God—and knowing we are the audience of God's conversation and have been long before we were born!

As one gets older, you seem to lose sensitivity to hearing and speaking that voice to yourself and to situations around you. You become intimidated and think that you have to mix that voice with what you have learned and what you are going through. So we became accustomed to the voice of the vicious taskmaster of the law of performance. It would at times be a pat on the back but mostly a voice of burden and guilt.

Graciously, Grace (the Holy Spirit) has been there all along and is within us from the moment we took our first breath.

I'm thinking of Psalm 23 now: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He leads me to still waters and green pastures." In those waters of reflection, I see peace, calm, and union.

So after many years of living life delightfully, it's wonderful to find the strength of one's voice in communion with the Holy Spirit becoming the dominant force in your life. It is a conversation that you engage with constantly. With all the noise and things going on around us, there's a conversation that is constant and divine. It's a conversation that one can draw strength from, beyond reasoning and contradiction.

It is very important to have joy in your own voice. Enjoy the conversations in your head. If what we are thinking does not bring a feeling of eternal truth and beauty, change stations. If you can't, and the noise is too much, turn the noise down and become still. I used to walk into the mountains almost daily in Hermanus. There are some beautiful big dams in the cliffs full of mountain water. One dam, in particular, is big—it was used for the entire population of Hermanus for water for many years. What I loved doing was swimming to the middle of the dam and just floating. Lying down and looking at the clouds and the rock faces on either side of you, the thought would cross my mind that this dam must be about 50 feet deep. But it makes no difference; if I can float, it does not matter how shallow or deep it is—I stay on top. It's a simple principle but so amazing. Get your being in that place of elevation—enjoy your thoughts of another dimension. Not this soul-ruled place, but the place of eternal bliss—our union with our Maker. Where I find myself perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Sing your song.

Know that you are having a conversation with your body, soul, and spirit, and that they are all divinely connected! Discovering one's voice and using it unlocks a mountain of amazingness.

Separation is an illusion; it's a lie. So often, we have ideas or things that make us feel like we didn't make the mark. Maybe my body isn't as it should be; too big, too small or even diseases that try to create separation within us. However, it's beautiful to reflect on when Jesus spoke about the Holy Spirit and said, "In that day, you will know that as I am in my Father, so you are in me, and I am in you." This union is something we can enjoy here on earth.

A few years ago, we had the privilege of joining our son, Stefan, in Cape Town, where he was set to play a delightful Mozart concerto with an ad-hoc orchestra. Observing the lead-up to the night of the performance was truly amazing.

Being part of this ad-hoc orchestra meant the musicians weren't employed full-time by the orchestra. They were accomplished artisans

who shared a common love and gift for playing a certain instrument as part of this group or another from time to time. There were teachers, postmen, bankers, and students—a delightful medley of young and old.

I could hardly contain my joy on the first night of rehearsal when these individuals arrived at the concert hall. Some hadn't met each other before, while others hadn't seen their fellow musician friends in months. I sensed their excitement as they arranged their chairs and instruments while chatting and laughing. They took out their music, each with their own score marked and well-scribbled. I imagined how, like Stefan, they had been engaged for weeks with their own portion of this concerto, going through the runs repeatedly. You could almost remove the music and find the notes etched in their memory.

There was no confusion or competition in the room, only anticipation of participating. The conductor, so familiar with this piece and all its nuances, knew every sound lying dormant in these pages was to be revealed. He understood well the ability of each musician to portray and exhibit exactly that.

His beaming face looked at his team, and I couldn't help but notice his joy in anticipating their delight in this moment of participation. He picked up his baton, and there was a magical silence before the first note fell. (I love those moments! It's almost like the word "Selah!") Suddenly, the room was filled with music that fell like stardust from the heavens. A brand-new Mozart was being released in our midst! How marvelous to hear Stefan's fingers run crisscross over the piano keys, accompanied by violins, cellos, double bass, flute, and harp—all playing the same magnificent piece. Magic! They played run after run, repeating some with determination because the script and conductor served as compelling guides in this moment of Mozart's fresh awakening. As my tears ran, I couldn't distinguish who was the teacher, postman, or priest. Enchanted, I could only sit and enjoy the moment.

What God is doing in all of us wonderfully lends itself to this analogy of the Mozart concerto. You see, the “Incarnation” is our masterpiece that we are playing together. It is composed by the Father and magnificently executed by you. The conductor is the sweet Holy Spirit. Why then is it necessary for us to “play” what Jesus so masterfully executed? He loves hearing your voice; through your life, it is magnificent. He wants us to hear the harmony of the ages echo through our very beings. My life resonates with all that God intended to communicate through Jesus.

Can I just play along, or should there be hours and hours of rehearsing? Perhaps, if you don’t know the origin and nature of the original piece, then yes. But remember, Jesus is the soul’s memory. Perhaps you have just forgotten what you look like, what the Father looks like, and who your neighbor truly is in the same beautiful score. We can blunder, crossing fingers and making sounds not part of the piece. No problem! Play it again. The authentic sound is there!

The reality of the Christ life as the perfect music score written in you and through you is more certain than anything contrary to what you have believed or anyone else has believed about you. I urge you, become familiar with what He knows to be eternally true about you—the truth from when we danced with the Father, Son, and Spirit in the creation of creation. We have always been there with them and always will be.

From the Mirror Bible: “God’s faith sees everyone equally valued and justified in Jesus Christ our Saviour. His desire is that we may now increasingly be overwhelmed with grace as His divine influence within us and become fully acquainted with the awareness of our oneness. The way He has always known us is realised in Jesus our Master. By His divine engineering He gifted us with all that it takes to live life to the full, where ordinary day-to-day lives mirror our devotion and romance with our Maker. His intimate knowledge of us introduces us to ourselves again and

elevates us to a position where His original intention is clearly perceived. This is exactly what God always had in mind for us; every one of His abundant and priceless promises pointed to our restored participation in our godly origin. Now the stage is set to display life's excellence. Explore the adventure of faith!"

Plunge into the loving, eternal arms of our Father and enjoy your rendering of the Incarnation together with me and your neighbor, too! Your voice is so good with you next to me!

LYDIA DU TOIT IS A LIFELONG LOVER OF GOD AND THE WONDER OF GRACE. A WIFE, MOTHER, AND GRANDMOTHER, LYDIA HAS SPENT DECADES EXPLORING THE HEART OF GOD THROUGH STORYTELLING, QUIET REVELATION, AND DEEP STUDY. HER WRITING FLOWS FROM A PLACE OF INTIMACY, NOT PERFORMANCE—INVITING OTHERS TO REST, REMEMBER, AND RETURN TO LOVE. SHE AND HER HUSBAND, FRANCOIS (AUTHOR OF *THE MIRROR BIBLE*), LIVE IN SOUTH AFRICA, WHERE THEIR HOME HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PLACE OF LAUGHTER, HONEST QUESTIONS, AND HEALING CONVERSATIONS AROUND THE TABLE.

SWAN SONG

NICOLE WEAVER

WHEN MY MOM FIRST ASKED ME TO WRITE FOR HER BOOK ON FINDING YOUR voice, I wasn't exactly sure where to begin. In many ways, I feel like my voice was gifted to me. I come from generations of people who did the hard work, who made the heavy, courageous choices that gave me the kind of foundation they never had. Not that my life has been without its challenges, but I know I stand on their shoulders. I am the product of men and women who fought to give their children a better story.

So, for me, finding my voice has been soft and slow. It hasn't come with a bang or a firestorm. It's been a quiet unfolding—a kind of growing into myself. I'm still so young, and I know this process will last a lifetime but here is what I've discovered so far.

When I think about finding my voice, I think of a swan song.

Swan songs have always held a special place in my heart. Whether myth or fact, the idea of a final, breathtaking melody rising from your last breath—a sound that marks everyone who hears it—feels deeply romantic to me. Maybe it's my Enneagram Four heart—the one that

leans into beauty, depth, and melancholy—or just a love of things beautifully bittersweet, but I live for that kind of poetry.

For me, finding my voice means learning what I want my swan song to be. What do I want to be known for? What is the sound I leave behind? The more I sit with that question, the more I realize that finding my voice isn't about being the loudest in the room—it's about discovering the heartbeat and the unique bend the Father designed me with.

When my husband and I were first engaged, we were working for a ministry in Southern California. It was there the Spirit began to reveal something sacred: that family was God's ultimate heartbeat. That our greatest mission field wouldn't be a crowd or a platform, but our home—our future babies.

We were undone by the truth that we wouldn't just *become* good parents when children arrived. We needed to become them *now* through the decisions we made before they ever took their first breath. We started to feel unsatisfied—pouring all our energy into a building or a ministry that rotated people every year. Not to diminish the impact of that season, but I remember thinking about John Wesley, the circuit-rider preacher.

While I'm sure he introduced countless people to Jesus, I was struck by the fact that his marriage was deeply unhappy. That in giving everything to the work of ministry, his home life suffered. I imagined the kind of legacy that leaves—especially if he had children. Would they resent the Father because of their father? How many generations have had to do the hard work of healing from distorted representations of God in their own home?

That thought gripped us.

We realized we didn't want to become another story like that. We decided our children would not be the collateral damage of what we thought was our "calling" (only to later discover our home was indeed our calling). We would build a marriage that reflects heaven. A home marked by peace. A business that doesn't compete with family, but

serves it. And a faith that doesn't orbit around a building, but around Presence.

That's when our vision became clear. That's when we found our focus—and, in many ways, our swan song. Because we knew what we wanted to be known for. What we want our children to one day tell their children about us.

So maybe my voice won't echo from a stage or carry headlines. Maybe it will be heard in the way I love my husband, the way we raise our babies, the way peace lives in our home. In our grandkids, and their children and the cultures their homes will one day carry. Maybe it will be in the daily, unseen choices to choose connection over performance, presence over pressure. If my swan song is anything, I pray it's the sound of a life well-loved and partnered with the Spirit. One that echoes, not just in the ears of the world, but in the hearts of the ones who knew me best.

NICOLE WEAVER IS A PHOTOGRAPHER AND CREATIVE BASED IN TENNESSEE. SHE AND HER HUSBAND, **ZACH**, CO-OWN **WEAVER MEDIA**, WHERE THEY SPECIALIZE IN VISUAL STORYTELLING THAT FEELS HONEST, INTENTIONAL, AND BEAUTIFUL. MARRIED FOR FIVE YEARS, THEY RECENTLY WELCOMED THEIR FIRST CHILD—A DAUGHTER WHO HAS ALREADY ADDED MORE LIGHT TO THEIR WORLD THAN THEY EVER IMAGINED. WHETHER BEHIND THE CAMERA OR BUILDING THEIR BUSINESS, **NICOLE** BRINGS HEART, VISION, AND A DEEP SENSE OF PURPOSE TO EVERYTHING SHE CREATES.

A VOICE THAT SPEAKS LIFE

ROBIN SMIT

WE WERE CREATED TO SPEAK LIFE.

Not just words.
Not borrowed phrases.
Not what sounds acceptable or spiritual.

But life—flowing from the life of Christ in us.

And yet, for many of us, that connection has felt lost along the way.

We've learned to speak from expectation.
From performance.
From fear.

But here's the truth: your voice was created for more—
to carry and release life—His life—into the world.

Rooted in union with the Triune God.
Unique.
Whole.

Free.

And when you speak from that place, it becomes a voice that releases life:

creative, active, impossible to imitate or replicate.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God's Word—the *Debar*—was never static. It wasn't just sound or language.

When God spoke, things happened—

Chaos became order.

Void became fullness.

Silence became revelation.

Death became life.

We were designed to echo that.

We were created as speaking spirits—

image-bearers of the Triune God whose Word brings life.

Our voice was never meant to mimic the noise around us.

It was designed to co-participate in that same life-giving flow.

To speak from union,

to call forth what reflects His heart,

and to release life and wholeness.

The Aramaic word *Memra* was often used in ancient Jewish writings to expand on the Hebrew concept of *Debar*, the Word of the Lord.

In the Targums (Aramaic paraphrases of Scripture),

when the text spoke of "the Word of the Lord" (*Debar YHWH*),

they would often translate it as "the *Memra* of the Lord"

to show this was not just speech,

but God's personal, active presence.

Later, in the New Testament,
John intentionally chose the Greek word *Logos* to carry this same
meaning:

“In the beginning was the Word (*Logos*).”

When John wrote those words,
he was building on a long, rich tradition:
Debar → *Memra* → *Logos*—
and showing that the living, creative Word of God
had now been fully revealed in Jesus Christ.

Early believers saw Jesus as the living fulfillment of what the ancient
rabbis had glimpsed—
the Word, not just spoken, but embodied.

He is the *Debar*.
He is the *Memra*.
He is the *Logos*.
And He lives in us.

As we find our voice again,
it is no longer shaped by chaos or culture—
but by the life of the One who speaks and expresses Himself through
us—
and through that voice, we begin to shape the world around us.

Finding your voice again isn't about learning new words.
It isn't about crafting the perfect message.

It's about listening.
Turning inward to the One who has never stopped speaking in you.

And yet, somewhere along the way,

many of us learned to silence our own voice—
to mimic the voices around us
instead of speaking from our union.

Little by little, we learned to shrink.
To edit.
To echo what was appropriate or expected.

We were taught what was acceptable to say ... and what wasn't.
And often, what it meant to *sound* spiritual.

The result?

Over time, we traded authenticity for approval—
until what we expressed no longer sounded like us.
And no longer reflected the voice of Christ in us.

The longer we lived that way,
the harder it became to even recognize our own voice at all.

For many of us, the loss began so early we didn't even realize it was
happening.

There was a time—maybe as children, maybe later—
when we spoke freely.
Honest.
Unfiltered.
At ease in our own skin.

We said what we thought.
We voiced our heart's wonders.
We asked what we needed to ask.

We weren't yet watching every word,
second-guessing every thought.

And then, slowly, something shifted.

Maybe it was the sharp look from someone we loved—
that unspoken message that what we'd just said was wrong. Foolish.
Embarrassing.

Maybe it was the moment we shared something real,
something vulnerable—
and were met with silence.
The kind of silence or dismissal that makes you feel small.
Uncertain.
Unseen.

Or maybe it was when we asked a hard question—
about life, about God, about what we were feeling—
and were told—

"You shouldn't think like that."

"You need more faith."

"You're too sensitive."

"Don't talk back."

I know this, because I've lived it.

Growing up, I learned quickly
that it often felt more important to say the *right* thing
than to say what I actually thought or felt.

And when I did speak up,
I felt the weight of uncertainty—
wondering if I had said too much,
or said it the wrong way.

It didn't take long for self-doubt to creep in.
I began questioning myself.
Pulling back.

Shrinking.

I learned how to stay inside the box others had drawn for me.

How to be *good*.

How to be *safe*.

And I carried that box into adulthood.

I learned to speak up only when I was sure it would be well-received—
or when I knew it was *right*.

And even then, a small, unsure voice inside me whispered—

Be careful.

Don't go too far.

Don't say too much.

And as a woman, there were expectations I didn't always know how to
name,
but I felt them.

About when to speak.

How to speak.

How not to upset or offend.

And beneath all of it—beneath the fear, the shrinking, the approval-
seeking—
another voice remained.

A brave voice.

A voice that still knew—

There's more in you.

More to say.

Words that mattered.

A part of me the world needed to hear.

But fear.
Hesitation.
Old patterns.
They kept it locked away.

I began filtering what I said,
careful not to say too much,
or the wrong thing.
Or worse, backing up and shutting down.

I learned to say what was polite.
What was expected.

Little by little, I stopped speaking freely.
I began measuring every word.
I spoke in ways that felt safe—
words I knew would be approved of.

And before long, the voice God created in me
began to feel hidden,
buried beneath layers of fear and approval-seeking.

Maybe you've felt the same way.
Maybe you've known, deep down, that there's more in you.
Words that matter.
A voice the world needs.

But for all kinds of reasons—fear, shame, old patterns—
it's felt locked away.

But here's the truth—your voice is not lost.

It may feel hidden.
It may feel distant.
But it is not gone.

The life of Christ in you has never stopped speaking.

And the voice God created in you,
formed to carry and release His life,
is still there, waiting to be discovered.

And as you begin to speak from union,
you'll find your voice begins to flow—effortlessly.

And the more you give voice to what is alive within you,
the more your voice matures.
The more it deepens,
carrying the weight of His life within it.

Because when you speak from union,
your voice becomes a vessel of grace.
A voice that brings freedom.
A voice that speaks life.

Just as God's Word—*Debar*—has always brought life, order, and
fullness,
so now your voice, rooted in Him, echoes that same creative power.

Not something you have to strive for.
It's who you already are—
Christ in you, expressing Himself through you.

When I work with writers now,
I find myself listening for something beneath their words—
that place where their true voice wants to emerge.

I've learned to recognize when someone is writing from fear.
From expectation.

From that old box of *acceptable*.

And I've learned to wait.

To listen.

Until I hear the sound of who they really are.

That moment is sacred.

To help a writer discover that voice—
and to preserve it as part of their legacy—
is why I do what I do.

And I'll be honest—

I'm still in the process of finding my true voice ...

as a woman,

as a writer,

as a publisher,

as a wife,

as a mother,

as a daughter—

and in every part of life.

Some days my voice flows freely.

Some days I still pull back.

Some days I silence my voice out of old fear.

Take for example finding my voice in my writing.

Trying to *get it right* and cover the points I thought I needed to say
clouded my true writing voice.

It wasn't until I wrote my most recent book, *The Very Good News*,
that something shifted.

I stopped trying to write from outlines and frameworks

and began writing from overflow.
From what was alive in me.
From union.

That's when I began to truly find my voice—
not just as a writer,
but as someone learning to express what the life of Christ is speaking
within me.

And the more I write from that place,
the freer my voice becomes.

But beneath all those moments—whether in writing or in life—
the life of Christ in me is steady and true.

He continues to speak
because my voice is one of His beautiful treasures.

And so is yours.

It matters.
And the world needs what only you can speak.

Not because it's perfect.
Not because it sounds polished or acceptable.

But because it was created to speak life—*Zoe* life, the life of God—into
the world.

The voice of Christ in you is not fragile.
It's not tentative.

It's steady.
True.
Whole.

And as you continue to speak from union, without shame, without fear,
you will find that your voice grows stronger.

Freer.
More full of grace.

It won't sound like anyone else's.
It was never meant to.

And that's the beauty of it.

When you speak from the life of Christ within you,
your voice becomes a vessel of freedom—
for yourself, and for others.

A voice that echoes the creative Word of God.
A voice that brings life.

You don't have to earn it.
You don't have to force it.

Just as Jesus spoke only what He heard His Father say—
so now your voice flows from union.

Whole.
Free.
Alive.
And exactly as He created it to be.

DR. ROBIN SMIT IS A BEST-SELLING AUTHOR, PUBLISHER, WRITING COACH, AND TEACHER WITH A PASSION FOR THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST. SHE HOLDS A TH.D. AND AN MA IN THEOLOGY AND BIBLICAL

STUDIES. SHE'S THE FOUNDER OF TWS PUBLISHING AND CO-FOUNDER OF GAN TV, WHERE SHE CHAMPIONS GRACE-FILLED VOICES ROOTED IN THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST.

ROBIN AND HER HUSBAND, STEVE, SPLIT THEIR TIME BETWEEN CALIFORNIA AND TENNESSEE AND DELIGHT IN THEIR GROWING FAMILY—INCLUDING THEIR BEAUTIFUL GRANDDAUGHTER.

FROM CONCRETE TO COMPASSION: A LANDSCAPE OF LOVE'S UNFOLDING

FELICIA MURR

IN THE 90s, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, WAS A PSEUDO-CITY. IT HAD THE bones of the city but hadn't yet fully come into its own. The transit system was unreliable, and tourism was nowhere near at the frenzy it is today. Parts of town had yet to be gentrified and renamed. People who knew its potential developed *The Plan of Nashville*; a community-based vision of how the urban core of Nashville should look and work in the 21st century. And to see what Nashville has become today, for those of us who knew it then, is a marvel. Street names have changed. Housing prices have increased. Business is booming. And the landscape has evolved so much, you have to look closely to see what was.

In some ways, I too am like Nashville. This is the city that I ran to when I wanted to flee my existence as a little country girl from small town rural North Carolina. In Nashville, in all my messy, immature ways of being, I caught glimpse of the 'Plan of Felicia,' the truth of my being—the me God had intended me to be before the foundation of the world was laid. I didn't quite know how to unearth her. Her transit system was still sketchy. She had the bones but not yet the infrastructure to sustain the weight of Love.

I was crying out but didn't quite know how to grasp what was true. And thus, I made a lot of mistakes. Burned some bridges. Had lots of opportunity to clean up some messes.

Like Nashville, who I am today is quite different than the me that existed when we lived there. The truth of who I am was always there. I always knew there was a vision, a greater invitation. Even when I ran, even in my mess and immaturity, I had an inkling of Love's invitation. I needed time and trust and a reckoning with Love to come home fully to myself. I needed to shed some lies, lose the weight of other people's opinions, and my need for approval and external validation. More than anything, I needed to know that God delighted in me and that I could learn to delight in myself in like manner.

It feels good whenever I return to Nashville. There, my heart fills with a deep sense of gratitude for creative possibility, for believing in me and for believing in its own becoming. Most especially, for not giving up on either of us. Nashville has arrived—it's become the destination it set out to be. But me? I continue to sojourn the Way of Love.

The Farmer went out to sow. In Nashville, Love began to ready the soil of my heart to contain its seed. There, the wheat and tares were still growing together in the field that Love plowed.

From Nashville, TN to Norfolk, VA, I had journal after journal crying out to God to make me a different person, to soften me, change me ... worm training—coupled with a myriad of pleas born from you're-no-good, piece-of-sh*t theology, carrot-on-a-stick religion I kept chasing. Where Nashville was a tilling of the soil, Norfolk was the sprouting of Love's seed. For there in the Tidewater region, I came home to Love. I learned to surrender, to receive, to draw near, to turn Face to Face to Face—to live in Love's flow. I learned to see for myself that Love was not disappointed because Love has no illusions to begin with. Love sees fully and loves what Love sees. In Norfolk, I learned to hear the song of Love over the ocean's waves and sing it over myself. Shame released its death grip from my vocal cords and words of Love began to spring forth.

There by the still water, under the auspice of Divine Love gazing deeply, fondly at me, I learned to bow to the beauty of my own reflection with reverential acknowledgment. Every day in a thousand ways, disguised as my life, the arm of Divine Love would extend to me and ask, "May I have this dance?" The dance, I learned, is the energetic flow of relational love between the Divine and me. I have never been separate from Divine Love. It is impossible to be, except in my mind. As I live the ordinariness that is my life, Love permeates and spills over onto all things.

From Norfolk, Virginia to Atlanta, Georgia, the dance of Love was woven more fully into the Circle of Life. I learned that my "I" includes, and Love can maneuver across five lanes of traffic at once. Traveling every path to draw Love's dearly loved ones into their own journey home to Love. In the vibrancy of a big metropolitan city, my eyes were opened to Love's bigness, Love's inclusion, Love's care and concern for all. And ... in Atlanta, I learned the heartbreak of humanity as well as Love's redemption.

In Atlanta, I had my insides royally crushed by 'church.' Church being a code word for people in the church, who are just people. People who happen to hold positions of leadership in the church and espouse certain beliefs, and thus, we tend to hold them to a higher standard and expect more from them than they are capable of in their own humanity and brokenness. After experiencing such deep heartbreak, I stayed away from church for a while.

It would have been easy in my hurt to use my voice to demonize the church, to pick apart its flaws. Where Atlanta taught me that cities have good and not so good areas that bleed over and into one another, Love's kindness taught me that truth-telling must always move us toward integration. The mercy of Love is to move us toward greater wholeness and well-being. That is how I live my life, how I use my voice, represents how well I mirror the gaze of Divine Love.

I needed time and space to allow Abba to heal my heart enough, so that I could stand outside the situation and see it more objectively.

Seeing through the eyes of Love and not through the lens of retribution or victimization created enough compassion within my own heart to return, not to the same church, but back to “church.” Though I returned with much caution and trepidation, announcing to my husband that I wasn’t getting involved in anything, didn’t even want anyone in the church to even know I existed. I just wanted to go for Sunday morning service and leave. And so, we did, for a long time.

During this reprieve, I discovered my soul needed something deeper than the shallow waters of emotional hype or convivial woo woo. Like the Atlanta Botanical Gardens, my contemplative oasis in the middle of the city’s hubbub, I found in the pages of Athanasius, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Julian of Norwich, Karl Barth, George Macdonald, Simone Weil, St. Thomas of Aquinas, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Francis, Teilhard de Chardin, Duns Scotus, and even more modern scholars like Rene Girard, Bradley Jersak, and Brian Zahnd, a well of truth so bright and beautiful and a love so deep, so profound, so freeing and inclusive it could only be the heart of God breathing across those pages.

Sometimes we have to go back to ancient wells and glean the treasures that lie unearthed. In the communion of these saints, some dead, some living, my husband and I started visiting another church. One I really liked. One I wholeheartedly believed in. And when I believe in something, it’s hard for me to sit idle on the periphery. Eventually, we attended a connection event, and I survived. I survived every loud whisper cautioning me not to trust, not to lean in, not to give my heart to church people again. The chatter and the whispers never ceased, but I showed up and participated anyway. In the face of my heart screaming at me, mind reeling in remembrance of every contextual relationship that didn’t survive the breakup of church hurt, I showed up.

Like sitting in the stillness of Atlanta’s holy hush, just before the frenetic pace of the city overtakes its quiet, I learned that I could sit in distrust and fear and all the negative energy of a thing would forever have power over me. Voice closed tight in dismay; I would live seized

up like knotted thread on the back of a tapestry. But to experience any part of life, connection, love, to be viable and life giving, I had to open up. To unfurl my fists. And yes, sometimes, to show up even when my fears are shouting me down. *This isn't that. And these people aren't those.* I can't let the energy and emotion of the past rob me of today.

In Atlanta, I learned that gridlocked traffic in any large metropolitan city will always be a thing. It's a part of life. No matter the city, I have no expectation for it to ever be any different. Traffic is traffic. I'm never going to change that. I can grumble at the gridlock, honk my horn, rage or I can accept it, allow it to be in process.

One day in the thick of Atlanta traffic, in a moment of choosing response, staying present to flow, instead of reacting, Love showed me how easily our hearts gridlock in the cares and burdens of life. And how each reaction and negative charge adversely affects another, setting off more charges. And there, Love invited me to respond instead of reacting, to let church off the hook and just be here now. Present with people, free of expectations and standards. Free of demands, attachment to outcomes and blame, with no desire to consume anything from people or manipulate the situation to be anything other than what it is. Like traffic, people are people in process. Some gridlocked. Some in flow. Some reacting. Some responding.

Will I use my voice to rail against the machine, or to bless the power of transformative Love in the hearts and minds of people? People are living, breathing souls with hearts and hopes and dreams. And though we all possess a uniquely different personhood, we are all from the same source. We all derive our being and our living in Love.

Large metropolitan cities like Atlanta are hubs of diversity. As such, there is a plethora of information and ideologies to consume and plenty of opportunities to grow in cultural awareness. In Atlanta, my participation in interfaith gatherings helped me see that all the fingers pointing to the moon were not the Moon itself. God is still God. Spirit is always leading us into Love, into Light, into Life. Learning in inter-

spiritual faith settings allowed me to attune my heart to the resonance of Truth at work in the finger pointing. To listen deeply and carefully for where Love is at work.

In a city like Atlanta, there were always opportunities to express my opinion. Ambitions abound in the thrum of the city. How do I nurture that which Love has for me to say? Sure, I could be a talking head, but was that the life Love is inviting me into? How was Love asking me to live and move and have my being?

For me, the invitation to life has to be more about transformation than information. Truth flourishes in the soil of Love. Information, by itself, will keep me splitting hairs, distant from Love and people. More than the ideas I believe and the information I amass, in the city of Atlanta, Love invited me to see that how I wield my voice must be in concert with how I do life (the practices I adhere to, how I respond to life situations, how I relate to others). Keeping my integrity by not invading or abandoning myself for the sake of likes, clicks, or any form of people-pleasing is my real and final truth. Truth is always for the sake of Love.

In Atlanta, I was greening. I'd given my heart to love, given my heart to freedom. Not freedom at the expense of another's humanity, or freedom wrought from wars or fears or genocide. Not freedom of tyranny or love that hurts. I'd given my heart to an existence that says we are bound to one another, interconnected in our flourishing and our diminishment. What I wish for myself is that which I wish for another. What I aspire to is to allow the unfolding of life's mysteries without manipulation, domination, or subjugation and to use my voice, my writing, to sing Love's song.

Sometimes in the journey, you reach a place where everything you thought you knew gets dumped out and turned on its head. For me, that place was Albuquerque, New Mexico. The Land of Enchantment felt strange, alien, and yet familiar because it threw me back into some childhood experiences I was invited to revisit.

Like, I was made to believe that certainty was next to godliness. And I was told to never let my faith waver or question what I'd read in the Good Book. But what happens when you do?

What happened when I traded certainty for mystery? I learned that Love is the structure in which freedom is governed. I learned that how I see, understand, and interpret the world revolves around how I participate with the Divine in the liminal space of unknowing that is filled with uncertainty and yet sustained by Love. How I live, move, and have my being is to extend empathy and lead with love while being led by Divine Love. To hold the movements of the day with compassion and great tenderness. To trust the ripples.

I believe in the inherent beauty, truth and goodness of all sentient beings and all of creation. I believe where we act outside that beauty, truth and goodness, Love is inviting us to re-member, re-connect, and re-turn to the truth of our being. Albuquerque tested all that I said I believed.

I believe that repeated disregard leads to disconnection, where extending empathy reminds me that we belong to one another. Empathy allows me to step into the trenches of someone else's dark moment. To feel their pain, hold their grief. To allow space for their rage without absorbing it or projecting it back to them.

Empathy is to fellowship with Christ in His suffering—to embody what He did for all humanity on the cross. Immanuel, God with us, identified in every way and bore the tragedy of our darkest, vilest moments. God, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. He didn't hurl back a defense, or offer a justification of why He believed differently, lived differently. Ever present, though silent before His accusers, Jesus spoke only with compassion to the thief beside Him, with concern to ensure His mother's safety, and to the voice of Love—His Abba—for comfort and pardon of His accusers. The rest, He bore.

What is it to bear the burden of another? To bear witness to their existence?

From following the way of Christ, I aspire to remain silent in the face of accusation. To speak with compassion, concern, and with a voice of love as one who reconciles the world to Divine Love. Remember the eyes that beg for mercy even when the mouth cannot admit culpability. "Mercy triumphs over judgment," reminds Love's heart of compassion. I touch my heart and remember. For there, by the grace of God, go I. I too fall into Love's embrace to receive mercy.

We are not so different— those caught and those wagging their tails, pointing fingers in ridicule. One stands exposed, the other in fear of being found out. Thus, I extend mercy, offer forgiveness.

In Albuquerque, Love taught me that there are treasures in the desert. That artichokes and cacti both produce stunning blossoms in dry earth. I learned in the beauty of a Sandia Mountain sunset not to count people out. Thus, I endeavor to believe in people more than I believe in my beliefs. Full stop: People matter more than my credo. And I'll use my voice to sing of the awe and wonder of people all my days.

I believe every human is the very good of Love's love, made in the image and likeness of Love and are free to exist as they are, unencumbered by my fears or projections. Because I trust the speed and timing of Divine Love to do what Love does in me and in all of creation, I do not need to resort to domination, manipulation, or control to assuage my fears. And where I stray from the path of Love's embrace, I trust the perfect work of Love to call me home. How, when, and what that looks like is between an individual and Love.

I believe Love lives and moves in us all, and the experience of God's love changes everything. Love yields. Love believes the best about us, even when we are presenting the worst form of ourselves. Love is not distracted or deterred by our character defects. Love sees the Divine in all creation, all of humanity. Love always moves us toward wholeness but never asks us to cut off, fragment, or deny any part of who we are. The work of Love is transformation not annihilation.

Even when we despair, Love conspires for our good. Love is always extending an invitation for us to awaken fully to who the Divine intends us to be, and to be it. This is our participation in the cosmic dance, our journey home to Love.

Over and over, in chaos and conflict, I return to the sacred presence of Love. I hide myself there. Being as emotionally truthful as I know how to be, I spew until I'm empty. Then I rest there, like a fallow field. There in the rest, I receive of Love's mercy. I receive Love's affection, Love's embrace. I receive of Love's compassion.

Compassion is the umbilical cord of connection. Compassion keeps me tethered to the Divine, to myself, and to the world around me. Compassion keeps me wielding my voice for transformation. And moved with Love's compassion, I think of all the cities that have held me, the places that have been integral in my own transformation. I think of the speck in others' eyes and the log in my own. How closely akin we all are, even with our differences.

The pulse of Love holds all our heartbeats. There is not one—victim, villain, perpetrator, perpetrated upon, witness, or passersby—that is not held in the heartbeat of Love. We are all interlinked in the heart of Love who holds all pain *and* weeps for the injustices and atrocities of the world with eternal sorrow. Our suffering, all suffering, is held in compassion.

Beneath Love's gaze, may our voices rise, as our souls cry anew, "Create in me an empathic heart and renew a compassionate spirit within me."

FELICIA MURRELL IS A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR AND THE AUTHOR OF *AND: THE RESTORATIVE POWER OF LOVE IN AN EITHER/OR WORLD*. WITH OVER 20 YEARS OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE, HER WRITING HAS BEEN FEATURED MULTIPLE TIMES IN THE CENTER FOR ACTION AND

CONTEMPLATION'S DAILY MEDITATIONS AND THEIR BIENNIAL JOURNAL *ONEING*. AS A CONTEMPLATIVE THOUGHT LEADER, FELICIA HAS SPOKEN AT THE BLACK CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER SUMMIT AND OTHER WIDELY RECOGNIZED ORGANIZATIONS. SHE BELIEVES LOVE IS THE SOURCE OF OUR AUTHENTIC POWER AND THAT A LOVE ETHOS CAN BE EMBODIED AS A WAY OF BEING IN THE WORLD. FOR FELICIA, THE WAY OF LOVE (*AGAPE*) IS TO CONSCIOUSLY PARTICIPATE WITH THE DIVINE IN HOW WE LIVE, MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING. MOM TO 4 ADULT CHILDREN, SHE MAKES HER HOME IN WOODBURY, MN WITH HER HUSBAND, DOUG.

ALSO BY THE AUTHORS

Books from the storytellers who lent their voice to this collection.

Cindy Buck:

Abide: Always Beautiful in Daddy's Eyes

Rachael Cannon:

Drink Deep: The Story of the Woman at the Well

The Year I Learned to Fly

Lambs & Lilies

The Heart of the Lily: Volume One and Two

Resurrection Life (co-author, poetry collection)

Agape Trilogy (releasing November 2025)

Lisa Wentworth Couture:

Resurrection Life (co-author, poetry collection)

Free to Give (co-author)

Lydia du Toit:

Little Bear and the Mirror (children's book)

Kaa of the Great Kalahari (children's book)

Stella's Secret (children's book)

King Solitaire's Great Banquet (children's book)

Flunderina's Great Ride (children's book)

Melissa McCrery:

The Kingdom Within

The C-Level Marriage

How to Find Your Superpower

Pivot to a Higher View

Shanda Miller:

God, I Forgive You

Felicia Murrell:

AND: The Restorative Power of Love In An Either/Or World.

Truth Encounters

Cindy Quarles:

The God of Covenant

Dr. Tony Robinson:

Kingdom Theology (co-author)

Intentional ACTS of Prayer: Prayer Journal

Cheryl Smith:

To Love Again: Reflections of a Redeemed Heart

Resurrection Life (co-author, a poetry collection)

Robin Smit:

It Is Finished

Awakened

I Am Healed

Free to Give (co-author)

A Place Called Eden (children's book)

Behold the Lamb

Resurrection Life (co-author, poetry collection)

The Very Good News

Amanda Stoneman:

Proverbs 31 Woman: A Twelve Week Study

Jesus' Ministry: A 40 day Study Guide

Redemption Finds a Way (releasing November 2025)

Catherine Toon:

Marked by Love collection

How to Hear God

Rare & Beautiful Treasures

God, Male & Female?

Tracy Vanderbush:

Women in Christ

The Four People You Marry (co-authored with her husband)

Soul Reformation

Brooke Waters:

Identity Unveiled

Emotions Journal

Gratitude Journal

Lori Zenker:

Treehouse Stories: 35 Fun Stories About God's Love (children's book)

Promise Land (children's book)

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Discover more from TWS Publishing—our authors, their books, and more—at:

www.thewritersocietypublishing.com



