

*The*  
**HIGHER  
CALL**

**EARLENE LEMING**

*with*

**ALLISON BOWN**

*The Higher Call*  
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Earlene Leming

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*A Higher Calling* by J. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905)  
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# Dedication

This book is dedicated to YOU!

You may be a member of my beloved natural or spiritual family.  
You may be a woman or man reading this in a prison,  
jail or a transition home.  
You may know Jesus as your Best Friend or have yet to meet Him.

No matter who you are or the circumstances of your life,  
you are someone who God greatly loves.

These stories are for you; to encourage and strengthen you  
as you become who God has always seen you to be.

Jesus and so many who have gone before you  
are cheering you on as you choose His Higher Call.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,  
which He prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."  
~ Ephesians 2:10 ~

"...with men this is impossible but with God, all things are possible."  
~ Matthew 19:26 ~



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# FOREWORD

*by Allison Bown*

The first time I met Earlene Leming, I was in a tough place. My husband and I had recently joined a new church after a difficult season and their annual women's retreat seemed like a good way to get to know the community...sort of.

On the long drive to the coast, I began to doubt my decision. Could I keep up my Christian "mask" enough to hide my battered and slowly healing heart in a room full of new acquaintances? While I was a bit uncertain, I was pretty sure I could get by. I had years of practice in being able to look okay on the outside while disguising my internal pain, even to myself.

But when I arrived, I discovered that this was a small gathering, a dozen or so women, which would make it more difficult to pull this off... except that after the first few minutes, I no longer wanted to.

Earlene Leming was the speaker.

At every session, she put up a portion of 2 Corinthians 4:7 on the wall and talked about what it meant to her and to Jesus.

**"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."**

## Foreword

Earlene talked about the treasure of really knowing Christ in us and His compassion for His beloved ones as earthen vessels. She gave meaning to the broken places in life and assurance that it was those very weaknesses where Jesus wanted to be our Strength, Light and Friend.

She talked about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit like she *knew* them... actually knew them!

So, when I went up for prayer and Earlene laid hands on me, I wasn't afraid anymore. And when she gently said, "Oh honey, you've been in the fire!" I felt as if a two-ton weight fell off of my shoulders. There had been times I had wondered if what I was experiencing was real. The only thing I wanted to know was if I was closer to the end than to the beginning. If I could just know that, I could make it. Earlene paused for a moment and then looked me *straight* in the eyes. The compassion was still there, but it was joined by a warrior's strength.

She slowly and deliberately said, "Yes, you are much closer to the ending than to the beginning. It will be a little while longer, but when you come out, you will be forever changed because Jesus Himself is protecting and keeping you in His love as all that has harmed you is being overcome by Him."

I believed her. I didn't know her story yet, but I knew that she knew the real Jesus.

Earlene would later say that she thought of her own daughter when she prayed for me that day; and more than 25 years later, we both know why. It has been one of the greatest joys of my life to be one of Earlene's "daughters."

We've traveled through many adventures and miracles during our Aglow Prison Ministry years, some of which you'll read about here. When I needed encouragement, Earlene shared stories from her life that restored hope and peace. You'll read a few of those in these pages too. And when anyone in the "family" has a victory in Jesus to celebrate, we all call Mama Earlene!



More recently, I was sorting through an unexpected, initially painful transition that pressed me to assess what God values most in our lives and work with Him. At the end of the age when we stand before Him, what is it that will have eternal worth? What will make Him smile and say “well done?”

That’s when Earlene sent me *A Higher Calling* by Hudson Taylor, missionary to China over 100 years ago. This truth and her continued friendship turned one of the most challenging times in my life into one of the most valuable and beautiful seasons of growth I’ve ever known.

Christians not only decide to make Jesus their Savior, but will continually make choices for Him to be *Lord* of their lives. The “Higher Call” isn’t about how many people know your name, how much money your ministry made last year or how many “likes” you have on Facebook. The “Higher Call” is... well... that’s what this book is all about. Let’s just say for now:

**It’s in the most everyday places where  
eternal choices are made.**

These are stories of an unlikely church-lady who chose and kept on choosing God’s way for her; and stories of fellow travelers in her life who have done the same, several of them starting in prisons or jails. *All* of us are living testimonies to God’s amazing grace. As you read this book, please remember:

**Everything in these pages is available  
to every believer in Jesus Christ.**

There is a relationship that God has imagined with you before you were ever born (Psalm 139). Jesus paid the same high price for each of us. We are *all* his great treasures and “vessels of honor” (2 Timothy 2:21).

“The Higher Call” expresses who I want to be in the years ahead. It is the reason that I gladly said “yes” to collaborating, editing and contributing to this book. I knew there would be many heaven-to-earth conversations with Earlene that would eternally expand both my heart and the mind of Christ in me. That alone made it an assignment worth taking.

## Foreword

May the words and stories you read here encourage and empower you to become a fellow traveler on the adventure of living in *The Higher Call*.

### **Allison Bown**

Friend, Writer, Identity Coach, Trainer and Fellow Traveler in Jesus  
Author of *The Image* and *Joyful Intentionality*

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## *Note to the Reader:*

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We've purposely left spaces throughout the book so that you have room to write your own thoughts and insights with God as you read.

It's also a place to record the promises you're reading about, and receiving them as your own gift from Him.

When God makes a promise to one of His children, it's for ALL of His children!

# INTRODUCTION

by Earlene Leming

For many years, I was encouraged by the writings of Hudson Taylor, the great Missionary to China over 100 years ago. I understand that God calls everyone to come to Him. He wants to be our Father. He wants us to be His child. He has plans for our life and He desires to fulfill them for us.

God may ask us to follow Him to higher, more difficult places than others dare to go. If we follow, it often leads to a glimpse of Heaven's rewards. I have chosen *The Higher Call* as the title for these stories because simply trusting God's faithfulness for many years has allowed me to feel the safety, security and joy of living on the doorstep of Heaven...and I would like you to experience that too.

Since I was a little girl, I wanted to be a missionary. I realized my family was blessed with a rich spiritual heritage that is rare in our society. My heart hurt for mothers and children who did not know who God is or what He is really like. I wanted to share these truths with them.

My maternal grandmother was 60 years old when I was born and she lived next door. She had been a school teacher and a lady evangelist for many years, and continued teaching, singing, and preaching to her own grandchildren. Because of her, I really *knew* God loved me, and that His Son, Jesus, was *always* with me. When I finished high school, I planned to continue my education and go to a mission field. However,

## Introduction

because of family and financial reasons, I chose to remain in Long Beach, California and attend school there. I became a teacher and I married. God gave us a precious daughter and son to raise in a godly home as I was raised.

Soon after I became a grandmother, God allowed my circumstances to drastically change. It was then that I discovered how the enemy of our soul tries to destroy God's plan for our lives. Each day, I had to focus on Jesus or I felt I wouldn't survive the events that changed the course of my life. During this time, I *never* dreamed God was just beginning to fulfill my childhood dreams.

Looking back, I am so thankful I chose and kept choosing to follow Him.

After God performed a miracle healing in my life, He led me into the unexpected mission field of women's prisons. Inside those walls, I witnessed miracles of transformation in broken hearts, minds, and bodies. Time and again I saw Jesus change wounded women into godly mothers, sisters, grandmothers and friends. These women knew they had been given a second chance to do things differently. And as you will read; by His grace, they did.

### **Just as God has been faithful to me and to them, He will be faithful to you!**

In 1995, the call to prison ministry was stronger than teaching piano in private schools. By overseeing a small non-profit ministry, the Shepherd Foundation, I could finally earn enough money to move from my mother's back bedroom into a lovely two bedroom apartment in Southern California. Now, I could travel up and down Highway 99 in California and devote my life to telling women in prisons about God's love and power.

For a portion of these years, I was able to live close to my daughter and her family. I've been blessed to be at their birthdays, graduations, and weddings. My family heard the miracle stories, and personally witnessed their own. We saw God answer prayers!

Then one day I felt the Lord say, "It is time to return. I have given you twenty years with your daughter, now you will live your next years with your son." It didn't happen right away. I had a bit more time with my great grand-daughters to show them what my grandmother had shown me:

**Jesus is my Best Friend and I am never alone.**

Finally the day came to move to my new little condo, an astonishing gift from my nephew. My granddaughter brought her two girls to play with me. It is a memory I treasure. After playing with last-minute toys, we walked downstairs to hug good-bye at their car. She helped the girls into their car seats and told them, "Grandma Earlene is moving tomorrow. The next time we visit her, she will be in a beautiful new home!"

With a questioning look in her big, brown eyes, my great grand-daughter Isabella spoke cautiously, "Will Jesus move with you, Grandma?" "Oh yes! Jesus will move with me!" I joyfully replied, "but He will stay with you too."

**"Remember what I've told you: We are never alone.  
Jesus lives with us!"**

Off they drove, waving and yelling, "Bye, Grandma! We love you!" My heart was at peace.

God did *not* reveal how the move would require a huge test of faith in His promises. The enemy tried to steal them, physically and mentally. Using Paul's advice in 1 Timothy 1:18, I had to war with the prophecies and promises given to me.

The rewards of simple trust in Jesus are great. In my eighties, I live independently, am still a good driver, and I enjoy playing piano and organ where my son and daughter-in-law minister. Following Jesus is a continual upward adventure!

Through the stories in this book, you will find lessons of Truth along with scriptures and prayers. *Ask the Holy Spirit to help you apply them*

## Introduction

*in your circumstances.* He is the Great Teacher who can take what is written here and personalize it in your own relationship with Him.

Wherever you are on your journey, my prayer is that you may be able see your life from a new perspective: the perspective of God's eternal values. God is a *good* Father who is lovingly shaping us into the image of His beloved Son, Jesus.

As you read, be encouraged to lean more and more on Jesus; and you *will* see miracles! Others may only see them as natural situations called "coincidences," but you will recognize God's hand working all things together for good as one who loves Him and His Higher Calling.

God is planning a New Heaven and a New Earth where we will live with Him forever.

**We are not home yet, but we can learn to live in the  
"Vestibule of Heaven."**

*"...but this one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

*~ Philippians 3:13-14 ~*

## **"A HIGHER CALLING"**

*By J. Hudson Taylor*

If God has called you to be truly like Jesus in all your spirit, He will draw you into a life of crucifixion and humility. He will put on you [requests for obedience that will not allow you to follow other Christians.] In numerous ways, He seems to let other good people do things which He will not let you do.

Others who seem to be very religious and useful may push themselves, pull wires, and scheme to carry out their plans, but you cannot....

Others will be allowed to succeed in making great sums of money... but God may supply you only on a day-to-day basis because He wants you to have something far better than gold: a dependence on Him and His unseen treasury.

The Lord may let others be honored and put forward while keeping you hidden in obscurity because He wants to produce some choice, fragrant fruit for His coming glory, which can only be produced in the shade.

God may let others be great, but keep you small. He will let others do a work for Him and get the credit, but He will have you work and toil without [others] knowing how much you are doing.

## “A Higher Calling”

Then, to make your work still more precious, He may let them get the credit for the work which you have done; this to teach you the message of the Cross, humility, and something of the value of being cloaked with His nature.

The Holy Spirit will put a strict watch on you, and with a jealous love [correct] you for careless words and feelings, or for wasting your time, which other Christians never seem distressed over.

So make up your mind that God is an infinite Sovereign and has a right to do as He pleases with His own, and that He may not explain to you a thousand things which may puzzle your reason in His dealings with you....

...Settle it forever; you are to deal directly with the Holy Spirit. He is to have the privilege of tying your tongue or [restricting] your hands or closing your eyes in ways which others are not dealt with.

However, know this great secret of the Kingdom: When you are so completely possessed with the Living God that you are, in your secret heart, pleased and delighted over this peculiar, beautiful, personal, private, personal guardianship and management of the Holy Spirit over your life;

**You will have found the vestibule of heaven,  
the high calling of God.**







*Part 1*

**ANSWERING GOD'S  
HIGHER CALL**



## Chapter 1

# THE YELLOW FARMHOUSE

*"And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you He will be with you.  
He will not leave you nor forsake you: do not fret nor be dismayed."  
~ Deuteronomy 31:8 ~*

There it was...right in front of me! A small house backed up to the golf course and nestled between two beautiful, large houses. It had yellow shutters on the windows, a circular driveway and a white picket fence. It looked just like it had come from a fairy tale book!

I stopped pushing the stroller carrying my two year old grandson, and gazed at the house. There wasn't a "FOR SALE" sign anywhere, but oh, how I wished there were. Without any sounds from my mouth, I began to cry out to the Lord, "You know how my heart hurts. I don't think I can live like this anymore. Please help me find the right house that my husband will buy."

Then I whispered aloud, "It is so peaceful. Could I finally be at rest here?"

Staring at that lovely house, I felt a deep sadness leaving my heart as I visualized myself inside it. I felt a sense of hope, and suddenly I could

## The Higher Call

even see myself standing inside and looking out of the bay windows. But there was one strange thing I sensed: I was *alone* in this picture.

I dismissed the vision and left to tell my husband of the adorable house on the golf course. We learned that the owner's wife just died and he had not listed it. We made an offer which he quickly accepted! We moved to what the community called, "The Little Yellow Farmhouse." I felt at peace from the moment we moved in.

I could never have dreamed what God had planned. It was from this "place of rest" that I would host my son's lovely wedding reception, experience a miracle-healing... and then walk through a painful divorce.

God's greatest gift in this place was that His presence became very real to me. The vision I had that first day did come to pass. I would be alone, but *Jesus* lived with me instead. And when it was time to move, His "place of rest" was now *in* me and went with me as I began my work in the women's prisons of California.

The word "rest" means "to settle down, be soothed or quieted, to be secure, to dwell peacefully." God can arrange situations to help move us into His place of rest. God intervened to give me rest, as He began to fulfill His next plans for my life. The outcome of my time in The Yellow Farmhouse was different than I imagined, but it remained my place of rest prepared by Him

Do you have a situation in your life where you need a place of rest?

This house was a physical dwelling place, but God desires to be your place of refuge and rest at all times.

**Your place of rest lives on the inside of you:  
It is "Christ in you, your hope of glory."  
~ Colossians 1:27 ~**

## Prayer

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Dear Jesus, thank you that YOU are my place of rest, peace and safety. You have gone before me into all my life situations and prepared a place of rest. Today, I receive the gift of Your peace that passes all understanding. Please renew my heart and mind. In Jesus Name, Amen.

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## Chapter 2

# THE VISION

*“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us...”*

*~ Titus 3:4-5 ~*

It was August 1982. I pulled the clean white sheet over my hospital gown and covered my face. I did not want anyone to see me right now. I felt terrible! Maybe I was dreaming. A nurse came into my room, saying she had come to take more blood samples and prepare me for an exploratory surgery. Now I remembered. The pain in my abdomen had been constant and very severe. After seeing the results of a week of tests, my own Baptist doctor turned my case over to a surgeon.

I was NOT dreaming! The ultrasound showed a huge mass in my abdomen, indicating very swollen lymph glands. The surgeon had said, “It looks like Hodgkin’s disease. We need to open you up to decide which will prolong your life: chemotherapy or radiation.”

With my head buried in my pillow, I cried aloud, “Oh God, I don’t want to go through any more pain. My living situation is even more painful than my body. I don’t care if I die. Take me home to Heaven to be with You.” Anger rose up within my heart as I continued talking to God, “*This*

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*is just not fair!* I'm not even fifty yet! All my life I have tried to do what was right! Why is this happening to me?!"

I remembered my two year old grandson and realized I would not get to be the special Grandma to him like mine was to me. I thought of all the people I had tried to please. Where were they now? What good was all that? Why had I tried so hard to do what people wanted? There was not one of them who could help me now. This situation was only between God and me.

Suddenly, I stopped crying. Something was moving in the corner of the room where the laundry was kept... and it was *not* clothing. I watched as the shape of a woman emerged! I knew I was not on medication, and I had never hallucinated. I was a nice, quiet school teacher. Then, I saw a mass of dark, tangled hair and realized this was a young woman! I thought, "How in the world did *she* get in *my* room? She must be a transient off the streets of Long Beach! I'll ring for the nurse to come."

But before I could push the button, the woman turned herself upright, and looked directly into my eyes. I gazed back at her in shock and disbelief! I was looking into my OWN FACE!

"*Oh no!* That can't be me! I don't look like that!" I gasped aloud.

I heard a gentle Voice say, "Earlene, that is how you look in your own self-righteousness."

The room seemed to swirl around. Then, like a movie passing before my eyes, I saw the faces of familiar people in my past. I could *feel* the betrayals and lies, and a bitterness began to surface from inside of me. I felt like I was choking. Deep sobs came out of my mouth as I helplessly cried, "Oh God, I think I'm dying! You're so far away. I can't seem to come into Your presence. *Where are You?*"

I knew I had confessed all my big sins to God, so why did I have this horrible feeling? Why did He say that I looked like this awful woman? Then, I remembered a verse that I didn't read very often from Isaiah 64:6, "Your righteousness is as filthy rags."

The gentle Voice continued, "Don't you know that when you hate your brother or sister, you are the same as a murderer?" I remember Grandma quoted 1 John 3:14-15 when I was a little girl, "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. *He who does not love his brother abides in death.* Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Then tenderly, almost audibly, I heard, "Earlene, you cannot come into My Presence like this."

**"There is only one way, and that is through  
the blood of My Son, Jesus Christ."**

For the first time, I looked at my own heart as God saw it. There were hidden sins, and they made my heart dark and ugly. I realized the blood of Jesus Christ was the only answer. "Oh, Jesus," I cried, "Wash me clean with Your blood. I can't forget these things. I'm sorry, but I don't know if I can forgive. *Can You do it for me?* Please cover everything with Your blood!"

Immediately, I saw the deep red blood of Jesus flowing over my body, from the top of my head, going down over the white sheet covering my gown. A tremendous peace swept over me. It was like someone was pouring thick, healing oil inside of my head and it covered my entire body.

I relaxed, repeating softly, "Oh, thank you, Jesus, *thank you*, Jesus. Now I can die. I am clean. I am forgiven. I know I can come into Your presence. Thank you, Jesus, I love You so much." The sweet peace of God swept over me and I fell asleep. I really thought I would wake up in Heaven by morning!

There is more to this story that I'll tell you in the next chapter, but first I want to encourage you with this:

God sees differently than we do. In His mercy, there are times He lets us look through His eyes so we can understand our need for what He longs to give us instead. Often, He will use what is common in our daily life to help us understand things in the spirit realm. Just as a picture is a

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tool for primary teachers, it is natural that God teaches us life-lessons in pictures to our minds, in our hearts and sometimes to our natural eyes.

**Is there something that you've been afraid to look at in your life that God wants to reveal to you? Ask Him to show you, knowing that it's His loving truth brings lasting freedom.**

**~ John 8:32 ~**

### *Prayer*

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Heavenly Father, I am so thankful for the precious blood of Jesus that covers ALL my sins. Help me see myself as You do. Teach me what You want me to know. I only want to please You. In Jesus Name, Amen.

## Chapter 3

# TO LIVE AND NOT DIE

*“He was wounded for our transgressions: He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”*

*~ Isaiah 53:5 ~*

When I awoke the next morning, I really expected to see Jesus visibly and be in heaven! But I was still in my white gown, still in the hospital bed and the young male nurse was saying, “Mrs. Leming, I see you have slept all night without pain medication. Do you think you could eat some breakfast so we won’t have to hook up the IV?”

Now I really thought I was dreaming. I felt such peace. There was absolutely NO pain and I was hungry! Something had changed during that night. Today, I wanted to live!

After eating both breakfast and lunch, I knew a physical change had occurred. Not daring to tell anyone of the strange drama on the previous night, I simply asked to speak with the surgeon again... and soon!

But how would I explain this to him? I knew he would never understand, so I just asked for a second ultrasound. I think he was

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insulted. He quickly said, "We have to open you up so we will know what to do for you. You do not need another test. We have a good picture of the mass."

A new kind of persistence rose within me, giving me boldness to ask him again for another test. He consented: a second ultrasound was scheduled before the surgery. When the doctor left the room, my friend, Cheryl (who is a nurse and witnessed the entire conversation), remarked, "Earlene, I can't believe you did that. Don't you know that you never argue with a surgeon?"

Now, I understood what happened the night before. The old Earlene really had died! The Blood of Jesus had washed away my old, filthy garments. God gave me a "Robe of Righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10), and a brand-new woman was wearing it. She was bold! She was persistent!

Now, I wanted to live! I was eager to get out of that hospital. I would go through whatever tests were necessary to stop the upcoming surgery, so I humbly prayed,

**"God, if You are really healing me, I'll NEVER stop  
telling the story. I'll do whatever You ask.  
I'll go wherever you want me to go."**

God's plans are accomplished in our lives only when we say as Jesus did, "Not my will, but Your will be done." God's will for my life began that afternoon in 1982.

Events took place quickly. Two long ultrasound tests were performed: one on the original machine and then on a new one. When the technician left the room, I experienced something frightening. Satan tried to tell me to stop the tests because I was being ridiculous. A strong spirit of fear filled the room and I felt like I was frozen and literally could not move!

From my spirit I heard, "*Plead the Blood of Jesus!*" I recalled Grandma's prayers, so I placed my hand on my forehead and spoke aloud, "The blood of Jesus covers me!" Immediately, God's peace filled

the room. The technician returned and wheeled me to my room saying, "Your doctor will give you the results."

That afternoon, as I sat on the hospital bed, our beloved family physician, Dr. Nixon, came rushing in. Our conversation has become one of my most treasured memories.

"Why are you huffing and puffing, Dr. Nixon?" I asked. He paused, trying to catch his breath. "Earlene, I ran all the way up the stairs from the X-ray department!" Dr. Nixon sat beside me on the bed, and with a grin he said, "They think their machines are broken."

I didn't understand. "Why in the world do they think that?" Taking my hand, he looked into my eyes and said, "Earlene, there is nothing wrong with you." My heart jumped! Words tumbled out as I asked him more. "There is no mass? Nothing twisted? But I heard technicians say something about the intestines?"

This time Dr. Nixon spoke firmly and very slowly. "Earlene, *there is nothing wrong with you.*"

"But the surgeon scheduled me for surgery!" I said in shock. With a twinkle in my doctor's eyes, he quoted the sightless man who Jesus healed: "Once I was blind but now I can see." (John 9:25) And then he added, "Go home, Earlene. I'll take care of everything here."

At home, I could not talk to anyone about the experience. I was still in awe. A real physical MIRACLE had occurred! Greater than that was the *miracle in my soul*. God revealed that He had to change my heart before He could fulfill my childhood dreams. Now, I was ready for the process to truly begin.

When we become aware of a thought, attitude or action that is not pleasing to God, we can remember the Blood of Jesus is available. Never allow strife, negativity, doubt, worry or fear to accumulate. As soon as we recognize these things, let us quickly apply the powerful Blood of Jesus, and be washed clean!

**This is the verse I call your “Bar of Soap:” “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”**

**1 John 1:9**

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## *Prayer*

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Dear Jesus, I love You with all my heart. Thank you for wrapping me in Your “Robe of Righteousness.” Thank you for covering my sins with Your precious blood.

When I don’t know how to forgive others or myself, I ask You to do it for me. I know You provide healing for my body too. Wash me in Your righteousness, Your forgiveness and Your healing of my body, soul, mind and spirit. I want to receive ALL that You have done for me. In Your Name I pray, Amen.



## Chapter 4

# SHARING MIRACLES

*"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh.  
Is there anything too hard for Me?  
~ Jeremiah 32:27 ~*

Before I learned to listen to God's voice, I did not understand how He uses situations in our lives to help others. Sometimes, I hear Him lovingly say, "Earlene, this is not just about you!" Now, I smile, wait and watch. My hospital miracle was not just for me, as you're about to discover.

As soon as Dr. Nixon left, I quickly pulled off that hospital gown and began dressing in my familiar clothes. Everything had happened so fast in the past two days and my mind was still reeling. Just a week ago, he had said, "Earlene, pack your suitcase and come to my office. You'll need to stay in the hospital awhile for some tests."

Then came the discovery of a huge mass in my abdomen. Next, the deep, spiritual experience with God. Just an hour ago, my doctor excitedly came into my room and said, "You can go home. They can't find the mass in your abdomen that was there yesterday. They have no explanation! There will be no surgery. I'll take care of all the reports. Just go home."

## The Higher Call

So, I began to gather up my things (still trying to understand all that had happened) when the door to my room slowly opened. A young, male intern with a look of amazement on his face cautiously asked, "May I come in?" I recognized this young man from the group of students who daily studied the medical charts at the foot of my bed during the week. "Of course," I answered.

"Mrs. Leming, I am a student at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I was often told about miracles during my time there, but I have never actually seen one. I just now heard what happened in the radiology department and I came to shake your hand! *I've really seen a MIRACLE!*"

He kept on smiling, shaking my hand, and saying, "Thank you, thank you! You have no idea how this has renewed my faith in God!"

That miracle became the "credential" I needed for inmates to listen to a little church lady! I wondered as I've prayed for this young intern if the miracle changed his life as much as it did mine?

Do not be disappointed if God does not reveal His reasons for the things He allows in your life. When you don't understand, just thank Him for who He has been to you: loving, faithful, good, kind...

**Tell Jesus that you love and trust Him because  
only He sees the end from the beginning.**

Agree with Him that He has a *good* plan, not only for you but for others as well. His timing is always perfect. "For I know the thoughts I think towards you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" ( Jeremiah 29:11).

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## Prayer

Heavenly Father, I thank You that Your plan is good for my future. Help me to trust You when I don't understand what You are doing. Open my eyes to recognize Your provision, not only for me, but for others around me. I ask this for Your Glory. In Jesus Name. Amen."

## Chapter 5

# WHAT HAPPENED?

*"And I want you to know... that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel..."*

*~ Philippians 1:12 ~*

Sometimes my divorce was still too painful to think about and I would cry when no one was around to ask questions. Today was one of those painful days. The moving van was coming to take the furniture from my beautiful Yellow Farmhouse to a tiny rental house in Long Beach, California. Part of my settlement was choosing the pieces of furniture that I wanted to keep.

I was determined to be brave. I had made my selections and now simply needed the movers to come and go quickly. I hoped no questions would be asked except where to put things.

When the movers and I arrived at the tiny two-bedroom rental house, I tried to ignore the puzzled looks on their faces. Although my organ had to be stored in the garage when they could not get it through the doors, I wasn't worried about my eight-foot grand piano. I saw that they had already unscrewed the three huge legs and carried the body of the piano through the door like a giant violin!

## The Higher Call

It fit in the tiny rental house living room, but now there was only space to squeeze in a small sofa and chair. As they continued to put the other furniture in place, I found myself fascinated by the way one of the young men replaced the piano legs.

As the last leg was put in place on the enormous instrument, he suddenly looked up and said, "Ma'am, I don't want to be nosey, but *what happened?*"

My mind thought, "I can't explain it. I'll pretend I didn't hear and just quietly leave the room."

But God wouldn't let me go. He reminded me of my new mission field where I played piano and shared God's love with women in prison. I had made Him a promise to NEVER stop telling my story of the healing power of God to anyone who would listen. This gave me the courage now to simply answer the young man, "I had a miracle. God saved my life three years ago, and I chose to follow Him. My husband did not want to make the same choice."

I will remember his words and the look on his face forever. "Wow! I get it. You just reminded me of a promise I made to God in Vietnam Nam. But I didn't keep it. I hope it is not too late."

With a sigh of relief, I gladly answered, "*It is never too late to give your life to Jesus.*"

God used the question I feared most to remind me of my promise. But He also used me to help someone remember their own promise to Him. This brought glory to God, and peace to me.

**Do you have a question that you fear being asked?  
Ask God how He would answer it for you.**

Or maybe you made a promise to the Lord that you've not kept? God is not upset about that! He has kept that promise safe in His heart and is waiting to share it with you again.

## Prayer

---

Father God, I am so grateful that You are Perfect Love and You cast out all fear. I know You have the answers I do not have, but that You will freely give them to me. Help me to be sensitive to the people you bring to me today. Let me encourage them with Your kindness and love, as You have encouraged me. In Jesus' Name, Amen



## Chapter 6

# ANGELS AND GRANDMA

*"And He shall give His angels charge over you  
to keep you in all your ways."*

*~ Psalm 91:11 ~*

Soon after I chose to follow God's call, my life took a drastic turn and I found myself divorced and alone at age 49. I still felt His sweet peace, but I had no idea what was ahead. I discovered God had earlier prepared me as a child with stories told by my Grandmother, Eva Buffum Fritz.

My favorites were when she was a lady evangelist in the early 1900's. I love this story, because God used it to keep me from being afraid when I drove alone to the many women's prisons and jails far from home:

Before she married, my Grandma, Eva Buffum, traveled with her brother Herbert to conduct church services. He composed and sang wonderful songs and she preached. When she held Revivals without her brother, she stayed with the local pastor's family in their home.

On one particular evening, Grandma was tired and decided to leave after she finished her sermon. This was not her usual routine. She loved to pray with people at the altar, then walk home with her host's family.

## The Higher Call

But tonight, she knew there were enough altar ministers present, so she put on her coat and slipped out the door...alone.

After a quick walk to the parsonage, she went inside and took off her coat. Suddenly, she heard a loud pounding on the door and men's voices calling, "Sister Eva! Sister Eva! *Are you okay?*"

She opened the door and faced two deacons with puzzled looks on their faces. They excitedly asked, "Who were those two men walking you home tonight?"

Grandma answered, "What are you talking about? I walked home alone. I didn't tell anyone that I was too tired to stay any longer. I just put on my coat and left."

"But you were *not* alone!" said one of the deacons insistently. "There were two very tall men walking with you, one on each side!" The other interrupted, "We saw them walk out the door with you. We didn't know if you knew them, so we followed to be sure you got here all right." Looking around the room, they continued to question her, "Where are they? And more importantly, *who* are they?"

My Grandma stood quietly for a moment, then slowly said,

**"They must have been my angels. I know they are always with me, but I don't think anyone has ever seen them before."**

Over the years, I became aware that God provided angels for me as I followed Him into prisons and jails. Stories were often told by inmates who saw "tall officers" they didn't recognize, standing in the Chapel doorways during our services... usually at a time when the atmosphere was tense or uncertain.

Our team of prison ministry volunteers knew who they were, and soon many of the veteran inmate believers recognized them too!



## Chapter 6

We always felt a supernatural peace enter the room when they arrived. I often wondered if they were the same angels protecting me up and down the highways!

Angels are present throughout Scripture as part of God's provision and protection. Read Psalm 91 and memorize it so you can pray specific verses over your own life and those of your family.

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### *Prayer*

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Heavenly Father, I am learning how to trust You and live daily in Your peace. Thank You that Your Word says You will send Your angels to protect me each day. Help me see YOU as my ever-present Keeper and Protector, whether or not there are people around me. I love You and trust You with my life. In Jesus Name, Amen.



## Chapter 7

### **WATCH FOR THE HINTS**

*"And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying,  
'This is the way, walk in it, when you turn to the right hand,  
and when you turn to the left.'"*

*~ Isaiah 30:21 ~*

My life felt so strange those first months alone in the house after my divorce. I talked aloud to Jesus and I often asked questions. God led me to Isaiah 30:20 saying "He would not remove my teachers, but that my eyes would see and recognize them."

I knew His Holy Spirit within me would be my Teacher, so I've learned to follow what I call "the nudging" of the Holy Spirit. If I had a peaceful feeling about a matter, I obeyed what He showed me and I would trust that soon, He would reveal the next step. This is how I learned to walk with Jesus and this story is one of the delightful ways God taught me to follow Him:

Since I now had to support myself, I found a job teaching music in private schools. Although it had been twenty years since I taught school, it was still a joy!

## The Higher Call

I cannot remember a time when I did not play the piano. At age four, my evangelist Grandmother, realizing that God had given me a gift for music, encouraged me to play little tunes from the songs she sang. My Uncle Charles graciously paid for my formal lessons, beginning a life-time of playing the piano and organ for churches, weddings, funerals, and eventually, in many prison church services!

Music is like breathing to me, easy and natural. So it was not unusual that God chose to teach me spiritual truths through my music; and He began with a kindergarten class practicing for their end-of-the-year school program.

All of the students were sitting on the rug looking at me on the piano bench. I said to them, "Now, watch my face. I will send signals and give you little hints to help you remember the words." Sure enough, when they watched my signals, they were able to easily sing the song together.

I knew several of the children, including a cute little boy named Christopher. (The Principal had asked me to tutor him, saying "that he *must* pass Kindergarten this second time!") As I looked at the children, I saw Christopher holding his hands over his face... and he was crying.

"What's wrong, Christopher?" I asked, trying to be as kind as possible.

He whispered, "I can't sing."

I softly asked, "Why not?"

He replied, "*Because I can't see the hints!*"

I realized that there were too many children in front of him, and he knew he was supposed to stay on the rug. So, with a smile I said, "Everyone move around until you can see my face!" When I could see every face, we practiced the song again; and I watched as Christopher proudly sang his very best. Their final program was a huge success, (and yes, Christopher was promoted to the first grade!)

God spoke softly to my heart as I drove home.

**“My children miss My best plans for them when they do not watch for My “Hints.” Learn to focus on My Face, and listen to My Words.”**

## *Prayer*

---

Heavenly Father, I open my heart today to see Your “Hints.” Help me to recognize Your small confirmations of the best way for me to go. Thank you that I will hear Your Voice and go through my day, confident of Your love and care for me. In Jesus Name, Amen



## Chapter 8

# NEVER ALONE

*"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you."*

~ Isaiah 43:2 ~

I was 50 years old when I actually felt my life began again. My children were married, and I was now a single woman after years of being surrounded with family. I learned to do many things for myself that others had always done for me. Even filling the car's gas tank was a new experience!

I remember how I first learned that God reveals His plans one step at a time; and no matter what happened, I would never be alone.

Nearly a year had passed since God had healed me. My days were spent playing the piano, singing, and worshiping Jesus. I was falling so much in love with Him that I hadn't really considered what it would mean to be actually, legally alone.

Now, as I was waiting for the divorce papers to be finalized, I really needed extra comfort from God's Word. I began reading my favorite verses in Isaiah 43, about how God walks with me through the storms

of fire and water. Isaiah 43:4 seemed to jump off the page! Why had I not seen it before?

**“Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you; therefore, I will give men for you and people for your life.”**

What?! Did this mean if I gave my life completely to God, He'd give me people in exchange? I recalled what I had said in the hospital: “If You are really healing me, I will go wherever you want me to go and I will never stop telling the story.” And I had told everyone I could about my healing, even the mailman and grocery clerks! But God seemed to be asking something more: Would I follow Him to a mission field?

But where? The only missionaries I knew were my cousins, Gary and Leslie Royer, in Venezuela. Should I visit them? I took the first step and called... and they were delighted! I took a deep breath and we all prayed that God would show me the next step *after* I took this initial giant step!

Plans were made to fly into Miami, stay overnight at the Marriott Airport Hotel, and catch a flight the next day to Venezuela. Not until I arrived after midnight at the baggage claim in Miami did I realize I was alone in a completely strange place for the first time. An overwhelming panic hit me when I tried to pick up my two heavy suitcases, and I wondered, “Why is this so difficult?” It had been easy in California as my sister and her husband put me on the plane. Now, I just stood frozen at the escalator. People were pushing, shoving, trying to get past me. I fought to hold back tears as I whispered,

**“Jesus, please help me. I don't think I can do this.”**

Suddenly, I heard a deep, masculine voice behind me say, “Here, let me take those.” A tall, young man with curly blondish-brown hair stepped forward. He tucked his motorcycle helmet under his arm and effortlessly picked up both of my heavy suitcases. He smiled and asked, “Where are you going?” I answered, “To the Marriott Airport Hotel, but I don't know where it is.”



## Chapter 8

Immediately, I heard the words, "Follow me."

I felt my strength returning as I followed him up two flights of escalator stairs and across an open vestibule. I stopped beside him when he set down my heavy suitcases. He smiled again, then almost tenderly, he looked straight into my eyes and said, "You'll be safe here."

I opened my purse to tip him for his help, but he was gone!

My mind raced with crazy thoughts: "What happened? Where did he go? There's no way he could have disappeared like that. I didn't even get to thank him." And then I realized, I was alone again! I said aloud, "Oh no! I don't even know where he has left me." "Dear Lord," I whispered, "I know You said that You'd never leave me. Show me where I am."

Suddenly, I looked up and saw the word: "MARRIOTT" and I realized: I was standing at the front desk of my hotel!

I couldn't wait to get to my room. Overwhelmed with emotion, I lay on the bed and began to talk to Jesus. For the first time, I understood what Isaiah 43 really meant. Jesus Himself was promising to walk beside me no matter where the path led; through emotional flood waters, through fires of uncertainty, and through an unfamiliar airport to the next airplane, into another country!

I recalled those words the young man said, "*Follow me*" and "*You'll be safe here.*" I decided that if God sent angels to help Grandma, I could expect Him to do the same for me. I pondered these things in my heart and sensed that another miracle had happened, but I did not tell anyone. I felt God would later confirm what I needed to know, and He did after I arrived home from Venezuela.

The Sunday after I returned, I went to my sister Linda's church and sat alone on the front row. I was aware how often Linda glanced over at me during the service and I wondered, "Is there something wrong?" Maybe it was difficult for her to see me sitting there alone?

## The Higher Call

When service ended, Linda hurried over with excitement. "Earlene! I kept looking at you because the seat next to you was *not* empty. A tall young man was sitting there!" I paused for a moment. "What color was his hair?" I slowly asked. She said, "It was blondish-brown and kind of curly."

I was shocked! Her description was identical to the man with the motorcycle helmet in the Miami airport. Then Linda told how God had encouraged her by saying, "I will *always* take care of your sister. She has a special work to do for Me." Once again, it wasn't just about me. I experienced God's miracle provision, but He also used it to give peace and assurance to my sister.

That was November 1983 and God has been faithful to His promises in Isaiah 43 for all these years. My prayer in Miami Airport was not complicated. It was simple: "Help me." Whether you pray a prayer of salvation, or re-commitment to Jesus, or cry for help in an emergency, He loves you and will respond.

**You can talk to God about any part of your life.  
He hears you and He will help you.**

## Prayer

---

Dear Jesus, I am so glad You are my Friend. Thank you for hearing my prayers and sending Your angels to help me. Help me to trust You as I follow Your plans for my life today. "Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His Word." (Psalm 103:20) In Your Name I pray, Amen.

## Chapter 9

# THE CROSS, THE BLOOD AND THE TRASH BAG

*“Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.  
Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore  
is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God,  
who also makes intercession for us.”*

*~ Romans 8:31-34 ~*

In 1990, the world’s largest Women’s Prison was built in Chowchilla, California to house 4,000 women. Aglow Prison Ministry had already trained a team who ministered in local jails, so we were the first “religious volunteers” cleared for Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF).

Every Monday night, you could hear an officer loudly announce over the loudspeaker “Aglow is in the Chapel.” Nearly 100 women would come from their housing units and cross the enormous Main Yard, hoping to find help and encouragement in Jesus Christ.

I gave fewer piano lessons in Long Beach so that I could travel monthly to the new prison. God gave me a place to stay with Rachel Bondshu in Mariposa, and I joined their team. It truly was a real mission-field where God confirmed His Word with signs and wonders. Nothing on the outside compared to these services.

## The Higher Call

Initially, I wanted to move to central California and experience this every single week! But God had spiritual lessons to teach me right where I lived. My encounters with Him as I traveled were just as much a part of my "training ground" as being with the team in this new prison.

I remember one late night drive home from a prison ministry trip. As I got closer to home, I realized that I didn't even feel tired from the six-hour drive. I was still so overwhelmed by what I had seen that weekend!

But as I opened my apartment gate, I suddenly heard a voice say, "Why do you drive up there? You don't deserve to see miracles. *Who do you think you are?*" I looked around and saw no one. Then, out of nowhere, my mind filled with disturbing old memories. It took a moment, but suddenly I understood: the enemy was attacking me. I learned to use I John 1:9 as my "Bar of Soap" for sins, but what should I do about these tormenting memories? I had thought they were long gone; and now they were back?

### **While thoughts raced in my head, a gentle Voice softly spoke. "Take it to My Cross, Earlene."**

I instantly recognized the Voice of my Friend. As always, I was never alone to fight this battle. Quietly, I asked, "Jesus, what do I do?" He answered with a picture instead of words. It was just as real as the vision I had in the hospital nearly ten years before this night.

I saw a dark hillside with a Cross standing on it. Nothing else was there; just the Cross. I saw a woman walking up the hill, dragging a heavy trash bag. She placed the bag at the foot of the cross. Just as in the previous vision, I knew that woman was me. She left the bag at the Cross and walked slowly down the hill. I watched as red blood flowed down from the Cross. It completely covered the old trash bag. Everything disintegrated. Nothing was left but the Cross on the hill!

If you live in a city, you have a trash service that comes and takes away your trash. But have they ever brought it back?! Their job is to take it away once and for all. That is what the blood of Jesus has done for your sins, your poor choices, and your regrets.

**When the enemy torments you with your past or with wrongs done to you or by you; hear Jesus saying, "Take it to My Cross." When you obey Him, He will fill your mind with His peace.**

## *Prayer*

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Heavenly Father, thank You for removing ALL my sins as far as the east is from the west. I bring my bad memories and accusations to the cross and by Your grace, I leave them there. You said, "It is finished" and I believe You. Thank you for the power of Jesus' blood to heal my mind. I receive Your peace today. In Jesus Name, Amen.



## Chapter 10

# THE WATCHMEN ON THE WALL

*"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness,  
and will hold your hand. I will keep you..."*

*~ Isaiah 42:5 ~*

Since 1984, Aglow Prison Ministry followed the pattern of Jesus when He sent the disciples to bring good news to the world. We knew the value of going "two by two" into jails and prisons (Luke 10:1). We took turns as one talked and the other watched and interceded for the women present. In our large prison chapel services, I especially appreciated seeing our veteran volunteers, standing behind the last row of seats, praying. They knew the value of being a "watchman-on-the-wall."

On most of my trips to Central California Women's Facility (CCWF), I spoke at the Monday evening Aglow meeting in the chapel on the Main Yard. This simple, cinder block building was a valuable gathering place for nearly 100 of the 4,000 inmates, many of whom became our friends over the years.

One Sunday, I volunteered to go with the team to offer services on A-Yard. This was the housing area where inmates lived when they first came to prison. Buses delivered the women from local jails across the state, usually arriving late Saturday night. This meant that the religious services held on Sunday mornings in these housing units were often

## The Higher Call

the first prison experience they had. Whether coming for the first time or returning again, A-Yard was where prison was no longer just a possibility. It had become a stark reality. During their time there, they would be evaluated and later placed throughout the prison system. Many women accepted Jesus for the first time in A-Yard, and this would be my first time there.

When I arrived that Sunday at CCWF, I was surprised to see only two of us: Linda Bombard (one of my favorite "Watchman") and myself. Yet I knew that there was more than one unit needing a Sunday service with worship, the Word, and personal prayer for the women. I slowly realized that I would be doing a service *alone* in an unfamiliar place.

As we walked through the final gate into A-Yard and Linda headed towards her assigned building, I silently began to pray, "Oh Lord, You have been with me in every situation and always gave me helpers. Today, it's just You and me. Please reveal Yourself as I tell them about Your love."

I entered the large, open day room and saw an officer escorting women from their cells to benches that held 50-60 inmates. I introduced myself to the women and noticed looks of recognition on many of their faces. Some began to whisper excitedly, while others looked at me and smiled. I overheard someone say, "She wrote the *Vessels of Honor* book!"

What a relief! God had sent my first book before me when we donated them to California jails! So, I was not a stranger, but a warm, familiar face to many of them.

After leading them in the song "Amazing Grace," I gave my testimony of how Jesus healed my body and heart; and was now my Best Friend. Then, I did something I'd never done before. I said, "I'm sorry that there are too many women for me to lay my hands on each of you, but I know that JESUS is here. I will ask Him to touch you while I stand here and pray for you."

As always, I asked the Lord to bring them peace, comfort, healing and miracles. Then I added, "Please reveal Yourself to them. Let each one feel Your touch as they return to their rooms."



## Chapter 10

During my six-hour drive home to Long Beach, I said, "Thank you, Jesus for revealing Yourself to the women on A-Yard. You were my Watchman-on-the-Wall!"

The next week, I received a letter from CCWF which read: "I was in the Sunday service when you said Jesus would touch us. I didn't even believe Jesus was real, but I felt a Hand on my shoulder while you prayed. I looked around and no one was touching me! When I went to my bunk, I still felt that Hand! JESUS IS REAL. I gave my heart to Him. Thank you for coming."

Later, our co-laborers at California Institute for Women (CIW) in southern California shared a story with me about an inmate who said "Jesus is real because He touched me." So, to assure them that this was quite possible, I told them about my experience on A-Yard in CCWF and the letter that I had received.

The next time I went to CIW myself, a woman excitedly rushed up to me saying, "I'm the one!" "I'm the one!" I couldn't help but laugh as I slowly questioned her, "The one...who?"

"I'm the one Jesus touched!" Her eyes were bright and her voice was filled with joy. I knew she had certainly met my Best Friend!

So, if you ever feel inadequate or afraid when you share spiritual things or pray with someone, always remember you are not alone. Jesus is right there with you. He wants to touch them with His love and healing power.

**You are laborers together for His Kingdom purposes.  
Even if no one else is there,  
He will be your Watchman-on-the-Wall.**

## Prayer

---

Dear Jesus, Thank you that YOU are my "Watchman on the Wall." You know what to pray at all times. Today, show me who You would like to touch with a Scripture, a word of encouragement, or a prayer. You can do great and mighty things beyond what I ask or think. In Your Name, Amen.

## Chapter 11

# I WANT YOU UNTO MYSELF

*"Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you  
the desires of thine heart."*

*~ Psalm 34:7 ~*

For the ten years following my healing, I had to make many adjustments, but there *always* was peace in my spirit. I moved into my parent's home to save money and to be around family. In the beginning, my emotions were still numb and I was not even sure what to do each day. It seemed I just put one foot in front of the other and leaned *hard* on Jesus. He helped me focus.

I made a schedule so that I could teach piano for income and plan special times to enjoy my children and grandchildren. Eventually, God also gave me "daughters" from the prisons and prison ministry that I encouraged, prayed with and counseled. I knew He was leading me like He did the Israelites. Deuteronomy 8:2 described my own journey too: "And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart..."

I began to wonder if God *really* knew what was in my heart? Disappointments and dreams were all mixed-together. Maybe I should

## The Higher Call

ask Him about this? On my next trip to CCWF, while lying in my friend Rachel Bondshu's guest room, I began to talk with Jesus about these things. Several years had now passed. I was tired being alone in apartments. It seemed that my only "normal" home was in my parent's back bedroom!

*Maybe God has a mate to minister with me?* Although it never really seemed His plan, I did have some opportunities I could pursue. My thoughts were suddenly interrupted with a clear word from Him. "Earlene, you can live the ordinary life, and I can work it out..."

### **...But if you go My way, you'll see MIRACLES!"**

I laughed, "Lord, you know I want to see miracles! What choice is that?" My mind had a picture of a little old lady, still traveling up and down highways, just going into prisons. "Oh dear," I thought, "I hope that's not my future!"

Then, I recalled one specific day after the hospital miracle when I walked through my beautiful Yellow Farmhouse with my hands raised in the air. I was full of joy and I kept saying, "Jesus I love you so much. You can have everything! You can have my house. You can have my beloved theater organ and piano. You can have all my heart. *I just want to follow You!*" I thought I had already given Him everything. So, what else did He mean now?

### **This was the gentle answer I heard: "I want you unto Myself."**

Immediately, I felt God's overwhelming love the same as that night in the hospital. My answer was simple, "Jesus, I love You so much. I want to see miracles. *I choose to go Your way.*"

However, as real as this all was, I knew that I'd need God's help with my emotions to follow through with this decision. I prayed, "Please take my desires out of my heart, and put Yours in there." I felt peace, so I continued praying, "Lord, can you give my emotions a 'spiritual anesthetic' for a while?" You know, like the dentist does?

God answered my question while driving home. As I cried and prayed, I felt healing oil from the Holy Spirit pouring over my heart. Suddenly, words came out of my mouth that I did not even understand. I said, "Lord, put a poultice on my heart!" With my left hand on my heart, I just kept repeating it over and over. The next day, I asked a medical friend, "What is a poultice?"

Her answer astounded me. "It is an old-fashioned remedy, like a salve. You apply it to wounds and it draws out the poison while it heals the wound." God knew what I needed!

**When we ask God to put His desires in our heart,  
He causes us to want what He wants.  
This kind of praying is vital to our spiritual growth.**

Only God knew His future for me and my desires in the moment could bring me harm. His way was to truly heal my hurting emotions, then put His desires in my restored heart. He just used a different kind of method that brought a new meaning to Jeremiah 30:17, "For I will restore health to you, and heal you of your wounds, says the Lord."

Perhaps you wonder why things are not working in your life as you planned? Or perhaps you have been waiting for an answer you feel God promised, but something just does not feel right? Do not be afraid to ask Him what HE wants for you. If you CHOOSE to go His way, I promise that you will find real peace and joy, and you will see miracles!

## *Prayer*

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Dear Heavenly Father, I am not sure what Your plans are for me, but I want to do Your will, I believe nothing is too hard for You.

Please replace my desires with those You know are BEST for me. Pour Your healing oil over any emotional wounds. I want to be a blessing to others. In Jesus Name, Amen.



## Chapter 12

# AMAZING CONFIRMATION

*"Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth  
by Your great power and outstretched arm.  
There is nothing too hard for You"  
~ Jeremiah 32:17 ~*

God often has a sense of humor with His timing. Sometimes, we wait a long time to see Him fulfill His promises. And sometimes He surprises us! That's what He did when He confirmed His special word to me. He wanted me to *never* forget! When God gave me that choice in 1995 as I prayed in Rachel's guest bedroom, He had said, "If you go My way, you'll see miracles." I expected Him to fulfill this sometime in the future, but God did it immediately!

The day after this encounter with the Lord, I joined the CCWF Monday night Aglow Team in the Main Yard chapel. Everyone was singing and worshipping as I led an old song from the organ with such beautiful words, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. There's just something about that Name..."

Suddenly, an inmate collapsed on a bench next to the wall. Our team leader, Sandy, (who later became a prison chaplain) rushed over to her and realized she was very sick. Sandy immediately called for an officer on the yard and a female guard responded in seconds. She ordered all

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the inmates out of the chapel, where they stood quietly in a group and prayed. I continued to play "There's Something about that Name."

Suddenly we heard the officer say, "Oh no! She's stopped breathing!"

A call went out for the paramedics, but because of the size of the prison, it took quite a while for them to get there. By the time they arrived, the inmate had been lifeless for at least 15 minutes. The medical team placed her limp body on a gurney and wheeled her out of the chapel. The first officer on the scene walked quietly alongside and passed silently through the group of stunned inmates.

Not far down the pathway, the silence was broken when she shouted, "Thank God! She's breathing again!"

The paramedics took the inmate to the nearest hospital and the officer kindly allowed us to continue the service. We said nothing. We just softly sang worship songs until time to leave. We knew we were in God's holy presence. He had shown us His power over death. During the drive back up the mountain, Sandy, Rachel and I could hardly speak.

In my heart, I secretly *knew* this was the confirmation God had promised me... and it was truly amazing.

Later, we learned that the female officer visited the inmate in the hospital daily. When the inmate returned to prison, she said, "I have repented. Jesus told me that He loves me. I saw myself on the bench in the chapel, and heard the women praying. I saw a light and moved towards it. A Voice told me to stop. I saw the feet of the Person speaking and I knew it was Jesus. There were scars on his feet. He said, "Go back. Tell them I am real...and I love them."

**When you go *His* way, you too will see miracles!**



## Prayer

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Dear God, I'm amazed at Your love for your children and for me. Nothing is too hard for you! I trust You for things You have spoken to my heart. I choose to believe You for the answers. Show me how to pray that I can see miracles in my life and in the lives of others. In Jesus Name, Amen.



## Chapter 13

# IN HIS TIME

*"To everything there is a season, and a time for everything under the sun."  
~ Ecclesiastes 3:1 ~*

I love to teach on hearing God's voice. It is the Holy Spirit who speaks to our spirit. We often miss His voice because the sound is similar to our own voice. The words are usually short and to the point, but most of all, there is a sense of peace.

When God's still, small voice comes to your heart, pay attention and try to remember what He says. Make a note of it as soon as you can. Often, the word is for you today. Sometimes it is for the future. Don't discount simple nudging, thoughts or words that come to mind.

**Your choices today can have a big effect on the doors  
God opens tomorrow!**

I remember such a time in 1999, as I was eagerly watching from my Temecula balcony for a big truck. Ten years ago, I had met Marie, founder of the Shepherd Foundation. She published the life-story of her husband, Phil Thatcher in the *Under Arrest* books for incarcerated men, giving them to chaplains free of charge. It was her ministry. I wrote

## The Higher Call

letters for her and mailed individual books. Her young friend, Tim, made large deliveries to the chaplains at conferences. Today, my own book for women, *Vessels of Honor*, was being delivered to my garage. It seemed like a dream come true; and it was!

I knew this book could *only* have been written because I obeyed God's still, small voice in some difficult, uncertain situations. I remembered times when God gave me specific choices to make. Looking back, I was happy I had listened and made the choices I made. Today, I was very glad I had obeyed!

After Marie died, we had felt that God wanted to continue the legacy of The Shepherd Foundation. It was an established non-profit organization and if I continued distributing their books, I would be able to receive a small salary through donations. I could finally move from my mother's back bedroom to my own apartment with a garage!

I felt God wanted me to move to a fresh, new area, away from sad memories. After talking this over with Jesus, I decided on a location where I had a few friends, and could drive easily to several women's prisons. I chose Temecula, a growing town between San Diego and Riverside. In the Luiseño Indian language, "Temecula" means "sunlight through the mist." It proved true for 22 years.

My move was a lesson in walking step-by-step with Jesus. I put my name on apartment lists and waited six months for the one I really wanted. It was on a hill above the post office so I could easily mail *Under Arrest* books for The Shepherd Foundation. When the complex became available, my friend and I walked and prayed through the model.

We asked God for a little miracle to put me here.

When we returned to the office manager, she asked if I was deciding where to place my furniture. I chose not to say that I had sold all of my furniture, except an upright piano and a sofa. I just replied, "No, we were praying."

She jumped up from her desk, and excitedly exclaimed, "You're a CHRISTIAN?! I just got Born Again last week! I want YOU in here!"

There was the miracle! God gave me His favor with the office manager to overcome the impossible financial qualifications that an apartment here would require!

She asked me several questions, so I shared my miracle-healing and how God led me to women in prison. The manager listened intently, then immediately began working on a rental agreement. It didn't matter to her how small my teaching income was, nor did she question the limited money I received from the non-profit I worked for. God encouraged this new Christian to give me the keys to a lovely two bedroom, two bath upstairs apartment with a beautiful view!

I could see the San Jacinto mountains in the east and watch the sun set behind the hills where my family lived on the other side, near the coast. The apartment had a large balcony which I later named my "Prayer Arsenal" (and it would live up to its name!)

Just think: God had prepared this new home long *before* I ever left the Yellow Farmhouse!

Now as I stood watching the men unload *Vessels of Honor* books, I again heard the still, small Voice of the Holy Spirit say to my heart,

**"Earlene, the books will go where you cannot go."  
One simple sentence. Such a big promise.**

In the years to come, we reprinted *Vessels of Honor* three times in English and once in Spanish. I have personally delivered hundreds of books to California Women's Prisons and given them to our volunteers for jails, youth authorities and women's transitional homes in many states. Copies have been sent to other countries in both English & Spanish. The Spanish *Vessels of Honor* books are taken by my own nephew into El Salvador on his mission trips.

In 2012, *Vessels of Honor II* was printed. That book contained inmate testimonies of women from Valley State Prison for Women's Leadership Class, which I taught for Chaplain Sandy Sebesta. It also has updates of the original paroled women from the first book. All of them are miracles

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of the power of God's love. For many years, donations to Shepherd Foundation provided books free of charge to prison ministries.\*

The stories I've heard and letters I've received are proof of God's faithfulness, mercy and grace. Many people have met Jesus, encountered Him as their Healer, and have been set free from bondages, because the Holy Spirit met them through the pages of a *Vessels of Honor* book.

And God continues to fulfill His promise now with *this* book!

If you want God to fulfill His Word in YOUR life, I encourage you to ask, trust, and obey Him. Whether it's a word from Jesus to your own heart as mine was, or it is one of the many beautiful promises from the Scriptures...

**Hold on to Your promises. Learn to be patient and wait for His timing and way. Thank Him daily as you submit to His will. You will see your miracle!**

*"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise."*

*~ Hebrews 10:35-36*

## Prayer

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Dear God, thank You for your exceedingly great and precious promises. As I follow You, I trust You to bring them to pass in Your time and in Your way. Help me to trust the way You work them out in my life. You are my trustworthy Promise Keeper. In Jesus name, Amen.

\*Content from *Vessels of Honor* and *Vessels of Honor II* is now available free of charge at [www.the-higher-call.com](http://www.the-higher-call.com)







*Part 2*

**LEADING WITH A  
HIGHER CALL**



# LEADING WITH A HIGHER CALL

*by Allison Bown*

When Jesus described people of influence, He said,

**“...he who is greatest among you shall be your servant...  
~ Matthew 23:10 ~**

Leaders who choose a Higher Call are those who lead like Jesus. His authority didn't come from a diploma, title or platform. It came from His deeply personal relationship with His Father: “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, *for He taught them as one having authority*, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28-29).

Later on, His disciples would be recognized by the same quality. Even though most of them were “uneducated and untrained men,” the leaders of the day marveled at how they spoke and taught. And then they realized: they had been with Jesus (Acts. 4:13).

**Study, training and giftedness are good, but they are  
not a substitute for the relational authority that comes  
from lovingly trusting God most and sharing  
His joy in serving others.**

## The Higher Call

A stage or platform is not required. Just as Jesus did, you can be a leader in a godly conversation, demonstrate His kindness to someone at work or recognize a person in distress and help them. You can see a need in a neighborhood, hospital, school or prison and ask, "Father, what do You want me to do here?"... and then lead the way in doing that.

When people meet leaders like this, they don't leave informed, but *transformed* by an encounter with Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). By your attitude, words and actions, people can "taste and see that the Lord is good." (Psalm 34:8) You've opened up a space for them to encounter more because you were willing to go first in your own life with God.

In Part 2, you'll read the stories of everyday leaders like this: joyfully serving and loving others because God has so wonderfully loved and cared for them.

**When you make this choice,  
others may be more well known.**

**But at the end of the age: God will honor you.**

*"...Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,  
and all these things shall be added to you."*

*~ Matthew 6:33 ~*

## Chapter 14

# REMEMBER HIS WONDERFUL WORKS

One summer in 2018, I received a phone call from Lee Krueger's daughter. "Earlene, I wanted to tell you that we brought Mama to our home. She is on her way to heaven. I thought you might want to visit her before she leaves us."

As I drove to Corona, my mind returned to 1984 when the monthly Prayer meetings for prison ministry began at Lee's comfortable home in Buena Park. She had resigned from the Aglow leadership board of Orange County to follow God's call to take Aglow to incarcerated women. I still have the "Letter of Invitation" to the first official Aglow Prison Ministry Prayer & Training Meeting, written by Mary Andrews, Lee's prayer partner.

By the end of that year, a team of women began Aglow services at the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC) in Norco. Within 10 years, Aglow Prison Ministry had teams in all five women's state prisons from the Northern California Women's Facility (NCWF) to California Institute for Women (CIW) in the south. There were also teams in local jails, youth, and juvenile facilities providing times of worship, Bible teaching and praying for inmates. Although Lee never personally saw the amazing plan of God in those facilities, I delightfully tried to bring her exciting reports any time I visited her over the next 30 years.

## The Higher Call

Few people knew about the unique relationship between Lee and myself. She and my sister were Aglow friends and prayed together for my healing before we ever met. When God miraculously healed my body and called me to a mission field, I never expected that place would be with my sister's friend Lee, going into women's prisons! When we recognized what He had done, we were amazed at His meticulous planning.

I could travel quite often because of my piano teaching job, so I joyfully drove throughout the state, visiting paroled inmates and joining local teams in prison. I loved to return and tell Lee about miracles God was doing. Each time her reaction was the same. She simply said, "WOW!"

For our last visit, the Lord impressed me to do just as I always did when we met: tell Lee of the great things God was doing. I treasure this memory. Her little body was propped up in a big comfortable chair. She looked as if she were asleep. I sat beside her and whispered in her ear, "Lee, this is Earlene. I came to tell you that God is doing miracles in the prisons." She slowly turned her head towards me and I continued, "I can't thank *you* enough for starting the Aglow Prison Ministry. It's been the joy of my life...and I'm still doing it in my eighties."

She opened her eyes, and I heard her softly say, "WOW! I fully expect to hear that same response when we share stories together in Heaven!

*"He has made His wonderful works to be remembered;  
the Lord is gracious and full of compassion."*

*~ Psalm 111:4 ~*

## Chapter 15

# **GOD GIVES US PARTNERS**

Nestled among the redbud trees, standing in a huge yard overlooking the highway a few miles from Yosemite was the Bondshu house. I had no idea that God had chosen this mountain place as a second home for me during the next 10 years. I certainly was not aware how vital Rachel Bondshu's guest room would be for making the choice to go God's way and see miracles in Aglow Prison Ministry. God had planned it long before I began traveling from Long Beach to those beautiful mountains in 1990.

When Aglow Prison Ministry founder, Lee Krueger, asked me to look for someone to replace her as President, I immediately thought of Rachel Bondshu, our Field Coordinator for the central valley of California. A huge women's prison in Chowchilla (CCWF) was being built which would house 4,000 inmates. We had already trained teams that were conducting Bible studies in local jails. Many of those inmates would be sent to the new prison. I knew that Rachel was God's choice to lead these waiting Aglow teams.

It was an exciting time! We held monthly Prayer meetings, trained volunteers, and scheduled English and Spanish services with chaplains. God had called Rachel for this assignment and I knew I was to be her pillar and stand-by support. I was invited to help her pioneer this work

## The Higher Call

whenever I could leave my piano students. Soon, I began arriving at Rachel's home once a month and stayed for several days. So much would be accomplished in the guest room at her home. It was truly "The War Room," ... and it was all part of God's plan for miracles!

Each month, I drove up the mountain and Rachel set aside time to meet for prayer in her guest bedroom. We shared all that we were thankful for and made our list of Prison Ministry needs to take before the Lord. We saw Him turn impossible situations around, change the hearts of chaplains and leaders, and literally raise the dead in a prison chapel! It was in that same War Room where God revealed His plans to me personally. He gave me a difficult choice for my life, and Rachel lovingly prayed me into it.

During her time as President, a second huge prison was built across the street from CCWF in 1995: Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW). Our former Aglow team leader, Sandy Sebesta had trained to become a chaplain in the prison system, and later applied for the job of VSPW chaplain. Rachel and I prayed she would get the assignment and God answered our prayer! I taught a leadership class under her supervision for inmates with life sentences. God even kept Chaplain Sandy there to become Chaplain for the men when the California prison system was reorganized in 2014.

Whether in "The War Room" or around Rachel's dining room table together with friends, God always joined us. I knew that I would never be alone because I had Jesus, but what a joy it was to have Rachel as a partner for so many years.

We traveled many miles together and we saw God answer many Prayers. Today, we travel together-in-the-Spirit through Prayer on the phone. We remain as Advisors to the Aglow Prison Board and continue to expect to see God work miracles. It has been an honor to follow the Higher Call together.

God has times where He wants us "unto Himself," but He also loves the fellowship of believers. Jesus Himself was given a team of 12 by

His Father to be His first disciples (John 17:6). God provided Paul with Barnabas and later Silas, Timothy and Lydia to help him in his work.



**If Christian friends and partners in God's work  
is a desire of your heart, then ask Him.**

If it is your time to be His alone, then enjoy every minute of it. He will connect you with others in His time. There may not be many who will want His Higher Call, but that's okay. You will always treasure the ones you find!

*"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every  
Prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in  
the gospel from the first day until now."*

*~ Philippians 1:3-~*



## Chapter 16

# SHARING THE LOAD

My life really slowed down when I resigned from the Aglow Prison Board in 2002 and I struggled to find God's assignment for me. I no longer needed to travel to board meetings or conferences.

Then, I was invited to help with "The Journey," a seminar written by Patty Rose, our new Aglow Prison Ministry President who stepped up when Rachel Bondshu retired. Her understanding of a woman's need for self-esteem in Jesus brought a fresh, new dimension to the ministry. Patty knew what it meant to be homeless, in jail and dependent on substances to numb intensely painful experiences. Jesus truly saved her and along with godly counsel and support, she was transformed and a "vessel of honor" for the Lord.

Patty knew how to keep it real and let Jesus shine. Her vision for "The Journey" was authentic, practical and powerful for the inmates that attended. After intense days of teaching and prayer, we enjoyed eating, laughing and sharing before we went back to the hotel each night to rest. I had really missed this fellowship!

One day I received a call from Dennis, Patty's husband. I was surprised to hear him say, "Earlene, I won't let Patty go to the National Aglow Conference this year unless you go with her." I was aware that Patty had

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battled severe asthma since childhood. Her testimony was powerful of how God had kept her time and time again. But her health challenges were becoming more serious, and now she needed to use a breathing machine. Dennis continued, "If you will be her 'Lumper,' she can go to this conference."

"What in the world is a 'Lumper?'" I asked. "Well, it's someone who carries a load for another person," answered Dennis. "Will you carry Patty's breathing machine and see that she uses it daily there?" God was giving me another assignment, and I knew this one with Patty would be fun!

Patty and I flew to Milwaukee, Wisconsin for the International Aglow Conference. In between each service, we found a little spot to sit while she used the breathing machine. The women who passed by had the funniest expressions and we tried not to show how much we were amused. They didn't seem to know whether to stop and pray, or just pretend they didn't see us!

I always felt God's sense of humor when I was with Patty. One of my favorite experiences was at the conference in Charleston, West Virginia. What an odd sight it must have been to see two nice ladies walking alone, carrying large Aglow bags, at night through a strange part of town. We laughed together as Patty said, "Oh no, Ma! We're lost and clueless!"

It was even funnier when we told our board members that we had hitched a ride with a strange man! Patty shocked them as she explained, "Well, I figured it was safe to get in his truck when Earlene said he looked like Santa Claus." I always laughed as I remember those delightful times with Patty. She was a ray of sunshine on some hard, dark days.

At the 2014 Prison Ministry Retreat, we made plans for Patty to visit me in Temecula. We wanted to pray about her next assignment, since she had finished hers with Aglow. What we didn't realize was that God knew that Patty had finished all her assignments. Before we could meet and without much warning, Patty went home to be with Jesus.

## Chapter 16

Patty often shared a scripture that was a comfort to me after she left because it had become reality for her! Philippians 3:1: "That I might know Him, and the power of His resurrection." Someday, I will share eternal adventures again with Patty, but until then I choose to follow her example and finish my God-given assignments faithful and well.

No matter what God calls you to do or where He leads you, never forget the JOY of the journey, recognize His sense of humor and delight in sharing the load of the Higher Call.

*"For You are our glory and joy."*

*~ 1 Thessalonians 2:20 ~*



## Chapter 17

# THE BEST IS YET TO COME

I met my first prison daughter, Jill Meskimen, in 1984. We walked together with Jesus while she was in prison, and now for more than 35 years in ministry. One of my sweetest rewards is to hear Jill say to me as she leaves on an assignment, "You're in my pocket, Earlene!"

In the early days, while being trained by Chaplain Steve Lowe of Pacific Youth Ministry, Orange County Aglow women began going into juvenile halls...and I joined them. When Mary Andrews invited me to a local prison with a charismatic Catholic prison ministry, I said, "Yes." My simple obedience resulted in the fulfillment of God's call to a mission field. The Protestant chaplain was delighted that I could play piano, so I helped him in Sunday Chapel services and prayed with the inmates after church services. One day, he asked if I would help him with a water baptismal ceremony.

It was a day I'll never forget! All I did was wrap a towel around each woman as she stepped out of the pool, but God's presence was powerful! Some women were crying, some were shouting, and each one was aware that she had made a public declaration to live her life for Jesus Christ. We sang the song "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" and, for a moment, I forgot I was in a prison!

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What I didn't know was that Jill was one of those women that was baptized that day! Who would have dreamed that I was putting a towel around someone who would become my spiritual daughter and friend? Who would have imagined that God was preparing a husband in San Quentin prison for her? Who would have seen that they would minister together in the Reno Jail? God planned all this! Jill would hold various positions on the Aglow Prison Ministry Board, and later become President of the ministry that mentored her in prison. I could never have imagined it, but God did!

Jill is a living testimony of a leader who has followed God's Higher Call. She has encouraged thousands of women in prisons and jail that where we start doesn't determine where we can finish in Jesus!

In 1995, Jill's amazing story was written in the Aglow Connection Magazine. I kept close contact by driving from Long Beach to Truckee, California for visits during the first 10 years after her parole. I know God used our loving friendship to keep me encouraged in going into the prisons.

Over the years, I attended her beautiful wedding to Les Meskimen, played with her two children Jessica and Sam, and shared many prison board meetings, Aglow conferences and retreats. The Aglow Prison Ministry grew mightily, and God gave Jill great favor. People forgot she was ever in prison! Yet God never forgot his plan for Jill. God has proved His purpose!

Her story will always remind me of the story of Joseph in Genesis 50:20. When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, he said, *"You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, to save many people alive."* (Genesis 50:20)

As I grew older, I couldn't drive so far and I was disappointed to not be able to spend time with Jill. Sometimes, I would complain a bit because I missed our visits so much. Her loving answer remains in my heart:

***"Earlene, just remember we will have all eternity to share special times together!"***



## Chapter 17

Jill knew that God is not finished with His plans for His children. He knows the good future He has for us (Jeremiah 29:11). No matter what occurs in this life (or what doesn't), we have the HOPE of a New Heaven and a New Earth... and all of eternity with Jesus and with each other.

Whenever times are hard, God is present with us now; but we can also persevere because we know a Higher Call truth: The best is yet to come!

*"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new...'"*  
~ Revelation 21:1, 4-5 ~



## Chapter 18

# ONE MORE MOUNTAIN TO CLIMB

Recently, as I lay on my little sofa by the windows in my lovely home, I thought about my move from Temecula. I was aware of God's hand in everything, but today was difficult. The chronic arthritis pain was more severe, and I realized that I was lonely for my family and friends.

Although I knew this was God's plan for me now, it was not what I had expected. And as I had that thought, an old song came to mind: "*One more river to cross, One more mountain to climb...*" And then I realized: I must keep following Jesus...without complaint.

The phone rang. I really did not want to talk to anyone, so I stayed on the sofa. Then, I heard a cheerful voice speaking, "Hi, it's Jenny! How are you doin'?"

Immediately, I hurried to pick up the phone. God had planned a visitor today for me after all! It was my delightful spiritual *granddaughter*!

Many years ago, Jenny Travis had come with one of our leaders, Cathie Dumas, to our Long Barn Retreat and I adopted her as my own beloved helper. Whatever I needed, she was right there to help (which was a special treat for a woman who lived alone!)

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I knew God had sent her. It was a fun, unique relationship. I shared my thoughts with Jenny and she listened without judgment. I offered advice to her and it didn't matter whether she took it or not because she listened so politely. And we laughed a lot!

Although our age difference was great, we had much in common. We were both teachers and we *loved* kids! She told me stories and showed me pictures of her nieces and nephews. Later, she met my Long Beach family and they are friends today. She and one of my granddaughters even have the same birthday! I'm grateful for all the wonderful times we shared in ministry.

When I retired, and could no longer travel up north, I never dreamed my spiritual granddaughter would still continue to check on my needs through phone calls, and sometimes even a visit. It is God's great plan to give us natural and spiritual families!

We read of the precious relationship in the books of I & II Timothy between Paul and his spiritual son. In his last years in a Roman prison, Paul asked Timothy to bring his writings and his coat, but it is obvious to me that he longed for a visit most of all. He writes in II Timothy 4:9, "Do your best to come to me quickly."

### **God can bring us encouragement and joy in the most difficult parts of our journey.**

I spoke with Jenny recently, and she shared some of what she has learned as we've traveled together. This is what she had to say in her own words:

*"What I remember most at those first Aglow Prison Ministry retreats was that Earlene and Rachel trusted me, even though they didn't really know who I was! From the beginning, I wasn't valuable to them because I had a position and I wasn't less valuable for the lack of one. I had value simply because I was there. That made an impression.*

*Over the years, that's really all I did: I showed up. I helped wherever help was needed at retreats and trainings because I love people and I love helping people. What I didn't realize for a long time was that I was*

*also learning. I was in the back of the room during the leadership meetings, I was able to hear the heart of the prison ministry and what they saw God doing. At some point, I became aware that I was often seeing and sensing the same things that the leaders would talk about after a conference or training... and it was very affirming.*

*God was training me and I didn't even realize it!*

*The funny part was that even though I was around the prison ministry, I had never considered actually going into a jail. I felt disqualified because I didn't have the life experiences I heard in so many of the wonderful testimonies. What did I have to contribute?*

*Yet, I had a growing sense that the Lord was calling me to not just watch, but to become part of the jail team...and it wasn't a joyful thought. "Lord," I prayed (with more than a little frustration) "I don't have anything to give these women in jail. I just don't!"*

***"How about you give them Me?" He gently answered.***

It was then that I realized: I had foolishly made this "ministry" thing about me, instead of about Him. It was a pivotal moment in my life.

Jesus said in John 4:37-38, "For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors." I was only responsible to do my part and trust God with the rest.

These wonderful leaders also trained me to realize that resistance here and there is a good sign that something worth resisting is happening! They called unexpected events or delays "fruit flies," those little annoying gnats that swirl around and threaten to get in your eyes or mouth. They're no fun, but they don't really do any harm.

***In fact, if you're going to be fruitful in this life,  
you can expect "fruit flies!"***

*We can minimize what the enemy is trying to destroy by seeing these as simply minor hindrances, instead of considering them spiritual warfare*

## The Higher Call

*or “backlash” when God has done wonderful things. Because they freely shared their experiences, I learned to only consider God’s good fruit, not what the enemy’s response might be. As Earlene always said, “Learn to just bat them away!”*

*Eventually, God opened the door to leadership roles in my local jail and as the Director of Special Events for Aglow Prison Ministry. When those opportunities came, I realized how much I had learned simply by watching, listening... and showing up. I thought it was just about helping the leaders, but all the while, God was training me to be a leader as well.*

*It seems natural for my friendship to have continued with Earlene over the years. We’ve become family. I call her my “God Grandma” and she says I’m her first spiritual granddaughter! She also says how encouraged she is by our conversations. But the truth is, I feel like I’m the one who has been blessed. That’s how sowing and reaping works with Jesus!” ~ Jenny*

God wants us to make it to the top of that mountain! I like to believe Timothy made it to the prison and shared special days with Paul before God took him to Heaven.

Perhaps you are struggling with loneliness, or you feel exhausted from climbing your mountain? *Don’t be afraid to ask God to send a fellow-climber to you.* You’ll discover that just a smile, a voice, or a touch will push you higher.

As I discovered with Jenny and so many others, God will provide everything you need. And you will become even closer to Jesus as you follow His Higher Call together.



## The Higher Call



*Part 3*

**FROM PRISON TO  
HIGH PLACES**

## The Higher Call

# FROM PRISON TO HIGH PLACES

— *by Allison Bown* —

In life, we often remember most clearly what happened last. It's the reason that "saving the best for last" is a way of showing honor and value... and that is the case here.

These are the stories of women who have followed God's Higher Call from prisons to the High Places of relationship with God in Christ. They had no earthly advantages but have become rich in the reality of His grace, mercy and love. They love Him because they always remember how He loved them first.

Each woman here is a miracle, a living testimony of the *power* of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are fellow travelers in God's Higher Call, true Warriors and Champions in all that really matters, continuing to grow up into all things in Christ and helping others do the same.

Just try asking any one of them if there's something that's too difficult for God. Then, watch their eyes. They will brighten and a slow smile will emerge. Each of them will tell you in her own way, "Oh no, my friend. It's safe to believe. With God, *all* things are possible. ALL things..."

## The Higher Call

Even if they don't say anything else, you'll believe them. Like the disciples of old, their authority comes from having walked with Jesus.

*"For I **know** in whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day."*

*~ 1 Timothy 1:12 ~*

## Chapter 19

# MERCY SAID "NO!"

### Viola's Story

I wasn't even sure I could drive my car to the gas pump without hitting it, but the needle was close to empty. Through my drug-induced haze, waves of anxiety and fear threatened to sweep me away. I knew I needed help... not tomorrow or next week, but right *now*.

As the attendant came out to fill my car, I approached him in desperation. "Please sir, can you call the police to come and get me? I'm so, so high. I shouldn't be driving. Please, help me."

The man looked away. Even in my altered state, I could tell he was struggling for an answer. "I'm sorry, but no. I don't want to get involved in any kind of police business" he muttered as he walked back inside the service station. "Nope. Just can't do that."

I returned to my car in absolute and utter hopelessness. There was no one, *no one* who was willing to help me; not even to call the police and have me arrested. "It's time to end this misery once and for all," I thought as I turned the key in the ignition.

## The Higher Call

And then I remember that my daughter's purse was in the trunk of my car.

"I need to return that to her first," I thought. I remembered a mutual friend who lived close to her. I could leave the purse with her, as I didn't want to go to my daughter's home in this condition. There had been enough damage done to our relationship over the years. On what I planned to be the last night on earth, I certainly didn't need to do any more harm.

That one simple decision probably saved my life, not just that night, but forever.

Life had not been easy before all this. My mother did the best she could, but she was not a warm, nor encouraging parent. I was a daddy's girl for sure. Even when I heard my parents fighting; even when I had to wipe the blood from my mother's face after he left, I still felt that it was my father who loved me most.

When he left our family, I begged to go with him; but both he and my mother knew that would not be the best for me. It's the one time I remember her standing up to him. She was loving me the best she knew how when she did that. Though I still visited my dad, everything was different. Other men came in and out of our lives who were not kind and their abuse left deep, traumatic wounds on my soul, body and mind.

I was angry! So angry that life should be this way. Angry that my mother had died when I was 14 years old. Angry that my life was on a reckless path of terrible choices and drugs to deaden the pain. Angry and ashamed that my young adult children were tangled up in my nightmare.

So, it was time to make what I felt was the best choice for everyone: to end my life... after I dropped off my daughter's purse.

Just before I pulled into our friend's apartment complex, an undercover police car drove past. I was quite familiar with them, as they were with me. I hurriedly gave the purse to my friend with a garbled explanation, hoping to get away before I was recognized. But, they knew my car and

shortly after I pulled back out onto the street, there were flashing lights in my rear view mirror and I was pulled over.

I knew what I had planned to do and I had no intention of getting out of my car. As the officer reached in to turn off the ignition, I hit the accelerator.

### **That's when mercy began to say "no."**

By God's grace, that officer was not hurt as I sped off. As I raced on to the freeway, the police followed, lights and sirens blazing. Ahead was a high overpass, narrow and curved. To my left was a truck with an empty cargo trailer. Slightly ahead was a semi-truck. No shoulder. No room to spare on either side... and certainly no room in between them.

But I wasn't going to be caught, so I hit the accelerator again. I have a vague memory of passing through and coming out the other side, but no more detail than that remains. I've driven on that overpass many times since, and every time, I marvel at the miracle: there is *no* room for three vehicles side by side. Not even three economy-sized cars, much less two large trucks... and me.

That night however, after driving through, I just drove on. My hope was to gain enough speed to crash into concrete support somewhere up the road before I was caught. When suddenly, my car began to slow down. I was out of gas! When the attendant wouldn't call the police, I had left the station!

I steered the car towards the grass-filled median while the officers surrounded me, guns drawn. There was a swirl of dirt and grass and handcuffs. I'm sure the sergeant amongst them was already making a mental list of the charges, knowing it would be a long one.

Mercy had said "no" to ending my life, but in the county jail, God's mercy started saying "yes."

That's where I met Chaplain Sandy with her friends Earlene, Rachel, Allison and other kind women who showed me the love of Jesus. I

## The Higher Call

didn't want to listen at first, but in the small quarters of the lockdown area (on suicide watch), there wasn't much choice.

One of the only good things about being in absolute spiritual darkness is that the smallest Light shines brightly. Those women never pushed, they just loved. Eventually, the love of God and His hope began to take hold in my heart. Against all reason, I encountered God's massive, unchanging love for me.

I met the real Jesus and He introduced me to His good Father... and a Helper and Teacher in the Holy Spirit.

During my nine years in prison, God would transform my life. I would learn the living reality of one of my most treasured scriptures:

**Psalm 51 "...according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin... Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness... create in me a clean heart... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation."**

What I didn't realize at the time was that my future was written in that Psalm. Verse 13 says, "Then I will teach transgressors Your ways and sinners will be converted to You... a broken and contrite heart You will not despise."

In prison, a dream began to form in my heart. I wanted to have a home for women who were transitioning from jail and prison into the world outside, so they could learn to make the same choices that God would make for them. To love and train them as God had loved and trained me through all the wonderful ministries that came into Valley State Prison over the years.

**God's mercy said "yes" to that dream because He was the one who gave it to me.**



It hasn't been easy. Overseeing three (soon to be four) transitional living homes for women is an enormous challenge: financially, legally and spiritually. In the decade since I was incarcerated, I've faced cancer and had Jesus the Healer restore me. Many women have been helped over the years, but there are many disappointments too in this work.

Yet as I have followed the Lord in His Higher Call, He has *always* been faithful. When I grow weary, He brings His joy to strengthen me. I sense His presence in the most everyday moments, and I know I am never alone.

When I look back at the night so many years ago, I see Jesus again and again. He was there at the gas station. He was with the officer who identified my car. He protected the other drivers, policemen; all of us that night, from serious injury or death.

God saw me that night as I am today: overwhelmed only by His mercy and grace, His beloved, His servant helping others discover life with a clean heart. He saw my relationships with my children and grandchildren restored. Jesus saw me at the worst moment in my life, when the enemy had come to kill me... and He stepped in and said, "No, I'm not letting her go."

Here's the Truth about that: God so loved the *world* that He gave His Son, Jesus, for us to be set free from sin and experience life with Him (John 3:16 and Romans 5:8). But I had to *accept* this as true. I had to stop hiding my shame, trying to fix the hurt myself and admit I *needed* a kind and loving Savior.

If you've been through some tough times, I encourage you to ask the Lord to show you how He was with you, even in the most difficult places. Let Him show you where His "mercy said, 'no.'" And ask Him what His mercy is saying "yes" to now.

More than anything else Jesus and I want the women we serve\* to know: *you are worth it*. You were worth the price of redemption and Jesus paid it gladly. Poor, rich, with diplomas or without, God paid the *same* highest price for all.

***Everyone is worth everything to Him.***

## The Higher Call

*"Mercy said no  
I'm not going to let you go  
I'm not going to let you slip away  
You don't have to be afraid*

*Mercy said no  
Sin will never take control  
Life and death stood face to face  
Darkness tried to steal my heart away  
Thank You Jesus, Mercy said no."*

*Mercy Said "No"  
Cece Winans  
©2003*

\*In the decade following her parole, Viola has developed and continues to direct transitional homes in the central valley of California, not too far from where this story took place. She is an established leader in her community, partnering with Jesus to practically and spiritually help women learn new "hope steps" in life.

## Chapter 20

# WALKING IN FREEDOM

### Suzy's Story

"Twenty five years to life" was what I heard as the judge's gavel came crashing down. There was a swirl of bailiffs, a shuffle of furniture and the feeling of being whisked away in a bad dream. Before I knew it, I was being processed out of the jail and boarding a bus: a bus headed for Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW).

I still couldn't grasp it, even after months of jails, lawyers and court proceedings. How could the testimony of one woman, a police informant with a history of unreliable reports, be the evidence that convicted me of a murder I had no part in? Even her own sister (who was a local law enforcement officer) said that she was a "pathological liar and a master manipulator." But my attorney didn't bring that into the case and seemed completely overwhelmed most days. What a mess! Yet, I still believed the truth would come out. It *had* to! But that day, it didn't.

Not too long after I arrived at VSPW, my broken-hearted mother passed away. I went to see the prison counselor to request permission to attend her funeral. As real as this nightmare already was, it was about to become worse.

## The Higher Call

"Ms. Mellen," the counselor informed me, "the only way you're going home is in a pine box." I didn't even know what that meant. Apparently, she saw my confusion and continued. "Ms. Mellen, *you have a life sentence without the possibility of parole.* You will never leave this prison until you are dead and they take your body out in a pine box."

I was reeling. Life without the possibility of parole? That's not what I had heard in the courtroom! Slowly, I began to understand: It's not what I heard, but it is what was said. God had protected my heart and probably my sanity by having me hear something different. But even more importantly, that life sentence was man's judgement, not His.

**The enemy wanted me to go home in a pine box,  
but God had other plans.**

For many years, it wasn't easy. There were times I cried almost every night, but by the grace of God, I never lost faith. I met Jesus in prison. He saved me, and one step at a time, He healed me. He healed me from my past and forgave me of the sins I was guilty of. He healed my broken heart, gave me hope and He sent me friends and prison ministers to help me grow strong in Him.

**Most of all, He showed me the value of  
forgiving others as He had forgiven me.  
That's when I began to walk in real freedom.**

About 12 years into my sentence, I received a pair of new shoes. God said, "Get your black marker out." It seemed an odd request, but I did it. "Why am I getting a black marker out, Lord?" "Because," He answered, "I want you to write 'FREEDOM' on the bottom of your shoes."

It was a simple action to write "freedom" on my shoes, but the Holy Spirit knew the power of literally having me "walk in my freedom." Jesus had set me free spiritually and life was now about walking in all of His promises, including His promise that the truth would come out and I would go home...and not in a pine box!

## Chapter 20

Jesus understands injustice. He knows what it feels like to be betrayed. He was unjustly accused and brutally put to death for a crime He did not commit. The people He created and loved didn't recognize Him when He came to save them. Yes, the Lord knows a thing or two about rejection!

Jesus had walked this path before me; and all He was asking of me was to follow Him. When I needed a Comforter, He gave me the Holy Spirit. When I needed a friend, He was the friend who never leaves. When other inmates thought I was nuts for standing on my promises from God, He assured me time and time again, "Don't be afraid. Only believe."

Then, several long term inmates from our prison fellowship were unexpectedly released. Around that same time, I received a letter from Earlene. As always, it was encouraging, but there was one sentence that seemed to lift off the page. "Suzy," she said, "you're the next one to go home."

The funny thing was, I would later learn that after Earlene wrote that, she wrestled a bit with the Lord about sending it. She had no intention of saying something so bold, but the Holy Spirit took over and she trusted Him. I didn't know any of that then, but it confirmed what I felt the Lord had been saying... so I believed it.

I would tell everyone I met, "I'm going home soon." Some people tried to be polite, many rolled their eyes and faithful friends stood with me in my declaration. God and I had walked through some really big valleys and climbed some huge mountains over the years as He healed me of my past and introduced me to my true life in Him. I trusted Him now and *I trusted His timing.*

Through a series of divine interventions, an organization called "Innocence Matters" took on my case - and won. On the day I was set free, the officers said on the loudspeaker, "Go to your nearest television and turn on the news. Ms. Mellen is being set free!" All over the VSPW prison yards and in the housing units, inmates began clapping and doing the "Running Man" dance I was known for.

## The Higher Call

I danced the “Running Man” too that day on the courthouse steps because I was walking out a victory in the natural that God had won in my heart years before. Superior Court Judge Mark Arnold declared, “I believe Susan Mellen is innocent. For that reason, I believe the justice system failed.”\* Yes, it had.

### **The justice system had failed, but Jesus did not. That’s why I could dance.**

One of my inmate friends told me that many of the incarcerated women began to write “freedom” on the bottom of their shoes too. They now knew that they didn’t have to wait for their physical freedom to manifest before experiencing their spiritual freedom in Jesus.

Sometimes I asked God, “Seventeen years, really? Did it have to take that long?” But now I can see the wisdom in His timing. I wouldn’t have learned what I learned or be where I am today without facing every challenge with the Lord behind those walls.

### **When I look back, I would do it again to have what I have today in Jesus.**

It makes me cry to say that, but it’s true. Every time I felt betrayed, confused, invisible and unloved, in every one of those places, God became my hope, my comfort and the One who loved me and stayed with me. Because the loss was so great and I felt so powerless on my own, HE became my everything.

Physically, I was set free on October 10th, 2014: the tenth day of the tenth month. John 10:10 has always been a dear scripture in my life. “The thief does not come except to steal, and kill, and to destroy. But I [Jesus] have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

The enemy tried to steal my life from me. For a time, he succeeded in taking my physical freedom but God gave me my spiritual and emotional freedom during those years of incarceration. My passion now is like Earlene’s, to “never stop telling the story” of God’s faithfulness and to restore hope to those who feel hopeless.

**It's not your address that determines your freedom.  
It's Jesus.**

*"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*

*~ John 8:36 ~*

\*Suzy's full story can be found on The National Registry of Exonerations website:  
<https://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/casedetail.aspx?caseid=4507>





## Chapter 21

# WALKING IN FREEDOM

### *Rhonda's Story*

Winters in California's Central Valley can be windy and raw. While I thanked God for the opportunity to work outside the prison walls in the orchards, days like this one made it tough to stay warm, especially in the early morning hours.

Since our inmate crew was usually at this job before breakfast, our meal was brought to us in an old work truck, battered by bouncing along the dirt roads to our location. No one needed to tell us that breakfast had arrived. We could hear it coming!

That morning, I was the only inmate around as the meal truck arrived. Even if the food had been hopelessly jostled about, sometimes it was still lukewarm... and this morning, anything would help shake the cold.

But when the truck door opened, my heart sank. There was only cold cereal. I knew how this worked: one little box, one small milk carton each.

I looked around and realized I wasn't being watched. The other inmates had yet to arrive and the driver had walked around to the front of the

## The Higher Call

truck. There were obviously more than enough cereal boxes and milk cartons for everyone; so I took two.

As I shoved the extras in my pocket, I justified my decision. Everyone else would get their share. There were few creature comforts in prison and on this bleak morning, they had sent us infinitely small portions of cold food when we had hours of hard, manual labor ahead.

My internal justification list continued. I was doing a seven year sentence for something that was truly an accident. I had met Jesus in prison and was faithfully going to church. I read my Bible. Certainly I deserved this one small luxury.

One of the things I've learned is that when I'm comparing my situation to others and feel I deserve more, I've abandoned the unique path God has for *me*. And that's the only one any of us are really responsible for.

As I walked away from the food truck, I heard Him say so clearly in my heart:

**“Rhonda, haven't I always provided for you?”**

In a moment, I knew it was true. No matter my situation, whether it was just or unjust, I had known God long enough to have experienced His faithfulness. Even this assignment in the prison orchards had been an answer to Prayer. In His kindness, He had blessed me with a job amongst these beautiful trees, which restored my soul daily.

So I stopped right there and answered, “Yes, Lord, You have always provided,” then walked back and returned the extra items before anyone was aware of what I had done.

As I sat against the wall, I bowed my head and gave real thanks for my food. Not only for my portion, but for God's kindness to keep me in His ways. When I looked up, there was a fellow inmate standing in front of me.

“Would you like my cereal and milk?” she asked. “I don't want it.”  
“Sure,” I replied.

Before I could comprehend what was happening, another inmate came over and did the same thing! Now, instead of a double portion of food obtained fraudulently, I had a *triple* portion that was a gift from God!

If you remember only one thing from this story, remember this:

**God's provision is *always* the best provision for you.**

It may not always make sense at the time, it may be different than you imagined or not be like what you see others around you receiving; but you can trust that His ways are higher (and better) than ours. It's a truth that I've never forgotten and that He has always been faithful to.

I saw it again when I had the top bunk above a gang leader in prison. Because there was no ladder, I was in perpetual danger of upsetting her simply by getting on and off my bed. I knew that it was only a matter of time before she and her "lieutenant" would get their retribution. So, I prayed for God's provision.

His answer was not what I anticipated. Suddenly one night, an officer shouted, "Roll up and follow me!" I grabbed my bedding and personal effects and was led to a new room without explanation. Initially, I was relieved; until I realized that many of the women in this room were satanists!

And in that moment, I remember His promise, "Haven't I always provided for you, Rhonda?"

It wasn't easy. My new roommates didn't take one look at me and all magically get saved. Quite the opposite. While the days were hard, the nights could be terrifying.

But I'll tell you what, I learned some new truths about the provision and protection of God! Provision doesn't always mean delivering us from our situations. Like the young men in the fiery furnace of Daniel chapter 3; God may choose to meet you in the flames, not before you reach them.

## The Higher Call

In this situation, God's provision was to allow me to stay behind each week while the rest of my roommates went to a special meal. I had a small bottle of perfume and I used that time to pray and sing over the room, anointing it with my "oil."

He sent His friends to the prison chapel to pray with me and encourage me, like Earlene, Allison, Sandy, Rachel and the women of Aglow. Through them, I not only learned but *experienced* the living truth of a scripture that is central to my life:

*"...each day, the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me, and through each night, I sing His songs, praying to the God who gives me life."  
~ Psalm 42:8 ~*

I learned that much of spiritual warfare is about standing in the peace of God's unfailing love, no matter what storms of life surround you. It's declaring His unchanging goodness, even when you don't understand why things are the way they are.

And when an officer came just as suddenly one day and told me once again to "Roll up," I wasn't surprised (though tremendously grateful) to be sent to a peaceful room, where the Lord gave me a godly bunk mate who helped me grow in my faith even more.

God's words of life to me on that cold, wintery day decades ago have carried me through my transition to life on the outside, the provision of jobs and place to live, through cancer and a difficult marriage.

His love has indeed been unfailing, never-changing and ever-present. Throughout my life, I have known what it is to be bullied, misunderstood, overlooked and rejected. But the love of God and knowing I am "accepted in the Beloved" has just become even more precious because of those situations.

Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who God met *in* the fiery furnace, it's been meeting God *in* the difficulties of life that has allowed me to leave with a soft heart and no smell of bitter "smoke." The only thing I've lost were the bondages of fear, shame and doubt. It's in those places that my Good Father, my Friend Jesus and the Holy Spirit became real to me. (see Daniel 3:25-27)

I'm so honored to be the last story in this book because I want to tell you: the inheritance of Jesus in Earlene, Viola, Allison, Jill, Suzy, myself and so many other women in these stories isn't just for us alone.

**The same God loves you as powerfully and wonderfully  
as He loves any of us.**

That is what I say to people when I share my story. I ask them to look in my eyes because I *know* that they will see and hear Him, not me. That's what the women who ministered to me inside and outside of prison did for me. And I would appreciate the privilege of doing that for you today.

So, take a deep breath and settle your heart. If that's difficult, ask the Holy Spirit to help you.

Imagine that we are sitting in chairs, facing each other.

See all the women you've read about in these stories standing around you, and the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit standing with you, smiling, because they've been looking forward to this moment.

In that place, this is what I would say to you:

"I want you to look in my eyes as I tell you that God loves *you* so very much.

You are not a failure. You are loved beyond anything you have ever known about earthly love.

The love of Jesus will *never* leave you alone or fail to love you just as you are. But He also loves you too much to leave you the way you are.

You will find the heart of God and the love of the cross of Jesus, and you can willingly follow the Lord all the days of your life as the best friendship you could ever know becomes a deeper reality step by step.

*There is nothing God will not forgive you of.*

## The Higher Call

Give Him what pains your heart and He *will* help you.

Right here. Right now, your journey in His Love truly begins in a new way."

You can trust Him, even if no other human has been trustworthy. He will always, *a/ways* provide His best, His unfailing love and give you life. It may not always be easy. But God will *a/ways* be with you too, as you discover the beauty, power and peace of His higher call.

## Epilogue

### ACCEPTING GOD'S HIGHER CALL

The Higher Call begins with Jesus. There is no way to live this life except through Him, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

For some readers, this may all be new to you. For others, you may have heard about Jesus, even attended church or read a Bible. If that's the case, please keep reading and be sure you don't just know about Him, but have had a living encounter with Him. No matter what your experience is:

**If the Jesus that you've read about in these stories seems unfamiliar, He wants you to trust who He *really* is from this day forward.**

It's not complicated. None of us can be good enough for God. The Bible says that there is none perfectly righteous, not one! That's *wonderful news* because it frees us from having to be good enough in our own strength!

God created you because He wanted a family and *loves* you so much. But He also knew that in your own strength, you couldn't be good enough and would need a Savior.

## The Higher Call

So, the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit decided before creation that Jesus, who was fully the Son of God, would become a human, born of a woman and of the Holy Spirit. He would remain God but He would give up all the privileges of being God to come to earth as a baby and grow up, experiencing everything that we do. He would be tempted to go His own way just like we are, but every time, He would choose to do the right thing because He loved His Father and us so much.

Then, He would sacrifice His perfect life for ours. His blood would cover our sins and we could have HIS righteousness. We could become children of God and totally new creations in Christ. We could have the same relationship with the Father that Jesus did on earth, we would be helped by the Holy Spirit as He was and when we died, we would be with Him in heaven forever.

The Bible says that the price of sin in our lives is death. Once Jesus died on the cross in our place, ALL our sin, past, present and future was paid for. And because that sin was ours and not His, once the price was paid, death could not hold Him and Father God raised Him back to life!

Not only that, but God gave us another gift: the Holy Spirit to help us learn to live this new life and thrive in it! He would live in us as our Helper, Teacher, Comforter and He would show us what life in Christ is like.

God did all the hard things! Your part begins with simply believing, praying and receiving.

Salvation from your current life is a gift that you make a decision to receive. You can't be good enough to deserve it. Like any gift, you can only receive it, open it and experience it. Your good works will *follow* your salvation because you want to live rightly and the Holy Spirit will help you; but good works isn't how you get your salvation. Trust Him and pray out loud...



## *Prayer for* **SALVATION**

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*Dear Jesus,*

*I am sorry for the things I've done wrong in my life, for the people I've hurt and the bad choices I've made. I don't want this life anymore and I can't fix my sins on my own.*

*Jesus, come into my heart and live as my Savior and Lord. I need You.*

*I believe that Jesus is the only Son of God, who came to earth and died on the cross for me.*

*I believe that He paid for my sins and that the Father raised Him from the dead.*

*I believe that God loves me and in Christ, I can have a NEW life.*

*I receive Your forgiveness.*

*I receive the blood of Jesus that washes away my sin.*

*I receive the righteousness of Christ as my own.*

*Thank you that the Holy Spirit now lives in me to be my Helper, Teacher and Comforter, the One who will show me how to live this new life in You. Fill me with Him completely today and every day.*

*Thank you for loving me, Jesus. I love You too.*

*In Your Name I pray,*

*Amen*

If you are absolutely sure Jesus is your Savior but you have not been walking with Him, then this is your opportunity to make Him *Lord* of your life!

Nothing is ever too much or has gone on too long to be impossible for Him. You weren't saved by your good works, so your poor choices don't take it away. God's love is unchanging. He loved you before you ever knew Him, so how could He love you any less now?

## The Higher Call

But sin does have a harmful effect on our fellowship with God. We feel shame and try to hide. We think God is like people who have hurt us and we feel afraid. But God isn't like humans. The Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit only want to have a free and open-hearted relationship with you every single day as you live in the righteousness of Christ.

If you have drifted (or have run) away from Him, it's time to stop and return to Him. You may have let go of God, but He has never let go of you. He is ready to welcome you home the way the good father welcomed his wayward son (Luke 15:11-32).

Confess your sins and receive His gift of forgiveness. Forgive others as He has forgiven you. Ask Him for a fresh start and the help of the Holy Spirit for anything that seems difficult.

You were never meant to do this alone or in your own strength. God is with you to lovingly empower you to become everything He created you to be.

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## *Prayer for* **RECOMMITMENT and** **PURSUING GOD'S HIGHER CALL**

*Dear Jesus,*

*I love You and I want to live in fellowship with You, the Father and the Holy Spirit.*

*Thank You for being my Savior and now I want You to be Lord of my life.*

*Forgive me for my sins.*

(You may want to talk to Him about the ones HE brings to mind, but remember, no shame, no condemnation. He already knows and has loved you just the same throughout this time.)

*I do not want that life. I choose to go YOUR way and follow YOUR Truth and I receive YOUR life.*

*I receive Your forgiveness and believe that the blood of Jesus cleanses me from all unrighteousness.*

## Epilogue

*Thank you that the Holy Spirit lives in me. Now fill me with His power to live in Your higher ways. I received His strength and His help as my Teacher and Friend.*

*I ask for the support and friends that You have for me to help me grow and walk in all Your ways. I want to live in Your Higher Call.*

*I want to go Your way and see miracles.*

*In Jesus Name,  
Amen*

## **THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD TO YOU!**

The Holy Spirit wrote the Bible through people He inspired. It's a *wonderful* book, unlike any other! It isn't just knowledge to be learned, but a way to experience and understand who God really is and who you really are now as a child of God. It is His Word to you.

The NEW Testament is the story of Jesus and how to live as a Christian. The Old Testament is also the inspired word of God and tells the story of people before Jesus. It has many wonderful truths, but if you're new to all this, start with the New Testament, especially the first four books about Jesus, called the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Many people start with the book of John.

Everything written in this section comes from the Bible. You can read what the Bible has to say directly in these verses:

Read your Bible often. It's one of the ways God speaks directly to us!

Romans 3:10

Romans 3:23

John 3:16-17

Luke 1:34-45

Romans 5:8

Romans 10:9-10

John 14:15-18 & 25-27

John 17: 20-23

2 Corinthians 5:17

Romans 6:4

Ephesians 1:3-14

Romans 8:1-11

Romans 8:31-39

## The Higher Call

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you every day. He lives in you now and is promised to be our Helper, Teacher and Comforter. He *loves* being these for you. Ask to be *filled* with His presence.

Talk to God in your own words. He loves every connection He has with you and talking to Him is called Prayer. Share what you're thankful for as well as what you need. *He always hears your heart.*

Never forget that Jesus is now in heaven, praying for you (Romans 8:34) and when you don't know what to pray, the Holy Spirit does! (Romans 8:26). No matter what, you always have a "Prayer team" that loves you and is praying God's perfect will for you!

Even though you are a new creation in Christ (or a newly recommitted one), you still have old habits and patterns of thinking and behavior. While all of God's righteousness is fully yours in Christ, you're still learning to walk in it and you're going to make mistakes as you learn.

Remember, when you sin, it doesn't cancel your salvation. You weren't saved by good works, so bad works don't undo it. But sin does harm our fellowship and relationship with God; and that's the source of our joy, peace, hope and strength!

When you sin (do something that is not like the true nature of God), come with confidence to God's throne of grace to find mercy and help in your time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

Use your "Bar of Soap," from Chapter 3 in this book: 1 John 1:9! If God loved you before you knew Him (and He did) then He loves you just as much when you forget who you are as a child of God. Trust His mercy and grace. Don't run. Come and get help when you need it!

Most of all, continue to grow in His love for you. Living in His ways becomes something we *want* to do because they are so beautiful and powerful... and because God has been so kind and good to us.

*Remember every day how dear you are to God and how happy He is that you chose Jesus.*

Learn to receive the gift of His love more deeply by reading the Bible,

talking to Him in Prayer and finding things to thank Him for. Then, you'll have His love to share with everyone you meet and discover for yourself the fulfillment of His Higher Call.

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## GATHER YOUR PROMISES

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### **Find your Scriptures:**

Go back through this book and find the Bible verses that you want to receive as God's special promises to you.

Write them out in the blank pages of this book or in a journal.

Read them aloud to the Lord often. He loves to hear His children believing that His Word is true for them personally!

While God has His own ways and times, He IS a Faithful Promise Keeper.

### **Find your Promises:**

What are some of the promises that God made to the people in this book that you would like to have as your own?

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you find which ones are yours.

Thank God that He is a God of abundance. He always has enough and He is always delighted to share His gifts of promise with you.

Write them down so that you have them to remind you of His truth when life's circumstances try to tell you something different.

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*Thank you for reading*  
*The Higher Call.*

You can connect with us through *The Higher Call* website  
**[www.the-higher-call.com](http://www.the-higher-call.com)**.

Our website offers free resources, blogs and devotionals  
by Earlene Leming, Allison Bown and our friends.

A request form to receive *The Higher Call* free of charge for registered  
chaplains, recovery group leaders, transitional homes and others is also  
available on the site.

We would love to hear YOUR testimony or God story connected to this  
book on "The Higher Call" Facebook page  
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We hope you'll join our Facebook page to read more stories by fellow  
readers, and receive encouraging devotions, prayers and insights  
from our team.



