

If we are too busy to take time to play, our children quickly begin to see themselves down the list of priorities. If we only bake when we are baking for others, they begin to think of their needs as less important to you than those of strangers. If we are constantly on the phone to "friends," then we communicate *just* by our actions that their friendship is of little value. Oh, our little actions show where our heart is!

Our children desperately need to see our love for them. We show this by being *all* home with them and showing our love for them through hugs, smiles, play, and giggles! We show our children that they are our treasure as we pour ourselves out on their behalf. These are the greatest gifts we can give our children, yet they cost us the most—our whole heart! Yes, ministering to the heart of our children begins right here...in *our* heart!

## Would the PERFECT Mother Please Step Forward???



Do you ever feel overwhelmed as you look at this awesome call of womanhood? Do you ever question your qualifications and abilities? Do you ever wonder how others get things to just work out fine while you are still struggling over the most mundane areas of life?

I have found myself right here more times than not! Face-down on the bathroom floor, complete with *nasty scum!!* Pouring out my limitations...my fears...my frustrations...my lack in character...my battle with the flesh...on and on! Confessing once again my greatest problem—stepping out to do things by myself—only to leave God somewhere back in the dust!

This feeling of despair is only compounded as I look to Scripture with its examples of hidden women of old. They seem so perfect...devoted to the call...steadfast through it all. I can not imagine any of them burdened, struggling, much less frequenting *my* quiet place!

### Did They KNOW?

Do you think that they *knew* the power of motherhood? Do you think they ever felt that their calling was too great of a burden or did they just step up to the call with confidence and absolute perfection? Do you think they had any idea *how great* their children would one day be when they were in the midst of those temper tantrums and character building lessons or did they ever find themselves wanting to *choke* their little darlings?

Think about it...do you think that Eve had any idea of the fruit of her womb? She was the mother of *all* living? Do you think she had a big enough vision to envision the heritage that was before her? Would it have made a difference in her choices when she faced temptation?

What about Jochebed? We know that she treasured her little Moses, but do you think

that she had *any* idea that she was nursing the "*deliverer*" of her people? The one her people had asked of the Lord? Do you think she *knew* how powerful her calling as a mother would be as it affected the life of this young man?

How about Sarah? In those lonely, desperate years of infertility and waiting for the appointed time of promise, do you think that she had any idea that her little boy would be the first child of an *entire* nation? The mighty nation of Israel? The beginning of the lineage of Christ? A man known for centuries as a man of great faith? Do you think that she really believed that God could go beyond the impossible to the incredible?

What about Ruth...do you think that in the midst of her grief as she mourned the loss of her dear husband and kept a commitment to his family to stay and care for his mother come-what-may that she could fathom the plan of God? Do you think that she could have ever imagined that *she* would be chosen to continue to lineage of Christ?

How about Hannah? Do you think those childless days full of torment would have been easier if she had known how God would answer her heart-cry to Him? Would she have rested easier if she had known that she was just waiting on the perfect time and perfect situation for the little baby that God would one-day use as the prophet of Israel? Yes her little baby would be the same prophet whose prayers were *heard* by God in a day that "*the word of the Lord was precious*" because "*there was no open vision.*". Actually that was an understatement. Scripture says that, "*NONE of his words fell to the ground,*" "*the Lord was WITH him,*" and "*the Lord REVEALED HIMSELF to Samuel.*" Do you think Hannah knew that she was being brought to the point of complete surrender so that her son could become a man who had power in prayer and power in his relationship with God? In those tender things that she did (staying home with him enjoying every minute with him until it was time to give him back to the Lord...consistently visiting him while he was at the temple...bringing him a little coat each and every year), do you think she had any idea that she was nurturing the mentor of a mighty king?? Do you think that she had a vision for the power of a mother's influence that not only affects the lives of one person, but continues to affect many, many more that are never seen or known?

How about Bathsheba? As the scandal of being the King's mistress and co-conspirator in the murder of her husband reached its maximum, do you think in the embarrassment and humiliation that Bathsheba could even imagine that *even* she could be used by God? We are talking about the mistress of David, the "*man after God's own heart.*" The seductive mistress who fell into great sin as her husband was away pouring himself into his calling to the point of laying down his own life for that call. Can you just imagine the heart-ache as this young girl found herself with child, the child of an affair? Can you imagine

the pain as the child's life was taken leaving this woman with a pain that words cannot express? Do you think she had any idea that God could and would *still* use her to become a godly wife and mother? Do you think she could imagine the splendor that awaited her son as he ruled in wisdom for the glory of God?

Don't forget about Mary! Do you think she had any idea of what God was doing in her life? That she would be the mother of the Messiah? Our Saviour? Our Lord? The Great I AM? Do you think she saw the great privilege, the great power, the holy moments that were all part of her calling when she began to endure the stares...the whispers...the quiet giggles? How about Mary? Do you think she had any idea of what God would be doing through the life of her child to bring hope, peace, and true salvation to the entire world?

Do you think that these women had any idea that their children would shape the world...be used mightily by God...and still teach and minister to the lives of others centuries after they lived? Did they have a vision for all God could do through them? Did they know the power of motherhood?

My thoughts...I believe that they were moms just like you and me. I am sure that they battled with day-to-day demands that often blurred their vision. I am sure that they had moments that were lost, never to return again. I am also sure that they had no idea of the way God would work in the lives of their children. In fact, I would imagine that they all have quite a list of regrets and things that they would do differently. I am sure that they struggled with the tremendous call of motherhood just as much as we do today.

Think about it...we are given such a tremendous calling. We are loaned a soul! A soul to teach. A soul to train. A soul to lead. A soul to guide. A soul to love. A soul to nurture. A soul to care for. A soul to enjoy. A soul to mother!

I am sure that every mother must admit that, at some time and in some (or most!) circumstances, the task gets overwhelming! The vast importance of motherhood looks too tough! Nurturing and encouraging the children to become all that God has planned for them, with their gifts, talents, bents, and capabilities, is too tremendous of a calling! There is so much power in our influence. And...are we worthy of this call? Are we qualified?

### Women with a Questionable Past...

The good news is that God already knows who we are! He already knows that we, like our dear Bible friends, are the perfect Mothers for our children. He knows our past. He

knows our present. He knows our future. Our ideas of the perfect mother may not be His!

A while back a friend called excited and told me that she just knew that I would love the passage found in Matthew 1. Mary had realized that not only was Ruth's mother-in-law in her first marriage Naomi, but in her second marriage her mother-in-law was Rahab, the town prostitute! She was so excited about how God blessed Ruth with a mother-in-law who would be the most open to love her just like she was. Think of it, both were Gentiles and both were from a questionable past! Mary began something in my heart that I could not explain! So, take a look at this Scripture with me, this is *good*!

Matthew 1: 1-17...

*"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; And Judas begat Phares and Zara of TAMAR; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; And Salmon begat Booz of RAHAB; and Booz begat Obed of RUTH; and Obed begat Jesse; And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of HER THAT HAD BEEN THE WIFE OF URIA; And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon: And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of MARY, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations."*

As I looked at this passage, I noticed something. God never makes a mistake in Scripture. He always has what is needed in Scripture and leaves out details that are needed as well. As the ultimate Writer and Editor, He does so for emphasis and for teaching.

As I looked at this passage, I realized that there were only a few women listed in the passage...five to be exact. This passage detailed the lineage of Christ. Now, in the world's eyes, wouldn't we imagine that those women would be the most exemplary? Wouldn't we think that it would be most important to share about the good girls? The girls from the perfect heritage, the girls with the best education, the girls with prominence? Wouldn't we keep the black-sheep in the background without any unnecessary acknowledgment of them and their existence?

Unlike us, God makes a statement here! He can use *any* of us! He simply does not

look at the same things in His vessels that we would look for or that we already look for! He can pick and refine *any* vessel for His glory (Comfort of all comfort here!) Take a look. In this passage, we find listed...

**Tamar...**A young girl married to a very wicked man. So wicked that *"the Lord put him to death."* Imagine, young and widowed...without any children (a disgrace in their culture). Judah gave her to his next son (a custom in their day) so she could have a child. God put him to death because he would not fulfill his obligation (giving her a child) to this young girl. After this death, Judah sent her back to her father's house to wait until Judah's son Shelah grew up to marry her. It was very apparent that Judah did not have the intention to give her to this son simply because of his fear that *"he may die too, just like his brothers."* After a long time, Judah's wife passed away and Judah mourned from the grief. His son was then grown, yet Tamar had not been given to him in marriage. I can only imagine how frustrated and hurt she was by this time. However, she decided to take things in her hands. She disguised herself as a prostitute, slept with Judah (HER FATHER-IN-LAW!!). Yes, you read right. God listed a woman in the lineage of Christ who prostituted herself out to her father-in-law in order to bear a child! Even a deceptive, incestuous relationship was not beyond God's grace. He used this woman with a questionable past as a mighty woman in His plan!

**Rahab...**You probably remember Rahab. She was the town prostitute from the city of Jericho. Imagine this woman's life. She was well known as the town harlot. Scripture describes her *"a harlot"* in Joshua 2 and again in Joshua 6, so it is clear that she had a horrible reputation *and* that God knew about it! Yet, this woman with a well-known and very questionable past was later commended in this passage in Matthew (in the lineage of Christ) and later Hebrews (in the faith "hall of fame") as a woman of faith. Even this woman without a proper upbringing, proper heritage, or proper lifestyle was not beyond God's grace. God could use this woman with a questionable past as a mighty woman in His plan!

**Ruth...**Ruth has always been one of my favorite Bible characters. I loved her purity. I loved her commitment to her very mother-in-law difficult (Depressed, mourning, self-pity, bitterness! What a package!). Yet, as I look at this woman, I realize that as easy as it is to identify with Ruth and to simply adore and love her as a hero to godly women, she was still looked upon with great judgment in her day. Many of us have faced this as well. She was a Moabite. What is that? Little history...remember Lot? His incestuous relationship with his daughters? Yes...Moab was a son of Lot through incest. His people quickly multiplied and became great enemies of the Israelites and their God until their destruction. They were known for their idolatry. This was Ruth's family. Not only from a bad family,

this young wife was widowed and childless, both a great disgrace. In spite of the costs, Ruth clung to her brokenhearted Mother-in-law, as she left her family, homeland, and faith to follow the God of Naomi. Ruth is the perfect picture that even a person from a bad family can find grace, grace, wonderful grace! ) She also shows that God does not throw away the questionable women *even* if they do not worship Him. Yes, once again we see that God can use a woman with a questionable past as a mighty woman in His plan!

**The Wife of Uriah...** Could it be any more disgraceful? This woman had a wonderful husband. A man of commitment. A hero! This is one woman who was mentioned in this passage, but interestingly it is without her name! Yes, this is Bathsheba. Uriah's wife. King David's mistress. Imagine for a moment the disgrace. She had it all, yet fell into great sin. If adultery were not enough, she soon found herself with child. Imagine the predicament! This affair was not easily be covered up. In fact, the cover up was top secret with all of the power a King could have. David brought Uriah home to sleep with his own wife...hoping that it would cover up the illegitimate pregnancy. Yet, once again we find that Uriah was so committed to his country that instead of sleeping with his wife, he *"slept at the door of the king's house with all of the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house."* Messing up *the plan* cost his life! David sent him back to the battle lines, only this time *"in the front of the hottest battle"* where he would surely die. Yes, David and Bathsheba were part of a plot to murder this innocent man they had sinned against! Adultery...now murder! Not your idea of a perfect mother. Yet, where the greatest sin abounds, grace more abundantly abounds. This questionable woman would later become David's legitimate wife and bear a son to continue the lineage of Christ. Yes, God can use a woman with a questionable past as a mighty woman in His plan!

**Mary...** I know, I know! You are saying, *"But...Cindy...SHE WAS A VIRGIN!"* Yes. But just think about it! A little girl from a small town. A nobody. An insignificant person. Not your likely candidate for the mother of Jesus, the Saviour, the Great I AM! Besides her lack of connections, imagine a young girl betrothed (engaged...much more serious than engagements of our day...betrothal equaled good as married!) to a man but all of the sudden with the child of the Most High??? Can you imagine the whispers? The gossip (Oh, you know that the religious are often the most ferocious...gossiping in the name of protecting the Lord, yet destroying people with their words.). The stares. The snickering. The judgment. Oh, and if that is not enough...imagine this young girl being ready to marry, only to have the man she is called to marry be heartbroken and not believe her. We know and accept the story. Yet, all throughout time, Mary has been a woman who had to pay a price for obedience. The price was her reputation as it became questionable whether she was truthful or not. Oh, yes...even sweet May found that little girls from insignificant lives can be used mightily. She found that in spite of the talk...the stares...the

judgment, that God can use even the most questionable women for His plan!

### God's Choice...The Least of These!

What about you? Where have you been? What is your secret? What have you done? Who has stared at you in disgust and judgment? Do you find that you would really rather not have your story written because you are not quite sure you want others to know that you came from a family such as yours? Would you rather hide away in obscurity not sharing your deepest, darkest secrets? Would you rather forget those moments when you made those mistakes that still send shivers all over your body as you feel the pang of humiliation and disappointment in the depths of your heart? Do you think that God surely can't use you...that He has made a mistake choosing you as a mother of your precious children...and that you are not sure you are up for the call even now?

There is one great thing about our great God—He can use any of us! There is no one so insignificant that God can't make great. *Actually*, God specializes in taking the smallest, most insignificant little people to the greatest, most spectacular heights! There is no sin so great that God's grace is not greater. *Actually*, God specializes in taking the greatest of sinners and turning them into the greatest of all saints. Yes, if you are a woman with a questionable past, *know* that God can use women of questionable pasts for His plan...and He has chosen you!

Yes, God can use any of us! If you are running away from your calling because of your load of excuses, know that God already knows and He still wants you! Nothing you have done. Nowhere you have been. Nothing, *absolutely nothing*, can hinder you from being used by God. He can make you into the perfect vessel for His purpose!

I do want to note that *HE will* make you into the perfect vessel for His purpose. You may have begun this chapter thinking, "I am *DEFINITELY* not the perfect mother!" Yet, God sees you much more differently than you see yourself. He sees you *IN Christ*...complete...covered by the blood of Christ...perfect! He does not expect for you to do anything by yourself!

I am not sure about you, but for me it is a great comfort to know that we can go to God, just as we are! He is willing to take us in just as we are. He loves to be our Teacher to give us the foundation we need to become a Biblical woman. He loves to unfold His wonderful plan for us through a step-by-step walk of faith. He loves to take insignificant people, the least of these, and make them great by using their gifts and talents in a mighty way. He loves to take those from "bad" families or "questionable" pasts to set them upon



the high-places in ministry for Him! It is all grace, grace, wonderful grace!

So, what would a God like this want for us to do as mothers? First of all, **His greatest desire is for us to depend upon Him!** A mother who learns absolute dependence upon God will be able to truly minister to the heart of her children. His power and anointing will flow through her directly to her children. She will be the mother that God has planned!

Secondly, **God wants our commitment!** He does not want for us to be tossed to-and-fro with the winds of change or adversity. He does not want for us to be discouraged from the great work in our home. He wants our commitment to minister in the little things for those in our home. The greatest gifts are awaiting us within the walls of our own home.

Thirdly, God wants for us to **teach our children *who we are!*** So often, we look around at others we think are great and want to emulate them. We look at all of the things that the world says that children are to learn, and neglect to teach the greatest lessons of all... ***who we are!*** Look back at each of the women I have shared about in this chapter. Each one was chosen to mother her own child. There were no mistakes. The lessons that each mother learned through the good times and bad times were the perfect preparation for their child to step up their call! When you look at where you have come from...what you have done...and what you do know, think of *all* that you are as exactly what God wants for you to teach your child. Made mistakes...those help you to have *more* grace as your children make mistakes! Gone through crisis situations? Those help you to teach your children aspects of God that they will need to know for their own life. Got a talent? Use it to minister to your children and prepare them for their calling! God made no mistakes in placing your children in your home!

Finally, **seize every moment with your children.** Know the importance of what you are doing. Our children are not here very long. We are loaned them for such a short period of time. That time is full as we have so much to teach and so much to share with them. Moments are filled with training, guiding, leading, loving, nurturing, and caring for them. Yet, in every moment we must learn to enjoy them. They are not here very long. Our enemy would love for us to drift along the way without seizing these moments for all of the joy that motherhood affords to us. He loves to accuse us...to bring back memories of things that we would rather re-do in our lives...to question our qualifications...and to keep us from realizing the influence that we have in the little ones in our home.

If you are tired...overwhelmed...ashamed of your past...worried about your capabili-

ties as a mother...whatever, know that God wants you to step up to the call. *You* are truly that *perfect mother* He has been looking for!

## Step-by-Step in the Spirit!



Clashes. Ever clashed with your children? If not, you are probably still childless or pregnant! ) Clashes are inevitable!

- It may be eating that squash that they ate by the barrels...well, up until today. It may be holding that pencil long enough to write just *one* line neatly. It may be those multiplication tables that we *all have* to memorize (don't we??). When is it a discipline problem and when it is just a matter of not being ready? How do I handle these clashes—these times of growth??

One day as I was reading through my email these questions came up. In lifting this concern up to the Lord, He impressed upon my heart the importance of measuring all that we, as parents, do up to the standard of Galatians 5. Let's take a look and glean some wisdom from this passage so we, too, may walk step by step in the Spirit...

• Begin with verse 16...

*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*

• Walk in the Spirit...sometimes *this* is the hardest thing to do! Let's face it! I guess that in my mind, I always thought that a Christian should be able to (pardon the pun!) "*Just do it!*"

• Years of walking in a constant battle of my flesh with one specific area of my life (my in-laws) was brought to a climax one fall day.

• I was at a weekend retreat where Mary Glynn Peoples was teaching. She gave a wonderful talk on this passage that would give me the first breath of freedom I had experienced since meeting my mother and father-in-law.

You see, you would have to go back in time to the first day that they met me.

• I felt an instant judgment of "*not good enough.*" This cute guy was their only baby! ) Plus, to make matters worse, *my parents* were divorced and just looking at the two of us,

anyone would just have to know that we were planned from creation to become one. This thing had to be stopped!

I had never experienced rejection. I had no idea how to make this better. Much less, quickly found that I could do nothing to make them like me. As matter of fact, it seemed that the more I revealed about myself, the more they seemed to hate me. I would spend many years in pain and breaking down into tears and losing my temper as I sought their approval and blessing.

As the years went by, the bitterness began to take root in that fertile soil of rejection. There were constant tests and bad situations at odd times that seemed to simply water that root into full growth. As much as I wanted to become godly, there was one great hindrance—my growing hatred of my precious husband's parents.

Oh, please don't think that you would have just known this about me! I was able to cover it up in front of many people, well except those who were close enough to hear my tears and frustrations. I lied to myself that I was doing all that I could do. I tried to ignore my pain and just move on.

Then...that retreat!

I sat there as Mary Glynn taught her little heart out. As she read through those verses (*that we will get to in a minute*) in this passage that described the works of the flesh, she asked one question that pierced right down to the depths of my soul to pluck up one of the deepest roots of the bitterness, *"Is there anyone in your life that you hate...really hate?"* I had never really thought about it, but all of the sudden their faces popped into my mind! Horror!

She then read another cross-reference...

2 Peter 1: 5-9...

*"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that LACKETH these things is BLIND, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."*

There it was! Right in black and white! If I wanted to be godly, I would have to repent and let go of all of my pain, anger, hatred, and malice and give all diligence to add to my faith—virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, *brotherly kindness*, and *love*!!!!!!!!!!!!!!.

Oh! This hurt so bad! I wanted to be godly. I wanted to be used by God. But one thing stood in my way!

I could not do this on my own. Yes, you have got it—it would take turning everything over to God and letting Him love them *through* me! He could use *me* to minister to *their* needs...IF I could only die to my pain, suffering, bitterness, and perceived rights! EEK! This would not be possible for me to do on my own. The only way that I, after all of these years, *could do* this would be for me to crucify my flesh and walk step-by-step in the Spirit!

I really do wish that I could say that this was instantly easier. It wasn't.

Mary Glynn said that if there was a situation that needed to be healed, that we needed to be biblical and go directly to those we are upset with. She *specifically* said that a letter would not do! UGH! Yes, I went home and went to work on a letter! I could not face my in-laws. I was afraid of more rejection and of more failure on my part if they rejected me once more. Surely, she did not know the people in *MY* situation!

The funny thing is that I wrote a wonderful letter, confessing my sin and asking for forgiveness, only to *lose* that letter into the great abyss (my home!). Only a little while passed by until one night, I got a call from Mrs. Rushton. Normally I would pass the phone *quickly* to someone else in the house, but for some strange reason no one else was around! (Starting to sound providential?) She asked how I was doing and what I had been up to. I began to pour out what was on my heart. Thank goodness it was deep remorse and humility! I could feel through the phone that she was not just shocked, she was speechless! As I asked her to forgive me, she so graciously did. That was such a blessing. I desperately needed that forgiveness. Not only that, before I could come back to my "fleshly senses," words from only God came out of my mouth, "*Would you like to come for Thanksgiving...AND Christmas??*"

That phone call was a turning point in my life. Not that I was perfectly in step with Holy Spirit, but I was committed then! There is just something about "confession" that *MAKES* you commit! J

They came for Thanksgiving that year. That was one of the toughest moments of my life. I wanted to succeed. I simply could not handle the guilt of another problem with them. I spent weeks praying before they came to visit. You see, just the year before we had one of those "last straw" holidays. I was completely fearful of how difficult it would be to walk in the Spirit instead of my stinking old flesh if there were a replay of the scene from the year before!

Yes, there were little and big moments of testing. Moments that I had to go in the bathroom to cry out for God to pick me up and carry me back into that room. Moments I would spend in prayer as I stirred the food asking God to help me smile and minister to them instead of indulging my flesh man who wanted to rip them to pieces as I had felt so many times before. Moments of begging God to pick up my heavy legs and hold my hands as I, much like a wobbly toddler, took each and every step that weekend.

Something miraculous happened on that Thanksgiving night. I was tired from the physical preparations of the home and food for the weekend. Harold had to work, so his dad went with him to work, leaving me and Mrs. Rushton at home with the children. A holy moment happened!

We were having just chit-chat that was pretty common in those days. I was deathly afraid of sharing my burdens or my heart to her for fear of more judgment and rejection, so chit-chat was about all that I could do. In the tenderness of that night, God moved in our hearts and broke down the barriers to our friendship.

I have no idea of what broke the barriers. All I know is that it was God! She poured out her heart about her deep heartbreak that she had not been there for me during my pregnancy losses. I don't think she really knew of my deep sorrows as I walked through those days with empty arms when I should have been nursing babies and playing with toddlers. God opened my heart to share the depths of my pain with her. As I did, I could almost feel the shackles that had bound our relationship just falling away! Not only did we share our hearts but all of the sudden she broke down crying. She asked me if I could ever forgive her for her failure to be my *mother* that God had called her to be. She said that she really did *love me!*

I don't know if you have ever wanted someone's approval and love that badly, but I must say that there was nothing like that moment to pour God's healing into my broken heart. All of those tears were worth it! All of those prayers were worth it! That pain and heartache were worth it! The relationship, God's way, was really worth it all!

Since then, we have become friends...real friends. I do not think that she has changed very much, it was not her who needed to change. I really think it was me in deep need of change! I was the one needing to die to my heartache and begin to minister to them. As I write this story of our life, it almost seems too unreal because now we are so different. This is truly a story of how God can do miracles through those who are obediently following Him step-by-step in the Spirit.

Now, I know that this is not a book on marriage or getting along with the in-laws. But, more than likely, you will face the same frustration in your life at some time and in some sphere of your life. There will be some area of your life that will test you to your personal limits to find out what is there in your heart. It is then that you will be at your own limits. It is then that you will have to thrust yourself into the arms of the Lord as He lifts you up to help you walk step-by-wobbly-step through your trial.

Do you find yourself confident? *"But, Cindy, I am doing just fine here! Thanks anyway...on to another chapter, please!"* Oh, you may walk a little while in the flesh, but if you are going to endure...walk in power...walk in *His* burden, then you must walk in the Spirit!

There are going to be times that obstacles will be so frightening...so overwhelming...so tremendous that it will take breath by breath surrender! The battle will be so intense that the only shelter is in the *"cleft of the Rock."* Where the struggle meets you with such intensity that you find yourself tottering just like a child beginning to walk. Lots of stumbling. Lots of falling...even on your face! Lots of those 1 step forward, 10 steps back! Yes, times where the only success comes as you hold on tight to your Heavenly Father's hand to take step-by-baby-step!

The only way that we can have victory over our own flesh in all situations—dealing with our own desires and lusts... adversity... mother-in-laws... husbands... or even those cute little ones declaring *"War of the Squash!"* --is as we grab on, hold on tight, and take *step-by-step in the Spirit!*

On to verses 17...

*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*

What about you? Are you like me? You *"would"* encourage your child...minister to their hearts...pour God's love into your child...have fun with your children... allow them

time to follow their God-given delights...and take your time teaching your child the way that God wants for you to teach. But why is this hard? Why is this a battle? Because our flesh wars against the Spirit!

I believe that there is something within every mother that makes her want to be a good mother. We may want so deeply to be gentle mothers, yet truth is, there *will* always be a battle between our flesh and spirit.

Half the battle is just realizing that there is a battle raging! The rest of the battle is dependent upon whether we will walk day-by-day, hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute, second-by-second in the Spirit. Only then will we find ourselves doing those things that we so desire. Only then will we find ourselves smiling instead of grinding our teeth... laughing instead of screaming...inspiring instead of picking them to pieces...and encouraging instead of destroying those around us.

Verse 18 continues...

*But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.*

The only way to reach the heart of our children is to walk in the Spirit.

Gentleness in motherhood requires allowing God to direct *our* steps, *our* attitudes, *our* spirit. It is far too common for mothers to live in bondage trying to *make* our homes and families godly instead of walking in the Spirit, totally surrendered to His plan for our home and family. When we walk in the Spirit, we are free to allow God to bring true holiness and the fruit of the Spirit into our homes. No more burdens of doing the "right" things or looking the "right" way or having the "right" things. None of these things enable us to have the home we so desire to have. None of these things will enable us to minister to the hearts of our children. In fact, the more that we try to DO, the more likely we will fail! For this reason, we have nothing to lose but stress and heartache as we surrender all and walk in the Spirit.

But, what does this look like? Now, this is where it gets touchy! Let's continue on looking at this next part bit-by-bit...

*19-21: Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these;*

*Adultery*, (Trusting anything or anyone more than God. Desiring anything or anyone more than God. Not fulfilling your true commitment to God because of your commit-



ment or desire for anything or anyone else. Devoted to earthly things. Is there anything or anyone that you are trusting or desiring more than God?? Are you able to fulfill your covenant relationship with the Lord to be used by Him for your calling? Are you being hindered from your call due to commitments to anyone or anything—including your marriage, children, church, friendships, or activities??)

**Fornication**, (Walking in the way of anything or anyone other than God. Forsaking the True God. Worshipping idols instead of staying faithful to God. Are you walking in the steps that God has set forth for you? Are you too afraid to trust God? Are you depending upon someone or something else for your direction? Do you have anything or anyone in any area of your life that you are attributing success?)

**Uncleanness**, (Impurity of heart, soul, mind, or body. Foulness. Dirtiness. Filthiness. Defilement by sin. Sinfulness. Lewdness. Going the World's Way instead of God's Way. Is there any impurity in your life? Are you going God's way? Are you staying pure all along the way?)

**Lasciviousness**, (Looseness. Lustfulness. Promotion of any sinfulness and sinful indulgences. Are you living with any sin in your life? Are you pure, but enabling or promoting sin?)

**Idolatry**, (Worship of any god other than God. Excessive attachment to anything or anyone that borders on adoration. What is your god??? Competition with others, religion, tradition, stuff, accomplishments, scope and sequences, busywork, tradition, comparison with others???? Who is your god? What is your god? Is there anyone you go to before you go to God? Is there anyone or anything that you expect to meet your needs other than God? Where is your focus...God or others??)

**Witchcraft**, (Looking to and depending upon satan for power and direction. How are you instructing, discipling, or teaching your children??? Are you looking to God and God alone for your strength, power, direction, and methods?? Are you depending upon God for all that you need? What are your techniques instilling in the life of your children--dependence upon God...ways of God...relationship with God...a passion for God?? What is your lifestyle instilling into the heart of your child?)

**Hatred**, (Great dislike. Great aversion. Enmity. Do you really love your child? Do you simply endure motherhood? Why did you have children? What are you teaching your children about motherhood? Do your children love life, learning, family?? Are they becoming bitter, dull, bored, rebellious??)

• **Variance**, (Change or altering of condition that results in dispute, controversy, disagreement, or dissension. A state of difference or disagreement. What is the atmosphere of your home? What are the relationships like in your family? Is there always a problem? Is everyone on the edge? Are you difficult to please?)

• **Emulations**, (Attempting to equal or excel in qualities or actions. Rivalry. Competition. Contention. Strife. Desire for superiority. Spending great effort to attain or excel. In a good sense, can be to equal or excel others in what is praiseworthy without a desire to depress others. However in this context, the flesh, it means to strive to equal or do more than others in order to obtain carnal favors or honors with a desire to depress others in their success to obtain greater favor and honor for oneself. Rivalry with a desire to depress the success of others. What about you? Are you guilty of looking around at others and what they are doing? Are you keeping your eyes on God and God alone? Are you trying to out-do others...or do only what you are called to do? Is there strife, rivalry, competition, contention between your children? Where did they learn it?)

• **Wrath**, (Exasperation...vehement exasperation. Violent anger. Indignation. Effects of anger. Do you find yourself at the point of screaming? Name Calling? Spanking?? Are you needing to SLOWWW DOWN?? Are you needing to step up to the call to become a gentle mother? What about your children? Have you driven them for so long that you are now having the fruits of exasperation... anger... indignation... violent outbursts?)

• **Strife**, (Exertion or contention for purpose of superiority. A contest for emulation, either by intellectual or physical efforts. Contention or anger or enmity. Contention in anger or enmity. Contest or struggle for victory. Quarrel or war. Opposition, contrariness, contrast, or the agitation produced by different qualities. Is there strife in *you* or *your child*? OR between you and your child? OR between your children? Is your child struggling *just* to please you or some unreasonable standards? Is there any strife that is driving any area of your family life—striving to be superior...look better than others...out-do others...be "better" than others?)

• **Seditious**, (Rebellion. Uprising or opposition against law or administration of justice. Opposition to law or lawful authority. Is what you are doing causing rebellion, commotion in your home? Exasperating your children? Pushing them away?)

• **Heresies**, (Unsound opinion or doctrine. Improper practice. IS there anything that you are doing that is contrary to what **God** says you should be doing? Are you basing *all* that you do upon what God wants for your child...your family...your home?)

*Envyings*, (To feel an uneasiness, mortification, discontent, or jealousy at the sight of supposed superiority in excellence, reputation, or happiness enjoyed by another. To repine at another's prosperity. To fret or grieve one's self at the real or supposed superiority of another and to hate him on that account. To grudge. To withhold maliciously. Is your vision on the narrow way for *your* child and your child *alone*? **OR** are you constantly looking around you to pattern what you do on others "apparently" perfect homes??? Does your home never match up to your expectations?? Are there any areas of life that suffer because of envy?)

*Murders*, (To kill a human being with premeditated malice. To put an end to. To destroy. How *do* you treat your child? Maybe not physical murder, but do you just *kill* your child through breaking their heart...beating them down with your words...destroying their passions...frustrating their dreams? Are you ministering to their little hearts?? Do you live your life with the purpose of blessing them all along the way?)

*Drunkenness*, (Intoxication. Inebriation. Disorder of faculties resembling intoxication. Inflammation. Frenzy. Rage. What fills you up? What excited you? Is it anything besides the Holy Spirit? Anything besides God's plan for you and your life? Anything causing you to be disorderly...frenzied...full of rage??)

*Revellings*, (To rave, rage, bawl, clamor, carouse. Are you constantly in an upheaval?? Are you thrown to and fro?? Are you resting in God's plan for you? Are you free to stay on the straight and narrow path?)

*and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Now, on to verses 22-23...

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

Are *these* things the fruit of what you are doing?? Fruit in your children *and* fruit in your responses to them? Let's look at them a little closer...

*Love*...Do you love them, unconditionally and without wavering? Love *them* and *not* their accomplishments? Love *them* and *not* their behavior? Do they *know* they are loved? Do they know that your love is unconditional? Forever?

**Joy...** Do you *really* delight in your children? Are you too busy getting things done to truly slow down and enjoy them? Are your expectations too high to enjoy the little things? Do you *really* want to get back to *your life* and *your "calling"* so you can get on with *your REAL* accomplishments!??? Can your children *enjoy* learning and living or are you too busy trying to accomplish all that is needed to compete with your friends or with your ideals or with that "professional" that you think knows the perfect plan for training children??? Do your children have *any* delights in their life? Any relationships with what they are learning? Do they have anything to pour themselves into?

**Peace...** Do you *know* that what you are doing is *just* right for you and your children? Do you feel in constant conflict? Can you *rest* in Jesus to take care of all of your needs and to direct you all along the way? Is your home restful, peaceful *or* constantly full of strife?

**Long-suffering...** Can you wait for the fruit in your home and the lives of your children *or* are you too busy trying to *make* fruit in your home? Can you wait until God leads *or* are you too impatient that you want to press on without Him? Are you pushing *or* are you holding on for the ride?

**Gentleness...** Does gentleness mark your home? Is all at the pace of the children *or* the world (Remember Esau and Jacob as they met to restore their relationship?) Is your home paced slow enough for a child to be nurtured *or* are your unreasonable expectations pulling your entire family around in a tizzy? Are you slowwwww enough to be a gentle Mommy... one who nurtures, encourages and ministers to the heart of her children? Are your techniques gentle and easy on the child *or* are they burdens that simply do not make sense to you or your child???

**Goodness...** Is all that is done reflecting the goodness of God? Is life lived devoid of God and His power? Does all in your home bring God to the throne and equip your children to carry His message to our culture?

**Faith...** Can we *really* trust God? Do you believe that God will *really* lead you each and every step of the way *or* do you think He will take us just "so" far and leave us to stumble, fall, destroy our children and ruin their lives forever? Will He *really* tell us each step of the way what we are to do and what we are to say? Can we trust Him???? Wouldn't it be easier to have someone else help us along the way just telling us *their* opinions and *their* ideas??? Can we really *trust* our child...what if they *don't* learn, grow spiritually, or ever stop that birping in public???

**Meekness...** Is our home marked by a softness of temper, mildness, gentleness, humility,

forbearance under pressure/injuries, submission to God's Will, lack of murmuring, complaining, or peevishness??? *OR* do we find ourselves arrogant when things go good--so arrogant that we simply *must* tell all of our friends what they are to do--so arrogant that if there is a problem, it *couldn't* be *our* ideas, just *our* children?? Can we go through the difficult times calmly or are those the times we tear our children apart with our words, attitudes and obvious displeasure???

• **Temperance...** Can we say that we are moderate? Moderate in *all* things?? Could we say that our home is moderate? Is it restrained to the purpose that God has set before us for our individual child? Do we indulge ourselves with the latest "*thing*" or just what God would have us to do with *our* child? Do we do things *just* because that head hen of our church or of the local support group likes it and says "*this way WE shall go this year!?*"

If these are not the fruits of our homes and each action between our children and us, then we are not walking in the spirit. We are going the pace of the world. We are tearing down our home by our own hands!

On to verse 24...

*And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*

These fruits are *only* available as we crucify our flesh with its preferences and desires... our rights...our offenses...our ways! Lots of sacrifice, yet the fruit is *worth it!*

Finally, verse 25...

*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

Back at the beginning! Isn't God so clear? Sounds so easy: *Walk in the Spirit.* Easy to say, but so hard to do!

I have bombed sOOOOO many times myself. That is why we each must go before our Heavenly Father for His constant help...His constant direction...His constant strength! He knows that each of us have so much that we want to do as a wife and mother. He knows that there is so much on our hearts. He also knows the battle that we face as we step up to the call!

He does not want for us to do miraculous things...to move our own mountains...to be tough enough on our own...to be good in our own strength. He wants for us to sur-

Surrender *all* to Him!

One of our greatest roles is that of mothering. It is one of our greatest gifts in this life. Children do not need all that the world can offer. They need whole-hearted parenting. They need spirit-led training. They need committed discipleship.

Although this is a tremendous call, God does not ask us to do this on our own. He gives us His Spirit as a Helper for all of the provision that we could ever need to be the mother that He can use to minister to the hearts of our children.

Why not fall down at the foot of the cross? Surrender all that you know. Surrender all that you *could* do. Surrender your plans. Surrender your ideas. Surrender all of your judgments. Surrender your attitude. And grab on to the Lord. Allow Him to hold you up. Ask Him to help you to remain steady as you walk in the Spirit...step by step! Enjoy the journey!

## The Battle is ON for the Heart of Your Child...Will You Step Forward???



Did you know that *you* are in a battle? A constant battle? A battle that is often relentless and exhausting? Hand-to-hand? A battle that hits you on every side?

I am sure that there are days that you would declare from the mountain tops that there has got to be a *war* going on! I am sure that there are days that you definitely feel as though you are going hand-to-hand with a foe, only you are not sure if you were imagining it or not! BUT, you *are* in a battle!

Does this surprise you? Does this alarm you? Turn to 2 Timothy 1: 1-4...

*"Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou has heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also (Can you find anyone more faithful than your children??) Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him Who hath chosen him to be a soldier."*

Scripture is very clear that we are soldiers. Soldiers are chosen for BATTLE! We, as good soldiers, are chosen to go to battle for the heart, mind and soul of our children! In the midst of the battle, we must remember that we are not battling with our children, our precious gifts from God. Nor, should we battle against the incredible call of womanhood, in spite of its many demands. Both are given to us by God for blessings. Instead, I believe that far too many of us struggle in the midst of the battle because we find ourselves not ready for the battles at all. There is something that leads us all to believe that being "saved" should mean that we are "saved from battles" or "saved from adversity" or "saved from tough times." This is just not reality. We can be sure that there will be battles sneaking up on us along the way as we seek to train and prepare our little arrows to shoot forth into battle for God!

I don't know what your struggles are when they raise their ugly head to battle you, but

I know that our struggles are not our imagination. They are guaranteed for all good soldiers. They come at odd, very inconvenient times. They come in all different shapes, sizes, and intensities.

### Stepping Up to Battle...

In Ephesians 6, Paul addresses how to handle these days in battle...

*"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His Might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places, wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." Ephesians 6: 10-20*

The way we battle is through stepping up to battle in our armor! Since battles are inevitable, we must put *on* the armor! We are armed with truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer! When the tough times come (and they will!), we have armor that carries us into battle as victors. Isn't this good to know? This is essential to know in the midst of the battles that constantly come along the way! Our armor is simple, but powerful! Take a look at what God gives us...

### Truth...

First of all, if you want to battle as a victor, you are going to have to know God's **Truth**. It is critical to know that no matter where you are or where you have been or what in the world you have ever done, He has still called *you* to be a godly woman. Your enemy is the master of deceit. He is a master of accusation. One of his mightiest weapons is his arsenal of lies. He will whisper those lies to you right in the heat of battle. There will



be a tendency to duck and run the other way, but be steadfast! If you let down the protection of truth at any time in the battle, he will toss out thoughts that will deceive you into defeat by appealing to your flesh with promises of great fruit in his ways. If this is not his tactic then you can be assured that he will hit you with horrible accusations. Oh, his hits are not baby slaps. They are often so hard that you will almost physically feel those gut-blows from his accusations of things that are long forgotten by your Lord and Master. You will be hit on every angle with his accusations of your lack of worth, your lack of ability, and your lack of determination. It is at this time that you must *know* that you are in the center of God's perfect will. Then, you can stand firm in truth, accepting the tough times that come from simply being a godly woman.

Godly women will get tired and weary! Making a home is tough work. Often this is the ministry that is most overlooked as women look around at "meaningful" careers or glamorize over becoming the next Elisabeth Elliot! Making a home is that quiet ministry that builds others, often without notice or appreciation. You can only imagine the importance in a woman's calling. Women are crucial in the kingdom of God. There is a reason that our enemy hits women so hard. He wants to eliminate their strength and their influence!

If we are to stand against this formidable foe, **we must know truth**. We must arm ourselves for the battle with truth as one of our weapons.

Yes, godly womanhood will sometimes hurt as we walk by faith. Often we find that in spite of our godliness, things do not always turn out just like we think they should turn out. Godly womanhood means that we trust our Lord in spite of what is going on around us.

Godly womanhood also means that we are going to look so different from the ways and traditions of this world. Our enemy will whisper lies about how "odd" or "fanatical" or "out of sink" we are. He will try with all of his might to convince us that a little compromise is necessary to win others to the Lord. He will work in our lives to cause others to think that our stands for God are *just a little too far*. As much as we love people, we will find that as we step up to the call of womanhood, the battle will wage hard and at times our walk will be full of loneliness and despair, which can only be quenched by communion with God and hope in God's truth!

Our enemy will be relentless with his attacks, yet we *can* stand firm and be strong as we step up in God's armor! We can stand strong in the midst of any battle that comes our way just knowing and resting upon God's truth. His truth is essential to battling as an assured victor in contrast to an unsure, wobbly-kneed warrior!