

A PUBLICATION FOR CHRISTIAN WOMEN

BUT GOD

SPRING EDITION

Mother's Day Special

Specialist talks
**WOMEN'S HEALTH
IN 2023**

**REFLECTING ON
SECOND CHANCES
WITH VERA JIMENEZ**

**Deise Eliassen
Fabi Ford
& MORE!**

**CHRISTINA
SMALLWOOD**
FINDING BEAUTY IN THE ASHES



A PUBLICATION FOR CHRISTIAN WOMEN

BUT GOD

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Editor's Note

BUT GOD MAGAZINE

Every year as the Winter fades away I face the Spring with a heart full of expectation. It is in the Spring that we see beauty and strength reborn.

When I lived in Massachusetts when I first moved into the beautiful town of Newton I saw so much snow and was in awe of how beautiful the winters were in the US! But it buried all my hydrangeas and tulips. At the beginning of Spring the tulips specifically were looking deader than dead. I was so frustrated that I had picked them out, the gardener helped me plant them, and then, a year later they were being killed by the brutal cold, snow storms and frigid temperatures.

I was frustrated. I was going to pick them out (whatever cold-burnt twigs were left) and throw them in the trash. I was ready to head out to the plant shop and buy new tulips, when an older friend told me with a grin that the tulips were alive.

I remember thinking she was crazy, and there was no way these flowers would regain their full strength and ever bloom again. To my total shock she was right. The tulips were "sleeping". And a short few weeks later they made a comeback and were all there standing firm, strong and beautiful again.

You see, some seasons of our lives feel like a frigid Massachusetts winter. We even begin to think if we'll ever again be strong, beautiful and have a purpose. Who think it is over BUT GOD in his infinite love, mercy and goodness gives us the strength to stand firm, to live our purpose and His presence to journey into season.



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In this issue, let's follow how women that were called by the Lord has faced the challenges that provided growth and grew their faith. God's purpose is not to make things easy, but to teach us how to trust Him even in the bareness.



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Second Chances

I was walking through the frozen food aisle one weekday afternoon when a man started up a conversation with me. I have no recollection of what we were talking about, only that I was trying to place him. He was talking to me as though we knew each other, but I was not sure where I knew him from. We continued the conversation for a few minutes, then he realized that I was not placing him. "Aren't you Rufus's mom?" he asked.

Yes, yes, I am! I was beaming with delight and pride, to have been recognized for my kid more than for my twenty plus years on Los Angeles television. To have such a good dog, that I was recognized for his sake, was precious. My husband, Brian and I do not have children. So, this little rescue dog is like our child. We would never compare a canine to a human, but when you do not know what it's like to have a mini-me, that's as close as we will get. To us, Rufus is our opportunity to feel like parents. He's God's gift to us.

But God had bigger plans for our puppy and gave him a second chance when a rescue organization recognized the sweet, gentle soul that lived inside him.

WE NOW KNOW, THE LORD SPARED HIS LIFE NOT JUST FOR OUR SAKE, BUT SO THAT HE COULD BE A JOY TO SO MANY.

I knew this, but that day in the frozen food aisle, there was no denying it. Rufus had made such an impression on him, that he not only remembered him but also remembered me as his mom.

Everywhere we go, he leaves an impression on people. His beautiful brown eyes are soulful. "Is your dog smiling?" they ask. Yes, he is. God gave him a second chance to brighten peoples' day, to bring a smile, and to share love and joy with those who may not otherwise experience it. He just makes people feel good.

As I said, Brian and I don't have kids and truthfully, neither one of us wanted them until we found each other. When we got married, I was already 39 years old, so yes, we started trying before we got married. Shortly after we started trying to conceive, but unfortunately shortly thereafter, Brian was diagnosed with prostate cancer. After a period of consistent surveillance, we were told that there was a possibility that his cancer had become more aggressive and that the prudent thing to do was to remove the prostate. Having children became impossible.

Brian saved some sperm in case I wanted to try at some point. But when I thought about it, I decided that if God wanted me to be a mommy, he knew what was in my heart and he would have made it happen. When we talked about it, we both decided that for that reason, and because we wanted a family that included parents that were present and not off working all the time, we should forget the sperm. If we became parents at our age, we would both work so much longer than we wanted. Maybe we were rationalizing, but we were completely fine with the path God had laid for us, and if parenthood was not what he wanted for us, we were both okay.

When we examined the totality of our lives, we agreed that we would not change anything if we had to do it over, the roads God had taken us down, both as single people and as a married couple, had worked out really well. Surrendering peacefully to his grace had not steered us wrong before, so there was no reason to start doubting now.

I told one of my sisters that we weren't going to have kids and she plainly said, "People who have kids miss out on half their lives, and those that don't have kids miss out on half their lives too."

Vera Jimenez is a Journalist and Meteorologist, going live on the screens of KTLA5. Vera has earned two Emmys, three Golden Mike's, and three Golden Pylons. Originally from Mexico but was raised in Southern California, the place she chose to make her home. Aside from her journalism career, Vera is a motivational speaker and writer leading people in entrepreneurship, by speaking at organizations and events, and sharing her journey online.



It was a very simple, yet profound statement that made me realize it was going to be alright. There was a beautiful life ahead of me if I chose to seek God's wisdom and simply follow the path he laid before me.

TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND DO NOT LEAN ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING. IN ALL YOUR WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM, AND HE WILL MAKE STRAIGHT YOUR PATHS. PROVERBS 3:5-6.

We take Rufus with us, as often as we can, just like a child. In his mind, we are a pack, and those who enter our pack are cared for and watched by him. When we go on hikes, he always knows who is in the pack, where everyone is, and if someone is missing. He is God's precious creation that gives us love and joy and we are happy and honored to be able to share that with those who need love. We do our best to make sure he knows he is cared for and loved.

We will not make an impact on the world through the descendants we leave behind, but we will make an impact by the deeds we do and the love we do them with. After all, love is the only thing God asks us to share and spread.

DEAR FRIENDS, LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER, FOR LOVE COMES FROM GOD. EVERYONE WHO LOVES HAS BEEN BORN OF GOD AND KNOWS GOD. JOHN 4:7

Second chances come upon us in small ways and large ones. All we need to do is see them for what they are. God is always present, and showering us with his love and grace, but sometimes we get so wrapped up in our lives, that we cannot see what is happening for what it is.



Hormonal Therapy and Health of Contemporary Women

By Waldir Arevalo

Through exploring studies on human evolution, we learned that we live much longer than our ancestors. As a result, women experience a sharp drop in sex hormones produced in the gonads, such as estrogen, during a period known as menopause. On average, women live 40% of their lives in this stage.

In the 1960s, the first oral contraceptives appeared, an invention that would change women's history forever, providing the choice of having or not having a pregnancy. Later, in the 1980s, promising evidence was discovered regarding the use of combined hormone therapy (estrogen-progesterone) during menopause. This granted women a better quality of life, particularly in maintaining labor and social productivity for much longer. One of the enormous benefits of this new therapy is the ability for women to remain productive until at least age 65.

However, this scenario changed at the turn of the century. A study named Women's Health Initiative (WHI), conducted with 8,000 women in the USA, was divided into three groups. The first group received doses of estrogen, the second group a combination of estrogen and progesterone, and the third group received a placebo. After four years of using these treatments, researchers noticed a slight increase in breast cancer cases, approximately 3 cases per 1000 women, which was unexpected.

Within the study, 30% of the women were already 10 years or more into menopause and were smokers, a known risk factor for several types of tumors. However, not all the

results were negative. The group that received estrogen alone experienced a reduction in breast cancer cases and a reduction of more than 50% in the appearance of intestinal cancer.

There was an enormous silence in the medical community for almost 5 years regarding hormone therapy until health professionals opened up and began to understand what was going wrong.

After 10 years of open data and a worldwide review of all studies on Estrogen-Progesterone Hormone Therapy, they concluded that using these hormones could increase the incidence of breast cancer by up to 0.1% per year or 1% in 10 years. However, this therapy's benefits are significant compared to the massive decrease in cases of intestinal tumors, the second-largest cause of female cancers.

Another major conclusion was that using hormones via transdermal patches or implants would not increase the risk of developing cancer. This finding led to a change in the route of medication management from oral to transdermal or implant pellets, tiny cylinders of hormones that are pressed or fused.

Similarly, several studies have shown that hormone therapy improves the quality of life, including better mood, sleep, libido, and cognition, and decreases and/or delays the onset of Alzheimer's disease. The central nervous system is one of the great beneficiaries of hormone therapy, with improvements in blood flow, memory development synapses, reasoning, balance,

and productivity, as well as improvements in libido and eroticization and a delay in the aging of the skin, hair, and nails during therapy.

In addition to transdermal medications and pellets, we can apply estrogens, progesterone, and testosterone through small subcutaneous medication chips that last 6 months and are absorbable. This characteristic makes it easier for patients to adapt to this therapeutic option.

Furthermore, to fully reap the benefits of hormone therapy, it is crucial to start using it as early as possible and take advantage of the window of opportunity, which is the first 10 years of menopause. It is also recommended to use the therapy for at least 10 years while being under medical supervision through regular exams and evaluations of the benefits for the patient twice a year.

Who cannot use these therapies? Patients who have already had breast cancer, severe vascular conditions, severe hypertension, and severe liver disease. Therefore, the evaluation of the possibility of using this therapy goes first through a careful assessment by the gynecologist.

If you have any questions on the subject, contact us through our social networks @waldir.arevalo, online consultations, or by the e-mail address waldir@matercor.com.br.

A photograph of three women of different ages sitting together, each holding a large white flower. The woman on the left has blonde hair and is wearing a white bikini top. The woman in the middle has blonde hair and is wearing a black bikini top. The woman on the right has white hair and is wearing a white bikini top. The background is a soft, light brown color.

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To fully reap the benefits of hormone therapy, it is crucial to start using it as early as possible and take advantage of the window of opportunity, which is the first 10 years of menopause.

DR. WALDIR AREVALO

He has made
everything beautiful
in its time. He has
also set eternity in the
human heart; yet no
one can fathom what
God has done from
beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 3:11



COVER

PHOTOS: ADA REY PHOTOGRAPHY

"AFTER A SEASON OF DARKNESS, GOD'S GOODNESS WAS SHINING THROUGH. I WAS GOING TO BE A MOM"

In this article, Christina Smallwood shared her story on turning her grief into blessings, and her adoption journey. Mom of 3, entrepreneur, and a woman of God, Christina will lead you on how to find beauty in the ashes.

WITH CHRISTINA SMALLWOOD

FINDING *Beauty* IN THE ASHES

will never forget where I was standing when I got the call, "Christina, we've got your results." "Hold on real quick," I said as I gestured to my client with a nod as I set my sheers down on the steel

rolling tray. I knew in my gut whatever they said wouldn't be definitive – I knew I would find a way to get what I wanted out of the situation. Still, I heard my breath echo as I walked to the end of the outside edge of the salon window. I didn't want any familiar eyes on me.

— Ok, I'm ready.

— So I'm afraid I don't have good news for you. It seems that your AMH levels are showing you have what's called Diminished Ovarian reserve...

And just like that, there it was again, like a punch to the gut, GRIEF.

THE GRIEF

Let me explain the first grief gut punch. Just 3 months prior life was pretty darn good. I was fully booked in the salon, my best friend and I had a thriving business doing weddings every single weekend, my wonderful husband and I were in the process of buying our first home and I was a proud Dog mom. We were trying to con-

-ceive for about 8 months & super excited for the holidays. We had our entire life planned out until November 20th.

It was Thanksgiving week so I was slammed at the Salon & working extra long hours. I shut off the notifications on my phone to make sure I get a full night's sleep. Around 1 am our dog started going nuts, and there was someone at the door. It was one of our longest family friends and as soon as I opened I could tell she was extremely upset. Before I could say anything she blurted out, "Your dad has been in a motorcycle accident and airlifted to the hospital."

My dad was my favorite person on the planet! He was extremely smart and cool, I loved bragging about the fact he was a professional baseball player for the Reds when I was growing up. My brother was more like my mom and I was more like my dad, so I often felt like the black sheep when my dad wasn't home. He worked multiple jobs to make ends meet for us. When I had no direction in life, he encouraged me to chase my passion for being a hairstylist. My brother was going to UCLA dental school and I wanted to go to beauty college... in some families maybe that would be a point of contention but he encouraged me to make it a business and not a hobby, and I'm forever



Follow along Christina on social media:
[@christinaasmallwood](#).

grateful for that influence. I had a lot of time to think about all of this while he was lying in a coma for 4 weeks.

He never made it out of the hospital. I woke up every morning with a wet pillow, I never knew it was possible to be so devastated that you could weep in your sleep. I was receiving the news of my infertility about a month after his Celebration of Life service.

Another grief?

— So are you telling me that IVF is my only option? — I asked fighting back tears, knowing how expensive & emotionally difficult it is.

— Well, it's your best chance at a successful pregnancy.

I dropped to my feet & held my head in my arms. Silently screamed for a few, then I stood up, walked back into the salon, and finished my work day. It was a gorgeous brisk winter night in Newport Beach. I drove home in a daze, and as I neared our apartment door I could hear the music. I walked into the warmth of comfort as my husband was making dinner. I was so nervous to tell him. Letting people down is one of my pet peeves and this seemed like the ultimate disappointment. Odd, he seemed almost relieved by the news.

Through my confused tears, I mustered, "So you still want to be married to me?" He said, "What am I? A medieval king? Bear a son for me or banish?" Now I was the relieved one and we laughed. We had learned that's how we dealt with grief, laughing. We discussed adoption as our only option and we made a plan. I was devastated but knew much like my dad's death, these were circumstances I couldn't change, so I gave myself 24 hours to have a pity party and then I was going to be done with it. I'm not sure how healthy that was, but it's what saved me from a dark depression.

A few weeks later we hired an attorney & began flying through the home study process. Before we knew the weather warmed up, it was summer & life was back to its normal rhythm. The acute grief of our loss had subsided and we were now happy hopeful adoptive parents. I was standing in the exact same spot when I got the call from my husband that we had been matched with a birth mom, this time I celebrated with my client inside and had tears of joy.

Man, we needed that win. We needed that joy. After a season of darkness, God's goodness was shining through. I was going to be a mom, it was the best phone call ever.

A few weeks later we met the expectant couple at Coco's Bakery accompanied by our attorney and his wife. I was more nervous than I'd ever been for a first meeting and if

you've ever seen the movie Juno, I was totally Jennifer Garner giving myself a pep talk in the bathroom, "be cool." We talked about our life over broccoli cheese soup & talked about our interests like a blind first date. But I suppose it went as well as it could go because we exchanged numbers and began texting around the clock. We weren't quite sure if they were 100% on their decision until the 4th of July they called and informed us that we were going to be the parents of their unborn baby due September 20th. Then they invited us to their upcoming 31-week 3D ultrasound appointment. Another memorable phone call and the joyous day ended with fireworks. It seemed like we were farther and farther from those grief-stricken days.

Sitting in a dark room covered with storks on the walls we all stared at the screen while the gray and white image slightly moved to the sound of nursery music – it was then that we collectively came up with her name, Finley Isabella. We cried & connected as a unit. Birth parents & adoptive parents, it was truly something I had never pictured for my life, yet it felt totally normal.

A week later we woke up in the middle of the night, and somehow my phone was on silent [again]. 30-something missed calls and a ton of unread messages, I opened my phone and all I saw was the word "BORN" and I immediately jumped out of bed, "SHE'S HERE!" Josh got up and as I was ready to run out the door shoeless in my pajamas, he said, "she's early and she's going to be in the hospital for a while. We've done this before. Let's shower, get our chargers, make some coffee, then head over". He was right & I love him for this. He always had a way to calm the crazy.

GRIEF & BLESSING

The entire drive to the hospital felt like deja vu. It was a rainy morning in July & my head was spinning as I was notifying people that I wouldn't be at work that day & texting my assistant & coworkers some phone numbers and formulas to make sure my clients were taken care of. Little did I know my entire life was about to change, I was ready for it... Or so I thought.

We went to visit Finley's birth mom first, she was out of it because she was just a few hours post-surgery. We got to love on her a little as I know that was one of the hardest days of her life. I can't even imagine the pain of placing the greatest love of her life into someone else's hands. My heart was just to love her as I was flooded with gratitude. My body failed me, biology failed me, but she chose me. I vowed to never forget how I felt at that moment.

The rigamarole of getting hospital bracelets and people acting like I was stealing someone's baby was super fun. It was my first day as an adoptive mom and here I was facing the harsh realities of it in the hospital.

"She's not really your baby" rang through my head. It got me thinking, "I know, but she's my responsibility." It was in those first few encounters my position as a mother was formed & it was that I could care less what others think, I know OUR journey. Amidst these intensely transformative thoughts, I was dealing with hospital staff and fighting back all the emotions that being in a hospital strums up. I could almost feel the walls closing in on me, but my mission was clear, get me to Finley.

After going back and forth there were only 2 bracelets to get into the NICU room. Her birth mom had one and she approved me to have one, so Josh had to stay behind.

I went in for the first visit.

I held my breath as I stepped into the dim room. The sounds of the heart monitor pulsed through the room and as I inched my way toward the incubator, my eyes caught her little hand first. I was flooded with emotions, as I stared at the 3-pound angel, hooked up to all sorts of wires. She was fighting for her life, yet she was sleeping so peacefully. I didn't know Finley meant "fair warrior" until after she was born. And that's exactly what she was.

The team of doctors told us she had suffered a traumatic brain injury, the very thing that killed my dad. Now our baby was born with one. Talk about triggering, except last time I was in the hospital I watched someone get worse, and now I was hoping to watch someone get better... "she might not walk or talk, or she might be fine, time will tell."

I made Finley a promise that day. That I would do my absolute best to make sure she had the greatest life possible.

Fast forward 15 months. I'll sum it up and say it was a very beautiful & challenging time, basically, the whole thing was like someone through us in the laundry dryer & hit start. Lots of tears as a first-time medical mama, but oh so much joy woven in. Finley had weekly specialist appointments and a surgery with more scheduled on the horizon. All of her medical situation aside, we had bonded beautifully, like I often forgot I didn't birth her. We visited with her beautiful birthmother every few months & we learned to navigate the boundaries of that relationship.

PLACED IN LOVE

Our open Adoption often confused people. I began to blog about it and post on my Instagram page as an advocate. I was actually a family member who was the most openly vocal about her opinion, "How long are you going to keep this up for? How confusing."

When I dove into truly understanding the adoption community I realized that it was less confusing long term if the adoptee knew they were and who they came from. That's what I wanted for my daughter, for her to never question where she came from or that she was placed in love. To be clear the distinction is: "Placed in love" is not "given up for adoption".

I'm honestly really grateful for a place to address the topic of birthmothers. They often get shamed or shunned, but they are women who chose life. They chose love. They often were the ones who chose to break their own heart to make sure their baby had a greater life than they believed they could provide. Some birthmothers fought unbelievable battles and fell short of conquering them and for that reason, their children were taken away.

Who am I to judge the shoes or anyone that I've never walked in? It was experiencing the death of my father & the adoption process of Finley that I was able to embrace the perspective of being judgment free. Sure, we read all kinds of quotes about it, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." It's very important to adjust our hearts, Christ asks us to love and be gracious to all.

As a Christian woman, I just saw it so clearly and I'm so grateful I wasn't blinded by my human insecurities. The entire time I was struggling with infertility, I never imagined open adoption was my future. Still, I fully embraced it as God's plan for me. I do not take for granted that it's extremely difficult for others and I have quite a few friends who battle infertility every single day. I am grateful God was my strength, and honestly for friends and a husband that fully supported the decision to adopt.

FACING NEW CHALLENGES

It was around the time that Finley turned 4 that I felt a yearning to add another sweet little soul to our family. I wanted to adopt the same way we did before, private domestic, and get matched with an expectant mother. My husband had the yearning to adopt through the foster system.

I would do my absolute best to make sure she had the greatest life possible.

“

God is so good and even when our story looks nothing like we imagined it ever would, He sprinkles His goodness all over it. He never stops working for us.



I'm not going to lie, we went head to head over this one for a few months, and one day I just had peace about it.

We went to our first home study meeting and when they began to cover the part about your child likely being neglected, abused, and riddled with trauma. It broke our hearts and solidified for me that [Josh was right] we were meant to foster adopt. Then the adoption worker began to share about what kind of lifestyle we would need and all I heard was, "You will have to work part-time and be extremely flexible." I know I had anxiety written all over my face because she remembered it a few years later when we started up the process again. But those words were not in my vocabulary at the time.

I was working 3 jobs & juggling special needs motherhood. There was no way I could cut back on any of it because those jobs covered costs we hadn't even spent yet. I remember mourning the fact that the decision just seemed so out of my hands and although I trusted God, I was very sad. We agreed to take growing our family off the table for a while.

A few years later, I had a new career with more flexibility. We were out of debt and life was moving in a new direction. We were financially ready & flexible to foster. I was heavy into documenting our life and one day it was on my heart to post a picture of the empty nursery on my Instagram. It was through that post we were matched with our twins. At first, I laughed, "Two kids? I just wanted one! Lord, you must be joking." But to my surprise, Josh was down with it. A week later we were in court & two months later they moved in with us. It's crazy how fast it all happened.

THE BEAUTIFUL WORK OF GOD

Life as an overnight mom of twin toddlers was wild. I'll be the first to say it, as prepared as I was, I was not prepared at all! It was extremely challenging before the global pandemic, so once the lockdown happened I was full-blown "Jesus, take the wheel" status. I hadn't thought much about the last few conversations with my dad and then one day it hit me like a ton of bricks.

When Josh and I were first trying to get pregnant, my dad knew. I'll never forget one of the last times I spoke with him he called me and said, "what do I gotta do to get you two to have a child?" Laughing I said, "Dad we're trying..."

"Well, I'm praying for twins."

There I was 6 years later, remembering this and sobbing while rocking the twins to sleep. My life was full of both grief

& blessings.

God is so good and even when our story looks nothing like we imagined it ever would, He sprinkles His goodness all over it. He never stops working for us. Way maker is my absolute favorite song.

***"Even when I don't feel it, You're working
You never stop, You never stop working
You never stop, You never stop working"***

I don't 'live adoption' every single day because, well, my kids look just like me. I can't take credit for their eyes or their beautiful smiles, but I know their biological families and I see where their beauty comes from. I will never not be grateful for their birthmothers choosing life & giving us the greatest honor of raising them. I will always share openly about it and not allow myself to feel less than a mother because I didn't birth my children.

Wherever you're at in your motherhood journey, whether you have struggled or know someone who has, I will continue to pray that our story inspires others to follow the path the Lord has planned for them. Where there is a will there's a way and a power of prayer. God never stops working.





LINDSEY FERRELL

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all things are possible to those who believe

Mark 9:23

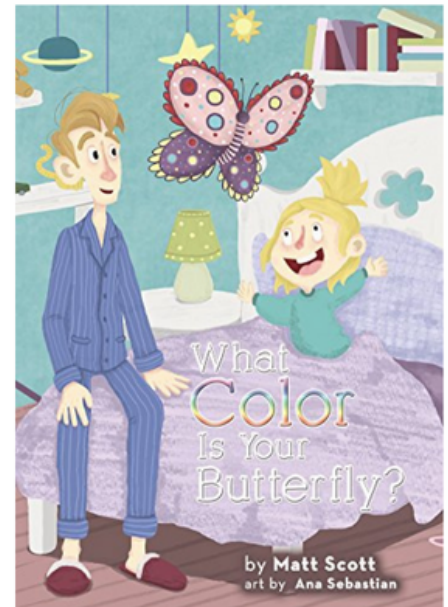
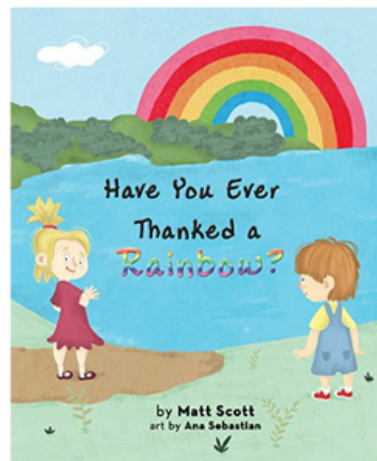
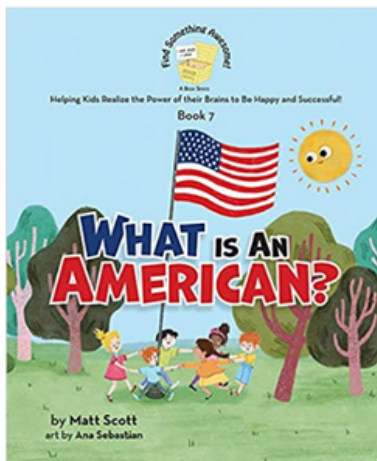


BOOK SERIES

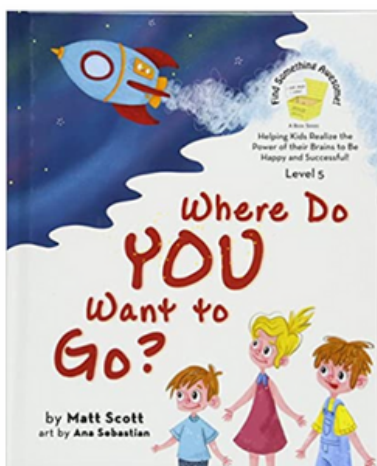
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No matter where you are on your journey, know that it is only a season.

Growing up in church can often leave us with unwanted emotions and shame. Many churches focus their teaching on all the ways we as humans fall short of holiness. The truth is, we make mistakes. No matter how well we were raised, or how hard we try, sometimes we make wrong turns and end up in circumstances that we wouldn't have chosen. I can think of several times when I found myself living a life I wasn't prepared for.

I was a teen mom. At the tender age of 16 years old, I felt certain that I knew what was best for me and my baby. A few bad decisions led to an unplanned pregnancy and a very young marriage. I married my high school sweetheart. As Believers, we hoped we could put things in the right order and honor God. I remember thinking, "OK God, I messed up, I will make this right." At 19 years old, my son was born. I was young and naive. I hadn't learned the lessons required to build a life with a spouse or a healthy family.

By the time I turned 21, I was a divorced single mom. I had no education and no plan. This was certainly not where I had imagined my life would be. Even when we knowingly make bad choices, I think a part of us is still hoping we won't have to experience their consequences. I felt lost and alone but knew I could never let my babies see my fears or emotions about those things. Instead of letting them know, I would pour my heart out in my journals. These were my letters to God.

FROM ALL SEASONS, *The Present*

By Michelle Schaffer

"Dear God," I would write and share every fear, every feeling, and every worry I had. I prayed every single day for His grace, over me and my children. I prayed He would fill in the gaps, as I knew I was falling short. Looking back at the 24-year-old me, I wish I could assure her of all that God would do in her life.


At the time, I felt certain that because I was the one who initiated the divorce, I would certainly remain alone. As many of us did, I heard over and over in church that God hates divorce. Of course, He does. It is a severe and tragic thing when it happens to a family. And I was the one who made it happen. After a few very unsuccessful attempts at dating, I didn't feel I would ever be in God's good graces again; I would surely end up alone.

For most of my 20s, I was in survival mode. I worked, sometimes two jobs. I put myself through school while working full-time. I juggled my kids between their dad and my mom, as I was working to desperately rewrite our future. I had resigned myself to the fact that I would be alone. I wasn't sad or depressed about it; I completely accepted it.



I was the one who made those bad decisions, and I was dealing with the consequences of my actions. However, I was willing and able to work my tail off to build a great life for my kids. I focused all of my energy on that.

One quiet Saturday night, while my kids were with their dad, I sat alone writing one of my letters to God. While I knew I was destined to be alone, I told God, if I ever would meet another man, it would have to be in the grocery store or one of the places I went in my everyday life, because I was DONE with dating. Next, I proceeded to write a list. This list I knew was unattainable, impossible to fulfill. At the time, maybe that was part of my way of accepting a life without a partner.



*“Dear God,
I am ok being alone. I have my kids, a little
boy and a little girl. It is perfect. I am so lucky
to have them. What more could I want? And
God, you’ve helped me to start a new career
that I love. I am so grateful. Lord if you ever
did have someone for me, you’re going to have
to put in the grocery store to find me. I don’t
want to date. I don’t expect you to give me a
marriage or a man, since I broke the first one
up. But if you ever had someone out there, he
would have to be:*

*Funny
Love God
Love his family
Be older than me
Be a dad
Be ambitious
Love adventure
Be chivalrous
Be a protector
Be a risk taker
Love sweets
Love my kids as his own
And adore me”*

I used to write books full of letters to God, but I don't remember much of what I wrote. Sadly, years ago, I lost the box filled with the journals of my life. However, there is one letter I will always remember.

It wasn't long after that letter that I met a man on a blind date. A friend I worked with had been persistent in trying to set me up, but I had refused for months. Eventually, I agreed to go on the date, but only with conditions.

On the night of the date, I wasn't enthusiastic at all. I went just to be nice to my insistent friend. However, I met a man that evening who felt like an old friend. We talked and laughed, and I felt an instant connection and friendship with him.

As I write this, my husband Bobby and I have been together for 23 years and married for 21. Everything about our marriage is a "but God" story. We have faced significant losses and hardships in those 23 years and have experienced times that could have torn us apart.

Despite our brokenness, God has shown us so much love and kindness. I have made many mistakes in my life, but God continues to give me incredible gifts and opportunities to experience joy.

Bobby was one of the many gifts from God to me. It feels like God read my letter and delivered the man who fits perfectly into that list, and even more than I could have imagined. This is just a glimpse into the lifetime of second and third chances that God offers to His children.

No matter where you are on your journey, know that it is only a season. God loves you, and He is for you. His plans for you are good. He is waiting with open arms and ready to give you second, third, and fourth chances to experience His love in all ways.

XO,
Michelle Schaffer

By Deise Eliassen

WHY DOES GOD GIVES US UNLIMITED CHANCES?

God gives us as many chances as we need to get our lives on track and does not use our mistakes against us. It can be difficult to stay on

the right path, even after we have already accepted Christ into our lives. There are so many temptations all around us and it's easy to stumble and fall, but we don't need to worry when we make mistakes.

God is not a God of first, second, or third chances. He is a God of unlimited chances! How many chances has He given you? I have lost count of how many chances He has given me. He continues to love, protect, and comfort me in times of sorrow, despite the countless times that I have made bad decisions and turned my back on His plans for me. Each time I have come to Him, I have been welcomed with an open heart, full of love.

The Bible is full of people who were given many opportunities: David, Jonah, Samson, Zacchaeus, Peter, the thief on the cross, and others. David was God's choice to be the king of Israel and the one whom God declared to be "a man after his own heart." But David slept with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his most loyal army officers. David killed her husband in battle and married her.

God sent Nathan the prophet to confront David and he repented (Psalm 51), and God forgave David's sin. Although the child born to David and Bathsheba died, God restored the couple and made them parents of the great King Solomon, whose descendant was Jesus Christ, as we read in 2 Samuel 11, 12.

One of the amazing aspects of God's character is His incredible patience with us. Psalm 86:15 tells us, "But you, Lord, are a God of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and full of love and faithfulness." And in Micah 7:18 we read, "What other God is there like you, who forgives the guilt of the remnant and forgets the sins of those who belong to you? You will not remain angry with your people forever, for you take pleasure in showing your love." No matter how many mistakes we make, God gives us the opportunity to return to intimate fellowship with Him all the time.

Do you know why He continues loving us and receiving us with open arms even after we make mistakes? Because He has such special and important plans for us that He doesn't give up easily. "'For I know the plans I have for you', declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" Jeremiah 29:11

Please don't misunderstand me: He is not a sloppy God. On the contrary, He continues to believe that we can be transformed and be like Jesus. He keeps offering you and me the chance to believe and accept that His ways are better for us because they are ways of life and not ways to make us suffer.

If you have lost your way in life and headed in the wrong direction, there is good news, God is waiting for you! He considers you too valuable to lose. In fact, God is so wonderful that He turns our mistakes into opportunities to teach us! He gently corrects us when we make mistakes. He directs us and gives us valuable lessons through our suffering. In this way, He perfects us. God leads us back to the path He has laid out for us.



Deise Eliassen is a commissioner of The Salvation Army, serving now in Johannesburg. She is originally from Brazil and has lived in many countries out there, such as Mozambique, England and Chile. After graduating in Journalism, she was called to serve as a full-time pastor. Deise is married to Torben Eliassen, with whom she share the blessing of two beautiful daughters and six very naughty grandchildren who are their source of endless love and inspiration. To follow Jesus Christ and share His abundant life is the Eliassen's ultimate goal which they embrace wholeheartedly.

Brazilian Fitness Coach, Fabi Ford, shared the perfect workout for you to do in the comfort of your home!



Fabi Ford
@fabi_ford

LOWER + CORE

This is a Lower body and core workout separated into 3 sections. Take your time, breathe, and move your body consciously, feeling your muscles contracting. Repeat 10x each exercise, and rest for 45 seconds after each circuit, and each round. If you don't have the equipment, you can replace it with anything from your house, such as a rice package or a water gallon. Exercises with bands can be done only using your body weight.

WARM-UP

2 minutes of jumping jacks

CIRCUIT 1

Sumo squats + pulse (10x)
Cross lunges (alternating legs) (10x)
Kettlebell swing (10x)
3 Rounds

CIRCUIT 2

Side lunges (10x)
Standing hip abduction with a band (10x)
Clamshell (10x)
3 Rounds

CIRCUIT 3

Plank rolls (10x)
Climber taps (10x)
Dead bug (10x)
3 Rounds

Need help with the exercise? Scan the code and watch selected video tutorials!

SCAN ME



WORKOUT



I WOULD LOVE TO PRAY FOR YOU! PLEASE EMAIL ME AT WALKINFREEDOM77@GMAIL.COM

FREEDOM

BY ROSE
KITTRELL

I was living 2 Timothy 3:7, "Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth". Until God radically set me free from demonic oppression, and Jesus healed areas I never addressed from my past. My eyes were then opened to my spiritual condition and spiritual warfare. It was the most mind-blowing experience with Jesus I ever had. I had never felt so free in my life, scales were ripped off my eyes, I was hungry for God and his word. I wanted to be in his presence always. I prayed for hours, and I couldn't get enough of Him. I went through a dying process to self and Jesus made me new. I just thought I was the way I was. Hosea 4:6 says, "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge". It all made sense, I didn't know my authority in Christ or what God has called us to be in Him. Jesus says in Ephesians 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms". I wanted to scream on mountain tops to what Jesus had done for me and what He can do for you. He called me to ministry and molded me into a prayer warrior. The Lord burdened me to set those who are in bondage free and to heal the broken hearted. Freely you have received, freely give. Overtime, without a firm relationship with God, a lack of repentance and a lack of Godly guidance and discipleship, these strongholds can develop. Everyone who calls on the name of the lord shall be saved. If you need freedom in any areas of your life, Jesus is waiting.



EVENTS

Wonder Woman Conference

May 10 - 13th

\$197.00

Houston, Texas | Details:

theglobalstrategistmysisterskeeper.snappages.site

Radiant Women's Conference "HOLY"

4236 W 147th St

Lawndale Ca 90260

May 19-20

\$75 early bird

\$95 regular admission

Details: visit restorationlife.church

Heart of Hospitality "Diner en Blush"

Los Angeles, CA

June 24th @ 6 PM

\$45 ticket

Details: visit heartofhospitalitymagazine.com

ACTIVATE 2023

October 5-7th

Dallas, Tx

Info SOON at girlpoweralliance.com

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