

I have many regrets in my life, but if I had read Robin Bertram's new book *No Regrets* as a young man, things might be different. This is a manual for living your life to the fullest. It's about not looking back and wondering what might have been. If you've ever believed there was more to life, then you need this book. It will give you a new vision for your future, a vision that could change everything.

—PHIL COOKE

FILMMAKER, MEDIA CONSULTANT

AUTHOR OF *ONE BIG THING: DISCOVERING WHAT YOU WERE BORN TO DO*

In *No Regrets* Robin urgently reminds us of the brevity of our earthly days, the benefits of the inevitable times of suffering, and the ultimate blessing in choosing to live God's way. The book is chock-full of actionable keys and strategies that are sure to bring joy and fulfillment to every reader.

—DEBORAH SMITH PEGUES

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF

30 DAYS TO TAMING YOUR TONGUE
CEO/FOUNDER, THE PEGUES GROUP, INC.

Ordinary people go through extraordinary experiences. Through those times of trials and testing they learn an extraordinary message. Robin Bertram has been given that message. This book will encourage you to view life in such a way that every moment counts. Life is precious; embrace it.

—DEBORAH G. ROSS

DEBORAH ROSS MINISTRIES INC.

AUTHOR OF *HEALING A BROKEN MARRIAGE*,
WOMAN2WOMAN: THE NAOMI AND RUTH EXPERIENCE,
AND *SAVE IT! MARRIAGE BIBLE STUDY*

Robin Bertram, in *No Regrets*, shares her personal journey toward unwavering contentment, unshakable faith, and abundant joy. Every individual who wants to live life to the fullest, pleasing God and loving people, should read this book. It offers keys to living a rich

life and reminds us to take time to embrace even the small day-to-day moments.

—JACK WATTS

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *HI, MY NAME IS JACK*

No Regrets is a page-turner and one of the most inspiring books I have come across in a long time. It encourages us to live in such a way that we will never have to regret decisions we make. Robin is a woman of prayer and deserves much credit for exploring topics in a novel way, one that not only instructs but also inspires. The concept of *No Regrets* is deep and inspiring, filled with wisdom-based insights that will warm your heart and encourage your faith.

—SHARON HILL

AUTHOR OF *THE ONCALL PRAYER JOURNAL*
AND *THE POWER OF THREE*

In a culture that seeks to convince us personal gain brings ultimate fulfillment, Robin Bertram proves the opposite. In *No Regrets* she uncovers the lies that would have us exchange the pursuit of the superficial for the greater reward of living passionately, loving unconditionally, and giving extravagantly.

Through candid stories, analogies, and personal transparency Robin Bertram reveals the truth about living with intention—that loving without limitations does not hinder us but liberates us to enjoy life the way it was designed to be, passionate and fulfilling.

—TRACEY MITCHELL

TV HOST

AUTHOR OF *DOWNSIDE UP*

Thought-provoking and introspective, *No Regrets* will cause you to pause and cut out the noise of hectic living. Robin Bertram encourages intentional living with a forward-thinking mind-set rather than one that dwells on past regrets. With an emphasis on loving, living purposefully, and forgiving, this book is an excellent tool for everyone who wants to live a more fulfilling life.

—WENDIE PETT

FITNESS AND WELLNESS EXPERT,
TV HOST OF *VISIBLY FIT TV*

I believe one of our failures as Christians living in today's culture has been our hesitation to write and leave our personal story for the next generation. Most of us have been silent, but Robin reminds us in *No Regrets* that our lives are short and our legacy matters. In this remarkable book she shares her story and encourages you to do the same. So what are you waiting for?

—KATHLEEN COOKE
WRITER, SPEAKER, AND COFOUNDER OF COOKE PICTURES
AND THE INFLUENCE LAB

Not everyone gets a second chance, but Robin, in *No Regrets*, does. She shares with transparency and sincerity her insight as she walked through this journey. This book will encourage you to evaluate your life and legacy and not wait until a tragedy occurs. Robin encourages the reader to accomplish their God-given assignments and move with power, passion, and prayer into a life with no regrets.

—JOAN HIGLEY
RIGHT WORD MINISTRY

One of the most significant takeaways of this book for me was the importance of building a spiritual legacy: build it, live it, and leave it. *No Regrets* encourages the reader to begin now by the way they walk, talk, and live and to become influential for Christ and through their witness they can be impactful for the kingdom of God.

—SUELLEN ROBERTS
CHRISTIAN WOMEN IN MEDIA
FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT

Is it possible to live life with no regrets? Imagine living free from regret, having a life filled with boundless faith and living a passionate, purposeful life. Learn how in Robin Bertram's powerful book, *No Regrets: How Loving Deeply and Living Passionately Can Impact Your Legacy Forever*.

—KATHLEEN HARDAWAY
AUTHOR OF *I KISSED A LOT OF FROGS*

TITLE PAGE

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This book was a gift from God: He gave it, and I now give back to Him. I dedicate it to God first.

It is only by His mercy that I am alive today.

I also dedicate it to my father, Paul A. Maddy, who inspired me, through a life well lived, to write it. It was his godly legacy and the impact he had on my life that allowed me to become who I am today.

I also dedicate this work to Ruth H. Maddy, my mother, who stood by my father's side for nearly sixty years. She taught me about the importance of having a generous, loving heart. I also dedicate this book to my dear, sweet family: Ken, Logan, Kelsey, Taylor, and Ben, who stood by me during the darkest, most difficult days of my life. It was through their love and support that I pressed forward.

No Regrets is a celebration of life, an invitation to love deeply and live passionately, and an encouragement to live the kind of life that will impact generations.

To God be all the glory, all the honor, and all the praise.

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FOREWORD

THE WORDS FOUND in this book echo sweet sounds in my heart. As soon as I heard them, I was reminded of the words of this old song, “Life is like a mountain railroad with an engineer that’s brave. We must make the run successful from the cradle to the grave.”¹ There are so many ups and downs, swerves and curbs, mountains and valleys in our lives that all of us experience. Sometimes we don’t know up from down and where to turn around. But I’m so excited to step into the pages of this book and take a journey through the tunnels and hills and mountains and valleys of life with a lady I have known for nearly a decade through praying together, presenting through Christian Women In Media Association, and watching each other’s journeys through some of these mountains and valleys, learning how to walk through the valley of the shadow of death and have no regrets. Remember, we are traveling *through* the tunnels; we’re not parking.

As Robin writes from her heart to us, she is demonstrating the values of strengthening and encouraging others to live a life of significance in spite of the terrain.

Regrets are inevitable in this uncertain world. I’ve often said, “I wish someone would have told me...” Or perhaps, “I wish I had listened to that someone!” Maybe my expectations in marriage would have been more accurate. Or I would have planned my finances differently. My diet would have fueled my health sufficiently. And the thoughts go on and on. Robin writes out of personal experiences that prove to us the benefits of growing through these twists and turns and looking in our souls for the maps to put us on a journey of no regrets.

At seventy-five years of age I frequently review my life of not

having a legal birth name until I was in my late thirties, but I still look back through the decades and say to God, “Thank You, Father, because though I was un-named for those years, You knew my name. No regrets. Even though I’ve lived with a blood disorder and cancer and a stroke, You walked me through the months of failing health. You walked me through when the doctors had given up on me and I could only turn to You. No regrets!”

Oh sure, I’ve lived a part of my life with lack of forgiveness, with my feelings hurt, with business struggles, with family issues, with ministry issues, and with a blurred mind without an understanding. But when I allowed God to take complete control of my ups and downs and ins and outs, He showed me how to live with no regrets!

Read this purposeful and powerful direction for a safe journey through the tunnels of life led by the engineer of life who makes the run successful from the cradle to the grave and live with no regrets.

—REV. DR. THELMA WELLS (MAMA T)

PRESIDENT OF A WOMAN OF GOD MINISTRIES AND
GENERATION LOVE:DIVINE EXPLOSION
AUTHOR, SPEAKER, PROFESSOR

PREFACE

ON HIS DEATHBED my father said, “Robin I have no regrets.” It took me years to understand what he meant by that statement. It became much clearer to me when I faced my own mortality. We all acknowledge that we will die one day, but it’s different when you actually face that day, particularly when it’s much sooner than you had ever imagined. You will have a new perspective, and that perspective will change the way you live your life. I had that epiphany.

I wrote *No Regrets* to share the powerful life-lessons and wisdom learned through my journey and to express the importance of living today with great joy while making every moment really count. It is my hope that this book will inspire, motivate, and encourage you to begin to walk a life of love, peace, joy, and faith with gratitude. It will encourage you to develop an intimate prayer life, to develop a willingness to forgive, to embrace every good gift you’ve been given with a thankful heart, and to live life to the fullest because no one is guaranteed tomorrow.

I hope to encourage you to move out of your own comfort zone and truly live for Christ, and by doing so you will be finding greater fulfillment as you begin to view your life from a heavenly perspective. How? Through the truth found in Scripture combined with the insight gained from real-life stories with victorious outcomes. *No Regrets* will encourage you to forgive, to love deeply, to mend broken relationships, and to build a legacy now so that when the day comes, there will be a strong spiritual legacy to leave behind.

INTRODUCTION

SAMANTHA PEERED INTO the mirror one day and saw a woman looking back at her that she did not even recognize. “Can this really be my life?” she asked herself. “This is not the way I thought things were going to turn out.” Her adult children had little interest in her life, her husband was not meeting her personal needs, and her career had not materialized into the success she so desperately wanted. “If only” kept running through her mind. “If only I had attended a better college. If only I had married a different man. If only I had spent more time with my children...”

While your life may not be like Samantha’s, without a doubt every one of us can think of times in life when we’ve experienced regret and wished we could just do it all over again. Though the past cannot be changed, I’m telling you with great certainty that your future can. It can take a different course if you live intentionally. Living intentionally means having a plan, a course of action, that will help to chart out your days in such a way that you will learn to embrace and enjoy all the good that life has to offer. And then you can decide to make it happen. It can be a future that is absent of regret and lived to the fullest, embracing the small things of life with great joy, contentment, and satisfaction, all the while honoring God and honoring people. You can live the life you were created to live.

This book addresses this very issue of backward thinking instead of forward living. We all can get so caught up in what we did or didn’t do that we forget to embrace and enjoy today. Not only that, but our regretful thinking can steal our tomorrows as well. Today is the best day you have; it is not yesterday because you cannot change it, and not tomorrow because it may never come. No matter what stage of life you are in, how young or old you are, what you have

or have not accomplished thus far, you can begin today to live your life intentionally for Christ, and doing so will minimize regrets and maximize personal fulfillment. Release your yesterday, embrace your today, and confidently and intentionally decide to live your tomorrow with purpose and direction as you begin to build a legacy worth leaving behind.

Throughout this book you will find keys that will prepare you to make the best life choices, to live biblically, and to leave a legacy that will far outlast the number of your days. The circumstances and situations that cause regret or solidify our destiny begin with the decisions and choices we make today.

Within this book you will find:

- **Pillars of Abundant Living:** These contain specific scriptures which have given me comfort, wisdom, and insight during my personal journey.
- **Intentional Living:** At the end of each chapter there are seven keys that will help you become more intentional in living your life for Christ and embracing today.
- **Shareworthy:** There are text boxes scattered throughout each chapter that include quotes expanding on the ideas in this book that are worth sharing on your social media platforms.
- **The Thirty-Day Love Challenge:** At the end of the book (appendix) there is a love challenge, which will help you personally evaluate your own love walk on a daily basis for thirty days so that you can honestly get a picture of where you are and where you can grow.

May God fill your heart with abundant joy as you come along with me on this journey. May your days be bright and fulfilling as you choose to serve and honor God with your time, talent, and resources. May your years be long and fruitful for His kingdom, His honor, and His glory, and may you accomplish all that He has sent you here to do.

PART I

LIFE IS SHORT

CHAPTER 1

LIVE LIKE YOU WERE DYING

Merely to live among men requires of us years of hard toil and much care and attention to the things of this world. In sharp contrast to this is our life in the Spirit. There we enjoy another and higher kind of life; we are children of God; we possess heavenly status and enjoy intimate fellowship with Christ.¹

—A. W. TOZER

ON HIS DEATHBED my father looked me in the eye and said, “Robin, I have no regrets.” That statement puzzled me. I was confused at the time. As I began to think about his statement, I quickly recognized that I already had plenty of regrets in my own life. I wondered, “How do you live your life in such a way that you can truly say, ‘I have no regrets?’” I pondered that statement for some time. I knew my father. He was a quiet, loving man, but he was not perfect. He had successes and failures, just like everyone else. He was a very hard worker. He loved God and he loved life. He loved the small things in life. He loved Maddy’s mountain, our home place in Virginia, and he loved the outdoors. He loved a good meal; I guess that’s where I developed a love for preparing great dinners for my family. He instilled in me a love for God and a love for family. He loved to play the piano and sing, and he loved people. But how could he say that he had no regrets?

At some point we will all die. That inevitable reality should be a wake-up call. Will we be able to say that we paid attention to the most important things in life, or will we look back with deep regret

and wish we could just have a do-over? Will we be able to say that we lived life to its fullest, or will we say that we did just enough to get by?

Truth be told, most of us live as though we will always have tomorrow, but we absolutely do not have that assurance. We don't know how or when death may come. We can't simply put off being the person God wants us to be and avoid doing what He has called us to do. We can't rely on tomorrows or somedays. My friend, someday may not come. I want to encourage you: Take this day and make it the best day ever. Live it as if you will not have tomorrow.

“LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how transient I am” (Ps. 39:4).

This verse and its prayer were going to be brought to fruition in my life. Along with it I was going to get an answer to the question I had regarding my father's deathbed statement, but not in the way I had expected. I had been a healthy person all my life; I never had much more than a cold or occasional flu. My diet was fairly good because I preferred cooking at home instead of eating out; therefore I was cognizant about the quality of the meals I would prepare. I was healthy. I did not drink alcohol. I was not a smoker. I did not even drink soft drinks, but rather tea, coffee, and mostly water. My biggest addiction was popcorn at the movies. I know, it's terrible. I loved going to movies and I loved eating popcorn. Outside of that, I did most of the right things to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Nevertheless, one day my life changed in a very significant way.

TUSCANY

Several years ago I was preparing to go on a family vacation to Italy. We were going to stay in Florence and the Tuscan countryside. My family had traveled to Rome several years earlier, and it had been one of our favorite vacations. I woke up in the middle of the night several weeks before we were to leave and my right arm felt strange. It felt very weak, and it was a chore just to lift it up. Days before I had volunteered to help a friend paint her bedroom, so I just assumed it was a pinched nerve. I dismissed it as a non-issue. But as the days went on, there was no improvement.

My extended family came in for my daughter's graduation party from NC State, which was just two days before we were to leave for Italy. I tried to pick up a drinking glass, and it felt as if I were lifting a ton of bricks. I could hardly pick up the glass. The house was overflowing with out-of-town guests, and my home was filled with joy and laughter. However, my niece was very concerned about my arm and convinced me to go to the urgent care facility. The entire time I was thinking, "This is such a waste of time." I had so much to do in preparation for our trip.

The nurse took me back, asked a few questions, and then promptly left the room. The urgent care doctor came in almost immediately. He asked a few more questions and then with a very grim look on his face he said, "I'm sorry, but this is neurological." It didn't even register to me what that meant. I thought to myself, "No, I'm a healthy person. I am not sick. I just have a little issue with my arm." He gave me a few potential diagnoses of what it could be: a stroke, an aneurysm, MS, or the deadly, incurable, intensely painful ALS. WHAT? It pains me even to write those words.

Then he continued, "But I feel certain it was not a stroke." He told me to get in to see a doctor as soon as I returned from my trip and indicated that it would be a process of elimination to get a diagnosis. They would rule out one thing at a time.

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). The Lord was certainly doing this in my life.

I gathered my things and left the doctor's office in complete shock. Thoughts flew through my head. "This cannot be happening to me. This is really serious. I do not believe this. He must be wrong. I'm too young to be having a serious and potentially deadly disease. I have too much to do. I haven't reached my goals in life." The shock I felt was overwhelming. The packing was finished, the guests were on their way out, and I sat in my home as if I were in some weird comatose state of being. I couldn't even think. I was so overwhelmed at even the possibility of having a serious disease that I could not move. After what seemed like hours my husband said to me, "Everything is going to be fine. We are going on this trip, and we will get you to

a doctor when we get home.” Vacation? Are you kidding me? But he convinced me it would be the best for all, so I acquiesced.

We flew into Florence and drove the hour and a half into the countryside. The home we had rented was lovely. It was on a mountain overlooking all of Tuscany. The fireplace was in the dining room and a large, wide-planked rustic table sat in front of it. The home had all the charm you might expect from such a beautiful, lush region. Its owner was just as charming. Francesco was a true Tuscan in every sense of the word. He was an artist who had quite a flare for the dramatic. Books about his work were prominently displayed on the sideboard in the dining room for all the guests to see.

Bronze statues dotted the entire property, including a huge urn that represented a mother’s womb. I gazed down at the statue with a perplexed look on my face. With broken English and tears welling up in his eyes, Francesco explained that it contained his mother-in-law’s ashes. Strange, I know, but quite interesting. When he explained what it was, he had to wipe the tears from his eyes, even though she had been gone for a number of years.

Everyone was so excited to be there. Each day we would take long trips to different towns, which were mostly fortresses from years gone by, dotted on what seemed to be every hillside. At night we would come back to our home, which was located on a working olive grove, complete with ducks, chickens, pigs, and of course, plenty of phenomenal olive oil. Oh, I can’t forget the boar prosciutto or snails, both considered true delicacies in Tuscany. We would light a fire in the fireplace and play games or have a late dinner.

LIGHTS OUT

But at night, when the lights went out, my face would hit my pillow and I would cry out to God almost the entire night. My pillow would be drenched in tears. “God, why? Why, God? Why?” The pain was unbearable. I begged God to please let me live. I begged God to take this away. I begged God to please heal my body, all the while feeling totally abandoned by Him. I felt completely empty. I

felt alone. I felt as if my Creator did not care about me. But deep inside I knew He was truly there to hear my cries.

The thoughts that ran through my head first were of my children. “What will my children do? They need their mother in their lives. Who will love them? Who will pray for them? Who will be there to support them throughout their lives? Who will be with my daughter when she gives birth to her first child? What if I can’t attend her wedding? And my son, who is going to help him? Who will pray for him, love him, and encourage him?”

Grandchildren. I kept thinking, “I want grandchildren. I want the privilege of seeing my children with children of their own.” I thought of my nieces and nephews, whom I love dearly. “What if I can’t be there to encourage them? Who’s going to love them unconditionally?”

Holidays were next to run through my mind: “Who will have Christmas? Who will put up the Christmas tree?”

My best friend: “What if we can’t travel together anymore? We have had such a tremendous time traveling around the world. Everywhere we go someone asks, ‘Are you two sisters?’ which is a very funny question because we look nothing at all alike. We have a special chemistry and people can sense the joy when we are out on one of our excursions. Who will take my place?” My BFF and I have been doing life together. Thoughts ran through my head: “Who’s going to be there for my BFF?”

These were agonizing, gut-wrenching, extremely painful questions that kept running through my mind. And then I would have a random thought such as, “There are certain foods I’ve not eaten enough of yet. What if I can’t eat Fettuccini Carbonara again, ever? Or a really good steak? Or cheese grits.” I love cheese grits; it’s a Southern thing. I know that there is food in heaven (Matt. 8:11), but is it the same? I know that sounds strange, but these thoughts literally flooded my mind. What if I could no longer walk, or lift my arms, or dress myself? What if I could not get to the beach again? Who would love my little Sophie? (Who, by the way, is the sweetest little Yorkie you’ve ever seen, and needs lots of love.)

“Who would...?” I kept asking. I was exhausted. I couldn’t sleep

at night and couldn't stop during the day. My husband didn't want the problem to interrupt our family vacation, which had been planned for quite a while. That doesn't sound very kind, but that's exactly how I felt: angry. Angry I was sick. Angry that God had let this happen to me. Angry that I had tried to serve Him and He still let this happen. I was just plain angry. I didn't want to miss out on our time together as a family and the memories that were being created either. It was a tough call, but ultimately I was very glad I pushed through.

I had to face my own mortality. Truly, before this incident, I felt as if I would just go on forever. Little did I know, when I got to a doctor, I would be given a potential death sentence with no chance of recovery and was told I may die within two years, but I will tell you more about that later. There was no cure, and there was no treatment. For one entire year of my life I waited to die.

Shareworthy

"We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations."²

—Chuck Swindoll

WAKE-UP CALL

Can you imagine? Perhaps not, but it was a real wake-up call for me. I thought of all those things I wanted to do but never got around to doing. I thought about the places I wanted to go, the people I wanted to see, the work I wanted to accomplish. Now everything was on hold.

My friend Claire was a brilliant woman in her mid-sixties who had worked as an accountant for a large real estate agent in Raleigh, North Carolina. She lived a rather meager life due to choices she had made early on. She had been in relatively good health but had begun having some issues with her shoulder. She gave me a call one day and asked if she could come over for prayer. As we were praying,

I sensed in my heart that I was to tell her to “get your house in order.” After we finished praying, I shared with her the impression the Lord had given me. We finished praying and she went home. Several days later she went to her doctor to have him check her shoulder and complained that she had been feeling tired. The results of the tests he ordered were clear: she had stage-four lung cancer. Three months later Claire was dead.

Wake-up call.

We see things like this happen to others, but we never think it will happen to us. We have all had loved ones, friends, or neighbors whose lives have been cut short, but we never really gave it much thought. My friend, now is the time to give it thought. What if your days on this earth were cut short? Would your house be in order? Would you be able to say that you have lived a life that pleased God? Have you placed the right priority on the most important things? Could you say, at the end of your days, that you lived your life in such a way that you have no regrets? If not, then you can change that reality. You can take each day and live it as if it were your last.

Shareworthy

“Let those who thoughtfully consider the brevity of life remember the length of eternity.”³

—Thomas Ken

LIFE IS BUT A VAPOR

“You do not know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? It is just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). Our life is but a vapor. It appears for a little time and then it vanishes. If you have seventy or eighty years, you are blessed. We are given one shot and only one. We have to make the very best of the life we’ve been given. You cannot determine the length of your days; that’s already been determined (Ps. 139:16). There is a time

to live and a time to die (Eccles. 3:2). You can, however, determine the kind of life you want to live. No matter how long you live, life is short. You can't truly understand the importance of what I am saying until you come close to your own mortality or perhaps lose someone very close to you unexpectedly. But you can find great joy in knowing that regardless of your length of days, you can live your life in such a way that you enjoy it to the fullest, embracing the very best it has to offer, by becoming the person God wants you to be and accomplishing all God has for you to do.

What would you change if you had only a short while to live? How different would your day look? Would you take more time to spend with family and friends? Would you pay more attention to the small things in life? Would you find moments of joy that you would otherwise have missed?

Recently someone very dear to me said this, "I don't want my next forty years to be like my last forty years." I asked, "Then what do you intend to change?" If we want a different outcome, we have to do things differently.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

When I was a little girl, I remember going to Monterey, Virginia, for the Maple Syrup Festival each year. The festival was considered to be "Virginia's Sweet Spot." It was like taking a step back in time. Buckets dotted the mountainside; they were strategically placed under taps that were drilled into the maple trees where they were still "opened" by hand. The process has been updated over the years, however: a pump is now used to increase the flow of sugar water, and tubes make gathering it much easier. After it is gathered, the sugar water is cooked over a fire in an open pan and then transferred into an iron kettle to finish.

We went every year, and the day was always filled with fond memories. It was such a big deal to me. We would get up early in the morning and make the drive in the spring of the year. I loved to look at the beautiful flowers that were just starting to bloom. I loved the buckwheat pancakes that were being offered up. They even had

a Maple Syrup Queen. Yes, you heard me; a beauty pageant was held in honor of the festival and a winner was crowned. I loved the smell of maple syrup in the air and the candy (lots of candy). Maple doughnuts, maple pit-cooked BBQ, pork skins, and those delicious pancakes were the highlight of the festival in my mind. Sweet memories. When was the last time you shared memorable moments like this with those you love?

WHY WAIT?

As adults we often forget the fun things. We forget the events that brought us joy as a child, and we become so busy in life we forget to enjoy it and to help our families enjoy it. Often it takes a major life crisis to get us to the point of understanding that life is short and we have to embrace every moment with joy.

Why wait? Why not embrace all that life has to offer and live your life in such a way that you too can say, “I have no regrets”? Why not decide that you won’t need a crisis to enjoy life to its fullest, but instead decide today that you are going to love living? Love it, no matter the circumstances.

Pillars of Abundant Living

“I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man”.

—Eccles. 3:12-13, ESV

Most of us know what we need to change, what we want to change, and what we can change so that we can live the life God wants us to live. Perhaps for you, it’s not about changing anything. I know that when my death sentence was handed down, I realized I wanted to get more out of life and to put more into life. I began to press into God more. I began to love more. I began to laugh more. I began to

notice the small things in life. I began to celebrate more. I began to treasure my days more, and instead of just getting through my daily schedule with all the time constraints and deadlines, I began to embrace life.

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

When the year of waiting to die was up, I went back to the Mayo Clinic. Tests were run. Inexplicably there was no sign of the disease and no further damage. A year and a half later the Mayo Clinic released me with no explanation because they could not determine what had happened to me. To say I was relieved would be a huge understatement. However, during that first year I had to deal with many internal struggles regarding end-of-life issues. One question that continually came to mind was, “What makes life worth living for me?”

Slowly the answers came. I realized that living a life that has worth and value is living a life that pleases God. What did I learn? I learned the importance of loving deeply. I learned how to forgive without reservation. I learned to treasure the little things in life. I learned who I was and what I truly believed. I learned to have a heart of gratitude, and most importantly I learned how to surrender.

How would I view my life from the rearview mirror?

Not only did the issue with my health change the way I think about day-to-day living, but it also gave me a new perspective on life. It gave me a desire to accomplish the God-inspired goals I had conveniently put on hold. It gave me the impetus to finish projects that had been on my heart for years. It gave me a desire to say “thank you” more often and mean it. I wanted to dance more, sing more, laugh more, and love more. I ask you, “Why wait?” Why not live this day as though it were your last? In this book I hope to impart to you just how you can do that—whether you have one day left on this earth or many years ahead of you.

As Warren Wiersbe said, “You do not move ahead by constantly looking in a rearview mirror. The past is a rudder to guide you, not an anchor to drag you. We must learn from the past but not live in the past.”⁴

INTENTIONAL LIVING

- Make a list of childhood memories that you really enjoyed.
- Make a video with an iPad or iPhone and tell about each one of those stories.
- Put the videos on a flash drive and give them to your family members as a keepsake.
- If you have children, plan at least once a week to do something with them that you used to enjoy doing when you were a child.
- Make plans for several generations within your family to celebrate a family day.
- Decide in your heart to enjoy every day; your days are numbered.
- Laugh like a child again; it makes the heart merry and is good for your soul.

CHAPTER 2

TESTS AND MEASUREMENTS

If man had his way, the plan of redemption would be an endless and bloody conflict. In reality, salvation was bought not by Jesus' fist, but by His nail-pierced hands; not by muscle but by love; not by vengeance but by forgiveness; not by force but by sacrifice. Jesus Christ our Lord surrendered in order that He might win; He destroyed His enemies by dying for them and conquered death by allowing death to conquer Him.¹

—A. W. TOZER

WHEN I WAS in my senior year at college, I took a post-graduate class in psychology called Tests and Measurements. It was a class designed to adequately prepare the student with a solid understanding of various kinds of psychological tests; the ability to develop, administer, and interpret tests; and the knowledge of measurement theory, which included reliability and validity. I found the class to be very interesting. We were learning how to analyze cognitive functioning, compare and contrast between constructs of intelligence and achievement, and analyze measures of emotional and behavioral functioning.

There were many factors that would be taken into consideration regarding the reliability and validity of the tests given. Probability and Statistics was truly my least favorite class. I found it rather difficult to understand; however, when it came to applying stats to psychological test data, I got it. I know that may sound odd, but when it came to practical application it all seemed to make sense to me.

Any test is only as good as the ability to adequately calculate its reliability and validity. The best outcome is achieved when you compare a fluid measurement to a benchmark or point of reference that has been set and is unchangeable. The benchmark is the standard by which all other measurements are assessed.

The study of human behavior and the mind was fascinating to me. It was so intriguing to look at why people behave as they do. Recently I was talking with a man who said to me, "I know for certain I would be willing to die for Christ." I paused for just a moment and then asked, "But will you be willing to live for Him?" He took a deep breath and said, "That's a very good question." What makes a person decide that they would be willing to die for someone or something but would not be fully devoted to live for that same someone or something? Ironic, isn't it?

MEASURES OF COMPARISON

In my studies the term *metric* was a quantitative term regarding parameters or measures of assessment used for comparison or to track performance in a given situation. What do you use as your personal measurement or benchmark when it comes to setting your own standards in life? Most people compare their standards to those of family members, others in their lives, or even to societal mores.

We often believe that we are living better than so-and-so; therefore we must be OK. I talked with a father who was convinced most of his life that he was doing better as a father than his father did. His measure: "My dad never went to one of my baseball games. I go to all of my son's games." Yet there was an obvious void in their relationship, and he failed to acknowledge his own personal shortcomings, because relatively speaking, in his mind, he was doing better than his own dad and he thought he had turned out OK. This form of relativism is clearly in error.

What measure are you using? Are you determined to think that all is well because you are not doing what your dad or mom did? Perhaps you are a pretty upstanding person in the community: well known, well liked, and successful. Do you determine your values

by what society says is acceptable? People change. Leaders change. Societies change. God's Word never changes.

PARADISE LOST

In British literature there is an epic poem titled *Paradise Lost* written in the seventeenth century by John Milton. He was dubbed the greatest poet of his time. It is a story of the battle between good and evil, light and dark, God and Satan. It was based on the biblical account of the fall of man, the temptation of Adam and Eve by the fallen angel Satan, and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Milton stated his purpose for writing the epic poem was to justify the ways of God to man.²

The story opens with Satan and his followers in hell after being defeated in a battle with God and ends with Adam and Eve being expelled from the garden, but only after receiving the revelation that God would send a savior into the world to pay for the sins of man.

I had taken a literature class, and my assignment was to do a literary critical analysis of *Paradise Lost*. After working tirelessly on the assignment, I was shocked and surprised when I got the paper back and had been given a "C." What? I loved working on that assignment and had spent well beyond my normal effort in writing it, but nonetheless my professor obviously was unimpressed. Under the letter grade he had written a note. It said, "Stop by my office. I want to discuss your work." Later that week I dropped by for our meeting. As I entered his office and sat down in a chair adjacent to his desk, he smiled and said, "Robin, no one can see things (life) in such black and white. I want you to go back and rewrite your paper." So I did. I turned my paper back in the following week. He re-graded it and this time gave me a "B." I had been graded on the conceptual aspect of the paper, and unfortunately for me he could not see things as clearly as I did. My grammar was pretty clean, but my concept, in his mind, was not. In my mind there is no gray, only black and white. It's easier to live that way. No confusion, just clarity.

Milton was devout in his beliefs, although at times unorthodox. The heart of the work was right on. He set a precedent in his work

for his desire to vindicate God's actions to man, to emphasize the results of disobedience, and to declare the eternal providence of God. It isn't that God's actions need justification, but that man needs help understanding the justice in His actions. Milton attempts to portray to man that the fall, death, and salvation are all acts of a just God.

Today we still have this same argument. If God is a loving God, how can He...? Fill in the blank. But He is just, and He gives us His plumb line, His standard of measurement, which is His written Word. It is not what your neighbors are doing or not doing. It is not what society says is acceptable. It is not what our government sanctions. Instead it is His Word, written by holy men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is infallible, and it is His Word that is the benchmark. His Word is never changing. It will always be the same, and you can trust in its reliability and consistency for all of eternity.

As I asked the man who said he would die for Christ but paused in answering the question, "Will you live for Christ?," I ask you the same question. Will you live for Christ? Have you dedicated your life to Christ? Have you given Him leadership in your life? Are you just calling yourself "Christian," or are you a true disciple and follower of Christ? If not, today is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2). Today is the day you can wipe away all those regrets you've been carrying around for far too long. Today is the day that you can put your past in the past, and let God direct your future.

What is your benchmark? The Word of God tells us we all fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Here the playing field is level. We all fall short; that's you and that's me. There is none who is righteous according to God's standard. We all are like filthy rags in His sight, not one clean enough, good enough, or righteous enough to stand before a holy God (Isa. 64:6). How do you measure up?

If you are like me, I didn't measure up at all. I fell short. I could see that my way of living was displeasing to God, and therefore I needed a savior. I needed a savior because I just could not be good enough. Neither can you. If we hold ourselves up in comparison to our friends or neighbors, then possibly we think we are good enough, or maybe not. It would depend on who is doing the judging and how accurately the judge could analyze our actions. The good news is if we accept

Jesus as Lord and believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that He is Lord, then we will be saved (Rom. 10:9). God judges us not by our standards but by His. His righteous Son, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, paid the price for our sins. All sin has a price, and that price is death. As we confess our sins, repent, turn from them, and submit to God in obedience to His Word, we are assured of eternal life through Jesus Christ. The *old you* is replaced by the *new you*, and your righteousness is now determined by blood sacrificed by a sinless Savior; not by all the sins that you have committed in your lifetime. I don't know about you, but I choose to be judged under the righteousness of Christ instead of my own righteousness, or the lack thereof.

Shareworthy

“Narrow all your interests until your mind, heart, and body are focused on Jesus Christ.”³

—Oswald Chambers

God sets the standard. We have to go by His measure, not the metrics we set for ourselves. In *Paradise Lost* Milton focused on the first sin of man: his disobedience to the directives of God. He argues that there is a hierarchy in which the inferior are to obey the superior. When Adam and Eve sinned, they defied the natural order of things and caused great chaos. Every time we sin, it causes chaos in our lives. Maybe not at that very moment, but eventually it always catches up.

SWEET CAROLINE

Caroline was a sweet Southern woman. She was that type of lady who always had something to offer you to eat when you stopped by her home. Whether it was fresh, hot biscuits served up with homemade jam, a piece of apple pie, or a cold iced tea with lemon, she knew how to make her guests feel right at home. Caroline was a frail woman of very small stature. She had struggled with breathing difficulties most of her life. As she aged, her health issues continued

to escalate. One day my father got a call. Caroline had been hospitalized and was not expected to make it. Although she was a church-going woman, she did not belong to my father's church but had attended a small Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the little town in Virginia where she lived. My dad called and asked me to go to the hospital with him to visit Caroline. When we got there, the doctor explained that she had flatlined and it took several attempts to bring her back. We visited Caroline for the next several days. In a conversation with dad and me, she explained that when she had flatlined, she was certain that she was not going to heaven. She said, "It was very gray and then dark. I am certain I was not going to make it to heaven. I know that I was on my way to hell."

Pillars of Abundant Living

"For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will in no way enter the kingdom of heaven".

—Matt. 5:20

I thought to myself, this precious woman had probably lived as good a life as anyone I've ever known. She was kind. She was loving. She was generous. Yet she was on her way to hell. Wow. Not by my judgment but by her own testimony. My father and I stood by her bedside and shared the plan of salvation with her. He asked her, "Caroline, are you willing to allow Jesus to be the Lord of your life?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "Oh, yes!" Caroline passed away several weeks after that, which was very sad, but fortunately we had witnessed her deathbed conversion. Caroline made the right decision. Many do not have such an opportunity. Deathbed conversions are a tremendous act of mercy of God. There are those who will neglect the invitation of the Lord's wooing until the Lord says, "I will not strive forever with man." There comes a time in your life when you must decide if you will serve God or serve Satan. These are the only two choices, and your decision will matter for eternity. Whom will you serve?

Shareworthy

“And now let me address all of you, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to accept of mercy and grace while it is offered to you; “now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation”; and will you not accept it, now it is offered unto you?”⁴

—George Whitefield

RADICAL LIFE CHANGE

We have to think about all those people we know who are refusing to serve God and how utterly empty their lives really are. They may look on the outside as though they have it all together, but on the inside they are dead. I had the opportunity to pray with a young, handsome man in his late twenties. His name was Ian. He had come to my church for prayer ministry. My prayer partner and I began to pray for this man, and immediately I sensed in my spirit that he had made a covenant with the devil. Trust me, that is not the norm for prayer ministry. However, I proceeded with that line of questioning. Ian was about to experience a God-encounter. I asked him why he had decided to serve Satan. The young man looked at me with astonishment and said, “How did you know that?” I told him that the Lord had shown me in my spirit. He began to weep. He had been searching for a church in the middle of the week when he ran into a police officer who had recommended that he come to our church. He told me that he was on the way to commit suicide. The word that I had been given in prayer was the impetus God used to encourage him to open his heart to the Lord for salvation. He repented of his sins, renounced his covenant with Satan, and asked the Lord to forgive him and become the Lord of his life. His heart was radically changed that day and he went on to be a missionary in Mexico. So I ask this day, whom will you serve?

This life is a journey, and it is one that can be snatched right out of

our hands. When my life looked as if it would be cut short, I remember thinking, “There are so many things I want to do for the Lord, and I haven’t completed my work.” I want to ask you: If your life were being cut short, what would you think about? What would you want to get done? Trust me, your vision will change when faced with the possibility of not being here. You will want to finish things. You will want to take care of those things that have been put on hold because of time constraints or just because there has been a lack of priority. What is your priority? If you are not saved, then your priority should be salvation. If you are saved, then it should be helping others become saved by sharing with them your personal story and the message of the gospel: the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

ABIDING

Once born again, to live a life of value, meaning, and purpose, you need to abide in His presence. Jesus said, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7, NASB).

There is a life-altering effect of being in His presence, and salvation is the first step in having a God-encounter. You may have had a visitation, but before salvation there was no communication. There are powerful benefits of being in His presence, which is practiced with day-by-day commitment to the cause of Christ. Do you need your prayers to be answered? I sure do, and I am thankful that we have His promise of answered prayers as we abide in Him. Abiding does not mean sitting idly by. It means resting in the work, resting in the moment, resting in the truth, resting in the confidence that God is your provision. He is your sustenance. He is your healer. He is your deliverer. He is your stronghold. He is your protector in the midst of every trouble or hardship in which you may find yourself. The abiding place is a place of peace and joy, and it is a place in which you determine to live your life in such a way that you no longer strive but instead rest with continual assurance of His goodness.

Helen Keller once said, “Deep, solemn optimism, it seems to me, should spring from this firm belief in the presence of God in the

individual; not a remote, unapproachable governor of the universe, but a God who is very near every one of us, who is present not only in earth, sea and sky, but also in every pure and noble impulse of our hearts.”⁵

There is a radical and transforming effect of being in His presence. Salvation is the beginning, and from that point on God-encounters are to occur and continue throughout the life of a believer, constantly bringing each of us into a higher level of spiritual consciousness, constantly sharpening our spiritual senses, constantly challenging our complacency and status quo mentality. It is to look at the Word of God and find meaning and application to your personal journey, and then live it out. Everything written in the Bible is your road map. There is only one way to find your particular path, and that is to earnestly dedicate time, energy, and prayer to the process, and through that commitment you will reach your intended destiny and experience a life of meaning and purpose along the way.

Practicing being in the presence of God will help you break with the past and establish a new direction and commitment wherever you may be in your journey. As you do, you will begin to find the true zeal and passion in spending time with God, and you will also grow in your desire to be in His presence and in His Word.

ONE GOD ENCOUNTER

There is no clearer picture of being in the presence of God, and the radical change that comes along with such a visitation, than the account we find in Acts 9:1–22. Let’s explore the radical transformation of the life of Paul through a God-encounter, as he saw the glory of the Lord. Here we see a man who was going about his business, on his own path, determining his own allegiance, until he had a radical God-encounter. He was very comfortable. He was an educated man who sat under the great teacher of the law, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Therefore he had developed a tremendous respect for what was written. He was highly regarded within the confines of the Jewish religious system. His father was a Pharisee, meaning his father was scholarly and well versed in Scripture, as was he (Acts 23:6). His father and mother were both native Jews. He was

a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” as he referred to himself (Phil. 3:5). Paul, through his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, became determined to live his life for the cause of Christ, no matter the cost.

There are some things that broke off Paul because of this single God-encounter. There was a new path determined by this encounter. There was a new passion stirred through this encounter. There was a new name given through this encounter. There was a divine mission given through this encounter. There was a clean break with ritual and religiosity through this encounter.

The apostle Paul was on the road to Damascus that day to find Christians, those of The Way, to bring them back to Jerusalem and throw them in prison or even to have them killed for their belief in Jesus Christ. Paul’s objective was to stop the Christian effort. He had sent letters to the synagogues in Damascus to seek out those who believed, but on the way he had a God-encounter and came into the presence of a holy God. (See Acts 9:1–22.)

Have you had a real God-encounter? Are you born again? This is the most important decision you will ever make, and making it can lead to a life of no regrets. God will always reveal Himself in a true God-encounter through the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, His Son.

As with the apostle Paul, one God-encounter can radically change the direction of your life forever. In a true God-encounter God’s presence is tangible. It is weighty. When Paul fell to the ground and heard “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” and then, after asking about the voice, heard “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” those with Paul, who was called Saul before his conversion, could also hear the voice of Jesus, and they stood speechless (Acts 9:4–7). They were in awe, afraid to move, afraid to speak, and afraid to be disruptive in any way. There was an overwhelming sense of His power and presence to which everyone paid attention.

In God’s presence there is an emptying that occurs. We are emptied of our pride. We are emptied of our selfishness, self-indulgence, and hard-heartedness. We are emptied of our religiosity. We see ourselves for who we really are. We put all of our life’s regrets, our sins, our failures, at the foot of the cross and literally have a new beginning.

Through this encounter with God the mind-sets that had blinded Paul were washed away. He was cleansed from a murderous spirit. He was emptied of all the hatred and condemnation against The Way. He was freed from religious chains of legalism and religiosity. Paul's eyes were opened. The scales fell off. The binding, blinding system of dead religion had lost its power, and he was a new creature in Christ. The old things had passed away. A true encounter with the living God will break the spirit of religiosity, empty man of his pride, and conform even the most vile and wicked into a living vessel for His glory.

Pillars of Abundant Living

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek”.

—Rom. 1:16

LIFE IN BLACK AND WHITE

My takeaway from *Paradise Lost* was that life can be black and white, with absolutes that are written on our hearts. I have not changed my position. Caroline, who had been trapped in the muck and mire of religiosity thinking that she could just be a good person and make it into heaven, eventually found out that it had little to do with her righteousness but everything to do with His sacrifice. Ian thought that he could give his allegiance to Satan and his life would be paved with his greatest desires, but instead the devil was trying to lead him to an early grave at the strength of his own hand. The apostle Paul, before his radical transformation, thought he was serving God while actually doing the devil's work.

How do we avoid such confusion? We understand that all that we need to live a life of godliness in Christ Jesus is already written. We understand that we have to take part in the process and do our part for kingdom expansion. We understand that time is short and there is a real urgency. The battle for souls is fought in the heavenlies; every time you or I share the gospel, every time we lift a loved one's

name before the throne of grace, and every time we invite someone to church, we are helping someone else find the abundant life Jesus came to give us. We have to be diligent to set our own standard of living by God's standards, not the standards set by ourselves or society. The most critical aspect of living a rich life is based on the decision to follow Jesus Christ, to accept him as Lord and Savior, and to know beyond a shadow of doubt that there is a life after this life in eternity. As Frederick Robertson once said, "In these two things the greatness of man consists, to have God so dwelling in us as to impart his character to us, and to have him so dwelling in us that we recognize his presence, and know that we are his, and he is ours.—The one is salvation: the other the assurance of it."⁶

How do you weigh your own righteousness? Abundant living starts with Jesus Christ, and it ends with Jesus Christ, and every moment in between is precious as we serve our living Savior. Take this free gift of salvation and share the good news and begin your journey to a life well lived.

INTENTIONAL LIVING

- Salvation is the first step in living a life of no regrets.
- Share your life's story; it can open hearts to receive the truth.
- Share your faith whenever you can; the rewards are eternal.
- Acknowledge the absolutes found in Scripture and live by them regardless of what society says.
- Judge your righteousness by God's standard, and not by the world's standards.
- A true God-encounter will always result in a changed life.
- Impactful living is living for Christ no matter your circumstances.

CHAPTER 3

REFINEMENT: A TEST AND PURIFICATION OF THE HEART

“Love loves unto purity. Love has ever in view the absolute loveliness of that which it beholds. Therefore all that is not beautiful in the beloved, all that comes between and is not of love’s kind, must be destroyed. And our God is a consuming fire.”¹

—GEORGE MACDONALD

WHAT IF THIS were your last day on this earth? If you were going to stand before God tomorrow, what would you change today? I asked my husband this question. He said, “I’d forgive more. I would make things right in all my relationships. I would ask to be forgiven.”

I said, “Then why wait?” Why not do what you know to do today instead of waiting until you are pressured into making changes or have to suffer greatly for refusing to make those changes? We all do it. We all know the right things to do. We all put things off for another day or perhaps a more opportune time. I thought, “What would I be willing to change?” I will share my answer shortly.

God changes us if we fail to make the changes that we should make:

And it will happen in all the land, says the LORD, that two-thirds will be cut off and die, and one-third will be left in the land. And I will bring this one-third left into the fire, and will refine them as the refinement of silver, and will

test them as the testing of gold. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, "They are My people"; and they will say, "The LORD is my God."

—ZECHARIAH 13:8–9

God changes us if we fail to make the changes that we should make, and sometimes we are refined so that we are cleansed of the very things that hold us back from our destiny. He refines us. Refinement is a hard process, but the finished work is a beautiful reflection of Christ shining through us. As believers we reflect Christ best when our flesh is out of the way and when we have been purged of the things that defile. As we are refined, we move from glory to glory, being more like Christ in our actions and our thinking. Our lives become lives that are not so cluttered with regret because we live intentionally with the goal of pleasing God first in mind. Our life experience is richer and deeper because of our enhanced understanding of God, our greater trust in God, and our complete dependence on God. How do you get started? By starting today and choosing to live as if this was going to be your last day on the earth. That is sound advice from someone who knows what it actually feels like to have to face the real possibility of an early death. How would you live today if you knew you would stand before God tomorrow?

Pillars of Abundant Living

"In order that the genuineness of your faith, which is more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tried by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ".

—1 Pet. 1:7

What is at the end of a time of refinement? Let's look for one moment at the end before the beginning. Joy is at the end of the refinement. Let me say that again: joy is at the end of our refinement. That is why James, the brother of Jesus, could write, "Count it

all joy,” and Paul would echo this sentiment (James 1:2; Phil. 1:20–21). They knew we would, as we go through a process of refinement, come out stronger, more patient, more content, and more confident in the Lord. They knew that we would come out on the other side reflecting more of God: more of His love, more of His mercy, more of His compassion, and more of His grace.

BIRTHING PAINS

My husband and I were out walking by a large pond in our neighborhood. We live in the low country of South Carolina, and our ponds are full of alligators as well as other reptiles and amphibians. We have blue herons, snowy egrets, cormorants, ospreys, red-tailed hawks, ibis, and wood storks, all of which make our walks so incredibly delightful. That day the gators were out in full force. We must have seen five or six on our short walk. For the first time ever we heard an alligator growl. Our neighbors, who were walking several steps ahead, stopped and shouted back, “Hey, did you hear that?”

“Yes,” I said, “But what is it?” Our neighbor replied and said that it was the sound of an alligator in mating season.

It reminded me of a time when I was a young woman, and I growled at my husband in that same way. It was in the labor room, as I was getting ready to give birth to my son. I had been in eighteen hours of hard, Pitocin-induced labor, with its characteristic intense and abrupt contractions of the uterus. I cannot remember ever being in such pain. It seemed as though it would go on forever. However, when my sweet baby son was placed in my arms, all the pain I had experienced seemed to fade from my memory. As I peered into his beautiful blue eyes, I saw in him the reflection of my husband and me looking down at him. Joy. What joy. He was perfect.

When a baby is being born, it has to be pushed through the birth canal. He has to leave his place of security and comfort and go to a new place, a place of the unknown. It cannot be a pain-free process for either the mother or the child, but when complete, the baby feels safe in his parents’ arms. The child quickly identifies with the mother who carried him for nine months, and then recognizes the

father as he quickly connects with him also. The pain is soon forgotten, and the joy of childbirth takes its place.

If you have ever had children, you might remember that precious look in your babies' eyes when they first looked up and recognized their father. The newborn knows almost nothing, yet he knows to whom he belongs. Think back to the time when you saw the father gazing into the eyes of his newborn. Dad was beaming with joy at every sound and every little movement.

Now take this picture of a father and a newborn and apply that to how God feels when we have come through a difficult period of refinement. He smiles down at His child. He is so pleased. He sees more of His own perfect reflection as He gazes into the soul, which has been refined. Was all the pain worth it? Yes. Yes. Yes. Pain is here for a time, but there is a joy that comes in the morning, after the darkness of the night. Joy bubbles up on the inside of you when you come through the fires of refinement. It is a joy that cannot compare with mere happiness. It's deeper. It's richer. It's more intense. It is a joy that cannot be shaken.

As you enter into periods of refinement, try to remember the principle A. W. Tozer points out so eloquently: "He remembers our frame and knows that we are dust. He may sometimes chasten us, it is true, but even this He does with a smile, the proud, tender smile of a Father who is bursting with pleasure over an imperfect but promising son who is coming every day to look more and more like the One whose child he is."²

REFLECTIONS

God sees Himself in the eyes of the refined soul. Embrace refinement. Remember what happens to you when you get through it. You've heard the old cliché, "Don't get bitter; get better." The getting better part is the very purpose of refinement. It is not punishment. It is tough love.

Discipline is the result of something we have done, while refinement is the preparation for your calling. God disciplines us when we refuse to obey, not to punish us but instead to teach us. God refines

us so that we will better reflect His goodness by showing us what is really in our own hearts and then removing from us all that is not like Him. Both refinement and discipline are actions that God will use in us to get us to become all that we are to become for His glory. For example, a father will discipline a child for not cleaning their room by taking away a privilege. A father may refine his child by going into his room with him, looking under the bed, looking in the closet, and cleaning it up with him. Thus, the testing part: “How clean is the room really, son? Let’s take a look together, and I will help you get things in order.”

We know that God disciplines those whom He loves. Discipline is a loving way to get you back on track with God. Refinement is a loving way to empty you of all that is not like Him and fill you with more of Him and prepare you for the work ahead. God always wants to move us from glory to glory, but to get to the next level of glory He must take us through the fires of refinement, especially if there are things in us that are not reflective of Him. If we fail to deal with those things, He will, while showing us what is really in our hearts.

When I went through the fires of refinement, I asked myself, as well as God, many questions. “God, am I being sifted? God, am I being disciplined? Am I being punished? God, what are You doing to me? Are You going to let me be destroyed?”

THE WHAT

A refiner’s fire is the process that we go through when God is testing us to see what is in our hearts. The change in us comes when we acknowledge there needs to be a change. However, it is not punishment; it is testing and then the purging begins. It is not punishment; it is testing. Job wrote that although God knew the way he would take when He tested him, he would come out like gold (Job 23:10). Job had to know in his own heart if he was serving God for what He had done for him, or if he was serving God for who God is alone, regardless of what He has done. Job had to know that he would serve God no matter what circumstances he was in. Sometimes we are not