

Chapter 1

Life Can Be Messy

When we have children, we look into their innocent faces and dare to dream only about the good things...milestones, smiles and laughter. My first four children lived out that dream of mine with only the normal scrapes and bruises of childhood that are a rite of passage. And then there was my last child, Whitney.

Whitney was born six years after our “last” child. While the pregnancy caused me some middle-aged angst, she quickly became the joy of the entire family. Her four older siblings doted upon her.

The script in my mind was violently derailed, when Whitney was three-years old. I found myself driving to Flagstaff taking my precious daughter to the doctor. Not just any doctor, but one who could knowledgeably examine a child who had been raped and molested. A few days before I had discovered that this had happened to Whitney by a twelve-year-old neighbor boy, Spencer. He was homeschooled and therefore free to be a companion to Whitney during the morning, while we worked in our home-based business. There were always adults around, but we were caught up with running our business. I had originally asked for Spencer’s sister, but she couldn’t, so his mom suggested him. In our world, young boys weren’t a threat to little girls. So, we were not diligent in watching over her and we paid the price! He managed to molest her over a one-week period. God knows how long it would have continued if I hadn’t casually asked her, as I sometimes did, if anyone had ever “touched her privates.” When she responded in an embarrassed mumble that “Spencer did,” our nightmare began.

The police were called, and after talking with her, they confirmed my worst fears. He had violated her in every way imaginable. In his psycho-sexual evaluation it was revealed that he had “learned” this behavior by looking at pornography.

For the first time in my life, I was faced with something that was so big, so horrible, so unthinkable that I couldn’t take it in. My emotions were tumbling over each other faster than I could identify them. I felt guilt, anger, betrayal, sadness, loss, failure, helplessness, a desire to die, a desire to kill, and overriding them all was hatred. I felt the seed of hatred plant itself firmly in my heart and begin to flourish.

As I dragged through the days and weeks, I became more and more aware of my ability to hate. I had never had a target so real or a cause so worthy to give me complete license to hate. It was frightening to realize that I was capable of something this destructive and consuming. I saw myself in my mind’s eye as being suspended over a deep, black, bottomless abyss of hatred. I knew that if I gave way to the hatred that was taking root in my heart, it would be like jumping into that bottomless abyss. And yet, as I thought about what this boy had done to my precious daughter, I could not keep myself from falling. And so, I prayed a desperate prayer, “God, PLEASE keep me from hating.” As I dangled over the abyss wanting to jump in, God faithfully held me in His hands and did not allow me to fall.

I knew that Christians were not supposed to feel the way I was feeling. But even entertaining the more noble emotions of forgiveness, peace, and joy was out of the question. I had to deal with what I felt, not what I *should* be feeling. I knew this because over the years God had brought many wounded women into my path. As a lay counselor, I had counseled enough to know that, though my experience was different from theirs, the path to healing, forgiveness, and peace was the same. I also knew that I was totally incapable of bringing any of it about. I could not change my heart. And yet, paradoxically, it was ultimately my choice. The path to forgiveness would take, not effort or striving on my part, but rather surrender.



Chapter 1

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Reading this chapter may trigger something in you. Maybe your life was also messy; experiences of neglect, abandonment and/or abuse. There is a one out of three chance that you have had a similar experience as Whitney did, as a victim; or like Dinah, as a mom. Take a big breath and read on...this book isn't about molestation. It is much broader than that. It is about an honest relationship with God and ourselves. It is about becoming unshackled from the lies of the past. It's best to start this study with a prayer. It doesn't have to be fancy. It doesn't have to have pretty words. Just write from your heart.

Dear Lord:

As I go into this study please help me to

I have feelings of

As I start this study, I pray to You give me

I give you my

Chapter 2

Offering Our Worst to God

In talking with women over the years, I have come to realize that many Christians, while well-meaning, place a terrible yoke upon women. Oftentimes, this bondage comes from those in leadership positions within the Church. Ministers need to keep their churches running smoothly. To do this, they need willing bodies. And so, unintentionally, they equate performance with spirituality. They challenge us to strive to become all that we can for God. Give God our best (which translates into attending church, singing in the choir, teaching Sunday School, etc.), and we will be rewarded. But God doesn't want our best—He wants our worst.

To some people, making this statement puts me precariously teetering toward heresy. However, upon closer examination, the biblical truth of this statement stands. Let's look at the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer. But to fully appreciate this parable, first you must know what each of these men stood for in Christ's culture.

The Pharisees were priests who taught in the synagogue. They knew the laws that had been laid down by Moses forward and backward. Along with the laws of Moses, the Pharisees created traditions and rituals of their own, which they imposed upon the Jews. They themselves observed all the laws, traditions, and rituals with passionate zeal. They often made a point of displaying their spirituality in public, so everyone would take note that they were indeed holy men. To the average Jew, the Pharisees were esteemed as "super-spiritual."

Just as the Pharisee represented all that was "religious" in the Jewish culture, the tax-gatherer represented all that was despised. He was a traitor who collaborated with the Romans in order to get rich at the expense of his own countrymen. Most tax-gatherers not only collected what Rome required, but used extortion to collect extra for themselves. So despised were these men that in Jewish

law they were treated as traitors and robbers; they could not testify in court, nor could their money be accepted by charities!

Speaking of these two men Christ said: *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax*

collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing far off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" Christ went on to say, *"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"* (Luke 18:10–14).

If I had been laying bets on who had God's ear, it should have been a sure thing for the Pharisee. He certainly had a great resumé! But, as Jesus did so many times in His ministry, He made it very clear that performance without a pure heart is worthless to God. The condition of our hearts is what counts. It is so easy to point to these men of 2,000 years ago and pass judgment. Yet, is it possible that we can become like the Pharisee in our service to God? I think, without even realizing it, many of us do good works so we can come to God and, like the Pharisee, attempt to impress Him with our offerings while we shield our hearts from His touch.



Chapter 2

Offering Our Worst to God

1. When you read the statement, “God doesn’t want our best, He wants our worst” what was your first reaction?

2. Remember the Pharisee? He was like a really popular pastor in our time. He and his fellow Pharisees told the Jewish people how to live and how to please God. He followed all of the rules and rigidly imposed them on others. Reading about the Pharisee, what were the “best” things he offered to God?

3. Now look at the Tax Collector. In his culture he was considered the worst of the worst...dirt under a “good” Jew’s feet, scum of the earth...well you get the idea. What things did he offer God?

4. If you were to compare their hearts, how would you describe:

The Pharisee’s?

The Tax Collector’s

Jesus finishes the parable (story) with this: *“I tell you, this man (tax collector) went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”*

The word “justified” means made right in the sight of God. The word “exalt” means to lift up, to raise high, to glorify.

Think about it. It was the tax collector who came to God with honesty and repentance who was justified. He was a sinner and he knew it. He didn’t try to impress God but asked for mercy *from* God.

5. What do you think this statement means “for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted?”

6. Read these verses from Luke 10:38-42 and answer the following question.

38. Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” 41 But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Consider how this as it applies to us women in the church. How does this change your view of what God wants from us?

MEMORY VERSE

God be merciful to me, a sinner

Luke 18:13

Chapter 3 Cleaning House



I liken our hearts to a house. On the outside it is beautiful. It is whitewashed to a sparkling brilliance. The boxes at the windows are overflowing with beautiful flowers. The gingerbread trim, neat brick walk, and orderly yard make this house look picture-perfect. Everyone who passes by admires it. Looking at it, you dream of living in this house. So, one day you decide to sneak inside, sure that it is just as “perfect” inside as it is on the outside. But rather than being delighted, you are shocked and appalled at what you find. It is shambles. The floorboards are rotted. The walls are filled with gaping holes. The ceiling is falling in, and the stench of rotting garbage is overwhelming.

Our hearts are often like this house. We look so good on the outside. We are involved in our women’s group at church. We sing in the choir and teach Sunday school. We respond dutifully when called upon for service. When the minister talks about “wretched sinners,” we do a quick inventory of our performance and are relieved to find that we don’t fall in that category. Others tend to agree. We love (though we hate to admit it) to be alluded to as the exemplary Christian woman. The more we perform, the more we receive praise and the more we perform—all for God, of course. There’s only one problem. God doesn’t want or need any of the wonderful things we do. If our God can “*raise up rocks to sing his praises*” (Luke 19:40), do we really think we are indispensable to Him? Now I’ve said it! I can hear the harrumphs and see the

backs stiffen. How dare I suggest that God doesn’t need or appreciate what you do for Him? Please understand I am not suggesting that God doesn’t use what we do. Or that what we do is not important to the Church. But God wants our hearts first (the dirty inside, not the spiffy outside), and then these other things will follow in their proper order.

This concept is dramatically illustrated in the Old Testament. In Psalms we find David praying to God for forgiveness for Uriah’s murder. He prayed, “*For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise*” (Psalm 51:16–17). This is a most remarkable prayer. God Himself established rituals of sacrifice and burnt offerings to atone for a man’s sin. It was the *only* recognized way a man could receive forgiveness. And yet, here we find David, a man after God’s own heart, saying that sacrifice and burnt offerings were not pleasing to God. Look what David knew was pleasing to God—“a broken and a contrite heart.” Even under the Old Testament system of laws and rituals, David recognized that it was his heart that God was interested in. And remember, this prayer was not for some small infraction of the law—it was for murder!

What possible things could be in *my* heart that would be symbolized by “rotting floors” and “stinking garbage,” you may wonder. This is where it gets a little painful. Most of us have lots of rot and garbage in our hearts. We just never get up the courage or feel the need to examine



ourselves. Instead we simply apply another coat of paint to the outside of the house and hope nobody looks inside. How many of us harbor bitter feelings toward someone? What about the hurt someone caused that we can't forgive? Or maybe we actually hate someone—but we feel justified because of the terrible thing they did to us. Other rot is more subtle, rather like dry rot in wood. How many of us women have itchy ears to hear something bad about someone we dislike? How many times have we heard the gossip prefaced with, "I really love her but..." And what about that "theater of our mind" where we enjoy rerunning over and over the scene where we exact revenge upon the person who hurt us? Or how about that area of weakness in ourselves that we are trying to conquer by our own might? We righteously point our finger at those with the same flaw, hoping that by doing so, ours will go unnoticed. And then there are the secret vices we just can't seem to overcome. Or the constant focus on self; constantly condemning ourselves and comparing ourselves. These are a few examples of our "rotting floors" and "stinking garbage." These are the things God wants us to give to Him. And *these* are the things we are so reluctant to give. In a perverse way we actually enjoy them. We are entitled to these feelings, and it's just not fair that we have to give them up!

You see, we fool ourselves into thinking we are really performing for God. We paint and shine the outside of our house, but He is not impressed. Neither, however, is He surprised by what is inside our house. In fact, He knows every rotten feeling we have, every bitterness,

every hatred, every vile thought and secret behavior. He knows them, and He *wants* them. Like the tax-gatherer, when we come to Him declaring our wretchedness, He hears our prayer.

When I faced a situation where I was totally helpless to change my heart, I had only one path open to me—to surrender. I could not fight to change my heart, I could not strive to change my heart, nor could I struggle to change my heart. My heart wanted to hate. In the theater of my mind I shot that young man dead while his mother watched. I wanted to hurt her as much as her son had hurt my little girl. I enjoyed my mental revenge. Simply put, I was capable of murder! THIS IS WHAT I HAD TO OFFER GOD. I had to admit my inability to overcome any of these feelings. I was capable of doing only one thing with them: give them to God. My prayer was not "Help me forgive"—forgiving was not within me. My prayer was "Lord, I want to hate. I want to hurt. I can't fix it. I can't change it. I can't overcome it. I can only surrender it to you. Take my hatred and replace it with YOUR forgiveness." God's forgiveness is infinite and all-encompassing.

Chapter 3 Cleaning House

When we are talking about filthy rooms in our heart and the guard of lies at the doors, no other Bible story speaks of this condition better than David and Bathsheba. If you want a story of treachery, intrigue, sex and abuse of power, this is it! The story opens with David, King of Israel, who God called “a man after my own heart.”

1. In 2 Samuel 11:1-25, it reads: 1 In the spring of the year when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites. They destroyed the Ammonite army and laid siege to the city of Rabbah. However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem.

Q1: Where was David supposed to be?

2. Verse 2: Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. 3 He sent someone to find out who she was, and he was told, “She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” 4 Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. She had just completed the purification rites after having her menstrual period. Then she returned home. 5 Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent David a message, saying, “I’m pregnant.”

Q2: When did temptation turn into sin?

3. Verse 6: Then David sent word to Joab: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” So, Joab sent him to David. 7 When Uriah arrived, David asked him how Joab and the army were getting along and how the war was progressing. 8 Then he told Uriah, “Go on home and relax.” David even sent a gift to Uriah after he had left the palace.

Q3: Why do you think David sent Uriah home from the front lines?

4. Verse 9: But Uriah didn’t go home. He slept that night at the palace entrance with the king’s palace guard.

10. When David heard that Uriah had not gone home, he summoned him and asked, “What’s the matter? Why didn’t you go home last night after being away for so long?”

11. Uriah replied, “The Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents, [c] and Joab and my master’s men are camping in the open fields. How could I go home to wine and dine and sleep with my wife? I swear that I would never do such a thing.”

Q4: *What does that say about Uriah's character?*

5. Verse 12: *"Well, stay here today," David told him, "and tomorrow you may return to the army." So, Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the next. 13 Then David invited him to dinner and got him drunk. But even then, he couldn't get Uriah to go home to his wife. Again, he slept at the palace entrance with the king's palace guard.*

Q5: Why do you think Uriah slept at the palace entrance?

6. *Verse 14 So the next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and gave it to Uriah to deliver. 15 The letter instructed Joab, "Station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest. Then pull back so that he will be killed." 16 So Joab assigned Uriah to a spot close to the city wall where he knew the enemy's strongest men were fighting. 17 And when the enemy soldiers came out of the city to fight, Uriah the Hittite was killed along with several other Israelite soldiers.*

18 Then Joab sent a battle report to David. 19 He told his messenger, "Report all the news of the battle to the king. 20 But he might get angry and ask, 'Why did the troops go so close to the city? Didn't they know there would be shooting from the walls? 21 Wasn't Abimelech son of Gideon killed at Thebez by a woman who threw a millstone down on him from the wall? Why would you get so close to the wall?' Then tell him, 'Uriah the Hittite was killed, too.'"

22. So the messenger went to Jerusalem and gave a complete report to David. 23 "The enemy came out against us in the open fields," he said. "And as we chased them back to the city gate, 24 the archers on the wall shot arrows at us. Some of the king's men were killed, including Uriah the Hittite."

Q6A: Now David is responsible for more men being killed. He also involved Joab in his deceit. How?

25. "Well, tell Joab not to be discouraged," David said. "The sword devours this one today and that one tomorrow! Fight harder next time and conquer the city!"

Q6B.: What is the lie David is telling Joab and himself here?

David thought he got away with his sin. Uriah was dead. He and Bathsheba were together. They had a child together. But God knew. Here is the following account of the confrontation by Nathan the prophet in 2 Samuel 12:1-10