

## Hope for Hurting Women

*By Jackie Kenaston*

I want to begin by sharing with you a dream that I had this morning right before the alarm went off, and then I want to share with you a nightmare that I had three and a half weeks ago. I don't know why certain people enter into your dreams, but this morning Vera Stumpf and I were walking along a road to this meeting, we were talking, and I had my little folder of notes. I knew we had to turn left to get to where we were going, and we started turning left. There were boulders, and rocks, and we had to climb up to get to this real high building here. It seemed like a rough way to get there. I didn't know if there'd be another lane that we could take, but we were just having a nice little talk, and we were on our way. Then the alarm went off. Did you ever wish you could go back to sleeping because you want to make sure you got there? But I obviously got here.

Three and a half weeks ago I had a nightmare about this meeting. My husband calls them "Preacher-speaker nightmares." Well, in this dream, for some reason, my son Daniel and his wife Christy were sitting on the floor in Papa's study. Aaron Hurst and Denny were there, and we were talking. Then I realized I should come downstairs because it was time for the meeting to begin. I came down, and everybody was chitchatting. I thought, well, I'll run to the bathroom. So I went to the bathroom, and it dawned on me, I don't have my notes. I haven't even looked at my notes. How can I say I was burdened about this meeting and I never in all this time even looked for my notes? I looked in the mirror, and I had a big blotch of something on my dress. I was panicking, thinking, "What do I tell them? I don't even have my notes!" Well I'm glad to tell you that is not true. It was a nightmare, because I did prepare as best as I know how for the meeting.

Why am I standing here today? Certainly not because I'm a public speaker. I'd like to think the reason was because I have my act all together, but that's not true either. After all, isn't Denny my husband? Aren't I the wife of the "Godly Home" preacher? Does that put your expectations up high? Well, do me a favor and just lower them. Because that is true, but, like you'll hear, I'm also the wretch who jumped out the windows and ran away in our early married life, and some of the many, many hidden dynamics behind the year 2004 in our life. If I had a success story to share with you, because of my own efforts, then I might be proud and you might think, "Oh wow, she had all these instances in her life that led her to this place of success." That wouldn't honor the Lord at all.

If anything that I share relates to you in my spiritual trek that I've taken, wonderful! This is today. I'm not where I was yesterday. And I'm not where I'm going to be a year from now. I trust that a year from now I will have many more exciting things to say about what the Lord has done in my life. I don't know specifically what each of you are dealing with, but I know in any group of women there are some hurting hearts. Maybe a very wide variety of needs, some hard circumstances, because this is life and this is where we live. We are facing obstacles. Maybe some of you are even where I was almost two years ago. Burnt out. Weary. Desperate. So loaded down. Not knowing where to turn. Why do I think that might be true? Because I know as the Lord leads me to be honest and transparent it's often because there are other people who are maybe very close to the same place that I was.

In the natural, if you asked me to give a topic, I might want to give you some charts, and some schedules, and some organizational ideas, a "how-to". That's not wrong. There's a place for seminars. I think those things are very helpful. I have also gleaned from some of them. But this afternoon we'd rather look into the crux of the heart where it all begins.

I'm a firm believer in using resources. In my bedroom I have a bookcase about four feet high, and it's full of books. How-to books. How to be a better woman. How to be a Godly wife. Devotional books. Dieting books. Home schooling books. Child training books. Inspirational books. Cookbooks. How to be an exciting lover. I have lots of books. Why? Because I've been a seeker. Ever since I was born again I've been a seeker. Wanting to improve. Wanting more of what the Lord had for me. It seems like I've had a lot of advantages with all those resources available at my fingertips. Besides that, I have the tremendous advantage of being married to Denny. I say that in all honesty. He is one of the godliest men I've ever met. So why is it, with all of these positive things, I missed so much for so many years? Well, maybe today I can give you a glimpse of some of that in such a way that it will help you, or somebody you know.

I didn't come to pretend to be anybody I'm not. I didn't come to play games. I came to bare my heart, in hopes that by sharing some of my miserable failures, and debilitating pain, you might do two

things. First, that you glorify God for His miraculous deliverance in my life. And secondly, that you might gain some hope and courage for your own difficult circumstances.

One of the largest reasons I'm sharing this is simply out of obedience to the ministry. They walk with God. They love us. They watch for our souls. They sensed this would be good. I also come out of a personal love for you ladies. We have faced some incredible spiritual warfare in the last three weeks, since this meeting was announced. I'm just selfish enough, and honest enough, to tell you I'm not willing to pay that price if I didn't see a measure of something on the other side. I know that there are some beautiful, attainable victories for some of you that you're not walking in the good of yet. That thought excites me. It is worth any price.

Honestly isn't always pretty, but it's so freeing. Pretence is a terrible bondage, and eventually a killer. A few of us have come through a lot of life together. Some of us go way back, almost twenty-two years. We've borne babies, we've raised children, we've married, we've buried, we've fasted, we laughed, we cried, we had fellowship meals, we had Bible School. Lots of water under the bridge. A desire to seek all God has for us will draw hearts together in fellowship as we pursue holiness. It's a solidifying agent to surrender to the Lord. I know some of you sit through church services and meetings like this in misery. Your head nods in agreement, but your heart is far removed. You think no one can understand, and there's no hope for you to get any further than where you're struggling right now. I know the only way for you to receive anything today is to have an open heart. Perhaps you need to do something daring. Perhaps you, personally, need to make a decision.

It is a choice, you know, to respond to God. You need to say "Yes, Lord. I'll take the plunge. I won't hide. I won't pretend. I'm open. Lord, I want to go on." If a piece of my confusion relates to a piece of yours, just admit it. If a chord of my pain strikes a chord with yours, it's okay for some tears to fall. Just be real. It wouldn't matter how earth shaking what I say today might be, if you're sitting there with the arms of your heart folded, saying "I'm not going to let you in. I'm going to be stubborn and resist it." Just ask the Lord to help you to commit yourself, set aside whatever you were doing this morning, and just think about where you are with God. Ask Him to take you the next step.

Whenever you're asked to share a personal testimony, there's a bit of a quandary as to how much to share. I turned fifty this year. Obviously I can't share everything that's happened in the last fifty years. That's not the goal. I'm hoping that I can share enough to give you a window of understanding into where I'm coming from, to glorify God for where He's brought me from, yet I don't want to bog down in specifics in issues. I have no desire to shock you. I could shock you. I could tell you some ugly stories. That's not the goal. That's not the purpose. It seems fitting where you're innocent to evil you should just stay innocent to evil and be grateful that you weren't exposed to some things that others were. I don't want to compare my testimony to somebody else's. This is my testimony, and this is where God has brought me.

It's only been in the very recent years that we've allowed our older children some intimate glimpses into my past. I think wisely so, to protect them from that. But as they've come to understand several of the circumstances of my younger years, I've been amazed at how beautifully they've responded, and have been so supportive, and so forgiving. It seems it's caused new respect levels in their heart as they realize what we've been through, and how much we've had to overcome. Denny and I have apologized many times for the rocky moments they saw in our early married days as we stumbled and fumbled along. To our surprise, it doesn't seem they judge us for it. It seems rather that they encourage us because we kept going, and that it's a motivational factor to them even though, thankfully, they'll never touch or taste some of the things that we did.

The enemy is after them. He may be more subtle in his attempts to derail them, but he's after them. I don't know how many children would be represented in this room. A lot. Hundreds for sure. Every one of them needs something real. They don't need a mom and dad who are pretending, who come to church and are something else when they're here than when they're at home. That is so confusing, so damaging. Our children will walk in the benefits of the victories we gain way before we ever did. They start at such a younger age, and with a pure heart. It's not long before they're strengthening and challenging us, as you know if you have older children. As they become youth, they bring their devotional thoughts, and what God said to them. How very sweet it is. How sweet Rebecca was this week, as I said to her "I'm feeling the load of expectation." In such a simple one-liner she said "Mom, they're not expecting anything from you. Their expectation is in God." Oh, yeah, that's right. So simple, but so profound.

I grew up in what today is commonly referred to as an extremely dysfunctional home. Both of my parents were alcoholics, which contributes to a very angry spirit in the home, with lots of arguing. I want to mention a little bit of trauma of some of my abuse in childhood days only so that you can see the load of

dark secrets that I carried for many, many years. I was looking for another word to express trauma, and when I looked up trauma, I found it's mostly a medical term. Do you know what trauma is? It's a wound. I thought "How fitting." Because most of the trauma in our life does leave wounds. If you don't know how to respond to those wounds they get larger, and more gaping, and more damaging. Infection gets in them.

All abuse is ugly, whether it's verbal abuse, emotional abuse, or physical abuse. It's all ugly. But I think that probably one of the most damaging of childhood abuses is sexual abuse. Especially if that abuse was administered by people in authority in your life. A representation of who these people are supposed to be, and what they're supposed to be, and then in part, who God is—it's a quagmire of confusion to a young child. Children ought to be learning how to ride bikes, and simple things, rather than to have to be carrying ugly loads of abuse. It's devastating. There came a time, after many instance of abuse in my life, where I grasped the reality that those laps I crawled on for a back scratch or a kind word had ugly, ulterior motives time after time again. When I was a little girl I used to think surely sometime my tear ducts would dry up because I cried so many lonely hours. Because who do you go to? Where do you go? Where do you go for help? You're just a little child. They won't believe you. It's your fault.

During one of my parent's drunken arguments late at night my father was permanently disabled in a fight which involved a chase, and a butcher knife, and a hard fall. He actually couldn't walk for a couple of years. That incident in itself became another dark secret to stuff and hide because my parents chose to lie and say he fell in another situation, and therefore they made an insurance claim. I was very young, but I saw it. I knew where he fell. But I learned to tell the same lie to protect my parents. It wasn't until I was a Christian many, many years that I realized in the middle of explaining it one time "Oh, I don't have to say that anymore. I don't ever have to say that again." I had told it many years as a Christian because it was so much a part of me. I hope you don't ever, in any small way, cause your children to lie for you. Somebody comes to the door, or the phone rings—don't cause your children to tell something that's not true, to hide or cover what you're doing, or what you don't want to do. They shouldn't have to carry that load.

This disability my father suffered changed our home situation very fast. He had a good job, but it wasn't like these days where you have places available to you to collect money from. He got a Social Security disability, but that was all. It threw us into poverty. My mother had been widowed at twenty-two with two little children. She came to the city where my father lived, and married him. He was twenty years older than her. She was a little country gal and didn't have any education, so the only jobs that she could get were bartending and all night cab driving. Well, probably to protect herself, Mom gained a lot of weight. She became a very large, tough, rough, woman. She wore men's clothes. She could out-cuss, out-dirty-joke-tell any man, any truck driver. I think it was a protection for the rough world she had to face. She became very hardened.

We didn't have any home life to speak of. We never sat around the table to eat a meal. A matter of fact, to sit down at the table it was a major chore just to clear a place to eat, as it was piled so high with things, so usually you ate in front of the television by yourself. Our house was so filthy, and I was so ashamed when I'd walk home from school that if anybody was walking with me, I would make excuses and walk other blocks so they would never find out I lived in the pink house. I didn't want them to know where I lived. My dad spent all day at the corner bar. Mom was anywhere but home. I was the youngest, so I didn't have the freedoms that my older brothers had. I was the baby of the family. So it often fell on me to put them to bed, separate them from fighting, clean up the vomit, try to fix it, try to make it all better. I would plead, I would beg them, to stop fighting. They were always threatening to call the police on the other. You know, that developed something in a child that's a very common trait of alcoholic parents. The children just think if I could be good enough, if I could just try harder somehow I could make this situation all right.

Well, I soon learned I didn't want to be home either. So I got very involved in after school activities, and community things, volunteered for this and that, and pursued my studies to get good grades. It seemed that two things back then pleased my parents. They were proud of my good grades, and would take me to the bar where I'd get on top of the counter, and dance. They would tell how many A's I had gotten, and people would give me money. That was a positive in my heart because there was some acceptance there from my folks. I used to always try get my parents to come see me in plays and musicals through my junior high years. One time my mom came. I was in the middle of my star performance. I was the pink panther in a dance recital, and in comes my mom. Drunk out of her head. Hollering, bellowing. I wanted to die. I didn't think I could ever face anybody again. But of course you do, you don't have a choice. I never asked them to come again.

I had a step brother who was my mother's son from her first marriage when she was widowed. He knew the home situation was bad, so he and his wife took me out of the home the summer I was thirteen. They weren't a whole lot older than me, but they did the best they could. They tried to make me happy. Because they didn't have discernment in those areas, they just did it with money and things. They had a new home, and bought me lots of fancy, immodest clothes. My brother was a Seabee, and my sister-in-law worked at the Air Force base, which meant they knew lots of single fellahs. I had more blind dates than I knew what to do with, at thirteen. Not good, of course. I remember sometimes feeling like Cinderella. I had red shoes, and navy blue shoes, and black shoes, and a couple pairs of sandals, and purple shoes, and tennis shoes, all at the same time. I remembered very clearly that as a little girl if I had a pair of shoes they didn't fit or the shoelaces were missing. So that did bring some temporary happiness. It was exciting. I lived with them a couple years. We moved to California, between the mountain and the ocean, on the beaches of California, where I had my own red convertible. I thought I was "it", you know.

But even in the midst of that "happier" lifestyle, I was still very plagued with the past. I had waves of depression. I had reoccurring nightmares. I had a nightmare a couple of times a month every month until I got converted, and I have never had it since. It was involving my parents, and it was awful. I'd hyperventilate, it was so distressing to me. I had a hard time opening myself up to friendships, male or female, in any deep sense of the word. Because underneath all the fluff, and being president of the student council, and the activity, underneath I knew I was dirty, I was no good, and I never would be. The stains and scars I was carrying really hindered me, haunted me.

At one time, when I was sixteen, I was committed to a mental hospital. I wasn't sleeping. I had undergone another severe trauma. I became an inpatient, and they hypnotized me so I would sleep. I have renounced all that. I have no idea what happens when they hypnotize you, but I know it's not good. They put wires all over me and had me watch drama to see if my heart rate increased, to see if I hated my father, to see what I hated. They were trying to see who I was and what made me tick, so they could help me. But even as a confused, ungodly girl, I knew that man was being paid to do his job, psychologist, psychiatrist, whatever he was. So I answered this way, and I answered that way, because I didn't know how I wanted to present myself. Did I want to present myself as a good girl? Did I want to present myself as a needy girl? So they labeled me: Maniac Depressive Schizophrenic. That's quite a title for a sixteen-year-old girl. They gave me three prescription drugs, and sent me on my way. But I didn't receive any help. I needed God, but they didn't know to tell me that.

My years in California ended rather abruptly when my father suffered a severe stroke, and I left school. I was on my way to being a lawyer. Can you imagine? Thank you Lord, He delivers us from our self, and our own goals. I returned to Nebraska where I was from. I went to my father's bedside, and he did pull out of that stroke. He was in a rest home after that until he died.

Back in Omaha I landed what I thought was just a fantastic job as a high class receptionist at a swinging singles club. It was a travel, dining, and entertainment club where they sold memberships. You got together with all these people at apartment complexes, and you could go to Acapulco for a cheaper price. It was the place to be. That's where I met Denny. Denny was five years older than I and fresh out of the army. He came in with his buddy who was coming to get a job. The Lord had other plans than that.

When I look back I'm always marvel how sly the devil is when he camouflages sin in our life. You know, as much as I despised my parents' drunkenness my own drinking was sophisticated, because it was done in nightclubs with bright lights and fancy clothes, and somehow that was different. The end is the same, but to me it seemed successful at the time. I don't know what all the factors were that led to the spiral down—old friends, trying to bury ugly memories, rock music—all of those things contributed for sure. My mother always credited Denny with my salvation, and that's true. But before I followed him in his footsteps to the Lord, he did lead me into much more wickedness with drugs and deeper immorality. I was attracted to him for all the wrong reasons. Absolutely totally wrong reasons. But I marvel all these years later what the Lord gave me in him. All of the character qualities that I would now seek if I were looking, they're already there. God's been good. During the time that Denny and I were dating we had some very stormy times. Of course, poor guy, I was a mess. He didn't know what kind of baggage I was bringing into our friendship.

I overdosed on these three drugs that they had given me, and I was not desiring to take my life. I was just trying to cope. It was a Sunday afternoon. I took a bunch of these pills, and I went outside and started walking. I walked miles and miles and miles. I ended up at the office of Club America, where I worked. The office has outside doors that lead you into the hallways inside. The outside door wasn't locked. I went in. All the offices were locked. It was Sunday, so they weren't open. I would have died

except some man, by God's grace, came in to get some paperwork he had forgotten from another office and found me. He sent me to the hospital. I have no recollection of any of that. It gave me a good scare about drugs, and kept me from experimenting with other drugs.

Many of you have heard Denny's testimony about his godly aunt and uncle, and where that all fit in our life, and us coming to the Lord. So I'm not going to share all of that. Some months after we were converted we were married, and then we went off to Bible School, which is what you did if you love the Lord, back in our Baptist setting. We jumped in with both feet, desiring to grow, and desiring to be used by the Lord. Denny was very shy and introverted in those days, but he was very zealous, and so he still succeeded in the Bible college there. We were in a mega church situation. We ran over 20,000 on a Sunday morning. He was eventually ordained, and was an assistant pastor there with several hundred Bible college students under his authority.

Let me just try to emphasize it for you. Here I was, this poor little girl from the wrong side of the tracks: poverty, drunken parents, trying to get acceptance by following Hollywood and being somebody, wanting to make money, wanting to be successful, trying to find my way through the mess of my home life. Then salvation comes to my heart, and with it, definitely, some joy, a new lifestyle, a new wardrobe. I raised my necklines, I lowered my hems, I put on undergarments, gave up slacks. In the church where we got converted, we were the big fish in the little pond. You know, we were the hippies, and everybody liked to tell our story of how we used to do all these bad things, and now we're converted, and isn't this wonderful? It was wonderful.

They put us to work right away. We didn't grow. We didn't get our feet planted. They were desperate for workers. They put us on a bus route and teaching Sunday school. I knew the stories from my childhood, I was enthusiastic and young, and that's what they were looking for. Then we whisked off to Bible school, where we all the sudden became little fish in a great big lake, and my insecurities multiplied there. The standard of appearance was way higher than it had been in our little bitty church. I made the foolish, unwise mistake of comparing myself to others. Here were all of these hundreds of virgin, young, Baptist girls, with bright eyes and big hair, and makeup. They played the piano. The perfect preacher's wife, you know. In my mind they were everything that I should have been. I just thought, "Oh, Denny should have married one of these gals, and he stuck with me." But I learned. I learned how to put "the look" together. I went to garage sales, and I took wardrobe coordination and grooming classes, and learned how to make-up, and what to accent and what not to accent. So I was acceptable, and as Denny rose in leadership there then I was Mrs. Kenaston, so I had a position.

Through a tremendously clear set of circumstances the Lord redirected our steps, drastically, to take a look at Anabaptist doctrine, and lifestyle. I want to say much of the agony of rejection I felt when I came into the Anabaptist circles was because of the junk that I was carrying. A lot of the mess was inside of me. Some of those women did make big mistakes, and I want to learn from them and not make them with someone coming in. The props of security I found some comfort in, in the Baptist setting, with the cascading hair and the makeup were taken away. You could have just had an argument with your husband, but you put on a little white, and some black, and a bunch of pink, and you could go to church looking very bright, where nobody knew the debauchery in the heart. All of that was pulled out from under me. It was a shock. Some of you others have experienced that. It is traumatic. You look in the mirror and you say "ugh", because there's no hair, there's no makeup, there's nothing. It's just you, the way God made you. It's the hidden man of the heart, and it's showing, and if it's ugly, it's just ugly. There's nothing to hide it with. No artificial props.

So what did I do? I again compared myself. Here were all of these virtuous women, who knew how to sew from the time they were small. They knew how to can from when they were small. Talk about being a second class citizen! I was less than half of a woman for sure. I thought "Denny should have married one of these women. And he's stuck with me!"

You know, those women had no idea, in all their kindnesses to me, of the load that they put on me, because of my ignorance. I remember one sister bringing me a big silver bowl full of cucumbers from her garden. Because of the time of year we moved we didn't have a garden. She gave them to me to make pickles out of these cucumbers. She left, went on her way, and I looked at these cucumbers, and cried. I might as well have been told to fly to the moon. I had no idea how to make a cucumber into a pickle. I had no canning jars. I had no canner. I had no knowledge. I was a mess! In my understanding I just went down, lower in my understanding of myself as a woman. Then we moved to Lancaster county. Well, compound the problem! And the expectations: manicured gardens, and lawns, and flowerbeds. Sometimes you look and think "That's all the women do." But then you go in their house, and they have quilts, and cookies, and

everything else. Well, I have learned. I can put on a meal for twenty people now, because I have meat in my freezer and I bake some thing ahead of time. But back then that just looked totally overwhelming.

When we came into Lancaster county I think that some of the rejection was even stronger because we were starting a church that wasn't quite going by the standard books of the other churches. So we were no longer Baptist. We weren't quite Mennonite. We definitely weren't in the lineage. Nobody wanted to help us. Nobody wanted to fellowship with us, and it was lonely.

So that was painful. Added to that time, ever since Denny and I were nine months into our marriage, when we went into the emergency room with my first migraine headache, I had migraines. Incapacitating migraines. If you've never had one you don't know what you're talking about. Only once in awhile have I ever wished one on somebody, and that's when they were unkind, and very uncaring, and I just think, "Oh Lord, if they would just have one, they would never again be so insensitive." You can't stand light, you can't stand noise, you vomit, you crawl to the bathroom. Debilitating. Incapacitating. Fortunately the Lord gave me Rebecca, who was very good little baby. Denny was in full-time service, Bible school, had a job, and she would just play by the hour.

We sought nutrition route. We were anointed. I went on elimination diets. I tried this and I tried that, and I kept thinking if I was just becoming spiritual through all this pain it would be worth it. But I didn't see any progress. People didn't know what to say. I took vitamins by the handful. I became known for being sick. Do you know that when you're sick it makes you sick? You know, after you lay in bed so much time, your body doesn't function right, your bowels don't function, and you get weaker. You're sicker. You miss spiritual blessing. I think even some of you ladies would remember back to the years when I was in church less than I was here. And even when I came, any smell would send me reeling. The dear brothers put a special fan up there at the stairs for me, so that I could try to breathe. I spent many times in the study. I had to take my hair down. I was just woozy with the headache.

I took so much pain medicine. We had spinal taps done. We spent thousands of dollars searching. Everybody had a contributing factor. But you know, once your body is out of whack, I think you just continue to get more out of whack. And the more they tell you what's wrong with you, the more becomes wrong with you. It's horrible. You know, during all of those years I don't know many people who tried as hard as I did. But I bore so little fruit. Those books I told you about, I read them. I tried to apply it. But something was missing. I'd get up early. I'd beat my flesh. I'd go on long fasts. Read the how-tos. But it seemed like the precious promises were not for me. They were true, but they were for everybody else, not for me.

What was I doing? I was reverting to that little girl who tried to get strait A's, who's going to make something of herself. I tried to earn my sanctification. I tried to work for it. I searched for why I've got this mumble-jumble, cloudy feelings, why all this cruddy stuff still under the table of my heart. After awhile it seemed like conviction just loaded on top of conviction. I wasn't getting anywhere, so I just started dismissing them instead of adding them to the pile. I started stuffing them.

I knew enough of fear. I had a public position. I knew the right answers to say. I really wasn't trying to be phony. I was doing the best I could do. People expected me to be cheery and to have godly answers. I was on overload. We had a lot of people come to the church back in those days. A lot of people came, a lot of people went. With serious problems. Most of them could not be contributors to the Body because they were so needy. Financially needy. The children were needy. Their marriages were needy. We got stretched so thin.

Back in the beginning days there Denny was working a job for seven dollars an hour, if you can imagine. Things weren't that much cheaper. He usually got in about twenty hours a week, because of counseling. Pretty soon that was a financial pressure. Added to, compounded by, all of the other things that we weren't good enough, and couldn't make it.

So my health deteriorated more. I developed other things. We sought answers for them. I would get temporary relief, which you often do when you go on a cleansing program or something. But as the years went by I developed something in my shoulder. Severe pain. It started going down my arm, my breath was short. I couldn't breathe deeply. I was going to a chiropractor. A godly man. After a few months he wouldn't let me pay anymore because he knew he wasn't doing me any good. I wasn't sleeping at night.

It was not too many months after the time our brother Vernon died from cancer which had begun by a Ganglion cyst on the shoulder. I think that because of that experience the ministry here decided on an emergency measure, fast. We were in the midst of almost ready to divide the churches, and I think the fear was cancer. It sounded like cancer. There must be a growth. Why is this doing all that it's doing? Better have it checked out. So the decision was made to send me to Mexico, which was a very fast decision. A day

and a half later I was there. I was in so much pain, and so doped up on pain medicine, I think that's the only way they got me there. To be talked into going to Mexico without my family for a month I had to be in pretty bad shape. I could bog you down with all the treatments. I was a pincushion. I received so many treatments there. Lots of uncomfortable things. We spent a lot of money. The church spent a lot of money. After I came home it was very discouraging to find out that I had more pain than before I went. New pain. We tried a couple more treatments here, thinking maybe I just need to get over a hump.

I did benefit from the spiritual time there. I had purposed in my heart not to turn on the television in my room, being alone for a month there. Not even to look at the news, but to concentrate when I was alone to be in the Word. I listened to tapes. I think that God really saw that as a preparation time for the next step in what He would bring us to.

We were feeling very desperate as my pain intensified. I remember one day going to Wal-Mart, and I had to throw my leg. I was pushing, leaning on a cart, and I was feeling very old. We didn't know what to do. We were feeling pretty desperate, because I was incapacitated, not functioning at home. Through a course of reading, listening, and asking questions of people, out of desperation Denny and I began to wonder, is it possible that there is any connection between all these years of physical things, one after another, and spiritual roots? We've tried everything else. It seemed possible, maybe even logical, as we would find out later. What we found out literally changed my life, to say the least. Why we had to search so long to find answers I have no idea. As a matter of fact it's not even healthy for me to go there, to think about it. You know why? It would be very discouraging to me to think of the wasted years, the lost time. Instead I need to be rejoicing for what God has done. And maybe I can help somebody else to not have to go all those years. Maybe I can help them find some answers sooner.

A year and a half ago, after my healing, I was in Africa with Rebecca, Daniel, and their family. Daniel sent the youth workers out and asked "Mom, how can this be? How could we have missed these things all of these years? You've ministered to other people. You've helped other people. You've walked the walk, you've talked the talk. How could it be that we could miss these issues?" You know, I'm so sorry for the lost fruitfulness, and the failures, but I'm so happy to be on the other side that I can't stay there very long. The children are very happy, and Daniel wasn't saying that in judgment, he was just saying it in amazement.

You know, it's torture not to be able to grasp God's love. Especially when everyone around you is walking in the good of it. You wish you could understand. It's agonizing to not know how to forgive yourself. Denny used to say to me, "Honey, if I had your theology I'd go crazy. I wouldn't know how to live with myself." Well, that's where I was. I wasn't doing a very good job of living with myself. Getting out of bed had become a major chore. Dread. Put one foot down. Have to get up. Have to face life. I look in the mirror. I hated what I saw, who I was.

You know, the image of who I was supposed to be compounded that, made it harder. Because I was Mrs. Kenaston. I compounded my guilt. I'd get up early and I'd sit there with my Bible open on my lap, dumbfounded, knowing this is what I should be doing. It didn't seem like anybody else was facing what I was facing, so that made me feel all the more foolish, and ashamed. I couldn't talk to anybody about it. I was Mrs. Kenaston. Aren't the preachers' wives supposed to have all the answers? Deliver us from that.

I don't know the correct theological terms to describe exactly what was happening. Maybe five years from now I'll be able to say it much clearer. But it was a long scene of darkness. I don't know hidden forces, strongholds, demons, but this I know. I was blind, and now I see. I longed for freedom and truth, but it just seemed out of my grasp, not for me. The scriptural truths of abiding and resting and trusting, they seemed so elusive. They sounded so beautiful. My young people would share things with me, and I was so glad for them, but I knew nothing of what they were talking about.

I want to quickly and strongly say that I do not believe we're supposed to wear our abuse on our sleeve, or use it as an excuse for sin, the hard time you had, the circumstances of your life. But you know I also learned that maybe, just maybe, you need to get it out, and you need to dump it, and you need to deal with it, so that you can go on. Sometimes folks who have never experienced any serious trauma accuse you that you're just wanting to use your circumstances to dodge personal accountability. Let me say I did not find it that at all. We found it to be exactly the opposite. Once we faced these issues in my life and we dealt with them I became free to flow and to grow. I'm learning how to walk, and to be clear moment by moment. Every time a new conviction comes to my heart I can look at it as fresh, and respond to it individually. Before I was so blocked and clouded spiritually my perception was so hopeless that it was like, what's one more thing? Just dump it on my ugly pile. I didn't know what to do with any of it anyway.

So learning to walk this way has been marvelous, and freeing, and exciting. I often feel like a new babe in Christ where the whole world is brighter. You hear people say “Oh, the sun is brighter and the water’s clearer.” Being able to understand conviction clearly and respond to it instead of being condemned is wonderful.

While Denny and I were seeking for answers, and reading, and listening, and hunting, after we’d spent lots and lots of money, a suggestion came to us to make a list of serious upheavals in your lives, like divorce in your parents, sickness, accidents, abuse, trauma, emotional, anything like that. Just make a list of them. Well because I wasn’t sleeping at night hardly anyway, I sat up late to make my list, and he went to bed. Then he got up early the next morning to make his list. He had to stretch and strain, and he came up with one item on his list, something that was said to him as a child that probably wasn’t wise, probably caused some damage. After he wrote his one down he opened up my notebook and he found my list. I was still hiding many of the things on my list. The list that he found was columns long. I think that somehow looking at this list, reading it, one after another after another, somehow it broke his heart, and God gave him a new perspective. How to view me, and how to nurture me. When I woke up he took me in his arms and he said to me the most tender, hopeful words that I had ever heard in my life, that ministered to my crushed heart. He said, “Sweetheart, I am so very sorry. I never realized the magnitude of what you’ve been carrying.” I felt a stirring of hope in my heart. I can hardly explain it. Something cracked. It’s as if I received a manifestation of my Heavenly Father’s love and acceptance through my earthly authority. It was awesome. It was beautiful. I referred to it as my benefit of the doubt moment. I guess I got the assurance that all of this mess was not totally my fault. I treasure it. I will probably never be able to exactly describe it, because that’s how God things are. It would actually be several months before I came face to face with dealing with these issues, but I knew we were on the right track. God was ministering something, and we were seeing something for the first time. So what happened to me that day was a major preparation for what was going to happen later.

Denny had put forth much effort trying to unlock my heart through all the years. He was not an uncaring man. But his most gallant efforts discouraged me. When he would say he loved me, I wouldn’t believe him. How could he care for me? I was despicable. I was unlovely. I was worthless. So when he would say something kind, I blocked it. Poor guy. I had such a warped self image that I twisted all of those things into negatives. Because there were so many authority-related issues, and abuses, I just had never been able to trust him.

Several months later, after us endeavoring to follow through on the beginning of what God had showed us, the Lord brought everything to a head for me in a twelve hour sessions with two very godly sisters. Where I painfully dumped my bucket. I wrenched, and I wept, and I moaned, and I confessed, and I acknowledged sin. I recognized where I had been a victim, so I forgave. I forgave my abusers, I forgave myself, and I forgave God. It was very painful. I went into the session out of obedience. I didn’t have faith of what any outcome would be. You know, at salvation I had believed God. I had trusted Christ to the best of my understanding. I had blanketly forgiven people. People dealt with me of what I needed to do, and looked at these issues. But it must have been on the surface because the pain didn’t disappear, and I never got any freedom.

It was, again, some months after this time that Denny’s sister called me up and we were chit-chatting on the telephone. She had talked to Denny’s father, who Denny corresponded with about my health all through the years of our married life. She said to me, “Dad says that you’re not having any headaches anymore.”

I had to think, when did I last have a headache? I said, “Well, you know, I’m not. I haven’t had one in a long time.” I was only beginning to recognize it.

Then she said, “And Dad says that you’re not having any muscle and leg and joint pain anymore.” And again, well, when did that disappear? “And Dad says you’re able to sleep at night.” Denny had been watching this all transpire in my life, but to have somebody else say it and put it all together and acknowledge it, I realized it was true.

You know, the healing in my heart had superseded the physical, which had taken place gradually. I didn’t have a hot flash over me and the pain was gone. We just dropped off the pain medication. I wasn’t taking any vitamins. And I was well. It was a marvelous revelation. As my inner body had come to peace I was sleeping soundly, and I was without pain. You know, just not sleeping will lead to serious problems. God made our body to rest. The nerve endings, and if you ever read, if you ever study it, which we did lots of, all those little nerves that put off whatever they put off, they have to sleep, they have to rest, or your body can’t heal itself. You’re immune system will go down, and you’ll develop all sorts of problems.



So here I was not taking any environmental cautions. I was going everywhere, in buildings with terrible smells and new carpet and paint, and here I was. I was free. I was able to do as they did in Acts 3. I was able to be filled with wonder and amazement, not understanding at all, but rejoicing. You know, I have always been characterized by physical sickness. A few weeks ago I had a phone contact with somebody I hadn't seen in twenty-five years, and then somebody I hadn't talked to in two years. And the first question out of both of their mouths? "How is your health?" They knew me for being sick. They were very sweet in asking, and I thought "It's wonderful!" Every time they'd talked to me or seen me I had been sick.

So why do I share all of this confusion with you? You didn't walk the same path that I did. Your path is uniquely yours as mine is uniquely mine. I didn't have your parents, you didn't have mine. I didn't have your home, I don't have your husband, I don't have your personality. But hopefully our end goals are the same. Our desire to glorify God with our life. What are the hindrances? As I said before we have all those teachings. What is it that holds you back, if something is holding you back? Do you examine it? Do you think about it? Aren't you getting tired of not knowing week after week? Are your children, if you have older ones, are they home today thinking "Oh, I wish Mom could get something at that meeting"? Are they hurting? Are there wounded ones around your table? It won't just go away. You know, somebody told me the other day that hurt people hurt people. Does that make sense? If you're hurting and you're stuffing, then most likely you are hurting most everyone you come in contact with. Not because you want to, but because you don't know what to do with it, and it comes out. The more that I open up and share, the more that I find out that a lot of other sisters are also stuffing, hiding, pretending. I don't know if there's spiritual bondage involved. Sometimes I think so, strongholds which have never been broken. It's like it's a half salvation. What a sadness to our Lord, knowing that He already paid for it all. We're not walking in the good of what He's already paid for.

I think on the natural side women are very good advice givers. That's good. If we find a new product or a new food that's good, we'll tell everybody about it. We're kind of walking commercials. I think I have literally sold gallons of Oxi-clean, once I discovered it, because it was a good product. I tell everybody how it takes out stains, and how it worked for me if you have a stain that you're trying to get out, and you've never had that particular problem before. You ladies remember our couples' night problem with candle wax on the new tablecloths? Everybody was saying, "What do you do for candle wax?" We'd talk about it, and we try to save money by not buying everything on the shelf. All stains aren't taken out the same way. Usually you do something different for blood than you do for grease, than what you do for ink.

In the Old Testament, we're given the example of the Lord being as a refiner's fire, and as fuller's soap. In the process of purifying. What is He purifying, and why is He purifying? That we might bring forth righteous lives. Back in Bible days the fuller was the expert at removing stains. If you had a problem that you can't get rid of you took it to him. He was the expert, and he could get out even the hard ones. The Lord Jesus is still the expert at getting out the stains. Even the hard ones. We're supposed to take all of our spots to Him. I'd like to try to make an analogy for that. Analogies always break down. Just follow me a little bit and see if you can understand what I'm saying.

Let's take our personal white robe of righteousness. It's already been washed in the blood. Sometimes I think one of the problems with us ladies with spots on our garments is that we like to talk about our spots. We like to compare our spots. We moan and groan about them. And then you'd say how yours is bigger, and all the hard times you've had, and how rough your life has been. You know, we're a mess in ourselves. Just in the course of a normal day we get dirty. It happens in different ways. If you're near a mud hole, you get mud splattered on you. You rub up against something greasy. Sometimes there's a smudge, you don't know where it came from. Maybe somebody purposely took an ink pen and scribbled on you. Gossip. Something that hurt. Something that made a mark. It doesn't really matter how the spots get there. At the end of the day when your dress is dirty have you ever just taken your hands and wiped them because you're going to change anyway? So out of carelessness you put those spots there yourself. Well the need is the same, no matter how the spot got there. You need to get clean. Maybe you even let some of your stains sit there awhile, like mine had. Way too long. Maybe you've added more on top of them. Those might take a little bit of extra scrubbing. You might need some help. Someone might need to help you get those stains out. You know the Lord might use somebody's book or tape to apply a Scriptural truth to your life. Oftentimes He does.

But you know, you have to start out right. If you're carrying a load of unresolved conflicts and guilt in your heart, if you're downright dirty, if you're not under authority, if you're not being submissive. Maybe you're crumpled up in despair, or you're taking those dirty rags and stuffing them up your sleeves, hiding all those dirty rags under your robe. Your way will not prosper when you hide stains. Scriptures are

very clear on that. We have to walk the same way that we first came to the Lord. We have to believe by faith. We have to obey. Oh the wonderful freedom that comes from getting clean and then staying clean! You know, fresh dust brushes off so easy. If you get it right away it brushes right off. I would like to challenge you to dump your bucket. If you have never dumped, you need to dump your bucket. Quit holding on to your spots and saying "Poor me! I had a rough life, and everybody's been mean to me, and you just don't understand." You can't keep wasting your life. Your children need you. They need to see something real. How the household suffers when Mama's spirit is not right. By example what you're actually saying to the children is "God's not big enough. God's a liar." Is that what you want to say to your children? You know it's a miracle when children who come out of a home that's pretending turn out to serve God. Hypocrisy damns them. They can't find their way clear very easily.

I want to come around this one more time, and give you an illustration from my everyday life I hope will help you see clearly what I'm trying to say. I'm a walker. I like to walk. It's good for me to walk. I feel better when I walk. I try to take walks several times a week. My most faithful walking partners are here. Mary Jane and I have really truly logged thousands of miles in the last twenty years, walking together, because we lived three miles apart, and then we moved and they moved and we still lived three miles apart. So we take walks on country roads where there are often little ditches along the side. It must be for drainage, because a lot of times they're muddy.

You know, while we're walking along the road there, if we would happen to stumble or slip or trip or walk too close to the edge, we might find ourselves in the ditch. Well if you find yourself in the ditch you have a choice to make. Number one, you can continue to walk in that ditch even though it's rocky and muddy, because, after all, you know, you're not a very good person. You really don't deserve to walk on that nice road anyway. So just stay in the ditch and condemn yourself, and feel bad and awful about it. Number two you could choose to beat yourself. How could you be so stupid to fall in the ditch? You get muddier and more miserable if you get stuck in condemnation. Number three, you could choose to become angry and bitter at that fella who just sped by that caused you to slip into the ditch. There's probably going to be somebody coming around the corner in a few minutes and do the same thing again, so you might as well just stay there and wallow. Or number four, you can recognize, "Hey, I'm in a ditch!" Step back up on the road, and start walking. And end up where you were going cleaner and happier.

I think we need to quit blaming the way that we are on the things that we've suffered. The way that we grew up, the people that hurt us. I think that once you deal with those things, once you repent, you need to get on the highway of holiness and walk. See how much more progress you'll make in faith as you stay fresh and current, and walk in freedom. You know, God wants to use each of us to bless others once we have the issues of our life settled. I used to wish when I was condemning myself that I could just get saved again, because then I could start over. But I realize now His mercies are new every day. I do start over. Actually, moment by moment. Many times a day I start over. The most wonderful words that I hear my husband say these days are "Mama, you are so different!"

Now to you on the outside, I look the same. I act the same. I talk the same. But it's because you don't know all the inner struggles. That's why those words are musical to me, because I know what he means. I know the freedom here. The actress isn't playing her part anymore in public. It's the same Jackie here as it is at home, and that's a wonderful freedom. My healing had applied to absolutely every area of my life. My outlook is so different. My responses are so different. Everything that comes my way I sift it so differently than I did before, because I'm not condemned. I have the freedom to respond in faith, and I'm amazed. My children are amazed. A compliment will come my way, and I just accept it. I have to practice that, because I have put myself down and rejected anything possibly being good in me for so long that I developed a very bad habit. You're probably aware I joke when I'm uncomfortable and trying to pitch off a compliment. I'll joke my way through it so I don't have accept it.

You know, when you live in a self-condemned state, just normal circumstances just send you into a thither. Something breaks. Well, it's your fault. Anything that happens, anything that comes your way you blame yourself. Well you know, we live in a world where moth and rust corrupts. You might run out of gas. I mean, things happen to you. If you're beating yourself, and taking the blame for all of that, you're going to be miserable. When you're on the other side of drinking of God's goodness and mercy, it's marvelous. I know some of you have walked there from day one, and I've always admired that, and wondered how you did it. But I also know that some of you aren't. And for you that haven't, it's my prayer today that you will take a serious look at that, and make a choice to get out of your ditch. There's a much better way to live.

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