

INCLUDES A 14-WEEK COMPANION BIBLE STUDY

Having a Mary Spirit

*Allowing God to Change Us
from the Inside Out*

JOANNA WEAVER

Bestselling author of *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*

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a
Mary
Spirit

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HAVING A MARY SPIRIT

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A Mary Spirit

*Create in me a clean heart, O God;
and renew a right spirit within me.*

PSALM 51:10 (KJV)



I've always dreamed of being much more than I am. More organized, more disciplined, more loving...much more "much more," if you know what I mean! Each January I set out on a new self-improvement program.

This year I'll get in shape.

This year I'll keep my house clean.

This year I'll send out birthday cards. On time.

This year—really—I'll be the loving, forgiving, obedient woman of God I long to be instead of the willful, stubborn, disobedient Christian I sometimes see staring back at me in the mirror.

All noble goals. And truth be told, I am much more at peace when my house is clean. And I believe that if you really love people, you ought to care enough to send the very best—or at least one of those ninety-nine-cent cards from Wal-Mart! And I know that genuine happiness only comes from living close to God and obeying Him.

I really do want to be different. I want to be changed.

As the saying goes, "There's a skinny woman inside me just struggling to get out." Unfortunately—as the saying continues—"I can usually sedate her with four or five cupcakes."¹

Working toward these noble goals has left me with little more than a cupboard full of half-empty vitamin bottles, several pairs of slightly worn running shoes, and enough cleaning products to Lysol a small third-world country. Not to mention a shelf filled with dust-covered devotionals.

Is that true for you as well?

Maybe you've discovered, as I have, that most of your New Year's resolutions have little effect on day-to-day life except to add a burden of guilt and a feeling of failure. Continually striving, yet never arriving. Hoping, praying to be different, only waking up to find you're not as far along as you'd hoped to be. Sometimes feeling like you're right back where you started—again!

I know. I've felt that way too.

In fact it was one of those discouraging moments that prompted me to write this book.

LEARNING FROM MARY AND MARTHA

It all began about seven years ago, with two sisters I'd met in the Bible—Mary and Martha of Bethany.

As a pastor's wife and—at the time—the mother of two almost-teenagers, my life was busy and often crazy. There was so much to do and so little time. Yet while I tended toward drivenness, my heart longed for intimacy with God. Maybe that's why I was drawn to take a new look at the story that had intrigued me for years. Luke 10:38–42 reads:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

After hearing several hundred sermons on these two women, I assumed the meaning was fairly straightforward. Mary was the heroine. Martha was the villain. And too much of the time I was Martha! I felt the Lord convicting me of my tendency to rush around, busy with "many things" while ignoring the "one thing" that was needed—to sit at Jesus's feet.

But as I studied the rest of the sisters' story in John 11 and 12, I discovered something so beautiful, so amazing, that I felt compelled to share it in a book. For I saw two women change before my eyes, both of them experiencing a holy makeover when they encountered the living Lord.

And so, six years ago, *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World: Finding Intimacy with God in the Busyness of Life* was born.

Perhaps the most comforting thing I learned as I worked on that book was that none of us has it all together. Even on our best days and with our best intentions, we all eventually blow it. We start out operating in our gifts and talents—excited to be serving the Messiah—only to have our efforts morph into a full-blown pity party when we don't get enough help, or we aren't appreciated, or someone else gets the attention we *know* we deserve.

But what stood out most to me was the fact that when Jesus scolded Martha about her busyness, He wasn't condemning her efficiency and hard work or her can-do personality. He wasn't telling her she had to be just like Mary to please Him. Jesus simply didn't want Martha to be so caught up in kitchen service *for* Him that she missed out on the joy of living-room intimacy *with* Him.

Jesus challenged Mary as well in John 11. When her brother, Lazarus, was sick and dying, Jesus waited two days before making His way to Bethany. By then, Lazarus was dead. And Mary, apparently paralyzed by grief, declined to go out to meet Jesus and stayed in the house instead. Later, she cried out her questions to Him. But while Jesus didn't answer her, He felt her pain. The Bible tells us He wept.

Neither Mary nor Martha got what they expected from Jesus. Instead, they received much more. For God never withholds good except when He has something better to give. Whether it's refusing more help in the kitchen or the miraculous healing of your brother, you can be sure Jesus knows what He's doing when He says no to our earthly requests in order to say yes to His heavenly plan.

But these two sisters had to accept Christ's better way—for it was a choice. Only as they humbled their hearts and learned from Him were they changed. Martha learned to be still and listen. Mary learned to pour out her heart as well as her expensive perfume in service. As they received Jesus's teaching, they learned the balance between a soul at rest and a body in motion,² between working for hard for Christ and sitting at His feet.

And I was learning right along with them. My Marthalike tendencies were being tempered by the tender grace of God. Because I no longer felt as if I had to earn the Father's favor, I was finally able to enjoy His lavish love. Rather than striving, I was learning what John 15's abiding in the vine really means. As a result, like Mary and Martha, I, too, was being changed.

I'm so glad we have a Savior who loves us just as we are, but loves us too much to leave us that way. After all, Christ's main purpose is to return to us the glory of God we were meant to reflect in this world. As author Donna Partow puts it: "Our task here on earth is to show the world an accurate reflection of what God is like. To show them, through our lives, who God is."³

In other words, the whole purpose of our holy makeover is to make us more and more like Jesus.

But that divine transformation only happens as we choose to have a Mary spirit and accept the Lord's rebuke.

Even when it hurts.

BRICK WALLS AND LEARNING CURVES

After completing *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*, I decided to take a six-month sabbatical. After being "spilled" out in my writing, I knew I needed time to be refilled.

I had no idea six months would turn into six years.

Not that they were barren years. No, far from that! During that time God taught me so much. He walked me through some valleys and up some mountaintops. I had the privilege of watching my son, John Michael, and my daughter, Jessica, grow up into wonderful young people. Then, three years ago, God surprised us with a baby we named Joshua—a truly unexpected blessing. Plus, our growing church purchased land, and we were finally ready to build our new facility—the one that had been years in the dreaming.

But it was that dream-coming-true that showed me just how far I still had to go. It also birthed this sequel. A book I didn't know existed.

I was so certain I was on the right track with the church building project. As the daughter of a part-time contractor, I was familiar with the construction process. As plans progressed, I discovered in myself a vision and a passion I hadn't felt in a long time.

With the official launch of our fund-raising just weeks away, I was running full tilt. There was so much to do—floor plans to finalize, brochures to design, numbers to crunch. I'd go to bed thinking about all the details and wake up with a focused energy and purpose that propelled me through my to-do list and beyond. It felt wonderful to be doing something for the Lord.

My pastor husband, John, tried to warn me. "Honey, I think you need to slow down. You're going to burn out." Of course I should have listened. My husband, unlike me, is not inclined to give his opinion 24/7. I should have realized that God was trying to get my attention through my spiritual covering. But I brushed away John's concern.

Sure, this was a crazy time, I told myself. Getting a ball rolling takes a lot of effort. I'd slow down later.

I slowed down, all right.

Brick walls have that effect on people.

The brick wall, in this case, was a lack of funding. We were unable to raise enough pledges to complete the project, and we felt strongly that we were not to borrow funds. Plans would have to be scaled back. So many dreams and ministries we'd envisioned launching would have to be downsized as well.

I tried my best to hang on to the initial vision. My Martha fix-it mode kicked in, and I scrambled to come up with ways to still fulfill the dream. But every option I came up with was discarded and, to be honest, my insistence began to wear on people.

Finally, I had to admit that God must have other things in mind. The vibrant passion I'd had for the project began to dwindle as discouragement and disappointment flooded in to take its place.

"Why, God? I don't understand," I wailed. "I so wanted to do this right. What did I do wrong?"

In that moment this book was born.

THE MARTHA IN ME

Joanna, I sensed the Lord whisper to my tired soul. You have a Martha spirit. You're a good girl wanting to do the right thing. But sometimes you do it the wrong way.

A Martha spirit? Oh, man. I knew what that meant. Martha was trying to

reassert herself in my life. Not the grown-up, lesson-learned, Jesus-changed Martha we meet near the end of the Gospels, but the old Martha. The high-octane, high-anxiety, chronically overachieving woman Jesus had to rebuke at her own dinner party. The Martha who loved the Lord but just couldn't be bothered to actually listen to Him. Who kept rushing in to do things her way and complaining loudly whenever anyone dared do things differently.

She was the Martha I thought I'd left behind—but she seemed to be running the show once again.

When you run ahead of Me, the Lord impressed on my heart, *you end up doing what I've asked you to do in your own strength rather than Mine. Instead of being cloaked in the sweetness of My Spirit, your efforts are cloaked in your flesh. And sometimes, my dear daughter, your flesh ain't that easy to receive.*

It was hard to hear, but I knew it was true. My woman-on-a-mission mode was rarely attractive. While I always strived to keep a sweet demeanor on the outside, my inner spirit—my heart attitude—often had an edge to it. Especially when I was busy. Especially when I was tired. Especially when things didn't go my way. You can only imagine the cosmic repercussions when the planets of those three *especially's* happened to align!

What made the truth even harder to bear was that I had learned—or thought I'd learned—this lesson before. More than once, in fact.

It was the same truth God had sought to teach me back at the beginning of our ministry. And again shortly after I finished *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*, when a misunderstanding led to a painful falling-out with friends.

Now here I was once again. Facing the same old flaws in myself. Struggling with a Martha spirit that continually tried to overshadow my Mary heart.

"Lord, change me," I prayed in all sincerity.

But, I must confess, with my repentance came an underlying fear. After so many years of being taught the same lesson over and over, would I ever be truly changed? Was lasting transformation even possible?

I knew in my heart it was. After all, I had experienced God's hand in my life over the years. But how would it happen now? And how could I better cooperate with the process?

You need a Mary spirit, the Lord whispered. And once again, in the quiet of that moment, I understood what He meant.

A NEW KIND OF ATTITUDE

In order to really change—and keep on changing—I needed the kind of heart attitude Mary had when she left her duties and spent time with Jesus, basking in His presence. The same kind of attitude Martha displayed when she chose to be teachable rather than offended by Jesus’s rebuke.

How to Use This Book

This book is different from *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World* in several ways. Rather than following a biblical story line, for instance, it delves into spiritual truths—truths that, I must confess, are sometimes beyond me.

You see, I am not a scholar, and this is not a theological treatise. The thoughts in this book come from studying the Word as well as from my own personal experience of having God work in my life so that He might change me. There may be places where you disagree with me. But I hope what you read here will spark a desire in your heart to wrestle with your issues before God just as Jacob did—until He blesses you. Until you are made over in His image.

The first half of this book attempts to build a foundation for this inner work of the Lord by outlining how the process of change happens and why God is so intent that it does. The second half focuses on the more practical application of training our minds, guarding our hearts, and purifying our ways. At the end of the book, you’ll find appendices of practical resources as well as a fourteen-week guide for individual or group study.

As you read, I pray that the Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth. For the Spirit is our teacher, and He makes real in our lives even that which we don’t fully understand.

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.

A Mary spirit is not a personality type. It isn't about being an extrovert versus an introvert or an active person versus a more contemplative type. Having a Mary spirit is about our attitude toward what God wants to do in our lives. The spirit behind our response to Him makes all the difference.

Mary of Bethany seemed to have a Mary spirit from the beginning. And although it took the tough love of Christ, her sister Martha eventually had it too. But there are two other Marys I want to mention (both of whom we'll discuss in greater detail later)—women who shared with Mary of Bethany not only a name, but also the grace-filled peace of a heart in tune with God.

First, Mary, the mother of Jesus, displayed a willing Mary spirit when she told the angel Gabriel, "Let it be to me according to your word." Although everything within her must have balked at the implications of mothering the very Son of God, and although she must have known in her heart that doing so would be costly, still she said yes to God's plan.

Second, Mary Magdalene exhibited the gratefulness of a Mary spirit after Jesus set her free from seven demons. Rather than settling down to a "normal" life, she abandoned it all in order to follow the One who had brought her out of darkness and into His marvelous light. That grateful and persistent love for the Lord, that desire to always be near Him and follow wherever He leads—that's also part of a Mary spirit.

And that, I realized, is what I wanted.

You see, Joanna, the Lord seemed to be saying, I delight in a heart that welcomes My work rather than resents it. A willing, teachable spirit is all I'm looking for. A life so surrendered to Me, I can do My work unhindered.

As God began to work these truths in my life, I realized this was the book He'd had me wait six years to write. For just as *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World* shows us how to make room in our outer lives for intimacy with God, *Having a Mary Spirit* is meant to show us how to give God access to the deep, hidden corners of our hearts. Those dark, sin-ridden parts of our lower nature that continually cause us to stumble when we so desperately want to walk in the light. Those secret, not-so-silent kingdoms Christ came to conquer as well as redeem.

So that we can be made holy as He is holy.

Changed from the inside out.

GIVING GOD ACCESS

I don't know your situation. I don't know what God is walking you through right now. But I suspect He's been stirring in you a divine discontentment—a hunger for something more, a desire to *be* something more. Otherwise you wouldn't have picked up this book.

May I tell you that such spiritual discontentment is a gift from God? For He only stirs us when He wants to change us. He only makes us feel uneasy with where we are so we're willing to do whatever it takes to get where He is.

So if you're feeling those discontented stirrings, if you're tired of taking one step forward only to fall two steps back, if you, like me, would like to stop learning the same lessons over and over again, then I'd like to invite you to join me on an adventure of change.

And I can't think of a better place to start than with this prayer:

Lord Jesus, I give You my life.

I invite You to have Your way in me.

Take me and break me. Shake me and make me.

Fill me and spill me. Change me and rearrange me.

But whatever You do, Lord...don't leave me the same.

Spirit of wisdom and revelation, I welcome Your work.

Open my eyes so I can see...my ears so I can hear...

I choose truth over comfort, challenge over complacency.

Lord, make me forever Yours.

And most of all, make me like You.

Amen.

Change Me, Lord

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 1:6



I started praying the prayer early in our ministry, and I meant it from the bottom of my heart: “Lord, make me perfect by the time I’m thirty.”

My inadequacies and imperfections were causing a lot of problems. Certainly God would honor my prayer and deliver me from myself.

I tried to enlist a couple of friends to pray on my behalf, but they just howled with laughter. “Yeah, right!” they said. “Perfect by thirty? Like that’s going to happen.”

Okay, perhaps I was a little naive. But the idea wasn’t mine. Jesus Himself had said it in His Word: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). If God required perfection, I reasoned, certainly He would give me the tools to accomplish it.

And, in many ways, He has. God has not only provided the tools for my transformation, but His Holy Spirit has also been at work in me, actively moving me toward the perfect wholeness God intends for my life. For this is what the word perfect means in the Bible.

Teleios. Mature. Complete.¹

However, the process of moving toward perfection hasn’t happened nearly as quickly as I hoped. In fact, at times I’ve felt that heaven itself was working against my best efforts. And perhaps it was—because God’s plans for making us like His Son have very little to do with mere self-improvement.

You see, I assumed that Christian perfection was an outer work *I* had to

do. A cleaning up and purifying of my words, my life, and my actions. If I could just be good enough and do the right things, then I would please God. But in my heartfelt desire to serve and honor the Lord, I fell prey to the same lie that deceived the Pharisees so long ago.

The lie that holiness is all up to us.

YOU, ME, AND THE PHARISEES

The Pharisees were godly men, at least on the outside. Their sole purpose in life was to obey all of God's commands, so they made up hundreds of rules and regulations to help them follow the original Law God had given. The summary of those rules is known as the Mishnah. Translated into English, it is a book of almost eight hundred pages. Later, Jewish scholars added commentaries on how to fulfill the Mishnah. Known collectively as the Talmud, these commentaries fill at least twelve volumes.

The Pharisees were famous for their scrupulous observance of the Law. Yet even the Jews recognized the hypocrisy that sometimes accompanied the Pharisees' pious attempts at religious perfection. The Talmud itself distinguishes seven different kinds of Pharisees.

1. There was the *Shoulder Pharisee*, who meticulously followed the Law but wore his good deeds on his shoulder to be seen of men.
2. There was the *Wait-a-Little Pharisee*, always able to offer a valid excuse for putting off doing a good deed. He spoke, but he did not do.
3. There was the *Bruised* or *Bleeding Pharisee*, so intent on avoiding evil that whenever a woman approached, he would close his eyes and therefore run into things. He then displayed the bruises to prove his piety.
4. There was the *Humpbacked* or *Tumbling Pharisee*, so determined to look humble that he bent completely over, shuffled his feet...and often tripped over obstacles.
5. There was the *Ever-Reckoning* or *Compounding Pharisee*, forever counting up his good deeds in the belief that each one put God further in his debt.

6. There was the *Timid* or *Fearing Pharisee*, always in dread of divine punishment, constantly cleansing the outside of the cup and the platter in an attempt to escape God's wrath.
7. Finally, there was the *God-Fearing Pharisee*, defined by the Jews themselves as one who truly loved God. Only one out of seven was admired as a man who found delight rather than drudgery in obeying God's Law no matter how difficult it might be.²

To be honest, I've been all of these Pharisees to one degree or another, with most of my time spent acting out versions of the first six. For no matter how pure my intent, the only result of making outward purity my goal has been an unhealthy self-obsession and a self-worth that swings wildly between feelings of inordinate pride or overwhelming failure—depending on how well I think I've done that day.

Oswald Chambers warns against this dangerous preoccupation with our own "personal whiteness," as he calls it, referring to the unhealthy kind of introspection that focuses on our inadequacies rather than on God's power to redeem and change our lives. "As long as our eyes are upon our own personal whiteness," he writes in *My Utmost for His Highest*, "we shall never get near the reality of Redemption." Later he adds, "The continual grubbing on the inside to see whether we are what we ought to be generates a self-centered, morbid type of Christianity, not the robust, simple life of the child of God."³

Jesus wasn't quite so nice when He denounced the Pharisees and their attempts at self-induced holiness. He ripped off the religious facades they tried to hide behind (as most of us do at times), calling these religious leaders, "whitewashed tombs...full of dead men's bones" (Matthew 23:27).

Whitewashed tombs were common in Jesus's day, especially during the Passover and other religious festivals. Graves were painted bright white so no one would accidentally touch them at night, becoming ceremonially unclean and thus unfit to worship. Such tombs might look beautiful on the outside, Jesus reminded the crowd, but their insides were filled with dead, rotting things and "everything unclean."

Jesus was indirectly warning ordinary people who admired the Pharisees and their superficial show of holiness to avoid them at all costs. *Ignore the outside*, Jesus advised, *no matter how brightly it shines. It's what is inside that counts.*

Over and over in the New Testament, Christ confronted those who had

succumbed to the whitewashed-tomb syndrome—the dangerous belief that we can somehow make ourselves presentable to God through our own human effort. Not only were such efforts pointless and even dangerous, Jesus said, but they were no longer necessary. God had a better plan.

The Sin Bearer had come.

SCANDALOUS GRACE

Jesus offered another way to holiness, and you'd think the Pharisees would have been relieved by this incredible news. They no longer had to pose and posture, grovel and beg, barter or try to blind themselves to avoid sin.

But sometimes good news can be just too good to receive. After all, the

Accepting Christ's Work

Like the Pharisees, you may be depending on your own goodness to make it to heaven. What a heavy load to bear! Jesus came and paid the price so we no longer have to strive and strain to be right with God (Titus 3:5).

Won't you take a moment and receive the forgiveness Christ freely offers? In many ways, it's as simple as A-B-C, and a prayer:

A—Admit your need (Romans 3:23).

B—Believe in Christ (Acts 16:31).

C—Commit your life to following Him (John 1:12).

“Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for taking the punishment for my sin when You died on the cross. I give You my life—be my Savior and Lord. Take the throne of my heart and make me the kind of person You want me to be. Amen.”

*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God.*

free grace that Jesus Christ offers to anyone who believes in Him can be quite scandalous. Imagine what would happen if we stopped resisting God's love and started resting in it? To those of us who are used to thinking that we're in charge of our spiritual development, that prospect can be hard to accept, even downright threatening.

Author Donald Miller describes this beautifully in his wry account of his own struggle with the message of grace. He tells about a time when "I used to get really ticked about preachers who talked too much about grace, because they tempted me to not be disciplined." Miller writes, "I believed if word got out about grace, the whole church was going to turn into a brothel." (He adds, pointedly, "I was a real jerk, I think.")⁴

Miller had fallen into the Pharisee trap that tends to trip us all; as he puts it, "trying to discipline myself to 'behave' as if I loved light and not 'behave' as if I loved darkness." But the only thing this macho, legalistic type of self-improvement—which Miller calls living "like a Navy SEAL for Jesus"⁵—brought him was failure and despair.

It's the same failure and despair the Pharisee/Navy SEAL in all of us feels when we depend on ourselves for salvation. More to the point, it's the cycle of failure and despair Jesus destroyed when He died on the cross. As the apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:2, "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set [us] free from the law of sin and death."

The Law outlined in the Old Testament serves an important purpose: It illuminates the sin in our lives. But that's all the Law can do. It can show us what's wrong with us, but it is absolutely powerless to make us right. By itself, it is incapable of bridging the chasm that sin made between *Abba* God and His children—the gaping crevasse in our souls that leaves us forever lonely, forever removed from the only love that can make us whole.

Bottom line, self-induced holiness is a miserable exercise in futility. For no matter how strictly we observe it, the Law will never make us righteous. It will never come close to making us changed, different, Christlike people.

Paul learned this lesson the hard way. All his years of militant religion and his obsession with keeping the Law did little but make him hate people who were free. It wasn't until Paul was blinded by the Light of the World and knocked off his spiritual high horse that he was released by grace to be all that he could be.

Thank the Lord that His grace is available to us as well! When I shared Oswald Chambers's term *personal whiteness* at our women's Bible study a few years ago, one of the ladies began to laugh. She'd just been to the store to pick up paint for her living room and discovered there were approximately 586 shades of white to choose from. Five hundred and eighty-six shades! You could spend a lifetime trying to get just the right shade. And some of us do just that!

But—praise God—we don't have to! "Though your sins are like scarlet," God promises in Isaiah 1:18, "they shall be as white as snow."

Christ offers us a fresh start. A clean slate. A "personal whiteness" so white that the human mind cannot comprehend, but only receive it. It doesn't come through our striving, our internal grubbing and external scrubbing. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can make us truly new. Only the mighty power of God working within us—the same power that raised Christ from the grave—can change us from the inside out.

You see, God doesn't want us whitewashing our tombs.

He wants to raise us from the dead.

FICTION AND FAIRY TALES

I don't know how I missed this amazing and important reality. I was raised in a grace-filled home and a grace-filled church. But, as a young adult, I somehow fell for the lie that when I accepted Jesus as my Savior, the rest was up to me. As though, after an initial warm hug of welcome, God had tossed me into the sea of life, stepped back, and crossed His arms as if to say "It's up to you now, sweetheart—sink or swim."

So swim I did. I swam like crazy—pouring myself into all kinds of good works. I led music. I taught Sunday school. I worked hard to be "all things to all men"—and women, boys, girls, infants, toddlers, senior citizens, teens, college and career, young marrieds. Well, you get the picture. I was a pastor's wife, for goodness' sake!

But no matter how fast I paddled, no matter how hard I tried to keep my head above water, my efforts were never enough. I could feel myself going down. One night I finally reached the breaking point. Sobbing, I clung to my husband. But nothing he said could comfort me, and I was at a loss to explain what was wrong except...

“Tell me the good news,” I begged him between sobs. “I honestly can’t remember. Tell me the good news.”

I’ve told that story many times before. I told it in my last book. But I felt I had to repeat it here because it’s such a vivid picture of just how far away from God’s grace a Martha spirit can take a person. The only thing my inner Pharisee had given me was deep despair and hopeless frustration. But coming to the end of myself also turned me toward freedom—because it pushed me to confront my own faulty theology.

It was the same turning point Brother Lawrence came to more than three hundred years ago. Desperate to serve God with his whole heart, he joined a monastery. But as hard as the poor monk tried to be holy and without sin, he constantly failed. Finally, as he describes in his timeless book *The Practice of the Presence of God*, he began to converse openly and honestly with the Lord. Looking to Christ rather than to his own character for strength, Brother Lawrence flung himself entirely upon God’s mercy and grace.

When faced with an opportunity to practice a virtue, he prayed, “Lord, I cannot do this unless Thou enablest me.”

And when he failed, he was quick to acknowledge, “I shall never do otherwise if You leave me to myself; it is You who must hinder my falling and mend what is amiss.”

After doing that, his biographer writes, Brother Lawrence “gave himself no further uneasiness about it.”⁶

Do those words minister to you as they do to me? To think we can have such an intimate relationship with the Almighty that we no longer have to whitewash our faults or deny our need of Him—well, that blesses me. After all, a true relationship must be based on honesty. The only way we will ever experience lasting change is to be willing to stand naked and needy before our heavenly Father. Honest and bold in our requests. Yearning for His transforming touch, yet secure in His steadfast love.

We can do that because we have a Savior who understands that we are caught in a human body of contradictions. Wanting God one minute and chasing the world the next. Desiring holiness, yet settling for compromise. Hungering for the divine, yet willing to trade it for a bowl of stale porridge and a nap in the shade.

But here's the best news of all: Jesus not only understands our weaknesses, He has the power and the know-how to help us change.

However, let me warn you. The process of transformation is not nearly as passive as that statement makes it sound. Instead of speaking a word and instantly changing our lives, God asks us to partner with Him in our own transformation.

I like how author Andrea Wells Miller describes this process. Too often, she says, when confronted with the challenge to change,

I spiritually lie down on the operating table, grab the ether mask, and get ready for surgery and the healing that will follow, saying "Okay, Lord, here I am... 'yielded and still, mold me and make me after thy will.'"

It's as if the Lord says, "First, fold your arms across your chest."

"Great!" I answer.

But then he says, "Now, sit up and lie back down 100 times."

"That's *not* what I had in mind!" Miller concludes.⁷ But it is what God had in mind when He made us. The Lord knows that we need the process as much as we need the product. For it isn't just our holiness God is after. He also wants to make us wholly His.

But beware—we have an enemy who wants to thwart God's work every which way he can.

SAVED BUT NOT CHANGED?

Because Satan hates God so much, he hates God's children. So his favorite pastime is whispering lies to us. Lies that tell us we're enough on our own...or that God could never love us.

And—the worst lie of all—the insinuation that our transformation itself is a fairy tale.

For Satan loves to twist our salvation stories and insist that, while for a moment our pumpkins may have become carriages and our rags glistening gowns, midnight has tolled, and it's time we face reality. He insists we're nothing more than barefoot Cinderellas, beggar girls trying to find our way back

home, with no happily-ever-after to close our stories and no handsome Prince to call our own. That no matter how we wish and hope and dream, we will never experience lasting change. Not here on this earth, at any rate.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Yet that doesn't change the fact that many of us are living far more like paupers than princesses. Like slave girls rather than daughters of the King.

I read an unsettling statistic recently. Researcher George H. Gallup Jr. reported in his 2004 poll that while 42 percent of Americans claim to be born-again Christians, only 10 percent of those polled can point to a transforming encounter with Christ.⁸

In other words, nine out of ten Christians report that, while they may be going to heaven, nothing much has changed for them here on earth. They may have secured an eternal fire-insurance policy, but they haven't experienced the life change Christ came to give. And while occasionally they may get spiritual warm fuzzies, they can't point to any noticeable reconstruction going on in their lives.

If that statistic is true, it absolutely breaks my heart, and I can only imagine what it does to the heart of God. To think that Christ gave us so much only to have us experience so little brings tears to my eyes.

I can only pray that this statistic is incorrect. That people were confused by the wording of the question. Or that Satan has somehow blinded them to the changes the Spirit has made in their lives.

I know that's what happened with me.

Because of my perfectionism and the fact that I failed more regularly than I succeeded when it came to living the Christlike life, I assumed one of two things had to be true. Either I was miserable scum—unworthy of God's love and unable to change. Or true victory over sin in this world was impossible, so I'd just have to hang on until the end and hope the good in my life outweighed the bad.

If George Gallup had come to my house back then and surveyed me, I'm certain I would have counted myself among the 90 percent of born-again Christians who say they have not experienced a significant life change since meeting Christ. The twisting of the good news by the enemy had convinced me to paint my entire life with a broad, black stroke. Convinced me that anything

Tools for Transformation

God has used many practices and experiences to shape my life. I've found that these six regular disciplines have helped me grow and become more like Christ. I recommend them all to you. (For more on these tools, please refer to the appendices in the back of this book.)

Developing a Quiet Time. Carving out a regular time and place to hear from God has truly transformed my life. As I sit quietly before Him, read my Bible and other devotional materials, write in my journal, and pray, He leads me in the way I should go. (See Appendix C.)

Memorizing Scripture. When I'm struggling in a certain area, I've found that memorizing verses on that topic is especially helpful. Hiding God's Word in my heart not only changes my thinking; it stores up spiritual provision for future need. (See Appendix E.)

Listening to Others. I'm thankful for the Christian wisdom I glean from books, sermons, Bible studies, and godly friends—faithful mentors who proclaim, “This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:21, KJV).

Journaling the Journey. It isn't enough for me to see my face in the mirror of God's Word; I must respond with obedience. I've found that regular journaling—keeping track of both my own thoughts and what I perceive the Lord is saying to me—reminds me of God's faithfulness and keeps me accountable. (See Appendix D.)

Gathering with the Body. I pursue every opportunity to meet with God's people—from prayer groups to church services to retreats and conferences. When two or more are gathered together, God is there and we are changed.

Altar-ing My Ego. Responding to God by going to the altar has changed my life. Whether I'm at home or church, bowing my knee as well as my heart nails down my commitment to obey what He is speaking to my heart.

*The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power...
and you will be changed into a different person.*

good and holy God might be doing in my life didn't count because I wasn't currently measuring up to some self-imposed standard of holiness.

In other words, because I wasn't *all* good, I assumed I was no good at all.

No wonder Mama warned me not to talk to strangers.

Unfortunately, there's always a grain of truth in every one of Satan's lies. It's true that many of us are not living as we ought to live—the way Christ called us to live. Statistics reveal that much of the Body of Christ in our culture prefers self-gratification over true transformation. Comfort over character. Ignorance over belief.

Pollster George Barna reports that 54 percent of adults think a good person can earn a place in heaven. One-third of born-again Christians believe that people can gain salvation through a route other than Jesus.⁹ And Gallup says we've become so biblically illiterate that nearly half of all Christians don't know who delivered the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁰

No wonder we are experiencing a powerless Christianity. Too often we have dethroned God and enthroned ourselves. We've thrown out the Cross as well as the mandates of Scripture. In doing so, we've put up significant obstacles to our true, long-lasting, joy-producing change. Both as a church and as individuals, we've chosen stagnation over transformation, and our homes and lives suffer because of our choices.

Yet I believe there is also an awakening taking place. There is a hunger for God's Word and God's presence all around the world. Church Bible studies and home groups are springing up as people search for truth. Worship is exploding in all denominations as God stirs the hearts of His people.

For in His mercy, our heavenly Father does not leave us to ourselves. He woos us. With open arms, He lovingly draws us to Himself—for He wants a people to call His own.

But we must come. And we must be willing to be changed.

Which brings us back once more to a Mary spirit.

“CHANGE ME, LORD”

God was good to place an important book in my hands early in my adulthood.

Every Wednesday morning in Libby, Montana, Grandma Rayson would gather a group of women in the back of the church sanctuary for Bible study.

A joyful, gray-haired pack of dynamite, she'd get us giggling, and then crying as we made our way through the lesson for that day. It was in this study I first read Evelyn Christenson's wonderful book *Lord, Change Me!*

As a nineteen-year-old newlywed and a youth pastor's wife, I desperately needed this study because I was struggling. With my deep need to succeed being thwarted on every level, my performance-driven Martha was in high gear. And all that my inner Pharisee could see was where everyone *else* needed to change.

If my husband were only like this...

If the youth would only respond like that...

If only...if only...

But as I read Evelyn's book, I saw myself. She, too, had a lot of passion and vision. Like me and Martha, she tended to think that her way was the right way, and this assumption often got her in trouble. Through a series of humbling circumstances, God brought Evelyn to her knees in more ways than one. Her book journals the changes in her heart and life as she chose to adopt a Mary spirit, receiving rather than resisting the rebuke of the Lord.

"I have discovered through the years," Evelyn writes, "surprising things happen when I pray, 'Lord, change *me*—don't change my husband, don't change my children, don't change my pastor, change *me!*'"¹¹

Oh, Father, I thought when I read that paragraph, *that's what I need.* And so Evelyn Christenson's lifelong prayer became mine as well:

"Lord, change me!

Whatever you do, don't leave me the same.

Make me like you."

THE GREAT BECOMING

While God has faithfully answered my prayer for transformation, it almost never happened the way I wanted.

Definitely not the way I planned.

I wish I could tell you how wonderful I am now. How put together and perfect-by-thirty I've become. How I nearly never get angry and hardly ever sin. But if I did that, I'm afraid my family (not to mention my church!) could sue me for false representation and "inflammation of character."

Now fourteen years past my target date, I wish I could tell you that my struggle against sin has been easy and is relatively complete. I can't tell you that either.

But to say I haven't been changed would be a lie as well.

What is true is that I am *being* changed.

Whether I can see it or not, my holy makeover is well underway.

And though I sometimes wish for quicker results, I am really grateful that God doesn't just barge in and perform radical surgery on my character. Instead, the Lord knows me so completely, so intimately, that He takes me at a pace I can go. He nurtures me, challenges me, builds my strength and understanding. Then when I am most ready, most able to respond with repentance, my loving Savior reveals an area of sin in my life and shows me exactly what needs to change. He knows I would be completely undone if He revealed all my sin at once.

Like someone peeling an onion, the Lord reveals one layer of sin in my life at a time. He gently exposes my failings, my prejudice, and my pride. Then He invites me to repent. To turn away from my destructive bent. To take advantage of His grace and the new paths of life He shows me.

And then, step by step, to move toward becoming what I was meant to be.

PRESSING ON

Over the years, the apostle Paul has become one of my dearest friends. He not only identifies with my struggles; he puts into words the frustration and the exhilaration I've experienced in my own walk with God. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul points out what I'm not, but he's also quick to tell me what I can become—and how it can happen.

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect,” Paul writes in Philippians 3:12–14, “but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

I press on. Those words echo in my heart, bringing me comfort and courage.

No, I haven't achieved all my goals. I'm not yet perfect. I'm still a recov-

ering Pharisee in many ways, still more eager to whitewash the outside of my life than to do the hard work of cooperating with God's inner renovation. But rather than giving in to the enemy's condemnation of my shortcomings, I am determined to "press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

My deepest fear is waking up twenty years from now still the same woman I am today. With the same annoying habits and petty attitudes; with the same besetting sins and false beliefs. I can't imagine anything more terrible than getting to the end of my life only to discover that God had so much more in mind for me—more freedom, more joy, more peace, more true effectiveness. And I had missed it all, simply because I refused to change.

So I press on, and I hope you will too. Believe me, dear sister, we can trust God. If we allow the spotlight of heaven to shine on the dark recesses of our souls, God will scrub off the old layers of whitewash. He'll remove those pockets of Martha drivenness and Pharisee pride. By the power of His Holy Spirit, He will transform us from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18, NKJV).

Until one day, to our surprise, we'll wake up and realize that we look just like...Jesus!

I'm not saying it will be easy. Or fully accomplished here on Earth. Even with God doing the real work, we'll have to cooperate. We will have to change, and change hurts.

But I can promise you this. It hurts good.