

***More than Rubies:
Becoming a Woman of Godly Influence***

Workbook

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Chapter One

The Power of Influence

Featured Passage: 1 Kings 11:1-13

Key Verse: “As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been” (v. 4).

Thoughts to Ponder: The longer we focus on the counterfeit, the more blinded we become to the authentic. If we habitually ignore the power of our spiritual influence in our homes, we and our family eventually believe a lack of spirituality in the home is the “normal” life for a Christian family. Like Solomon’s wives, we *will* influence our husbands and family. However, we must *choose* the direction of that influence.

Examining My Life

1. List three recent spiritual instances in which you influenced your husband and/or children for the positive or negative. (Throughout the workbook, feel free to include involvement with children of the extended family, such as nieces, nephews, grandchildren, and so on)

2. List three spiritual areas in which you wish you could have a more positive influence on your family:

3. List an instance in which you’ve recently failed to take seriously your spiritual influence on your family, and “rewrite” the story to turn that situation into a positive. Pledge now to live out the rewritten story.

According to Barna Research Group, 78 percent of teens say their parents, and especially their mothers, have a lot of influence in their thinking and behavior.

Your Contribution

Featured Passage: 1 Cor. 12; 1 Cor. 11:11

Key Verses: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground’” (Gen. 1:27-28). “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor. 12:12-13). “In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God” (1 Cor. 11:11-12).

Thoughts to Ponder: When God created the first couple, He did not intend for them to work independently from each other, but rather to complete each other in every facet of life. When we view our husbands as complete without us, we expect them to be not only themselves but also us. We expect them to do everything in their capacity and realms of insight as well as everything in *our* capacity and realms of insight. When we approach our marriage and home life in this vein, we set ourselves up for disenchantment. No man alive can be himself *and* his wife! No wife can be herself and her husband! No man or woman will exhibit his or her gifts as well as every gift of his or her spouse.

Examining My Life

1. Reread the personality types description in *More than Rubies: Becoming a Woman of Godly Influence*. Which descriptions best fit you? Your husband?

2. Based on this observation, detail your strengths regarding the spirituality of your home.

3. Detail your husband's strengths.

4. Ask the Lord to show you any hindrances to your exercising your strengths in your home in the past or present. Then ask Him to deliver you and to free you to be all He wants you to be in your home.

5. Ask the Lord to show you how you can best empower your husband to exercise His strengths in your home. Then ask Him to give you the insight and strength to implement what He has shown you.

God's Word is not static, and it never has been. What God planned from the beginning of time was for couples to merge their hearts, their minds, and their strengths, then stand side by side in order to deliver a well-rounded, God-ordained impact upon their homes.

Hannah's Commitment

Featured Passage: 1 Sam. 1:1--2:11

Key Verse: "So now I give him [Samuel] to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD" (1:28).

Thoughts to Ponder: Only when we give our husbands and children *completely* to the Lord will we be able to focus on creating a godly home. If we're fearful of the things God will ask our family members to do in service to Him, we won't focus on God; instead, we'll focus on ourselves and fear. As Hannah took Samuel to the Temple so that he could serve the Lord, so we must be willing to dedicate our lives to creating a godly home. Only then will our families be enabled to daily serve the Lord.

Examining My Life

1. How does your commitment to God's will in your family compare to Hannah's?

2. Finish this statement: In order to get to Hannah's place of commitment, I would need to

3. Does fear play a role in the times you have failed to be a powerful spiritual influence in your family? (such as fear of failure/success or fear of familial rejection) If so, list one recent instance in which you reacted from fear rather than living out faith, and rewrite that story for the positive. Live that rewritten story!

4. Using a dictionary, look up the words "control" and "influence," and write out a brief definition of each. Ask God to show you whether you're trying to control or

influence your husband and family. (Note: Hannah's choices strongly *influenced* Samuel, but she relinquished to the Lord all *control* of her son's future.)

Hannah was not unaware of her powerful influence. She impacted her world for God and therefore saw God impact her life. This combination is an undeniably powerful equation.

Chapter Two

Michal's Attitude

Featured Passage: 2 Sam. 6

Key Verse: “As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart” (v. 16).

Thoughts to Ponder: In order to fully understand the friction between David and his first wife, Michal, it is important to understand their whole story. David married Saul's daughter, Michal, and eventually had to run for his life when her father was trying to kill him (1 Sam. 19). Later, in 1 Sam. 25, we learn that David married two more wives, Ahinoam and Abigail, and that King Saul arranged for Michal to marry Paltiel. When David took more than one wife, he violated God's command for kings: “He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray” (Deut. 17:17).

The next time we see Michal, David has been declared king. He ordered that she be taken from Paltiel, her second husband, and returned to David as his wife. Neither she nor Paltiel had a choice in this decree. 2 Sam. 3:16 states, “Her husband [Paltiel], however, went with her, weeping behind her all the way to Bahurim.” In a day when many considered women mere possessions to be traded and owned, this scripture is phenomenal. For Paltiel to follow his wife and weep for her, he must have loved her more than any words could express. While Michal had indeed married David first, according to their law she was now Paltiel's wife. And her second husband loved her enough to follow her and sob after her. There's no indication that David loved Michal that much. Rather, he violated their wedding vows and God's law by taking other wives. Indeed, David transgressed God's laws as much as Saul did when he ordered his daughter to marry Paltiel.

It's likely that when Michal's resentment sprung forth regarding David's dancing before the Lord, her rancor involved much more than just the dancing. Hers was likely a raging case of indignation over being passed from one man to the other with no regard for her feelings or the feelings of the husband who followed her and mourned for their marriage.

However, after she and David shared words over her ill feelings, 2 Sam. 6:23 states, “And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.” Many noted scholars believe this was God's punishment upon her for her wrong attitudes. At this point, you might be thinking, *Wrong attitudes! I don't really blame her for resenting David! I'd resent my husband too! How could God punish her for such a natural reaction?*

No matter what wrong has been done to us by our husbands or others, their sin in no way gives license for our carnal attitudes. In other words, God still holds us responsible for our wrong attitudes, even when we've been sinned against. Another person's mistreatment of me in no way validates my right to harbor resentment, anger, malice, or any form of ill will. Rather, God wants to deliver us of our wrong attitudes regardless of how badly we've been treated and to invade our hearts with His love, forgiveness, and a breathtaking freedom that comes from a clean heart with pure motives. Anything less leaves us spiritually sterile, as Michal was physically sterile.

Examining My Life

1. Have you been harboring a wrong attitude against someone who sinned against you? If so, who?

2. What sin did this person commit against you?

3. What would you have to release in order to completely forgive him or her?

4. Ask God to show you how this impure attitude is harming your other relationships, and write what He shows you.

**As long as we resent a person,
we live in bondage.**

Let's Talk Fair

Featured Passage: Gen. 37--50

Key Verse: "But Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives'" (Gen. 50:19).

Thoughts to Ponder: To say that Joseph's brothers treated him unfairly is an understatement. However, their father, Jacob, should not have played favorites. Any time a parent plays favorites, resentment creeps into the picture. Despite Jacob's error, Joseph's brothers had no right to mistreat him. Joseph could have fallen into the "this isn't fair" trap and whined, moaned, blamed God, and given up on life. Instead, he made the best of the situations he was in and allowed God to use him to actually save the lives of his family. Whatever your situation, remember: God has not left you. He's still in the business of bringing beauty from ashes and using all situations for His glory and purposes--no matter how hopeless they appear. The question is, are you willing to follow Joseph's example and allow God to minister through you to those who have harmed you?

Examining My Life

1. List several unfair situations in your life from the past or present.

2. Are you using God's eyes in viewing these unfair situations, or are you looking at them through fleshly eyes? (If through God's eyes, you'll have a deep sense of peace and know that He will bring eventual good from the negative. You'll also have no hesitation about forgiving and ministering to those who have harmed you.)

3. In order to truly see life through God's eyes, ask Him to remove any hindrances in your mind that might prohibit you from seeing life the way He wants you to see it. Hindrances might include but are not limited to wrong attitudes, wrong motives, self-righteousness, or a short memory of when you have been unfair to others. Be still before God, and then list what He shows you.

One of the things a habitual complainer often says is “Life isn’t fair.” Truthfully, life really isn’t fair. God has blessed each of us more than we ever deserve.

Spot Removal

Featured Passage: Ps. 51

Key Verse: “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. . . . Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (vv. 7, 10).

Thoughts to Ponder: When David wrote Ps. 51, he was not asking God to give him a spin on the gentle cycle with delicate soap. He was asking God to take him to the river, lay him on a rock, pick up another rock, and pound the impurities from his heart. Rest assured--every time you ask the Lord for deliverance or for heart purification, He will answer your prayer. The problem is that His answer often involves a process that can be painful. After every such petition, the Lord may require some changes such as releasing negative behavioral patterns (criticism, complaining, conflicts), ceasing ungodly habits, or making restitution with someone for wrong attitudes, sinful words, or carnal motives. When we choose to obey, the purification process will be complete. When we disobey, our hearts will remain impure, and we will deny the power of God’s presence in our lives.

Examining My Life

1. Respond to this question: From what ungodly areas in my life do I need deliverance?

2. Are there any incidents from your past for which God is asking you to make restitution because of ungodly attitudes?

3. Be still before God and listen. Then make a list of the people God is asking you to talk to. Act on what He shows you by phoning them or talking to them one-on-one. Writing letters is also good, as long as it’s God’s idea and not a way around interacting one-on-one with the individual. Don’t shrink away from

restitution! It's one of the most freeing and spiritually powerful things you'll ever do. Until you're willing to live in radical obedience to the Lord, you'll keep your spots.

As long as I focus on what's wrong with everybody else, I prohibit God from showing me what's wrong with me.

Chapter Three

A *Chayil* Woman

Featured Passage: Prov. 31:10-31

Key Verse: “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies” (v. 10).

Thoughts to Ponder: The Hebrew word *chayil* means noble character. It is interpreted as might, strength, power, ability, valiantness, virtue, valor, army, host, forces, riches, substance, wealth. The primary meanings are strength, army, and wealth. A woman who “fears the Lord” (v. 30) carries an undeniable honor, power, and authority in her home that is decidedly feminine and undoubtedly of God. But the secret to this God-ordained force is that the woman of *chayil* puts Jesus first in her life and shows her allegiance to her God through regularly spending time with Him.

Examining My Life

1. List the days during the last week in which you have spent at least 30 minutes reading your Bible and praying.

2. List the days you did not spend time with the Lord.

3. Describe the difference in the days you did pray and the days you didn't.

We will never learn to control our thoughts and tongues and truly be a “woman of *chayil*” to our families unless we daily take the time to encounter God in a radical way.

Send Me

Featured Passage: Isa. 6:1-8

Key Verse: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (v. 8).

Thoughts to Ponder: Have you ever thought of yourself as God’s representative to your family? It’s often easy to view our family more as an annoyance than as a ministry to which God has called us--especially if our kids are fighting and our husbands are less than understanding. Truly, your first calling is to sit at Jesus’ feet. Your second calling is to be Jesus to your family. In this passage Isaiah eagerly beseeches the Lord to send him as a minister of truth. Likewise, the Lord asks wives and mothers if they are willing to be “sent” to their families. If you answer “yes,” then the only way to radically impact your family is through encountering Jesus up close and personal on a regular basis. Only through an intimate walk with God will a woman be able to ooze the kind of power-packed love that takes the breath away.

Examining My Life

1. Have you ever asked Jesus to “send” you to your family?

2. If you do ask the Lord to “send” you to your family, what would have to change in your life for you to truly be God’s representative?

3. Respond to these questions: Do I have “unclean lips,” as Isaiah claimed in v. 5? If so, am I willing to allow the Lord to touch me with the coals of His holiness and purify not only my lips, but also my heart, my mind, and my every motive?

4. If you do allow the Lord to touch you with the coals of His holiness, what specific things would He require that you allow Him to purge from your heart?

**No matter what the date on the calendar,
carving out a living, taking care of children,
and running a household is a time-consuming
business. *The question is--am I willing to put God
as the number-one priority in my heart and mind?***

Spiritual Hygiene

Featured Passages: 2 Cor. 2:14-17; Rom. 12

Key Verse: “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing” (2 Cor. 2:14-15).

Thoughts to Ponder: What spiritual aroma are you spreading in your household? Do you believe that you’re more spiritual than other members of your family? If so, do you have a condescending attitude toward those people deep within your heart? God sends wives and mothers as His representatives to their families. And as His ears and eyes and arms, He asks us to offer our bodies, our minds, and our hearts as living sacrifices to Him (Rom. 12:1-2). When we truly live as an act of worship to Christ, we will spread a pleasing spiritual aroma through our whole house. We also will never “think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought” (v. 3); but rather, we will “Honor one another above [ourselves]” (v. 10).

Examining My Life

1. How many hours did you spend in physical hygiene last week? (Include bathing, doing your hair, putting on makeup, choosing your clothes, and ironing.)

2. How many hours did you spend in “spiritual hygiene” last week? (Include private prayer, Bible reading, attending church and/or Bible studies, and praying with your spouse/family.)

3. Which time is more?

4. Which time should be more?

5. Respond to this question: What needs to change in my life so that I spend the time with God that He is asking me to spend?

6. Respond to this question: Until I radically obey Him in “spiritual hygiene,” what kind of aroma am I spreading throughout my household?

**The bottom line is that if we aren't
worshiping Him at home, it's because
we really don't make time in our lives.**

Chapter Four

The Dragons Among Us

Featured Passage: Rev. 12:1--13:1

Key Verse: “The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born” (12:4).

Thoughts to Ponder: This passage in Revelation has been dissected and analyzed by many prophecy scholars. And while it is traditionally viewed in futuristic terms, the dragon images also hold a truth for our everyday lives. Any time we grow spiritually, Satan stands nearby ready to devour every inch of growth we have accomplished. If we allow sinful attitudes, wrong motives, or ungodly choices to taint our lives, then we are giving Satan license to keep us in bondage. However, if we denounce each and every sin that Christ sheds His light upon, make restitution as He requires, and truly repent as He commands, the devil is powerless. He won't even be able to take a nip out of our spiritual growth!

Examining My Life

1. Be still before God and ask Him to show you the “dragons” in your life; then list them.

2. What do you need to do to kill them?

3. If you have been truly honest before God, at this point you might feel some discomfort and resistance against what He is asking you to do in order to get rid of the dragons. Dare to also ask God what will happen if you don't kill the dragons. Listen for His voice, which will most likely come as a very strong thought and will be in alignment with the Word of God.

**We have a tendency to excuse sin
based on circumstances.
Circumstances are no excuse for sin
or for a lack of Christlikeness.**

The Adam and Eve Thing

Featured Passage: Gen. 3:1-13

Key Verse: “The man said, ‘The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’ Then the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate’” (vv. 12-13).

Thoughts to Ponder: Nearly every time my children get into mischief together, they blame each other. Even if I discover them locked in mortal combat over the last bite of ice cream, they inadvertently try to pass all the blame to the other. This is exactly the way carnal humanity operates. Any time we’re caught in an ungodly act, we want to pass the blame to somebody else. However, those living in the Spirit don’t operate this way. Instead, persons who have allowed the Holy Spirit free reign in their lives fall contrite at the Father’s feet when He brings a transgression to mind. They beg His forgiveness and do their best to make restitution, even if that means bowing the knee and begging forgiveness from the enemy.

Examining My Life

1. In the previous segment you listed any “dragons” in your life. Ask yourself, “What ‘dragons’ am I blaming someone else for?” Include childhood issues here. For instance, “I demean my children because my mother demeaned me.”

2. When dealing with childhood issues, realize that any wrong treatment in childhood might be the *reason* for your ungodly behavior or attitudes--but never an *excuse*. What excuses have you used to validate ungodly behavior?

3. Ask God to show you what needs to change within you to stop the “Adam and Eve” mentality. Write what He shows you. (You might very well need to allow about an hour for this one point.)

**When comparing myself with others,
there’s always someone who’s “worse” than I am,
and I’ll naturally come out looking good.
But I’m not. The reason for the false assumption:
a wrong standard. I must forever compare myself
to Jesus Christ. This puts the picture of
me in its proper perspective.**

The Freedom of Confession

Featured Passage: James 5:13-20

Key Verse: “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man [or woman] is powerful and effective” (v. 16).

Thoughts to Ponder: When I was a junior in college, I took a grammar class. A friend who had also taken the class gave me some old tests to study with. I presumed that the tests I would take would be completely changed and that having the old tests would provide a great study tool. After taking the first test, I saw that about one-third of the new test was content from the old test that I had studied. The Lord really convicted me at that point. Until this point, I had been innocent. But after taking that first test, I knew that studying by the old tests was essentially cheating. Instead of obeying the Lord and setting aside the old tests, I continued to study them. The irony is that I really didn't *need* the old test to make a good grade, but they were available, and I took advantage of them. Once I really started seeking the Lord with my whole heart, He brought this instance to mind and asked me to write a letter of confession to the professor. I wrestled against God until I could wrestle no more. Finally I wrote the letter and experienced an incredible freedom.

Examining My Life

1. Reread the story in *Becoming a Woman of Godly Influence* about my friend, Ruth, who confessed to stealing money when she was a junior in high school.

2. While reading the story, is there any past sin that God is bringing to your mind? If so, what?

3. Be still before Him and write what you believe He is telling you to do.

4. In *Becoming a Woman of Godly Influence* reread the five questions that outline whether or not a particular sin requires restitution. Remember: don't act in haste,

and make certain before you act that you're in God's perfect will. You will know that God is truly leading you to act when, after several days or weeks, you cannot seem to escape the necessity of making restitution.

**“Confessing our faults to one another” is a lifestyle
for those who daily encounter Jesus.
Restitution is God’s way of making us humbly
take responsibility for our actions and
therefore teaching us, through His power,
to control ourselves.**

Chapter Five

Poison Ivy or Roses

Featured Passage: Phil. 4:1-9

Key Verse: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things” (Phil. 4:8).

Thoughts to Ponder: Recently I went on a camping excursion with my little boy. During the trip, something negative happened that involved another individual. When I came home I was tempted to tell my husband about the whole sordid ordeal and to detail all the reasons I was exasperated while validating my “right” to be annoyed. But the Lord stopped me with a strong thought, “What good will it do?” At once I closed my mouth and never shared the story with my husband. Instead, I focused on telling him about the good things that happened on the trip. Any time we voice criticism to our families, even if it isn’t directed to our families, we taint the atmosphere in our homes with a negative spirit and essentially plant poison ivy. There’s a wealth of power in radically living Phil. 4:8.

Examining My Life

1. During the last week, what have you done or said to plant roses in your home?

2. During the last week, what have you done or said to plant poison ivy in your home?

3. Below, write a pledge to God that you will plant only roses for the next week. Ask the Lord not only to control what leaves your mouth but also to control what you think about. Make a copy of this pledge and tape it in an often-frequented place in your home, such as over your kitchen sink or on your bathroom mirror. Daily restate this pledge.

**Every time you criticize, you plant poison ivy
in your home. Every time you praise your family
members, you're distributing roses. Each word of
encouragement plants beds of fragrant flowers.**

The Overflow

Featured Passage: Luke 7:37-49

Key Verse: “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks” (6:43-45).

Thoughts to Ponder: The most loving woman I ever met was forever praising others and expressing her appreciation to them. She worked as a secretary at a Christian school. One of the things she often said to everyone was “You’re just wonderful!” She also served as the “school nurse,” which is a loose term for chief Band-Aid distributor. She daily received a steady stream of children with incidental wounds that at times appeared suspiciously microscopic. One day I laughed and said, “I think these kids just want to come see you and get one of your hugs.” With a merry twinkle in her eyes, my friend said, “I think you’re right!” Oh, she wasn’t perfect by any means. I saw her get exasperated with a fellow employee once, but she quickly recovered. However, the overall tone of her life oozed with the positive love of Christ that just spilled forth on anybody who came near her. For many years I have prayed to be as free in my expressions of love as that friend. She exuded the essence of Christ and forever drew others into the circle of her waiting arms. Truly, she overflowed with a love that spilled from a heart saturated in the presence of God.

Examining My Life

1. What is overflowing from your heart--praise or criticism? If it’s praise, you’ll find that the overall tone of your life is saturated with the positive. If it’s criticism, you’ll recognize an aura of the negative as the predominate trait. Please realize that this is not about being perfect but about the *overall tone* of your heart and life.

2. List three people you know who have an overflow of Christ’s love.

3. During the next week call these three people and ask them what their secret is. Write their responses below.

**“A wife of noble character who can find?
She is worth far more than rubies. . . .
Her children arise and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
‘Many women do noble things, but you
surpass them all.’ Charm is deceptive, and
beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears
the LORD is to be praised” (Prov. 31:10, 28-30).**

Holy Hugs

Featured Passage: Ps. 63

Key Verse: “I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands” (vv. 2-4).

Thoughts to Ponder: An overflow of praise begins with God. When we make a habit of praising the Lord for His holiness, His love, and His power, we soon find that He will praise us right back. One Saturday as I drove to a speaking engagement, I was listening to worship music and pouring out my love and praise to the Lord. In the middle of my adoration, the Lord broke into my thoughts with a strong message that blew my socks off. I was saying, “O Lord, I love you so much.” He returned with something like, “And do you know just how much *I* love *you*?” At once I was overcome with awe, that the God who created the universe, the whole world, loved me so much that He took the time to continually embrace me in His presence. Truly, I felt as if I had received a “holy hug.” Usually when this happens, I want to just go hug and praise everybody I see. How long has it been since you took the time to praise your Creator?

Examining My Life

1. When you pray, is your main focus on asking God to answer requests, or is it to praise Him, worship Him, and simply be with Him?

2. When was the last time you really felt a “holy hug”?

3. Be still before God and ask Him to show you what needs to change in your life so that you can regularly receive “holy hugs” from Him and therefore extend them to others. Write what He tells you.

A spirit of love and praise doesn't just accidentally happen.

Chapter Six

Mary's Song

Featured Passage: Luke 1:26-56

Key Verse: "And Mary said, 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior'" (vv. 46-47).

Thoughts to Ponder: A soul who glorifies the Lord and rejoices in God will bask in His presence and put no person or material possession above Him. Women who bask in His presence ooze unconditional love to everyone they encounter--including their family members. Like Mary, these women daily pray, "I am the Lord's servant. . . . May it be to me as you have said" (v. 38). And no matter what the Lord asks them to do or asks them to give up, they're willing to go forth as His messengers of light.

Examining My Life

1. How does your willingness to do all that God asks or release all your possessions compare to Mary's abandonment to God?

2. Are you as willing as Mary to step out of your comfort zone? If not, what needs to change within you so that you're pliable in God's hands?

3. Is the Lord asking you to alter the materialistic focus of your home? If not, what is He asking you to change in your home?

4. What needs to change within you before the change(s) in your home can be successful?

Mary was undoubtedly one of the most godly women who ever lived; otherwise, God would never have trusted His only begotten Son to her care. As Christian women, we carry the name of Christ. We must forever strive to be as faithful as Mary.

The Death

Featured Passage: Gen. 22:1-19; Mark 10:17-31; Matt. 10:37-39

Key Verses: “The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, ‘I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you’” (Gen. 22:15-17). “Jesus looked at him and loved him. ‘One thing you lack,’ he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Mark 10:21). “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39).

Thoughts to Ponder: Anything or any person you hold more dear than Jesus is your god. Jesus asked the rich young ruler to be willing to release all his possessions. God asked Abraham to release his cherished son. Sometimes our possessions or children and spouse can become more dear to us than the Lord. At that point, we have placed God in second or third place in our lives. With God it's either all or nothing. He wants all of our heart, or He actually has none of our heart. God is not trying to be mean or selfish. Quite the contrary--only through a full release of all we are, all we own, and all we hold dear do we find complete fulfillment in our lives. “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39). Furthermore, we will stop trying to hoard our money or control our loved ones. Conversely, we will view all our possessions and money as a means to glorify God and also be free to focus on being Christ to our family. As God blessed Abraham, He will bless us, and every relationship we have will glow with the approval of a holy God.

Examining My Life

1. If God were to call your children to be missionaries in Afghanistan and you knew that this might mean their early death, would you release them to their calling, or would you fight it?

2. If God were to ask you to give away or sell your most treasured material possession(s), would you be willing?

3. Do you fear that the Lord might allow your early death or mental breakdown

and therefore leave your children without a mother? (I have struggled in this area. Because I lost my mother to mental illness during my teen years, I have endured the gut-wrenching pain of having no mother. Therefore, I have struggled with fear that God would allow me to die young or perhaps lose my mind. Frankly, I could deal with their early deaths better than knowing that I would die or have a breakdown and leave them without a mother. In their early deaths, they would go to blissful heaven and have no more pain. I would be the one to bear the pain. I would rather be in pain than know that their hearts were ripped to shreds by my early demise or separation from them. I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy the agony I have suffered.)

4. Do you fear that God will allow your husband to die early or leave you?

5. Have you put your husband in the place of God in your life? If so, you will do whatever he asks, even if it goes against God's Word. You trust your husband more than you trust God. You look to your husband as your ultimate spiritual guide and inspiration rather than to Jesus Christ. And you refuse to wholly release your husband to the Lord.

6. If you have put your material possessions, children, or husband above God at this point, you are extremely uncomfortable. Be still before the Lord, and ask Him to minister to you. Write below what He speaks to you.

**Fear is the opposite of trust.
The need to control is the opposite of freedom.
Completely embracing God's love annihilates**

fear and frees the controller.

Chapter Seven

Time Crunch

Featured Passage: Ps. 46; Luke 10:38-42

Key Verse: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).

Thoughts to Ponder: I look back over the last three years with breathtaking wonder at what God has brought about in my life. So many things have changed-yet so many things have remained the same. One of the things that has remained firm is my commitment to my husband, my children, and making certain my home remains a godly haven. Another thing that has remained unchanged is my choice to keep my family a top priority in my life. Because of this choice in past years, I have turned down two significant editorial positions, a college professorship, other various teaching positions, and numerous out-of-town speaking engagements. While I do travel and speak, I made a commitment from the start to keep my solo out-of-town engagements to once a month at the most. As an outgrowth of that commitment, the Lord is now bonding my husband and me together as a ministry team in music and the spoken word. So we’re now traveling and ministering as a family. Frankly, I could go alone to out-of-town speaking engagements almost every weekend. But where would that leave my husband and my two children, now five and seven? I have also turned down significant book deals and positions at church, because I knew that if I added too much more to my schedule I wouldn’t be much good for God or my family. Every one of these declined opportunities came from either Christian ministries or Christ-centered organizations.

And guess what-nobody died when I said no. Conversely, if I had said yes too often, some very important things would have “died.” First, some of the daily time I spend with God would be sacrificed. Second, the overflowing love that oozes from my home would be destroyed. Third, I would have become so busy that my effectiveness for the kingdom of God would have been annihilated.

But honestly, even in the midst of saying no to the big stuff, I recently came to a point at which I realized I had mismanaged my time and said yes too often in a host of little things. At that point God required that I weed out even more good things from my daily schedule so that I could continue to be all that I could be for Him. I believe this issue of time management must be revisited as the seasons of our lives change.

As with Martha, it’s easy to get sucked into frenzied activities for good causes and not have time to sit at Jesus’s feet. And all the while, Jesus is simply saying, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). If you’re struggling in this area, Ps. 46:1 has the remedy: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present

help in trouble.” Rely on His strength to help you decide what commitment level is right for *you* for *right now*! Realize this might change every few years as your life changes, and be willing to alter as the Lord leads.

Examining My Life

Note: In order to truly discern God’s voice, be prepared to commit 30 minutes to an hour for this section.

1. Aside from being a wife and mother, list everything else you do. Include church work, career, and any volunteer positions.

2. Ask God to show what of this list is in His perfect will for you. List what He says.

3. List the items that are left.

4. Write out a script in which you are resigning the positions He is asking you to resign. If no resignation is required, write out how you will make the needed change in your life.

Trying to create a godly atmosphere in the home while doing the work of three women is like trying to steer a small boat that has a two-ton anchor attached

to it: it's an impossible task.

Submission: a Two-Way Street

Featured Passage: Matt. 7:12; Eph. 5:21-33

Key Verse: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21).

Thoughts to Ponder: Often when submission is taught, much is said to women but not much to men. In other words, women are often told to submit to their husbands, but men aren’t encouraged to submit to their wives. I’ve been in the church my whole life but have heard only a few presentations that encouraged mutual submission. Because of this unbalanced view of scripture, I’ve spent more time being exasperated over submission than actually living it. When a husband and wife equally submit to one another, harmony and peace reign in the home. Each is more concerned with the other than with self. As a result, there are no power struggles over who’s going to control whom or what, and Christ can become the center of the home. God’s love can then pour freely through the family, bathing each in a supernatural glow that defies description.

Many times women roll their eyes and think, *My husband isn’t submitting to me, and he never will! Therefore I am **not** going to submit to him!* Well, the beauty of “do unto others” is that it actually works! Rest assured that for most normal guys a wife’s healthy submission will so “wow” him that he’ll submit right back before he even realizes what he’s done. I say *healthy* submission, realizing that enabling abuse, sin, or selfishness is not healthy and is in direct contradiction to the Word of God. But once you *honestly submit* to your husband, he will most likely become your best friend, your prime confidant, your chief cheerer, and the one person who can best help you not become overcommitted.

Examining My Life

1. Have you truly submitted to your husband?

2. If not, why?

3. If so, describe what you believe characterizes your submission then decide if you are biblically submitting or enabling sin or selfishness. Biblical submission

says, "What can I do to make your life better?" Unhealthy submission says, "I will do anything you ask me, even if it's sinful, enables your selfishness, or perpetuates an addiction or abuse." Unhealthy submission turns your husband into your father and/or your God. Healthy submission is actually unconditional love in action and makes your husband your lover and your spiritual journey mate. Essentially, unconditional love without submission is an empty shell--whether from a man or from a woman.

4. Ask the Lord to show you how to implement healthy submission in your marriage. Write down what He says.

**A biblical marriage requires mutual submission.
Within this context, there's no room for a man or a
church group to demean a wife or use her as a doormat.
Furthermore, there's no room for a wife to demean her
husband or use *him* as a doormat either.**

One in Christ

Featured Passage: Judg. 4-5; Acts 10:34; Gal. 3:26-29

Key Verses: “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism’ (Acts 10:34). “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Thoughts to Ponder: A female friend recently told me that a prominent man at church told her, “You’ll never be as influential in church as a man.” This deeply wounded my friend, because she was trying so hard to live for the Lord and to influence others for Him. When I shared this with my wise pastor, he said, “Who wouldn’t have been wounded by something like that?!” When I hear of instances like this, I immediately think of such greats as Old Testament prophet Deborah, Mother Teresa, Joan of Arc, and even Ann Graham Lotz. Frankly, I don’t think anyone can deny that these women, and many like them, have been anointed by God and have carried a holy influence that few other men or women can claim.

I wish the above mentioned story were an isolated incident. Sadly, in some circles it’s more the norm than the exception. I myself have repeatedly experienced condescension in church settings because I was female. There have been times when the roles of men and women were discussed, and the conclusion was that a woman could never be as spiritual as a man and that God really favors and honors men over women. But even in the face of brutal spiritual abuse, I’m thrilled to know that our Heavenly Father does not agree! God can and will use mothers and wives just as powerfully in their homes and His churches as He will fathers and husbands. He does not, nor has He ever, shown favoritism. Neither should we! Even when I’ve felt as if I ‘ve essentially been spiritually bashed for being a woman, God continues to remind me that I must forever embrace a servant’s heart and never have a condescending attitude toward others--even those who have been condescending toward me. Rather, I should be willing to wash the feet of those who look down upon me.

Women and men are equally valuable and influential before God--in their homes, at church, and abroad. The question remains: Are you willing to break out of the crowd and let Him use you? Believe me,--when you say yes, you’ll be attacked by those who aren’t truly Christ-focused. Whether you’re male, female, young, or old, Satan will make certain that there’s a “respected believer” who’s ready to tell you that you’re “out of line.” Nearly every time I have ever moved forward for the Lord, a Christian I didn’t ask for advice has told me that I was out of God’s will. Other prominent men and women who have stepped forth for the Lord testify to the same experience. But the bottom line remains: We must forever be more concerned about what God thinks and what He calls us to than what others think.

Examining My Life

1. Have you been affected by the mindset that you're not as influential in your home as your husband? If so, describe how this has made you feel as a woman.

2. Describe how this antibiblical concept has affected the spirituality of your home.

3. Ask God to show you how you can correct the harm this erroneous doctrine has inflicted in your home. Be still and listen, and then write what He says. Next, act on what you've written.

The belief that women are to be “lessers” spiritually or otherwise is just as unbliblical and untrue as society’s view that women are “lessers” if they choose to be homemakers.

Chapter Eight

A God of Love

Featured Passage: Ps. 103

Key Verses: “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. . . . For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. . . . As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him” (vv. 8, 11, 13).

Thoughts to Ponder: Recently I was thinking about some doctrinal beliefs that pose God as harsh, cold, arrogant, and quick-tempered. These beliefs were varied and came from two contrasting denominations. After thinking of them for a while, I wondered, *How could anybody believe such horrible things about God?* At that point, the Lord spoke to me with a thought that touched the very bottom of my soul: *Because they don't know Me.* Any doctrinal belief that presents God as harsh, unkind, cold, arrogant, and quick-tempered is not based on the overall truths of the Word of God. This type of view of the Creator will annihilate any chances of His completely healing a person from a painful past. Sadly, many people stay chained in their painful past because they never overcome an erroneous view of God.

Examining My Life

1. Are there things you have been taught about God that contrast with the Scripture passage above? If so, list them below.

2. Ask one by one for God to deliver you from the items listed. You might have to devote several weeks or several months to each item, depending on how deeply ingrained the error is upon your heart. During this journey, daily ask God to reveal His true nature to you.

3. Memorize Ps. 103. Use the blanks below to write it from memory.

**We tend to paint God in the image of our parents.
So if your parents were perfectionist and critical
with you, then you most likely think that God is
the same way and that no matter what you do,
it's never good enough. None of this
accurately portrays the God of the Bible.**

Hobbling or Walking?

Featured Passage: Matt. 9:1-8; Heb. 12:1-3

Key Verse: “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:1-2).

Thoughts to Ponder: Where are your eyes fixed? Are they fixed on Jesus or on your husband? At times I’ve listened to messages or read books that essentially encourage Christian women to focus on their husbands rather than Jesus Christ. Paul’s Eph. 5 commentary on marriage has at times been misused to create a family setup that essentially puts husbands in the place of God in their wives’ lives. Please don’t think that I’m in any way slamming men who exhibit strong leadership in their homes, churches, and communities for the cause of Christ. I’m honored and thrilled to be married to a man who believes the two of us are truly one and lives a strong example of Christ inside and outside our home and then applauds me for doing the same. If there was ever a time in our society when we desperately need mighty men and women of God to represent Christ in all areas of life, it’s *now!*

But within that context, it’s important for wives to understand that God has never called women to put their husbands in the place of Jesus Christ, or vice versa. Our husbands did not die for our sins and can no way save us from them. Our husbands are indeed our spiritual journey mates and co-heirs in Christ. But anytime a woman focuses upon her husband as her source of spiritual fulfillment, she’ll live in spiritual defeat. Christ does not call us to live in defeat! He calls us to “run with perseverance.” Anything or any person in our lives who distracts our focus from Christ will become our ultimate spiritual downfall.

Examining My Life

1. Is your focus honed upon Jesus Christ? If not, who or what has your focus?

2. Reflect over the last year of your life. Do you see yourself hobbling along in spiritual defeat or running with perseverance?

3. If you see yourself hobbling more than running, explain why.

4. Ask God to show you what must happen in order for you to be a runner. Write what He says below.

If our homes are to be permeated with God's presence because of our powerful relationships with Him, we cannot afford to allow the past or our lack of Christ-focus to cripple us. As godly women, we must grit our teeth, pray for God's strength, pick up our mats, and walk--not limp, not hobble, not crawl, but walk upright, sure-footed, and in love with the One who has delivered and healed us.