

 One

Realization

Where Am I and What Do My Taste Buds Like?

If you're like most of the women I talk to and hear about, you probably have something going on in your life right now—something that's occupying your thoughts and prayers. Maybe you're preoccupied with where you are right now in life and the direction you want your life to go. Maybe you're spending a lot of time thinking about what you like about your life and what you would like to change. What is dominating your thoughts and emotions? What are you dealing with? What is your issue? Is it a relationship? A parent or child issue? An education issue? Is there something going on at work, at church, with your weight, your finances, your friendships, your spirituality?

We are all dealing with something. Either we're in the midst of a problem or coming out of one. And if you're riding on easy street right now, just keep on living; a challenge is bound to be on its way. Life is not easy. And have you noticed that being a Christian hasn't made every challenge go away?

Indeed, life's journey is interesting and, unfortunately, it does not come with a warranty for a smooth ride. To the contrary, Jesus says, "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20). The apostle Paul put it this way, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always

carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body” (2 Cor. 4:8-10).

OK, OK, I know. You’re probably thinking, “I don’t need somebody to tell me how bad things are. I’m reading this book in hopes that it will lift me up and help me live above my issues.” Hang on. That’s exactly what I want to do, but we’re going to be realistic. I just want to encourage you that you don’t have to pretend like everything’s OK or that you’re doing everything perfectly. Since life’s journey can be a hard road, we’re going to do some hard preparation. You’re up to it. Let me start by telling you a little story.

When I was a child, my family took on the challenge of traveling cross-country by car almost every summer. My parents were from Maryland, and since they had moved to California, visiting relatives was a great reason to get to the East Coast every year. My father made us kids the navigators. We had to figure out where we were and where we wanted to go and then plot our course. Thanks to the map and those two fixed points—where we were and where we wanted to go—we always knew our location.

Now that I’m grown up, I still use maps. These days I either print them from my computer or use the navigational system in the car. I type in my address as the starting point and then type in the address of my destination. I press “enter” and up pops the directions and a detailed map or the voice of the satellite lady to tell me exactly where to go.

Although technology has advanced, the basic principle of travel has remained the same. In order to end up where I want to go, I must have a clear idea of where I am.

This book is going to take you on a journey to help you clearly identify exactly where you are and launch you toward the place God would have you go. The good news is you’re not going alone. You will travel alongside the Israelites. The

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bad news is that you will not have the benefit of hindsight. Although they took this journey long before you did, you are going to travel with them as if this were the maiden voyage. It's more exciting this way. You'll experience the journey from bondage to deliverance firsthand and, hopefully, you'll experience the same thing for yourself.

However, you cannot move to where you want to go until you come to a full realization of where you are. Let's start by rating your satisfaction with your life as it is at the present moment. Using a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 meaning you're completely satisfied and 1 meaning you're totally dissatisfied, rate the issues of your life to get a realistic picture of your present location.

Are you spending most weekends satisfied, perhaps fulfilling some personal goals or with interesting people at interesting places? If the answer is yes, then your dating or friendship satisfaction level is high, perhaps a 10. Or are you staring at the phone, wishing it would ring with an invitation and feeling distraught when it doesn't? Rate that a 1. Is your marriage still like the honeymoon? Take a 10. Do you wish he was on the moon? Make it a 1. Is it exciting to go to work every day? That's a 10. Were you just thinking about quitting tomorrow? That's a 1. You get the idea.

Once you have rated the areas of your life on the chart (you can add other areas if you like), answer the final questions to round out this first picture of what you realize about yourself. What caused you to be in the place you are right now and were you prepared for it?

How satisfied are you with—

your dating or marriage relationship? ____

your relationship with your children? ____

your relationship with your parents? ____

your relationship with your friends? ____

Living a Milk-and-Honey Life

- your relationship with your coworkers? ____
- your relationship with your boss? ____
- your relationship with your subordinates? ____
- your level of education? ____
- your job or career? ____
- your financial picture? ____
- your residence? ____
- the way you handle your emotions? ____
- the way you look? ____
- your health? ____
- your service to others? ____
- your life overall? ____

Check all of the following that apply to you:

I realize my life situation is a result of:

- Choices I have made
- Pure chance
- Someone else's choices

Check one of the following:

My current situation (and/or issues) is what I expected:

- Yes
- No

I'm not going to analyze your answers. That exercise was just to get you thinking.

My friends and I were talking one day about the Israelites, and it dawned on us that they never had any intention of being slaves in Egypt. After all, they were God's special people. Not because they were any better than anybody else but because God just chose them. Genesis 12:1-3 relates how this choice got started.

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The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Abram (who later became Abraham) was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob’s name was later changed to Israel, and his descendents are called the Israelites. God had promised to make Abraham’s descendents a great nation, and He is fulfilling His promise in the Israelites. God could have chosen any group of people, but He chose the descendents of Abram because He’s God and He can do whatever He wants to do.

God has always had a heart for fellowship with humans, His highest creation. He wants to communicate His love to us since those first walks in the garden with Adam, but we consistently and stubbornly turn from sweet fellowship with God to seek more thrills. How we can imagine anything better than what God has for us is inconceivable, yet we do it, don’t we? Like Eve, we figure God must be keeping something from us. Remember the serpent’s deceptive ploy? “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5).

It was true that when she ate the fruit, Eve would know good from evil. The point is, Eve had only known good. God was trying to protect her from experiencing evil. But what did Eve decide to do?

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate

it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves (*vv. 6-7*).

So bite-bite-chew-chew, Adam joins in, and there went their innocence, their spiritual lives, and the spiritual lives of the babies of the future. (Thanks a lot, you two!)

Now God kicks the plan into play to communicate His love to humankind another way. As the descendents of Adam and Eve multiplied into the nation of Israel, I believe His thoughts toward them went something like this: “You are going to have all these special laws. You’re going to be different, so that people will ask you, ‘Why are you different?’ Then you can tell them, ‘It’s the God we serve,’ and that’s how people are going to get to know Me.”

Well, the Israelites got big-headed and began to act as if their reasoning ran something like this, “We’re God’s chosen people, and we have all these laws, and we do all these different things, because we’re special. It’s all about us.” They totally forgot they weren’t God’s people because of themselves. They were God’s people because of *Him*. They were God’s people because of God’s purposes, and God’s purposes had absolutely nothing to do with any attributes they might have possessed.

So God moved to get their attention. Being God, He was already two steps ahead of them. God had told Abraham years before that his descendents would have to endure slavery. “And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance” (Gen. 15:13-14, *KJV*).

This time of slavery served both as a reason for God to judge Egypt and a rebuke on Israel. Funny how hardship

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has a way of suddenly getting our attention! The Israelites never intended to be slaves in Egypt, but there they were, and there was nothing to do but survive and look to God in hope of deliverance.

The decades passed. Generations were born and died. The Israelites got used to being slaves. Even though they hoped for a deliverer, they lived through the experience, slowly developing a slave mentality because their will was being broken. They hated their situation but were forced to adjust to it. Do you know anybody like that?

My friends and I just shook our heads in wonder that God put up with us and still loved us enough to sustain us through what we jokingly called our own “Egyptian periods.” Like the Israelites, each of us had sojournd—or was presently sojourning—in Egypt. Our Egypts took the form of stressful relationships, problems with children, financial struggles, and so on. And while in the midst of our issues—like the Israelites in the midst of their bondage—we became accustomed to the language, the landscape, the attitudes, and even the food. We hadn’t planned to, but we became Egyptized. We realized that the longer we stayed in Egypt, the more Egyptian we became. Some of us had picked up the accent, others learned the idioms and hand gestures, still others adopted the dress and makeup styles, and some exhibited the attitudes.

For example, Heather (not her real name) had been a promiscuous teenager. She had a great relationship with her parents, but her natural, adolescent sexual curiosity was met with disapproving responses from her well-intentioned mother. Her loving father was emotionally shy and virtually silent about the subject of her relationship with boys. The way her parents dealt with the topic actually fueled her need for responses from the opposite sex. Left to her own

devices, she fulfilled that need inappropriately by becoming sexually active by the time she was 16.

By 18, when Heather received Christ into her heart as her Savior, her spiritual needs began to be met, but she had not learned how to fulfill her emotional needs in holy ways. She continually fought the habit she learned in her own Egypt of satisfying her emotional needs by participating in sexual relationships with boys.

As my girlfriends and I continued to talk, we realized it didn't really matter how we got to our individual Egypts—our own choices, pure chance, others' choices, childhood abuse, neglect, ignorance, or just blatant disobedience—the result is always the same. We, like the Israelites—despite their hatred of all things Egyptian—have developed a fondness for the food. With those taste buds awakened, we craved the things we were accustomed to but were never born to enjoy. We were connoisseurs of Egyptian delights. (Of course, by now you realize that by Egypt I mean “the world”—those ways that are contrary to God's ways.) Becoming connoisseurs was the Israelites' first mistake—a mistake they didn't even know they were making.

We were all in Egypt before our relationship with God. However, like my friends and me, maybe you're a Christian who took a side trip to Egypt. However it went for you, you now find yourself with tastes and cravings that are opposite to what pleases God.

Adapting or Adopting

Know this: There's a difference between adapting to your situation and adopting it. It's possible to be in the midst of struggles and adapt to them without adopting them forever. Christians who have joy in the midst of their trials have *adapted* without adopting the negative effects of those trials. How do you know if you adapted or adopted?

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You know by how you think and act when separated from the trial or issue. If you respond with the same attitudes and reactions that you had during the trial, you have *adopted* its effects.

While in Egypt, the Israelites adopted some of the ways of the Egyptians. How do we know that? Look at what they said and did when they got out of Egypt. They were delivered and crossed the Red Sea, but the first little problem that came up found them crying—not for comfort from the God who had just delivered them—but for the things Egypt had supplied.

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim . . . on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death” (*Exod. 16:1-3*).

Even after God began to supply them *literally* with bread from heaven, what they craved was what they had in Egypt. “We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes” (*Num. 11:5-6, KJV*).

Why did the Israelites grumble so much? They had been freed from their bondage—their Egypt—and were headed to the land God described as a place flowing with milk and honey. “And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey” (*Exod. 3:8, KJV*).

What moved them to keep looking back? They had developed an Egyptian taste while they lived where they had no intention of being in the first place.

Yummy—Leeks and Onions

You're the same way. You've been in Egypt. You've also adopted some Egyptian tastes. But now you've crossed your Red Sea—you've become a Christian or you've rededicated your life to Christ—and you are trying to cross over into your Promised Land. The minute you enter, you will be able to partake of milk and honey, the diet of Promised Land dwellers. The problem is, you still crave leeks and onions.

No one ever said leeks and onions don't taste good, but you are not supposed to dine on leeks and onions in the Promised Land. That's slavery food, but that's all you know. So what do you do? You try to make leeks and onions compatible with milk and honey. You try mixing new recipes. But no matter what you do, you can't get those leeks and onions to blend with milk and honey. Until you develop a completely new taste for milk and honey, you will not get the taste of leeks and onions out of your mouth.

Throughout the rest of this book I am going to challenge you to come to grips with the leeks-and-onions issues in your life. If you don't want to be confronted, you may as well stop reading this book right now and give it to someone who is serious about making a change.

But I think you really want to live a milk-and-honey life. I believe you desire a transformation because you realize that the way things are going is not working for you. I'm suggesting that you start renovating your tastes by taking a long, hard look back to see how you got to this place in your life. I contend that once you understand that, you can begin to experience the milk-and-honey life.