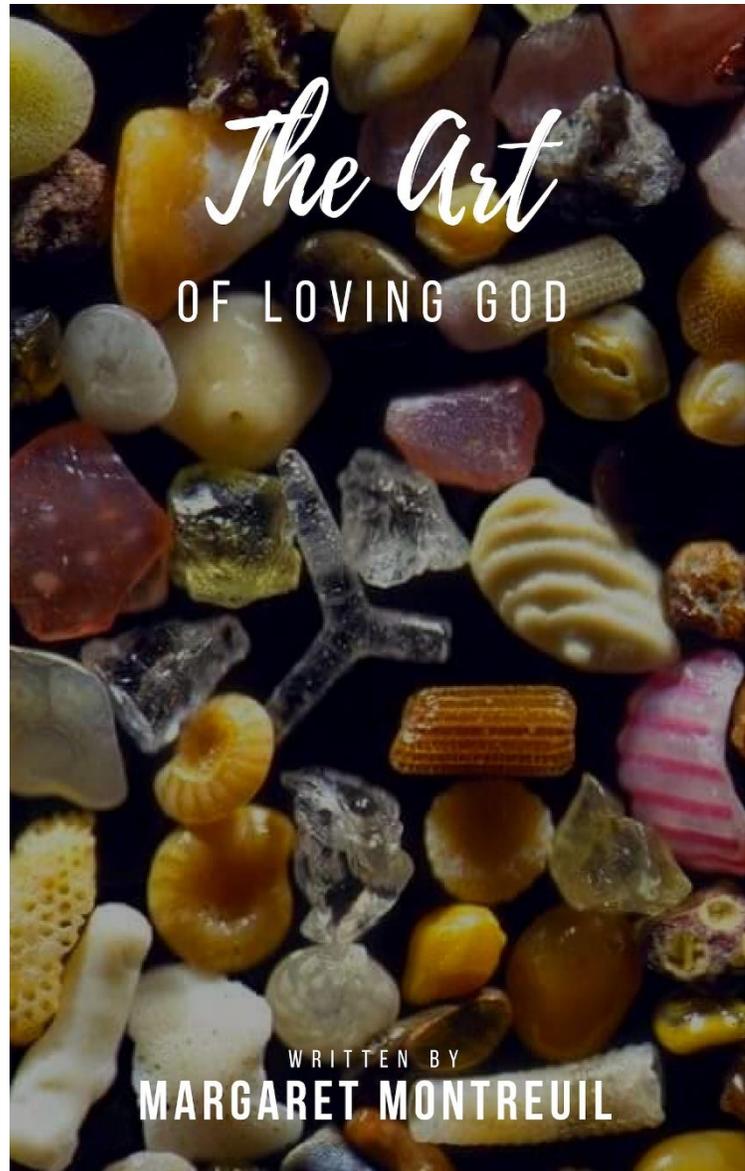


NOVEMBER 1, 2018



SAMPLE CHAPTERS

FOR THE ART OF LOVING GOD

MARGARET MONTREUIL

THIS IS AN UNPUBLISHED BOOK
And a temporary book cover

*Note: The photo on this temporary book cover is magnified grains of sand.
Imagine, if God cares so much about the beauty and uniqueness of so many tiny things, what
must He love about you and me? People are His favorite creations.*

*Sample chapters 1, 2, and 9
of
The Art of Loving God
by Margaret Montreuil, October 2018*

The definition of *art* in the context of this book:

A noun.

“A superior skill that you can learn by study and practice and observation.”

The definition of an *artist*:

A noun.

“A *person* whose creative work shows sensitivity and imagination.”

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*The best book is the one that sets us off on a train
of thought that carries us far away from and far beyond the book itself.
Sometimes a single paragraph will accomplish this, or a single sentence,
then we will be wise to close the book and let
God and nature and our hearts be our teachers.*

A.W. Tozer, *The Size of a Soul*
(Tozer 1993)

Chapter 1: FALLING IN LOVE

OUR HIGHEST JOY

The moment I saw the difference between being in love with God and loving God was the day Jesus saved me. I had no idea how much love was possible between a soul and God until then. Sometimes when I think about Jesus and try to describe Him, I am left speechless. Words do not exist. Well, here I am, putting word after word in strings of words hoping to share the wonder, mystery, and bliss of knowing Him.

What happens when you fall in love? Suddenly, the center of your universe shifts. Your beloved is the sun in your life and everything begins orbiting around that beauty. You change your hairstyle, dress to please, and look for ways to show your affection. You defer your preferences to your beloved's choices overnight. You're held captive by little things—the way the lip curls a certain way, or how sunlight captures glinting strands of your beloved's hair. You are obsessed with devotion and want to spend the rest of your life with your beloved.

The one thing you want most is to be together and, ultimately, to experience intimate union. This is God's design for being in love that comes directly from His divine nature.

We are called to the duty of delight in that God Himself is meant to be our greatest love and highest joy. When God has utterly “won our heart” life radically transforms.

Passion is necessary for all forms of art—whether it is “the art of having a skill” or “the art of creating something expressive.” By following our desire for more of God, we practice the art of loving Him, even if fanning the flames of old coals is what is needed. God adds a bit of fuel and blows on them and they flare up in a blaze. We were created for the all-consuming fiery love of God.

We hunger for a love we see reenacted over and over in love stories. The lover we're drawn to in these stories is selfless and kind. He's unwilling to be apart from his

beloved. He's attractive, so attractive, and expressive of his love, but never smothering. He knows no sacrifice too great in pursuit of the one he loves, to the point of heroism. Unlike all others, he wants only the highest good for the one he loves.

TURNING SONWARD

We were made for Eden, for delighting in God and His love. Like sunflowers turn with the sun, our souls reach *Sonward*. Jesus promised, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and *manifest* Myself to him" (John 14:21 NKJV).

When I first read this astounding promise, I prayed to find out what Jesus meant by the word "manifest." Four decades later, He continues to answer that prayer.

One of Jesus' long-ago manifestations to me happened when a close friend and I were doing a Bible study together and we wondered about the King's scented garments of Psalm 45:7-8 (NIV): "Therefore God, Your God, has set you above your companions by anointing You with the oil of joy. All Your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia . . ."

We learned this was a combination of oils the prophets used to anoint the kings of Israel. Because Jesus is the Messiah, the *Anointed One*, the prophetic psalm was about Him. We wondered what the Messiah's garments might smell like.

We went to a store that sold essential oils and bought a small bottle of myrrh. We were a bit disappointed that we couldn't buy the exact scents that included cassia and aloes but at least we had myrrh.

We stood in the parking lot outside the store and, holding the bottle, my friend unscrewed the cap. We were giddy with anticipation. My friend brought the round rim to her nose and drew in a whiff. I watched her facial expression and her eyebrows lifted wide with knowing.

"Well, what's it like?" I asked.

She sniffed it again. "Nothing I've ever smelled before. It's kind of exotic."

I took my turn. "Oh, my." I closed my eyes. Something about the fragrance made me wonder how mysterious Jesus is.

A day or two later, I was alone in a waiting room at a doctor's office when, suddenly, a fragrance similar to what was in the small bottle wafted around me. The fragrance smelled amazing, close to myrrh, a little smoky, and not as pungent as the myrrh alone had been. I realized at once Jesus did this for me and I broke into a grin. I felt His favor. I told my friend about what happened that evening and she said the same thing had happened to her. Out of nowhere came this wonderful, heady fragrance and she was about to call me to tell me. We realized then we had delighted the Lord. Why else would He do this to us?

The experience did not end. The fragrance continued to visit us. We told a few of our friends about what was happening and, for several weeks, we, and five others, experienced visitations of the supernatural fragrance. They'd come only when each of us were alone. In the

laundry room. Performing a mundane task. Walking down a public hallway. Sitting in the living room with the television on. Interestingly, they never came during our devotional times. The fragrance came when we least expected it. Then the Lord ended the visits with a crescendo. What happened next was more than a coincidence.

My friend and I, plus one of the other women involved in the fragrant manifestations, heard a sermon one evening at a church we didn't usually attend. We had gone there to hear a worship band's new music. The teaching happened to be about the fragrant, anointing oil of the Messiah's garments—a rather odd sermon topic, right? We were amazed. The supernatural visits of the fragrance ceased after that night.

I feel somewhat foolish admitting what we did. However, isn't that what a person in love will do—act like a fool? Evidently, we affected the Lord's heart—grown women acting like young girls . . . Perhaps Jesus responded in kind. He gave us the perfect manifestation of His presence for our seeking hearts.

JESUS OVERTURNED THE TABLES OF RELIGION

Jesus didn't come to start a new religion. He came to bring us very close to Himself.

The image and fullness of God from heaven and the carpenter from Nazareth came near the brokenhearted and the poor in spirit, who had no hope. He drew the castaways to Himself and made them His friends. He turned the tables on duty-driven, fear-based religion and rescued us from the laws we could not keep. He ushered in God's favor and grace.

God came near and told us His dreams and stories. He truly shared Himself with us. He turned the world upside down with God's wisdom—bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth.

He was a one-man revolution who rescued us in only three years of dedicated effort. The first thirty years He spent blending right in with us, personifying how, in God's eyes, ordinary life is as sacred as being God's healer and teacher. His memories as a young playmate, a brother to siblings, a friend or neighbor, and a hardworking laborer in a Galilean village are still with Him as He rules the universe from on high.

He is God and we can relate to Him intimately; yet He is *unique*, in that there is no other like Him. He cannot be fully comprehended. Harder yet is our ability to grasp Him through rational thought. Faith in Jesus comes first, the mind follows after—and it is then we gain measures, line upon line, of knowing Him.

Before Jesus came, God formed a people to call His own and He gave them His first messages. In giving the Ten Commandments, foremost in His heart was to be their “above all”—“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5 NKJV).

People tried to obey God's greatest command, and He did much to initiate and establish relationship with them. Only a few rose above the mark that distinguished them as “friends of God”—those were the ones who cared about God's heart.

However, Lord Jesus transformed how we can all easily and wonderfully relate to God. What God had etched on stone tablets with His finger, Jesus engraved on hearts of flesh. By giving His all, the selfless Man of Joy won our hearts forever and made the First Commandment an oxymoron—as in an “open secret”—because everyone He has attracted, caught in His nets of love soon discover, we move from *obey* to *desire* when it comes to loving Him. No moment exists which is more important or radical than when our souls become enflamed and consumed with divine fire and joy, the passion for God.

MANIFESTATIONS OF JESUS

I believe the person most famous for enjoying Jesus’ love and manifestations is John, son of Zebedee, an intimate disciple of Jesus.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke were widely circulating among believers during John’s lifetime and he would have been well aware of them. In his old age, John set out to write his own account that would differ from theirs. He used wisdom-related themes while describing sensory details, as a good storyteller does. He aimed at his readers’ hearts, imaginations, and their desire to “be there,” and he filled in the gaps left out by the other three gospels.

John was the last living disciple of the Twelve when he wrote his gospel. It is traditionally thought that he lived sixty-eight years after Jesus ascended into heaven. This means *seven decades* of a Spirit-filled life with his dearest Friend, after three years of close company with Him in the flesh. It’s no wonder Jesus wanted him to live a long life. John carried so much within him that he could give to the world. His own gospel, letters (epistles), and prophetic message (book of Revelation) earned their place in God’s Word.

What a wonder to think how much one man experienced with Jesus. Was happenstance in play? Was John simply at the right place at the right time when he met Jesus? How did John manage such favor, to become the “beloved disciple” of the Savior and a pillar of the church? John came from the small fishing town of Capernaum and he was no one noteworthy when Jesus literally walked into his life.

John left his ordinary life for a time before he met Jesus. He had followed his heart’s desire and traveled a week’s journey away from home to hear a prophet. Three fishermen, John, Simon, and Andrew, left their fishing nets behind for a while and went to Judea before Jesus left Nazareth to go there. Here’s our first clue as to why John (and the other two men) may have experienced so much favor from God.

They may have hoped, like many others at the time, that John the Baptist was the long-awaited Messiah. They followed their hearts, their *love-for-God*, to the Jordan River. Scripture calls young John and his brother Andrew “disciples” of the Baptist on the day they met Jesus. This means the three fishermen *happened* to be at the Jordan River when Jesus came into the public eye. Never did they realize what a life-long pilgrimage it would be the day they left home.

I wonder what it was like for John as he relived his memories of Jesus and put down reflective, instructive thoughts in ink. I wish I could ask him what, of all his experiences, was his favorite. Did he ache to see Him again, to hear His voice, to look into His eyes?

John knew Jesus outwardly, then he knew Him inwardly, like we do. Was knowing Jesus inwardly for sixty-eight years as extraordinary as those golden three years? I like to think so. Jesus gave His disciples a promise on their last night together on Passover: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” Life in the Spirit is exactly that.

What a scene it must have been when the risen Jesus first appeared to His grief-stricken disciples. John’s emotions were still raw. He had witnessed the crucifixion and helped carry his Lord’s lifeless, battered body to a sepulcher. What must he have felt when he saw Jesus alive again, appearing and disappearing . . . yet touchable . . . His voice still sounded the same . . . Jesus was Himself, but He was more, much more. The risen Son dawned on John. Realization set in.

Imagine when he first looked into the eyes of his resurrected Master. He may have recalled how Jesus once asked “Who do you say I am?” How could he explain what he saw with his own eyes? He worshiped Him.

One of John’s sweet memories would have been the hour he rested his head on the Lord’s breast during their Passover meal. He soon learned the significance of what Jesus had shared with them that “night of all nights” when God’s covenant promises were literally being fulfilled. From that Passover on, open communion (closeness) with God was possible—because Jesus gave His body and blood as the slain, saving, Lamb of God.

For thousands of years, even today, the Jews have yearned for God to send redemption on Passover.

John listened to God’s heartbeat that night. If we captured that moment in a photograph, we’d say it represents what Jesus came to do. That one image is the essence of John’s gospel. He heard and understood the heartbeat of God.

He surely told and retold his memories while teaching their applications to his congregation in Ephesus from what he’d gained after several decades of reflection and ongoing closeness with Jesus.

I picture him praying, eyes closed, a waiting parchment and a jar of ink in front of him. He asks Jesus for guidance, to put in words what his Lord wants. Perhaps that’s why John’s first sentence calls Jesus “the Word”—John likely asked Him to come and fill his heart and mind with the right words and to manifest Himself through his writing.

I see John pause, a smile spreads across his face, he’s reflecting on some detail, reliving a memory. He didn’t recall his stories from old memories, he described old memories through an enlightened place of reflection. Jesus certainly enjoyed the process with him as they recalled the experiences they shared. I imagine the words bubbling up, pouring from Jesus’ heart and his own. John’s inspired imagery comes alive on the pages because their love and ideas were one.

As John wrote, he relived the shriek of demons as they were cast out of people. He remembered the times he hauled heavy nets of fish into a boat or onto shore simply because

Jesus had told the men where to drop their nets. He still wondered if Jesus had created the fish out of nothing because of their unusual size. He watched Him produce them more than once without water or nets. They'd be on a remote hillside and Jesus produced basketfuls of fish and bread, more than enough for everyone in the crowd. If Jesus wanted fish, He made them appear.

John shook his head, smiling broadly as he remembered the sight of a healed man dancing, shouting about what he could see for the first time—and how Jesus's face shone brightly after healing him.

He recalled the disappointment in his Rabbi's voice when the Jewish rulers misunderstood everything He said. He could almost smell the aroma of spikenard, the fragrance of Mary's perfume she poured on Jesus, and he especially remembered the deeply-moved look in His eyes only moments before Judas complained about it.

John's stories, as well the other three gospels, have helped shape our faith in Jesus. I celebrate what John has done for me. He showed me a God of dazzling love, a God who comes. A creative God, who came two thousand years ago and comes now to those who desire Him. His love is in the flames and the wind of God's Spirit and He breathes Life into the lifeless. We can expect Jesus to treat us the same way He treated people during His days on earth.

“WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?”

Imagine Jesus suddenly appears by your side. You look up. He is smiling with warmth in His eyes because you are awestruck to see Him. He puts His hand on your shoulder and says. “Yes, it's Me. I'm really here.”

You are more than astonished. Just as you are about to fall to your knees, He leans close and says, “I have a question for you.”

You are all ears. Your heart is thumping hard in your chest.

“Who am I to you?” He is gazing into your eyes.

Overwhelmed, you are about to blurt out that He is your Lord.

He puts His finger to your lips to gently hush you. “Don't answer me now,” He says. “I want you to think about it; and, don't worry, I will know when you're ready. I'll be waiting, but take your time to answer Me the best you can.” Then He disappears.

What Jesus wants from us is a meaningful, personal response—and not just in words.

Jesus asked a similar question of His disciples. They had been with Him for a while when He brought it up. At the time, they were in the northern reaches of Israel.

In all the towns, houses, synagogues, and on the roads, everyone talked about the teacher who did miracles. The question lingered in many minds: *Who is He?*

Jesus and the Twelve had gone as far as the rapids near the headwaters of the Jordan River in the region of Caesarea Philippi. They'd spent several days walking. They stopped to rest and Jesus brought up the topic He knew everyone discussed.

Some of them were napping while Jesus prayed quietly—which fits how the gospel writer Luke describes this scene.

They would have chosen an area in the shade.

Jesus broke the silence and asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

The men glanced at one another waiting to see who would speak first.

The question sounded strange on His lips.

They wondered what answer He wanted.

Someone finally said what they’d been hearing. “Some say, ‘John the Baptist.’”

I’ve imagined Jesus pinching His eyebrows together with a doubtful look to match the ridiculous idea. Likely sorrowful, too. Jesus grieved what happened to John.

Someone else said, “Elijah.” And another added, “Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”

“But who do *you* say I am?”

He looked from face to face, peering into sets of eyes. When He reached Simon’s intent gaze, He hesitated.

Simon’s voice lifted, full of confidence. “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Based on Jesus’ reaction in words, we can just about see Him in these moments. He threw His head back, closed His eyes, and a broad smile lit up His face.

Looking back at Simon, their eyes met again, and they both were *all smiles*.

Jesus’ voice bubbled up with joy: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:17-19 NIV).

Simon, just as surprised as everyone else by Jesus’ dramatic declaration, had the look of a man who’d been given a vision of heaven.

None of them knew He was the embodiment of the God of Israel. That knowledge came later. We, however, know well who Jesus is. We are on the other side of the greatest revelation of God—we live after the incarnation of God in Jesus. And we have the incarnation of both the Father and Jesus through the Holy Spirit within us. Believers today know who Jesus is—much more than the disciples did at the time they walked beside Him on dusty roads. Once the Holy Spirit filled them, they knew Jesus as we do now.

GOD CALLS AND FILLS THE ARTISTS

I applaud Chris Tiegreen’s words he used in his book *Creative Prayer*: He says “God is a *multimedia* God.” He gives the example of the time God called two artisans, Bezalel and Oholiab, to use their creative skills to accomplish the designs God wanted in place for worshiping Him in the Tabernacle:

He and his partner [Bezalel and Oholiab] were summoned into the gap between God and man and were told to be creative. The mission to form gilded angels on the box of God, to provide the ornate details of the articles of worship, to weave the colors of divine royalty into the fabric of the holy tent, was given to Bezalel and Oholiab.

They aren't exactly household names, are they? They didn't part the Red Sea, slay Goliath, write psalms, prophesy to the nation, or any such work of spiritual power and leadership. No, they were artists. Craftsmen. . . Moses had already gone into Egypt, pronounced plagues upon Pharaoh's kingdom, miraculously delivered his people through wilderness and water, and spoken face to face with God on a mountain, yet the first time the Holy Spirit actually inhabited someone was when God chose these men. (Tiegren 2007)

Concerning the artist Bezalel, God said to Moses: "And I have filled him with the Spirit of God . . ." (Exodus 31:3 NKJV). The reason God called the artists to carry out His creative designs was so that He could communicate through imagery—by meaningful illustrations and concepts of spiritual, heavenly things. God likes to use pictures, symbols, graphic images, stories, prophecies, metaphors and parables, sounds, smells, and words.

He is the same today. When we respond to God's advances, the creative force of the universe becomes extremely personal and engaging.

The reason is that the Lover of our soul *wants* us to experience Him in meaningful ways. He desires to relate to us at heart-level.

He will do anything to gain us and is jealous to keep us close. He longs for more than one-way dialogue. He cares little about our following a set of rules, or living up to certain Christian expectations, that are often not even from Him. He wants us to live, choose, and act by His indwelling Spirit—to live from our hearts and return our love for His love.

God created us to *experience* Him. "You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11 NRSV).

What is the psalmist specifically talking about? David was a man after God's heart. Do you think he meant that his pleasures were found in, and from, God's heart?

God *adores* us with familiarity and His fierce longing reaches for us wherever we are and in all sorts of ways. The same is true for our desire for Him. The pleasures found in God become ours when our creative selves, the best of ourselves, get involved. We need to do whatever draws us closer to God, whatever makes our hearts beat faster for Him. This will not be the same for everyone. And that's how God likes it. This life of ours is meant to be an adventure and journey with God—one that begins here but will never end.

PRAYER ENCOUNTER

(Note: You will need to use a notebook and Bible to get the most out of these prayer exercises.)

“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”
Jeremiah 2:13 NKJV

Choose any scene that took place in the gospels but pick one you consider to be your favorite event, only one, the one you'd choose to witness yourself if you could. What if God suddenly transported you there? What would you do? Ponder this with the Lord. Record in your notebook or journal why you chose that particular scene. Ask the Lord to reveal to you why that Bible event rose above all the others in your heart's desire.

*A wise lover regards not so much the gift of him who loves,
as the love of him who gives.
He esteems affection rather than valuables,
and sets all gifts below the Beloved.
A noble-minded lover rests not in the gift,
but in Me above every gift.
Thomas a' Kempis
(Kempis 1958)*

Chapter 2: SENSITIVITY

NOTICING GOD'S FAVORS

My grandson Matthew is an enthusiastic kid. When he gets “into something” it seems he draws a small orbit of others who become “into it” with him. The family storage shed in the backyard holds a number of tokens from his *some things*: a hodge-podge of fishing equipment, home-made bows and arrows (made from PVC piping), footballs, soccer balls, home-made clubs and swords, street hockey pucks, and the like. It is a difficult phenomenon to describe, this orbit of friends and family who get lured into the gravitational pull of Matthew’s interests, but we think it’s because he gets so excited that we all can’t help but join in. He’s contagious that way.

We are not the only ones who have been pulled into Matthew’s orbit. One day, when he was about four or five years old, God joined us in Matthew’s orbit of quirky interests and He played along. If you want to call the discovery of a wandering turtle and the sudden appearance of a giant, rainbow-colored hot-air balloon a miracle, we experienced two. Although young, Matthew recognized these things for what they were and still remembers the events of that day today as a sixteen-year-old.

That summer the interest was turtles and hot-air balloons that Matthew, and his immediate family, were “into” in Rochester, New York, where they lived at the time. We heard that Matthew had wanted to go to a hot air balloon show that they missed near Rochester because of their visit to see us in Minnesota. Leading up to their trip, they had drawn pictures of hot-air balloons and researched how they worked. As for the turtles, no one remembers how those became fascinating to Matthew, but they were at the time.

Right after their arrival at our home, Matthew’s grandfather came across a turtle on the road and gave it to him. Matthew was thrilled. I remember Matthew gave credit to God for giving him the turtle and then all of us were busy outside in the front yard making a home for the creature in a plastic container with grass, rocks, water, and the like.

Our house was in a rural area situated on the crest of a hill with a view of a beautiful lake just across a dirt road of our property—a most picturesque place. A shadow passed on the lawn in front of us and we looked up to see what was blocking the sun. A life-sized, rainbow-colored hot-air balloon floated by. The passengers waved and called out hellos.

And the chase was on! Matthew’s mother, grandfather, and Matthew jumped in the car and followed on country roads all the way to its landing spot a few miles away. According to their story, the hot-air balloon descended upon a farmer’s land, and they watched with fascination as the balloon slowly deflated and the passengers climbed out. Matthew stood there, watching from afar, eyes wide, unwilling to even move. He got his own, private hot-air balloon show, and we all knew *Who* orchestrated it—that, and the turtle—all in one afternoon.

And, the best part is—so did Matthew.

My daughter snapped a picture of the hot-air balloon as it was beginning to deflate, and Matthew’s little head is in the foreground as he watched from a distance. The photo became a screen-printed image on a t-shirt Matthew wore. Our favorite part of this story is that Matthew wore his t-shirt when he chose to be water baptized at the age of seven. He carried into the baptismal tank a concrete, personal memory of God’s favor, a day God did something *big* just for him.

<IMAGE> (Matthew and Hot Air Balloon)

Matthew has a sensitive heart for God. Even today, my daughter tells me how his faith and insight sometimes surpasses hers, even with her decades of faith-building experiences, Bible-studies, and life-knowledge, she is sometimes trumped by his godly wisdom and perspective. He loves worship music and to see others engage with him through his music.

I am sure God was as delighted as was Matthew in the experience.

We need to become like little children and embrace God’s wonders around us.

What is your earliest recollection of a God-encounter in which you knew God helped you, spoke to you, or manifested Himself to you? He knows just what will please us, no matter what age we are.

Some of my best memories of God’s favors and methods of communication have happened while visiting Israel. It’s what I’ve learned to call a “thin place” because heaven and earth feel palpably close together there. The Christian Celts first used the terminology and I believe there are certain places and experiences that feel like a thin place because we can sense God more than usual.

My first glimpse of Jerusalem caused such an epiphany in me, though it took me totally by surprise when I realized what I felt and why.

Our tour bus wound up and down the wilderness landscape in a mountainous, rugged terrain on our way to Jerusalem. Thankfully, our ever-watchful tour guide brought to our attention that we’d get a quick view of Jerusalem from a distance once we reached a clearing on

higher ground. He said we'd have a view of it for only a few seconds. The bus was unable to stop or park anywhere along the road and so we'd need to be alert. For about five minutes, I gazed out the window, eyes ready. Our bus bounced along, took curves, climbed and descended. I watched as high rock walls blurred past the window. We'd move into an opening, then another wall of rock would fly past. We moved along the winding, narrow road, and then, at once, I saw her! I cried out and pointed. "There! It's Jerusalem!" Unmistakable, yet still far off, I saw the defining wall that wrapped around light-colored limestone structures. The "City of God" sat nestled by other surrounding mountains.

At first sight, joy exploded in me. I'd never felt such strong wonder and it lasted only seconds. My Christianity—what I thought about God, Jesus, salvation, the Bible, all of it, took on solid form. Jerusalem, a real historical place, was never in my reality, my own day-to-day experience, and now here it was, as real to me as the bus I was traveling in.

I have visited Jerusalem several times since then but I've never approached the old city on the same road. I haven't repeated that sudden sight of her filling my eyes from a distance. That experience had been specially planned by God. He knows how to please us—He meets us in particular and unique ways and circumstances that fit who we are, knowing just how to best touch our hearts. He's a true lover in that way.

SYMBOLS, TRADITIONS, AND REMEMBRANCES

Faith traditions, symbolism, and endearing remembrances enrich our relationship with God. We need to be careful, though, because we can slip into religious practice out of rote if we're not living from our hearts. In the Judaic faith Jesus lived, God had initiated seven holy feasts, the tabernacle and temple, the fringed prayer shawl with its specific instructions of how to tie the knots and what color to dye the strings—all of which held meaning to the wearer and God. Their faith is rich with symbolic practices, art, and celebrations. God instructed His people to put "The words that I shall tell you this day" . . . at your gates and on your doorposts . . . 'Hear, O, Israel! . . . you shall love your God, believe only in Him, keep His commandments, and pass all of this on to your children. This, though a bit paraphrased, is called the "Shema!" which is Hebrew for "Hear!"—This symbolic tradition is a reminder that every time one enters or leaves the home, the mezuzah is a reminder of God's covenant with them. The mezuzah serves as a symbol to everyone else that this particular dwelling belongs to a Jewish family and operates by special rules, rituals, and beliefs. Above all, the mezuzah stands for *listening* and *putting God first*. Traditionally, the people touch the mezuzah and kiss their fingers out of respect before they enter into the home or building. These are just a couple of examples of the kind of symbolism God initiated to build meaningful relationship with His people that continues today.

He's not changed. He still uses symbols and mementos with His beloveds. Intimacy with God is full of shared endearments, reminders, celebrations, traditions, and commemorations. When we are sensitive to God's love, it's easy to come up with creative, heartfelt ways to show

Him through signs and symbols of our own. He's quite extravagant in the giving of tokens and messages, we just need to be attentive and recognize them for what they are.

One day, I received a small, elegant framed piece of art that a woman in my church surprised me with before our worship service. She made it herself and had included my name done beautifully in calligraphy, with a pearl in the center of a poppy flower as a decorative on my name. Without her knowing it, the pearl symbolized God's nickname for me. My favorite Scripture was also included. God had inspired every part of it. Yet she hardly knew me. Therefore, I knew God gave me a very symbolic gift through a sweet, discerning woman that morning.

A picture of a sunflower hangs on a wall because it reminds me of a promise God gave me regarding my future. Sunflowers are like a "flower" form of the sun. The yellow petals are like rays. Framed photos and artwork of poppies decorate my house, blogs, tea cups, and wherever else I can put them. That's because of an experience we shared in a field of poppies. The sound of a mourning dove is a call to prayer when I hear it. A lit candle on my desk represents my need for His presence and inspiration while I write. A rock from the site of the fallen-down walls of ancient Jericho reminds me of God's power and that nothing is impossible for Him. Artwork of women worship-dancing represents my heart for God. I like to think I'm *dancing* my life—for *Him*. These tokens of love are expressions of my relationship with the One I adore. The reason believers share Communion with one another is one of the most wonderful remembrances of Jesus' love. That, too, was initiated by Abba, through Passover, and Jesus, at the Last Supper on Passover.

God revealed Himself through the people of Israel—by symbols, traditions, and remembrances that gave meaning to their lives as His people. The Jews' faith has always included God's promises, instructions, and interactions with them. God established them, gave them the Law and Scriptures, and He ordained certain feasts and traditions meant to facilitate relationship with Him communally. All of this was in preparation for Jesus and what was to come through Him. This speaks of a God of symbols and story as a way to communicate and manifest Himself.

God sent a core, symbolic message to humankind at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem the moment Jesus died on the cross: the tearing apart of the veil by the hand of God put the exclamation mark on Jesus' last words, "It is finished!" The tear came from the top down and split the four-inch curtain in two. That is dramatic language by God through symbolism.

Think of the painstaking effort and patience, the forethought, God took in bringing us that message. He built up to it. Creatively. He wanted to write it like a living play on the stage of religion with the words "I love you" and He wrote the words in His Life-blood. Because of the symbols in place, God made an incomprehensible, staggering statement in a way humankind would understand.

We should be deeply moved by the smells, bells, trumpets, and hoopla God designed in that historical place. Especially in Jerusalem, God communicated Himself without compare.

All of the senses were engaged in the Jewish rituals, feasts, and celebrations, all of which God instigated. Jesus was called the Lamb of God but without Judaism's ritual of Passover, His work on the cross on the Day of Passover, would mean nothing. Passover existed *for* Him. It was His plan, laid out from the foundations of the world. God, in Jesus, stepped into His own epic story to become the hero.

This is God's heart. The God of Israel desired to walk among us as one of us in the land He chose, like He'd wanted to do in the Garden of Eden. He came as a Jew because He had been building history with a people to be able to more fully reveal Himself to humankind through that nation, especially during His incarnation and the ushering in of God's kingdom. Without Israel's experiences with God, where would we be? Israel exists, and miraculously still does, as God's chosen people so that when Jesus came, we'd know why and what all of it meant. Even still. The story of God is coming close to its climax. We can see this in our global news as it lines up with God's Word.

Jesus will physically return to Jerusalem—to the Mount of Olives first. We know this for two reasons. Just as Jesus rose into heaven from there, heaven sent a message.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Acts 1:10-11 NIV

This Scripture will also be fulfilled:

On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.

Zechariah 14:4 NIV

God speaks through Creation, history, the Bible, personal words, living parables and symbols, and directly by His Spirit. God communicates creatively, oftentimes through other people who speak for Him, through the events and experiences in our lives, through His still, small voice, by gentle nudges and sometimes through strong urges. He beautifully guides us through our own hearts' desires.

By becoming more attentive and reflective, we can "walk with God" but if we hurry through our days, never stopping to consider or look for Him in the midst of life, we will miss

God-with-us. If we ignore Immanuel for the most part, what does that say about our relationship with Him? I think this quote from R. A. Torrey sums up the situation in an eye-opening way: “If loving God with all our heart and soul and might is the greatest commandment, then it follows that not loving Him that way is the greatest sin.”

If we don’t prefer our Lord above all else happening in our life, we miss out—and so does He. His love is unchanging no matter what but His love is jealous to have us as His beloved. Revelation 3:15 and 16 (NIV) paints an emotional Jesus reasoning with the church of Laodicea. “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

God longs for us. He takes risks. He sets Himself up for rejection, for being overlooked and passed by. That’s why our faith is so precious to Him. When we believe in Him, when we even glance His way, we delight Him.

GOD HIDES LOVE NOTES AND HIMSELF

In Jan Harris’ book *Quiet in His Presence*, she makes an excellent analogy. She would hide love notes for her husband to find. She writes:

He found notes in his sock drawer and his underwear drawer, in the pocket of his overalls, in his toolbox, in the glove box, in his lunch box between his sandwiches, under his pillow, in his ammunition or tackle box (he loved to hunt and fish), and even on the steering wheel of the car as he left for work. I wasn’t doing it to woo him, because the love was mutual. I did it because I couldn’t tell or show him enough how special and wonderful and cherished he was.
(Harris 2003)

That’s what God does with us. He hides love notes for us and waits with anticipation for us to discover them. They come in all sorts of creative ways, but so often we fail to notice or acknowledge God’s efforts. When we notice them, the more He will leave us more of them. When we pay attention to the ways He relates to us, we discover His personality and that He interacts with us particularly and uniquely.

Sometimes God withdraws or conceals Himself so that we will desire, miss, or look for Him. I have seen this personality trait in the Lord. He waits for us to desire Him with all of our heart. Jesus told parables, aware that His listeners struggled to understand what the stories meant. We have the benefit of Jesus’ explanations that are part of the narratives we have read and studied. When He told His parables, even His closest followers struggled with nearly all of his illustrations and metaphors. Once they asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

He replied: “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. *Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.* This is why I speak to them in parables: *Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.* In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’”

Matthew 13:10-15 NIV. (Italics are mine for emphasis.)

Doesn’t that seem the opposite of what Jesus wanted? Didn’t He want them to understand with their hearts and turn and be healed? This saying of Jesus made no sense to me until I saw something about His personality. He sifts hearts. He waits for sensitivity.

Do you think He does that to us in other ways in our relationship with Him? Are we seeing living parables from Him in our circumstances but missing the meaning and interpretation of what they mean?

Perhaps His mystifying words made His listeners yearn for understanding, which He gave if and when they opened themselves to Him. His miracles and words meant: *I am God and I am here.* Jesus said it humbly with the words: “. . . the Kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20 NIV). Nothing’s changed in that regard.

That is why the greatest sin is against the Holy Spirit—to turn a deaf ear to God and dismiss Him.

Those who have extraordinary experiences with Jesus will have more, abundantly more, simply because they look for His expressions of love. Their faith is in the now. Their relationship with God (in Spirit) is real (in truth). Remember what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman—“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth . . . (John 4:23 NIV). Our Lord wants us to look past His gifts to see *Him*. He wants us to know His personality, to be moved, astounded, shaken, surprised, and to experience all He desires for us.

GETTING REAL—IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

My friend and I got a taste of Jesus’ personality at the bottom, not at the top, of the Mount of Beatitudes in Israel. We spent over a couple of hours at the summit overlooking the view of the harp-shaped lake, called the Lake of Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee), while our eyes

gazed at the landscape that surrounded us. We let our love and prayers rise to God. We experienced first-hand why Jesus considered that mount one of His favorite places to be. As in the days He lived there, the mount and mountains all around, with the lake below, offered a beautiful respite with uninhabited, natural beauty. I imagine occasional shade trees and gentle breezes blew across the lake as they do today, which explains why Jesus and His disciples spent a lot of time there.

We wanted to walk downhill to Capernaum and the lakeshore but we couldn't figure out how to get there. All the busses and tourists' cars came to the summit around the opposite side of the mount on a paved road. We had arrived by public transit from Tiberias. We asked a nun who lived in the retreat center there if she knew how we could walk the direct way down the Mount of Beatitudes to Capernaum. She said there was no way for the public to do so. But then she kindly helped us. She asked a workman to unlock a small hidden gate for us, explaining to us that the land between the property called the Mount of Beatitudes (the summit area only) and the road at the mount's base was privately owned by a banana farmer. He had given the sisters permission to use his tractor-path for walks down to the lake whenever they wanted. Since it was just the two of us, she saw no harm letting us in on the favor (God's favor).

We were delighted to walk what certainly was the direct way to Jesus' town during His ministry. We knew from our biblical studies and traditional history that this was the mount He often found solitude to pray, where He chose the twelve apostles and from where He sent His men out two-by-two supernaturally empowered. This was the place He preached the "Be-Attitudes", miraculously fed a multitude, and where He appeared after His resurrection and gave the "The Great Commission." All of that!

The same panoramic view of the landscape filled our eyes just as it had in the eyes of Jesus about two thousand years ago. Also, He reminded me that He was seeing the same landscape through my eyes that very day.

< IMAGE > (Photo of me on the path leading to Capernaum downhill on Mt. of Beatitudes)

My friend and I could barely contain our joy, reeling in God's favor while we slowly made our way down the farmer's tractor path beside rows and rows of banana trees. Tall grasses and wild-flowers, including poppies, bloomed in the areas not being farmed. We prolonged our experience to be there as long as we could. We found huge boulders scattered here and there to sit on. Certainly they existed in Jesus' day, too.

Together we sang praise songs to Jesus—and we took time to pray by ourselves—just to *be* there with Jesus. We felt *very special* for this favor. The experience felt holy. That is, until we reached the bottom of the mount, almost to the road, which had been called Via Maris (Way of the Sea) in Jesus' day.

I was close behind my friend as we stepped along when she saw a horizontal wire in her path. It was a little higher than her ankles. She called out, "Watch out! There's a wire."

I missed what she said. I was too caught up in my thoughts—still sensing the sacredness of where we were. She had slowed down to step over the wire and I didn't. I plowed into her and the two of us tripped over the wire and landed in a heap together in the dirt and weeds.

She raised her voice at me. "I told you there was a wire!"

I blurted, "I didn't hear you!" in a loud, defensive voice.

"I can't believe you did that!" she went on as she struggled to get up.

I asked her if she was hurt.

She was, and she showed me scratches on her leg. She shook her head, disgusted at me.

I felt angry she was angry about it. *It was an accident; I didn't do it on purpose*, I thought.

The holiness of our experience disappeared.

She stood up and began brushing dirt and pieces of dead grass and debris off of her jean jumper. So did I—we were both wearing jean jumpers. Her glasses sat on her face crooked and she continued to bluster. "I told you! Why didn't you . . ."

At once, the look on her face, her glasses perched sideways on her nose, the matching jean jumpers that had just been in a pile with arms and legs intertwined, and the jarring change from our "holy" and sacred experience to acting like a couple of fighting kids took on a terribly humorous twist. I began to laugh. Then she laughed. We couldn't stop laughing. A strong spirit of laughter came over us—that is the only way I can explain it. We laughed at ourselves over and over, before dinner, repeating what happened to our hosts where we stayed for a few nights. We wailed with laughter in our guest room for hours. We came to the conclusion that Jesus experienced a good laugh at our expense—something about "pride before the fall."

He may have enjoyed Himself with us possibly more than we enjoyed walking in His footsteps. I'm sure the Lord knew we'd see the humor in it, and a lesson, too. Our true selves came out in seconds in that ditch—even though the ditch was in a pretty amazing place.

Tripping on a wire became a sacred experience. The memory still raises a laugh out of me. It's a wonderful thing when Jesus laughs with you.

The Lord wants our company—especially when our relationship with Him is real in our everyday moments of life. Actually, when the Bible talks about praying unceasingly, the intent is just that—being relational with God at all times. Being sensitive to the reality of God's presence means we *notice and reflect* on the happenings of life because God is with us and cares about everything going on in our lives.

Ken Gire said it this way: "The reflective life is a way of living that heightens our spiritual senses to all that is sacred." (Gire 1998)

Glory! If all Christ's lovers and followers actually lived aware of God's present reality, we, the world, and the church would be transformed. Actually, isn't that God's Kingdom on earth?

PRAYER ENCOUNTER:

Be aware of God with you in this moment and consider Psalm 139:1-6 (NIV):

“You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.”

The Lord leaves you “love-notes” and He is creative in bestowing tokens of favor. Can you recall any of them? Ask the Lord to show you why He chose those particular ways to show His love to you. Share the memories with Him as the focus for your prayer time with Him.

*We are to be children of light, and we are meant to walk in the light,
and we have been groping along in the darkness.
The creative act helps us to emerge into the light,
that awful light which the disciples saw on the Mount of Transfiguration,
and which the Hebrew children saw on the face of Moses
when he had been talking with God on Mount Sinai.*

Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water*

(L'Engle 1980)

Chapter 9: CREATIVENESS AND ART

BORN ARTISTIC

How often have you heard someone say—or you've said—"I'm not creative?" It's a shame, though, a lying shame. You are artistic. God endowed you with originality, vision, innovativeness, ingenuity, creativeness, skills and talents. Did you enjoy finger painting when you were young? Did you make sandcastles on the beach or snow-angels on new-fallen snow? Were you ever scolded for crayon spirals on a wall or something not meant as scratch paper? Wasn't *Art* the class you most enjoyed in school, even more than Gym? Did you imagine stories with dolls, plastic animals, colored markers, Matchbox cars, or Legos? Did you sing in a choir, play in a band, or work on the school paper?

Do you agree art is a lot like *playing*? Do you have a hobby or a strong interest in any of these: knitting, photography, cooking, woodworking, quilting, gardening, refinishing furniture, restoring old cars? Do you enjoy music, reading, writing, or decorating your home? You've chosen an artistic interest somewhere. You are both imaginative and creative because you are human.

The reason for art is self-expression. The musician plays his music to be enjoyed by others. A writer wants his or her work to be published. A photographer captures a meaningful event in a moment of time in hopes others will see it. A painter wishes his finished canvas makes it beyond the studio. You put your designing skills and personality into decorating a couple of rooms and invite your friends over to see the transformation. You put yourself—your likes and personality into imaginative output.

Our expressions will often pull from our spiritual life and faith. God designed us to live creatively, imaginatively, spiritually alive, and personally expressive. When it comes to loving God through art, we will be passionately inspired, gracefully driven, and uniquely ourselves.

OUR HUMAN, SPIRITUAL, CREATIVE SELVES

Johann Sebastian Bach was a gifted artist with tremendous passion for God. His originality and faith in his Creator used mathematics with spiritual feeling to compose gloriously moving music. His art expressed a most profound heart of worship. Always, Bach claimed that his first audience was his Creator. His love of Jesus expressed itself through the genius of his mind and heart with such original, profound compositions that his music still gives more meaning than words have the power to do.

Bach was called to music because what he did with it was beyond himself and yet was in him to do. The higher the artist reaches, and the more gifted he is, the more profound the art will be.

What about a hairstylist? A good stylist cuts hair and does magic at changing the colors of your “crown of glory.” Want a bit of flare? Purple, pink, and blue? They’re what’s new. What about the silvery blonde, or smoky gray? Wait a minute, is gray really *in*? Whatever you want, she can make it right. This takes experience and skill. She’s got the heart for it. Styling hair calls for devotion, patience, and perseverance. Sometimes, she will stand for long hours while slaving over one client. Her heart and hands are busy at work caring about how a client feels about the way she looks. The stylist’s real reward, even more than money earned, is to see her client radiant about her hair. I know this because my daughter is an artist with hair and prides herself in the art. Another gift my daughter has is that she’s a good listener. When a hairstylist is filled with God’s Spirit, God is part of the art.

Left-brained people are creative, too. My son-in-law does wonders with an Excel spreadsheet and he enjoys his pivot tables, macros, and formulas. He turns financial spreadsheets into sheer works of art. He feels euphoric the moment a complicated worksheet, and all the numbers, balance perfectly. All loose ends are tied up and accounted for. Statistics and patterns are tracked and forecasts are projected.

God is into numbers, too. In fact, Phi is a mathematical number of approximately 1.618, whose mathematical formula appears in structures of nature. The tail of the seahorse is the mathematical formula of 1.618 as are the seashells, snails, and all kinds of flowers, storm systems, tornadoes, galaxies, planets, and it’s in the human body. God designed what is called the “Divine Proportion” or “Golden Ratio” which sets the standard of beauty. Have you ever wondered why you are attracted to certain faces because they are strikingly beautiful compared to others? What makes them beautiful? God’s mathematical design applies to the rest of the human body as well—we are ratio-proportionate according to 1.618.

Cooking is an art. Dancing, too. God made us to be lovers of music and singers. We have a sense of rhythm built in.

Quilting. Origami. Glassblowing. Woodcarving. Stonecutting. Filmmaking and Acting. Pottery. Writing. Gardening. Painting. Designing. Architecture. Landscaping. There are so many

forms of art. I recently discovered Lyman Whitaker's wind sculptures online. They gracefully capture the wind in complicated designs of moving metal parts. In physics, the phrase "kinetic energy" is used to describe the energy of motion. His wind sculptures dance in beautiful movement. They are captivating and calming to watch.

The renown American painter and teacher of art, Robert Henri (1865-1929), in the book *The Art Spirit*, said,

When the artist is alive in any person, whatever his kind of work may be, he becomes an inventive, searching, daring, self-expressing creature. He becomes interesting to other people. He disturbs, upsets, and lightens, and he opens ways for a better understanding. . . . For an artist to be interesting to us he must have been interesting to himself. He must have been capable of intense feeling, and capable of profound contemplation.

(Henry 1923, 1951, 1958)

Stories move us. Most art tells a story in its own way. Have you ever been moved to tears hearing instrumental music? Or have you learned something about other people, or another time, perhaps you've seen third-world living conditions, or witnessed someone's moment of triumph, or tragic loss. Stories are captured by a single photograph, film clip, or video. These more modern forms of art have the power to change us and our world.

When I was in fifth grade, I discovered my love of words and story. I still remember my teacher's name. After our class reconvened after lunch, Mrs. Malone told us twenty-five pre-teen kids to rest our heads on folded arms on our desks, close our eyes and listen. For an hour each day, she read to us from Mark Twain's novel *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*. Her voice had that gifted storytelling quality. I doubt anyone fell asleep.

I felt transported. Tom and Huckleberry enlarged my world. I began the journey of becoming the person God destined me to be. God knew I'd love words and stories that would become integrated into my identity and makeup.

I recently attended a reunion with the classmates that were part of that magical hour of story time in fifth grade. I shared my memory with someone at the reunion; she'd been a close friend at that time. We were still kids the last time I'd seen her. I asked her, "Do you remember how Mrs. Malone read *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn* to us?"

"I sure do." Her face lit up.

"That teacher made me a reader." I beamed with the words. "She opened up the world of books and the wonder of using my imagination."

She smiled broadly. "Yes! And do you remember how, that summer, we rode our bikes to the library every Saturday and checked out armfuls of books to read? (We had baskets on our

bikes I do recall.) And then we'd talk about the stories?" I had forgotten about those trips to the library and how we shared the joy of reading with each other. That was a wonderful time in our young lives.

We live in our imaginations while children and we must never ever stop. Our imaginations should take us into science, inventions, leadership, and creative expression. We are meant to be earth-shakers and mountain-movers. That's what Jesus told us to do.

Human beings, wonderfully and fearfully made, are creative and innovative! In the book *Dreaming with God*, Bill Johnson wrote, "When unbelievers lead the way in inventions and artistic expression, it is because the church has embraced a false spirituality." This rings true to me. Every invention in this world is a product of someone's imagination, of reaching to learn and discover. Ben Franklin discovered electricity. Thomas Edison invented the lightbulb. People put their hearts and minds together until a few of us climbed aboard rockets and flew to the moon. Imagine how far into the heavens our heart, imagination, and spirit can reach. Christians should be, by all rights, the most creative, innovative thinkers, movers and shakers in the world.

When we are expressing ourselves artistically, we are in our "happy place" and can be our truest self. Perhaps it's a taste of what heaven will be like. I doubt we'll be known in the hereafter by our earthly name, or that we were a teacher, a mother, or the president of a country. What we carry inside of us, our love, our personality, our interests and gifts—these identify us.

We're the fire of God when we're empowered by His love to be creative in His name. God made us dreamers. We have individual passions that make us persevere and reach. Dreaming is a God-given gift.

NOT QUALIFIED

As the world sees things, Jesus entrusts His kingdom into *incapable* hands. He did it two thousand years ago and He does it still. Imagine, the first ones to carry God's life-transforming power on earth were rough and tough fishermen, "blue collar workers" who were utterly unqualified—except "they'd been with Jesus." By human standards, they were the least likely to be given such an important undertaking. However, the first time they were dragged before the Jewish court, not long after they'd seen their Lord rise up to heaven, we see men lit with divine fire. The Holy Spirit had given them "lion" spirits. Jesus was no longer beside them. He was *inside* of them.

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it" (Acts 4:13 NKJV).

Jesus shone through them just as He wants to do with each one of us.

I had an amazing experience during a facilitated retreat in 1991. Alone in my retreat room, I wrote a question to God in my journal. “Lord, why do I want to write about You?”

I’d been reading books by master word crafters Max Lucado (*God Came Near*), Ken Gire (*Intimate Moments with the Savior*), Calvin Miller (*A Requiem for Love*), and Michael Card (*Immanuel: Reflections on the Life of Christ*) and I devoured their insights. Their love of God was expressed so beautifully. Then innovative novel *Joshua* by Joseph Girzone came into my life. I saw Jesus dressed in khaki pants and a pullover shirt, making His home in a three-room cottage in a small town in America while becoming part of their community. That did me in. My heart filled with desire. I wanted to do what these writers were doing, to dig deep into the treasures found in the Bible and unearth them the way they did, and then offer my discoveries to the world. I wanted to stir people’s emotions, the way mine had been, through writing. Could I? Should I try? These questions kept recurring throughout my days leading up to my retreat.

At last the weekend arrived and I rejoiced to have no distractions to keep me from focusing on God. I hoped to hear one way or the other from Him so that I could dismiss the idea and get on with my life. I could hardly imagine it; I was no writer! I had no formal education in literature, theology, or anything. I was self-taught—although quite ravenously. My life was already full. I could see more reasons not to write. But what about the unrelenting desire? I put the question before the Lord in my journal.

“Lord, is it You?” I waited a few minutes, listening, but I sensed nothing in response.

I closed my notebook and left my room to join the other retreatants for lunch. Since it was a silent retreat, participants did not speak to one another. Our group sessions involved listening to teaching sessions and singing worship songs during those times. Most of the weekend we were on our own and free to be present to God. Staying silent gave everyone the chance to be attentive to God and not have to engage in small talk. This way, we had no distractions and it was wonderful.

When I entered the cafeteria, I saw that our facilitators had beautifully arranged two long tables with flowers and tablecloths. We were free to sit wherever we wanted. After I sat, I noticed each place had a light blue card with a beautiful, artistically designed message on each one. The lettering was done in black calligraphy handwriting. Something different was written on each card. I picked up the card that was mine. All that was written on it was, “*Come!*” *Matthew 14:29.*

This felt a bit like opening a Chinese fortune-cookie. *Was there anything “prophetic” written on these small cards?* I wondered. If so, I had no clue what my fortune “Come!” meant. It was the least amount of writing on any of the cards around me. Without my Bible, I had no recourse but to wait until after lunch to see if God was in it. As soon as I finished eating, I hurried to my room to look up Matthew 14:29 in my Bible.

Jesus was saying *Come!* to Peter. I could hardly contain the joy at what I found in the verse above it: “Lord, *if it is you*, tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come!” Jesus was calling out to me.

I read the biblical story in full. Peter saw Jesus walking on water and he wanted to do it too. This became an intimate, profound God-encounter in my retreat room. The word *Come!* a life-changing message. As if I climbed out of a boat to walk on waves, suddenly words began to flow from Abba and I wrote them down in my prayer journal. “Shine My Son!” sums up what became a couple of pages of specific, motivational, passion-filled guidance.

The next week, full of enthusiasm and encouraged by God’s affirmation, I went to the library to find books on writing. One title practically jumped off the bookshelf into my hands. The moment I read the title on the spine, I felt goosebumps. Within moments, I was weeping for joy while thumbing through its pages. The book was *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art* by Madeleine L’Engle. This became the foundation of what God taught me about writing for Him. The powerful guide written for writers by a phenomenally creative, spiritually endowed writer was exactly what I needed.

She taught me that the art of writing is incarnational. Like Mary, Jesus’ mother, I needed to obey the work that comes from God’s heart and mind, to let God impregnate me with His Spirit. I accepted the reality that success in God’s eyes may not look like success in the world’s eyes. It has to do with being true to God’s specific calling.

Even though her book focused on the art of writing, her wisdom and guidance applied to all forms of creating art within the framework of Christian faith. Besides giving me her book, God whispered an endearment in my ear. He told me His love for me, and my love for Him, would be creatively expressed through the art of writing. I think this is true for all Christian artists. Whatever your art is, if it is part of who you are and what you carry, you will fulfill your destiny because of your relationship and experience with God. Writing is my sweet spot, my happy place. When I am sitting under the flow of inspiration, I am in heaven. Whatever your passion is about, so will you find God in the midst of it.

My favorite quotation of Madeleine L’Engle says a lot:

To paint a picture or to write a story or to compose a song is an incarnational activity. The artist is a servant who is willing to be a birth giver. In a very real sense the artist should be like Mary who, when the angel told her that she was to bear the Messiah, was obedient to the command. I believe that each work of art, whether it is a work of great genius, or something very small, comes to the artist and says, “Here I am. Enflesh me. Give birth to me.”

Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, “Each of us has been given his gift, his due portion of Christ’s bounty.” God calls us to be true to ourselves and live in freedom, taking God’s gift He’s given us and running with it with all of our heart and strength. This has nothing to do with qualifications and everything to do with Calling.

The promises and destiny God has for you is your portion from Him, from His bounty. If you are following the Lord with all of your heart, then your talents and skills, interests,

fascinations, all such things that draw you and take up your attention, are part of God’s favor on you. Here are a few guidelines to help you express your creative gifts:

Be comfortable being you—humility is being yourself but in an un-self-conscious way. Children are humble because they can run naked and free without a thought about themselves. No, being naked isn’t the same as being humble, but being transparent is. Don’t hide yourself from God or anyone else. Be authentic.

Do not compare yourself to anyone else. Be thankful for what you carry within you. You have fire (God’s love) for people and it will be expressed in your own unique ways. Obey the Lord when He needs you, when He prompts you, when He corrects you, regardless of the consequences. Believe what He shows you, asks of you, imparts to you.

Remember, God delights in assigning the “least likely” to build and release His kingdom. His grace helps us to greatly shine for Him. This has always been His way. He chooses to entrust His dreams and plans into our hands, calling us to do what is impossible without Him.

THE INSEPARABLE HEART, SPIRIT, AND IMAGINATION

The words imagination, heart, and spirit are interchangeable throughout Scripture. What we desire, picture, emotionally feel, and *think* happens here. If you imagine a particular person is out to harm you, you think this in your heart. In order to plan a vacation, you imagine what it will be like and go there. If you listen to a friend’s story, the two of you imagine and share in the experience together through your imaginations. When you pray, God meets you in this place of inner senses. This is where ideas, images, and thoughts are processed, seen, heard, and understood. Like an inner screen, the Bible defines our imagination as “illuminated eyes.”

Jesus appealed to the imaginations of His followers by imagery and stories as His main method of teaching. Abba conveyed His heart and purposes to Israel through words, symbols, and imagery giving them spiritual understanding.

Paul wrote to the Ephesian church “I pray that the light of God will illuminate the eyes of your imagination, flooding you with light, until you experience the full revelation of the hope of his calling . . .” (Eph. 1:18a TPT).

The imagination, according to the English dictionary is “the power to create in one’s mind.” The definition continues with this string of related words: artistry, awareness, ideas, images, ingenuity, insights, intelligence, inventiveness, originality, resourcefulness, thoughts, visions, and wit. I love each one of these words—they are powerful and they define our abilities.

Jesus said that what happens in one’s imagination is as good as it happening in reality: “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28 NKJV).

God created our imaginations to be potent. We are seers, hearers, and dreamers. Sad to say, a Christian teaching has given many of us the wrong idea about how we should think about ourselves as carriers of God. You’ve heard the prayer: “Lord, help me to get out of the way so

You can minister here.” And this one: “I must decrease so He can increase.” These concepts sound humble and good, but they are the opposite of how God delights in us and wants us to shine for Him.

The last biblical quote is based on the time John the Baptist learned that Jesus was drawing a greater crowd at the Jordan River than he was. John happily interpreted this to mean that Jesus’ time of ministry had come and his time was ending.

John, the cousin of Jesus, was a spiritual rebel in his day. He wore camel skins for clothes and ate locusts and honey (crunchy and gooey, how gross!). What he ate was absolutely repulsive. This means John was famous for his awful diet and strange appearance. Outrageous and audacious, he was as wild as the wilderness he lived in. John’s prophetic ministry shook the foundations of the Jerusalem hierarchy from afar. He was in no way “decreasing” while fulfilling the call on his life. He only decreased his ministry when Jesus increased His because John realized he had accomplished his mission.

Every saint, artist, and human being is called to be glowingly individual. God dreams particular things for each of us. Only you can be you. He wants you to embrace and follow your heart’s desires and dreams, His and yours. We all have our own flare, methods, gifts, and mission in life.

If you get one thing from this chapter, this is the most important. Know who you are in God’s eyes and be free to be yourself. You are God’s delight. You make Him smile just by being you. Do not get out of the way so God can use you. Just watch for pride, your ego, that’s all. Do everything for God’s glory, not your own.

Jesus wants you to be you. He’s involved in whatever you do because your love relationship with Him is a partnership.

Another sad affair in recent church teaching is that we should not use our imagination but, rather, put a lid on it. We have naysayers in opposing corners. There are some in the “Contemplative Prayer” circles who say we should empty our minds and cast out all images, visions, or concepts that come. I am a person of contemplative prayer and I enjoy visions, prophetic words, and conversations, often with a sense of God’s feelings, His love, and more. It seems obvious that a true contemplative, which the dictionary defines as “deeply and seriously thoughtful”—is the opposite of emptying one’s mind. A person who meditates does not empty the mind. Meditation, in the truest sense of the word, is filled with thoughts and ideas. If you wish to be still and simply present to God with nothing going on, that’s good too. Being silent with God is like being held in His loving arms. New Age meditation aims at experiencing nothingness. Christian meditation aims at experiencing God’s everything.

When we think, meditate, and contemplate, our imagination comes to life. Whatever draws a person closer to God and increases love for Him is pursuit of God.

There are those who say using the imagination to meditate by envisioning is wrong. In this camp, the saying goes that our hearts and imaginations are of the flesh, doing evil, and we need to rely not on feelings or anything imagined.

Can you hear the voice of Jesus responding to this? I can: “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.”

He said as much to the Jewish leaders when they asked Him about something they should have understood based on *all* the Scriptures and God’s heart.

“Truly I say to you, you are redeemed and have a new heart!” That’s what I imagine Him saying. You are a new creation in Christ!

When we belong to Him—our heart, imagination, and spirit becomes the seat of the Holy of Holies, the throne of Immanuel. If God wants to favor you with visions, dreams, or anything He gives your inner eyes, your imagination, let Him! Let your faith arise to experience Him the way He chooses.

God used a booklet to get through to me when I was on the verge of getting saved, “Who is on the throne of your heart? You? Or God?” I’d never heard anything like that before. I realized that the throne is the “control center”—and I asked the Lord to take over mine. He did it immediately; my life completely changed after that prayer. My frame of reference changed, my center, my desires, my interests and dreams became connected to Him. I know that I know that my spiritual heart, which holds my imagination, is the place where God reveals Himself to me.

CO-CREATING WITH THE CREATOR

Not only does God inspire us, He opens the floodgates of heaven on our behalf. You can expect God’s guidance and partnership. With God, things you need or opportunities you cannot make happen on your own, miraculously fall into place. Expect perfect-for-you surprises from God.

One morning, while at my job in the year 2009, I thought about how much I would like to interview someone as a resource for the New Testament novel I was envisioning about the first believers in Jerusalem. As I was wiping down a conference table, preparing the room for the next real estate closing, I asked the Lord if He would help me find a Jewish rabbi.

You’ve got the internet at your fingertips, came thoughts that could have been mine, but I was almost sure they were God’s reply to my request.

“Lord, I really want to talk with a rabbi. I don’t believe what I need will be on the internet.”

Within the hour I had the idea to go to a local Christian library during my lunch hour. The library had been converted from a church building and was a unique ministry to the local community.

However, I didn’t want to look at books. I wanted to talk with a rabbi. Why should I go to the library? I argued with myself about going there. It made no sense.

Earlier, I had contacted a Messianic rabbi, someone I didn’t personally know. “Messianic” is a Jewish believer in Jesus. My intention of calling him was to make an appointment with him. We talked briefly at that time. When I told him about my book idea and

asked if he'd be willing to meet with me, he said something like: "You better be very careful if you do write such a book. You don't want to mislead people by making things up that didn't happen. You will be held accountable to God . . ." He didn't like the idea of fictionalizing the story about the first fellowship of believers, nor did he have time to meet with me and talk about it.

I pulled the phone away from my ear, looked at it with pinched eyebrows and a scrunched up face, took a deep breath, returned it to my ear, and thanked him politely while saying good bye.

This rejection could have thwarted me, but the Messianic rabbi didn't know all the confirmations I'd received from the Lord. This was something on my heart, not his, and I knew God would help me bring to life the story of that wonderful, tumultuous, pivotal time when Jesus conferred His kingdom into the hands of His first followers.

I understood the man's concern and simply accepted that he wasn't the rabbi I needed. I knew the gift of God and my own calling. I was disappointed, however, because I felt sure he would have been a perfect resource.

The idea to go to the library persisted. At last it dawned on me. *Why was I arguing with myself about it? Maybe God was urging me to go there.* I skipped lunch for lack of time. It took me seven minutes to drive there.

The moment I walked in, I saw an acquaintance of mine from a church I had attended. She was putting books on shelves as a volunteer there. Upon seeing her, I remembered she had recently married a man from Israel.

"By any chance is your husband here?" I asked.

"Yes, he's upstairs reading."

My heart leapt with excitement.

"I think this is a God-appointment!" I said. I explained what had brought me to the library and that her husband was possibly "my rabbi"—a gift from God. She was all smiles when I explained everything and she led me to the second floor and brought me to her husband.

When we met, I explained to him the circumstances and that I thought he was God's answer to my prayer the moment I learned he was there. I shared what I was hoping for and what my book project was about. The first thing he said to me was: "Why do you need me? You've got the internet at your fingertips."

I realized in that beautiful moment, God was being humorous with me.

Our conversation continued and I was amazed by the lively discussion we shared. I can still see him pounding the table with his fist, his eyes full of intensity, spitting while speaking, all this because he was so animated. Full, white beard, gesturing profusely; he was full of passion and opinions.

I won't explain everything we discussed, the main thing is that he believed in Jesus as the Son of God, his personal Savior, and that He died to save him from his sins as the ultimate Passover Lamb. However, he emphatically did not agree that Jesus was the Messiah. "Not

according to what the Scriptures say” he insisted. “No,” he said emphatically, “the Messiah will restore all things and that hasn’t happened.”

This beautiful man was a modern-day Jewish scribe, well-educated and grounded fully in the Hebrew Bible. He had been raised in Israel to become an important rabbi. A real scholar from Jerusalem! God had just given me “my rabbi”.

Little did I know until about half-way into our theological discussion that he was just what I needed to bring life to the character of the well-respected Jewish rabbinical teacher, Gamaliel, a highly revered rabbi of rabbis in ancient Jerusalem, who was an important character in my novel. I soaked up “my rabbi’s” gestures, manner of speaking, methods of debate . . . even the way he looked. He had confirmed historical facts with me that I had already found through my research, but what he gave me, which I hadn’t anticipated, was a living example of what a strict, impassioned Jewish rabbi would act like. I had a perfect model to shape my character after.

I realized God had put it in my heart to find a rabbi as a resource, then the urge to go to the library in that window of time. God orchestrated all of it and filled my imagination with just what I needed.

The Greek language uses two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* is a measure of time: a minute, an hour, a day, month, year, etc. Where *chronos* measures actual time, *kairos* measures the quality aspect, as in a special time. Artists often experience *kairos* when creating. You lose track of time because you’re in God’s time.

Madeleine L’Engle describes the two words this way: “*Chronos*: our wrist watch and alarm clock time. Jesus took John and James and Peter up the mountain in ordinary daily *chronos*; during the glory of the Transfiguration they were dwelling in *kairos*.”

In John 7:6, Jesus said: “My time (*kairos*) is not yet here; for you any time (*chronos*) will do.” His words were spoken in Nazareth in reply to His brother’s sarcastic remark that He should go to Jerusalem for the feast and show Himself to the world instead of staying in Nazareth. His brothers later believed in Him but they did not at that time. The point is, Jesus knew His “*kairos* time” (appointed time) was *not yet*. It’s interesting to note He went to the feast in Jerusalem shortly after but He traveled alone and in secret, not wishing to draw a crowd to Himself at that time.

The moment Jesus was baptized was a *kairos* moment in history and in His life as a man. The day I heard the call to write for God was a *kairos* time in my life. That hour in the library with “my rabbi” was a *kairos* time. We need to be attentive to God-in-us in order to discern our “*kairos* times” and respond accordingly. God anticipates them.

Abba wants to join us in our creative efforts. He invites us into partnership. Once we realize our personal opportunities come from the One who created DNA and galaxies, we can rest assured in His favor. Especially today, God is calling artists to come forward to shine His light, beauty and glory. “He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. (Psalm 147:4 NIV).

You are God’s shining star.

SEEING OURSELVES FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

Imagine your little son has been learning to play the piano and he's ready to play one piece in front of an audience tonight. He's been practicing and talking about his school concert for weeks. He made you so proud at the rehearsal yesterday. A week ago you bought special clothes for the occasion. A decorated cake awaits your family at home. You invited a few friends to the performance and to the party after.

You're sitting straight up in your seat, hardly breathing. It's his turn. You watch him walk onto the stage, heading for the piano bench. It's his pale face you notice first. Then his awkward pace. His eyes are scanning the crowd, looking for you. You raise your hand to wave, but he can't see you. The audience, the silence, the lights, all these things are overwhelming him. He stops. Moments pass like hours. He stands alone, motionless like a statue. You can tell he's about to cry. You want to run out and save him. You hear his teacher's muffled voice from somewhere, "Go on! Go on! You're okay."

But he is not okay. He turns and runs off the stage and disappears from your sight. Your heart breaks for him. Tears well up in your eyes. You make your way out of the auditorium and rush to find him. You need to hold him in your arms. You'll tell him that next time he'll know what to expect and will be ready.

This is how God is with each of us. We all have fear, challenges, setbacks, disappointments, and outright spiritual warfare. Expect these things. Sometimes I think the more God favors a person, especially when called to do special things for Him, the more heartache and hardships come. If this is you, you're in good company. Every biblical name you can think of, in fact, had tremendous trials.

God wants us to shine, to play our best. Hard times refine us, and transform what we do, into gold.

The original movie *Chariots of Fire* came out in 1981 and struck a chord in many people. In a powerful scene, Olympian Gold Medalist, Eric Liddell, explains to his sister why he thought it was important to race rather than go to China as a missionary at that time. He said, "I believe God made me for a purpose—for China. But he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure."

Liddell is still celebrated for his strong Christian principles that took the spotlight at the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris when Liddell refused to race in the 100 meters, which he was highly favored to win, because they were held on a Sunday. Instead he competed in the 400 meters race held on a weekday. He won, even though he hadn't trained for that long of a run. He returned to China in 1925 to serve as a missionary teacher. Aside from two furloughs in Scotland, he remained in China until his death in a Japanese civilian internment camp in 1945.

Can you image the celebration in heaven the day Eric Liddell arrived home? At the end of all of our lives, we can expect the same welcome. This life is just a stage compared to the real

one to come where Abba and Jesus wait for us. While we're here, let's play and do our best. Abba's watching us with pride and perfect love.

EXPECT SERENDIPITY

Creatives often talk about supernatural experiences in the process of creating. It happens suddenly and seems magical and perfect. Some people call the phenomenon "serendipity" and others call it "anointed by God."

I believe what happens when someone experiences serendipity or God-breathed inspiration is that God joins in on the act more than usual.

God doesn't do "automatic writing" nor does He put us in a trance and take over. Abba wants us to be the ones creating our art while He's the one inspiring it. Just like "Your life is hid in Christ" and "It is not I who lives but Christ in me." These Scriptures point to the utterly astounding truth that God abides within us and we partner with Him.

I got a laugh out of my daughter when she said, while looking at her newborn daughter, "My husband and I made that beautiful baby." She knows what a miracle her child is. The Creator had given them a serendipity gift during their creative act of lovemaking.

In the mid-nineties, I was involved in a small writers group and a writing assignment turned into one of my favorite experiences with Jesus. Call it serendipity, inspired, or anointed, or whatever you wish—God was involved! I couldn't have done it without Him.

The writers group I was part of decided to do a writing exercise together. Our homework assignment involved using 14 random, extremely unrelated words, in a piece of writing that had to be 1,200 words or less. We could write anything we wanted but the 14 words had to flow well, make sense, and not feel forced. It was a challenging exercise mostly because of the oddness of the words themselves. We agreed to share our writing results at our next meeting.

One person wrote a fabulous children's story that included colorful illustrations. It turned out so good, she submitted the work to a magazine publisher of children's literature. Each of us shared amazingly diverse writing as a result of using the same 14 words.

The writing assignment was the furthest thing from my thoughts one morning during my devotional time. I had many days in which to complete the assignment. My prayer at the time was for God Himself. I asked Him to help me sense His love and presence. He then impressed on me that whenever I felt such strong longing for Him, He was in it. I think He draws us closer that way.

He reminded me of an experience we had once shared. This helped me. I wrote in my journal how I felt close to Him again through that special memory and I thanked Him for the reminder. In my thoughts, I heard, "You know how romantic I am and how much I like to have fun with you." Then He said, "Come, let's go to your computer and do your writing assignment."

This surprised me. It seemed unlike Him and doubts arose. Would He want me to leave my prayer time to sit at my computer? Was this a distraction, my own thinking? However, just in case it was the Lord, I headed for my desk.

I felt expectant. I placed the sheet of paper with the writing assignment beside the keyboard on my desk and sat, ready to write, with no idea what it would be. I read the 14 words and closed my eyes. I let my faith rise. I wanted this to be His idea. I stayed quiet and waited. I still had no thoughts of what to write, no clue how to even start. Nothing. I listened a while more in silence. Then I opened my eyes, glanced at the words on the paper and felt inspiration start bubbling up. Words from God, in “first person” point of view started coming, with a rhythm and pace of their own, and they gently began to flow from my thoughts, through my fingers, and onto the computer screen. It felt like reading, not writing, which is what some writers call *serendipity*. The words came effortlessly, fluently, and seemed perfectly right. They amazed me; I had no idea what was coming until I wrote them.

The assignment, using all 14 words, wove together in a mere 220 word-count. Here are the 14 words: sparkle . village . rusty . sugarcoated . dancer . cloudy . sheep . violate . garden . soapsuds . weave . wasted . satin . sandcastle.

Crazy, random words, right? And, now, the end result. Notice the assignment's 14 words are italicized and underlined to easily spot them.

Whenever you turn to me, my heart skips.
Do you realize this?

In your dreams and wakefulness,
I *weave* in and out, the *dancer* of hope,
Calling you to come away with me,
To fly this *village* to solitude, alone, we two.

Whenever you turn to me, my heart skips.
Do you realize this?

My darling, so often you *violate* my heart
When, for long periods, you do not notice me.
Special moments are *wasted*
And the *sparkle* in your eyes grow *cloudy*.

Whenever you turn to me, my heart skips.
Do you realize this?

Your *sugarcoated* promises of Sunday

Are forgotten for your "more important" sandcastle
 On the shores of the world, busy at work
 While I await you in our garden.

Whenever you turn to me, my heart skips.
 Do you realize this?

As a shepherd, I seek to tend my sheep.
 My little lamb, you are my bride!
 I have a bridal gown, made of white satin
 And a crown of jewels for your head.

Whenever you turn to me, my heart skips.
 Do you realize this?

Behold, my beloved, these gifts of wedding finery
 Look away from rusty treasures that draw your eyes
 My precious, they are soapsuds that vanish.
 Turn, and come away with me.

Like the scripture book *Song of Songs*, I believe this was a partnership with God in much the same spirit.

I titled the poem *Come Away With Me!* What made it more amazing is what happened the next time I visited Israel. You'll read that story in the next chapter.

Creating art can be the epitome of expressing your love with God. Not all art or creative expression comes easily. Like anything else—no pain, no gain. We're all on a journey of faith, and creativity and artistic interests needs to be a big part. We're designed this way. Surely God delights in our creative efforts more than we can imagine.

PRAYER ENCOUNTER:

For who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?
But we have the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:16 NKJV

Reflect on what makes you the most happy, something you enjoy doing, and see it from God's perspective knowing He doesn't look for qualified people but empowered-by-His-Spirit people. His prophets, artists, servants, and ministers aren't qualified by the world's standards. What do you think He's given to you, as far as interests, talents, and desires that He'd like to see expressed for Him? What do you carry within you? What has God promised you that is yet to be fulfilled? Or, is there something new, a vision or a calling bubbling up within you from God?