



Own
your
life

*Living with deep intention, bold faith,
and generous love*

SALLY CLARKSON

CHAPTER 1

SEEING BEAUTY AND PURPOSE IN YOUR ORDINARY DAYS

Owning the Hero Who Lives inside You

What distinguishes men of genuine achievement from the rest of us is not so much their intellectual powers and aptitudes as their curiosity, their energy, their fullest use of their potentialities. Nobody really knows how smart or talented he is until he finds the incentives to use himself to the fullest. God has given us more than we know what to do with.



Own Your Part

I have a collection of teacups and mugs. Each is different in size, shape, and color—but every one of them is functional and beloved by my family. In the same way, each of our lives is unique. Our differences do not devalue our intrinsic worth, but they do create a different design. I have always told my children, “You might as well

decide to like God's will for your life, since your circumstances are probably not going to change just because you wish they would."

1. What defines and makes your life distinct? What resources do you have? What do you consider to be advantages to your particular puzzle? Are there any areas that seem impossible at this moment that you need to put into God's hands?

We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ROMANS 8:28

How does the verse above apply to your own life right now?

2. Learning to see each turn in the road and each unique circumstance as a part of what God has ordained has helped me find purpose at each juncture. I ask Him, *Lord, what can I learn from this? What message at this moment might prepare me to encourage someone in the same circumstances later? Show me Your faithfulness now so I can keep learning.*

Trust in the LORD and do good;
Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. PSALM 37:3

This verse has helped me learn to stay in the moment and grow where I am. How is God asking you to be faithful wherever you are today? What does it mean to cultivate faithfulness?

Praying with You

Lord, each of us finds challenges in each season of our lives. Help us today to cultivate faithfulness right where we are. Give us the spiritual eyes to believe that You will work this situation out for our good. We come in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

CONTROLLING THE CHAOS

Owning Your Priorities and Commitments

You will never have a greater or lesser dominion than that over yourself . . . the height of a man's success is gauged by his self-mastery; the depth of his failure by his self-abandonment. . . . And this law is the expression of eternal justice. He who cannot establish dominion over himself will have no dominion over others. LEONARDO DA VINCI

Thus says the LORD,

“What injustice did your fathers find in Me,

That they went far from Me

And walked after emptiness and became empty?” JEREMIAH 2:5



Own Your Part

Before a great house is built, an architect must design an extensive plan that considers the beauty of the structure; the practical application of electrical, plumbing, and heating elements for the home; and the aesthetic appeal for those living in the home. Any great structure requires great planning. So it is with life. In order to build a vibrant spiritual life, intentional plans must be made. Planning for the practical issues, the spiritual goals, and the dreams to accomplish comes through intentional and purposeful consideration.

Before you read the next chapter, take the following actions to help build a solid plan for your life:

1. Identify the chaos in your life.

What activities or relationships create the most havoc? Steal your energy? Produce life-noise that keeps you from quiet and peace?

2. Recognize the voices.

Name the voices that are influencing your decisions and the commitments that are leading you away from a centered life or promising false gratification.

Ask yourself who or what is influencing your decisions and if they are worthy of following.

Determine to begin writing down the goals and decisions that will lead you to a wiser stewardship of life.

3. Build on the right foundations.

Identify worldly values that have taken your money, time, and heart commitment. Where might you begin investing those resources to build your life on what matters?

Make a plan to incorporate back into your life the ideals that lead to real relationships and eternal values and that will fill you up emotionally, spiritually, and mentally.

Control your schedule by eliminating time wasters. Schedule a daily time when you can begin to read and study the Word of God.

4. Master your will.

Identify the areas of your life that you have neglected or ignored and that you know will bring you more health (e.g., better time management, devotions, personal relationships, health, church).

Write down the ways you would like to grow in each of the areas you identified. Then set small goals toward moving in that direction.

Praying with You

Lord, so often we are overwhelmed by all the tasks ahead of us. Today help us to turn our eyes to You so that we can discern between the truly important tasks and those that will not add any real value to our lives. May we look to You as our Peace today. Amen.

CHAPTER 3

LISTENING TO NEW VOICES

Owning Your True Identity

I am a princess. All girls are. Even if they live in tiny old attics. Even if they dress in rags, even if they aren't pretty, or smart, or young. They're still princesses.

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT, *A LITTLE PRINCESS*

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. EPHESIANS 2:10



Own Your Part

Once when I was a young woman, my next-door neighbor said, “Sally, you are so very poised and gracious. What an amazing young woman you are!” Even though I did not know her well, I received words of affirmation so seldom that her words have stayed with me all of my life. They gave me a picture to live into. Because of the words she spoke into my life, I wanted to be poised and gracious.

There are many passages in Scripture that tell us of God’s divine love. For example,

The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying,
“I have loved you with an everlasting love;
Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.”

JEREMIAH 31:3

1. If God loves you forever, then how can you receive this love into your heart and allow it to renew a healthy self-image?

Write down in a journal or on a piece of paper the negative voices you listen to that accuse you or allow you to feel guilty or inadequate. Now write the verse above at the bottom of the page and remember that what God thinks about you is the truest thing about you.

2. Romans 8:1 says, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” When we accept His forgiveness by faith, we are able to live free from the feeling that somehow we are disappointing to Him. Identify the ways you feel you have fallen short

of His desires for you. Then memorize Romans 8:1 and bring it to your mind every time you are tempted to feel guilty.

3. Paul says in 2 Corinthians, “Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (5:17, NLT).

Remember that each day you live is a new day in which Jesus sees you as redeemed, forgiven, beloved, and innocent before His throne. At the beginning of each day, spend at least a couple of minutes acknowledging the newness of life that He provides you. Ask Him to usher you through each minute of your day and to keep His love present in your mind.

Praying with You

Heavenly Father, so often our ears are tuned to the voices that insist we are hopeless, guilty, and worthless. Please help us turn back to the truth of Your Word, which reminds us that we are redeemed, forgiven, and cherished. We thank You for demonstrating Your great love and compassion by sending Your Son to carry the weight of our sin. May our lives reflect the joy and freedom that are ours in Christ so that everyone we meet will be drawn to You, too. In Jesus’ name, amen.

CHAPTER 4

LIVING WITH THE END IN MIND

Owning Your Life Vision

*A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it,
bearing within him the image of a cathedral.* ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be.

Remind me that my days are numbered—

how fleeting my life is. PSALM 39:4, NLT



Own Your Part

Young though she was, my friend Judy had lived through the divorce of her parents, her mother's alcoholism, and sexual abuse from an uncle that she was afraid to reveal to her busy parents. Yet in college, someone shared Christ with her, and for the first time, she found the love, forgiveness, and hope she had always longed to experience. She studied the Bible every day and asked to be mentored

by a woman she had met. As the years passed, she cultivated great compassion for others with broken pasts, so she began to write short devotionals for women on a personal blog and started small groups for young women in her home. She felt so fully redeemed that she made her story a means of offering compassion, restoration, and healing for others who longed to know Christ's love.

You, too, have a story worth telling, an opportunity to bring the light of Christ into your world, right where you are. It is my prayer that as you seek to take ownership of your life, you will be renewed, refreshed, and inspired to live into the wonderful life God has created for you to embrace.

1. As you place your dreams, plans, and stewardship of your life into His hands, you will hear Him whispering ideas to pursue, sins to confess, areas to strengthen, and people to reach. What dreams have you always had in your heart that He might want you to pursue? What messages are particularly meaningful to you, and how might you begin to share these with others?
2. Someday each of us will have to give an account to God for how we made His messages known in our world. How then might you specifically live into your heritage as a Christian? What are your skills? Your drives? Your talents that God might use for His glory? What do you feel is a special strength or skill that God has given you to use to encourage others—giving, serving, encouraging, writing, teaching, cooking, hospitality, mercy, compassion for the lost?

Often the story and circumstances of your life will influence your message. How do you want to use what you have experienced to speak into those who have similar lives? List three practical things you can do to begin serving those around you who need encouragement, help, or guidance.

Are you willing to live by faith and bring His influence to bear in every aspect of your life—to live each day filled with His love and power? When Jesus lives through someone, He always moves that person to do what is on His heart. He is always concerned to redeem others through the life that is yielded to Him.

3. If God lived fully through your life, what could He bring to pass?
4. Who in your life needs to know God's love and goodness?
5. How have you manifested and taught God's truth and values to people who long for wisdom and direction?
6. In the power of the Holy Spirit, what will you dream for His glory?
7. Can you think of any way He would want to use you to influence your world in your lifetime?

Praying with You

Heavenly Father, bless those who read this book. Show them the deep wellspring of Your love; give them the courage of faith that comes from knowing You, our great God; give them wisdom to figure out how to live their present lives in a way that brings harmony; and give them the companionship of Your Spirit each step of the way. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

LOOKING TO GOD AS YOUR LIFE COACH

Owning God's Training

This is all the inheritance I can give to my dear family; the religion of Christ can give them one which will make them rich indeed. PATRICK HENRY

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. 1 PETER 2:9

Own Your Part

In an attempt to make her son “happy,” a woman I know always made excuses for her son when he acted selfishly, insulted other children, or made immoral choices during his teen years. Instead of gently training and instructing him, she allowed this child to always get his own way. Consequently, when he left home, this young man was unable to cope with the difficulties he encountered at his university. His mom retrieved him, one more time, and brought him back home from college, blaming others for her son’s failure to withstand the pressures of college.

Since then, her son has gone from job to job, has been married twice, and is now living at home again. The woman recently said

to me, “I was avoiding immediate discipline and training in the life of my son but now have deeper disappointments to bear because I never wanted him to be unhappy. How I wish I had disciplined him so he could have become a confident, strong man.”

1. God is not so concerned that we are always happy as He is committed to helping us become mature and learn to be content. Begin to ask God how He wants you to live out your role in the story of life He has granted you. How can you live truthfully, heroically, and faithfully in such a way that you will fulfill the very destiny for which you were born? Where must you be faithful? How will you redeem the dark places in your life? How will you leave a legacy of faith that will give courage to those who come after you? Where does God want to see you develop excellence of character?
2. Your life is significant and meaningful in light of God’s overall purposes. How will you own your decisions so that you may fulfill your divine and providential calling?

Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:13 that God “is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” It brings God joy to see His children flourish, just as I delighted in Joel’s accomplishments. Even when the road looks hard, Christ is at your side to strengthen you and to give you hope and encouragement. In the end, however, He leaves it to you to decide whether you will live with diligence and endurance.

Praying with You

Heavenly Father, help us to trust Your ways in our lives. Difficulties can sometimes overwhelm us. Give us the grace to keep taking one step at a time, to respond to Your training, and to rest each day as You carry us through. In Jesus’ name we come. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

RESTING IN THE
TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD

Owning the Mystery of His Supremacy

As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you. C. S. LEWIS, *MERE CHRISTIANITY*

Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time. 1 PETER 5:6



Own Your Part

I was awash with weariness. Tension was giving me a neck ache, as I was anxious about meeting several deadlines as well as three weeks of impending company. One morning I rose early and drove thirty minutes to a five-star hotel near my home that is built next to a little lake.

I ordered a cappuccino, found a shady spot in front of the lake, and sipped in the coffee and the peace and beauty of a Colorado mountain morning. I sauntered slowly around the lake a couple of times. Finally, as I was driving home, I put on an album of some of my favorite music, and after my two hours of getting away from it all, got lost in the melodies.

When I got home, all the deadlines were still there, but my spirit was much changed. My little mini-rest had changed me so that I was better able to face the next few weeks.

1. What is the biggest emotional drainer in your life? How can you place it in God's hands and step back to get a better picture of how you might deal with it?
2. Read this verse: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Colossians 3:15).

What is ruling your thoughts instead of the peace of Christ? You were called to live in peace. What false light is hiding your issues from the light of God's power and commitment to lighten your load and walk you through your circumstances with His strength and wisdom?

3. Plan a time when you can get away from the concrete, noise, and demands of your world. Look for a place in creation where you can rest your whole self. It might be a hike in the mountains, a day at the beach, or a picnic in the park. Be sure to get away often enough that you are regularly exposed to God's art and able to remember that He is transcendent above all the details of your life.

Praying with You

Lord of the mountains and the sea, take these precious ones away from the daily pressures and demands of life to a place of quiet where they might see Your eternal and transcendent beauty and rest there for some time. Take their burdens and give them peace. We love You. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

ALLOWING GOD'S SPIRIT
TO BREATHE IN YOU

Owning the Holy Spirit's Strength through Your Life

Spiritual transformation is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the Master Sculptor. JERRY BRIDGES

[Jesus] breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

JOHN 20:22, NLT



Own Your Part

As I was working in my home office recently, my laptop shut off and would not come back on. After verifying that the cord was plugged into the power strip, I asked Joel, my resident Apple expert, to help me try to fix it.

We both became frustrated when, no matter what we attempted to do, my computer would not restart. Unbeknownst to us, someone had accidentally unplugged the power strip from the wall, so my computer was separated from its source of power. Even though my computer has the potential to connect to the world through the Internet, to receive e-mail messages, to serve me as I write and store books there, it is still totally useless to me when it's disconnected from its power source. Likewise, no matter our potential for living fully, when we are disconnected from our power source, the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to live fully and to live well.

1. God's Word is the language He uses to speak to me. The passages I have memorized over the years constantly speak to me in the moments of my day. To tap into the power of Scripture, choose five verses of Scripture that encourage you and memorize them this month. Start with this verse: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).
2. Practicing good habits enables us to respond well to challenging life situations. Every day before you get out of bed, make it a habit to pray to God and acknowledge that He is with you

and loves you. Speak to Him throughout your day, inviting His Spirit to live through you. The more you talk to Him, the more you will be filled with His words, wisdom, and strength.

3. Romans 8:1-2 says, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

Each of us daily falls short of the righteous ways in which we would like to live. Begin practicing living in light of the truth of Romans 8:1-2. Because you are in Christ, you are not condemned by God. The Spirit of Life, the Holy Spirit, has set you free from the bondage of death. Breathe in that truth today—there is no condemnation for you because of His Spirit in your life today. Live in His grace.

Praying with You

Dear Precious Lord, we need You every moment of our lives. Help us to struggle with the pressures of life less and allow Your Spirit to blow through our attitudes, our hearts, and what we value, and teach us how to leave our burdens in Your hands. We bow our wills to Yours because You are the only One who can live the Christian life through us. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

CULTIVATING THE PRACTICES
THAT DEEPEN YOUR FAITH

Owning the Spiritual Disciplines

In prayer it is better to have a heart without words, than words without a heart.

ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN BUNYAN

[Jesus] said to them, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer.’” MATTHEW 21:13, NLT



Own Your Part

A couple of years ago, I was teaching my fourth child to drive. When we started out, my daughter was overwhelmed by all she had to learn: getting the car out of park, keeping her foot on the brake, looking in her rearview mirror, and accelerating. “Mom, it is all too hard!” she told me. “I just can’t get the hang of it.” Yet recently after driving hundreds of hours, she quipped, “Sometimes driving comes so second nature to me that I have to remember to pay attention to what I am doing—because it is so effortless.”

So it is in our spiritual walk with God. At first we may be unfamiliar with Scripture or prayer, but the more we invest time reading, praying, and pondering God, the more it becomes second nature to us.

1. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” How can we know the ways of God in our lives if we do not have His words and voice informing our decisions? How disciplined are you in pursuing a deeper walk with God? Where do you need to grow?
2. How can you fit habits into the rhythms of your day so you will gain spiritual strength? Plan how you will fit reading and praying into your schedule as a daily investment. Without a plan, failure is assured. As you think about when to fit in quiet time, consider your own personality and time preference. Some women

are morning people, some afternoon, some evening. It does not matter when you spend time with God, but you are more likely to keep to a schedule if you figure out what would work best for you.

3. If you're not sure how to start reading your Bible regularly, you might consider using a book containing Scripture readings for each day. Two of my favorite daily devotions are listed below.

- *Daily Light on the Daily Path*—This classic collection of Scripture readings for morning and evening is available in many published formats.
- *Celtic Daily Prayer*—Published by the Northumbria Community, this book provides meditations, Scriptures, and spiritual quotations from godly people throughout the ages.

Often, I choose a psalm a day to read, and I circle the attributes of God found in the passages.

4. Buy a journal in which to write down all the things for which you are grateful or a list of your prayer requests. Be sure to write in it at least once a week. Then it will become a history of God's faithfulness in your life.

Praying with You

Lord, we know You want to have conversation with us every day, because You are the One who created relationship. Please help us learn to be comfortable in Your presence, and teach us to become as close to You as You desire to be to us. We love You. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

LEARNING TO TAKE RISKS

Owning Your Faith

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

C. S. LEWIS, *THE WEIGHT OF GLORY*

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

HEBREWS 11:6



Own Your Part

My son dreamed of God using him in Hollywood. After years of living as a starving artist and barely making ends meet because he would not accept roles that would compromise his faith, he poured his heart out to God. God spoke to him in his tiny apartment. “I want you to begin writing the kinds of scripts you think would become the kind of movies that would honor Me.”

He stepped out in faith, wrote a script, raised money, and organized actors, and now his first film, *Confessions of a Prodigal Son*, is going to screen. He discovered that being a part of God’s work in the world requires a heart of faith and then hard work and obedience.

1. What circumstances are you in right now that require you to give them to God, allow Him to work, and wait until He answers so that you can see His greatness above your own human vision?
2. What work or dreams has God placed on your heart to accomplish? What step of faith do you need to take?
3. What difficulty are you facing, and how will you be faithful to wait for God to work through the “lions of your life” or the

“giant” that is looming large? Will you wait for Him and worship Him in this place until you see the salvation of God?

Heroes are not those who do not feel fear or see the difficulty of their circumstances, but those who choose courage or action when in danger, fear, or need.

Praying with You

Dear God, we know You delight in rewarding the faith of Your children. It is Your way. Help us to be willing to look beyond the present realities of this world so that we can live to please You. Give us patience to wait to see Your personal miracles reserved uniquely for those who took the risk to believe. In Jesus' name we come. Amen.

CHAPTER 10

TENDING YOUR HEART AND INVESTING IN YOUR SOUL

Owning Your Emotional Health

The true beauty in a woman is reflected in her soul.

AUDREY HEPBURN, QUOTING SAM LEVENSON

Watch over your heart with all diligence,

For from it flow the springs of life. PROVERBS 4:23



Own Your Part

Recently I was reminded that tending your heart doesn't have to be complicated. Joy and I were the only two at home, so we decided to jump in the car and have dinner at a new café we'd heard about. After splitting a burger, we took a walk down a nearby block lined with Victorian homes. We had such fun waving to families eating dinner or swinging on their front porches. As we breathed in the

cool night air, we shared some of the thoughts and dreams that had been on our minds.

Simple moments like these are life giving. In fact, they seem to line up with Jesus' desire to give His followers joy and peace in the midst of their ordinary lives. While speaking to a crowd, Jesus offered this invitation: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29). That invitation still stands. Will you take it?

1. Nature, music, books, healthy foods, conversation with good friends—each of these is a good gift from God that can help restore your soul. Which one appeals to you most? How might you incorporate that gift into your schedule this week?
2. Another way to tend to your soul is to focus on the "art of life." What would that look like in your own life and home?
3. How might you begin to fill your mind with great thoughts?

Praying with You

Lord Jesus, we praise You because You came to restore life to our bodies, souls, and minds. Help us to seek You today in the midst of all the good gifts You have given us, and may we be refreshed by Your Word, Your creation, and all that we take in through our senses. And then, O Lord, help us to become life givers within our homes, neighborhoods, and churches, for Your glory. Amen.

CHAPTER 11

CHOOSING TO OVERCOME:
MOVING BEYOND HURT

Owning Your Response to Others

As long as we continue to live as if we are what we do, what we have, and what other people think about us, we will remain filled with judgments, opinions, evaluations, and condemnations. We will remain addicted to putting people and things in their “right” place. HENRI J. M. NOUWEN

Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

MATTHEW 7:1-2



Own Your Part

Not long ago, I found myself very hurt in a relationship. Personality issues and a disagreement on our ideals had broken the trust between us. Having been in ministry for over forty years, I was not totally surprised, but any broken relationship hurts both parties. Yet by then I had learned that God is big enough to hold my cares, fears, and hurts and that when I try to carry things that destroy my heart's energy, it drains me too much.

Psalm 131:1-2 has become a pattern of commitment in my life:

O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty;
Nor do I involve myself in great matters,
Or in things too difficult for me.
Surely I have composed and quieted my soul;
Like a weaned child rests against his mother,
My soul is like a weaned child within me.

So this time, I sought to be like a child before God—"This is too much for me to carry, and only You can make it right in the long run. I am like a baby in my need. I rest against You and leave You to solve this dilemma, which is out of my control."

When I hand over my pain to Christ, peace fills my heart, even though the hurt may resurface once in a while. I just acknowledge that my Jesus will hold this mystery for me in His capable hands and solve it in His time. Here are a few other ways I've learned to overcome negative responses to others:

1. "Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life" (Proverbs 4:23, NLT) was written by Solomon, supposedly the wisest man who ever lived! (watch over, protect, put borders around. If you jump into relationships. Instead, trust God, see

and interested in others, but take your time in giving the depths of your heart to another—as you are opening your life to the possibility of foolishness or hurt.

2. “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). Jesus Himself acknowledged that when we go into our world, we are being sent as sheep among wolves—even in the church at large. Everyone is at a different level of maturity. When I begin spending time with a new friend, I have learned to be aware of warning signs to avoid long-term hurt. If a woman is constantly critical of others; carries lots of drama; tells me secrets and then always says, “Don’t tell anyone”; is fearful, gossips, or is not humble but defensive when corrected, I see these as cautions.

We are to be humble and loving toward all people, but we need to develop discernment in relationships. Scripture says that “Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men” (John 2:24). Seek to understand the direction of the heart of the person to whom you are considering entrusting your heart.

3. Look for wise, mature, trustworthy people with whom you can be close friends. Don’t trust your secrets, fears, deepest desires, and dreams to someone who has proved to be immature in the past. Seek out people who inspire you to love Jesus more, who are humble of heart and trustworthy in character, and who do not gossip or hide anything from others. As Proverbs 13:20 says, “The companion of fools will suffer harm.”
4. Philippians 4:7 (NIV) instructs us in guarding the imaginations of our hearts: “The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

When we find ourselves enmeshed in a hurtful relationship, it is tempting to obsess about the hurt and the unfairness of our situation. We may even engage in “he said, she said” sorts of conversations in our minds. Some of this is the process of figuring out issues and getting back to our center after we have been hurt. But, honestly, I have found that focusing on that which we cannot change and storing bitterness is neither productive nor healthy.

I have learned to write out in prayer the issues that repeat themselves in my brain—and then I write, “This is Your issue to resolve, God. Show me where I am wrong, and in the areas where I have been wronged, help me to forgive. Lord, this is Your burden to carry. It is taking too much brain space and time space in my life. I give it to You to care for and resolve, because it is too much for me.”

After praying such a prayer, we can leave the matter in God’s hands—we do not need to allow it to steal our joy or energy. In time, God will work out His will. It only destroys us when we’re eaten up with unproductive thoughts; we only create further bitterness that steals from our prayer time and joy.

Praying with You

Dearest Father, God of unconditional love, we understand how much You hate division and strife, and yet You came to die for us so that even these relationship flaws would be covered. Teach us about Jesus in our difficult relationships. Help us to make loving, generous choices. Thank You that all of our faults in relationship issues have been paid for and covered. Help us to grow in love to please Your heart. We come in the name of Jesus, our own soul friend. Amen.

CHAPTER 12

HARVESTING A GODLY CHARACTER

Owning Your Integrity

All life demands struggle. Those who have everything given to them become lazy, selfish, and insensitive to the real values of life. The very striving and hard work that we so constantly try to avoid is the major building block in the person we are today.



Own Your Part

When I first moved to Colorado, I was introduced to an older friend who immediately became a kindred spirit. She was someone with whom I could share dreams and struggles, laugh and travel with, learn from, and love unconditionally. I did not realize just how much I needed her until we invested regular time in each other's lives.

A master gardener teaches the less experienced how to cultivate with skill. A wise woman becomes wise by copying other, more

experienced wise women. We were not meant to become wise in isolation but to partner with others who care about us and who can help us, over a long period of time, to live into our potential.

1. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.” Look for women in your life who might disciple you or those who might mentor you through their books. They can help instruct you how to live more wisely.
2. Take some time to develop a long-term plan for growing stronger in character. I list three attributes every six months or so that I want to work on in my life. For instance, gentleness, wisdom, and faith are the attributes I have been working on for the past few months. I have picked books to read to inspire me and made specific goals in each area. Choose gentle words and listen with your eyes to the people God brings into your life.
3. Hebrews 12:12-13 teaches us to work on the areas of our lives that need to be strengthened and healed: “Strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.” It is God’s will that we become strong, and so He admonishes us to work and stretch toward healing and growth when we confront difficult areas in our lives.

Praying with You

Dear God, let us see the potential for a beautiful harvest springing from our lives, if we will only believe in the seed potential in our lives today, this moment, which by faith will become a harvest of righteousness beyond measure throughout our lifetimes. Amen.

CHAPTER 13

PURSUING LIFE'S MOST
DEFINING COMMITMENT

Owning Your Choice to Love

The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread.

MOTHER TERESA

[Jesus] said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

MATTHEW 22:37-40



Own Your Part

Late one evening after spending time with friends who'd returned from international ministry in a very difficult country, I was yawning repeatedly and longed to be in bed. Yet the Holy Spirit was tapping on my heart, telling me I needed to give a word of confidence to our weary friends. They had told many stories of the challenges, faith, and loneliness they had experienced overseas.

I grabbed a note from my drawer and quickly wrote, "Your model of giving to others is such an encouragement to our family. Though we know your labor is so very difficult in a country closed to the gospel, we also know that God is with you. The Lord of Hosts is your protector and your Father, and He will use you to change history in the lives of people who long to know Him. Our family loves you and cherishes the legacy you are leaving. Know that you will be in our prayers."

I left the note outside their door. A year later, I received an e-mail from my friend. "Sally, I keep your card in my Bible. When I am tempted to give up, I read it. Your note encourages me again and again that I am not alone. Thanks for taking the time to love me through your words."

I had no idea that the one simple note had been so cherished.

1. Peter, who had walked the dusty roads with Jesus and understood his own need for love and forgiveness, penned these words: "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for

a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22). What does it mean to love fervently—from the heart? This seems to be a directive. Who is in need of your special love? How will you show it to them?

2. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This statement from Jesus is simple but has such profound meaning. How do you love yourself? What does this imply for all of those around you—do they need the same grace, sympathy, help, kindness, words of encouragement that you need? Write a card to two people who are your neighbors and who need to know love.

Praying with You

Lord, we know that Your heart is filled with love and motivates all the ways You have reached out to redeem and strengthen us. Please show us how to be more consistent in loving others. Give us the grace to extend Your love to those who need to feel Your touch through our actions. Amen.

CHAPTER 14

CULTIVATING A SENSE
OF PLACE

Owning the Atmosphere of Your Home

To invite a person into your house is to take charge of his happiness for as long as he is under your roof. JEAN ANTHELME BRILLAT-SAVARIN

*The wise woman builds her house,
But the foolish tears it down with her own hands.* PROVERBS 14:1



Own Your Part

Since our home has been filled for so many years with people who have needs, there are obviously times when I am weary and spent . . . and then comes one more day! A friend of mine sent me this note in December: “Our pennies are fewer than ever with a child in college and another one who needs a car soon, but I have a special Christmas gift for you. At your leisure, I want you to bring yourself and two other people to my home for a breakfast planned for your pleasure!”

I chose my daughters as the friends to bring since they were home for the holidays. When we arrived, homemade hollandaise sauce was bubbling on the stove, eggs Benedict was being prepared, and monkey bread and a large pot of coffee adorned the table. I felt as though I were at a queen’s feast. To have someone take the time to serve me was about the most loving and wonderful gift I had been given in a long time.

I thought of Proverbs 24:3-4, which says,

By wisdom a house is built,
And by understanding it is established;
And by knowledge the rooms are filled
With all precious and pleasant riches.

1. What ideals do you want your home to reflect to those who enter? What are three ways in which you can build your home into more of a haven of rest, comfort, and beauty?
2. Proverbs 14:1 tells us that “the wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands.” How will you build a legacy of faith and love through the rhythms of your home life? What factors do you see in your life that might “tear down” your home or the relationships or faith in your home? What do you need to do to gain control over that area? Television, phones, and computers can steal from personal time or lead to bad attitudes and anger. Be practical and honest as you consider what may be preventing you from bringing more of God’s life into your home.
3. In order for you to be a conductor of beauty, goodness, and love in your home, you need to keep filling your heart so that it has the strength and endurance to keep giving. What are two ways in which you need to pull back from stress? What are two ways in which you can refuel (e.g., a time-out alone at a café for coffee and quiet to plan your week, or a morning a week to sleep in and catch up on rest—whatever means the most to you)? Plan these into your weekly schedule.

Praying with You

Precious Father, You have gone to such great lengths to build a world that is packed with the beauty and artistry of Your hands. Help us to take the time to enjoy what You have made. You are creating a place for us for all of eternity. Help us to follow in Your footsteps and become homebuilders right where we are so that those who come into our lives may also sense a place to belong and a haven where they might find Your love and provision. Thank You for caring not only for our needs but also for our desires. Amen.

CHAPTER 15

BUILDING A LEGACY
OVER A LIFETIME

Owning Your Marriage

Happy is the man who finds a true friend, and far happier is he who finds that true friend in his wife. FRANZ SCHUBERT

They are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. MATTHEW 19:6, NIV



Own Your Part

Clay and I spent a couple of days of our honeymoon in Santa Fe, New Mexico. While there, we happened upon beautiful wildflowers that were pressed between two pieces of glass and then framed. We bought this artwork as a visual representation of Jesus' words in Luke 12:27: "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these."

We recognized in this humble gift a reminder that God would have to clothe our marriage, give us beauty, and make us strong. He was the mysterious third partner in our relationship who could make our commitment stronger.

1. What are the biggest challenges in your marriage? What attitude do you have about those difficulties? How can you seek to grow and mature in handling these stresses as a service of worship to the Lord?
2. Name three things you are grateful about in your relationship with your husband as it relates to your marriage and family. Write a card (or an e-mail!) to him, telling him several ways that you appreciate him.
3. What one area can you work on during the next six months that will add more peace and grace to your relationship with your husband? What do you think he wants you to understand about his personality?

Praying with You

Father, we are beginning to understand that our marriages are representations of our oneness with You. Our marriages are pictures to the world of what unconditional love and commitment look like.

Please give us Your strength, grace, and wisdom so that we can grow in mature love and commitment. And bring us peace, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 16

SHAPING GENERATIONS TO COME

Owning Your Motherhood

The most important gift you can give your child is to help them begin a walk of faith with the God of the universe. From the moment your children arrive in your home, you are teaching them how to see the world, what to consider important, what to seek, what to love. As a mother, you have the opportunity to form your home and family life in such a way that God's reality comes alive to your children each day. SALLY CLARKSON, 10 GIFTS OF WISDOM

The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. GENESIS 3:20



Own Your Part

Our son Joel is a musician whose homes have been in Boston; Hollywood; Cambridge, England; Nashville; and Tijuana, Mexico. Yet the older he gets, the more he looks for opportunities to come

home. One evening after dinner, we chatted while watching the sun set behind the mountains.

“You know, Mom, the longer I live, the more I understand that a child, no matter how adult, always loves having a mom to come home to! Your cooking, your voice in my life, your acceptance and understanding of my personality, and the comfort of our home all call me back to who I am amidst the busy, demanding world where I live.”

Moms never outlive the importance of their roles in their children’s lives. Even now, in my sixties, I long to have my own mom caring for me and comforting me in the stresses of life, even though it has been many, many years since I had my mama’s attention.

1. Paul compares himself to a gentle, loving, nursing mother when he speaks of his leadership and influence in the lives of the people he worked with in Thessalonica: “We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7, ESV). How is the gentle nurture of a nursing mother a way to reach the hearts of your own children? How do you need to change some of your attitudes?
2. If Jesus told you that the service He most wanted from you was to raise your children and teach them all about God and His Kingdom, what would you need to do to take this role more seriously? Write down two specific things you can do to cultivate a more meaningful spiritual impact on your children—or in the lives of children you know.
3. Proverbs 31:26 says, “She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.” The word *kindness* in this verse has also been translated as *lovingkindness*—referring to the lovingkindness of God. Write down three ways you can more purposefully teach your children of God’s attributes and His lovingkindness toward them.

Praying with You

Father, You have shown us how to parent our own children by giving up Your Son in order to parent and redeem us. Help us to learn more about becoming servant leaders so that we can willingly lay down our own lives to serve our children. Amen.

LIVING INTENTIONALLY TO LEAVE A LEGACY OF FAITH

Owning the Influence Your Life Can Make

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. . . . It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. C. S. LEWIS, *MERE CHRISTIANITY*

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 TIMOTHY 4:7-8



Own Your Part

My hope is that as you have read my story, you have thought about your own life and the kind of legacy you will leave. There are so many areas to grow strong in—faith, love, living in the power of God’s Spirit, marriage, parenting, friendship—and so much more that I did not cover in this book. Remember that God has created you with such spiritual potential to live within your personality, your dreams, your life, just as they are, and to leave a legacy of love, faith, and spiritual influence.

What decisions is He asking you to make? Whom shall you love? How will you forgive? How will you serve? In what ways will you

make His light, comfort, truth, and beauty come alive in your life? I invite you to consider your answers as you reflect on the questions and recommendations below.

1. Think about the legacy you are leaving behind—even now, as well as after your life on earth is over. Are you content with what you imagine it will be? Can you identify any areas of your life that you would like to build into in order to leave a more godly heritage?
2. Practice writing your own good-bye letter to family and friends. Doing so can help shed light on the reality of the story you are writing.
3. Think of ways you can help those you care about start owning their lives as well. Perhaps you can share with them the insights you've gained and the strategies you're formulating. Remember that “two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor” (Ecclesiastes 4:9). As you share your journeys, you will be more fully inspired to take steps that will leave a life-giving legacy for others.

Praying with You

Heavenly Father, I know how much You love each precious person who has read this book. You have designed each of us with such tender care, and You know all of our circumstances. I also know You have so much love, wisdom, insight, and strength to give us as You reveal the purposes for our lives. I pray that we will fall more deeply in love with You and will give our lives to follow Your paths for us. May we discover the profound blessing of walking each day of our lives hand in hand with You, the living God. Bless us as we seek You, and favor us with Your grace, strength, and joy each step of the way. We come to You in the precious name of Jesus, with hearts filled with gratefulness. Amen.