A person wearing a long, flowing orange dress is captured in motion, running or jumping through a field of tall, green grass. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and foliage. The overall mood is joyful and liberating.

*"Charming, funny, honest, touching....  
You will love this book!"*

—Sheila Walsh

# HEART WIDE OPEN

TRADING MUNDANE FAITH  
FOR AN EXUBERANT LIFE WITH JESUS

SHELLIE RUSHING TOMLINSON

HEART  
WIDE  
OPEN

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FOR AN EXUBERANT LIFE WITH JESUS

SHELLIE RUSHING TOMLINSON



WATERBROOK  
P R E S S

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*To Phil, love of my life and sharer of the dream*

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WHEN ALL YOU CAN BRING HIM  
IS A BROKEN WANT-TO



*“Jesus, I know I don’t love you like I  
should, but I want to want to love you!”*



I like to say I was in church nine months before I was born and shortly thereafter my people began toting me back to the Lord's house as quickly and as often as they could. I now understand there are worse places to grow up than the left side, second row of a small country church, but as a rambunctious kid with a serious imagination and a bad case of the fidgets, I had a hard time imagining why so much churchgoing was necessary.

It seemed highly unlikely we would miss out on anything earth shattering if we skipped a service here and there. Even a wiggly little tomboy with smudged eyeglasses could tell you who was going to come in late, who was going to make a scene taking her baby to the nursery, and which elderly deacon was going to rouse himself from a brief nap to offer a hearty "Amen!" People are creatures of habit even—and maybe especially—in the Lord's house.

To my way of thinking, a little absence could have made our much-churched hearts grow even fonder. My sisters concurred. Had this ever come

to a vote, we girls would have ruled the day with a three-to-two tally, but our parents weren't the least bit interested in running a democracy.

Our list of required appearances included, but was not limited to, Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, two-week vacation Bible schools in the summer, and two-week annual revivals in the spring and fall, both revivals having been prefaced with two-week cottage prayer meetings in anticipation of the big events. Sickness could get you an excused absence from any of these services, but it had to be verified. Holding a thermometer inside your electric blanket so you could stay home on Sunday night and watch *The Wonderful World of Disney* never worked. Not that I ever tried.

As a child, I enjoyed the rhythm of familiar hymns as well as the sense of belonging I felt inside those church walls, even if I firmly believed we overdid the whole attendance thing. As a teenager, however, I became increasingly skilled at being present in body alone while my thoughts were occupied elsewhere with my peers and our many dramas. I had a healthy respect for the teachings of the church, and God seemed real enough to me while I was there, but I didn't understand why my faith felt so compartmentalized. Where God went once I left the church building I couldn't say. And honestly, I wasn't all that concerned with the mystery.

This disconnect between my Sunday morning faith and my everyday experience followed me into my young married life where, despite my childhood conclusion that our parents overdid the churching, I found myself choosing the same level of commitment to the weekly services. I still enjoyed attending church, but I could seldom carry the warm fuzzies I felt during the service any farther than the parking lot before my sense of God's presence began to fade. The Sundays that bookended my weeks seemed to have little to do with what happened in the days that lay between them. As the years rolled by, I gradually began to wonder why this was and if it had to be. Thankfully, the day finally came when I was ready to admit that I needed

something more. I had no clue what it was that had been missing for so long, yet I knew I had to find it.

I had no clue what it was that  
had been missing for so long,  
yet I knew I had to find it.



As it happens, God used my own children to turn the heat up under my growing desire for more. I was a married woman with a loving husband trying to raise two young teenagers when the persistent dissatisfaction I'd never been able to name began to reach a boiling point.

During my kids' early years, I'd been able to pull off the church-lady gig, or at least my concept of the role. I knew the Bible and I knew the rules. Thinking this would be enough, I forged ahead, confident that if my husband and I took our children to church every time the doors opened, just as my parents had done with my sisters and me, all would be well. And for the most part it was—until they hit adolescence and I came down with mommy terrors!

My babies were growing up, and it was both exhilarating and terrifying. Everywhere I turned the culture around us was laughing at what I considered sacred and celebrating what I found immoral. Increasingly our kids were exposed to things outside our home that neither their dad nor I approved of, and it frightened me to realize the temptations they faced could potentially wreck the futures we had always dreamed of for them. I tried to placate myself. We had taught them our values. If they were strong in their faith, they would be okay come what may, right? I had already purchased this holy life insurance myself, hadn't I? I simply needed to make sure they had taken out a similar policy. I needed to know they believed me when I said that the fullest life was one lived in God.

Such logic should have brought peace, and it would have, if not for one overgrown, peanut-eating elephant loafing smack-dab in the middle of my living room: I had zero life experience to offer as evidence for what I was advertising. As much as I disliked admitting it, any spiritual direction I was offering my kids came strictly from the biblical head knowledge gained through my years in the pew. I was merely regurgitating what I'd heard my whole life.

In short, I was a hypocrite!

Though the news came as quite a surprise to me, the ugly truth was undeniable. An Internet dictionary offers the following spot-on definition of my true state in that telling moment: a hypocrite is “a person who pretends to have virtues, moral or religious beliefs, principles, etc., that he or she does not actually possess, especially a person whose actions belie stated beliefs.”<sup>1</sup>

Bingo. If I were to be honest, the faith I was experiencing wasn't satisfying my deepest longings at all. My picture could've been pasted right beside that entry. Say “cheese,” Church Lady.

Even as I came face to face with the realization that I couldn't pass on something I didn't have, I was also painfully aware that young people are like mini lie detectors, capable of spotting anything short of the whole truth and willing to call you on it. I'm reminded of the time I came through the living room all dressed up for a big event, whereupon my grade school son looked up and announced, “Wow, Mama. You do not look fat in those pants.” Obviously, Phillip had heard this subject discussed in his few short years on earth, and, just as clearly, there had been other times when I had looked fat in my pants. But enough of *What Not to Wear*. My point is, children can sniff out insincerity like a bloodhound and see through hypocrites with their eyes closed. My Big Faith Advertisement must have sounded as weak in their ears as it did in mine.

This sobering realization about the lameness of my own faith stared me down without blinking and prompted some serious soul searching. Why wasn't my faith satisfying? Why was it that my God and I were friendly acquaintances at best? Why didn't I know this One I called my Savior? Worse yet, *why didn't I love Him?* Oh, I liked Him well enough. I appreciated the gospel, and I was grateful for the promise of a secure eternity, but love this Jesus in the here and now? Not really. In light of all my years of churching and being church-ed, I wondered how on earth that could be true. And why did some people seem so passionate about Jesus when all I could muster for Him on my most spiritual day was a healthy respect?

I knew people who talked about Jesus with the kind of affection normally reserved for a flesh-and-blood person. Me? I could sing "Oh, how I love Jesus" as heartily as everyone around me (albeit off-key), but deep down I knew that I could just as easily be singing "Oh, how I love watermelon" for all the fervency in my aching faking heart. My fellow southerners and I have a saying we're fond of using to encourage someone to be honest. "Tell the truth and stay in church," we'll warn. I've always thought the line was funny, but I wasn't laughing as I compared my empty profession of love with the words of Jesus Himself in Mark 12:30: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (NIV). I knew I didn't love Him that way, and I didn't have the slightest idea what to do about it. Coming clean with my Jesus-loving church members about the state of my faith didn't sound at all appealing.

Have mercy! If this is all I had to advertise for my abundant life, I realized I was going to have a hard time selling God to my kids, or to anyone else for that matter.

## FLYPAPER FAITH

With that, the nagging concern over my lackluster faith that had dogged me for years became a desperate need to find out what I was missing. I was no longer willing to settle for the distance that separated me from the God I'd heard about and prayed to from my earliest memory. I think of that turning point as my Flypaper Epiphany.

When I was growing up, most everyone I knew used flypaper to combat the bothersome insects that populate our southern summers. Flypaper seems to have lost its appeal over the years. But back in the day, these sticky pieces of vertical yellow tape, each about a foot and a half long and a couple inches wide, hung beneath carports all over our Louisiana Delta and as near as possible to the main entrances of our houses.

Flypaper is coated with sweet-smelling glue and designed to be so sticky that should a pesky fly encounter it while heading into the house, said insect would be immediately detained and permanently affixed to its surface. I can assure you that flypaper lives up to the billing. I once got my hair caught on the stuff, and I thought for sure Mama was going to have to shave me bald-headed to remove it from my crowning glory.

Eternal life isn't a gift from God;  
eternal life is the gift of God.



—Oswald Chambers

I don't remember the exact day I sat staring at John 17:3 (I do know it was shortly after I identified myself as a hypocrite), but I'll always remember the challenge I heard in Jesus's own words: "This is eternal life, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." That scripture was familiar to this church girl, but the hope I heard in it was

brand spanking new. For the first time I saw in those words a way to get off the spiritual merry-go-round I'd been riding my whole life and strike out on the biggest adventure of all time: to actually know God. I saw this as the way I would learn to love Jesus, to crazy love Him.

In my new plan God was the flypaper, and I would be the fly. The mission: to throw myself at Him and stick for eternity! The rest of my life began with a single prayer and an honest admission that surprised neither of us:

*"I admit it. I don't love You like I should, but I want to love You. Help!"*

## CHOOSING TO LOVE JESUS

I finally admitted that I had nothing to offer God. Zero. Zip. All I could bring was my weak, broken want-to. Here's the beautiful reality: it was enough. If you want to love Jesus, it's enough for you too!

The embarrassing truth I had avoided all my life—that I didn't really love Jesus—was the very admission He would use to ignite my lukewarm heart. Who knew?! All I had to offer was a desire to love Him, but it was enough. Okay, to be accurate, I couldn't even say that I wanted to love Him. It was more like I wanted to want to love Him, and still it was enough. He accepted my passionless heart and began to breathe on it, and a new way of living began opening to me.

I've had so many women tell me personal stories about their faith, and I'm always struck by how similar they are to my own. These sincere believers believe in God and they're trying to follow Him, but they admit to having little to no sense of intimacy with Him. They long for the passion they see in the Bible, but they're resigned to going through the motions without it. If this resonates with you, if you've been trying to ignore a certain dullness to your faith, please hear me. You aren't asking for anything that God doesn't want

you to enjoy and Jesus didn't die to give you! I'm walking proof that you can fall in love with Jesus by learning to whisper a simple prayer that meets with His wholehearted approval: *"I don't love You, but I want to love You. Help me!"*

Taste the sugar-sweet words of Ephesians 1:3–4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world."

God chose to love all of us, but He gave us free will to decide whether or not we would return that love. The type of honest prayer I'm advocating means admitting that our want-to is broken and asking God to teach us how to love Him well.

Have you been waiting for your heart to spontaneously combust into love for Jesus? If so, you have your cart before your horse, and I'm here to testify through firsthand experience that it's a frustrating way to ride and produces scant forward progress. In 1 John 4:19 we're told that "we love, because He first loved us." In other words, you and I will never be able to bear down and deliver a passionate heart for God out of determination or self-discipline, and it won't overtake us by surprise. It will, however, ignite in our hearts when we discover the secret of feasting on God's love in the person of Jesus Christ. Scripture assures us that He loves us not because of who we are but because of who He is.

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified



by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4–7)

God put His love on eternal display by sending Jesus to save us, not because of our merit but in spite of our sin. He initiates the love affair with us. The blessed challenge is to continue drinking that love in as freely as when we first reached for salvation. When we feast on this extravagant love and the many gifts He poured out upon us through Jesus Christ, we receive a nutrient-rich meal that nourishes His passion in us. But I reiterate, it is a decision, just as surely as the one we make when we pull our chairs up to the dining room table. No one can make this choice for us.

So what does this decision look like? That's the question I'm excited about answering. Let's begin with some powerful words from Jesus, recorded in Matthew.

Don't collect for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (6:19–21, HCSB)

For the longest time I allowed the good news of this passage to be totally eclipsed by the last sentence: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." That sounded like something of a spiritual inkblot test to me, and it was one I was sure I could never pass. I was quite convinced that if God examined what it was I treasured, He would see that He wasn't at the top of the list. In my guilt-induced anxiety, I completely missed the clear directive of the passage. These six power-packed words turned my perceived inkblot test

on its head when I finally understood their decree: “Collect for yourselves treasures in heaven.” That, my friend, isn’t a question or a suggestion. It’s an instruction that begs a proactive, determined choice of action. It’s also good news, foot-stomping good news. You and I get to choose what we treasure!

This power-packed privilege of choosing God as my treasure is the very decision I made on the day of my Flypaper Epiphany! I’ve since come to better understand the paradigm shift that occurred that day, but at the time I had no idea of the magnitude of my newly adjusted aim. I couldn’t have known that the decision to toss aside all reserve and throw myself at God with the sole goal of coming to know Him would not only open the door to the passion I was missing but also rescue me from another of my persistent struggles.

### THE PROBLEM WITH DR. SEUSS PRAYERS

For as long as I could remember, I had struggled to feel secure in my salvation. I knew what the Bible taught on the subject, but because my heart could find no rest, I had long followed the Dr. Seuss method in search of that elusive certainty that I belonged to God. Every altar call aggravated the inward struggle, so...

I prayed the sinner’s prayer in a car. I prayed it near and I  
prayed it far.  
I prayed it in a tree. I prayed it on bent knee.  
I prayed it once for all, and I prayed it each time I heard  
an altar call.

The wonderful news is that when my focus changed from trying to know if I was saved to knowing the God who saved me, He began to lead me

out of the endless frustration of not knowing if I belonged to Him and into an endless pursuit and delightful discovery of Him! Knowing that I am His and He is mine has brought a rest to my soul that trumps anything this world can offer.

I've since come to understand something else about those Dr. Seuss prayers. All of those earlier repetitious rituals were simply my confused responses to Christ's ongoing invitation to live in and through Him.

All those times I heard Jesus say, "Come unto Me," I thought He was inviting me to confirm my eternal destiny, when in reality I was hearing my Redeemer calling me to experience His presence. I had called on God one hundred and one times for salvation, while Christ called one hundred and two times for me to abide in Him, to do life in Him. He was and is forevermore constantly and consistently calling me to come to Him for life itself!

All those times I struggled to know if I was saved, that tug on my heart was Jesus calling me to come and discover the life God was offering me through Him, to come and find nourishment for my soul through Him, to come and rest through Him, to come and learn through Him. He hasn't stopped. He is calling you too. He is calling us right now to run to Him for our very lives. Come. Jesus doesn't ask us to come to Him just once, for salvation. Listen to His words in John 6:35: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (NIV). That, my friend, is our 24/7 invitation to fully experience the abundant life by continuing to come to the Father through Christ.

The apostle Paul said it this way: "If, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Romans 5:10, NIV). In other words, now that we're on God's good side through the grace of Jesus, let's get busy exploring what it means to be alive in Him, what it looks like to treasure Him with all our hearts!

## THE MEASURE OF OUR TREASURE

More than a decade ago, I created All Things Southern. It's a website, radio show, and all-around platform where I can be found celebrating the charm and heritage of the South. I chose the egret as my official mascot. I so enjoy watching the long-legged birds stalking our Louisiana lakes that it just seemed fitting to bring them into the family biz. I've since amassed quite a collection of egret pictures and accessories. I have big egrets, little egrets, a metal egret, a porcelain egret, and a fascinating three-foot, artfully carved egret I bought for too much money on a book tour because it called my name! (At least that's what I told The Husband.)

I have a number of other collections that, just between us, aren't nearly as special. Some materialized after I inadvertently mentioned in passing that I liked this or that. See, I made those casual admissions too close to Christmas, and in my big southern family, where everyone is always on the lookout for gift ideas, that kind of thing will buy you a collection every single time! Before you decide I'm an ungrateful soul, let me be quick to assure you that I'm happy to keep these other collections because I appreciate the love behind the purchases. But I keep my egrets because they're special. They're valuable to me because I chose to collect them. Each one holds a memory of where I was or what I was doing when I acquired it, meaning they each have a story that I have *chosen to remember*.

My friend, as surely as I can choose what to collect and value in my home, you and I can choose what we collect and value in our hearts. Choosing All Things Jesus—this is the choice we benefit from making today and tomorrow and the day after that and every day that follows. God's Word repeatedly instructs us to remember God, His name, His words, and His acts.

In Deuteronomy 4:9, Moses said, "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest

they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren” (NKJV).

And again, in Deuteronomy 5:15, God tells the people of Israel to “remember that you were slaves” (NIV). He says the same to those of us on the New Testament side of the Cross. In Ephesians 2:11–12, Paul encouraged believers to remember where God had brought them from and what He had brought them into:

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Oh yes, God wants us to remember Him! One definition of the word *remember* is “to recollect.” It means to collect again by remembering. That’s exactly my point about choosing our treasure. The things we hear about God can be like a forced collection of knickknacks from family and friends. They won’t mean that much unless and until we purposefully hold them in our hearts because we want to store up everything we can learn about Him.

While head knowledge ends up on the shelf gathering dust, real treasure comes from chosen memories of precious firsthand experiences with God. Want even more good news? If we choose to remember Him and collect everything we can discover about Him, God is willing and eager to contribute to our collection on a regular basis as we ask Him to help us value and love Him more. But we’d better be ready to rumble because this is a prayer He loves to answer! It’ll also become a prayer you love to pray.

As for your holy collection, it’s impossible to spend too much time

searching out the mysteries of God's love for us. We can't exhaust the subject because it has no limits. In the third chapter of Ephesians we find these words from Paul:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (verses 14–21)

When we dwell on the breadth, width, length, and height of the love of Jesus, we see it stretching into eternity, and we begin to realize that it's impossible to measure the love of God. But we can have a fine time trying!

Words fail to explain the mystery of God's love and His desire for our company, but the love letter He has written us overflows with this great divine call to friendship, first in the garden and over and over again throughout the Scriptures. Here are just a few examples:

"Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8, NIV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 14, NIV)

God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. (1 Corinthians 1:9, NIV)

Let's RSVP with a yes to His love and a request that He help us learn to treasure it!

### JUST ENOUGH JESUS WILL NEVER BE ENOUGH JESUS

Did I mention that we'll need to make the decision more than once to treasure and respond to God's love? It's vitally important that we learn to repeat this good choice precisely because we so often repeat the wrong ones! We are remedial learners, one and all. If we aren't purposeful about what we choose to value, retain, and treasure, we'll be apt to "taste and see that the LORD is good" today and look for something else to fill our longing hearts tomorrow.

Oh, for we are clearly born yearning. For more of what, we don't always know, but not knowing what our hearts are longing for doesn't keep us from trying to satisfy them with things, experiences, and people. *More* is our mantra from birth forward, and our constant striving after it never fails to deliver. The problem is, it delivers more dissatisfaction instead of the greater contentment we're anticipating. But what if our insatiable desire for more isn't the problem? *What if this unrelenting hunger is exactly what we've been divinely designed to feel, a gift from God to compel us toward the One our souls really crave?*

Did you know that Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us that God put *eternity* in our hearts? Consider the implications. It doesn't say we were placed in eternity; it says eternity was placed in us. Forever and a day can be incredibly hard to fathom. Try to think about eternity. Your mind will bail on you every time, the finite staggering before the infinite—and yet God says He placed this open-ended reality in your heart and mine. Amazing! I suspect we haven't begun to scratch the surface of this mysterious gift of eternity, but whatever else it does, I believe it stirs in all of us an inherent awareness of something more, something greater than our current experience, coupled with an insatiable desire to pursue it.


More than a century ago, a well-known English preacher named Charles Spurgeon said, "It is the incessant turmoil of the world, the constant attraction of earthly things which takes away the soul from Christ."<sup>2</sup> It was true then and it's true today. Nothing and no one on this earth can fully satisfy our human hearts. The pursuit of anything and everything temporal will only alienate us from the Creator who sets our hearts to beating, because God Himself is the more we're looking for! He designed us to reach for eternity, found in relationship with Him.

Perhaps this is why no mortal can adequately explain this life to us. We're dropped somewhere into God's timeline with nothing but the flesh on our bones and a delicious dissatisfaction in our hearts. Even if we should come to faith in Christ, our souls will still die a thousand deaths if we settle for going through the motions of religion. Our restless hearts won't stop longing precisely because there really is more and God wired our hearts to pursue it.

I don't know why you picked up this book. Maybe you've found Jesus to be so sweet you're always on the lookout for more of Him. Maybe you don't honestly want more Jesus but you wish you did. Either way, the very admission that what you're experiencing of Him is not enough is setting you up for



more. I liken it to what happens when an extended family gets together and everyone there wants to hold the new baby.

The very admission that what you're experiencing  
of God is not enough is setting you up for more. 

How many times have you seen one relative after another try to soothe the child while the mother looks on, content for a time to let the scene play out? She may watch without intervening while her loved ones try to give the baby a pacifier, change his diaper, or offer him a bottle. One of these efforts may even distract the child for a while. But tell me, what happens when nothing and no one will satisfy that baby but the presence of his dearly beloved mama? You'd better believe it. Score one for baby. He's about to be united with mom.

Likewise, God reserves His intimacy for those unwilling to settle for anything less. If going to church is enough, if being around others who are passionate about Him is enough, if anything short of realizing His intimate presence for ourselves is enough, that's all we'll ever experience.

God knows that His presence is the greatest thrill this world has to offer, that joy and contentment are found in Him, but still He allows us to resist Him. He simply will not drag us kicking and screaming into His presence—even if we do belong to Him.

Some time back I shared with my newspaper readers a family secret my dear husband and I had been living with for way too long. Once, years ago, my husband, Phil, and I forced our early adolescent children onto the biggest roller coaster they'd ever seen—against their will. I know what you're thinking, and you're right. But if I may explain, we callous brutes had our reasons.

For starters, it was late. We were about to leave the famed theme park

with its highly publicized ride, and we felt sure we'd never be back. It was now or never. Besides, we knew Jessica and Phillip loved roller coasters. They were just a little intimidated. If we could manage to get 'em on board, we knew they'd thank us later. I'm not excusing us, but somehow the two of us convinced ourselves we were doing the right thing.


As hard as it is to admit, Phil and I each took a child and began to drag, pull, and coax them up the long ramp. The poor babies whimpered and begged while we pleaded. We could feel the reproachful looks being thrown at us by the teenage attendants and the other straggling theme parkers, but we knew our kids would love the ride once we got them on it. For what it's worth, we were right. Several wild, fun-packed, squealing moments later, we pulled back into the roller coaster station with those very same kids begging to go again. But by this time, reason had returned and Phil and I were more sheepish than smug. I feel guilty every time I think of that story. I'm also awed every time, awed that a God big enough to compel us to do anything He wishes would restrain Himself from overriding our free will.

Indeed, God placed this desire for more in us so that we might search for Him of our own volition. I've taken to calling it a blessed dissatisfaction. God knows that yielding our lives to Him brings us this life's ultimate pleasure, but unlike me and my man, He's not going to force anyone to go along with His plan.

Sometimes I wish God wasn't such a gentleman. The more I taste of His sweet presence, the more I wish He'd grab everyone else by the arm and pull them onto the ride of their lives (or at least let me manhandle 'em, what with my experience and all), but deep down I know that forced companionship isn't friendship.

Remember my flypaper commitment? When I decided I absolutely had to know Jesus now, on this earth, in this lifetime—instead of living in anticipation of seeing Him in the next—I had no way of knowing that com-

mitment would be the catalyst for a completely new life. I didn't realize that looking and listening for Him in His Word would create in me the sweetest of addictions to His friendship. I was simply ready to admit that what I had wasn't enough. I was soon to discover that at the core of my "not having enough Jesus" problem lay all my previous efforts to have "just enough" Jesus. Oh mercy, the rubber is slapping the road now!

At the core of my "not having enough Jesus" problem lay  
all my previous efforts to have "just enough" Jesus! 

### THE PROBLEM WITH JUST ENOUGH

If, like me, you want to stay fit but have a hard time squeezing those daily workouts into your tight schedule, I have good news. It turns out that fifteen minutes a day is all you need! Oh yes, according to a recent study, there's no need to run six miles a day or sweat to the oldies for a solid hour with Richard "Spandex" Simmons. Growing evidence suggests that you can cut in half the previously recommended thirty minutes of aerobic activity per day and still reap some nice health benefits.

I was as excited to hear this news as the perky little newscaster seemed to be as she shared it. My first thought was, "Yippy Skippy!" Have I mentioned that I live in the Deep South, otherwise known as the Land of Humidity? Dixie Belle, my beloved but spoiled canine, and I feel as if we're going for a swim every time we venture outdoors for our evening walk. Did I like the idea of cutting that walk in half? You betcha!

Then I found myself musing a little deeper into the idea of "just enough." It's been my experience that shooting for the minimum requirement in most anything tends to return minimum results. Yet we are all prone to taking that route by default: *How far do I have to walk to get the benefit? What's the*

*lowest grade I can make on this test—and still pass? How many sick days can I take without jeopardizing my job?*

Aiming for the minimum requirement is one thing when it comes to physical exercise and passing grades (worst-case scenario: you'll be a slightly fleshy, average student), but it's a seriously handicapped starting point for anyone who wants to experience an authentic, abundant life in Jesus Christ. *How long is long enough to pray? How much is enough Bible reading? How much am I expected to give, to forgive, to love? When is enough, enough?* Trying to follow Jesus just enough to get to heaven will never satisfy the eternity in our hearts, the yearning for God that is woven into the very fabric of our souls. And it will never, ever fix our broken want-tos! On the other hand I can promise that when our "just enough" turns into "I can't get enough," we find that He is a gracious plenty.

Allow me to explain exactly what this just-enough mentality looked like earlier in my life. Have you ever heard someone described as being so heavenly minded that she's no earthly good? Believe me when I tell you that there was no danger of my falling into that category. Nada, zilch, no way.

In the years before my low burn turned into a boil, I was trying to follow Christ "just enough"—just enough to stay on His good side, just enough to avoid His wrath, just enough to secure me one of those mansions in glory. As long as I checked off my church attendance and daily devotion, I considered myself free and paid up, so to speak, until the next time. My life in between church and daily devotions I saw as precisely that: *my* life.

My mentality had nothing to do with wanting to stray from the church's teachings and everything to do with buying into the Enemy's twisted but effective deception: I was sure that if I cashed everything in for Christ, my life would be bland and boring. I could not have been more wrong. When I finally stepped out of my "just enough" mind-set, I discovered that an all-out pursuit of Jesus Christ equals a hold-on-to-your-hat adventure!

It's as if He says, "So, you say you're ready to go with Me? Well, darling, let's dance!" Oh, and have we ever danced! We've danced the slow songs while tears ran down my cheeks, and we've shaken a leg on the fast ones as my heart soared. I admit with great regret that I have even sat out a few dances in a huff. But once I decided I absolutely had to know Him, once I gave up my average Christian life for the unknown and put my shaky hand in His, God began to transform my dry, checklist living, and He has never stopped. He joins me in the Scriptures, and He meets me in prayer when I come, not looking to feel good about myself, but longing to know more about Him. He has shown me the secret of abiding in His love by choosing His ways over my own, and He has opened my eyes to the beauty of His body, the church.

We'll talk more in the coming pages about giving up the status quo, what that has looked like in my life, and how He has met me in the search. Right now I want to be clear that it's not just me or your pastor or some third-world missionary who has access to this abundant life in Christ. Father God loves you with a steadfast love. He wants to do life with you. You're not an isolated case, someone who can't find God. He is just as available to you as He has been to any other human being who has ever drawn a breath. This is His promise: "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

Dear one, get thyself into the hunt!



*Dear Lord, I don't want just enough Jesus to get to heaven. I want more! Give me the desire to love You with all my heart, soul, and mind. Help me know the width, depth, length, and height of Christ's love for me. Lead me into the adventure*

*of divine friendship with You. Open my heart wide to understand and experience Your love for me and to increasingly love You more in return. Amen.*



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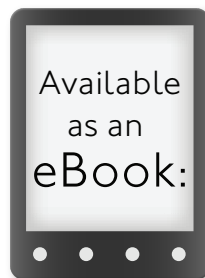
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