“This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you.  (2 Timothy 2:6 NLT)

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**Chapter #1:**

**How I Found My God-given Purpose**

**First Main Point: My Passion**

**Support A: Knowing My Interests and Abilities**

**Example:** I was drawn to the arts and wanted to play the piano, dance, sing, write songs, and draw.

**Example**: Dance was my passion

**Support B: Putting my passion into action.**

**Example:** As a child, I taught a dance to other children

**Example:** I participated in a summer youth talent show where I choreographed a dance for me and other youth to perform.

**Support C: Using my passion, interests, and abilities for kingdom purposes.**

**Example**: My creative skills as a child continued as a young adult when I started choreographing dance pieces for ministry purpose

**Example:** As a child, I started using flags and rifles when I was involved in the O’Quinn Band and Bugle Corp and I started using ministry tools when I started ministering in dance including flags, streamers, tambourines, scarves, mattah sticks, etc.

**Second Main Point: My Pursuits**

**Support A: Pursuing different avenues of dance.**

**Example**: At the age of 16, I took my first ballet class at Malcolm X College

**Example:** As a teenager, I joined the O’Quinn Royal Gladiators Drum and Bugle Corps where I learned to twirl a rifle and to carry and twirl a flag.

**Support B: Pursuing dance in college.**

**Example**: My main focus at college parties was to dance

**Example**: I joined an African dance company called Omnimov, while in college

**Example:** Every semester of college, I took dance classes including ballet, jazz, and modern

**Support C: Pursuing a relationship with God.**

**Example**: I receive Jesus Christ in my life while in college

**Example**: I join Rock church after graduating from college,

**Third Main Point: My Purpose**

**Support A: Accepting the Call**

**Example:** I accepted the call to dance for the Lord

**Example:** I started the ministry of the Lord through God’s leading

ministry

**Support B: Surrendering All**

**Example:** Surrendering my will

**Example:** Sacrificing time to seek God and His Will

**Support C: Serving Through the Dance**

**Example**: Starting and leading Rock Church children and adult dance ministry.

**Example:** Teaching biblical dance classes at Dorolyn Academy School of Music through Divine Expressions Ministry (DEM).

**Example:** Teaching biblical dance classes through Eagles International Training Institute’s (EITI) TEN Network.

**Chapter #2:**

**Created for God’s Purpose**

Eph 2:10 NIV)

**First Main Point**: **We Are Created as part of God’s Plan.**

**Support A: God existed before creation.**

**Support B: God chose man before creation.**

**Support C: Through Jesus, all things were created**.

**Example:**. Colossians 1:16 NIV

**Second Main Point: We Are Created out of God’s love.**

**Support A: God is Love.**

 **Example: “**We love because he first loved us.”

 **Example:** God loves man and desires a relationship with man

**Support B: We are commanded to love God and others.**

**Support B: God created us in His image. (**Gen 1:27 NIV)

**Example:** We have God’s intellect to think, reason, make decisions, invent, create

**Example:** We have a conscience that reflects God’s holiness. We know the difference between evil and good.

**Third Main Point**: **We Are Created to Glorify God**

**Support A: We glorify God through our praise.**

**Support B: We glorify God when we obey His Word**

**Support C: We glorify God by proclaiming His Truth**

**Example**: We proclaim His Truth by sharing the gospel

**Example**: We proclaim His Truth when we testify of who God is and what God has done

**Support D: We glorify God by Taking Charge**

**Example:** We are God’s gift to the earth when we serve by using our gifts, abilities, and talents

**Example:** Reproducing and filling the earth are acts of serving to bring an increase through multiplication and replenishing the earth

**Example:** We lead or take charge as a means of serving not controlling (we “lead with the heart of a king”(Senator Shannon Grove)

**Chapter 3**

**Gifted for God’s Purpose**

**First Main Point: Who Are You?**

**Support A: How do you see yourself?**

 **Example:** Do you accept yourself (abilities, interests, weaknesses, strengths, ? (

**Example:** our identity is in Jesus

**Second Point: God Knows Best**

**Support A: Who is God?** (2 Thess 1:11-12 NIV)

**Example:** How is God described in the Bible?

 **Example:** What has God done or is doing in your life.

**Support B: How Does God See You?**

**Third Point: Beyond the Gift: My Story**

**Chapter #4:**

**Overflowing With God’s Gifts**

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

**First Main Point: Being Called**

 **Example: Called to follow Christ**

 **Example: Called to serve the body of Christ**

**Second Point: God’s Natural Gifts**

**Example:** the potential to learn and develop a skill through practice or training

**Example:** a natural skill or ability to do something without having any experience or training

**Third Point: God’s Fruit of the Spirit**

**Example: “**love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness**,** and self-control

**Example:** character traits that are produced by the Holy Spirit

**Fourth Point: God’s Spiritual Gifts?**

 **Example:** spiritual gifts are to build up the church

 **Example:** Spiritual gifts are effective if they are used for God’s glory

**Fifth Point: The Unexpected Gifts: My Story**

**Chapter #5:**

**Running with God’s Gifts**

*” … let us throw off everything hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” (Hebrews 12:1 NIV)*

**First Main Point: Walking Worthy of Your Calling**

*“So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do.”(1 Thess 1:11 NLT)*

**Support A: Walk Worthy: Seek God**

**Example:** Seek an intimate relationship with god

**Example:** Listening to God

**Example:** Trusting God

**Support B: Walk Worthy: Stay Committed**

**Support C: Walk Worthy: Let Your Light Shine**

**Second Main Point: The Blessings of Gifts**

**Support A: Be Alert**

**Support B: Recognize the Blessing of Using Our Gifts**

**Support C: Recognize the Blessings of Serving Others**

**Third Main Point: Finishing the Race**

**Support A: Stay Connected to the Vision** (Habakkuk 2:2-3 NKJV),

**Support B: Serving With Joy** (James 1:2-4 NIV)

**Support C: Victory in Jesus.** (Hebrews 12:2)

**Introduction**

 While Donald Lawrence and the Tri-City Singers’ song played, "I feel seasons everywhere and I feel blessings in the air”, the dancers made figure eight movements about the stage. You could see the fluidness of their light blue angelic-like garments flaring out like the opening of an umbrella as they made Chaine turns with motions of splendor and beauty. As the song repeatedly said, “The wait is over, walk into your season”, each dancer, one by one, began to walk through a veil represented by two long white sheer flags held up like curtains. After walking through the veil, each dancer would spontaneously dance down the aisle not holding back in their expressions of freedom. As this took place, you could hear an uproar of praise from the audience shouting, "Amen!” Praise the Lord!”, and "Hallelujah!". When the song came to an end, some dancers were walking about and praising God with their hands lifted high and with tears of joy. Other dancers were shouting, “Thank you Jesus!” and “Hallelujah!”

  Taking place at Dorolyn Academy School of Music was not just a dance graduation, but a movement of God. Through the music, lyrics, dance, and praise, an atmosphere was set for the Spirit of God to come in. It wasn’t just that one dance that made that evening so powerful, there was also a series of presentations during the graduation. There was a time of praise and worship singing and dancing. There were children, teenage, and adult dance presentations that included hip-hop, ballet, mime, solo dancing, tambourine, and congregational dancing. Following the dance presentations was an encouraging message from a guest speaker and then a time of impartation where each graduating student was prayed over by either one of the teachers or one of the ministers of the event.

 At Dorolyn’s dance graduation, students were either discovering, developing, or enhancing their gifts in the dance. As these students found kingdom purpose, the audience was able to partake in God’s work. For some people in the audience, that graduation may have been their only exposure to seeing, hearing, and experiencing God. For others, that graduation may have been the encouragement that was needed to strengthen their faith. And then for others, that graduation may have been the invitation needed to ignite a desire to accept Christ into their life. Because students were pursuing and using their gifts, God was able to use that time to touch lives and minister to the people in attendance.

 We are God’s gift to the earth. **As Christians, we are called to serve in God’s kingdom to help meet the n**eeds of the body of Christ and ultimately of the world. Each of us has been given the hands, feet, mouth, heart, and mind of Jesus to continue the work that Jesus began. Our gifts, talents, and abilities are needed to help proclaim God’s truth and to help strengthen and unify the body of Christ. God has given us gifts, talents, and abilities to fulfill His unique purpose for and through our lives. That purpose is not based on age, background, level of education, or even our level of spiritual maturity. That purpose is strictly chosen by God. God sees us, knows us, and most importantly, uniquely designed us for His purpose. God is not looking for us to be spectators but participators in His kingdom. As born-again believers, God is looking for us to be the “salt of the earth”, and “light of the world”. Do you know the purpose for which God has created you? Do you know what gifts, talents, and abilities that God has given you? Are your gifts lying dormant or being used for God? Why are your gifts, talents, and abilities so important?

 This book was written to be a source of inspiration, a source of knowledge, and a source for doing some personal reflections. I’m trusting that as you read this book, God will empower you with renewed hope in this season of your life and help you to embrace your purpose with excellence. I have found that the best way that I can expound on the importance of gifts, callings, and purposes is through sharing my testimonies. In this book, I share my stories of God’s goodness and divine intervention in my life. I share how God called me, gifted me, and gave me kingdom purpose in the ministry of dance for 34 years and still thriving. I also share about finding our purpose and the importance of our gifts. At the end of each chapter is a personal inventory prompted by questions to consider. As you take this journey, may you be encouraged to be the person God has called you to be, to reach the people God has called you to reach, and to go to places God has called you to go. May you choose the path that will enable you to become what God wants you to become so that you are living an abundant life in Him and impacting lives for His glory. One day we want to hear God say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant”.

**Chapter #1**

**How I Found My God-given Purpose**

***My Passion***

 During my childhood, I was very active, playful, and inquisitive. I grew up in a single-parent household, with my mom, two brothers, and two sisters. Each of my siblings had different interests and endeavors. For myself, I loved playing outside, and I also enjoyed the arts. The arts helped me to escape into a world of positivity, joyfulness, and freedom. I found pleasure in singing, playing the violin at my school, writing songs, drawing, and dancing. More than anything else, I was drawn to singing and dancing. From childhood through my teenage years, I sang and danced, however, dancing became my joy and passion. It was one of the activities that I felt confident in doing. I kept abreast of all the latest dance trends. I danced at home, I danced at house parties, I danced in a high school club, and I danced in a youth talent show. I not only enjoyed secular dancing, but I was interested in pursuing all genres of dancing. My dream was to be like Debbie Allen and pursue dance in the performing arts.

***My Pursuits***

 At the age of sixteen, I worked a summer job and paid for my first ballet class at Malcolm X College in Chicago. I had no experience with ballet other than what I saw on television. After the first day of attending the ballet class, I began to question my ability as a dancer. I thought I could be like Debbie Allen, but I realized that I did not have enough experience, skill, knowledge, or exposure to dance in the performing arts. At that time, I did not know ballet terminologies like jetes or ton ‘dues nor was I able to achieve the movements correctly. I did not know how intense a dance class could be until I took my first ballet class at Malcolm X. In my discouragement, I dropped the class and returned to the familiar, which was secular dancing. Surprisingly, I was able to find another pathway to the performing arts by joining a marching band called O’ Quinn Royal Gladiators Drum and Bugle Corps. In the band, I learned how to twirl a rifle and twirl a flag. Marching in a band was an exciting but brief experience for me because the parades only happened during the summer, and I participated for one summer.

 After graduating high school, I decided to attend the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, where I made another attempt at take dance classes. I was not a dance major, but I took dance classes every semester including ballet, jazz, and modern dance. I was determined to continue to pursue my interest in dancing. I also joined a dance company called the Omnimov Dance Company which was an African dance company. Looking at my college transcript, my dean could not determine if I was a mechanical engineering major or a dance major because I kept taking dance classes. Because my dean knew how much I enjoyed dancing, he encouraged me to continue to take dance classes as an outlet from studying.

 During my sophomore year of college, I signed up for a work-study program to help pay for some of my college expenses. I was assigned a job as a server working in the cafeteria of my dorm during the breakfast shift. Every morning as I served food, I was captivated by this one student as he went through the food line. This student was not like the other college students who often looked grumpy, half asleep, and speechless while passing through the food line in the morning. Instead, this student was always pleasant, always smiling, and always saying, “Good Morning” every single day. I could not understand at that time why this student was always so happy and so pleasant. I was not trying to pursue a relationship with this student, but I was simply attracted by the uniqueness of his character. He just did not fit into the norm of what would be considered a typical college student at U of I at that time. In my curiosity, I wanted to know why this student was so different.

 One day I decided to approach and ask this student who I learned was named Michael, why he was always so happy. Michael told me that he had received Jesus Christ into his life. (Special note: When we receive Christ in our life, God’s glory flows through us. The glory will manifest in each believer differently.) Michael asked me if I was interested in learning about Jesus and when I complied, he connected me with a female student who shared more details about who Jesus was. Through that female student, I came to accept Jesus Christ into my life.Because of God’s glory reflected through Michael, I came to know the Lord. (Special note: The Word says, “So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.” (2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT))

 From that point on, my life was transformed. (Special note: The Holy Spirit is doing the work of transforming us into the image of Christ who is the image of God.) I connected with the Christian organization that Michael was part of called the Navigators and I joined their Bible study. As time progressed, I was no longer investing so much time in attending parties, nor feeling the pressure from family to pledge to the Zeta sorority. In fact, after 3 weeks of pledging, I decided to get offline. My focus was to graduate. I continued taking dance classes, but most of my time was dedicated to my studies. By the grace of God, and it was undoubtedly God’s grace, I graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering from U of I.

 Meeting Michael made a difference in my life because he introduced me to the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ. It was through Jesus, that I was able to graduate as a black female in the field of Mechanical engineering. Michael allowed God’s light to shine through him on a college campus which made a big impact in my life. (Special note: We are to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. We are to be living examples of God’s love. We are to make disciples. We are to reflect God’s glory everywhere we go.)

***My Purpose***

*Accepting the Call*

 Before graduating I interned during my last semester at Control Data Corporation in Minnesota. Because of the very dry cold weather in Minnesota, I decided to return to Chicago after graduating from U of I. Desiring to continue my walk with the Lord, I joined a church called Rock of Our Salvation Evangelical Free Church (aka Rock Church) located on the west side of Chicago where the Pastor and founder was Raleigh B. Washington. During my first few years at Rock Church, I was “a jack of all trades, master of none”. I sang in the choir. I was part of the singing ensemble that traveled with my Pastor when he spoke at different churches. I served as a youth leader, I was part of the singles ministry, I was part of a fellowship group, and I was part of a discipleship bible class. After work, I was involved with church activities almost every day of the week. This was great for a while because all the experiences contributed to my spiritual growth.

 Even with my busy schedule, I was still able to take a dance class at a dance studio, now and then. As my faith grew, I began to question whether I should be doing secular or any type of dancing. Although I had invested so much of my life in dancing, I was ready to give it all up to live for God. When I told my worship leader about my intentions to end my pursuit of dancing, he said to me, “My sister, you don’t have to stop dancing, you just need to change partners.”

 That day, I received a word from the Lord through my worship leader. Although I was willing to make the sacrifice, it was a relief to know that I did not have to follow through with it. I believe God was speaking through my worship leader, to let me know that I did not have to stop dancing, but to start dancing for Him. I had no clue what that entailed but I was ready to take the dance in a new direction. I was ready to accept the call to dance for the Lord.

 When I started dancing for the Lord, it was a very humbling experience. I did not know what my next steps would or should be. I didn’t know how to dance in a way that would be pleasing to God. I did not know what type of worship songs to dance to. I could not consult with anyone because I didn’t know of anyone else who danced for the Lord. I didn’t know what type of dance garments to wear. My only question was, “What now God”?

*How Do I Dance for You, Lord?*

 I know you have heard the saying, “God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things”, well that became my story. When I started dancing for the Lord my life began to come full circle. All I could hear God say was come as you are. I started as a soloist ministering in a black leotard and African wrap material. It was a relief to learn that I didn’t have to fake it to make it, but I was able to be accepted regardless of what I had, and what I knew about dance.

 While I sought other dance attire to wear, I also had to address the concern that I did not know how to dance for God. Even with my dance background, I was still bewildered by how to move in a way that would be honoring to the Lord. The only person who could help me was God. The verse in Revelation chapter 3 became very real for me during that time. It says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” (Rev 3:20 NKJV) Many Christians use this verse to introduce someone to how they may enter a relationship with Jesus Christ. It was Jesus speaking through the Apostle John in this verse challenging the church of Sardis to get their hearts right. They were neither hot nor cold but lukewarm in their faith and Jesus was standing at the door of their heart to enter if they let Him in. At that time, that verse spoke to me differently. All I wanted was God in my life. Through that verse, God was reminding me that I was not alone in this new venture in my faith. That verse let me know that I seek God, He will be the one to come in and do the transforming within me. Even though I didn’t know how to dance for the Lord, I was able to come to God in my lack, my awkwardness, and my uncertainty.

 I begin to seek God on how to dance for Him. The first song I ministered to was “What a Mighty God We Serve”. As I practiced movements to the song, I learned that my time of practice was about coming before Him with my offering of praise and worship. My time of practice was then looked upon as a time of dancing in His presence before His throne. As I began to look at dance differently, movements became easier and more fluid. I was lifting my hands and moving my feet to express forms of praise as the song and Holy Spirit would lead me. God was crucifying my flesh. I no longer wanted to dance just for entertainment or to move my body. Now, dancing was about having a heart of worship and giving praise and honor to God through my body.

*Surrendering All*

 When I started dancing for God, I began to realize that this was not just another ministry, but a calling. God had called me and given me purpose and now I stood at the feet of His grace to guide me. In the early stages of my calling, I only knew two scriptures about dance, Psalms 149:3 and Psalms 150:4. I was struggling to drown out all the secular music that resonated within my spirit and overpowered my thoughts. I was in a position where I had to depend on God to deliver me. Not only did I need to depend on God’s guidance and direction, but I also needed to surrender to God. Surrender is about completely giving up my own will so that I can subject my thoughts, ideas, and deeds to the will and teachings of the Father. **1** I needed to surrender my will so that God could do His Will in and through me. If I led the dance ministry according to my will, it would have been more of a performance than an actual ministry. I needed to surrender the secular music that I was listening to and spend more time listening to praise and worship music that I would dance to. I realized that the music had a great impact on my thoughts, attitude, and motives. When I listened to secular music, my flesh reverted to the old way that Sandra used to dance and think. To be dedicated to my calling, I had to let go of secular music so that I could find strength and faith to carry and live out my role as a minister of dance. I also had to surrender the way I choreographed dances. Everything I needed, the right perspective, the vision, the wisdom, the discernment, all had to come from God because I had very little to offer apart from Him.

 When we lead a ministry, we are not an entity. We are co-laboring with God and with church leadership. In my role as the leader of the dance ministry at my church, I was under the submission of God, but I also was under the submission of my Pastor. Submission is about yielding to the authority of others out of reverence for God. I needed to submit to my Pastor and walk in obedience. As I shared my ideas about dance ministry with him, there were times when Pastor Washington told me to wait. An example was when I wanted the dance ministry to do congregational dancing during praise and worship singing. That meant that while the praise team sang, the dancers would dance. My Pastor told me that the church wasn’t ready for that and that it would have to be brought in methodically. Even though I strongly believe that dance was the missing third cord in our time of praise and worship, with the singers and musicians being the first and second cords, I had to trust my Pastor’s judgment. He knew the heart of the church. It took about 2 to 3 years before dance was incorporated during the time of praise and worship.

 Leading the dance ministry also involved making sacrifices. Sacrificing time to study God’s word to help interpret the meaning of the song and determine the vision for the ministry and each choreographed dance. I found a verse to support every vision for the dance that was choreographed. I had to sacrifice time to just be still before the Lord and allow Him to begin to give me movements for the dance. I had to sacrifice relationships so that I could be surrounded by people who wanted to live for God. This simply meant spending less time with people that discouraged my spiritual growth and more time with people that encouraged my spiritual growth.

 From the time I started dancing for the Lord to the place where I am now, God has been faithful. God was faithful in leading me, providing for me, teaching me, and comforting me. God’s faithfulness has helped me to walk in faith through my journey in the dance ministry. Even when I did not expect, God used someone to provide me with my first dance garment. After I saw how dance ministers dress, I started designing some of the garments for the dance ministry. I did not have to worry about anything in the dance because God was making all the provisions.

*Serving Through the Dance*

 As God was working in me and through me, I began to develop a heart to start a children's dance ministry. As God built up my confidence while working with the children, adults became interested in joining the dance ministry. Eventually, I found myself working with a children and adult dance ministry. As the children got older, I started the teenage dance ministry and continued to work with the adults.

 It was God that was drawing people to the ministry. As I trusted God, He started depositing spiritual gifts within me. The spiritual gifts of teaching, mercy, giving, service, administration, and leadership became more evident. God guided me in how to lead a ministry. I had to stay before the Lord because my endeavors involved a covenant relationship with the Lord in which God fulfills all His promises to me. In 2 Chronicles 6:14 it says, “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart” (ESV) No matter how mature, or seasoned or experienced others may have been, God’s power was enabling me to choreograph, lead, teach, pray and serve with compassion and love.

 As the ministry was growing in number, I was growing in my understanding of ministry, in my ability to lead the ministry, in my faith, in my confidence, and in my knowledge of God’s Word. Scripture memory kept me grounded in my walk with God. Numbers 23:19 says, *“God is not a man, so he does not lie.  He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?”* I believe every verse that God gave me and planted in my heart because I took God at His Word. It is in trusting God that I was able to dance as a soloist before an entire congregation. It is in trusting God that I was able to lead different age groups in the dance including children, teenagers, and adults. It was in trusted God that I found favor with my Pastor, who provided me with a budget for the dance ministry.

 As God opened more doors in the ministry of dance, I had more reasons to trust God in every area of my life including trusting Him with my singing. Because I loved to sing, I decided to take voice lessons at Dorolyn Academy School of Music which was founded and directed by Dr. Dorothy Bounds. Through my voice teacher, I was introduced to Rosalyn Acevedo who was not only the founder and director of Divine Expressions Dance Ministry but at that time, she also headed the first dance program at Dorolyn. As I got to know Rosalyn, she invited me to join her dance ministry as an outreach ministry. Through Rosalyn, I acquired a deeper biblical understanding and appreciation for the ministry of dance. As we minister at different churches and events, I was also learning how to flow spontaneously in the dance through the movement of God’s spirit which is called prophetic dancing.

 As my relationship with Rosalyn developed, she invited me to join the first dance class that Divine Expression Ministries (DEM) would be teaching at Dorolyn Academy. I was asked to minister a solo at the first dance graduation which I did. After I graduated from the first dance graduation, Rosalyn asked me to become one of the dance teachers for DEM at Dorolyn Academy. This was a big step for me, but I rose to the occasion. I started out teaching the Biblical foundation of dance class, but eventually, I taught other classes including tambourine dancing, beginner ballet, beginner jazz, congregational and solo dancing, pageantry, and prophetic dancing. These classes were not just about teaching dance but giving perspective on why God is the Lord over the dance. Teaching these classes also encompassed ministering to students as they participated in Dorolyn’s dance program.

 After a couple of years, I was able to encourage members of the dance ministry at my church to take classes at Dorolyn Academy. As some of Rock’s dance ministers grew in their understanding of dance ministry, I was able to pass on some of my leadership of the dance ministries at Rock Church. One of the Rock dance members was able to take over and lead the children’s dance ministry at Rock Church. For about 12 years I taught dance classes at Dorolyn while leading the teenage and adult dance ministries Rock.

 The dance ministry teams at Rock were being used by God to encourage the church through movement with expressions of God’s love, power, hope, and salvation. The classes at Dorolyn Academy were being taught to activate the gifts and help develop students who felt called to the ministry of dance. As God was bringing the increase in these ministries, in number, abilities, and spiritual understanding, my role was to continue to do my part as God did the rest. I had to continue to walk with Him and trust the work that He was doing in the people and the work He was doing in and through my life. I had to walk in humility, in faith, in love, in God’s strength, with confidence, and not be afraid of the new.

 Many times, in the Bible God had to remind Joshua to be strong and courageous. Joshua struggled with courage. When Caleb and Joshua spied out the land of Canaan, which was to be conquered, they returned to the Israelites with a report that the land had powerful people and fortified and large cities. Despite the report, Caleb and Joshua trusted God but the other 10 spies doubted God and were afraid. Because of Israel’s lack of faith and trust in God, every person aged 20 and above died in the wilderness and did not make it to the promised land except Joshua and Caleb. Through God’s strength, Joshua was able to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land, defeat the enemies, conquer battles, and stay true to God. Just like Joshua, I was often challenged in my faith, to remain strong and courageous despite division and rebelliousness in the ministry, attacks of the enemy, and other circumstances. By God’s strength and power, I have been able to overcome every obstacle that presented itself and to lead the dancers to new levels of knowledge and experiences in ministry.

 In 2007, God showed me that my time with Divine Expressions was coming to an end. At the same time, Divine Expressions Ministry's time with Dorolyn had also come to an end. This was a time of shifting for not only me but also for Dorolyn Academy School of Music and DEM. No longer was I a part of DEM which was a large part of my life and my spiritual growth at that time. This was a difficult transition for me because I had been with DEM for almost 13 years and we ministered together, we dined together, we traveled together, we had fun together, we gleaned from each other, and we held each other accountable. No longer would I have my tribe to turn to.

 Without knowing the reason for the transition, I was asked by the founder and director of Dorolyn Academy to oversee the dance program. God was elevating me, once again. It seems that during my times of elevation, God has always placed me in a position of being alone and having no one else to trust but Him. I was not sure if I was ready to lead the dance program at Dorolyn Academy but the director, Dr. Dorothy Bounds, believed in me. It was an honor and a privilege to be asked to serve in that capacity. However, after a year of leading the dance program at Dorolyn Academy, I did not feel that I was moving in the direction that God wanted me to go. So out of obedience to how the Holy Spirit was leading me, I stepped down from heading the dance program at Dorolyn Academy of Music.

 When I left Dorolyn, I felt a void. I had already separated from DEM and now I was leaving my students and my music family. I was thankful that I still had my Rock family, but I still felt stagnate and alone as a minister of dance. After acquiring a deeper biblical understanding of the dance through DEM and Dorolyn, I yearn for more. I wanted more biblical teaching and understanding of the dance. I wanted some accountability and support. I wanted to be around other leaders with kindred spirits who had the same endeavors. I didn’t know where to find what I wanted and needed. As a result, I started to focus on the wrong things and felt sorry for myself. God had already done so much for me through the ministry of dance, but I still struggled with trusting Him at that time. I didn’t feel like I had much more to pour into the dance ministry because I was always giving but now felt depleted. I knew that God was still with me, but I didn’t know what direction to take Rock dance ministry.

 I wasn’t sure what God was saying to me at that time because my hearing was muffled by my insecurities and self-focus. One thing I knew for sure was that I was in a waiting period which may have been self-inflicted. In that waiting period, I decided to branch out and attend dance conferences. I attended a couple of conferences in Chicago and a dance conference in New York during the summer of 2008. That conference in New York was life changing. At that conference, I saw and experienced a whole new perspective on the ministry of dance. The dancers were dressed in what they called priestly garments. The biblical teachings on dance were even more in-depth and thought-provoking than I had ever experienced. God had not left me but was doing 4 new things in my life through the dance once again. In God’s faithfulness, He heard my prayers and need for more and He was now fulfilling my desires to receive more of Him.

 At that conference, I met one of the guest speakers and dance instructor, Dr. Pamela Scott. She was amazing. She connected me to her ministry, the Eagles International Training Institute (EITI), and through that ministry, I was able to continue to soar in the ministry of dance, once again. In 2009, I graduated from an EITI course, Dance Year One, which provided a more in-depth study of the biblical foundation of dance than what I already knew. I was challenged, stretched, and encouraged to personally dig deeper into the Word of God. Through EITI, God brought me to a new level of maturity as a leader of the ministry of dance and gave me a world perspective on the ministry of dance. I continued to take classes through EITI from 2008 through 2016 and now in 2023/24.

 God had taken me from starting a dance ministry in my church to joining the Divine Expression Dance Ministry to teaching biblical dance classes at Dorolyn Academy School of Music and now becoming part of an international ministry, EITI, where I have been able to continue to grow, develop, and serve in His kingdom, locally, nationally, and internationally, serving in places like the British Virgin Islands and Trinidad. I am still a part of EITI, and I am still involved in the ministry of dance because of God’s faithfulness. God’s hand is on my life, and He is using His gift to me for His glory.

 God called me to the ministry of dance. No matter what area you are gifted in, whether it is ushering, preaching, teaching, missionary, drama, hospitality, or whatever the calling may be, remember that it is God who will lead, protect, provide, open and close doors, and bring the increase.

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DIGGING DEEPER INTO YOUR PURPOSE

1. How did you utilize your interests, desires, or passions during your childhood?

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1. Are you using any of your interests, desires, or passions for ministry?

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1. Share briefly how you received Jesus in your life.

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1. How are you presently serving in your church?

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**Chapter 2:**

**Created for God’s Purpose**

*“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10 NIV)*

In Rick Warren’s book, *Purpose Driven Life*, he says, “The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose.”**2** Let’s take a closer look at God’s purpose for creating you and me by considering these three facets: God created you and me because it was part of His plan. God created you and me out of love. God created you and me to glorify Him.

***Created as Part of God’s Plan.***

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)*

 Before God created the world, God already existed. God is not defined by time, space, or matter. God is the Alpha and Omega and knows the beginning and end of all things. God already had a plan for the layout of the design of the world. God already had a plan for you and me even before the foundation of the world. God already knew what day, what time, what place, and what person would bring us into the world. God already had in mind how He wanted you and me to serve on this earth and in the body of Christ before we were ever born. Jeremiah the prophet was called to ministry before he was born. Jeremiah was told by God, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5, NIV) God already had a plan for Jeremiah to be a prophet even before He was born. God knew the unique purpose that He wanted Jeremiah to fulfill.

 Colossians 1:16 says, “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, powers, rulers, or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.” (NIV)

Through Christ, we were predestined to be adopted as God’s sons and daughters and chosen before creation as holy and blameless. God created us knowing that we would sin and would need a Savior to redeem us from our sins. God already had in mind that Jesus would be the sacrificial lamb to redeem the world from sin. Jesus was chosen before the creation of the world to redeem us from our sins and to give us eternal life by sacrificing his precious blood on the cross. We are justified through Christ Jesus. Without Jesus, the creation of man, the love of man, God’s relationship with man, the forgiveness of man, and life eternal would not be possible.

 ***Created Out of God’s Love.***

“God surveyed all he had made and said, ‘I love it!’ For it pleased him greatly…” (Genesis 1:31 TPT

 Before the beginning of creation, there was love between God and Jesus. God’s love existed before time because God is love. God had us in His heart before the creation of the world. He created you and me with love and care and with the intent to have a relationship with us. The Bible refers to love as being patient, kind, not envious (a desire to gain something that is not yours), not boastful, not proud, dishonoring, not self-seeking, not easily angered, keeping no record of wrongs, not delighting in evil, and never failing but rejoicing with the truth, always protecting, always trusting, always hoping, and always persevering, as stated in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NIV). That love refers to who God is to us and what we should be to others. The Word is saying that God is patient and God is kind and God is not envy nor boastful and so forth. God’s love extends to all man. Just as God loves us, He wants us to love Him and love others. Love is so important to God that He has given us two great commandments. The first is “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” The second is “Love your neighbor as yourself”. We are to love others just as much as we love ourselves. How we show love to others is demonstrated in our willingness to serve others.

 On the last day of creation, God formed Adam from dust and breathed life into his body. God, who is spirit (John 4:24), gave Adam a “material body and an immaterial soul/spirit”**3**. God loved us so much that He created the immaterial part of man to resemble Him, mentally, morally, and socially. We were created to be like Him in our personalities, our emotions, and our intellect. God did not create us as robots but to be functional. We have God’s intellect to do such things as think, reason, make decisions, invent, and create. As believers, we have the mind of Christ. We have a conscience that reflects God’s holiness. We know the difference between evil and good. We were created in righteousness with the potential to be patient, kind, humble, respectful, compassionate, honest, forgiving, and empathetic. When we perform these deeds through our strength, they can be conditional or prideful but when they are done through God’s love, then God can get the glory. God also created us with the intent to fellowship with others reflecting His love as well as the nature of oneness just as He is one with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

***Created to Glorify God.***

*Glorify God Through Praise*

 The next time that you can enjoy the outdoors, look around. Take note of the radiant sun, the blue skies, the swaying of the tree branches, and the blooming flowers. Listen to the chirping birds and feel the caress of the gentle fresh wind as it touches your face. What you are experiencing is God through nature. You are experiencing the sights and sounds of God through His creations. God’s magnificence and splendor are being displayed as nature functions in the way that God purposed it to function. God created all things to glorify Him or in other words, to honor Him with praise, admiration, or worship. When we see God’s glory in nature, we see how amazing and wonderful God is. We are seeing His power and majestic beauty.

 If God is glorified in nature, how much more is He glorified through mankind? Our responsibility as God’s children is to glorify God through praise and worship. Psalms 15:6 says, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.” (NIV) Jesus told the Pharisees that if the people had kept quiet, he would have gotten the stones to praise him. (Luke 19:36 -40) There is also a verse in the bible that expresses that God inhabits the praises of His people. Whether we praise God in words, in song, in dance, by playing an instrument, by painting, through poetry or writing, by lifting our hands, or by some other means, when we come together in our praise, God's presence will be manifested. This is when the glory of God will fall. This is when the miracles, signs, and wonders can be manifested. This could entail a time of deliverance, revival, or restoration bringing us to a place where we can hear God and God can work through us to renew our minds and our bodies. God desires to commune with us and is seeking those who will praise and worship Him in spirit and truth as stated in John 4:23 -24.

*Glorify God by Obeying His Word*

 We also glorify God when we obey His word. Obedience to God’s word is the way we grow personally and the way we draw closer to God. In 1 John 2:5, it says, “But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this, we know that we are in Him” (ESV). “God wants us to hear His Word, to know His Word, to trust His Word, and to keep His Word…. We can only keep His Word if we trust His Word. We can only trust His Word if we hear His Word, for faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. And we can only keep His Word if we hear, know, and believe in our hearts ALL that God has said in and through His Holy Word.”**4**

*Glorify God by Proclaiming His Truth*

God has not only given us the eyes to see His magnificence but also the words to proclaim His Truth. “In the Bible, “proclaim” signifies making a public announcement or sharing the good news.” **15** We are all called to proclaim to others God’s Truth about sin, love, judgment, repentance, and salvation. When we talk about our faith to others, we are proclaiming God’s Truth. It is not only in spoken word but the songs that are sung or danced to, proclaim the attributes and power of God. We use our gifts in such a way that God’s Truth is being proclaimed through us. Luke 4: 18, it says “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,” (NIV).

 We are to be an example of Christ through how we live our lives and in how we serve others. We are the temple of God and God’s Holy Spirit dwells inside of us. No matter where we go, we are carrying His glory.

*Glorify God by Taking Charge*

 When God blessed Adam and Eve, and said to them in Genesis 1:28, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it”, He was giving them a command and a responsibility to rule over the earth. He was telling them to oversee and manage the earth’s resources. God was giving them the authority to take control of, to exercise power over, and to dominate the earth. God has called us to lead or take charge. Man is to serve as the king of the earth. What do kings do? They lead. They rule. They govern. They make life-changing decisions. They are problem solvers, providers, overseers, and inventors, as examples. They hold responsibility for the lives of others. I once heard a politician say,“Rule with a servant's heart” and “Lead with the heart of a king”.I also heard someone say that “leaders are servants”.

 The body of Christ is who will carry out God’s work in the world. God has given us gifts so that we can serve in the body and demonstrate the love of Christ. In the body of Christ, we serve with compassion and out of love. Every purpose that we fulfill in the body of Christ should be an act of love. Serving should not be a chore but a privilege. Serving should not be done out of guilt or obligation but cheerfully. Serving is about utilizing our gifts, talents, and abilities to glorify God. Using our gifts is God’s love in action. Serving is about utilizing our gifts, talents, and abilities to help unify and strengthen the body of Christ. We are giving from what God has given us. Nothing is ours; everything about us belongs to God. What we accomplish on earth is what we put into action and what God allows us to accomplish.

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DIGGING DEEPER INTO YOUR PURPOSE

1. How has God shown His love to you?

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1. In what ways do you show love to others?

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1. In what ways do you bring glory to God?

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**Chapter 3:**

***Gifted for God’s Purpose***

 *“Your Kingdom purpose is the service God has gifted you to perform, that has eternal value. More specifically, your Kingdom purpose is that thing you do, that you do not do – but that God does through you.”* **5**

 Every time I receive a gift that is wrapped in festive paper and sealed with a beautiful ribbon or bow, Ithink about the time, the love, and the thoughtfulness of the person who prepared that gift for me. Even before I open the gift, my heart is emotionally grateful for the generosity shown. God has created each of us as a special gift to the earth. We are beautifully designed and wrapped in the skin that God chose for us. We are all wrapped differently which makes each of us so unique as a person and in God’s eyes. The ribbon or bow is that stamp of approval sealing that gift with the final touch of beauty. God has sealed us with the touch of His Holy Spirit which serves as the final touch of beauty to our packaging.

 Sometimes when I open a gift, I don’t want to throw the wrapping paper or ribbon away because the design of the paper and the color of the ribbon are so attractive to me. As God’s gift, we cannot throw ourselves away by forgetting who we are. We have mirrors to look at and remind us of the beautiful wrapping God has placed us in. When we look in the mirror, we are looking at God’s beautiful creation. How God defines beauty is not how the world defines beauty because everything God created was very pleasing to Him. How do you see yourself? Are you comfortable with who you are? Have you considered how God sees you?

**Who Are You?**

 Our identity answers the question “Who are you?” Our identity stems from what is inside of us. According to *Psychology Today*, “Identity encompasses the values people hold, which dictate the choices they make. An identity contains multiple roles—such as a mother, teacher, and U.S. citizen—and each role holds meaning and expectations that are internalized into one’s identity. Identity continues to evolve over the course of an individual’s life.” **6** *Psychology Today* went on to discuss that your identity is formed by “Discovering and developing one’s potential, choosing one’s purpose in life, and finding opportunities to exercise that potential and purpose. Identity is also influenced by parents and peers during childhood and experimentation in adolescence”.

 When we receive Jesus Christ in our lives, our identity is redefined by who we are in Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (NLT) As we get to know who Christ is, we get to know who we are. How Christ lived his life on earth served as a template for Christians to follow. When we surrender our life to Christ, we start talking, acting, and thinking like Christ which pleases God and shows the true us.

 As we enter into God’s presence, we are being taken through cycles of cleansing from prewash to wash to pre-rinse to rinse where our identity is evolving. God is washing away all the dirty lies that the enemy has placed in our hearts and minds since childhood and before we accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior. God is making us new, peeling off the self that was contaminated by the stains of the world and giving us beauty instead of ashes, joy instead of mourning, strength instead of fear, wholeness instead of brokenness, praise instead of hopelessness, and peace instead of anxiety.

 As we accept God’s truths by faith, we are taking back the power and identity that the enemy stole from us. Psalms 139 speaks about God creating our inmost being and that we were fearfully and wonderfully made. 1 Peter 2:9 says that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s special possession. 1 Corinthians 6:19 reminds us that our bodies are the temples upon which God’s Holy Spirit dwells. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says we are ambassadors of Christ. John 1:12 states that we are children of God and Romans 8:1 says that we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. Ephesians 1:4 calls us holy and blameless. Psalms 17:8 says that we are the apple of God’s eye. We may not realize how valued, how precious, and how important we are to God but God knows. God is doing the work to shape us into the person He designed us to be. We cannot allow others to define who we are, but we must believe and accept our profile that has been laid out in God’s Word. Believing and accepting who we are and how God has created us and the gifts that God has given us, will allow us to continue to soar in everything God has purposed for us to do.

**God Knows Best**

 As far back as the 1300s, gifts were wrapped in fabric to symbolize protection and good luck. When the wise men from the East brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to honor the birth of baby Jesus they didn’t just plop the gifts on the ground, but they offered the gifts in treasured chests as a protective covering. Traditionally, we often placed our gifts in boxes to protect the gift from getting damaged. God is the covering and protection of us, His special gift. God not only protects us; his gift, but He also protects the gifts that He has given us. In addition, He protects our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being through the comfort of His Word and His power at work in our lives. He heals and strengthens our bodies. He renews our minds. He gives us a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone. He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit to teach us, guide us, comfort us, and reveal to us. So, who is God?

*Who is God?*

 God’s nature and character can be found in the Bible. When we come to know God for ourselves, we will not only see him as our protector but also as our Father, our physician, our friend, our peace, our comforter, and everything we need to sustain us for eternity. In addition to these qualities, God is also characterized in scripture as being good, gracious, merciful, faithful, holy, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, just, perfect, and unchanging. Depending on the context in the Bible, God is also labeled by different names such as the “Sovereign Lord”, “The Living God”, the “Everlasting God”, Adonai which means Lord Master, Elohim, which means The Creator, El Shaddai which means God Almighty and Jehovah-Jireh which means The Lord, our Provider. Without knowing God for ourselves, we would not be able to acknowledge Him in the way He is being described. When we can relate to God by knowing His character and His nature, we then can embrace Him as the lover of our soul, the father to the fatherless, and the friend to the friendless. When we come to know God, we become more connected in seeing the way He sees, hearing the way He hears, and speaking the way He would want us to speak. We become familiar with the heart of God.

How Does God See Us?

 Not only should we know who God is, but we should know how God sees us. God knows us better than we know ourselves. Psalms 139 says that God knows our thoughts and our ways. There is nothing about us that is hidden from Him. Luke 12:6 says that there is no sparrow that God has forgotten. If God has not forgotten about the sparrow, He has not forgotten about you. Although we may not be able to tell one sparrow from the next, God knows each one intimately and provides for them all. How much more consideration does God give to each of us? We are so valuable to God that He even knows the number of strands of hair on our heads. We are God’s dearly loved children, and He loves us as a perfect Father. “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1 NIV) God has crowned us with glory and honor. We are His special possession.

 God sees us differently from how we see ourselves. To God, we are precious and irreplaceable. John 15:15 says, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” (ESV)

God sees us through the lens of His Son, Jesus, who died on the cross for us, who became our sin offering and our burnt offering. As our sin offering, Jesus took on our sins so that His righteousness was transferred to us. As our burnt offering, Jesus’ righteousness, excellence, beauty, and perfection have been transferred to us. All that Jesus is before God, we become when we receive Him as our Lord and Savior. **7**

 Undoubtedly, we are very valuable to God. When we discredit ourselves, we are discrediting the one who created us. We are speaking against everything God proclaims us to be. When we doubt our abilities, we are saying we have no faith in what God can do through us. When we fail to use our gifts, we are saying what God has given us is not important. While we are looking and seeing all of our human limitations, God is looking and seeing all the potential and greatness that He has put in us. He is waiting on us, His Beloved, to “Be” who He has blessed us to “Be” through His love.

***Beyond the Gift***

*My Testimony*

 Do you remember the encounter that Jesus, who was a Jew, had with the Samaritan woman? Traveling from Jerusalem to Galilee, Jesus and His disciples took a shorter route through Samaria. While the disciples were at the village of Sychar to purchase food, Jesus conversed with a Samaritan woman who had come to Jacob’s Well to draw water. Jesus asked her for a drink. The woman questioned why Jesus would ask her for a drink because she was a social outcast. Jesus was breaking three Jewish laws by speaking to the woman, associating with a Samaritan, and asking the woman for a drink of water. Jesus offered the Samaritan woman the gift of salvation because He accepted her and was more concerned about her soul than the Jewish laws. (John 4:1-26)

 To reach people with the love of Christ, we need to go where the people are. Some people may never set foot inside the door of a church. Whether we are in the church or outside the church, our mission is to serve all people. God wants to reach all people working through the gifts, talents, and abilities that He has given us. I was called by God to minister in dance to help encourage the body of Christ and reach people in ways that only the ministry of dance can do. While working in the marketplace, I also received another call from God. That call was to make a difference in young people's lives through a teaching career. Here is my story of how I changed careers and accepted the call to become a high school math teacher:

 Math has always been my favorite and easiest subject in elementary and high school. Even though I enjoyed math, I did not enjoy my math classes. My math teachers made math seem difficult and boring. At the age of fourteen, I remember saying that I would never become a teacher because that type of career did not seem appealing. My interest in math and science led to me graduating with a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Illinois in Champaign, Urbana. According to statistics, this accomplishment was and still is not common for an African American female growing up in a single-parent home and under-resourced community. Nonetheless, God made it possible. Against all odds, God blessed me with a career in Mechanical engineering and exposed me to certain people, places, and things that I had never experienced before. Overall, I was very grateful for every door God had opened for me. At the same time, I had to deal with every struggle that came with being an African American female in a male-dominated career.

 It was God who had blessed me with a church home, a ministry in dance, singing in the choir, and my role as one of the church youth leaders. Now, I was being called to a career that entailed a historical struggle that has haunted black people and women for many decades. The struggle for equality. What I did not realize at that time was that God was working out the plans He had for my life and these plans were far greater than any struggle that I experienced on my job. Although I felt like a “square peg in a round hole” in the corporate world, God was using that experience to build my character and prepare me for what was to come. God was also using me to be a light in a work environment that consisted of men with narcissistic behavior. If I was able to reach one person, through sharing my faith, the experience would be worth it.

 Some of my coworkers saw that I was different because I was humble and helpful rather than prideful and competitive. Some of my coworkers started asking me if I ever considered teaching. My coworkers were seeing an ability in me that I did not see in myself. I not only received comments about teaching from my coworkers, but friends and church members were also complimenting me on being a good teacher or trainer. As I kept receiving encouraging words of my abilities in teaching and training, I began to question what God was trying to say to me through these people. I felt it was strange that different people had similar perceptions of me.

 Unexpectedly, I received an email from Chicago Public Schools (CPS) around the same time that I was receiving various comments from people about pursuing teaching and being a good trainer. CPS offered me an opportunity to change careers through a program called Teachers for Chicago. To this day, I do not know how CPS received my email address or knew of me. In the email that CPS sent to me, I was told that my tuition would be paid in full to obtain a master's degree in education if I simultaneously taught at a CPS school. I decided to pursue the offer and I was able to successfully pass the interviewing process and successfully complete the certification process to become a teacher. Unlike most of the candidates, I was also given the privilege to choose the high school where I wanted to teach. Without a doubt, I knew that God had made all what I was experiencing possible. For two years, I took evening classes at St. Xavier University in the evening, and I taught math during the day at John F. Kennedy High School without having any prior teaching experience.

 Why would God introduce me to a new career when I never had any intentions of becoming a math teacher? Even though that was not my goal, my dream, or my desire, I realized God had a bigger plan in mind that targeted reaching the many students who would one day sit in my math class. Just like Jesus and the disciples could have continued their travel from Jerusalem to Galilee in the direction they were going, Jesus changed course for the sake of the Samaritan. Jesus knew that He would be the only one to reach her and let her know that she was loved, accepted, forgiven, and had the chance to receive eternal life with the Father. Even though I did not know what I was walking into, God knew of the many students who were hurting, living in abusive homes, dealing with low esteem, mental illnesses, and feeling unloved. God had already chosen me to be one of the vessels that would make an impact on the lives of young people for the cause of Christ.

 Even though some people thought that I was insane to make a drastic career change, I never looked back or had regrets about my decision because it was all for His glory. Once again, God made the impossible become possible. Not only has God blessed me with many years of teaching, but He allowed me to continue to be elevated in my new career with blessings on top of blessings. Through another CPS program, I was given another opportunity to receive a second master’s degree in school leadership at Concordia University. This degree took one year and allowed me to be considered for an assistant principal or principal position. Not only was I blessed with some of the professors coming to my high school in the evening to teach their courses rather than having to travel to Concordia University, I was also able to take the classes with a cohort group of teachers at my high school which made the endeavor more exciting and attainable.

 I decided not to pursue the assistant principalship or the principalship. Instead, God allowed me to use my second master’s to serve for one year as an Instructional Support Leader in Math for 25 elementary schools. I mentored principals and assistant principals and coached math teachers. After that experience, I went on to become a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) Specialist for an elementary school for 5 years and a STEAM ((Science, Technology, Engineering, Art & Math) Specialist for a high school for 4 years incorporating my background and experience in Mechanical Engineering to foster the ideas and activities that I would implement for the school and teaching math classes as needed.

 I am thankful that God uses people, experiences, and places to speak into our lives. It has been a blessing to see the ways God has moved in my life using my gifts to be a blessing to others. God has shown me that I have a purpose. God has reminded me all the gifts He gives us are important. What God has done for me, He wants to do the same, if not more, for you. Don’t take for granted your gifts, or the transitions that may be happening in your life. God may be repositioning you for a greater purpose. Be sensitive to how God is speaking into your life because you do not want to miss out on how God is trying to bless you and bless others through you. There are times you will need to simply say yes and trust God for what will come next. It wasn’t until I said yes to accepting Christ into my life that I was able to understand His will for me. It wasn’t until I said yes to the calling to dance for Him, that the dance ministry began to take form and prosper. When I said yes to the call, I was telling God that I was willing to be used by Him according to the purpose and plan He has for me. It is your choice to say yes to God’s Will for your life, but when you do, your life will never be the same.

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DIGGING DEEPER INTO YOUR PURPOSE

1. How do you see yourself?

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1. Are you comfortable with who you are? Why or why not?

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1. How does God see you?

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1. What transitions have you experienced where God may have been requiring you to make a shift?

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**Chapter #4:**

**Overflowing With God’s Gifts**

 All gifts are functional and serve a purpose. The purpose goes beyond meeting our personal needs but includes meeting the needs of others. When we serve people, we are indirectly serving God. Because all that we do brings glory to His name. We are fulfilling an assignment that God has called us to do while on this earth. God may give some of us similar gifts but each of us fulfills our use our gifts in unique ways based on the relationship we have with our Heavenly Father.

***Being Called?***

 In Matthews 22:14, Jesus says, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” (ESV) This verse summarized the parable about a king who invited many people to attend his son’s wedding banquet, but no one showed up. People either ignored the invitation, refused the invitation, or were preoccupied with doing their own thing. The king decided that those people that he invited did not deserve to attend the wedding banquet, so invitations were given out again, and this time to anyone that the king’s servants met on the streets. These people accepted and were guests at the wedding.

 Being “called” is about being invited. We are first called or invited to a relationship with Jesus by becoming a disciple and a follower of Jesus. We may receive the calling through someone sharing the gospel, through reading the Bible, through watching someone’s life, through some type of ministry, or by some other means. The call to follow Jesus goes out to all people, of different backgrounds, talents, and circumstances. The ones who wholeheartedly decide to accept the calling or invitation and who then bear fruit are considered the chosen meaning they have said “yes” to the calling and yes to living their lives for Jesus.

 In addition to being called into a relationship with Him, God calls us into relationships with others inviting us into families, communities, and churches. God also calls us to roles, vocations, or professions. Throughout our lives, we may have many callings and one of our callings is to join God in His work in the kingdom. God is doing the calling because He knows the needs of people. “Calling is really about God saying, ‘I have a plan and it involves you and it involves us. God guides us, walks with us, and enables us to do what He calls us to do.” **8** God has given us gifts so that we can do whatever He is calling us to do.

 Just as Christ sacrificed His life for others, we too must sacrifice our lives to help bring those who don’t know Jesus to His saving grace. Through our calling, God may be able to reach the unreachable. People who have a different perspective, vision, or angle on life may not be attracted to the church, per se, but may be attracted to you or to how you serve in using your gifts inside and outside the church. People will be able to see God’s love in action.

***God’s Natural Gifts?***

 When I think of a gift, I think of something willingly given without expecting anything in return. God has freely given us many gifts. Through Jesus Christ, we have received His gift of God’s unconditional love, His gift of salvation, His gift of eternal life, His gift of grace and mercy, and the list goes on. In addition to these gifts, God has also given all mankind gifts to enable us to function in our humanness, to partake in pleasure, and to serve others. God has given us natural gifts and talents, the fruit of the Spirit, and spiritual gifts.

 When I open a gift, I find treasure. No matter what is in the box, it is valuable to me because someone took the time to make or purchase it for me. God took the time to choose what gift he would put inside each of us. Our gifts are not a coincidence but thoughtfully chosen by our Father according to His plan and will for life. Some gifts we receive come to us because of the faith we have in Him.

 When we open our gifts, it is about being transparent with our Father as He is with us. It is about thanking God for the gifts and asking Him how He wants us to use our gifts. It is also about recognizing that every gift that God has given has equal value to Him and should be equally valued by us.

 God has given us natural gifts and talents that we have from birth. Natural gifts include the ability to see, hear, speak, walk, and talk but also include having the aptitude to do something such as teach or work with your hands, or manage people. Aptitude means that you have the but have the aptitude to work hard, to play a certain sport, or to learn a language. A talent is a natural skill or ability to do something without having any experience or training. Some people have natural talents for singing, dancing, public speaking, and writing poetry. Just to give you a few examples. God does use our talents and our skills and abilities to serve Him whether it is in our homes, schools, churches, or the marketplace. However, there may be one or two skills, abilities, or talents that are tied to your purpose.

***God’s Fruit of the Spirit?***

 Jesus said in John 14:26, ‘But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (NIV). It is a blessing to know that when we receive Christ in our lives, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. God has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit as our Helper, helping us to become more like Jesus Christ and helping us in every other aspect of our life. When we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, we always have the presence of God with us because He dwells inside of us. The Word of God tells us that the Holy Spirit is our comforter, our counselor, and our peace. The Holy Spirit empowers us. We are given strength or power in our innermost being through the Holy Spirit working in us. It is through the Holy Spirit we can understand who God is and understand how God’s word applies to our life. The Holy Spirit empowers us to glorify God and proclaim His Truth. The Holy Spirit not only empowers us but also purifies us, reveals us, and unities us. **9**

 When we use our gifts to serve others, we operate through the Holy Spirit. **“The work of the Holy Spirit is to manifest the active presence of God in the world, and especially in the church.” 10 In whatever capacity that we serve in God’s kingdom, we want people to see Jesus in us. We want people to see Jesus’s power working in our weakness. We want people to see His grace covering our sins. We want people to see the fruit of the Spirit flowing and evident in our lives. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is “**love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness**,** and self-control” (NIV). The Fruit of the Spirit are character traits that are produced by the Holy Spirit and should become evident in the lives of believers, as we live out our faith in God.

***God’s Spiritual Gifts?***

 “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12: 4-7 (NIV))

 Every believer or follower of Christ has received a spiritual gift from God to serve the body of Christ. Every spiritual gift serves a purpose and displays who God is. God has called us and equipped us with spiritual gifts so that we take an active role in the kingdom. A “Spiritual gift is a unique gift given by God through his Holy Spirit to believers in Jesus for the purpose of bringing glory to Him and strengthening His church.” **11** In the New Testament, the phrase spiritual gift is rooted in two words, “God’s grace and His Holy Spirit”. Paul and Peter referred to spiritual gifts as “charismata” which means the grace of God or “Pneumatikos” in Greek, meaning of or relating to the Spirit. **12**With a spiritual gift, we have a God-given ability to serve God by serving the church. We serve out of love and not out of guilt or obligation. Our spiritual gift is recognized and affirmed by the church. In essence, people in your local church know your spiritual gift(s) and can attest to how they are edified by your spiritual gift(s). In 1 Peter 4, we find that spiritual gifts were placed into two categories, speaking, and serving.Spiritual gifts are effective if they are used for God’s glory and not our own.

The spiritual gifts are divided into speaking and serving gifts and include the following:

Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor, Teacher, Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, Faith, Gifts of Healing, Effecting of Miracles, Prophecy, Distinguishing of Spirits, Speaking in Tongues. Interpretation of Tongues, Serving, Teaching, Encouragement (or Exhortation), Giving, Leadership, Mercy, Helps, and Administration (Leadership). **13** A description of each spiritual gift can be found at the end of this book in the section titled, “Definitions”.

*The Unexpected Gifts*

My Story

 Just like many, I wanted to know what my spiritual gifts were. I have taken spiritual gift assessments and I have found that our gifts can change as God brings us through different seasons in our lives. I also found that when God calls you to a ministry, He will equip you with the gifts needed to function effectively in that ministry. While serving in the ministry of dance, God equipped me with the gift of dancing, teaching, administration, serving, helping, giving, encouragement, mercy, and leadership. Unexpectantly, I was also blessed with the spiritual gifts of prophecy and the gift of speaking in tongues.

When I started flowing in the prophetic dance, I would sense God directing me in movement. Prophecy is “the ability to speak forth a message from God’s Word that edifies, exhorts, and/or comforts the body”**13** . This, as well as having the experiences of being prophesied over, made me more sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and more sensitive to hearing God speak in the spirit. At one time, my church had a breakthrough ministry, under the direction of Pastor Lincoln Washington one of my former pastors. During his pastoral leadership, Pastor Lincoln taught the leaders that was interested, in how to minister to people when they came to the altar for prayer. When Pastor Lincoln gave an altar call towards the end of the service, as the spirit was moving in the sanctuary, I would join the other leaders in laying hands and praying for those who would come to the altar. At times, God would give me a prophetic word to speak over some of the people. These times of prophecy would come when the spirit of God was moving in the atmosphere.

 Another gift that was given to me was “speaking in tongues” also known in some Christian circles as “speaking in a heavenly language”. Speaking in tongues refers to “the supernatural ability to speak an unlearned language as a form of prayer or communication with God.” **13** I remember taking a class at another church that taught on the topic of prayer. During the last session of that class, they wanted us to speak in tongues. At that time, I did not know how to speak in tongues, and I did not want anyone to pressure me into speaking in tongues, so I left the class. In my bewilderment, I decided to study the scripture that spoke about speaking in tongues when I returned home from the class. I also prayed and said to God that if He wants me to speak in tongues, then He will have to do it because I am not going to try to make myself do it.

 A month later, my church had a women’s retreat. When the evening service at the retreat ended, a few of us remained with the guest speaker to lay hands and travail in prayer over one of the young ladies who was dealing with a lot of spiritual warfare in her life. While praying over her, I suddenly found myself starting to speak in tongues. Beyond my control, my speaking in tongues was occurring and flowing, and I could not stop the process even if I tried. God was in control. That was a God moment that I will never forget. Amazingly, God answered my prayers and demonstrated His faithfulness, His provisions, and His power working in me to enable me to speak in an unknown language. Since that time, I have continued to speak in tongues, and I know that it is God who enabled me and not man.

 Frankie Mazzapica, who also speaks in tongue, says that when you speak in tongues you can pray as well as fight in prayer for multiple things in one sentence, versus praying with understanding one by one for each concern. From my experience of speaking in tongues, I find that I am praying about things in the spirit that is beyond the depth of my thoughts, imaginations or understanding. I feel blessed to speak in tongues because it reinforces my faith, with a constant reminder of God’s presence with me and that God is constantly at work in my life. It is when I am praying at home and start speaking in tongues that I am clearer about what things I should pray for with understanding. When I pray over people at the altar, that is often when the speaking in tongues and prophecy will also occur.

 There is a time for speaking in tongues in public and speaking in tongues in private. When speaking in tongues is done in private, it is for the edification of our own soul. When it is done in public, it is because there is someone there with the gift interpretation of tongue or it is a testimony to God’s power and one of the manifestations of God.

 God has distributed spiritual gifts to all believers. It is God’s plan for us to function together, grow in faith, grow in love, grow in character, be unified in purpose with one heart and one mind that is centered on Jesus, and on using our spiritual gifts for His glory. When we are alone and not using our gift in the body of Christ, the church is incomplete and divided. When we are using our gifts in the body, and working together, then we are whole as a church.

 To determine which gifts God has given you will involve several considerations. First, seek God in prayer and ask Him to give you wisdom, understanding, and clarity to help you identify your spiritual gifts. God will be your greatest revealer. You can also take a spiritual gift assessment inventory. There are two resources provided in the back of this book. One of the resources, *Finding Your Spiritual Gifts*, is the bestselling spiritual gift inventory pamphlet which can be purchased on amazon.com. The other resource is a spiritual gift online assessment that can be taken at your leisure. You also may have Christians in your life who know you well and can help you identify some of your spiritual gifts. You will have to determine the best assessment resource for you. Some of your gifts will be revealed to you by God as you voluntarily serve in the body of Christ.

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DIGGING DEEPER INTO YOUR PURPOSE

1. Has God called you to a particular ministry? How do you know?

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1. What natural abilities or talents do you possess?

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1. What spiritual gift(s) has God given you?

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1. Have you taken a spiritual gift assessment? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?
2. If so, what spiritual gift(s) resulted from taking the gift assessment?

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1. Are you using any of your natural or spiritual gifts for the kingdom? Why or Why not?

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**Chapter #5**

**Running With Your God-given Gifts**

 *“Therefore*, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, *let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith…” (Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV))*

 Being a fan of the game of tennis, I enjoyed watching the movie, titled, “Never Give Up”. This movie was based on true events, about Brad Minns who became gifted as a professional deaf tennis player. Brad had many reasons to give up on himself, his education, and on pursuing his dreams, but he did not. At the age of three, Brad was diagnosed with 80 to 90 percent loss of hearing after experiencing an extremely high fever. Despite the challenges and the rejection that he experienced throughout his life; He kept moving forward. At the age of twenty, Brad became the number one deaf tennis player in the nation after winning the 1985 Men’s Single Tennis Finals for the deaf. The odds of Brad winning were against him. Yet, Brad held the title of number one deaf tennis player in the nation for five consecutive years.

 It was Brad’s faith and trust in God that enabled him to win and become the number one deaf tennis player in the nation. Through Brad, God was showing the world that what seems impossible is possible when you believe in Him. God enabled Brad to become a very skilled tennis player because he persevered through all of life's challenges. If Brad had given up on what God had gifted and proposed for him to do, he would not have reached his destiny. Today, Brad serves as a tennis professional sharing his testimony of living his life for Christ with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes group and as a personal trainer helping others to achieve their dreams. **14**

***Walking Worthy of Your Calling***

*“So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do.” (1 Thess 1:11 NLT)*

Walk Worthy: Stay Committed

 This endearing movie is a great example of why we persevere in our God-given purpose. The plan God has for our lives is not just about us, but it is always designed to impact the lives of others. So, we don’t stop when situations become difficult or seem impossible because God has called us to be overcomers. We must believe that God can do the impossible for us and through us. No matter what challenges we may face, we must stay in the race and not give up on ourselves, God, or His purpose for our lives. There are times when the enemy will try to get us off track by infiltrating our hearts and minds with doubt, insecurities, pride, criticism, and judgment. The enemy wants to keep us in bondage so that we don’t receive God’s blessing or be a blessing to others. The enemy will whisper in our ears that we are not eloquent enough to be speaking before a group of people, or we don’t have enough spiritual knowledge to teach that group or there is someone else better suited to lead that ministry. We can’t allow the enemy, people's issues, our issues, and other circumstances to cause us to give up on our God-given purpose. We must remember that we are not working for man but for God. The Lord will fight our battles and provide whatever we need to complete any assignment that He has given us. We must persevere through the challenges, feelings, and spiritual attacks.

 If we are committed, we will continue to move forward in our spiritual growth and development with the attitude of a servant. The purpose that God has called us to is not just about serving but also being planted in a position where you can grow comfortably and spiritually.

*Walk Worthy: Seek God*

 Apart from God, we are nothing. God says this in John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (NIV) It is God who has done and is still doing everything for us. He has made it possible for us to have a relationship with Him. He has given us purpose in His kingdom. God has chosen us, predestined us, created us, accepted us, saved us, and redeemed us through Jesus Christ. He has given us grace, mercy, unconditional love, and favor. He has given us an inheritance which is His kingdom and all His promises and blessings. He has sealed us with His Holy Spirit and has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

 So, what does God desire of us? God wants a relationship with us. It is in a relationship with God that we learn of our unique purpose and gifts. It is in a relationship with God, that God can reveal to us how to walk in our purpose. It is in a relationship with God that we can become more like him in how we act, what we say, and what we think. God is such a gentleman that He does not force us to do anything. Living for him is a choice that we make because of our love for Him. It is that continual hunger and thirst for God and the things of God that will draw us into an intimate relationship with God.

 Seeking God should bring us to a place of hearing God’s voice. Sometimes we may feel like God has abandoned us or He is not speaking to us, but that is never the case. God often speaks to us in the quietness of our hearts reminding us of His love, strength, and power, and directing us in what He wants us to do, how He wants us to do it, and what He wants for our lives. There are times when we need to be still or even silent so that we can have a listening ear and tune out every other voice but God. God can speak to us in unique ways. He can speak to us through scriptures, music, songs, praise dance, dreams, nature, conversations with someone else, preaching, teaching, sickness, and other circumstances, and through the Holy Spirit moving in our thoughts, feelings, and senses. At the same time, God is always ready to hear from us. He desires songs of praise, words of thanksgiving, and words of adoration. He is ready to meet our every need and our prayers for the needs of others. When we sup with Him, we will find everything we need to sustain us.

*Walk Worthy: Let Your Light Shine.*

*“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5%3A16&version=ESV#fen-ESV-23251a)*] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16 NIV)*

Sometimes our family can be our greatest critics and other times our family can be our greatest supporters. These are people who have lived with us for a large part of our lives. These are people who have seen us when we are not dressed in our Sunday best. These are people who have seen how we handle life when it comes to conflicts, gossip, bad and good news, losses, taking care of our home, managing money, work ethics, caring for others, church attendance and involvement, and so forth. Some believers may act one way when they are with their family, another way when they are with their church family, and another way when they are with friends or coworkers. As Christians, we must consider how we are living our lives before men. Our families knew how we were before we knew Christ. Now that we have dedicated our lives to living for Christ, there should be a difference in how we talk, how we act, and the choices we make. What exactly are others seeing in us? Who exactly are we portraying? Are they seeing qualities and characteristics that depict being a new creature in Christ Jesus or are they seeing the quick temper, gossiping, and boastful person we used to be?

By no means is it meant for us to please men, live our lives for men, or become someone that we are not. God wants us to be our authentic selves. God wants us to become more like Christ through His strength and not our own. We must depend on Him to bring about the changes in our lives that would glorify and honor Him. We simply can’t do it on our own because we would fail with every attempt.

 What is needed on our part is sacrifice. We must allow God to have free course in our lives. We must sacrifice our lives to live His life. As stated in Romans 12: 1-2, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” (NIV) As we give our entire being, our heart, our love, our talents, our energy, and all our strength for God’s service, God will mold our character, mature our faith, and transform our hearts so that we become more like Him. As God brings the changes in our lives, our identity in Christ will become more evident to others. People will then be able to affirm God’s work in us and through us.

 **The Blessings of Gifts**

“Eyes that focus on what is beautiful bring joy to the heart and hearing a good report refreshes and strengthens the inner being.” Proverbs 15:30 (TPT)

 God told Abraham that through him, all nations of the earth would be blessed. (Genesis 18:19) Do you realize how blessed you are? Do you realize the extent of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us? Do you realize that you already have everything you need to serve and to live an abundant life in Him? Isn’t it also a blessing to know that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus? When we fall short, God is faithful to forgive us. God will find a way to turn our failures into successes. God has even given us the blessing of laughter so that we don’t take ourselves so seriously, or our services so seriously. We are rich in Christ and lack no good thing. We have been blessed with health, wholeness, soundness, prosperity, and every spiritual blessing. Because of the blood and finished work of Jesus on the cross, we are 100% righteous and are fully accepted and perfected by God. God has given us grace, his undeserved, unearned, and unmerited favor. Every action of God toward us involves his grace including His creation, providence, conviction of the sinner, gift of salvation, equipping of the saints, and the future He has prepared for us. All of this is due to God's grace.” **15**  Romans 8:17 tells us that we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. We already have victory in every circumstance. Joseph Prince says “We don’t fight for victory; we fight from victory.” **16**

 **“**Jesus has the power of God. And his power has given us everything we need to live a life devoted to God. We have these things because we know him. Jesus chose us by his glory and goodness, through which he also gave us the very great and rich gifts that he promised us. With these gifts you can share in being like God. And so you will escape the ruin that comes to people in the world because of the evil things they want. Because you have these blessings, do all you can to add to your life these things: to your faith add goodness; to your goodness add knowledge;” (2 Peter 3:1-5)

 Knowing that God has blessed us with everything we need, we can serve with confidence and joy. We can rest in the fact we operate in God’s grace and possess the victory to accomplish whatever He leads us to do. The joy we have should be inspiring and contagious. As we partake in God’s blessings, let us continue to believe that God will fulfill every promise that He has made to us.

**Finish the Race**

2 Tim 4:7 –**“**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (NIV)

 A marathon race is a sport that requires training, endurance, and dedication. In a marathon, a runner is trained to pace himself because if he runs too fast, he will tire out and if he runs too slow, he may give up. A marathon runner must be so in tune with their body that he knows how to maintain energy, patience, and drive throughout the entire marathon. More than anything else, a marathon runner must be disciplined enough to wake up very early in the morning to run, or to run during uncomfortable or inconvenient times, such as during rain, or when experiencing bodily pain. Marathon running is a sport of confidence and willpower.

 When it comes to living out our calling, it is like running a marathon race and not a sprint. The race before us requires faith, stamina, perseverance, commitment, and training. We can never feel like we have reached the peak of our serving in god’s kingdom because God always has more to show us, more to pour into us, more for us to experience, and more for us to do as He takes us from glory to glory. Our responsibility is to have the eyes to see, the ears to hear, and the heart to receive what God is doing and how God is moving in our lives during different seasons. We must stay in alignment with the direction that God moves us in. Shifts will happen and we must allow God to shift the vision, to shift the people, to shift the place of ministry or how we minister.

 For different reasons, people will always leave ministries. People have left ministries because their calling or giftedness did not align with the ministry. Just because people leave ministries does not mean that the ministry is ending. There are times when God may be birthing something new and must remove the old to bring in the new. Isaiah 40:31 says, “but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” (ESV) We must be patient and wait to see the good that God will do.

 What enables us to persevere in serving with our gifts is keeping our eyes fixed on the author and perfecter of our faith. Hebrews 12:2-3 says, “*… For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.****3****Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart*..” (NIV) Jesus has already made it to the finish line, and He is now the focus of accomplishing what God has called us to do. It is Jesus’s examples during his time on earth that we follow in how to serve, how to act, and how to live the Christian life.

 When you finish a marathon race there are rewards like medals, ribbons, and the satisfaction of completion. Our rewards as we serve with our gifts encompass not only what we acquire while serving but also seeing the work God does in the people that you have ministered to in some capacity. To see people come to know the Lord, grow in their faith, develop their gifts, and serve the Lord in different capacities because of the impact that we made in their lives is a reward. Let us continue to fix our eyes on Jesus, and to live, serve, and use our gifts for Christ. God is rewarding us as we serve with power, strength, knowledge, faith, peace, wisdom, insight, inexpressible joy, and every heavenly treasure to function within the capacity He has called us. Ultimately, we will spend eternity with our Heavenly Father who promises to reward us for a job well done. When He accepts us in His loving arms, we will be able to hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Matthew 25:21 NIV).

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DIGGING DEEPER INTO YOUR PURPOSE

Time to Reflect

1. Do you seek God daily? Why or why not?

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1. How have others benefitted from the love you have shown in Christ?

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1. What helps you to stay committed to your calling or ministry?

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1. In what ways have you felt blessed by using your gifts? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Conclusion**

“but you shall be called the priests of the Lord;
they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God;” (Isaiah 61:6)

 There are so many ways to share the good news of Jesus dying on the Christ for our sins. We can preach the good news through speaking, singing, dancing, dramatization, using sign language, painting, or while voluntarily serving inside or outside the church. Even how we live our lives from day to day could be a walking testimony because we carry the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “But we Christians have no veil over our faces; we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him.”. Without knowledge of the gospel or the righteousness of God, no one can be saved. Romans 10:14-15 states it this way, *“*How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (NIV) We have the beautiful feet that God is calling on to impact the world today.

 We have the potential to change the eternal destiny of those who don’t know Christ. Unless we are willing to say yes to God, people will not have an opportunity to be saved, to be delivered, to be healed, to be comforted, to find hope, and to experience God’s unconditional love. God summons us and then sends us out to different platforms equipped with the gifts needed to fulfill his purpose. It’s time to recognize that we have purpose, we have value and we are needed to bring change in the world. God has given each of us a platform by which we may impact a group of people through our God given gifts.

 Each one of us are needed. We are needed inside church walls, just as much as we are needed outside the church walls. 1 Corinthians 12:16-20 says, “… “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.” (NIV) Everyone has been given spiritual gifts that is is needed in the body of the church to make the church whole or complete. God has given each of us different spiritual gifts so the church body can be unified, strengthened, encouraged, and grow together as the body of Christ.

 Life circumstances will try to consume our time and energy and drive us away from our purpose. May we have the heart to seek, to find, to become, and to do all that God purpose for our lives. May we have the eyes to see, the ears to hear the heart to receive all that God is showing us, speaking to us and giving us. There are blessings in store for those who persevere in what God is calling them to do. May you be the movers, shakers, and life changers as God leads you.

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**Bible Versions**

* King James Version – KJV
* English Standard Version – ESV
* The Living Bible (TLB)
* The Message (MSG)
* New American Standard Bible (NASB)
* New English Translation (NET)
* New International Version - NIV
* New King James Version – NKJV
* The Passion Translation (TPT)

**Definitions**

I) ‘***kingdom’*, or ‘*God’s kingdom*’, or ‘*kingdom of God’***

The biblical meaning of “kingdom” is God’s kingly rule — his reign, his action, his lordship, his sovereign governance.” **1** “The “kingdom of God*”* is a spiritual kingdom, an eternal kingdom” not a physical place. It is the realm of God's sovereignty, presence, and influence in our lives, where God reigns and rules over us with love, justice, mercy, and grace. In the kingdom, we find hope, peace, joy, and purpose that can only be found through living under God's rule.” **3**

II) **Descriptions of Spiritual Gifts**

**Speaking and Serving Gifts**

1. Apostle - one sent as a messenger with a specific commission.
2. Prophet – one with a God-given ability to speak forth a message from God’s Word that edifies, exhorts, and/or comforts the body.
3. Evangelist – a messenger of the good news; one who shares the gospel clearly so that others may come to faith in Jesus.
4. Pastor - a shepherd; one cares for the local congregation by feeding, tending to, and protecting the flock.
5. Teacher - an instructor who cares for the local congregation and teaches the truth of the Word clearly and understandably.
6. Word of Wisdom – a clear insight into God’s truth and the true nature of things so that application can be made from that clear insight.
7. Word of Knowledge – a seeking to know, investigation, an inquiry of god’s revelation and truth, communication of knowledge.
8. Faith – an unusual measure of trust in God. This is more than the faith all must have for salvation.
9. Gifts of Healing – the ability to restore physical, emotional, and/or spiritual health through divine intervention which includes praying for and witnessing.
10. Effecting of Miracles – workings of supernatural acts that can only be explained as demonstrations of God’s power.
11. Prophecy- the ability to speak forth a message from God’s Word that edifies, exhorts, and/or comforts the body.
12. Distinguishing of Spirits – the supernatural ability to distinguish between different spirits, discerning whether they are of God, human, or evil origin.
13. Speaking in Tongues – the supernatural ability to speak an unlearned language as a form of prayer or communication with God.
14. Interpretation of Tongues – a supernatural ability to translate an unlearned language, making it understandable to others.
15. Serving – the capacity to attend to, serve, aid, and minister to others selflessly and meet practical needs within the church.
16. Teaching – the ability to instruct and teach the truth of the Word clearly and understandably.
17. Encouragement (or Exhortation) – the ability to encourage, appeal, comfort, and urge others toward spiritual growth and maturity.
18. Giving – the ability to give, share, or impart generously and cheerfully.
19. Leadership – the ability “to stand before”; the God-given ability to lead others so that they may follow the Lord.

20)Mercy – to demonstrate compassion, and empathy, and to feel sympathy with the misery of another, especially sympathy manifested in action; to extend help.

1. Helps – one who serves others selflessly, often behind the scenes.
2. Administration (Leadership) – those who provide guidance and organization.**13**

**Resources**

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