“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:**

**My Testimony: Finding 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 the song played, 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 numerous Chaine turns with motions of splendor and beauty. As the song repeatedly said, “The wait is over, walk into your season”**1** , 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 without holding back 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 as 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 to expound on the importance of gifts, callings, and purposes is by sharing my own experiences. In this book, I share testimonies 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. I also talk about finding our purpose and the importance of our gifts. At the end of each chapter are questions for your consideration and to serve as a platform for you to gain a deeper understanding of yourself. May this journey encourage you to be the person God has called you to be, to reach the people God has called you to reach and go to places God has called you to. May you choose the path that will enable you to live out your purpose 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**

**Testimony: Finding 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 taking dance classes. I was not a dance major, but I took dance classes every semester including ballet, jazz, and modern dance. Yes, I attempted ballet once again. 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 continued to take dance classes. My dean also encouraged it as an outlet for 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 off the line. 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 Pastor Raleigh B. Washington and his wife, Paulette 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 wore, 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 if 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 a ministry but a calling. God had called me to the dance and given me purpose in ministry; 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. With a limited biblical understanding of the dance, I struggled 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. **2** 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 rather 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. I still love some of secular music, but to be dedicated to my calling, I had to let go of secular music so that I could find the 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, time spent before God to obtain the vision for the ministry and each dance, time spent choreographing each dance and time spent in prayer for the ministry and for each member of the dance ministry. I found a verse to support every vision for the dance that was choreographed. I had to sacrifice time to 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 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 worked in 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's 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 who 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. I believe every verse God gave me and planted in my heart because I took God at His Word. 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?”* 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 Pastor 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 Pastor Rosalyn, I acquired a deeper biblical understanding and appreciation for the dance ministry. As we ministered together at different churches and events, I learned how to flow spontaneously in the dance through the movement of God’s spirit which is called prophetic dancing.

As my relationship with Pastor Rosalyn developed, she invited me to join the first dance class that she taught 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, Pastor 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, beginners’ ballet, beginners’ jazz, congregational and solo dancing, pageantry, and prophetic dancing. These classes were not just about teaching dance but giving perspective on why we dance and 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 at Rock Church.

The dance ministry teams at Rock Church 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 often faced challenges. Despite the division and rebelliousness in the ministry, enemy attacks, fear of the unknown, and other circumstances, the question was, would I remain strong and courageous in my faith? If I had not held on to my faith, I could have died spiritually or God’s work in and through me could have been hindered. By God’s strength and power, I was able to overcome every obstacle that presented itself. Over time, I have led the dance team to new levels of knowledge and experience in ministry.

In 2007, God showed me that my time with Divine Expressions was coming to an end. It was time to enter a new season of ministry, but I did not know what that meant for me. At the same time, Divine Expressions’ time with Dorolyn had also ended. This was a time of shifting for not only me but also for Dorolyn Academy School of Music and DEM. Although I felt I was following God’s lead, this was still a difficult transition for me. I have been with DEM for almost 13 years. We ministered together. We dined together. We traveled together. We had fun together. We gleaned from each other, and we held each other accountable. Yet I had to be obedient to how God was leading me, no matter how difficult it was to leave the ministry.

Dr. Bounds decided she wanted to continue the dance program at Dorolyn, and she asked me to consider overseeing the program. I wasn’t sure if this was God elevating me or me just helping a friend, but I said yes after praying about it. It seems that when God is about to move in my life, He always places me in a position of being alone and having no one else to trust but Him. I was unsure if I was ready to lead the dance program at Dorolyn Academy or if God was truly calling me to lead the dance program at Dorolyn. It was never my intent or interest to lead the program, even though being asked to serve in that capacity was an honor and a privilege. After a year of leading the dance program at Dorolyn Academy, God clarified to me that I was not moving in the direction He 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 Dorolyn. I still had my Rock Church family, but I felt stagnated and alone as a minister of dance. After acquiring a deeper biblical understanding of the ministry of dance through DEM and teaching the biblical foundational dance classes at Dorolyn, I yearn for more. What I have experienced thus far inspired me with a desire to go deeper in the ministry of dance. I did not know where to find what I wanted and needed. As a result, I started to focus on the wrong things. I focused on what I did not have and failed to recognize how much God had already done for me and gave me. I was at a low and struggled to trust God in the place where I was now positioned in my life. I was in a place of loneliness, feeling depleted and feeling like I did not have much to offer the Rock Church dance ministry.

I was not 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. 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. 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 very thought-provoking. God had not abandoned me but was orchestrating something new in my life through dance. If I had not stayed obedient to God’s leading, I would not have been able to go through the doors that God was opening for me. In God’s faithfulness, He heard my prayers and fulfilled my desires.

At the conference in New York, 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. 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 2017 and now in 2023/24.

In 34 years, God has taken me from starting a dance ministry in my church to joining the Divine Expression Dance Ministry, teaching biblical dance classes at Dorolyn Academy School of Music, and becoming part of an international ministry, EITI. 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 because of God’s goodness, faithfulness, and His desire to use me to bless others through the ministry of the dance. Serving and growing spiritually through the dance ministry has been a blessing. It has been a blessing to meet and glean from some of the most phenomenal women and men of God. It is amazing how God brings the right people into our lives to help us fulfill the purpose He has for us. If we allow God to have the steering *will* of our lives, He will do the planting, watering, and growing. I know without a doubt that God’s hand is on my life, and He continuously uses the gifts He has given me for His glory.

God called me to the ministry of dance. What has God called you to? No matter what area of ministry to or is calling you to, remember that it is God who will do the work through you. God will lead, protect, provide, direct, open and close doors, and bring the increase. Our responsibility is to say yes, even when we feel uncomfortable or uncertain about what God is doing. We must be willing to trust and wait on Him.

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TAKING A DEEPER DIVE

1. What do you remember most about the time you received Jesus into your life?

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1. In what way is God asking you to wait on Him?

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1. In what way is God asking you to trust Him?

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1. Is it difficult to say yes to God? Why or why not?

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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.”**3** 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)*

God already existed before He created the world. God is the Alpha and Omega and is not defined by time, space, or matter. He 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, time, and place we would enter the world. Before our birth, God already knew our livelihood and how we would serve in the body of Christ. 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 purpose that He wanted Jeremiah to fulfill, and God knows the purpose that He wants you and me 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 chosen to be holy and blameless before the world's creation and to be adopted as God’s sons and daughters. 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 by sacrificing his precious blood on the cross. We are justified through Christ Jesus. Without Jesus, the creation of man, God’s relationship with man, the forgiveness of man, and eternal life 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

We are God’s dearly loved children, and He loves us as a perfect Father. God’s love existed before time because God is love. Before the beginning of creation, there was love between God and Jesus. God created you and me with love and intends to have a relationship with us. The Bible refers to love as being patient, kind, not envious, 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). The Bible's description of love refers to God in terms of His love. God is patient, God is kind, and God is not envious… Every word that is used to describe what love is in that passage refers to God because God is love.

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. We show love to others through our willingness to forgive and serve others.

One of the ways that God has demonstrated His love to us is by creating us in His image. We resemble God mentally, morally, and socially. He created us 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 His intellect to think, reason, make decisions, invent, and create. We have the mind of Christ to know the difference between good and evil and the inner workings of the Holy Spirit to help us reflect God’s holiness. God gives us the strength to be patient, kind, humble, respectful, compassionate, honest, forgiving, and empathetic. In our strength, these deeds could be performed conditionally or pridefully but when they are done through God’s strength, God can get the glory.

***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 miracles, signs, and wonders can manifest, like someone receiving Christ or someone being healed or delivered. God desires our praise and seeks those who will 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 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 our lives and through our service. Because God’s Holy Spirit dwells inside of us, we carry His glory with us. No matter where we go or where God positions us, we can proclaim His truth through our walk, our talk, and our actions.

*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. 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. What we accomplish on earth is what we put into action and what God allows us to accomplish. God has given us gifts so that we can serve in God’s kingdom and demonstrate the love of Christ. Every purpose that we fulfill is a privilege and should not be a chore. 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. We are giving from what God has given us. Nothing is ours; everything about us belongs to God.

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TAKING A DEEPER DIVE

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. How have others benefited from the love you’ve shown?

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1. In what ways do you think 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.”* **6**

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 His Holy Spirit, which is the final touch of God’s beauty in 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. 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.” **7** *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 person God desires us to be.

As we progress with our walk with the Lord, we undergo cleansing cycles where our identity evolves. God is washing away all the dirty lies that the enemy has placed in our hearts and minds since childhood or before we accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior. God is making us new, purifying the old 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 will allow us to soar and have confidence in everything God has planned 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 set 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. God does so much for us, but do take time to acknowledge what He does and who He is.

*Who is God?*

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. God’s nature and character are described in the Bible. In scripture, God is characterized as good, gracious, merciful, faithful, holy, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, just, perfect, and unchanging. Depending on the context in the Bible, God is also labeled 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 us, we would not be able to appreciate Him in how He is described. When we personally know God’s 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. 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. “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 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. **8**

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, a Jew, had with the Samaritan woman? Traveling from Jerusalem to Galilee, Jesus and His disciples took a shorter route through Samaria, which was Jesus’ plan so that he could meet the woman at the well. 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 to touch hearts.

While working in the corporate world, 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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TAKING A DEEPER DIVE

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**

***Being Called?***

In Matthews 22:14, Jesus says, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” (ESV) This verse encapsulates the parable Jesus shared with the crowd about a king who invited many people to attend his son’s wedding banquet, but no one showed up. People either ignored or refused the invitation or were preoccupied with their own affairs. The king concluded that those people he invited did not deserve to attend the wedding banquet, so invitations were given out again, this time to anyone that the king’s servants met on the streets. The people on the streets responded positively to the invitation and were guests at the wedding. This parable illustrates the difference between being 'called' and 'chosen'- the 'called' are those who receive the initial invitation, while the 'chosen' are those who accept the invitation and live for Jesus.

Being “called” is about God inviting people to dine with Him. This invitation is not exclusive; it is extended to all, regardless of their backgrounds and circumstances. We are first 'called' or invited to a relationship with Jesus by becoming disciples and followers of Jesus. This 'calling' can come through various means, such as someone sharing the gospel, reading the Bible, watching someone’s life, or through some type of ministry. The call to follow Jesus goes out to all people, and the ones who wholeheartedly accept the calling or invitation are saying “yes" to the calling and saying “yes” to living for Jesus. They are the ones who would be considered the 'chosen' ones.

God's call is not just about our individual relationship with Him; it extends to our relationships with others. God forms families, communities, and churches to support and encourage us. As Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 states, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor; for if either of them falls, the one will lift his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up!” This scripture underscores the importance of community in our spiritual journey. Proverbs 27:27 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (NIV) God is a God of relationship and community. In times of loneliness or feeling isolated, Satan may try to steer us away from God’s calling, but our community can help us stay strong.

With God’s guidance and enablement, we are also called to serve in God’s kingdom in various roles, vocations, or professions. “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 to fulfill an assignment that God has called us to do on this earth. People can see God's love in action by using our gifts to fulfill our calling.

***God’s Natural Gifts?***

When I think of a gift, I think of something willingly given without expecting anything in return. 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 the gift he would put inside each of us. Our gifts are not a coincidence but thoughtfully chosen by our Father according to His plan for our lives.

God has freely given all mankind many gifts to enable us to function in our humanness, partake in pleasure, and serve others. In fact, James 1:17 reminds us that “Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father” (NLT). As we open our gifts, we acknowledge God, the one who has given the gifts. We thank God for the gifts and ask Him how He wants us to use them. We also recognize that every gift that God has given has equal value to Him and should be equally valued by us. In addition to such gifts as His unconditional love, His gift of salvation, His gift of eternal life, and His gift of grace and mercy, we have all received natural gifts and talents.

Before birth, we were predestined to receive gifts. Natural gifts include the ability to see, hear, speak, walk, and talk. Still, they also include having the aptitude to do something, which could be the ability to work hard or the ability to learn something. For example, a person may have the aptitude to teach, play a sport, learn a language, or work with their hands. A natural 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. God can use our natural talents, skills, and abilities to serve Him in our homes, schools, churches, or organizations if we are willing.

Our gifts go beyond meeting our personal needs and include ministering to the needs of others. When we serve people, we indirectly serve God because all we do brings glory to His name. God expects us to assume ownership and use the gifts and talents He has given us. Even if our talents and abilities seem small to us, they may be a very large blessing to others.

***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, counselor, and peace. The Holy Spirit empowers us. We are given strength or power in our innermost being through the Holy Spirit working in us. “The Holy Spirit empowers us, purifies us, reveals truth, and unites us so we can bring glory to God”. **10**

“In the Bible, the word *fruit* is often used to describe a person’s outward actions that result from the condition of the heart. Good fruit is that which is produced by the Holy Spirit.”**11 Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that the good fruit produced by the Holy Spirit is “**love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness**,** and self-control” (NIV). **In whatever capacity that we serve in God’s kingdom, we want people to see the fruit of the Spirit flowing and evident in our lives. It is the fruit of the Spirit that produces the godliness in us. We want the fruit flowing in our lives because we want to reflect Jesus. We want people to see Jesus’s power working in our weakness. We want people to see the love of Christ shown with kind, compassionate, and giving hearts. We want people to see His grace covering our sins. We want people to see our oneness with God. Apart from the Holy Spirit, we cannot bear the fruit of the Spirit.**

***God’s Spiritual Gifts?***

Every believer or follower of Christ has received a spiritual gift from God to serve the body of Christ. A “Spiritual gift is a unique gift given by God through his Holy Spirit to believers in Jesus to bring glory to Him and strengthen His church.” **10** Every spiritual gift serves a purpose and displays who God is. For example, the spiritual gift of healing tells us that God is a healer and is working through the person with the gift of healing as His vessel to heal someone. God has called us and equipped us with spiritual gifts so that we can take an active role in the church. We each exercise the power of our spiritual gift based on the depth of our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

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. **10**With a spiritual gift, we serve God by serving the church. We serve out of love and not out of guilt or obligation. When people in your local church know your spiritual gift(s), they can attest to how they are edified by your spiritual gift(s). Spiritual gifts are effective if they are used for God’s glory and not our own.

“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)) Through t**he work of the Holy Spirit, we use our spiritual gifts to manifest God's active presence in the world, especially in the church. 12**

In 1 Peter 4, we find that spiritual gifts were placed into two categories: speaking and serving.The spiritual gifts 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 " Definitions " section.

*The Unexpected Gifts*

My Story

Just like many, I wanted to know what my spiritual gifts were. I have taken spiritual gift assessments and found that our gifts can change as God brings us through different seasons in our lives. When I was leading the dance ministry, God deposited in me every gift I needed to effectively lead the ministry. While serving in the dance ministry, God gave me the gift of dancing, teaching, administration, serving, helping, giving, encouragement, mercy, leadership, and creativity. Unexpectantly, I was also blessed with the spiritual gifts of prophecy and the gift of speaking in tongues. The gift of prophecy refers to “the ability to speak forth a message from God’s Word that edifies, exhorts, and/or comforts the body. ”**13**

When I started flowing in the prophetic dance (spontaneously dancing with prophetic music, singing, or speaking to edify, exhort, or comfort the body), I would sense God directing me in movement. This experience, along with other experiences where someone prophesied to me, made me more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading and more sensitive to hearing God speak in the Spirit.

During the time that my church had a breakthrough ministry under the direction of Pastor Lincoln Washington, one of my former pastors, I was taught how to minister to people when they came to the altar for prayer. Part of the teaching came by watching Pastor Lincoln helping at the altar and the other part came through the Holy Spirit empowering me. When Pastor Lincoln gave an altar call towards the end of the service, I would join the other leaders at the altar, and we would lay hands on those at the altar and pray for them. During those times and as the spirit moved, God started giving me a prophetic word to speak over some of the people.

Some gifts we receive come to us because of our faith in Him. 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 pursue a study of scriptures speaking in tongues. I also prayed and said to God that if He wants me to speak in tongues, He will have to do it because I will not 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 pray over one of the young ladies who was dealing with a lot of spiritual warfare in her life. We prayed over an hour for her. While praying over her, I suddenly started speaking in tongues. Beyond my control, my speaking in tongues was occurring and continuing nonstop. I could not stop the process when I tried. God was in control. That was a God moment that I will never forget. Amazingly, God answered my prayers that challenged Him when I said that if He wanted me to speak in my tongue, He would have to do it. That He did. God demonstrated to me His faithfulness, provisions, and power working in me to enable me to speak in an unknown language. Since then, I have continued to speak in tongues, and I know that God enabled me and not man.

On Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), a pastor spoke on speaking in tongues. He said that when you speak in tongues, you can pray and 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 are beyond the depth of my understanding. I don’t know what I am saying because I don’t have the gift of interpreting tongues. However, I do feel very blessed to speak in tongues because God clearly gives me what to say. As I stay yielded to the Spirit, God continues to direct me in my thoughts and in what to say in my natural language, as well. Speaking in tongues increases my faith and provides me with a constant reminder of God’s presence with me and that God is constantly at work in my life. My speaking in tongues occurs mostly at home, but when I pray to people at the altar, that is a time that speaking in tongues and prophecy may also occur.

There is a time for speaking in tongues in public and 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 of interpretation of tongue, or it is a testimony to others of the manifestations of god’s power at work.

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 centered on Jesus, and use our spiritual gifts for His glory. When we are not using our gifts in the body of Christ, the church is incomplete because every gift is needed to help unify and build the church. I believe that when we are using our gifts and making an effort to work together, the church can become healthy and whole.

To determine which gifts God has given you will involve the following 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 may also have Christian friends or leaders 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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TAKING A DEEPER DIVE

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 God’s 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))*

As a tennis fan, I enjoyed watching the movie “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 experiencing challenges and rejection, Brad kept moving forward throughout his life. At age twenty, Brad won the 1985 Men’s Single Tennis Finals for the deaf. Against all odds, Brad became the number one deaf tennis player in the nation, holding the title 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 showed 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

If you persevere in your God-given purpose, God will be able to use and bless your lives just as He was able to use Brad’s life as a tennis player. God's plan for your life is not just about you; it is always designed to bring Him glory. Serving God’s people and serving in ministry is not always an easy task. Still, when you face overwhelming challenges or circumstances, you must remember that God will give you the strength to be an overcomer. You must believe that God can do the impossible for you and through you. No matter what situation you face, you must stay in the race and not give up on yourself, not give up on God, and not give up on His purpose for your lives.

Sometimes, the enemy will try to get you off track by infiltrating your heart and mind with doubt, insecurities, pride, criticism, and judgment. The enemy wants to keep you in bondage so that you don’t receive the blessings of God, or you cannot be a blessing to others. The enemy will whisper in your ear that you are not eloquent enough to speak before a group of people or you don’t have enough spiritual knowledge to teach that group or someone other than you should lead that ministry. Remember that God has and is equipping you with everything you need to reach your destiny. You cannot allow people’s rebelliousness, judgments, and bad attitudes to cause you to give up on your God-given purpose. We are not working for man but for God. The Lord will fight your battles and provide whatever you need to complete any assignment that He has given you. We must persevere through all encounters of spiritual warfare, negative emotions, negative experiences, and negative feedback.

God's purpose for you is not just about serving but also about being planted in a position where you can grow comfortably and spiritually. If you are committed, you will continue to move forward in your spiritual growth and development with a servant's attitude.

*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 you. He has made it possible for you to have a relationship with Him. He has given you purpose in His kingdom. God has chosen you, predestined, created, accepted, saved, and redeemed you through Jesus Christ. He has given you grace, mercy, unconditional love, and favor. He has given you an inheritance, which is His kingdom, and all His promises and blessings. He has sealed you with His Holy Spirit and has blessed you with every spiritual blessing.

So, what does God desire of you? God wants an intimate relationship with you. In our intimacy with the Father, God will reveal His plans for you. You will learn how to walk in your calling and use your gifts. You will become more like Him in how you act, talk, and think as you spend time in His presence and in His Word. God is such a gentleman that He does not force you to do anything. Living for him is a choice that you make because of your faith and love for Him. That continual hunger and thirst for God and the things of God will draw you into an intimate relationship with God.

Seeking God should bring you to a place of hearing God’s voice. Sometimes, you may feel like God has abandoned you or He is not speaking to you, 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 you will need to be still or even silent so that you can have a listening ear and tune out every other voice but God. God can speak to you in many ways. He can speak to you through scriptures, music, songs, praise dance, dreams, nature, conversations with someone else, preaching, teaching, sickness, and other circumstances. Most importantly, God speaks to you through the Holy Spirit moving in our thoughts, feelings, and senses. At the same time, God is always ready to hear from you. He desires songs of praise, words of thanksgiving, and words of adoration. He is ready to meet your every need and your prayers for the needs of others. When you commune with Him, you will find everything you 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)*

Our families are people who have lived with us for a large part of our lives and tend to know us well. These people see us when we are not dressed in our Sunday best. These people have seen how we handle life regarding 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 with their church family, and another with friends or coworkers. And another way is when they are among strangers.

As Christians, we must consider how we live before men. Some of us have families that knew how we were before we received Christ into our lives. Now that you have dedicated your life to living for Christ, a transformation should occur. As God is molding you into a new creation, there should be a difference in how you talk, act, and make choices over time. Are others starting to notice a difference in you? Are others seeing qualities or characteristics that depict God is at work in your life, or are others seeing characteristics in you that do not portray Jesus or the real you?

It is not meant for you to please men, live your lives for men, or become someone that you are not. God wants you to be your authentic selves. God will bring about the changes in your life to glorify and honor Him. You simply can’t do it on your own because you will fail with every attempt. However, you must learn to surrender.

For God to do His will in our lives, we must surrender our will. We must allow God to have a free course in our lives. We must surrender 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 you give your entire being, your heart, love, talents, energy, and all your strength for God’s service, God will mold your character, mature your faith, and transform your heart to become more like Him. As God changes your life, your identity in Christ will become more evident to others. People will then be able to affirm God’s work in you and through you.

**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 all nations of the earth would be blessed through him. (Genesis 18:19) Do you realize how blessed you are? Do you realize you already have everything you need to serve and live an abundant life in Him? Isn’t it also a blessing to know that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus? When we fall short in being used by God, 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 seriously or our services for Him 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. 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.” **8**

Knowing God has blessed you with everything you need, you can serve Him confidently and joyfully. You can rest in the fact that God will fulfill every promise He has made to you. You operate in God’s grace and possess the victory to accomplish whatever He leads you to do.

**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 pf confidence and willpower requiring 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 early in the morning to run or run during uncomfortable or inconvenient times, such as during rain or when experiencing bodily pain.

When it comes to living out our life for Christ, it is like running a marathon race and not a sprint. We don’t just run, but we run while using God's gifts to help fulfill our purpose. This spiritual race requires faith, stamina, perseverance, commitment, and discipline. We need the discipline of prayer, bible study, church attendance, evangelism, and stewardship, to name a few. We can never feel like we have reached the finish line 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, but we must allow God to shift us, the vision, the people, the place of ministry, and how we minister.

For different reasons, people leave ministries. People leave ministries because their calling or giftedness does not align with the ministry. People leave ministries because they fail to trust God or God’s leader. Just because people leave ministries does not mean that the ministry is ending. Sometimes, God may be birthing something new and must remove the old to bring in the new. Isaiah 43:19 says, “Behold, I am going to do something new, now it will spring up; Will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, Rivers in the desert.” (NASB) We must be patient and wait to see the good that God will do. (Isaiah 40:31)

Keeping our eyes fixed on the author and perfecter of our faith will enable us to persevere in serving with our gifts. Jesus has already reached the finish line and is now focused on 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, act, and live the Christian life. Let us continue to fix our eyes on Jesus and to live, serve, and use our gifts for Christ.

When we finish a marathon race, we normally receive medals, ribbons, and certificates of completion. As we fulfill God’s purpose in our lives, the rewards will encompass what we acquire while serving and seeing God's work in the people we have invested time in ministering to or ministering with. It will be rewarding just to see people come to know the Lord, grow in their faith, develop their gifts, and serve in different capacities.

God will reward you as you serve with power, strength, knowledge, faith, peace, wisdom, insight, inexpressible joy, and every heavenly treasure to function within the capacity He has called you. Ultimately, you will spend eternity with your Heavenly Father, who promises to reward you for a well-done job. When He accepts you in His loving arms, you 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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TAKING A DEEPER DIVE

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

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1. In what ways have you felt blessed by using your gifts? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. What do you need to do or are you doing where God can say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”?

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**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)G

When God says speak, then we must speak. When God says do, then we must do. When God says go, then we must go. When God says give, then we must give. Whatever God is calling us to do, we must do. God has called us all to fulfill our purpose. God has equipped us with gifts so that we may fulfill our purpose with fidelity. Until we recognize and utilize the gifts, talents, and abilities God has given us, some people may not be reached, and some churches may not be strengthened. With our gifting, we can help change the eternal destiny of those searching for hope, love, and purpose. With our spiritual gifts, we have the potential to spur the body of Christ on in faith, spiritual growth, and unity. As it says in scripture, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him, 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!” (Romans 10:14-15 NIV)

We will reap God's provisions, protection, and empowerment as we stay consistent, faithful, and committed to serving God’s people. In fact, there are many blessings in store for those who persevere in what God is calling them to do. Let us have the heart to seek, to find, to become, and to do all that God purpose for our lives. What is God asking you to do today? Will your answer be “yes, Lord”?

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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 – NKJVew



* The Passion Translation (TPT)



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**Forward**

Doctor Raleigh B Washington

President/ CEO of Awakening the Voice of Truth

Pastor Emeritus Rock Church

President Emeritus Promise Keepers

I pastored a multiracial church that became the agship congregation for an

Evangelical, formally all White Denomination. This Church was awarded the

title of Chicago's Outstanding Church of the Year by the Greater Sunday

School Association of Chicago. I co-authored a book “Breaking down Walls”

that earned the Gold Medallion Book Award. That book was based on the

Racial Reconciliation experiences in the Church. These achievements were

due in large part, because of the Dance Ministry described in this book. I was

captivated by and always had complete trust that the Dance Ministry would

Honor God and Bless the members of our Church. Choreography, Attire,

Movement, and Song Selection are individually and collectively capable of

sending the wrong message to an audience. Consequently, each one of

those elements must meet the standards of being Appropriate and God

Honoring. Every presentation of Sandra’s Dance Worship rendered a

perfection of God Honoring Worship without exception. An epic

presentation occurred at the National Annual Conference of our Conservative

Evangelical Denomination. I was selected to be a Keynote Speaker and my

Gospel Choir was selected to render two songs. Dance was not permitted or

practiced in that Denomination. I decided to do one song by my Choir and

one presentation by my Dance Ministry. My book, message, song, and Dance

Ministry were all designed to communicate the message of Reconciliation. My

Choir was racially mixed. The dance team was comprised of an African

American, Asian, a White and a Latino. They danced to Steve Green's

rendition of “Let the Walls Come Down.” I placed my reputation, which was

sterling within the Denomination where I had spoken in at least 100

churches, at risk. The result was a Standing Ovation that lasted at least 5

minutes. My Reputation went through the roof. Why? The God Honoring

Professional Acumen of Sandra Jackson.

READ THIS BOOK AND YOU WILL UNDERSTAND HOW AND WHY THIS

DANCE MINISTRY WAS

FAN INTO FLAME!

Doctor Raleigh B Washington

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**READ THIS BOOK AND YOU WILL UNDERSTAND HOW AND WHY THIS DANCE MINISTRY WAS**

**FAN INTO FLAMES!**

**Forward (cont.)**

Pastor Rosalyn Acevedo

River of Life Worship Intl

Divine Expressions Christian Academy of Worship Arts

Since the beginning, Sandra intergrated her gifts and calling to the purposes of the Kingdom of God; her honesty and sincerity evident as she bares her soul and insight in this book. As she shares about her journey in worship, and true relationship with the Master Creator and Artist, I pray it will inspire readers to greater levels of intimacy with the Master of the heavens and earth."

**Terminology**

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.”

**Acknowledgments**

To Beverly: Thanks for being a loving sister and always having my back.

To Sheila and Greg: Thanks for your patience throughout this writing adventure.

To Pastor Raleigh B. Washington: Thank you for supporting my spiritual growth and the dance ministry.

To Pastor Lincoln Washington: Thank you for supporting me in the dance and your contribution to helping me understand spiritual gifts.

To Pastor Rosalyn Acevedo: Thank you for contributing to my biblical understanding of the dance.

To Dr. Pamela Scott: Thank you for providing a platform in which I have been able to acquire a deeper biblical understanding of dance, worship, and ministry tools

To Dr. Dorothy Bounds: Thank you for opening doors that led to new opportunities to exercise my dance gifts.

To Pastor Robert Stevenson: Thank you for those sermons, which reinforced some of my writing.

To my small group: Thank you for your prayers and encouragement.

To D’Lana: Thank you for our sisterhood and for having my back in my writing struggles.

To my dear friends and sisters and brothers in Christ: Thank you for your prayers and encouragement in my writing.

**Dedication**

**To my Heavenly Father**: I dedicate this book to you, whom I honor and praise. You have given me a reason to write a book and made it possible. Thank you, God, for your faithfulness, guidance, strength, and peace throughout this journey of writing. book.

**To my mom**: I dedicate this book to my dear mom, who passed away in July 2022. I know she would have been proud of my new accomplishment. More than anyone else, my mother knew my heart for God. Thank you, Mom, for always believing in me and being my biggest fan.

**To Believers Searching for their Purpose**: I dedicate this book to you. You are blessed. God has birthed something in you. May this book ignite your search for your purpose and inspire you to put your gifts into action.

**Suggested Reading and Resources**

1. Wagner, C. Peter. 2003 Finding Your Spiritual Gifts (Self-Guided Questionnaire)

2)<https://www.livingwatercoast.com/thegifts?gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIooCD9_y_hAMV3_dMAh0U4QpKEAAYBCAAEgJ8yPD_BwE>

**Appendix**

**Description 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**

**Synopsis**

**Fan into Flames**

You may think that dance is just a form of entertainment, but for me, dancing became the ministry that God used to encourage people in their faith, help bring people to His saving grace, and help me mature spiritually. After serving in dance ministry for 34 years, God has led me to write this book to inspire other Christians searching for their God-given purpose. I have seen too many people walk away after serving in ministry or people who allow their gifts to lie dormant because they do not understand God’s purpose of the gifts.

The title of this book, “Fan into Flames”, comes from 2 Timothy 2:6, which says, “This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you” (NIV). While in prison, the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy encouraging him to use the gifts of leading the church and preaching which God had given to him. This was not a case of Timothy not using his gifts but Paul reminding Timothy to use his gifts effectively. Not using our gifts or not using our gifts effectively is like not tending to a campfire; the flames will eventually go out. However, if you have small branches that are still glowing, you can rekindle the flames of a campfire by adding more branches and continuously fanning the pieces to increase the oxygen until the flames are burning again. The Apostle Paul wanted Timothy to fan into flames his gifts.

For similar reasons, I am writing this book to encourage you to fan into flames your gifts. Find your purpose and use your gifts. If you have not said, “Here I am, Lord, use me”, this book will help you understand that you have a purpose. If your heart is not overflowing with gratitude because of who God is to you and what He has done through you, this book will help you recognize the blessings God has bestowed upon you.

**About the Author**

Sandra J. Jackson is an ordained minister and licensed educator with a BS degree in mechanical engineering, an MA in secondary education, an MA in school leadership, and a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) certification. As a choreographer, leader, dance minister, teacher, speaker, and consultant, Sandra has ministered to Chicago's children, teenagers, and adults for 30+ years. Sandra has also dedicated almost 3 decades to teaching and leading children, teenagers, and adults in the educational arena.

As a Rock of Our Salvation Evangelical Free Church member in Chicago for almost four decades, Sandra has led the dance ministry, sang on praise teams, led the youth, and served in other capacities. In her devotion to the Lord and love for people, Sandra continues using her gifts to build God’s kingdom.