“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)

# **Table of Content**

Introduction

Chapter 1 - - My Testimony: Finding My God-given Purpose

Chapter 2 - - Created for God’s Purpose

Chapter 3 - - Gifted for God’s Purpose

Chapter 4- - Overflowing with God’s Gifts

Chapter 5 - - Running with God’s Gifts

Conclusion

**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 ended, 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!”

  The event at Dorolyn Academy School of Music was not just a dance graduation, but a profound spiritual experience. The music, singing, praise dancing, and other acts of praise and worship created an atmosphere for God's presence. The program included a time of collective praise and worship through singing and dancing. It featured diverse dance presentations by children, teenagers, and adults, showcasing various styles such as hip-hop, ballet, mime, solo dancing, tambourine, and congregational dancing. The event culminated in an uplifting message from a guest speaker and a powerful time of impartation, where each graduating student received individual prayers from the teachers and ministers present.

 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 the audience's non-church members, that graduation may have been their only exposure to seeing, hearing, and experiencing God. For Christians in the audience, that graduation may have been the encouragement needed to strengthen their faith. And then, for non-believers, graduation may have opened the door to them accepting Christ into their hearts. 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.

 Whether we are dance ministers, worship leaders, deacons, preachers, doctors, moms, students, husbands, or actors, or have other roles, we are God’s gift to the earth. God has called us, as **Christians, to help meet the world's needs for the cause of Christ**. God has given each of us the hands, feet, mouth, heart, and mind of Jesus to continue the work that Jesus began in proclaiming God’s truth and strengthening and unifying the body of Christ. God has given us gifts, talents, and abilities to fulfill His purposes, which include glorifying Him. There is a scripture that says “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.” (Colossians 3:23-24 ESV) God sees us, knows us, and most importantly, uniquely designed us for His purposes. God is not looking for us to be spectators but participators in His kingdom. God wants us to be the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” as we serve in His kingdom. Do you know the purpose for which God has created you? Do you know why God has given you certain gifts, talents, and abilities that God? Are you using those gifts, talents, and abilities in His kingdom?

 God's calling led me to write this book, a testament to my journey from discovering Him to being an instrument of His will. With a ministry spanning over 34 years, I bring to you my personal testimonies and experiences, shedding light on the profound topics of God’s purposes, callings, and gifts. I've been a witness to God’s goodness and divine intervention, and I'm fervent about helping fellow Christians realize the gifts He has bestowed upon them, urging them to use these gifts in alignment with His divine purpose.

 May this book inspire you to answer the call and activate or fan into flames the gifts God has given you. My desire is to see you walk into God’s purpose for your life with excellence. In this season, may God empower you with renewed hope as you acquire knowledge that will help you understand your purpose and ignite you to use your gifts. At the end of each chapter are questions to consider as you reflect and make applications. 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 follow 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 highly 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 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.

 I signed up for a work-study program during my sophomore year of college to help pay for 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, Glenda, 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 stop pledging or “drop off line” as they would say. My focus was all about graduating. 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 significantly impacted 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 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. 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 did not 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 did not know of anyone else who danced for the Lord. I did not know what type of dance garments to wear. My only questions were, what now, God, and How do I dance for you?

*What Now, God? How Do I Dance for You?*

 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 saying to me 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 did not have to fake it to make it, but I was able to be accepted by my church 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) 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, I knew I had God in my life. That verse let me know that I was not alone in this new venture of living by faith and serving Him. God was there for me amid my lack, awkwardness, and uncertainty. I just needed to seek Him, and He would be the one to come in and do the transforming within me.

 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 initial 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 type of music that I listened to and spend more time listening to the music that would glorify God in the dance. I realized that music significantly impacted my thoughts, attitude, and motives. When I listened to secular music, my flesh reverted to the old way of dancing and thinking. I enjoyed secular music, but to be dedicated to my calling, I had to stop spending so much time listening to secular music so that I could operate by faith and in God’s power in carrying 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 truly little to offer apart from Him.

 When we lead a ministry, we are not an entity. We are co-laboring with God, with the dance ministry, 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 was not ready for that and that it would have to be brought in methodically. Even though 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, time to pray for the ministry and each member of the ministry, time to listen to the ministry song, time to choreograph, and time for preparing to minister (practicing the choreography, delivering devotionals, selecting dance attire and the team praying together). As God gave me vision, I always had a verse to support every dance piece that was created. I also 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 my life, I developed a heart to start a children's dance ministry. As the children’s dance ministry progressed, adults became interested in joining the dance ministry. Eventually, I worked 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 were rooted in 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. 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?”* (NLT) *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 trusted God in more areas 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 encouraged members of the Rock Dance ministry to take classes at Dorolyn Academy. As Rock’s dance ministers grew in their understanding of dance ministry, I passed my leadership of the children’s dance ministry to one of the dance ministers. 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.

 In the Bible, God had to encourage many of the people that He called to serve to be strong and courageous, including Joshua, who 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 large fortified cities. Despite the report, Caleb and Joshua trusted God but the other 10 spies doubted God and were afraid, which impacted Israel. 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 while leading the Rock church dance ministry which demanded strength and courage. Coming up against rebellious and divisive people, fear of the unknown, Satan attacking me mentally, physically, and through other circumstances, I had to trust God through the process and hold on to His Word. If not, I could have died spiritually, or God’s work in and through me could have been hindered. By God’s strength and power, I overcame every obstacle that presented itself. Over the course of time, the Rock church dance ministry rose to new levels of knowledge and experience in the 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 followed God’s lead, this transition was still difficult 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 was unsure 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 through teaching the biblical foundational dance classes at Dorolyn, I yearn to go deeper into the ministry of dance. I did not know where to find what I wanted and needed. I was at a low and struggled to trust God in the place where I was now positioned. I felt depleted and lonely and did not have much to offer the Rock Church dance ministry then.

 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. During the summer of 2008, I attended a dance conference in Chicago and a dance conference in New York. At the conference in New York, 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 praise dancing were very thought-provoking. During my time in New York, I realized that 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.

 One of the guest speakers and dance instructors that I met in New York was Dr. Pamela Scott. She was amazing. She connected me to her ministry, the Eagles International Training Institute (EITI), and through that ministry, I could 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 thanin 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 my 34 years of ministering in the dance, 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. Meeting and gleaning from phenomenal women and men of God has been a blessing. 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 God has called you 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.

\_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_

TAKING A DEEPER DIVE

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

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**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 consider these three facets to take a closer look at God’s purpose for creating you and me: God created you and me because it was part of His plan, God created you and me out of love, and God created you and me to glorify Him.

***Created as Part of God’s Plan.***

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

 Before the world was created, God existed. 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. Someone said, “God is not just creating, but He is assigning purpose.” Consider the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah 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 planned 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. We are connected to the Creator in our purpose.

 Through Jesus Christ, man was created. 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 desires a relationship with us. Just as the Bible refers to love in 1 Corinthians 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, so is God, our Creator.

 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, emotions, and 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. These deeds could be performed conditionally or pridefully in our strength, but God gets the glory when they are done through God’s strength.

***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 humankind? 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) 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 other means, God's presence will be manifested. As the Word says, 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 inhabits the praises of His people. (Psalms 22:3) 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 how we grow personally and 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 given us the eyes to see His magnificence and the words to proclaim His Truth. Concerning the Bible, ‘proclaim’ signifies “making a public announcement or sharing the good news.” **5** We are all called to proclaim God’s Truth about sin, love, judgment, repentance, and salvation to others. When discussing our faith with others, we proclaim God’s Truth. It is not only in the spoken word that we do so but also in the songs that we sing or dance to proclaim the attributes and power of God. We use our gifts to proclaim God’s Truth 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, talk, and actions.

*Glorify God by Using Our Authority*

 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 gave them the authority to take control of, exercise power over, and 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”. We must never forget that we lead as servants.

 The body of Christ is who will conduct 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.

\_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_

TAKING A DEEPER DIVE

1. How has God shown His love to you?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. How have others benefited from the love you have shown?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**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**

 Whenever I receive a gift 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 completion, sealing that gift with a finishing touch of beauty. God has sealed us with the beauty of His Holy Spirit, which is the finishing touch of being packaged as a new person in Christ Jesus.

 Sometimes, when I open a gift, I keep the wrapping paper or ribbon because the paper's design and the ribbon's color are so attractive to me. As God’s gift, we must know and hold on to who we are and how God has designed us. We have mirrors and people in our lives to remind us of the beautiful wrapping God has placed us in. When we look in the mirror, we look at God’s beautiful creation whom God loved, gifted, and given purpose. 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* discussed 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”. **7**

 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) We now live a life of faith in God guided by the Holy Spirit instead of the flesh. As we get to know Christ, we get to know who we are. We must pattern our lives after Christ, who demonstrated to us how to live a godly life on earth. When we surrender our life to Christ, we start talking, acting, and thinking like Christ, exemplifying the true person God desires us to be. God is purifying the hearts and minds of the old self that was contaminated by the stains of the world and all the lies that the enemy planted within us. God is 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 regain the power and identity God had already established for 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. 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 in our purpose having confidence that comes from God to accomplish 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 did not just set the gifts on the ground, but they offered them 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. So who is this God that has gifted us and cares for us?

*Who is God?*

 When we come to know God for ourselves, we will see him as our protector and as our Father, our physician, our friend, our peace, our comforter, and everything we need to sustain us for eternity. In scripture, God is characterized as good, gracious, merciful, faithful, holy, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, just, perfect, and unchanging. God is also referred to 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 who He is and what He does. 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?

 We should not only know who God is but also 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 be unable 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? God knows how valuable we are. We are so valuable to God that He even knows the number of hair strands 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 and burnt offerings. 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 important 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 say we lack 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 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 went to purchase food at the village of Sychar, 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, a social outcast, for a drink. 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 was more concerned about the woman’s soul than the Jewish laws and he offered her the gift of salvation. (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 received another call from God. That call was to have an influence on young people's lives through a teaching career. Here is my story of how I 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 resulted in me pursuing a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering. According to statistics, this accomplishment was and still is not common for an African American female growing up in a single-parent home and in an under-resourced community. Nonetheless, God made it possible. Against all odds, God blessed me with a career in mechanical engineering giving me exposure to the type of people, places, and things that I had never experienced before. I was incredibly 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.

 Having experienced a new life in Christ that involved ministering in the dance, singing in the choir, and serving as a youth leader at my church, I had now embarked on a career painted by 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 exposing me to the world with all its brokenness and working out the plans He had for my life at that same time. His plans were more meaningful than any struggle that I would experience at my job. Although I felt like a “square peg in a round hole” in the corporate world, God used 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 reached one person, through sharing my faith, the experience was worth it.

 A few of my coworkers saw that I was different. They saw me as humble and helpful rather than prideful and competitive. Some coworkers asked me if I ever considered teaching or a trainer position. My coworkers saw an ability in me that I did not see in myself. I received comments about being a good trainer from my coworkers and friends. Church members were also complimenting me on being a good teacher. As I kept receiving encouraging words about my abilities in teaching and training, I began to question what God was trying to say to me through these people. I saw it as strange that people from different spheres of my life perceived me similarly.

 Unexpectedly, I received an email from Chicago Public Schools (CPS) around the same time I received these comments from people. In the email, 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 even knew of me. It was stated in the email that my tuition would be paid in full if I was willing to obtain a master's degree in education while simultaneously teaching at a CPS school. I decided to pursue the offer. I successfully passed the interviewing process, and outside of the norm, I was also given the privilege to choose the high school where I wanted to teach. 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. I then successfully completed the process to become a certified teacher. Without a doubt, I knew that God had made all that I was experiencing possible.

 Why would God call me to a new career in teaching when I never intended to become a math teacher, and I was just ‘getting my feet wet’ as a mechanical engineer? Even though teaching was not my goal, dream, or desire, God had a bigger plan in mind that involved more than I could of imagined. 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 would be walking into as a teacher, God knew of the students who were hurting, living in abusive homes, dealing with low esteem and mental illnesses, feeling hopeless and unloved, and struggling to understand math. God chose me to be one of the vessels that would impact young people's lives for the cause of Christ. In my first year of teaching, I will never forget how one of my 9th-grade students cried because she said she had never done well or understood math until she took my class. Because of her previous teachers, she had developed a fear of math that paralyzed her ability to learn math. Seeing God use me in this young lady's life and in so many other students’ lives have been the inspiration that has kept me serving in this career for 28 years.

 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. God enabled me to become a teacher and then allowed me to be elevated in this 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 degree to serve for one year as an Instructional Support Leader in Math for twenty-five 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 implemented for the school.

 I am thankful that God uses people, experiences, and places to speak into our lives. God has done tremendous work in my life, using the gifts He gave me to bless others. God has shown me that I have a purpose. God has reminded me that all the gifts He gives us are important. What God has done for me, He wants to do for you. You cannot 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 speaks in your life because you do not want to miss your blessings. Even though it may be difficult at times, we must simply say ‘yes’ and trust God for what will come next. It was not until I said yes to accepting Christ into my life that I could understand His will for me. It was not 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 saying to God that I was ready 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.

\_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_

TAKING A DEEPER DIVE

1. How do you see yourself?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. How do you think God sees you?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. In what ways has God required you or is requiring you to make a shift?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**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 were not worthy 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. However, one guest did not dress in the appropriate wedding clothes and was thrown out in the darkness outside. The ‘called’ received the initial invitation, while the 'chosen' accepted the invitation and responded appropriately.

 The point is this: Being called, invited, or summoned by God is always for a purpose. Although everyone has ears to hear the call, only a few people listen and respond. Others refuse or ignore the call, are preoccupied with their own affairs, or do not respond appropriately. Those people will not be found worthy of the call.

 God’s first invitation or calling is not exclusive but goes out to all people, regardless of background or circumstances. God first 'calls' or invites us to a relationship with Him by becoming followers of Jesus. 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 whom God will be able to use to be effective in His kingdom.

 God's call is not just to a relationship with Him but also to our relationships with others. God forms families, communities, and churches to support and encourage one another. 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 emphasizes that God is a God of relationships and community and the importance of not being alone. Proverbs 27:27 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (NIV) We are not called to serve God’s people in isolation but need accountability. In times of loneliness or feeling isolated, Satan will try to steer us away from God’s calling, but being part of a community can help us stay strong.

 We are also called to serve in God’s kingdom in various roles, whether at home, in church, in school, in vocations, or in 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.” **9** 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 humankind 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, let us remember that God is the one who has given the gifts. Let us thank God for our gifts and ask Him how He wants us to use them. Every gift that God has given has equal value to Him and should be equally valued by us. In addition to to giving us such gifts as His unconditional love, His gift of salvation, His gift of eternal life, and His gift of grace and mercy, God has also given us natural gifts and talents.

 Before birth, we were predestined to receive gifts. Natural gifts include the ability to see, hear, speak, walk, and talk. Natural gifts also include having the aptitude to do something 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 talent is a natural skill or ability to do something without needing training. Some people have talents in singing, dancing, public speaking, and writing poetry. God can use our natural talents, skills, and abilities to serve Him if we are willing.

 Our natural 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 skills and talents He has given us. Even if our talents and abilities seem small to us, they may be a 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?***

 Using our natural gifts can be a vehicle to open the door for 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.” **12**

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 our faith in our Heavenly Father. Spiritual gifts cannot be perfected but can be increased as they are used.

 In the New Testament, the phrase spiritual gift is rooted in two words, “God’s grace and His Holy Spirit”. Paul and Peter referred to spiritual gifts as “charismata,” which means the grace of God, or “Pneumatikos” in Greek, meaning of or relating to the Spirit. **12**With a spiritual gift, we 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. 13**

 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 in the appendix section of this book.

*The Unexpected Gifts*

My Testimony

 Just like you, I wanted to know what my spiritual gifts were. I have taken spiritual gift assessments and found that our gifts and callings 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 lead the ministry effectively. While serving in the dance ministry, God gave me the gift of dancing, prophetic 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** Prophetic dancing refers toHoly Spirit-led spontaneous dancing accompanied by either prophetic music, singing, or speaking to edify, exhort, or comfort the body of Christ. When I started flowing in the prophetic dance, I would sense God directing me in movement. This experience made me more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading and more sensitive to hearing God speak in the Spirit.

 When Rock Church was under the pastoral leadership of Pastor Lincoln Washington, there was what Pastor Lincoln called a breakthrough ministry. Through that ministry, I was taught how to minister to people for prayer when they came to the altar. Part of the teaching came from watching and helping Pastor Lincoln at the altar. The other part of the teaching came through the Holy Spirit's empowerment and guidance. 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 Holy Spirit moved, God would give me a prophetic word to speak over some of the people that I would pray for.

 Some gifts we receive come to us because of our faith in God. I once heard Tony Evans say, “To stir up our gifts is to stir up faith. Everything God plans to do for us is already planned but must be activated by faith. Growing in our faith will enable us to operate from the spiritual and not just from the natural. God will not attach us to the spiritual apart from faith.” James 2:17-18 says, “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without [[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%202%3A14-26&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-30312a)]your works, and I will show you my faith by [[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%202%3A14-26&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-30312b)]my works. ” (NKJV)

 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, nor was I interested in speaking in tongues. I left the class because I did not want to be pressured into speaking in tongues. In my bewilderment, I decided to study scriptures that spoke about 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, several women, including myself, remained with the guest speaker to lay hands and pray over one of the young ladies who was dealing with spiritual warfare in her life. We laid hands on her and prayed over her for about an hour. While praying, I started to speak in tongues. Beyond my control, I was speaking in tongues, and I could not stop the process. God was in control. That was a God moment that I will never forget. Amazingly, God answered my prayers, and I spoke in tongues. God did it! 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, which I now see as a blessing and a privilege.

 A pastor who speaks in tongues 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 am praying about things in the spirit that are beyond the depth of my understanding. Romans 8:26 says, “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”(NIV) I do not know what I am saying because I do not have the gift of interpreting tongues, but the Holy Spirit gives me what to say, and in the process, God is renewing my mind and refreshing my spirit. As I stay yielded to the Spirit, God also directs me in my thoughts, and what I say in my natural language comes more freely and intentionally. Speaking in tongues provides me with a constant reminder of God’s presence with me and that God is constantly at work in my life.

 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 during times of prayer, prophecy, or ministry.

 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. Every gift is needed to help unify and build the church. When the church works together and uses the gifts that God has given, the church will be 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 resources and suggested readings provided in the appendix of this book, you may also have Christian friends or leaders who know you well and can help you identify your spiritual gifts. You will have to determine the best resource for you. Some of your gifts will be revealed to you by God as you voluntarily serve in the body of Christ.

\_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_and suggested \_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_

TAKING A DEEPER DIVE

1. What natural abilities or talents do you possess?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Have you taken a spiritual gift assessment and what was your result? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you use your natural or spiritual gifts for the kingdom? Why or why not?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Chapter #5**

**Running With God’s Gifts**

 “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith….” *(Hebrews 12:1-2 (NASB 1995))*

 About eight years ago, a shift in Rock Church leadership strongly affected church membership and the membership in the dance ministry. During the time of transition, there was only one dance ministry team remaining, the adult dance ministry, and that ministry was left with two members: me and a young adult female. The two of us continued to minister in the dance and I also used this opportunity to mentor this young lady. As time passed, I didn’t feel led to rebuild the dance ministry from the ground up again. When I learned that the young lady that I was mentoring was leaving the church because of the transitions in her life, I decided to bring my leadership of the LEAP Dance Ministry at Rock Church to an end, and I stopped ministering for a while.

 Even though I thought my time of leading and ministering in the dance had ended, God showed me otherwise. God still brought people who wanted me to use my gift. Various people were either asking me to choreograph a dance for them, teach a workshop, or minister in the dance. This experience taught me that situations and circumstances should not dictate our calling. Despite what we see and what we experience, God can still use us. In fact, whenever someone asked me to choreograph, teach, or minister in dance, I was honored and excited to serve again. I didn’t need a title, just a willing heart. I am happy to say that Rock Church dance ministry is on the move again under new leadership and I am there to help in any way I can.

 I know that I will not dance forever here on earth, but if God continues to open doors, that indicates that He still has more in store for us to do. Our responsibility is to continue to walk worthy of our calling, be a light to others, continue to grow in the area where God has planted us, and continue to seek His Will. One day, when I was taking an aqua aerobics class, the instructor, in her jovial nature, said as she made direct eye contact with me, “Don’t stop dancing.” I never told the instructor I danced. Was this God speaking to me again as He spoke to me through the worship leader many years ago when He first called me to dance for Him? I would like to think so.

 The fate of our calling is not for us to determine. God will let us know when we have completed our assignment or when one season of our calling is over and a new season has begun. In essence, God has the final say. If we are able and capable, God still wants to use us to be a light for others to see. God still wants to use us to mentor others with similar gifts, to build up more leaders, and to multiply His kingdom. We do not always need a title to validate our calling.

 In general, when we use our gifts, we expand the mindset of the body of Christ. We impart understanding and purpose. For example, the ministry of dance has not always been accepted in the body of Christ, but as more people have been exposed to it and have sought biblical understanding of the gift, God has opened the hearts and minds of the churches. God has used the dance ministry to praise, worship, and proclaim His truths. But the dance has also brought joy, deliverance, restoration, and encouragement to the body of Christ.

***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

 Sometimes, the enemy will try to get us off track by infiltrating our hearts and minds with doubt, insecurities, pride, criticism, and judgment. The enemy wants to put and keep us in bondage so that we do not receive the blessings of God, or we cannot be a blessing to others. The enemy will whisper in our ears that we are not eloquent enough to speak before a group of people or we do not have enough spiritual knowledge to teach that group or someone other than us should lead that ministry. Remember that God has and is equipping us with everything we need to reach our destiny. We cannot allow people, temptations, trials, tribulations, and spiritual attacks to cause us to give up on our God-given purpose. We must remember all of the following: We are not working for man but for God. “We don’t fight for victory; we fight from victory.” (Joseph Prince **8**)The Lord will fight our battles and provide whatever we need to complete any assignment that He has given us. We must persevere through all encounters of spiritual warfare, negative emotions, negative experiences, and negative feedback.

 If we are committed to doing what God has called us to, we will be content in our circumstances because even in our weaknesses, God will show Himself strong. If we are committed to doing what God calls us to, we will allow God to position us and trust Him with the process. If we are committed to doing what God calls us to, we will seek God and take advantage of every opportunity He provides. If we are committed to doing what God has called us to, we will seek spiritual growth and development to perfect what He has given us. If we are committed to doing what God calls us to do, we will be willing to learn and glean from others. If we are committed to doing what God calls us to do, we will continue to move forward 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 us.

 So, what is one of the things God wants from us? God wants a relationship with us. A relationship where He can lead us in everything that He desires of us. God desires to reveal to us His plans for our life. God desires to reveal to us how to walk in our calling and how to use our gifts. God is such a gentleman that He does not force us to do anything. Our relationship with Him is based on trust and not force. Our relationship with God is a choice that we make because of our faith and love for Him.

 Seeking God should bring us to a place of hearing God’s voice. 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 and how He wants us to do it. There are times when we will need to be still or even silent so that we can have a listening ear and tune out every other voice, but God. God can speak to us in multiple ways, including through scriptures, music, songs, praise, dance, dreams, nature, conversations with someone else, preaching, teaching, sickness, and through our circumstances. Most importantly, God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit, moving in our thoughts, feelings, and senses.

 God speaks to us and is ready to hear from us. He desires our songs of praise, our words of thanksgiving, and our words of adoration. He is ready to meet our every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Everything we need to sustain us will be found when we commune with God.

*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)*

As Christians, God sees us and knows how we live before men. As God molds us into a new creation, there should be a difference in how we talk, act, and make choices for our lives. Others should see qualities or characteristics in us that depict God at work in our lives. We are not trying to live for men or become someone that we are not because God wants us to be our authentic selves. We are letting go and allowing God to take the ‘will’ of our lives. In fact, God will bring about the changes in our lives to glorify and honor Him. We cannot do it alone because we will fail every attempt. For God to work in us, we must surrender.

 For God to do His will in our lives, we must surrender our will. We must allow God to speak, direct, lead, teach, correct, and train in our lives to live His life. As stated in Romans 12: 1-2, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, and sisters, given 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 we are? God has chosen you, predestined, created, accepted, saved, and redeemed you through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, God has made it possible for you to have a relationship with Him. He has given you purpose in His kingdom. He has given you grace, mercy, unconditional love, favor, and eternal life. You will spend eternity glorifying God, praising and worshipping, magnifying, and loving God. God has given you an inheritance, which is His kingdom, and all His promises and blessings. He has sealed you with His Holy Spirit to teach us, guide us, comfort us, and reveal to us.

 In addition, God heals and strengthens our bodies. He renews our minds. He gives us a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone. We have been blessed with health, wholeness, soundness, prosperity, and every spiritual blessing.We are rich in Christ and lack no good thing. God has even given us the blessing of laughter so that we do not take life so seriously. Isn’t it also a blessing to know that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus? God is faithful to forgive us. God can turn our failures into successes. Romans 8:17 tells us that we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. We already have victory in every circumstance.

Knowing that God has blessed us with everything we need, we can confidently serve Him. We can rest in the fact that God will fulfill every promise He has made to us. We operate in God’s grace and possess the victory to accomplish whatever He leads us to do. So, let us continue to run our course, allowing God to do the work He is doing in and through us.

**Finish the Race**

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

 A marathon race is a sport of 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 even 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 do not just run, but we run with God's gifts to help fulfill our purpose. This spiritual race requires faith, stamina, perseverance, commitment, and discipline. We need the discipline of prayer, studying God’s Word, gathering with other saints, praise and worship, evangelism, and service. God has more to show us, more to deposit in us, more for us to experience, and more for us to do as He takes us from glory to glory. God cannot experience what we experience until it happens. 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 walk into that season. 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. People leave ministries because their calling or giftedness does not align with the ministry, because they fail to trust God or God’s leader, or because God is moving them on. 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 on the Lord to see what God will do. (Isaiah 40:31)

 If we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, we will never be disappointed. The Amplified Bible defines “fixing our eyes” as “looking away from all that will distract us”. We must fix our spiritual eyes and tune our spiritual ears to what God is showing us. The Amplified Bible also defines Jesus as the “author and perfecter of faith,” meaning “the first incentive for our belief and the One who brings our faith to maturity”. Jesus has already reached the finish line and is now at the right hand of God, interceding for us so that we may accomplish what God has called us to do. Jesus understands suffering, has been tempted in every way possible yet without sin, and can sympathize with our weakness. It is Jesus who we should draw near to and who can help us in our time of need.

 If we persevere in our God-given purpose, God will use our gifts and bless our lives. God's plan is always designed to bring Him glory while serving His people. Serving in any capacity is not always easy, but God will give us the strength to thrive in our giftedness and to be overcomers. No matter the situation or circumstance, we must believe that God can do the impossible, and we must stay in the race running with our gifts and never give up on ourselves, God, and His calling on our lives.

 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 the pleasures of serving and seeing God do the work in the people. It is rewarding just to see people come to know the Lord, grow in their faith, and start to use their gifts.

 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. You will spend eternity with your Heavenly Father, who promises to reward you for a well-done job. When God 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).

\_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_

TAKING A DEEPER DIVE

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

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**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 ESV)

 In this book, I have shared the journey that God took me on to help build my faith and trust in Him by walking in my purpose and utilizing the gifts He had given me. Because I aligned my will with His Will for my life, I experienced firsthand what God can do and how God can work in and through us out of His love for us. Your journey, calling, and gifts may differ from mine, but at the end of the day, it is all about saving souls and changing lives for the cause of Christ. Salvation is impossible without knowledge of the gospel or the righteousness of God, which can only be shared or displayed by God’s children who exercise their gifts. Romans 10:14-15 states it this way, *“*How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (NIV) We have the beautiful feet that God is calling on to impact the world today.

 The gifts assist us in conducting God’s great commission. God calls us and then sends us out to different platforms to save, deliver, heal, comfort, give hope, and proclaim God. We do not necessarily have to look for our purpose but walk into it through our relationship with God. God has equipped us with gifts to work in partnership with Him. In fact, God's gifts will carry us from glory to glory in Him. We possess natural gifts, the fruit of the Spirit, and spiritual gifts for God’s glory and to help us fulfill our purpose. Natural gifts such as singing, dancing and speaking are abilities and talents that God has given us. Fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy, and peace, are the attributes that the Holy Spirit produces in us to help us develop Christ-like character. Spiritual gifts such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, and the gift of healing are the gifts God gives every believer through the Holy Spirit so that the church can be whole, unified, strengthened, encouraged, and grow together as the body of Christ.

 Knowing that we have a purpose keeps us thriving in God’s kingdom. We will reap God's provisions, protection, empowerment, and sanctification as we stay consistent, faithful, and committed to serving God by serving His people. May we be the movers, shakers, and life changers as God leads us. May we have the eyes to see, the ears to hear and the heart to seek, to find, to become, and to do all that God purpose for our lives. There are blessings in store for those who persevere in what God is calling them to do.

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Footnote References**

1. Donald Lawrence and the Tri-City Singers
2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrender\_(religion)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrender_%28religion%29)
3. Warren, R. (2002). Purpose Driven Life. Zondervan
4. Cook, Ryan J. January 2024. In the Beginning. Today in the Word. Moody Publishers
5. <https://biblifocus.com/blog/what-does-it-mean-in-the-bible-to-proclaim/>
6. <https://www.foundationswithjanet.org/columns/blog-columns/what-is-your-kingdom-purpose/>
7. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/identity>
8. Prince, Joseph 2008. Destined to Reign Devotional
9. Guiles, Shirley G. 2018. God.Gift.You
10. <https://valeriemurray.com/why-does-god-give-christians-the-gift-of-the-holy-spirit/>
11. https://www.gotquestions.org/bearing-fruit.html
12. Guiles, Shirley G. 2018. God.Gift.You. Calling Video
13. Arthur, Kay & Lawson, David & BJ 2010. Understanding Spiritual Gifts
14. “Meet Brad”, <https://bradminns.com>

**Foreword**

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

President/ CEO of Awakening the Voice of Truth

Pastor Emeritus Rock Church

President Emeritus Promise Keepers

Forward

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

President/ CEO of Awakening the Voice of Truth

Pastor Emeritus Rock Church

President Emeritus Promise Keepers

I pastored a multiracial church that became the flagship 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 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 FLAMES!**

**Front Matter**

Pastor Rosalyn Acevedo

River of Life Worship Intl

Divine Expressions Christian Academy of Worship Arts

“Since the beginning, Sandra integrated her gifts and calling to the purposes of the Kingdom of God; her honesty and sincerity are 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 My Heavenly Daddy: Thank you, God, for giving me guidance, strength, peace, and perseverance throughout this writing journey.

To my Family: Thank you for your patience and support throughout this writing adventure.

To Dr. Raleigh B. Washington: Thank you for establishing the foundation that sprouted my spiritual growth and an opportunity to use my gift of dance.

To Pastor Rosalyn Acevedo: Thank you for contributing to my biblical understanding of the dance and allowing me to have the joy of co-laboring in ministry.

To Dr. Pamela Scott: Thank you for providing a platform on which I have acquired a deeper biblical understanding of the dance, ministry tools, and praise and worship.

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

To Pastor Robert Stevenson: Thank you for being a great example to our church in your dedication to teaching, loving, and serving God’s people.

To all those who graciously supported me in my writing: Thank you for your prayers, contributions, and encouragement.

**Dedication**

I dedicate this book to my Heavenly Father, whom I love, honor, and praise. You are the reason that I wrote it, and in the process, I have had the privilege of reflecting on your goodness in my life, realizing that I am still growing in my faith, and learning more about you.

I dedicate this book to my dear mom, who passed away in July 29, 2022. She would have been immensely proud of my new accomplishment.

I dedicate this book to believers who are seeking to understand their earthly purpose. God has birthed something in you. Let’s put it into action.

**Appendix**

**Suggested Reading and Resources**

1. Wagner, C. Peter. 2003 Finding Your Spiritual Gifts (Self-Guided Questionnaire)
2. Online Spiritual Gift Assessment - <https://www.livingwatercoast.com/thegifts?gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIooCD9_y_hAMV3_dMAh0U4QpKEAAYBCAAEgJ8yPD_BwE>
3. Arthur, Kay & Lawson, David & BJ 2010. Understanding Spiritual Gifts
4. Guiles, Shirley G. 2018. God.Gift.You (A six-week bible study)

**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.

22)Administration (Leadership) – those who provide guidance and organization.**12**

**Synopsis**

 In 2 Timothy 2:6, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy from prison, saying, “This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you” (NIV). The apostle Paul was encouraging Timothy to use the gifts that God had given him of leading the church and preaching, effectively. Not using our gifts is like what happens to a campfire; the flames will eventually go out. However, if there is a glimpse of embers, you can rekindle the flames of a campfire by continuously fanning the pieces of wood to increase the oxygen until the flames are burning again.

 Are you ready to “Fan into Flames” your gifts? When God calls you to speak, will you speak? When God calls you to go, will you go? When God calls you to serve, will you serve? Whatever God is calling you to do, will you do? God has equipped you with gifts, talents, and abilities because you have a purpose and are needed. You can potentially change the eternal destiny of those who do not know Christ and strengthen the faith of those who need inspiration and encouragement. God has given each of us a platform by which we may impact a group of people through our God-given gifts. May this book help you understand your purpose and spur you on in using your gifts where you will be excited to say, ‘Here I am, Lord, use me.’

**About the Author**

 Sandra J. Jackson is an ordained minister with 30 years of leading the LEAP Dance Ministry (Life Expressed Abundantly through Praise) at Rock of Our Salvation EFC Church. As a choreographer, leader, dance minister, teacher, and consultant, Sandra has ministered to Chicago's children, teenagers, and adults, providing biblical instruction and discipline and cultivating skills and gifts. As a licensed educator with a Master's in secondary education and in school leadership, Sandra has also dedicated almost 3 decades to the public school system, teaching and leading children, teenagers, and adults in the educational arena. In her devotion to the Lord and love for people, Sandra continues using her gifts to build God’s kingdom.