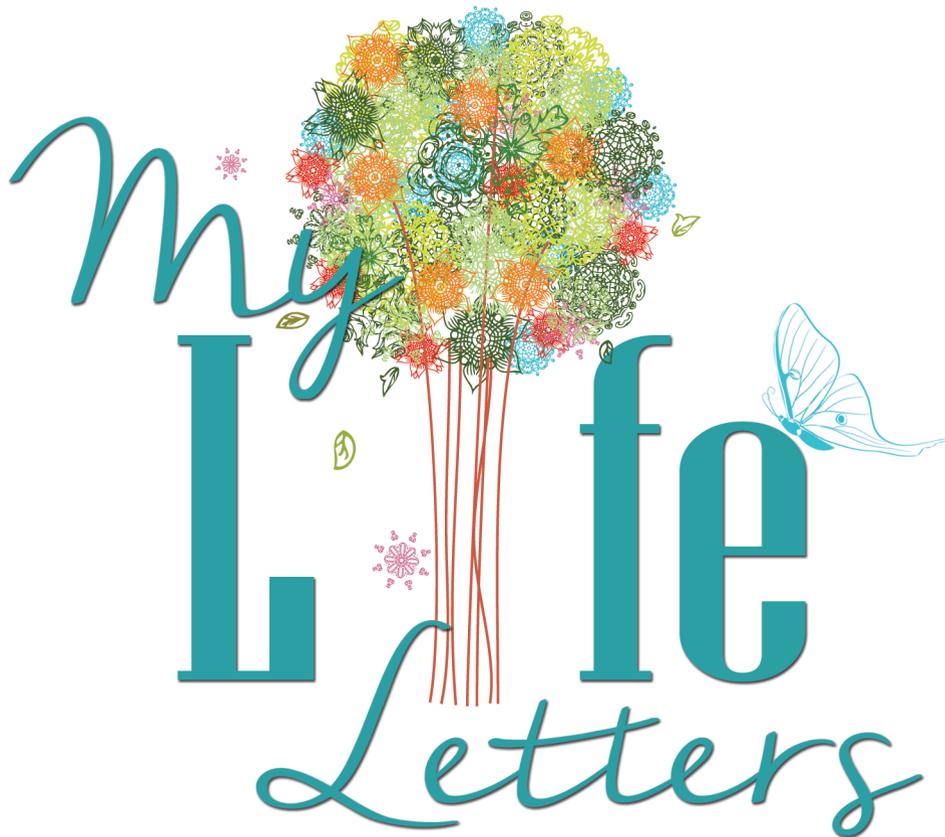


Cheryl J. Dore
with Leslye Hebert



My
Life
Letters

Conversations with God that Lead to an Extraordinary Life



REDEMPTION
PRESS

© 2014 by Cheryl J. Dore and Leslye Hebert. All rights reserved.

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022 Toll Free (844) 2REDEEM (273-3336)

Redemption Press is honored to present this title in partnership with the author. The views expressed or implied in this work are those of the author. Redemption Press provides our imprint seal representing design excellence, creative content and high quality production.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the prior permission of the copyright holder, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture references marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture references marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

ISBN 13: 978-1-68314-049-8

ePub ISBN: 978-1-68314-050-4

Kindle ISBN: 978-1-68314-051-1

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2016937877

LANDMARKS

to Stay
on Course

*“Set up road signs; put up guideposts.
Take note of the highway, the road that you take.
Return, Virgin Israel, return to your towns.”*
—Jeremiah 31:21

Contents



Introduction.....	7
1. Unforced Rhythms of Grace.....	15
2. Draw Near.....	53
3. A Clean Slate.....	89
4. Ask Boldly.....	127
5. Track Answers.....	179
6. Capture Promises.....	223

Introduction

Life was full of tension. It seemed to be one thing after another. “Why is faith so hard at times” she thought. “Why can’t I take God at His word and then leave it alone?”

Leslye opened her Bible to Eugene Peterson’s rendition of Matthew 11:28–30. “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Drawn by Matthew’s insight into the yoke of Christ, Leslye sat back in her chair to imagine an *unforced life*. It had been a challenging season. “What would that look like?” she thought. Would God actually show her how to recover her life?

Leslye described going deeper. She pressed in with God to chew on it for a while and sat back in her chair to let His exhortation to “learn the unforced rhythms of grace” sink in. “To be honest,” she said, “I was captivated by the idea of a grace so accessible that life is unforced.”

She had been on a journey of prayer with me to secure God’s plan for this book and the next season of her life. And although the day-to-day was hard and the season more challenging than most, she thrived on each conversation with God in prayer. They had a unique pulse—not merely spewing frivolous speeches with little faith, but drawing close enough to experience a grace so amazing that life is unforced. We were after a level interaction with God that left no room for second guessing His plan.

Things began to take shape the day Leslye shared her encounter with Matthew 11:28. I think we were both burnt out on religion, and she called it out. *The Message* translation of that portion of Scripture was awe-inspiring: “keep company with Him.” God used it to write His

Introduction

plan on our hearts—to teach us to interact with Him, not religiously, but conversationally. Our goal should always be to encounter God in His Word and through prayer, having a sense of His presence.

The Holy Spirit was pouring God’s plan into our hearts. We were to teach a generation unsure of His voice, how to walk with Him, work with Him, and watch how He does it, that they might draw close enough to experience a grace so accessible that life is unforced!

We prayed toward that end for two years and more, compelled by the task. Our lives were flipped upside down as a result. All other pursuits, activities, and involvement came to a standstill. The only thing that made sense was investing our whole hearts and our conversations with God in this book. It was a journey like no other. We grew to pray with an uncommon force and did not let up. We cried out for simple, yet life-changing ingredients to make your encounters with God all that we were experiencing and more.

In light of today’s use of technology—social media platforms and text messaging—our assignment made perfect sense. Technology keeps us connected yet more disconnected than ever before. We live in a digital world and work tirelessly to decipher the emotions scratched across one screen or another. It amounts to a struggle to make sense of abbreviated text without emotion, feeling, or human touch. Conclusions are drawn with frightfully little information. Conflicts explode over the tone of a text and yet, who can accurately read the emotions in a word? We get to the point in a text using little more than three words thereby circumventing meaningful conversation.

Perhaps like me, you have witnessed the airing of dirty laundry on digital platforms. I can understand the feelings being expressed and yet, I cringe when I see it. I want to comfort the one whose heart is broken, the one airing her dirty laundry and hoping her feelings will be regarded by the masses. And more often than not, the response of the masses or the one with nothing to lose is disappointing and disconfirming.

Awash with technology, anyone can hide behind a post, tweet, e-mail, or text and create an illusion of wellbeing. We can be whomever we want to be in that moment; our audience is none the wiser. It seems reasonable to find a growing hunger for meaningful conversation—the kind that not only speaks to our circumstances but is uplifting and personally edifying.

The lights went on that day indeed. Using Matthew 11:28, God heightened His plan for a remedy and a rest. He is writing personal words on the hearts of a discontented generation and satisfying the growing hunger for meaningful conversation. It is while sitting in the bleachers of our lives, observing, available, and eager to reveal His thoughts concerning everyday matters that God says, *“Come to Me.”*

The invitation is to go after a mountainous encounter that leads to personal transformation or a simple moment of being immersed in His grace. “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.”

Are you ready to make life a conversational journey with God? How will your life’s tempo change if you were to interact with God in the everyday, ordinary place? Imagine giving the Holy Spirit access to your heart. Are you convinced of ways that He makes the ordinary moment sacred? Give it some thought; put the smart phone on mute long enough to hear the life-changing commentary of your Father and your God.

Leslye and I have imagined life-changing encounters with conversational prayer. We took a bold step of faith, pulled the material of this book together loosely, and taught it in small groups on my back patio to help a growing generation of women listen, hear God for themselves, and see that He is present. The feedback was more than we hoped for—each one grew to recognize God’s voice to them personally. They celebrated a growing dependence upon God in the everyday place.

If you are reading this material, please know we have prayed for you as well. We have asked the Father to make your prayer life as simple as picking up the phone to have an ordinary conversation; we’ve asked Him to make your faith life-changing. The last thing we want is for you to miss out on the ways God is at work in your life. Countless hours in prayer have shaped the direction of this material. On these pages you will be immersed in our combined approach of God.

And while portions of the material in this book are not unique to us, we have poured our whole hearts into developing a simple door to amazing faith—a door that opens up to complete confidence in God to do more than you can hope or imagine. We are deeply thankful for assorted authors, leaders, and researchers who have gone before us and provided a vast range of principles to draw upon.

Unless noted otherwise, the “I” in this book refers to me, Cheryl, since I have assumed the narrator’s voice. However, Leslye plays a crucial role. She is an equal developer of the ideas, ideals, and activities that position us to grow more intimately aware of God.

Are you ready for a conversational journey with God? Can you imagine drawing near to Him in the privacy of your heart and home? How will life change once you are confident of God’s voice and receiving direction, finding comfort, and going about your day convinced of His love?

If you cannot wrap your faith around every possibility in Christ just yet, this book has been written for you so that life with God takes on new meaning.

If you find any chapters to be a bit long or daunting, don’t be afraid to come back to them. Do your best to work through each application exercise to grow your collection of conversations with God. Make *My Life Letters* your road map to an extraordinary life.

Wander & wonder

Are you wandering through life with your eyes closed?

Is your heart in tune?

Are you listening?

Getting lost in Redwoods National Park is not what I (Leslye) set out to do. But that's what happened. Captivated by canyons of ferns, mountain streams, and the tallest trees in the world, the Coastal Redwoods, two hours passed before realizing the path we were on did not circle back to our campsite.

The six-mile leisurely hike turned into a twelve-mile drudge. The wondrous terrain was now a blur. The morning fog that caressed the great trees, the long, misty shadows and lush terrain left a vague impression. Our sights were set on landmarks, road signs, and guideposts instead, anything that would show us the way to go.

"Stacy," I finally said out of sheer desperation, "there's a man dressed like a hiker! Let's ask him for directions."

"Excuse me," I said rushing to the man in Gore-Tex. "Are you familiar with the Redwood Forest? We left our campsite early this morning and got turned around. We're wondering which path takes us back to our campsite."

"Where's your campsite?" he said.

Stacey turned to me with bewilderment written all over her face. It was a somewhat condescending look that said we'd be headed in that direction if we knew.

"We have no idea," I countered, embarrassed. We walked amongst the redwoods long enough to get lost somewhere in the fifty-mile-long park and could only give the hiker a vague description of the parking lot.

He pointed toward a fork in the path and said, "Well, it sounds like you should go that way."

So, off we went. Hungry. Thirsty. No longer in awe of the Redwoods and plumb out of interesting conversation.



Getting Started

Have you ever journeyed through life in a similar fashion? Perhaps you can appreciate the sore outcome of ending up on the wrong path. You look up one day to discover you are miles away from the destination for which you were aiming. Or you look back to a crossroads and realize the path you chose has kept you walking in circles for months, even years. You never seemed to arrive.

How might abiding with God in the everyday place keep you from wandering onto a path that does not lead to a hoped for destination while wondering if God truly has a plan and purpose for your life?

My Life Letters positions you to encounter God. It helps you avoid the pitfalls and keeps you from wandering and wondering. Life is full of distractions, and they can be as captivating as the Coastal Redwoods. Without a growing dependence upon God, without knowing His word and hearing His voice to discern His ways, we get off track. Perhaps even lose our way. By accumulating a collection of encounters with God we grow more attuned to His voice. We become more familiar with His ways.

My Life Letters teaches us to gather stones, track landmarks, and set up road signs to broaden our experience of God. This is the approach of the forerunners of faith. Joshua gathered stones and built walls or altars to remember and recall what God had done—to look back to God's involvement and to move forward with great confidence in His promises (Josh. 4:6–8).

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1 NKJV).

Jeremiah was instructed in the same way. He learned to set up road signs, put up guideposts, and take note of the highway: the road that you take to keep from wandering (Jer. 31:21).

James, the brother of Jesus explained that *if* we draw near to God, He will draw near to us (James 4:8).

Who doesn't want to know God on a personal level and to live in close proximity to Him in the everyday place? Who doesn't want to find an approach of God that aligns with Scripture and works with our personality while satisfying our faith?

We have a choice. We can go to God to stay on course. We can grow our faith by becoming more in tune with His work behind the scenes or ignore biblical examples and struggle for the best path, merely hoping God is involved in the details of lives but never be affirmed or hear Him with our hearts.

My Life Letters is an interactive tool to abide with God in the everyday place. It's designed to help you draw close to God that He might draw close to you. And it will help you to remain intentional when life does not make sense by developing your faith to withstand trials.

The Father has designed you for intimacy with Himself. That's what abiding is all about. He has not told you to put your hope in Him and wander aimlessly through life, but to trust in Him with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths (Prov. 3:5–6).

God does not give you a road map of life, but a relationship for life.” –Henry Blackaby

My Life Letters is the perfect tool to grow your very own collection of encounters with God. Use each *My Life Letters* application exercise like a road map to journey with God through the everyday place. Don't forget to look back to move forward—look back to conversational encounters to flourish in your

experience of God. You'll be surprised by the intimacy that unfolds.

Look back to maintain forward movement. You'll be empowered to stay on course when life does not make sense. Realize, however, that it happens because you are taking a relational approach to life by turning to God to obtain help in route or beforehand to endure during those times when life does not make sense when trials wear you down and the path grows dim.

The point of faith is not to get stuck in an old place, but to cross the river into a promised land. You'll collect stones for that purpose. They'll serve like landmarks to avoid ruts and navigate detours. Pay attention to the highway, Jeremiah was told, to the way that you take. This applies to us so that we can be aligned with God's will, uncover His plan, and hear a word that leads to renewed vision and uncapped potential.

Don't be afraid to put your whole heart into each exercise. Through intentional participation with God, you are positioned to listen for His voice and discern His will. That's your assignment: listening for God, watching for landmarks, and setting up guideposts.

Can I encourage you to get excited about growing your very own collection of encounters with God? They will serve like a road map to a hoped-for destination. And don't forget to look back from time to time to move forward. Look back to conversational encounters you collect to grow familiar with God's ways.

Make My Life Letters Your Personal Portfolio

- **Use it to journey with God through life’s landscapes.**
- **Fill it with letters made up of face-to-face encounters.**
- **Let one notebook full of conversations account for one year of your life.**

Are you excited to get started? I know I am. To grow your very own collection of encounters with God, there is a six-step approach to conversation. It’s how the chapters are broken down and includes:

1. **Draw Near**
2. **A Clean Slate**
3. **Ask Boldly**
4. **Track Answers**
5. **Capture Promises**
6. **Mine Treasure**

I realize the idea of spending an hour with God can be daunting. And for most it feels like an unrealistic expectation. The feeling of disconnect is equally overwhelming once you’ve experienced God, once you’ve grown to recognize His voice and benefit from face-to-face encounters.

Your very own collection of letters will account for conversational encounters with God. They will prevent you from waking up ten years down the road, miles away from the longing etched upon your heart. If you chronicle your journey, write letters in response to faith, and take note of the highway—the way that you take—you will have confidence to remain intentional. The apostle Paul puts it like this: “Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward” (Heb. 10:35 NKJV).

Your time and your approach of God in prayer is about to change. No longer will it be only about making your requests known, but also developing a greater confidence.

If at any time you find that you are meandering down a path detached from God’s will or unsure of His voice, know that the enemy of your soul is after your confidence. Also know that you’ll have signposts in place to recount and recall: a collection of letters to turn to that restore the awe and wonder and a collection of encounters that provide an all-consuming sense of God’s involvement with you.

By growing familiar with God’s voice, His will, and His ways, you will circumvent puddles in your path on the road to great and precious promises (2 Pet. 1:3–5).

It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up He had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose He is working out in everything and everyone” (Eph. 1:11–12 MSG)



Chapter One

Unforced Rhythms of Grace

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” —Matthew 11:28–30 MSG

Letter One

Walk with Me...
In the Arrangements of Life

Letter Two

Work with Me...
In the Tension of the Landscape

Letter Three

Watch Me...
In the Unfolding Assignment

Letter Introduction

Marlee, a dear friend and mentor, skipped through brilliant fields of green in an unforgettable dream. She was having the time

of her life and couldn’t wait to tell me about the colorful landscape with marvelous things God placed in the meadow like treasure for her to find.

“Cheryl, it was a phenomenal, carefree time,” she explained. “I frolicked through the meadow with the grass up to my knees and felt the breath of heaven through the gentle breeze with the sun warm on my face. You were with me, following close behind. I’d see a butterfly and reach for it. I’d marvel at its uniqueness, delight in God’s creative genius, toss it over my shoulder, and move on to the next thing. In my dream, you reached for every amazing thing I tossed aside, grabbed hold of each nugget and tucked it in a satchel you clutched tightly.”

My Life Letters

Marlee's dream was prophetic no doubt—so very precise in painting a vivid picture of my life's landscape at that time. I was reaching for butterflies . . . promises of my own.

Every Monday morning I met in Marlee's home with other women for prayer and encouragement. My faith was enlarged by the truths she captured on her knees with God. They were like rain to a sun-scorched land. They helped me make sense of God's plan for that season of my life. It was as if each promise were heightened to her to pass on to me so that I would be prepared through intimate conversation for an extraordinary life.

And to be honest, most of us are reaching for butterflies every day. We're in search of dream destinations that surely lead to a sense of fulfillment, prophetic insight into the purposes of God in our lives, or an encounter with the Spirit that removes all doubt and fear.

We have an idea of what we hope to see unfold, an unspoken desire our hearts are set on, or a sense of purpose we long to fulfill even when it is not fully clear.

The struggle is for a clear-cut path to get from *here* to *there*. And until that mark is hit somewhere in the distance, there remains a disconcerting tension and with it the inclination to question whether we have discerned the will of God or to compare the unfavorable tempo of our life to the sweet music of another.

But is the tension meant to be rectified in our lifetime? It's a question best answered in conversation with God. The tension positions us for grace like an unforced rhythm. We learn to interact with God, or as Matthew 11:28–30 describes, to “keep company with Him.”

In God's presence we are positioned for landscapes with butterflies—landscapes painted similar to the one we long to experience. So, although disconcerting at times, the tension instills a dependence upon Him that cannot be apportioned any other way. It teaches us to interact with Him in the everyday place:

- Where intimacy is developed,
- trust is built,
- and a destiny forged.

The journey unfolds as we do our part to interact with God conversationally—not religiously, but intimately. Instead of hiding behind the faith of another, envious of the promises they profess, why not go after butterflies? Why not uncover promises of your own?

That is what this first chapter is about. Your first letter will involve life's unforced rhythms and the tension when the rhythm of the season does not make sense. You'll learn to wait on God and to go after butterflies hidden in hard places.



Letter One

Walk with Me in the Arrangements of Life

“God did not create us in His own image for passivity. Not pursuing the job, because if an opportunity opens up it is proof of God’s will, is like sitting in the middle of a highway . . . if a car does not hit me it is proof of God’s will not to be hit.” —John Ortberg

*I*t was difficult to ignore the emotions Matthew 11:28–30 evoked or the prodding of the Holy Spirit. I (Leslye) was captivated by the idea of unforced rhythms of grace. So, I camped out in that passage and imagined life with God, how I was living it, and how it was meant to be lived.

I am not naturally a restful person. My mind is continually at work. I tend to over think and over extend myself on a regular basis. Abiding with God in a restful place was a novel idea. It silenced every other conversation in my head, becoming my focus.

I asked, “Lord, is it even possible to live at rest with every thought subdued and my heart content? How do I do it? How do keep from being weighed down by expectations I allow others to impose upon me and high demands I impose upon myself?”

I turned again to Matthew 11:28–30 in *The Message* paraphrase of the Bible and read the words of Jesus one more time to listen for how God might respond. Toward the end of the passage I was stopped by four words that latched onto my heart.

“Keep company with Me” it said, and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.

Keep company with Him. That’s it! That’s all I need to do.

That encounter with God in His Word was timely. The Holy Spirit consumed my thoughts, immersing me in the words of Jesus. For the next two years that one instruction became my life focus and the underlying theme of this book.

Like me, you might be ready to live at rest with every debilitating thought silenced, made to obey Christ once and for all. You might be wondering how that’s possible, how God will enable you to live freely and lightly.

My Life Letters

Well, I have good news. The unforced life is the focus of our first chapter. I can't think of a better topic to start growing your collection of conversations with God.

Keep Company

The unforced life is foundational to *My Life Letters*. We keep company with God to live freely and lightly but also to gather stones, track landmarks, and set up road signs to broaden our experience of Him.

The way that we keep company with God is no different than how we interact with a spouse, child, or close friend:

- To keep company is the state of being together; it is caring for the condition of that relationship.
- To keep company requires self-disclosure by sharing personal information and intimate details. If we connect at the start of each day, we'll be able to go about our day with a sense of God's presence.
- To keep company is to highly regard that relationship; it's to give God our burdens but also our appreciation. The idea is to draw close to exchange hopelessness for His grace and peace.
- To keep company means to pause briefly from time to time to talk with God. I'm not talking about ignoring or replacing intentional conversations or time in His word, but looking into the light of God's presence throughout the day.

In His presence is fullness of joy (Ps. 16:11). If we never draw close to God, if we never move toward His presence, how are we going to experience fullness of joy? How will we learn the unforced rhythms of grace?

Word Wealth

KEEP COMPANY

Keep: to maintain the condition of something

Company: the state of being together

That one objective and the effort we put into it makes the accompanying *My Life Letters Journal* an invaluable tool. Its purpose works in tandem with the instruction of Joshua to gather stones that will one day testify to God's miraculous involvement in their lives. (More on this later.) The journal will serve as your collection of encounters, answers, and personal promises

You might be thinking that to write letters or journal encounters with God is a lot of work. Why bother?

The value behind it is more than you can hope for. If you consistently draw close to hear God for yourself, you will grow confident and be more apt to apply your faith. And you will take away words of encouragement. If you get involved with God's Word, you will gain supernatural insight into unsearchable things. If you keep company with God, you will live with a sense of His presence.

Take a look at Joshua 4:4–7. Here you will see that the Israelites used stones as signs, so that their children could one day reflect back and see God's goodness. May I encourage you to make your *My Life Letters* your stones? Let them be your testimony of God's goodness to pass on to another one day.

Bible Context

Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe; and Joshua said to them: "Cross over before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in times to come, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?' Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever (Josh. 4:4–7 NKJV).

Life Can Make It Difficult to Keep Company

Let's be realistic. Life gets hectic. Our schedules are full. Hungry kids and time clocks demand our attention. Who has time to keep company with God with a competing list of daily demands? How is it even possible to draw near to Him on those days when we're stretched to our limits and a bit overwhelmed, when everyone's vying for our time and attention: a crying baby, demanding boss, or relentless creditor? Where is the unforced rhythm in everyday life? How do we rest in God in the middle of it all? And how do we keep from working so hard to be approved that we lose sight of His grace and feel invaluable, unappreciated, or defeated instead?

To be honest, these assorted scenarios have been my personal challenge more times than I'd like to admit. It's how I felt just prior to finishing this book . . . *defeated!* Leslye and I seemed to hit one obstacle after another. If not for the grace of God, this book would not be in your hands today!

My plan had been to push hard and finish the rewrites. I had set a goal with Leslye. After two years writing and with two months till Christmas we were determined to have this book in the hands of an editor by end of the year. That is, until my phone went off while in line at Starbucks.

My Life Letters

“Mom, my house is black. It’s filled with smoke,” Jenna said in an unusually subdued tone given the circumstances. “You need to come now.”

Her husband, Zach, was due home the next day from a six-month deployment. She was overjoyed, anticipating the moment he walked through the front door. I sensed that my daughter wanted everything to be perfect.

I had heard my husband on the phone with her the day before. “Sure,” Tim said. He signed up to help his daughter with her carpets and was happy to do it.

That morning he moved several large items without asking for a play-by-play. The brick pad to the free-standing pellet stove seemed like a good place for the large quilt rack with three quilts nicely hung. There was plenty of room. There was no fire in the stove. And the sun was warm on the house. Although he knew the pellet stove was wired to the wall thermostat, he did not expect the temperature to drop or the stove to kick on.

They finished shampooing and rushed out the door. Tim met up with me for a class. Jenna returned the shampooer.

With her thoughts wrapped around the perfect welcome home dinner, she made a few more stops. Two hours passed. Jenna hurried back to find 80 percent of her home’s interior up in smoke.

Ten days later and after conversations you never intend to have with the fire marshal, insurance adjuster, various cleaning services, and specialty contractors, I was a wreck. Her burden was more than I was prepared to carry. It led to emotional overload, trumping the demands of my brother’s estate in which I was making tough, timely decisions as his personal representative, my university-level course work, and the very recent death of my husband’s mother.

The chaos mounted, overshadowing my thoughts. Emotionally spent by life’s assorted and unpredictable arrangements, I gave up in my mind. It was to be a season of writing. I had set goals. My thoughts went something like, “I can’t do this. What makes me think I will ever author a book or that it’s God’s plan for my life.”

I had given myself a small window in which to rise up above all our circumstances and get back to writing. Delay was not an option. And so I felt defeated.

In the *arrangements* of life there is no element of chance. The ministry of the Spirit is involved in the tension of the landscape, as molder of character, faith and destiny.

Ten days after the fire, I took my husband’s hand and quietly wept, as together we prayed through the November 15 devotional in Sara Young’s book, *Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence*.

Word Wealth

ENJOYING PEACE IN HIS PRESENCE

Approach problems with a light touch . . . When your mind moves toward a problem area, you tend to focus on that situation so intensely that you lose sight of Me. You pit yourself against the difficulty as if you had to conquer it immediately. Your mind gears up for battle, and your body becomes tense and anxious. Unless you achieve total victory, you feel defeated. There is a better way. When a problem starts to overshadow your thoughts, bring this matter to me. Talk with Me about it and look into the light of My presence. It puts some much needed space between you and your concern, enabling you to see from My perspective.¹

Though the fire was horrific and the unrest of moving into a hotel with only the clothes on their backs was more than what most can bear, the builders promised to put their home back together better than before. I listened to each promise and offered solicited advice as they picked out carpet samples, wood flooring, and paint colors and as they decided on a kitchen remodel, a master bath make-over, and a great deal more.

The end was going to be far more than they ever imagined. Right away I saw that end, although it did not make the present any easier to swallow. Memorabilia is not easily replaced, nor is a seven-month home displacement easy to bear.

Have Conversations with God That Involve Your Problems

Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble.” There’s no getting around it. We’ll face all kinds of challenges in day-to-day life. It won’t be a walk in the park; it won’t be easy. He also said, “But, take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

We will always have Him with us. He promises to be there when we call out in whatever arrangement: good or bad, hopeful or disconcerting. The Father has an end in mind—a time of abundance, though it may only come after plodding uphill for weeks, months, even years.

He prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. He lifts our countenance and fills our cup to the brim with blessings (Ps. 23:5). So, don’t be discouraged or overly alarmed. There is great benefit to the current arrangement. There is even more benefit to learning His unforced rhythm. It is having no doubt that the Father restores our sight; He quiets our anxious thoughts and helps us look forward with insight into the end He has in mind.

A Black Fog Obstructing Our View

You might be thinking, so how do we look to God in the middle of it all. How do we draw near when the day gets away from us? How do we see Him when there is a black fog obstructing our view?

Let's be realistic! That's how life gets at times. I will never forget my daughter, Jenna, describing the smoke on her 911 call to Mom. "I can't see my hand in front of my face," she said. "The entire house is filled with thick, black smoke." Nor will I ever forget seeing her on the floor in a heap against the outside wall with her soot-covered face in her hands.

It was impossible to walk through the home unscathed. The black ash in the air attached itself to our skin and clothes. I thought back to the sore effects of the ash and her stirring remark while battling my own ash residue. I could see through the fog made of smoke to a wonderful end as it related to her circumstances but wrestled with God's work through that one landscape, as it related to me, that is, until coming to the One who promises to guide us with His counsel and in whom life unfolds like an unforced rhythm.

That rhythm is the main objective of this book. It hinges on conversation. Our hope is that you discover the great reward of bringing your problems to God. They are not small, especially when they start to overshadow our thoughts like a thick, black fog and sully our countenance.

Walk with God and to talk with Him about everything. It means drawing near—sit in the light of His presence until the fog obstructing your view clears enough to take hold of the end He has planned and see it with eyes of faith.

I have no doubt that God put out the fire that night. The fire marshal said, "Your home was mere inches from becoming a complete ash heap, and I cannot explain it." His firefighters were also amazed that the fire went out on its own and that there was minimal structural damage.

I am convinced God's angels were the first responders and the arrangement was about preparation—something had to be done so that something else could happen in my daughter's future and in mine.

How to Develop a Conversational Lifestyle

If you are asking me how to develop a conversational lifestyle, I'd like to suggest that you ask yourself if you are willing to make requests of God. Are you willing to ask the hard questions? Do you know that God cares?

Word Wealth

ARRANGEMENT

Preparation: Something that has to be done so that something else can happen in the future.

Agreement: An agreement made with somebody to do something. —*Encarta*²

David had no problem saying, “Listen to my words, Lord, consider my lament.” He also said, “Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken (Ps. 55:22).

How invested are you in your relationship with God? Do you want to have the boldness of faith to ask Him to consider your lament? Do you desire to know Him intimately and hear His voice?

I ask that, thinking it’s a silly question. Who doesn’t want to benefit from an unforced life? Who doesn’t want to talk with God on a personal level and hear Scripture speak to their circumstances and instill hope?

Then I thought about the one who doesn’t know God at all, the one who is not convinced that He cares. They will be equally less likely to call out to Him in the day-to-day or in the muck and mire.

Still, we are hungry today for intimacy with God and with one another. Living somewhat connected isn’t working anymore. Even those who will never admit it want to believe that God hears and cares. We want more out of life and are hungry for an experience of God that shapes destiny.

Just think how refreshing it will be to develop a conversational lifestyle and experience God through a word that not only transforms the moment, but positions us for the life that our hearts are set on. (More on this later.)

Here’s the challenge: Conversation will only be what we want it to be if we actually do it—if we dial God’s number. That is how I once heard Jeremiah 33:3 described, as God’s number. It says, “Call to me and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer. 33:3 NKJV).

Conversation will only be what we hope if we actually call to God. Get connected; call out! And then keep calling out. Ask God the hard questions. If we are not drawing aside to interact with Him on a personal level, we are working too hard just to get by in life.

Jesus says, “Come.”

Abandon yourself self until connected with Him on an intimate level until there is an unquestionable sense of His presence—that He’s on the other end of the line and we are hearing His voice. Then live that way. Fully connected, and in close proximity to the Father.

Word Wealth

COME

In its original Greek, the word *come* is *deute*; it is an exhortation with strong appeal to the will. The word evokes movement or change. It asks for a complete turn-around in one’s attitude and approach of God. What Jesus is saying is, push past all uncertainty. Call out.

Application Exercise

To Develop a Conversational Lifestyle:

- Be intentional.
- Decide if you believe it is possible to know God and hear His voice.
- Ask God to direct you in Scripture to promises that affirm His good intentions.
- Ask God to help you discern His will and know His ways.
- Talk to God about your doubts and fears.

You might be thinking, “Aren’t they merely talking about prayer and the value of a consistent personal prayer life.” In some ways yes, but the approach we hope to model makes prayer an everyday, ordinary application of faith.

Think of faith in terms of movement. We want you to pursue extraordinary movement. That comes through life-changing conversations. It’s listening to be empowered in devotional-type settings but also growing to hear God in the day-to-day.

A conversational lifestyle encourages various applications of faith while aligning all our efforts with a supernatural ease or rest. We go to God for faith to trust in His all-knowing hands and for the ability to wait, knowing our steps are ordered, and His intentions are good.

Think of conversation as our response to God. We talk to God, assert faith, and He draws us to Himself, giving us the ability to walk with Him in the arrangements of life.

Of course prayer involves making our requests known (Phil. 4:6). However, a conversational lifestyle hinges on relationship; it’s recognizing and responding to the broad stroke of the Father’s hand, acknowledging a Spurpose etched across the canvas of our lives.

Prayer is even more life changing if we:

- Expect to encounter God
- Take hold of a promise
- Wait in His presence to obtain hope

The psalmist says God has made it so that we are not hurled headlong when we fall (Ps. 37:23–24). Without moving toward the Father, it is impossible to live unencumbered by what we cannot change. But by employing simple, yet practical steps for intimate interaction with Him in His Word, we are equipped for battle. We are empowered to fight for every promise of God and determined to do so.

“I never would have quit my administrative job on staff with my church if it weren’t for wrestling with my ongoing desire to teach,” Kristin said while sitting in my living room. She was

addressing the first small group of women to put *My Life Letters* into practice. Not only was teaching her life-long passion, but her gifting and academic degree.

I do not doubt that the dream she shared created an innermost tension, like personal conviction pushing her toward that mark (Heb. 12:1). That one unfulfilled dream in all our lives can be like a rock in our shoe especially when we are not moving toward it.

By what Kristin believed to be a bold step of faith, she applied with the local school district. And was delightfully engaging in several interviews.

Kristin waited for the call back. One day turned into four months. Her phone did not ring.

Still, she kept her eyes on God—trusting and waiting. She believed her common sense decision was God’s will for her, because there was no feeling of restraint to say otherwise.

Bible Context

The steps of a man are established by the LORD, and He delights in his way. When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong, because the LORD is the One who holds his hand” (Ps. 37:23–24 NASB).

“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” (Jer. 29:11).

Application Exercise

1. Walk with Me in the Arrangements of Life

Look back to Matthew 11:28–30 at the beginning of this chapter to fill in the blanks:

_____ with Me.

_____ with Me.

_____ how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.

Using your *My Life Letters Journal*, have a conversation with God referring back to Matthew 11:28 MSG. Your conversation can be written into a notebook as follows:

Date: _____

Scripture: Matthew 11:28–30 MSG

Topic: How would you describe your current arrangement? Are there circumstances that are testing your faith? Write out a conversation explaining the situation to God.

Application Exercise Continued

Conversation Content: Now that you have told God about it, write out a prayer asking Him to get involved and to teach you the unforced rhythms of grace as you wait.

Conversation Content: What life goals or personal ambitions have you walked toward feeling awe-inspired until conversations and/or circumstances started to undermine that step of faith? Talk to God about it. Have a conversation with Him in writing.

Application: With consideration for the ambitions listed in your previous conversation, ask God to show you how to walk with Him. Ask God to show you how He does it. Jot down thoughts that He brings to mind.

2. Walk with Me in the Arrangements of Life

Using your *My Life Letters Journal*, have a second conversation with God asking Him to direct you to a passage of Scripture. Your conversation can be written into a notebook as follows:

Date: _____

Scripture: _____

Topic: Practice listening:

Ask God to direct you to a Scripture that helps you trust Him with a challenging arrangement. *Wait.* Be still in God's presence long enough for a Scripture to come to mind or to hear Him to speak to your circumstances using a current devotional or study application. Make note of the Scripture in your journal.

Application: Read through the Scripture. Read only a verse or two while listening with your heart. If the passage resonates with you, read it again and perhaps even a third or fourth time. If it does not speak to your circumstances, ask God once again to direct you to a Scripture. Listen for what resonates with your spirit. Then follow the three steps below.

1. Draw a line down the center of a blank page in a journal or notebook.
2. Write out the verse. Using the left side of the page jot down insight while prayerfully listening for ways God is speaking to you through it.
3. Use what God is showing you to write out a conversation, applying it personally through prayer.