

WHEN
GOD
SPEAKS

An Unspoken Gift is Birthed

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DEDICATION

DADDY, THE WORDS in this book are a tribute to your legacy, to your life, and to who you are. I could never tell it all. Thank you for introducing me to my Heavenly Father. Without your instruction and your daily structure, where would I be? I remember saying, “I’ll never be like you,” but thanks be to God, I’m just like you in so many ways.

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CHANGES

MY DAD BEGAN to change after the surgery. He had always been a man of authority and strong-willed—verbally abusive at times, but loving and kind in his own way. All those traits and more were wrapped into my father's being. But suddenly, he was different. He loved me, he loved my mom and the kids, but he could no longer show it or share that love. He was having mood swings daily. He would snap at Mom and me but not at the kids. Oh, my, what a change!

As a teenager, I was busy being me. Daddy would have provided me the world if he could. Anytime I asked for something, he made a way for it. I knew no other father, just my daddy. With him changing so

much, all I could see was who he once was, but still, he was my daddy. This season of attempting to comprehend what was happening was tough to grasp. My heavenly Father had sent me down a path I was unfamiliar with. All of a sudden I was bi-directional: new path, new streams, new waters.

The prophet Isaiah says: “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland” (Isa. 43:18–19).

Daddy raised his girls to be career-minded women. He said, “Always be able to take care of yourself and not depend on a man to take care of you.” Daddy wanted us married, but he also wanted us independent. I was a part of a work program in high school: classes in the mornings and job training in the afternoons. My first job was in a nursing home facility. I provided companionship for the elderly and assisted with activities, but I was also just loving people. As I grew, my work environments grew. I remained in the people arena but expanded to a larger forum.

My life began to change as well after Dad’s surgery. Some days, I could only sit at my desk and stare at the walls. I was worn out by life’s inconsistencies. I was all

over the place on some days, and on other days I could have been led by a string. I found myself sneaking away from my job and going home to calm my mother's fears, especially when Daddy was missing in the car or simply walking the floors of the house in anger with her. Daddy never hit her, but he had become a different person. I'm not sure if we knew what he was capable of doing. My dad had been pretty predictable. This meant we could often play out a situation and know how he might react once he was told about something.

But now we were walking on pins and needles. Every little thing was now magnified by three. Mother told me, "Your daddy was up all night peeping out of the kitchen, bedroom, and living room windows. I tried to sleep, but I hardly could because I was just not sure what he did when I was asleep."

When I arrived at the house, my mother would be all upset, but my being there would bring comfort and calmness to her. I could see the signs of relief in her demeanor when I walked through the door. My time with her was limited since I had to return to work. If Daddy was gone in the car, he eventually returned home; at least he always had at that point. Some days, two or three hours would pass; but of course, it seemed longer than hours. If I was there when he returned, I'd ask where he had been, but getting an answer was

like pulling teeth. This was when Mom and Dad's life became my life.

Mom and Dad were always a huge part of my world. I never strayed too far away; I was always in snatch-back distance. I was dependable. They could depend on me, and I could depend on them. My kids were their kids, and they claimed them as such.

There were four girls in my family; I was the baby girl of all my siblings. I was married with kids for a while, trying to find my way, trying to be all my daddy said I could be. But I could feel a stretch approaching my life, a stretch beyond my reach. Wife, daughter, mother, employee—I was very confused about the order on most days. Now a new title was rearing upward; what would it be?

I was always there with my parents; they couldn't get rid of me if they tried. My life was a mess. I tried my best to stay on the straight and narrow path, but there was always something to interfere with my peace, to intrude in my happy living, but what did *happy* mean anyway?

My parents were avid churchgoers. I was raised/dragged to church. When the church doors opened three to four nights a week, I was there. Even if my siblings and I would cry, kick, scream, or holler, we went to church. My mom tells a story about when Christ invaded Dad's soul. When Daddy decided to follow

Jesus, according to the story told by my mother, the entire household, including her, followed Jesus, too.

“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15).

As the story goes, my mother wasn't ready for the newly filled life of being all spiritual. She enjoyed going dancing and having fun as a couple. But she also loved the man she had said “I do” to; if his life was changing, then so was hers. At church, I sat right beside my mother. In the chair next to her, on the pew during choir rehearsal, or in a church meeting, I was always there. I learned to love it on some days and hate it on others. I spoke in church; I taught lessons from a podium at the front of the sanctuary. I learned how to read a Scripture, break it down, and form a word for the congregation. I was told that I sang like a bird—a song bird. Church members commented on how profound my lessons were and how my voice rang through the midst. I'd hear my dad saying, “She's a chip off the old block.” How funny; I was the “chip”!

Through it all, my marriage fell apart. My kids and I ended up back with Mom and Dad for a short time—they needed me, and I needed them. I didn't want to be needed in the manner brought forth, but God had spoken. (He speaks, you know.) I didn't understand what was about to happen, but change was definitely on the way: changes in me, changes in the kids, and changes in Mom and Dad. Most days, things were good. Other days, who knew?

Moving forward and before the surgery, Daddy had gone to the doctor alone. Things were so hush-hush. My mom didn't know what was wrong except that Daddy was experiencing urination problems. When Dad was ready to talk about it, which was very difficult for him, he said to me, "Bebby, it's bad." I had not a clue what that meant. I didn't know what questions to ask, I just knew my daddy, the strong figure in my life, the man I looked up to, the rock of my world, was sick and that "it was bad." Apparently, surgery was discussed with him and the doctor, but Daddy had not made the final decision to have it done. We didn't talk this over as a family. My parents kept a lot of secrets from me. Daddy still looked at me as being his little girl, not the woman I was growing into. I was his Bebbby. Weeks later, surgery was scheduled, and I was probably the last to know. Dad had never been sick, never had surgery, and never been in the hospital. This was

a new experience for us. God spoke. A life change was occurring.

Daddy never stopped. The things he was still able to do were continued. He maintained his regular routine: working in the yard, washing all the cars on Saturdays, cutting the yard at the church, cleaning the church, and ignoring the fact that he was ill.

The decision was made. Daddy was having surgery: prostate cancer surgery. All the testing had been done as far as I knew. We showed up bright and early at the hospital. The hospital staff was cordial, smiley, and ready for his arrival. We were a bag of nerves. Dad was a little fussy, but he had every right to be. His trust had always been in the hands of the Lord. All of a sudden, his assurance, revolving around doctors, nurses, and the medical arena, was locked in an unknown box. He'd never been sick like this. The diagnosis had to be accurate, and for once I wasn't sure how strong his faith was. He had been convicted. He needed to stand tall on the words he had spoken for years into our lives and into the members at the church. Was the doctor saved? Who knew, but we needed to believe that the doctor he chose was good at his job and knew how to fix Dad's medical condition. We sat forever in the waiting room. It wasn't crowded, which was good. My thoughts consumed me. Every twenty minutes or so, the kids would ask what was taking so long. I remember the doctor

saying the surgery went well. His words were, “We got it all, and he’s cancer free.”

This was the first time *cancer* had been mentioned out loud. When Daddy told me it was bad, he never said it was cancer. He never spoke about his problems or the changes in his body he was experiencing. Mom told me. Daddy was very secretive about the illness; he was secretive about a lot. “What happens in this house stays in this house.” Those were the words taught and spoken by my dad all the time. We were girls. We liked to talk, but Dad said there was no reason for everyone to know what was done in his house. We abided. When every episode led me to know that something abnormal had breached the security realms of my dad’s body, I began to ask, but my questions were overlooked. No matter how many times I asked or what I asked, I was ignored.

After the surgery, once out of recovery and in his hospital room, Daddy had a terrible allergic reaction to the anesthesia. He itched for hours, was no longer drowsy, and could communicate with us. He itched and scratched himself for days in that hospital room. His legs were almost raw by the time the doctor decided to give him something for the itching. He was provided vein stockings to protect his legs from the scratching. He was suffering; at least that’s what I thought.

Weeks prior to the surgery, I had a meltdown at church. Actually, it was the Sunday before the surgery.

I was singing in the choir, and the tears began to flow uncontrollably. All I could do was cry. My dad was sick, and I didn't know the extent of the illness, nor did I know what was going to happen next. Fear had hit my mind and my heart, and all my understanding was gone. I'd held it all together until now. God was speaking, but I wasn't listening. I was in my flesh. Now the surgery was done, but still fear was present.

Weeks later, the surgery had happened, the itching had calmed some, and Daddy was complaining and ready to go home. Mom had spent every night at the hospital because she felt that was the right thing to do. Once the kids and I made it to the hospital, Mom would go home, rest a bit, freshen up, and return. The kids and I would bring food from the hospital cafeteria and eat it in Dad's room. I must say they truly enjoyed this part of being at the hospital. The kids and I were in and out during Dad's hospital stay. We all had full days, but being at the hospital with Daddy was where we had to be at night. He expected us to be there, and to ensure that he was given a proper healing and receiving excellent care, we were. Daddy was a father to my kids, and to them, their dad was sick. They would stand over him and stare. If he moved the wrong way or groaned loudly as in pain, he got the third degree of questions. So of course, we stayed nearby. Daddy was the only stable male in their lives, mine too, for that

matter. I had to be strong for everyone, and I tried my best to do just that.

When the doctor said that Daddy could go home in a few days, I felt my stomach drop. Was he ready? Were we ready? My job was hard, and I was there physically, but never mentally. I performed my duties because I knew the process with my eyes closed, not because I was thinking through every procedure. I was there, and I was doing better than I had done in the past few weeks. I got my check mark; I was present. It was our departure day. Daddy was released from the hospital with a laundry list of dos and don'ts. There was still work to be done, but I was praying that we were at the top of the mountain looking down on a new-found life.

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!” (Isa. 52:7).

The list provided to us at the hospital explained how to care for my dad: what he could do, what he couldn't do, what he could eat, and what signs to watch for. He was wearing a catheter that required us to ensure it was in place and to empty it regularly. At home, he sat around very quiet. It was the calm before the storm. I thought the healing had begun because he made it

through the surgery and was released to go home, but Daddy still showed no signs of getting better or an improvement in his health. Every day was the same. I found myself asking him many times, “Are you okay?”

Daddy wouldn't allow Mom to empty the catheter, but I could. So I did. I believe he felt inadequate with her. Before the prostate cancer was detected, Daddy had experienced impotence, urinary retention, pain, and fatigue. He was not the same man, and telling his wife of many years what was occurring with his body was not easy. In fact, he never really told her. He ordered enhancement drugs through mail order and used them, but the success rate was not what he wanted it to be. Dad was accustomed to being in charge, in control; now he had to allow us to take control. This was not easy for him. He was the head of the family, the decision maker, the breadwinner; he was the overseer, the man who set the rules and set the pace. Yes, he was in charge. As days passed, Mom started to reminisce about the things that got us there. She talked about his frustrations during their sexual moments. This was a hard conversation to have with her daughter, but she needed to talk about what had occurred, and as I listened, she said many things. I let her talk, and I listened. Dad had the surgery, but we were living with the scars.

