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# THE LIFE-GIVING WOMAN

JANUARY 2020 NEWSLETTER

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Dear friend,

I hope you've had a good start to 2020. I can't believe February is upon us! Welcome to a new year of what I hope will be thought-provoking and heart-stirring newsletters. As always, I love hearing from you! So feel free to drop me a line and introduce yourself.

In past newsletters, I've made the case that if a life-giving woman is one who knows God and is increasing in her love for Him, she *will* grow in her love for others.

But have you wondered how do we grow in love for God?

It's not enough that we read our Bibles and go to church. Those are good things! We must go *soul-deep* with the Lord. We need to be able to bare *every* part of our heart to Him, allowing our heart to touch His. *Then* can we grow inwardly. **Here** will transformation begin to take place and love flow outwardly toward others.

This is because as we grow up in God, our hearts become more aligned with what the Lord says is true and right. We're increasingly **aware** of what pleases God and our desire to please Him grows.

We increasingly respond in obedience. And to obey God is to love Him. So, as we obey Him more and more, we love God more and more. Which means our ability to love others increases.

But a key aspect to our growth in God involves work. Now, before your alarm bells go off because you think I might be suggesting a gospel of works, please hear me out.

[Jesus invites us](#) to put on his light and easy yoke and to move forward next to Him, *doing work*. Just like anything else in life that we want to grow in, we must exert effort to grow in Jesus. This is the process of our sanctification, where a beautiful mingling

of the work of the Spirit and our effort grows us up in Him.

But (oh I wish you were sitting across from me so you can see and hear me say this), ***this invitation to co-labor with Jesus is actually an invitation to cultivate intimacy with Him.***

This. Is. Beautiful. The Lord's commands aren't burdensome! He gets in the yoke with us and helps us every step of the way.

But to put it in another light, if we don't get in the yoke beside Him, where He sees all our heart grime, we'll become stunted at worst and weak and atrophied at best. We'll be immature spiritually and emotionally because we won't be laboring with Him. And so, our ability to love others well as life-givers is greatly diminished and limited.

### **Self-Awareness**

One of the best ways that we can grow in our love for God and others is to take time to grow in awareness of who we are—what do we like? What do we dislike? What brings us joy? Where do we come from? What is our story?

Maybe you just read that paragraph and thought, "I know these things about myself." But really, very few of us can articulate them, and here's why I say that. When was the last time you experienced conflict with someone? Did you act in an obedient way, or a selfish, sinful way?

If you responded with the latter, then in the moments of conflict, you were likely unaware of what was happening inside of you and coming out of you. *If you had been aware, you likely wouldn't have responded in that way.*

Here's a test for you as you read the rest of this newsletter. Stop right after this sentence and ask the Lord to help you pay attention to what's happening inside of you as you read.

And then, pay attention to your thoughts and your body. Do you tense up? Does your heart rate quicken? Do you sweat? Do you like what I'm saying? Do you disagree with it? Does it bother you?

*Be aware of yourself.*

If we were made to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever, let's seek to yield *every* ounce of who we are for His glory! **But the degree to which this is possible is the degree to which we are willing to look at and become aware of ourselves in these ways.** Then, and only then, can we **purposely orient** our thoughts, feelings, desires, and actions toward God's glory.

We need to give time and attention to cultivating our inner world so that what's deep inside can be our first offering of love to the Lord. Then, what flows out can be an

outward offering of love toward Him and others.

**! Fair warning!** it's not an easy journey. In addition to hard work, it will require a courageous honesty and integrity in your own heart, openness to the Holy Spirit, and **time**. But it's worth it.

### **What is Self-Awareness, Biblically Speaking?**

Proverbs 4:23 says, *"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."*

Mark also tells us *"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person"* (Mk. 7:20-23).

The idea of self-awareness began with the Lord. He knows what resides in our hearts. And He is jealous to have all of our heart for His glory. He also knows that what's inside will come out **and affect others**, and so he cares very much that we become aware of what's happening in there. He wants us to walk in holiness, but holiness begins on the inside.

He's also painfully aware of how easy it is for us to ignore what's happening inside of us or to dwell on it too much. But He doesn't want us to fall into either ditch, because he knows the painful repercussions of either. I believe it's why He calls us back to matters of the heart repeatedly throughout the Bible.

***"There is much beneath the surface of our lives that needs excavating if we are to be transformed. Deeply ingrained parts of who we are need to be confronted and put to death."*** [1]

He wants us to pay attention to the details because He is in the details. And it's the details of our hearts and lives He wants to transform.

Paul tells the Ephesians to no longer live futile lives, but *"to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."*

How in the world could the Ephesians know what deceitful desires still resided in their hearts? And how can we? In order to obey Paul's instruction, attention to what's happening inside of the heart is required.

But lest we think this is a self-directed activity, we need to be reminded that as Christians, we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us. He's alive and active in our hearts! These are just a few ways He ministers to us:

- He convicts us of sin (Jn. 16:8),

- He teaches us (Jn. 14:25-26, 16:13-14),
- He searches our hearts (Rom. 8:26-27),
- He helps us in our weaknesses (Rom. 8:26-27),
- He intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26-27),
- He gives wisdom, revelation, and understanding of God (1 Cor. 2:12-14, Eph. 1:17-18),
- He enables us to desire the things of God (Gal. 5:16-26)

So, while effort is needed on our part to grow in self-awareness, we have the Holy Spirit to help us!

### **Practical Steps**

As with anything in the life of the believer, we need to start with prayer. The Lord is attentive to our hearts, and He loves it when we come to Him. Remember, He invited us into His yoke. He wants to be involved in all of the details! A valuable prayer is, ***“Lord, please help me to pay attention to what’s going on inside of me. I want to be fully yielded to you in every moment, but I need you to help me see where I’m not.”***

But then, it’s helpful to get a journal to write down things you notice. Start with the basic questions I mentioned above:

- What do I enjoy?
- What do I dislike?
- What brings me joy?
- What drains me?

It may prove more difficult to answer these questions than you initially think! If that’s the case, it’s okay, remember to ask the Lord to help you pay attention. Walk away and purpose to pay attention throughout your days, and come back to answer. *Take time, there’s no rush.*

Remember, the point of growing in awareness of who you are is to be able to grow in love for God and others. Rather than being an unhelpful introspective exercise, **let this be a springboard for intimacy with the Lord.**

As you recognize things you don’t like, for example, you may find that you’re experiencing anxiety because something is happening in your life that you don’t like.

*“I don’t like it when people violate my personal boundaries. I have someone in my life who regularly violates them.”*

You have an opportunity in those moments to go to the Lord and do something with what you learn about yourself. You may discover that you deal with certain circumstances or people in a sinful way. You may need to repent. You may need to

ask for wisdom for how to handle a situation. You may discover that you need to have a difficult conversation with someone. And you may need to spend some time in lament because goodness, this is hard.

You need to be willing to ask the Lord and yourself some difficult questions. And you need to be willing to hear from the Lord. At this point, you can either stay the way you are, or you can allow the Lord to transform you.

### **The Need for Silence and Solitude**

I think you can probably see now why I said this takes purposeful work. It's not for the faint of heart, either. But the good news is, we have a very patient Father who is okay with the time and space needed for us to grow up in Him. He's also quite okay with how terribly messy it can all be. He's not in a rush like we often are.

In fact, He **wants** us to come to Him and to sort these things out *with* Him, not on our own. **I believe that doing this with the Lord in prayer is integral if this is actually going to be a helpful tool for our growth.**

But we need to prioritize time to talk with Him about it. And, just like any healthy relationship, we need to allow space and time for a beautiful exchange of listening and talking occurs. We need time and space for which we can devote our attention **solely on Him.**

As we seek the Lord and hard questions or realizations rise to the surface, we can use the Word to guide us.

- "Father, you delight in truth in my inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Please help me to see areas in my heart that aren't in line with your character. Help me to better understand how my heart is leading me" (Ps. 51:6).
- "Father, I need your help to understand my own heart. It is wearisome to try to do it on my own. Rather than trying to make sense of things by my own wisdom, I am coming to you for discernment" (Ps. 73:16-17).
- "Your hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments! You know me better than I know myself. Please help me see what's in my heart so that I can better obey you" (Ps. 119:73).
- "Search me and try me, Lord! You know my heart. Help me see if there are grievous ways in me and lead me in your way" (Ps. 139:23-24).

### **Going a Layer Deeper**

It's important to be aware of the basics of who we are--what we like and dislike, etc.

But we can't stop there! Remember, the goal is to love God and others better. Whether we realize it or not, we often live out of our past experiences and unspoken rules we've adopted.

Family culture is especially influential.

It's been said that "Jesus in our hearts, but Grandpa's in our bones." And how true it is. There are familial patterns, tendencies, and behaviors that we all carry with us into adulthood and that have a direct influence on how we function. We are deeply imprinted in ways we often don't realize, even until much later in life.

**Unless we take the time to look at our family of origin and do some work there, we will greatly lack a true understanding of who we are.** And, it's highly likely that unless we're aware of things we think, or say, or do that stem from our family of origin rather than from the Word of God, we will hurt someone at some point or another. We'll lack *the Father's* love.

Whether we realize it or not, we each have our own "normal," and things that we think are "right" and "wrong". Out of these things unspoken expectations are formed, we place subtle demands on relationships, and we project our "normal" and "right" onto others.

Where are we first taught these things? Whether you come from an unbelieving family or a believing family doesn't matter. **Every family has their own culture.**

Here are a few questions<sup>[2]</sup> to work through regarding your family of origin, which will help you become more aware of yourself:

- Describe your parent's and grandparent's marriage
- How did your family handle conflict?
- How were feelings dealt with? Which ones were acceptable and unacceptable?
- What was considered success in your family?
- How were holidays handled?
- What did your parents value?
- How was sexuality talked about/not talked about/implied?
- Were there any family secrets?

As you can likely imagine, each of these questions can lead down a path of many more questions. *It'll be kind of like opening a can of worms.* But explore them. Ponder them. As you talk with the Lord, different ways of thinking and how you handle different things will begin to make sense in a whole new way. You'll likely encounter things you don't like, things you wish were different, things you appreciate, and you may have a few "Aha! That's why I do this," moments.

## A Few Implications

I want to encourage you to keep in mind that as women, we are called to be life-givers. The extent to which we can give life to others is directly tied to the life we receive in Christ. If we are willing to settle for a surface-level Christianity, our horizontal relationships will stay on the surface, and the life we have to offer will be severely limited.

Doing these exercises of growing in self-awareness is a futile endeavor if we don't follow our awareness with action. It's one thing to become aware that I struggle to maintain personal boundaries. That's nice to know! People will continue to barrel right over them until I act on the information I now have. I'm not actually loving the boundary pusher when I let her run over me. So, I need to learn how to lovingly be more assertive.

Remember, **how we move forward matters!** I can grow in assertiveness *but not love* if I attempt to grow in my own wisdom and strength. I'll likely become a clanging symbol instead.

It's time to roll up my sleeves next to the Lord in His yoke. Next to Him *with His help*, I can begin to move toward growth in assertiveness. I need to talk to Him and study His life, and the life of others in the Bible. How did He and they do it when He was on the earth?

Sister, this place, side by side in Jesus' yoke, is where we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. And it's where **a profound depth of intimacy with Christ is cultivated**. We are knowing Him and He is knowing us. We are being transformed through intimacy with Christ. The beautiful mingling of His power and our effort allows Christ's image in us to emerge.

And, as we're transformed in Christ, our love for others grows because it's His love pouring out of our hearts. We'll be much more aware of our tendency to wiggle out of the yoke, attempting to love Him and others on our own. And we'll see just how damaging it can sometimes be.

For example,

- We'll begin to see our prayerlessness and our knee-jerk reactions to people and circumstances. We'll repent and begin to run to Him more often and faster.
- We'll begin to see where we have unrealistic or unhealthy expectations in relationships, and we'll repent before the Lord and ask for His help to readjust them
- We'll recognize where we tend to insist on our own way (out of fear?), and we'll repent and put on Christ's way of considering others as more important than ourselves.

- We'll see our tendencies toward anxiety, fear and the harmful ways we respond to it by seeking to control, manipulate, or shame others. We'll repent and ask the Lord to help us handle those emotions *His* way.

One last thought. I want to urge you to **consider the next generation**. Whether you're single or married, you're called to ministry! Even if you don't have children of your own, you should have spiritual daughters in your life.

Ladies, if we are married, our first ministry should be to our husbands. Our second ministry will be to our children. If we as women and as mothers would take the time to cultivate the deepest places of our hearts in the Lord—if we make it our most important priority—we have the opportunity to pass on a priceless legacy.

But if we don't, it is very possible that we sabotage our own ministry. There will be things in the way of people seeing and experiencing **Christ** in us. Our ability to lead another to Christ will be hindered because, in ways we don't realize, we'll be yanking them to us.

And can I be painfully honest? We do not have anything in ourselves to give to another that will bring about life. And in fact, it will repel them eventually.

I've been praying for you as I've been writing, and will continue to pray for you as you read and think on these words. It's a lot, but my hope and desire is that it will provoke thought and conversation with the Lord. May this be a springboard to deeper intimacy in Christ, and more loving relationships with others.

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**Whew!** This is an extensive area of study and growth, and I cannot possibly cover everything in one newsletter! This is a toe dip into the vast depths of self-awareness. However, **if you are interested in exploring this more, hit reply and let me know.**

**And finally, a few favorites from January:**

- Our kids and I have been jamming out whenever we can to For King and Country's most recent album, [Burn the Ships](#). They love it and I love it. Lexi (my almost-five-year-old) said to me the other day that she was having a *really* hard time not jumping to the music—her little sister was napping below her. 😊
- My friend Chels wrote a fantastic article, ["Why Younger Women Need Titus 2 Women and Snickerdoodle Cookies"](#). I had the delight of co-leading a workshop on Titus 2 ministry last summer with Chels (and our dear friend [Susan](#)), and I'm telling you, there are few more approachable than her.
- Lastly, I wouldn't call these favorites, but I did want to make you aware of three articles I wrote this month.
  - [2019: Themes I Observed](#) – I'll give you a hint: being overwhelmed was a



major one!

- [Why We Should Prioritize Reading](#) – This was in response to an article Tony Reinke wrote, which I link to in the article.
- [How to Find Rest for Your Soul](#) – I actually linked to this early in the newsletter. In this article, I fleshed out Jesus' invitation to take his yoke upon us.

Blessings!

Kelly

[1] Geri Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Woman, 74

[2] I'm indebted to [Pete and Geri Scazzero](#), true gifts to the body of Christ. They've written extensively about emotionally healthy spirituality.



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