

Chapter 1

The Encounter

It is 3:00 a.m. one night in 1990. My husband and I and our four children (soon to be five) are sound asleep in our beds. Suddenly the bedroom is filled with sounds and sights the likes of which I've never seen or heard before.

I hear the most beautiful symphonic music—perfect harmonies, sounds I've never even heard in the most magnificent symphonies on earth, more like Enya's music, but no words. I am lifted up in my spirit, shaking off the physical feelings of sleepiness, feeling the impact of this very spiritual music. Then, one by one, angelic beings in the form of women wearing white garments appear in the room. By then I am aware that I am having a dream-like experience, but a “waking-dream,” an encounter with God complete with lights, sound, and visuals. Makes sense since I'm a very visual person, and my Father knows that. By visiting me in this encounter, He was answering a question I'd recently been posing to him over and over again: “What does it look like to be fully me with Jesus in me?” One thing I knew for sure, His answer was not something I could make up!

“What does it look like to be fully me with Jesus in me?”

Back to the women who were one by one entering into the scene in my room. All were dressed in white, all gracefully dancing to the symphony of sound in the background. Each one had a name tag pinned to her dress, much like we would wear at a women's meeting or retreat. But these names were all symbolic of something. Their names represented a particular quality of virtue they carried within them. All of them had a beautifully wrapped gift in their hands. Each woman danced up to me and gave me her beautifully wrapped gift, simply pressing it into my chest, into my heart. With each gift, I tangibly felt the impartation of virtue, and my instant response was to make room for this gift in my heart. I somehow reached into my chest and pulled out a crumpled old rag or cloth, and handed it to her. Each one seemed delighted to have received it for some reason!

Here are the names of the women in the line-up:

- Merry Heart—her impartation was Joy!
- Unfailing Love—her impartation was supernatural Love
- Peaceful Tranquility came next, her gift being Peace, Shalom
- Lady Longsuffering—her gift was Patience
- Loving Kindness—her gift, Kindness
- “Shirley” Goodness—her gift, Goodness
- Faithful and True—her gift, Faithfulness
- Gentle and Meek—her gift, Gentleness
- Ms. Temperance—her gift, Self-Control
- Beloved Daughter—her gift, secure status as the daughter of her Heavenly Father
- Soul Sister—her gift, sisterhood with other women in our Father's family
- Mama Bear—her gift, the Fierce Heart and Loving Arms of a Mother
- Precious Bride—her gift, marriage in life for some, in heaven for all His daughters

- Faithful Friend—her gift, the gift of true friendship
- Pure Heart—her gift, Purity of Heart
- Sweet Forgiveness—her gift, receiving and giving forgiveness, purified of bitterness
- Maid of Honor—the gift of Honor/Respect, and ability to bestow honor on others
- The Lord’s Princess—the gift of royalty as a daughter
- Del Gratia Regina—the gift of mature royalty as a partner, by the grace of God
- Fearlessly Courageous—speaks for itself, courage and boldness!
- Personality Plus—the gift of being authentically, totally yourself
- Total Security—secure; free from insecurity
- Graceful Dancer—graciousness, ability to live in and give grace
- Timeless Beauty—the gift of beauty from the inside out
- Grateful (on her back was written Appreciated)—the gift of gratitude
- Job’s Sister—being tried by fire, emerging “better not bitter”
- Unsinkable Hope—the Hope that does not disappoint of Romans 5:5
- Passionate Sage—the gift of wisdom and passion combined

After they had all given their gifts, they stepped aside. A hush filled the room followed by a sense of anticipation. One last woman came into the room. Her presence filled the entire place. Her countenance was so bright that she lit up the whole atmosphere around her. She was a bit intimidating because of the power and authority she carried. But the most powerful thing about her was the love she exuded. Her name was “FULLY ALIVE.”

She was FULLY ALIVE in Jesus and He in her.

She was fully alive in Jesus and He in her. She was standing tall, laughing out loud, and crushing a serpent’s head under her feet.

She was the *composite* of all the others, a woman who was truly a great soul, an overcomer, able to fully live and give from the abundance within her. She was the epitome of Christ formed in a woman who was fully herself. She was “redeemed Eve,” who had finally crushed the serpent’s head under her feet (Gen. 3:15). As I pondered this analogy of Eve, I realized that it was

the serpent’s THINKING (which is in his head) that she had overcome, the very same poisonous thinking he had injected into her mind in the Garden of Eden. Jesus began to reverse the effects of that poison that exists in Eve’s daughters when He died on the cross. He took the poison upon Himself and mysteriously became the antidote. When we receive Him, we also receive the “antivenin” (antidote), which makes the reversal of the serpent’s thinking in us possible. The woman named “Fully Alive” symbolized the promise of complete recovery and redemption. She overcame and stood in a new place of dominion, by His grace and her determination to believe the truth in every part of her soul.

The message of this encounter with “Fully Alive” is about receiving the “grace packages” God offers us in the midst of the events, pressures, and pains of life. Names are powerful—they speak of our identity and nature. We need His grace to reject the lies and false names communicated to us through those events by the enemy of our souls. In these grace packages we also receive truth and new names to redefine ourselves according to the truth and align ourselves with Christ in us. There is no end to this process. We continue in it as long as we live. He’s given us a lifelong supply of “make-overs” free of charge—no earning or deserving, just because He loves us so.

I am overjoyed to think that this is the destiny He’s offering all of His beautiful daughters if we dare to hope for it!

As I have pondered all of this in the years since this vision was given to me, I understand this: what Jesus looks like in me is the alignment of 1) Jesus' attributes, character, and fruits of the spirit, that are true for everyone He lives in; 2) Me being my true self. He lives in ME, and me being, my truest self, with all the qualities of personality, strengths, and gifting that are uniquely "mine." That includes me being a woman!; 3) Living in right relationship with others, in love, as Jesus did.

So the right alignment with Jesus, in me, in right relationship with other people, after being transformed by the "grace-gift-exchange" described in this experience, shows the perfect countenance of Jesus in an individual. He looks like me, I look like Him, and the love I have for other people comes from that beautiful union. This brings great glory to God!

"The glory of God is man fully alive."

—St. Irenaeus, 2nd century AD

There are so many "God-encounters" described in the Bible! I believe these are examples to instruct us through the truth they communicate. I also believe they are there to show us the kinds of encounters God wants to give us all. The Bible is the written Word of God that speaks truth and life into us. It then unites with the Living Word of God, Christ in us, to apply and amplify that truth and life. The Holy Spirit counsels and inspires us to take it from mental assent, to integration in the core of our being, then into inspired action.

"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." Matt 11:28-30 MSG

Chapter 4

The Invitation To the Dance

There *IS* an invitation being extended to women everywhere, to find that BETTER WAY. You are

being given an invitation to the dance of liberation unto transformation to the rhythm of grace! Come one, come all! Liberation comes through inviting Jesus into your life, embracing the cross, and choosing to follow Him. Transformation comes by the Life within integrating with your mind, will, emotions, and physical body. It's an "inside-out" make-over! There is a "dance" with your partner, Jesus, that you are invited to enter into every day of your life. It is an invitation to step up to being the beauty you were created to be. It is also an invitation to step out to dance with Him in every area of your life until who He is and who you are so integrated, so entwined, that you move as one.

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Have you ever watched two dance partners who have practiced and honed their dance moves so well that they move in total synchronization? (*Dancing with the Stars*, for instance?) This is how you and Jesus would look dancing together. He wants your life to flow with such grace, such creativity, such discipline, such dependence on Him, that the two of you become inseparable. You move together as one, doing the Beauty! Breathtakingly beautiful!

I have personally been powerfully affected by the book *Captivating* by Stasi and John Eldredge and by the retreat ministry that developed around it. I would recommend that you read it and also attend a retreat if you can. I've read the book and studied it with other women, attended the retreat a couple of times with friends and have been truly inspired by it. My big take-aways from it are these truths: Women's hearts have been shut down by the false messages they internalize from the pains of life. Their hearts need to be awakened again to who they are and how God uniquely made them. The core desires of a woman are God-given and good. Those desires come from the original design He gave women. Stasi says it well in chapter one of the book *Captivating*:

"Look at the games that little girls play, and if you can, remember what you dreamed of as a little girl. Look at the movies women love. Listen to your own heart and the hearts of the women you know. What is it that a woman wants? What does she dream of? Think again of women like Tamar, Ruth, Rahab—not very "churchy" women, but women held up for esteem in the Bible. We think you'll find that every woman in her heart of hearts longs for three things: to be romanced, to play an irreplaceable role in a great adventure, and to unveil beauty. That's what makes a woman come alive."⁵

For your hearts to "wake up," these are the longings that need to be honored and validated in your life. Healing needs to take place for the wounds that have brought disappointment and put a "lid" on these

truly feminine desires. You are worthy of being romanced. You have an irreplaceable role in a great adventure. You have a beauty uniquely yours to unveil.

If you haven't already, now is the time to step up and enter into it! Step up to BE THE BEAUTY you were created to be.

Once our hearts are awake, then what? How do we step out to "DO" the Beauty? How do we *do the beauty* without striving and becoming uber-busy, exhausted women?

I remember regularly hearing the phrase: "Beauty is as beauty does" throughout my growing-up years. I think this Bible verse relates to that thought:

"For women who claim to be devoted to God should make themselves attractive by the good things they do." 1 Timothy 2:10 NLT

Moreover, I believe that it's not just "any old good things" we are called to do, but there are *specific* good things God has in mind for each of us.

"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

What if we were so connected to Jesus that we actually understood who He made us to be and what He made us to do? What if we entered into that dance I described in the dream in chapter one and allowed those virtues to be formed in us? What if the specific good works we are called to do are aligned with who we are and what our purpose is? And then, what if we banded together, performing good works with the people we love for the people who needed it?

I believe that all of those "what ifs" are exactly what God has in mind for us. But how do we do them? How do we DO that Beauty?

Thinking back to the dream of the Fully Alive woman, I know this: The Lord is giving all of His daughters a personal invitation to dance in relationship with Him in a graceful gift exchange. He's inviting you to the Dance! As God offers us the gifts of virtues that call us up to the nobility we were born to embody (We are called to be Ladies!), we receive them freely, gracefully, free of charge, in exchange for our less than noble qualities. Sometimes it takes some doing, some hard knocks, for us to "let go" of our flawed humanity in order to receive what God offers us. But "life happens." It will try and test us to help us become desperate for what He wants to give us. He has already imparted through Christ in us everything we will ever need to become fully alive, godly women—true nobility (Col. 1:26, 27). The gifts He was giving in the dream are full of the GRACE we need to "put off the old and put on the new" (Col. 3:5-10). When we allow this graceful gift exchange to take place in every area, He leads us through the process again and again. One day we will reach critical mass. The composite work of grace in our lives results in a magnitude of authority and light within us. It then shines through the very pores of our countenance!

One thing I noticed about the "exchange" in the dream was that I was clearly being made an offer of something far better than I had. My immediate response was to receive that offer. Afterward, I gave away whatever old thing was taking up space in me to make room for the new!

That's the way grace works. He offers us something far better than anything we already have. It's free. There's no earning or deserving. Sometimes we think this must be too good to be true. We get jaded by all the ways things work in our world and think, "Where's the catch? What isn't 'free' about this deal?" Or, sometimes we can receive Jesus as our Savior as a free gift but then feel transformation (aka sanctification) is something we earn. The truth is that they are both FREE, as in F-R-E-E!

We do, however, have to let go of something to make room for the gift. We have to get rid of some things we've held onto for whatever reason. Some of them are lies about who God is, who we are, how loved and valued we are. Some are habits that keep us enslaved. Some are fears. Some are forms of Narcissism or pride. There's probably a long list of things you could write for yourself of things you know you need to let go of but somehow haven't or feel you can't. When grace comes to us, we are offered the strength to let go of "our stuff" if we choose.

If you are receiving joy, you may need to let go of being non-relational.

If you are receiving peace, you may need to let go of anxiety.

If you are receiving love, you may need to let go of hatred or bitterness.

If you are receiving longsuffering, you may need to let go of impatience.

If you are receiving gentleness, you may need to let go of anger.

If you are receiving goodness, you may need to let go of your 'bad girl' stuff.

If you are receiving meekness, you may need to let go of pride.

If you are receiving self-control, you may need to let go of self-indulgence.

If you are receiving faith, you may need to let go of fear or doubt.

See how this works?

In light of the offer being made to you, and with it the grace of God to give you the strength to let go of your "stuff," what do you say? The appropriate response might be, "Thank you, Lord! Yes, I receive it, and yes, I release it."

Many times, it isn't that simple. Truthfully, it is always a process, and God is okay with the process. He knows how bound we are, how human we are. He doesn't despise our humanity; He loves our humanity, He actually did make it! And He became human as well, so that's not a problem for Him. It's the sin and brokenness, the rebellion and stubbornness, the addictions, the destructive behaviors, and the "serpent's thinking" in our minds that are a problem for Him. He knows just what it will take to get us to release those things we tenaciously hold onto. Grace, you see, is received on an "as needed" basis. You need to know how much you need it to get it.

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If you never acknowledge your need, you won't get it. To the degree that you acknowledge your need and don't rely on your own performance, you will receive that amount of grace. And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say,

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. Let there be tears

for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.” James 4:6-10 NLT

Beauty will come from those ashes! (Isaiah 61:3)

He will release His grace to us generously when we humble ourselves, admit our need, and receive it. Clearly, we do have divided loyalties that cause us to be conflicted within ourselves. The wrestling match described in Romans 7 is about the inner conflict caused by those divided loyalties. Like Jacob, who wrestled with God (Genesis 32) because he so wanted His blessing, we can bring our desire to receive His blessing to the Lord. As we wrestle with the Lord, we lose our performance orientation, our ambition, and our deceitful mixture of motivations. Whatever is there, we get to lose our less-than-noble propensities in that process.

In order to receive the grace packages we need to overcome, we simply ask Him, “What area are you emphasizing now?” Let’s say He makes it clear to you that He is emphasizing Joy. In light of that virtue, one of the nine fruits of the Spirit, identify what you are currently holding onto that represents a “divided loyalty.” In other words, it’s something you are giving more power to than the virtue God is offering to you. Instead of giving all the reasons you feel you legitimately have NOT to be joyful, simply humble yourself before God. Bow. Get on your knees and give up resisting. End the tug of war within yourself. Make a decisive choice! Say to the Lord, “I give up!” There is nothing more powerful than You, Lord, I want most of all to have JOY. I LET GO of my right to be joyless, non-relational, grumpy, negative, and acting like You aren’t with me. Forgive me Lord. I believe that in Your presence is fullness of joy, and that You are WITH ME always. I receive your GRACE right now to connect with You. I shift into relationship with You, the source of all Joy!” That’s a snapshot of what the “gift exchange” looks like. It’s simple. It can be easy, but it isn’t always easy “getting there.”

Once we have received the grace packages God is offering us and given up whatever is taking up space to make room for them, then we are ready to roll. We can take action that flows from the Beauty that’s been formed in us. Remember “beauty is as beauty does”? All our “doing” was meant to come from our “being,” from a place of rest rather than striving.

“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.” Matt 11:28-30 MSG

Here’s how these “unforced rhythms of grace” work—they are represented by the dance in the dream I shared with you. First, He leads. Then, you follow. Step by step, repeat. Each step represents one of the names of those qualities in the dream. Which one is He focusing on with you right now? Let Him show you. Ask Him. He knows how to move in your life so that you will sense His leading. You only need to follow and trust, step by step by step. Before you know it, you are dancing, imperfectly to be sure, but that doesn’t matter to Him. He’s just soooooo delighted to be dancing with you!

As you think about the cultural “pulls” on women I described earlier, think about nestling into Him in this dance and letting Him develop these kinds of virtues in you. This is where true femininity is found. He will lead you into the specific roles He wants for you—in career, homemaking, whatever applies. But it’s what YOU bring to those roles that really matters—consider this well-known verse from Proverbs 31.

It's what YOU bring to those roles that really matters

...To Become Virtuous Women

"A capable, intelligent and virtuous woman—who is he who can find her? She is far more precious than jewels and her value is far above rubies or pearls." Proverbs 31:10 AMP Classic

When you are able, I encourage you to take some time to read the whole passage of Proverbs 31:10-31. This woman is a wife, mother, homemaker, and businesswoman. Presumably she filled different roles in different seasons of her life. But what she brought to *every* role in *every* season was her virtue.

Now, I want to take a one-by-one look at the virtues being imparted in the dream and the "gift exchange" represented by each one.

There is so much to say about each one of them! I would have a very long book if I wrote all I wanted to convey. So I am planning to create an online course called "The Divine Invitation: 7 Steps for Entering the Dance of Becoming Fully Alive" where we can take a more in-depth dive into each virtue. For now, I will give you enough to "enter the dance"!

Let's take a look at the virtues each of these angelic women were imparting and receive that impartation for ourselves! Let the Holy Spirit lead you as you read to bring the appropriate application for you personally. This process is not about receiving all of these at once. It's one-at-a-time getting in sync with the rhythm of grace.