

LOVING WOMEN



Christ



walking with purpose

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to
Christ

Lisa Brenninkmeyer



walking with purpose

SO MUCH MORE THAN A BIBLE STUDY

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The recommended Bible translations for use in all
Walking with Purpose books are: The New American Bible, which is the
translation used in the United States for the readings at Mass;
The Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition;
and The Jerusalem Bible.

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Breakthrough: Give Her Freedom

An unexpected shift of focus interrupted the 1988 presidential campaign. The news cycle relegated Bush and Dukakis to the small headlines, and two whales named “Bonnet” and “Crossbeak” claimed all the attention.

Winter arrived early in Alaska that year, and an ever-increasing covering of solid ice trapped the two whales close to the shoreline. The ice prevented them from swimming back to the ocean—the only place where they could thrive and flourish in freedom.

At first, no one really paid much attention to their problem. Then, a few Eskimos noticed that the whales were trapped. They headed out onto the ice and started gouging out holes with chainsaws and long poles. This allowed the whales to breathe on their way to the open sea. The work was exhausting, but they were determined to help the whales.

But another turn of the weather made the effort complicated. The temperature dropped to a point that they brought out water-churning devices to keep the surface of the water from freezing over. All this activity caught the attention of the media.

Alerted by the news coverage, more people joined in the efforts underway. Soon someone brought in an “Archimedean Screw Tractor,” an enormous eleven-ton vehicle that rode on two screw-shaped pontoon boats. This machine cleared the ice after it was broken up by the saws and pushed the ice away, inch by inch, slowly clearing a path to the sea.

But that was still too slow. The National Guard got involved, bringing in CH-54 Skycrane helicopters that dropped five-ton concrete bashers onto the ice, mile after mile, speeding up the whales' journey to freedom.

If you can believe it, the Soviets arrived next, sending two of their ships to the scene. Two flags flew on the stern of the Russian ships: the stars and stripes flew alongside the hammer and sickle. Think of all the political, economic, and military differences that had to be set aside. The world cheered when the two whales silently slipped out to sea. Think of the enormous amount of time, collaboration, and money that was put into these efforts so that two whales could be set free.¹

Here's my question: How much effort are we willing to put toward helping—not two whales—women worldwide come to a place of inner freedom and wholeness?

I've had the privilege of speaking at the Amazing Parish Conference alongside Catholic leaders from both business and ministry sectors. The conference exists to help parish leadership from all over the world build and sustain healthy parishes. When business consultant Pat Lencioni kicked off the conference, he brought our focus to the seven traits of an amazing parish. He said three were absolutely critical—that without a reliance on prayer, a clear vision, and a healthy team, a parish can't succeed. He then challenged the attendees to pick just one of the remaining four traits (the Sunday experience, compelling formation, small group discipleship, missionary zeal) and work through them one at a time. I was there to represent one of the "one at a time" traits—I would speak about small group discipleship—and Pat's intro brought out my competitive nature. Before I started speaking, I looked out at the audience, and thought to myself, *If they have to pick one area, I'd like them to build and change in this one.*

1 Chuck Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 115-116.

That was going to be tricky, because the majority of the people in the audience were men. I wanted to convince them that helping the women experience inner freedom and wholeness through small group discipleship was worth the time and resources of the parish. I knew what they were thinking. I knew it because I had pored over their surveys before they came.

They were thinking, *The women are all ok.*

They could count on the women. Women were the ones sitting in the pews, the volunteers serving on the committees, and the teachers giving the catechism classes. The youth—they were worried about them. But the women? The women were fine.

Let me tell you the same thing I told that audience: The women are not ok.

They may look all right on the outside. They may show up and do what needs to be done. But...

Over 17% of women take anti-depressants.²

That's a 400% increase from the early 90's until now.

Nearly one in four women in the United States (23.7%) will have an abortion by age 45.³

59% of American women are dissatisfied with their home/work balance.⁴

72% of women are stressed out.⁵

The women are struggling. How does this affect the next generation? A recent study of Catholic family life found that 68% of Catholics with children under the age of 18 have not given their

2 <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db377.htm>

3 <https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2017/abortion-common-experience-us-women-despite-dramatic-declines-rates#>

4 <https://www.barna.com/research/tired-stressed-but-satisfied-moms-juggle-kids-career-identity/#:~:text=For%20instance>

5 Ibid.

children any form of religious education.⁶ One in three parents did not find it important that their children celebrate their first Communion, and one in four didn't consider it important that their children be confirmed.⁷

In the words of Kathleen Cummings, the director of The Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism at Notre Dame, “For the first time in history, young Catholic women are more disengaged than their male counterparts. That is a huge, important shift. If you don't have women, you lose the children.”⁸

If you lose the women, you will lose the next generation. You will lose the children. But if you strengthen the women—on the inside, the place that matters most—then you unleash an army. Free women are passionate fighters who will do all they can to win the hearts of the next generation.

So how do we give the women strength? How do we reclaim their hearts? Let's learn from people who have gone before us—the original evangelists.

6 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/09/16/american-catholics-decline--flux-pope-francis-visit/72320496/>

7 <https://religionnews.com/2015/09/16/catholic-us-catholics-measure/>

8 Mary Ellen O'Donnell, *Ingrained Habits: Growing Up Catholic in Mid-Twentieth Century America* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 111.

Revolution: Just One Conversation

If we read through the Acts of the Apostles, we would discover the stories of the people who laid our foundation. They started a movement that eventually spread around the world. One of these stories is the story of Saint Philip and the Ethiopian. It's found in Acts 8:26-40.

At the beginning of the story, an angel of the Lord told Philip to head south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert route. Saint Philip followed the directions of the Spirit and came upon an Ethiopian eunuch who was sitting in a chariot reading the book of Isaiah. The Spirit again told Saint Philip to climb into the chariot and sit with the man. Doing so, he asked the Ethiopian if he understood what he was reading. He responded, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" Saint Philip leaned over and saw the passage:

As a sheep led to the slaughter
or a lamb before its shearer is dumb,
so he opens not his mouth.
In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken up from the earth. (Acts 8:32-33)

The man asked Philip who the passage was about. Philip began to explain the passage, telling the man how it was talking about Jesus Christ, even though it was written centuries before He walked the

earth. While they traveled and talked, they came upon some water. Saint Philip baptized the Ethiopian man at his request.

It is so easy to believe that, in the early Church, the gospel spread by some sort of impersonal Holy Spirit magic. But this could not be further from the truth. If we look closely at this story from the Acts of the Apostles, we see that the Ethiopian came to know Jesus through two ways. First, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Second, through Saint Philip's obedience to promptings of the Spirit. Saint Philip sat with the man, answered his questions, and patiently led him to Jesus Christ.

This is how Christianity—the good news of Jesus Christ, the promise of our salvation, the restoration of true joy, and the invitation into new life—spread around the world. The world was not converted through a mass proclamation or program. The world was converted when unbelievers saw followers of Christ caring selflessly for the sick in the middle of a plague or adopting babies who were discarded as unfit to live. The world was converted when Christians were jailed and poured out radical love to their jailers and proclaimed Jesus to their fellow inmates.

The lives of the early Christians stood out from the lives of people around them. The early Christians loved radically and shared boldly. They spoke the name of Jesus with one person at a time. They rushed to help when others stepped back. Their self-sacrificial love brought about the transformation of entire nations and generations as the good news of the gospel spread around the world. Something made the early Christians different, and the watching world wanted to know what—or Who—it was. The early Christians lived in a way that compelled the world to change. Are we still the same today? Do our lives have that same kind of impact? Is it even possible in postmodern America?

Modern culture, with its comforts and technologies, creates a setting that would be unrecognizable to those who lived in

the ancient world. There is no question that we have different challenges than they did.

One challenge our society is primarily focused on people as individuals verses as a member of a larger community. Without deep familial bonds and ties to the community, we are growing increasingly disconnected, discontent, distrustful, and misunderstood. According to a survey released in January of 2020, over 61% of Americans say that they are left out, poorly understood, or are lacking companionship.⁹ That was before a global pandemic separated us from each other for months.

How did we get here? Here's the short list. Extended families no longer stay close together because jobs transfer people to different parts of the country. Many people work multiple jobs or very long hours to make ends meet, and they are too tired at the end of the day to seek connection. Involvement in municipal and community groups has plummeted over the past fifty years. Families are so busy with extracurricular activities that there is almost no time for family leisure.

The largest factor perpetuating our loneliness, however, fits into the palm of our hands. The comfort found in the glow of a screen is so much easier than the effort it takes to connect face to face. We have given ourselves to our devices with little return for our investment. From the Baby Boomers to the representatives of Gen Z, almost all of us are guilty of repeatedly turning to our social media app of choice for connection, communication, and information. At any moment we can interact with hundreds of people. But these quick interactions—dopamine hits garnered with each comment, like, and text message notification—are not feeding our souls or helping us to form lasting relationships. They entertain us but leave us numb. We're unable to ask the deeper questions and are ill-equipped to search for God.

9 <https://www.cigna.com/about-us/newsroom/studies-and-reports/combating-loneliness/>

Another challenge is our tenuous transition from a Christian culture into a post-Christian culture. The second chapter in the book of Judges illustrates our modern moment well. Here's the context: Moses led an entire generation of Israelites out of Egypt. This generation of people saw the glory of God over and over again. They may not have always trusted God, but they knew Him, and they knew that His ways led to life. The next generation was led by Joshua, who led the Israelites into the land of Canaan. Joshua was God's faithful servant, and Joshua led the Israelites in that faithfulness. Take a look at what happened after Joshua died.

And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work which the Lord had done for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten years. And they buried him within the bounds of his inheritance in Tim'nath-he'res, in the hill country of E'phraim, north of the mountain of Ga'ash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, who did not know the LORD or the work which he had done for Israel. (Judges 2:7-10)

The generations now reaching adulthood are far less familiar with the beliefs and practices of Christianity than their elders. According to the pew forum, while 51% of the Greatest Generation attended weekly religious services, only 28% of their grandkids, Millennials, attend weekly religious service. 69% of the members of the Greatest Generation say that they pray frequently but only 39% of Millennials say the same.¹⁰ In the mid-twentieth century, it was easy to see the influence of the Judeo-Christian traditions on society's values. Today, we are migrating away from that tradition and embracing secular values.

10 <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/generational-cohort/>

In some ways, our post-Christian environment resembles the setting of early Church more than 1950s America did. The early Christians were not surrounded by governments and cultures that were friendly towards their message. They were constantly fighting an uphill battle to spread the gospel. Today, our fight is a bit different. Millions of people are vaguely familiar with Jesus and Christianity. They have heard just enough to know that they aren't interested.

Of course, our social media saturated, post-Christian culture is different from the culture of the early church. The early Christians, however, were faced with challenges and opportunities that are not totally unlike ours. And despite their setbacks, the apostles embraced the time for which they were made. They led a social revolution that turned the world upside down as they helped thousands connect with God.

We wonder if it's possible for this kind of revolution to happen today. It almost feels foolish to expect a movement of the Holy Spirit to make an "early Church" kind of impact. Sure, we'd like people to know God, but we assume that the deck is stacked against us. As a result, we attend Church and go about our Christian business—privately tucking away the faith that could move mountains.

Journey: Love Her to Christ

Though the details of life look different all along the timeline, some things never change. For all the progress we have made over thousands of years, the human heart has not changed. We hunger for connection and belonging. We desire to know that we matter—that our lives have meaning. Propelled to fill our inner void, we seek the divine. We connect with each other as a foretaste of God's love.

The Holy Spirit wants to move powerfully in this generation. Believe it. God wants to set the world on fire with His love. How do we start changing hearts? It's not a secret. We can use the latest technology, the best marketing, and most on-brand messaging, but lives are ultimately changed in the exact way they were two thousand years ago, through the movement of the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit that draws a heart to God, and He usually moves through personal relationships. Our job is to respond to His promptings, to be the people who love others to Christ.

Key Factors in Spiritual Growth

If we were to make a big list of all the factors that played a part in each of our journeys towards a relationship with Christ, we'd probably find some overlap. At Walking with Purpose, we like to focus on five key factors that contribute significantly to spiritual growth. Let's dive in.

1. The Influence of a Key Relationship

Years ago, I decided to leave the Catholic Church. I had grown up a very happy Evangelical Christian but converted to the Catholic faith when I got married. Though I went through the motions, I never fully embraced Catholicism. At that point, I was done. Being a Catholic only made me feel judged and devalued. It didn't matter that the judgment I was feeling was not the heart or the teaching of the Church. It was *my* experience.

That was years ago. Now, I am so grateful that I didn't leave. I discovered the richness and the depth this ancient Church offers me. I love being a Catholic. So, what changed?

I met a new friend.

I'll never know what possessed me to tell her the truth about how I was feeling, but I shared authentically. I named all of my struggles. My dear friend listened to my frustrations, my hurts, and my confusion. She didn't judge me. Instead, she apologized to me, recognizing the real pain in my experience. Then she asked me if I would be willing to give it one more chance. She introduced me to a priest who was willing to listen to my whole story. Without their presence in my life, *Walking with Purpose* would not exist.

Think back on the time in your life when you started to wake up spiritually. Was there someone who came alongside you? Was there someone who cared enough to talk to you about God even if it might have felt awkward at the beginning? Did someone's life make you wonder what made him or her different?

The priest was this person for me—I'd never met anyone like him. No matter how aggressively I came at him, he gently kept me engaged and gave me answers. I never felt rushed. I never felt like he thought my questions were dumb or threatening. He taught me at the pace I set. I started softening. That priest recognized something really important—the heart won't surrender to God

in an instant. I was on a journey, gradually growing in trust, and he was patient.

Who was that person for you?

How can you be that person for someone else? It's important to recognize that we are not the ones in control. If we really want people to grow, we must give them the room to grow at their own pace.

It's also important to realize that you don't have to be full of knowledge to build that key relationship with someone. You need to be full of love and easy to love. When a person is drawn to you, you can in turn point them to Christ. You don't point to Christ by knowing more than they do. You point to Christ by being transparent, by letting them see that you really need God, and by sharing openly about the ways that He comes through for you.

There is simply no substitute for your physical presence. There is no substitute for time you spend listening and, when God gives you the nudge, time you spend pointing to Him. Not every conversation is going to be centered on the big theological questions. But if you never mention Him at all, they'll have no idea why you are so different in the first place.

There is nothing better than walking alongside a friend while she begins to open her heart to God. Stepping out and exploring spiritual matters is a huge exit from the comfort zone, but it's worth it. You could say to your friend, "You really should read this book or listen to this podcast, it will help you spiritually." Or, you could say to her, "Let's do this together. Come with me to Walking with Purpose. Sit with me. I'd just love to have that time with you, and I promise it won't be awkward. I will be right there."

Don't underestimate the power of your presence.

In the first years of Walking with Purpose, a parish deacon asked me why our retention rate was so high. He shared with me that so

many of the parish programs started out with good attendance, but it always fell as the program continued. People wouldn't commit and come back. By contrast, our numbers grew as the year went on.

I think one of the big differences with *Walking with Purpose* is that we make sure the women know that they are wanted when they come. We care about who they are; we're not just feeding them information.

It is our desire to reach the furthest woman out—the woman sitting in the last pew, wondering why she's even here. We look for the woman with one foot out the door. We want the woman who already left and doesn't think anyone even noticed. This is how Jesus loves, and we seek to imitate Him.

We acknowledge the power of Christ's presence in anyone's life, but we often underestimate the power of our own presence. He has chosen to work through us on earth—we are His hands and feet. We start just like the early Church started: with a relationship, an invitation, or an extended hand.

2. Pivotal Life Circumstances

Karol Wojtyla was the only surviving member of his immediate family by the time he was twenty years old. He lost his sister before he was born, his mother to a heart attack and kidney failure, his brother to scarlet fever, and his father to a heart attack. His life was marked by suffering, so he was forced to grapple with existential questions earlier than most people. The suffering he experienced was one of the reasons he became a priest, embarking on the journey that would eventually lead him to become Pope John Paul II.

All of us will experience an earth-shattering life circumstance. Our suffering reveals that we aren't as in control as we'd like to be. Sometimes we create the circumstances with our own dumb choices. We long so deeply to be satisfied that we seek joy in

temporal fleeting pleasures. We then come up dry. Dealing with the consequences, we long for something more. Sometimes we simply experience the consequences of living in a broken world. We are living far from Heaven, longing for Heaven.

Our pivotal life experiences are part of our journey. We are all eventually confronted by our limits. Many of us must reach the end of our rope before we finally reach out for God. Unable to fix situations, people, events, and conflicts, God beckons us to turn to Him.

The same trying circumstance can cause two very different faith decisions. Karol Wojtyla was part of a men's prayer group that was led by a quiet, awkward man named Jan Tyranowski. He was there, walking with Karol, having conversations with him, praying, and simply living life alongside him. Saint John Paul II gave Tyranowski credit for helping him find his vocation. The same type of suffering and loss that Saint John Paul II experienced has plunged others into anger and bitterness. It all depends on who is there to be a companion on the journey. Without guidance, many people grow bitter and blame God for their circumstances.

How will you respond when you are faced with difficult circumstances and suffering? Will you feel so guilty because of your choices that you believe that there's no way back? Or will you allow the difficulty to reveal your need for God? How will you lean in and walk with someone else on their journey? Will you pull back because you're afraid of saying the wrong thing, or will you speak words of mercy and comfort? You can be the one to reach out. Trust that the Holy Spirit will use you to bring His presence into the situation.

3. Encountering Relevant Content

In Mark 2, four men brought their paralytic friend to meet Jesus, who's teaching in a crowded house. When they realized that

they were unable to access Jesus, they climbed onto the roof, and lowered the paralytic down to Him. Moved by their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” The scribes were angry and called Jesus a blasphemer. They demanded, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Jesus then questioned them, asking, “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your pallet and walk?’ He then turned to the paralytic and said, “I say to you, rise, take up your pallet, and go home.”

Jesus knew that God’s will has power over our everyday reality. In this scene, He spoke to the needs of this man’s heart and to the needs of his current situation. On a spiritual level, Jesus forgave his sins. On a physical level, Jesus spoke healing over his body. The paralytic needed to experience the power of both the spiritual truth and the dramatic change in his daily life. In this story, Jesus demonstrates that the truth has dominion over our souls and our bodies—the truth permeates all levels of our experience.

In a perfect world, we’d all be truth seekers. We’d just want to know what was true and good. Once we discovered it, we’d throw ourselves behind it. However, we must take into account that sometimes we don’t want the truth—what we are really seeking is personal well-being. It sounds superficial to say that we all want to be happy... but let’s be honest, we aren’t seeking *unhappiness*!

When people are trying to figure out life, they don’t want a bunch of truth dumped all over them or shouted at them all at once. They need to hear things that are going to be genuinely helpful and practical in their daily reality. They need solutions to their problems and relief from their pressure points. At Walking with Purpose, we call this “truth with handles.” This was what I needed all those years ago. I need my questions answered and my doubts addressed. But, more than that, I needed to see how those truths applied to my life and my current problems.

When I write studies and other content, I often find things that fascinate me about the Bible. I think that the historical context and the Greek word translations are really interesting. But in order for me to include them in a Bible study, they must be helpful. I always ask the question, “So what? What does this have to do with day to day life?” If I can’t answer that question, the material doesn’t make it into the Bible study.

I want people to feel they are encountering Christ in the material—not getting a list of to-do’s shoved down their throats. Women are welcomed to come to Walking with Purpose as they are, and they move through the material at whatever pace is comfortable for them. We try really hard to make sure that our Bible study materials meet the needs of the everyday woman. We want to offer them relevant content.

Coming to Walking with Purpose doesn’t mean that you’ve committed to believing every word of the Bible or obeying every letter of everything you read. We just want women to show up. We want them to encounter Jesus, to wrestle with who God is, and to figure out what that truth means for them personally.

God is not afraid of anyone’s doubts, tensions, and fears. He wants us to get real with Him, and so we seek to get real with the women who come. It is only then that a woman can start to see God’s hand over every moment of her life, not just during Sunday Mass. Real and relevant content catalyzes her journey—she slowly starts to see fingerprints of God all over her life.

4. Learning to use the Basic Tools

At some point in our journey, we discovered the basic tools that helped us keep growing. We learned how to pray and read the Bible. We learned how to take advantage of the sacraments. Most importantly, we learned why we would be happier if we used these tools frequently to connect with God and form our hearts.

Catholic theologian Jeff Cavins describes many of our Catholic upbringings in this way: He says that most of us have received a pile of Catholic stuff. We know that we pray the rosary and receive sacraments. We know that we celebrate the saints and that we fast during Lent. But we don't always know why. We don't know how to make sense of our Catholic pile—we just pull from it once in a while and then go back to daily life. But when we learn to use the basic tools, we learn how to make sense of our Catholic piles of stuff. We can start to understand what it means to be Catholic and to invite God into our everyday lives.

We provide lessons in how to use these basic tools—prayer, Scripture, and the sacraments—in all of our Bible Studies, but we focus on them especially in *Opening Your Heart*, one of the courses we offer. Some of the topics I cover in this course are:

Why is Jesus interested in my friendship?

Why and how should I pray?

What are the limits of Christ's forgiveness?

What is the role of suffering in my life?

Can God really change me or is that just wishful thinking?

When we dive into these questions and explore the practices of our faith, we can become women who know how to connect with God more frequently. With the basic tools laid out for us, we can start growing. We even gain the confidence to invite a friend to join us on our journey.

5. The Rush of being used by God

As we grow in relationship with God and start to understand His story throughout the narrative of the Bible and in the history of the Catholic Church, we start to see where we fit. Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have

commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” This call to spread Christ’s love was meant for us—yes, us. It was meant for all of us who would know Him and would want to make Him known.

The fifth factor of spiritual growth occurs when we see God using our “yes” for His glory. I call this the rush of being used by God. What does the rush look like? Maybe it looks like speaking the very words that someone was praying to hear. Maybe it looks like showing up at just the right time to offer a helping hand. We may experience the rush when we give an answer to someone’s question about Christianity. While we often think we gave a silly answer, God used it to speak right to the heart of the person who needed to hear it. God is out for His glory, and He uses our imperfections to glorify Him. When He uses our weakness, it is almost hard for us to believe the outcome. We are all too aware of our limitations, but He leaves us in awe of what He can do through us.

Have you ever experienced the rush of being used by God? What happened? How did He use you? How does your continual yes to His will reveal His glory in the story of Christianity? These moments prove that He is real. He intervenes, and He hears our prayers. The very thing that we think is so far beyond us becomes the thing that draws us closest to Christ and increases our faith—not in our own abilities—in His power.

Challenge: Don't Hold Back

Is there anyone in your life who would benefit if you reached out and walked with them spiritually? Do you have a friend who is all about the superficial, who feels empty, or who lacks purpose? Is there someone you love who has lost all hope? Or maybe there's someone you love who actually feels very satisfied... even though God doesn't play any part in his or her life. We know that there is more for them, and we want more for them.

It's so easy to look at them and say, "Boy, does she ever need God in her life. I'll pray for her." And we may even pray, "God, bring people into her life that can tell her about you!" But the truth is, we shrink back from being the person who reaches out.

Why?

We don't want to feel awkward. We don't want people to think we are weird or offensive. On top of all of that, we feel like we don't have the authority to speak because we don't have all the answers. We tell ourselves, "I'll just live out my faith through my actions, and that should be enough." Feeling a bit helpless, we quote Saint Francis, "Preach the gospel at all times, use words if necessary." (Incidentally, St. Francis never said this, and actually, he used words all the time.)

Most of us get really comfortable in our holy huddles. Our focus turns inward. We get cozy with people who believe what we believe. They are just so much easier to be around. We become spiritual "consumers," always wanting something new, always

busy with community experiences that meet *our* needs. We close our hearts off to the people who are different from us. They just don't "get us" like our friends do. Research shows that the longer a person attends church, the fewer interactions they have with people who are not Christians. The circle gets more homogenous.

This would be fine, if our goal was our own comfort.

But the Lord never told us that we would be comfortable. The Bible suggests that the opposite. Psalm 78:3-4 says, "things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders which he has wrought." Matthew 10:8 commands, "You received without paying, give without pay." Hebrews 12:15 implores us, "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God." These are the charges that are given to us. This is what God is asking of us. He is calling us to reach out, to hand the evidence of His glory on to the next generation. Freely give away what you have spiritually received. See to it that no one misses the grace of God.

When a woman comes to Walking with Purpose for the first time, we don't know her background. We don't know if she's been hurt by the Church or if she's seen hypocrisy and a lack of authenticity among the Christians she knows. We don't know what her baggage is. Perhaps her marriage is falling apart. She may be worried about a child suffering from depression. She may feel overwhelmed and overworked. She may have been betrayed by women in the past. We don't know.

One thing we do know—she needs community.

She needs love. She needs a safe place to grow spiritually. This is what we long to provide, a relationship with a person that will ultimately lead to a relationship with Christ.

God is calling us to be His love to the world. But He doesn't force us. He leaves us with a choice. We can turn our focus inward and be so glad for our own spiritual awakening. We can become "spiritual consumers" who are always looking for the next thing we need to feel "spiritually high." Or, we can embrace the power of the Word. We can continue to do the things that help us to grow spiritually and at the same time, turn our focus outwards. How?

1. We build those key relationships with others.
2. We recognize and reverence others' pivotal life experiences, no matter how difficult they may be.
3. We seek out relevant content—"truth with handles"—to offer to others.
4. We introduce others to the tools—prayer, scripture, and sacraments—that will help others grow spiritually.
5. We experience the rush of being used by God in others' lives—and, by His grace and through our weakness, they go on to build more key relationships.

The revolution started by the early Church continues.

Christianity is not a club. The Holy Spirit is ready to move. We were made for such a time as this. With the early Church as an example and our eyes fixed on Heaven, we can direct those in this world back to the One who made them.

Your story isn't finished yet... and neither is hers.