

LIVE IN EXPECTATION

The room is dimly lit in the wee hours of the morning. The sun is only partially up, casting just enough light as you step out onto the dance floor and wait for the words of the song to begin. This is the dance of expectation, one of knowing your partner will arrive and speak with a still small voice as you read His Word.

Expect to encounter Jesus, the Word made flesh. He longs to speak to you. Expect long-term transformation as your mind becomes renewed. This isn't an overnight process, and learning to navigate your Bible will take time, but you can believe you will learn and grow and begin to detect the sound of His voice as you show up each day. That must be your commitment of faith in the beginning, reading and learning the lyrics of God's love song, His Word. The ability to hear and follow His lead will develop as you get to know the One who calls you away to dance the dance in a quiet place with Him.

At first it's all so overwhelming with new concepts to learn and apply. I remember well what my first women's study was like. Once when we were watching a session video, I looked around the room and wondered if the other women there had a clue what the speaker was talking about. Bible-talk was all new to me then. I felt stupid for not knowing what she was talking about and too proud to ask someone to help me learn. Part of me feels my stubborn pride was a hindrance, but now I'm glad I allowed the Spirit to be my teacher. I'm sure it took longer for me to learn without help, but the lessons I've learned over the years have sure stuck.

One thing I committed to do was the homework. I noticed how other women would come in and say they just didn't have time. I know we all get busy, but I have to say that investing time in reading the material, looking up the verses, and filling in the blanks to the best of my ability made a huge impact.

I don't want to see anyone shy away from reading their Bible because it seems too intimidating. If you're brand spanking new, try to read story-related books early on. Genesis and Exodus set the stage for the Patriarchs and tell you of Moses and his impact on the people of God. Joshua will help you cross over into the Promised Land with the people of God. Esther's story will captivate your romantic heart as she becomes an unlikely queen. Her willingness to risk her life for God's purpose and people will take your breath away.

The Old Testament books of Psalms and Proverbs bring peace and wisdom. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the New Testament share accounts of Jesus and His journey here on earth.

The prophetic books like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel may throw you for a loop early on. And Revelation? That'll curl your toes. They are all amazing books that declare God's faithfulness, but at first they might seem overwhelming.

It doesn't matter your experience with reading your Bible; we are all on equal footing as believers. We have the Holy Spirit within, the Author of the Book who will open up our understanding.

"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

(John 14:25-26)

One key thing I discovered while learning to read my Bible: I didn't have the capacity to figure things out. It was up to the Spirit to open my understanding. There is a big difference. Only the Spirit can illuminate a verse that seems a mystery. Sometimes, I never know what something means, but I have to believe it's just not for me to know at that time. I don't have to know it all, just what it takes for me to follow Jesus faithfully.

Something the Spirit whispered into my spirit along the way was to not jump immediately to reading commentaries or notes in study Bibles, which are simply man's interpretation of the Word. Once we read someone else's explanation, we tend to view that as the only explanation. Go to the Spirit first and allow Him to tell you what He means.

Here are a few things you can expect as you begin to read your Bible more often:

You will grow in understanding.

Along with a deeper knowledge of the milk of your faith, which is God's love, you will learn new and more challenging concepts while reading. You will be addressed in ways that are unique to you regarding areas where you need to shift your attitude.

Case in point: Me and my mouth. I can have a sharp tongue. When I first began to read my Bible with any regularity, I was constantly challenged to watch my mouth. Actually, today would have been a great day to have been challenged. I lost my cool with someone I love dearly and said some things I should have kept silent about. I kept telling myself how right I was on the matter and just kept spewing hurtful things. It didn't matter if I was right or not. I was wrong for my brutal words. I can't take them back now.

If I'm perfectly honest, I did receive a word through Scripture just this morning. It wasn't a passage that spoke specifically about the mouth, but it was clear enough that it applied to my situation and should have defused what became a heated exchange. Had I heeded the warning, I wouldn't have said the things I did. That's why applying what we read matters. I didn't today. I regret that. I can only be thankful that God's mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Your faith will grow deeper.

The more you see the truth of Scripture come to life and be proven in and around you, the more faith you will have to lean on. When you read something that challenges you to take a step of faith in obedience, and you choose to do it, you will find God faithful. It may not be right away that you see the outcome you hoped for, but time will almost always show you your step of faith was exactly God's plan for you at the time. It's often easier to see that in hindsight than while walking out the step.

If you poll mature believers who have consistently taken faith steps, you will be hard pressed to find many who will later say they regret their obedience. Most will say the opposite, how God used what seemed like a failure at the time in a way He couldn't have had they not taken that step of faith.

Looking back at my own history, there were times when I stepped out in faith and felt like it was a disaster. Just like every other less-than-mature believer, I blamed God. I asked all the usual questions: Where were you? I thought You said to... How could You let me fall?

In every case I can now look back and see my faith steps were rewarded and were exactly His plan for my spiritual growth at the time. It sure didn't feel like it then, but His plan was always better than mine.

I once taught a class that seemed like nothing less than a disaster at the time. I never felt prepared enough. At the time I gave it the best I had to give, which wasn't much with my level of spiritual maturity. All these years later, I can see that class as my entry point into the current ministry I now know. I formed bonds that will be lifelong. I hope I made a small impact on those young-adult lives. What mattered was that I was faithful to obey what I knew to be God's leading at the time.

I tell you that for this reason: Take steps of faith. Whatever the outcome, your success lies in your obedience. If God is calling you to trust Him enough to step out in faith, then rest assured He will either catch you if you fall or teach you invaluable lessons when you land. I will never pretend to understand God's ways. I do know this, though: He is good. Whatever His methods, His way is the right way.

Inner healing will take place.

I've mentioned before how broken I was when I first began my true pursuit of Jesus. At the time I actually had no idea how damaged I was in my emotions and my way of viewing life. I found, though, that the more I read truth, the more I recognized the lies I had believed. The more I read of God's love for me, the more I was willing to open myself up to that love.

There's a verse I claimed as my own many years ago:

*"He sent forth His word and healed them."
(Psalm 107:20 NIV)*

My miraculous transformation and subsequent use by God can be explained by no other means than His Word healing my wounded soul. I can't express enough or implore you enough to seek healing through God's

Word. No matter the collateral damage done in your life by the world's warfare, healing is found only through Jesus as He tends to your own wounded soul.

Healing takes time. A lifetime of wounds requires the Great Physician. There is something about the lasting effects of childhood and young adulthood trauma that lingers in a way only those who experience it can understand. It remains so ever present that over time the enemy convinces you that your wounds are part of who you are. That isn't true at all. Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted and proclaim liberty to the captives. If your past hurts hold you captive, Jesus is your liberator (Isaiah 61). Plan to spend time in that power-packed chapter in your takeaway. My Bible is marked up with all kinds of notes along the margin of that particular passage.

What stands out most to me now are "the after" statements. It's as if verses one through three depict the healing and transformation of the believer. Then in the latter part of verse three and following we find out the "what for."

"That they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified. And they shall rebuild the old ruins..." (Isaiah 61:3-4)

There is a reason for God to spend time on your healing. He has a plan for you, that you will glorify Him through your transformed life. If anyone is proof of His healing power, I am. I say this with all sincerity: I have no idea why He is choosing to use someone with a past such as mine. Maybe he is using me *because* of my past. What better way for God to receive glory than to turn Old Lisa into this new version of myself, a woman who loves Him with all her heart, soul, and mind, a woman who will shout His love from the rooftops to anyone who will listen.

He has a plan for you. Don't ever doubt that.

He will speak clearly and precisely.

The more you read, the more you will learn to hear from God as He speaks into your life and circumstances. While reading Scripture, you will begin to hear His voice convicting or directing or reminding you that you are loved and protected. Or you may hear His response to a question or concern you have brought before Him.

One of my own favorite examples of God speaking directly to me was through the obscurest of verses. I found a show called *Madmen* and watched a few episodes. It was about the behind-the-scenes life of advertising executives. Those first few episodes weren't so bad. At least infidelity was accurately portrayed, in that there were consequences for the cheater. Then something happened on one episode that made my eyes nearly pop out of my head. The act wasn't actually shown, but what was insinuated was sexually graphic, almost to the point of a violent assault.

That scene so stayed with me that I even woke the next morning with the image burned into my mind. Before beginning my quiet time that morning, I half-heartedly whispered, "Lord, I don't think I need to watch that show anymore."

The reason my statement was half-hearted was that, knowing myself, I liked the show so much that I could have easily discounted that one thing considering the show wasn't bad overall.

Yeah, that didn't happen.

I opened my Bible to Jeremiah, where I just happened to be in my normal flow of reading. When I picked up where I had left off, this verse was there waiting in response to my statement:

*"You too, O Madmen, will be silenced."
(Jeremiah 48:2 NIV)*

I have never seen a more blatant and direct response by God. I nearly threw my Bible when I read that. Come to find out, *Madmen* was the name of a city, but that was beside the point. Needless to say, I never watched that show again.

When I say God speaks in not-so-gentle ways, my *Madmen* verse is a great example. His Word to me cracked like thunder that morning. That too was a good example of why maintaining a normal flow of reading is

beneficial. When you get a word specific to your situation, you are able to see God as the strategic genius that He is. Also, you see how intentional He is to be present in the details of your life—even your TV watching choices.

Just a note: If you watched that show, I'm not beating you up at all. That one instance may very well have been isolated. For me, though, I have to take great care with what I watch when it includes anything of a sexual nature. With my past of sexual abuse and later sexual sin, it's just not where my mind needs to dwell.

Questions will be answered.

In Proverbs 3:5-6, we are told:

- Trust in the LORD with all our heart.
- Lean not on our own understanding.
- Acknowledge Him in all our ways.
- He will direct our path.

When you have little and large life questions, ask them. God wants to guide and direct you. He's your Father. Why wouldn't He answer when you ask? Notice, though, those first three points. They provide what seems to be a key to hearing His direction.

First, we need to trust Him enough to follow. When we ask His direction, we need to be prepared to do what He says.

Second, His direction often flies in the face of conventional wisdom. And it almost always differs from what the social expectations of the world around you say. Sex outside of marriage is a great example. Everyone does it now, right? Sadly, yes, even professing Christians. As a Christian fiction author, I find it difficult to write characters who wait for marriage, not because of what I believe, but because even Christians nowadays consider not waiting the norm. It's difficult to make it believable that a young woman in her twenties could still be a virgin.

If you are single and ask God His direction on that topic, His answer will be to wait. No matter what you feel. No matter what everyone else thinks, God's best for you is to wait until marriage.

Third, acknowledging God in all our ways seems like a vague statement, but it's actually pretty specific. It means all, not some, not only the ones that match our viewpoint. All means all.

I bring this verse and all its parts into focus for this reason: God answers questions for those who want to hear His answers. It's those who want to pick and choose the answers and their obedience to them who struggle with hearing Him.

Your mind will be transformed.

Several times already I have discussed how the world we live in has shaped our minds, so I won't spend much time here. I will say this: If you have attempted to read Scripture before and found yourself frustrated enough to quit, then give it another try. Approach your reading with a new attitude, knowing that it will take time for your spiritual eyes to focus.

It's okay to begin where you are comfortable enough to stay the course. Just don't stay in the shallows forever. The deep end with God is where I've grown and been challenged in inexpressible ways. Like Jeremiah, for example, steering me away from a show that wasn't God's best for me.

There are innumerable treasures you will find in Scripture. You will find stories of intrigue, infidelity, faith walks and falls, expulsions and invitations, and rises to and falls from power. There is no literature on earth with the power contained in this precious Love Letter written to God's beloved. Your attitude when approaching your time to read affects the outcome of your experience. Expect little and receive little. Expect much and receive much.

You will hide His Word in your heart.

The more time you invest in reading, the more God's Word will seep into your thinking and come to you when you need it most. You have likely been told this so many times that you find yourself ignoring it: You should be memorizing verses. I mentioned in the "Day to Day" chapter some suggestions to get you started, like reading plans and ways to get familiar with your Bible. Memorizing God's Word is the act of drawing the Word within you. Consider the written Word God's exhale and memorizing your inhale.

What I consider memorization is different than most people. Their goal is to get the exact words down pat so that they can quote it word for word, which is a great thing. Ultimately, my goal is to draw the essence of the verse into my mind and absorb it into my understanding.

The reason I am more concerned with the essence rather than the exact wording is because focusing on exact words can become more of a check list toward perfection. The goal is to apply the meaning of the verse in my heart and to my life. Too, versions differ. I read so many different versions, I can't possibly know every one down to the last word. I would much rather know what God is saying than the words man has used to translate. This may not be your way of doing things, but I genuinely believe God's truest desire is for us to absorb His heart on the matter rather than only the exact words.

To live in expectation means you know God loves you and that His love will speak and guide those who read His Love Letter. When He speaks to your heart through Scripture, claim that verse as your own. I shared the verse about His sending forth His Word and healing me. Your own specific-to-you verses will come and will soon begin to accumulate in number. I now have many special verses after my years of pursuing God through His Word. When certain situations arise, a verse comes to my mind and answers a question I haven't even thought to ask. It will do the same for you in time. Remember, your job is to show up. His job is to claim your heart and transform your mind.

CHAPTER TAKEAWAY

Key Point

Expect to encounter Jesus, the Word made flesh, in your time with Him. He longs to speak to you.

- 1) Do you “hear” the sound of His voice? If so, did you hear early in your walk, or did that take time to develop? If not, how can your commitment of faith and believing God will show up set the stage for your heart to be receptive?

- 2) When you read something in Scripture that you don’t understand, do you immediately look at study notes or commentaries? How can this lead you to “expect” to hear from man instead of God, the Author?

- 3) Read Psalm 32:8 and John 14:25-26. Who promises to be your Teacher? _____

Key Point:

As you read your Bible more, you will grow in understanding, and your faith will grow deeper.

- 4) Do you challenge yourself to go deeper with God in your reading or simply skim the surface? Do you allow the Spirit to interrupt your flow of reading so that you can hear what He is trying to teach you?

- 5) Has there been a specific verse that God has used to address a misstep on your part, when you *knew* the Word was pointing at you or your actions? Share your experience.

- 6) Can you recall a time when you stepped out in faith only to encounter what seemed like failure? Did you later discover how God used this to grow you or your faith? Explain below.

Key Point

Inner healing will take place through the Word.

- 7) Write Psalm 107:20 in the margin. Do you believe this verse and approach the Word with hope for healing? List an example of a verse or passage that has helped in your healing.

- 8) Has the enemy convinced you that your lingering wounds are now part of who you are? Have your wounds become your identity, or do you possibly cling to a victim mentality?

- 9) Read all of Isaiah 61. Write out the verses that most speak to your healing in the past and even your current need for healing. Dig deep here! You can claim these promises for your life.

Key Point

God will speak clearly and precisely, and questions will be answered.

- 10) An earthly dad's tone may differ depending on his child's unique needs at the time. What are some different ways your Father may need to address or respond to you as His child?

- 11) God is in every detail of your life, even those things you may consider minor. Has He given you clear direction in a matter or an emphatic no to a particular behavior or attitude in your life? Share below.

Key Point

Your mind will be transformed as you hide His Word in your heart.

- 12) What stories or people in the Bible has God most used to transform your mind or your life? Tell why.

- 13) What is the difference between drawing the essence of a verse into your mind and absorbing it into your understanding versus simply memorizing the words?

- 14) What situations have you experienced when a memorized verse came to mind to direct you or give you unexpected insight?
