

Princess
Unaware

Princess Unaware

finding the *fabulous*
in every day

brenda garrison

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To my dear friend Myfanwy



The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.

—Zephaniah 3:17

Thanks and Praise

to God for allowing me to do the thing he put in me.
Thank you to my number-one cheerleader—my husband, Gene.

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who think it is so cool that their mom writes books and who
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and I appreciate them all so much.

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A Note from Brenda

I am thrilled to have you on this journey with me. I pray the biblical truths here will transform your life and relationship with God as they have transformed mine and continue to do so.

Princess Unaware consists of ten chapters, each containing a four-day study at the end. I hope you won't just go through the material—I want the material to go through you! There are several ways this can be accomplished. I will suggest a couple.

For Individual Study

I recommend doing a chapter per week. Take three days to read the chapter and then do the study over the next four days. This way the principles have time to be absorbed into your thoughts as you work through the chapter and go about your week.

For Small Group Study

Princess Unaware would make an excellent ten-week course for your Bible study group. As with the suggestion for individual study, your group members would read the chapter and do the four-day study on their own during the week—and then discuss everything when you meet together. Or the group could read the chapter during your time together, briefly discuss it, and then encourage members to do the study on their own at home.

Choose or create a plan that works best for you or your group. You'll also be prompted throughout the book to write in or refer to the Royal Truths, a section where you will personalize key points. Even after you've finished the book, you'll be able to return to these pages as a mini refresher course.

Enjoy the journey—from living as Princess Unaware to finding the fabulous in every day!

chapter one

Brawling Out of the Mud Hole

The Princess Recognizes
the Traps and Snares

I hate icebreaker games, wedding shower games, and baby shower games. One game I especially don't like is the describe-yourself-in-three-words game. I resent the insinuation that I can be summed up in three words. You too are a deep and complicated person, so three words will hardly help us really get to know each other. However, if I had to choose three words to describe myself, I would choose *enthusiastic*, *inquisitive*, and *passionate*.

Did I win the prize? *Enthusiastic. Inquisitive. Passionate.* These words drive me to live my life with purpose. Knowing that these words describe me will help you understand why I wrote this book and why I am excited that *you* are reading it!

Enthusiastic. I get excited about doing life well and the fabulous things that happen along the way, whether talking with another woman for five minutes and feeling like we've known each other for years, or celebrating with a dear friend who has achieved her dream after years of preparation and work.

Inquisitive. I want to know the source of information. (It's not that I don't trust you; I just need to know how you know.) I ask questions. *How can I make a difference? What was I made to do? How can I enjoy life? How can I do life so as not to have all this guilt and frustration?*

Passionate. What excites me in life, I am passionate about. Why spend time and emotion and energy on something if I'm not passionate about it?

Since we started the game, let's finish it. What three words would you use to describe yourself? How do those adjectives reflect the way you live? Are those words getting you to a place of fulfillment, or is something missing? If the adjectives you used are full of despair, guilt, and fear . . . or apathy, carelessness, and passiveness, I want to ignite your life with the truth and hope befitting a princess, because if you know Jesus, you're a child of the King! And if you don't know Jesus (or even *about* Jesus), keep reading and I'll introduce you.

For much of my life, I was on a quest for something to make my enthusiasm count, to answer my questions, to be worthy of my passion. I kept hearing I was a princess of the King, but I couldn't find my crown, much less keep it on my head. I searched in places that appeared to have what I was looking for—relationships, church, Bible studies, ministry, at-home businesses, doing all the right things. Somehow I kept missing it—the *umph*, the *fabulous* that I knew would be worthy of my enthusiasm, inquisitiveness, and passion.

But I did eventually find answers to my questions. God brought to me his truth that was so applicable. His answers made sense, and they made sense together. Throughout this book, I'll share with you the answers I found and how I know they are true and right. But first let's read about another young woman on a journey for answers. She's a lot like I was. She might be like you today.

The Journey of a Princess Unaware

The time had come. Jess's packed satchel sat by the front door. She came from her room, dressed for the big expedition.

"Mother, I'm ready."

"I hope so," Mother murmured, swallowing hard to hold back tears.

"What?" Jess asked, fingering the jeweled gold crest she wore around her neck. It was almost a part of her; she couldn't remember ever not wearing it.

"I know you're ready," Mother answered tentatively. But her eyes revealed doubt.

Mother and Father had been preparing Jess for this moment since she was a small child. Jess had known her time with Mother and Father was limited and that when she turned eighteen, they must send her to the castle in the Faraway Land.

"Mother, now that I am leaving, I must ask you . . . why have you and Father always called me Princess?"

"You will find out soon enough, dear."

"But where is the castle, and how do I get there?"

"Princess," Father said as he joined them, "remember the signs I taught you. Follow Polaris north until you see the mountains. Then turn west until you reach the Forest of Amusements. Go around it and continue west. Beware of Pit Weasels, of Glittering Greens and Scaly Reds," he warned.

Jess gasped. "What are those?!"

"You must see them for yourself," he said simply.

Her mother nodded, biting her lip worriedly.

"And take this," Father said as he handed her a well-worn book.

"But Father, this is the book you have taught me from since I was a little girl. I can't understand it without you."

"Yes, you can. I have taught you everything I know from the book, and you have learned well. Use what you have learned on your journey." Father put the book into the side pocket of Jess's satchel, turning away to hide his damp eyes.

"But how far is it? How will I know if I get off course? Will anyone at the castle be expecting me? What will I do there?" Jess had always trusted Mother and Father about the big expedition, but now she needed answers.

"I'm sorry. I've told you all I can. Now it's time for you to leave," urged her father.

Jess hugged and kissed Mother and Father, picked up her satchel, and walked out of the house and down the lane. She turned and headed north, resolving not to let anything stop her from arriving at her destination.

Her day was uneventful. The sky was blue, the breeze gentle, the forest calm and dark. She found herself saying out loud, "Why, this journey is not difficult at all! What a pleasant stroll I will have to the castle in the Faraway Land."

Scarcely had she spoken when . . . she rounded a bend and spotted a pack of strange creatures in the road. They were small and dark, furry, bustling things—with huge heads, long thin tails, and sharp little teeth and claws. Some were digging in the road; others were dragging brush from the forest with their teeth, scattering it over the holes, and covering the holes with dry grass and dirt.

They're setting a trap for travelers, she realized, to trip them unawares and leave them to die . . . or worse, to devour them!

"Pit Weasels!" she cried. The creatures stopped in unison, stood on their hind legs, and looked at her, their eyes gleaming maliciously.

"Go away!" she yelled. She swung her satchel in wide circles, as if she were going to hurl it at them. "Get out of my way!"

They darted into the dark forest. Jess hurried past, keeping her eyes on the path.

That night she camped under a grove of evergreens. Before the fire went out, she tried to read some of the book Father gave her. *Maybe this will help take my mind off those dreadful Pit Weasels*, she told herself. Much of what she read didn't make sense. *I knew I needed Father to help me understand this*, she thought. But as she read on, a peace and comfort covered her like a warm blanket. She rested her head on the book and fell asleep.

When a gorgeous new day dawned, Jess awoke and looked forward to making significant progress in her travels. She remembered the evil forest creatures. Her fear was quickly chased away by her resolve not to be trapped by them.

Late in the morning, dark clouds moved in, and suddenly Jess found herself in a downpour. She ran under a rocky ledge for shelter. As the rain let up, she decided to continue on. "If I let every raindrop stop me, I will never get to the castle," she reasoned.

The terrain turned rocky and gradually steepened. She didn't see the slippery rock her foot landed on, and down she went.

"Ick! My dress is soaked . . . and muddy." She stood up and pushed her wet hair out of her face. "Ugh. My hands are muddy too. I'm a mess."

There was no stream to wash in, but Jess did her best to get most of the mud off. "I'm not letting a little mud slow me down," she said, continuing on her journey. "Father told me to get there, no matter what."

Jess made great progress. Toward twilight she came upon a green meadow with a little brook in the distance. "Fresh water!" she exclaimed. "What a lovely place to camp!" Excitedly she ran toward the brook . . . and right into a very deep hole in the path, one that had been camouflaged with underbrush and a thin layer of dirt and grass.

Struggling out of the hole, she heard skittering and snickering. From the dark cover of the forest, many pairs of eyes gleamed at her. Pit Weasels! Terrified, she cried out, "Oh, Father!" She searched frantically for her satchel. "Oh, what shall I do!" She had no other weapon. How she wished for her father!

Out skittered the Pit Weasels, snickering as they scurried toward her. Suddenly, they looked toward the sky, stopped, and ran squealing back into the underbrush.

What? Jess followed their gaze . . . High overhead a lone falcon circled. Greatly relieved, she climbed out of the hole, thankful for the raptor's presence.



Do you ever feel like Jess—not ready for what life brings, slipping into mess after mess, falling for traps others set for you? Jess has much going for her. She was raised well, she has the book of wisdom from which her father taught her,

and an exciting future waits for her. However, despite these benefits, she is not doing well on her journey.

Maybe you feel you don't have any of Jess's assets. Maybe you didn't have a loving, caring family. Maybe you have never been taught wisdom or life skills. Maybe you were told you'd never amount to much, so you don't expect much. If any of this is true, my heart aches for you, and at the same time, I'm thrilled for you! Because no matter where you have come from or what lies you were told, you are loved and cared for by your Father in Heaven. "I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Or maybe, like Jess, you have much going for you—but you still aren't living a rich life. You feel stuck. You are ricocheting through life, hoping that someday you will stop and make changes to really live to the fullest. But someday hasn't come.

Now is the time. Let's journey with Jess and learn the truths that will make a difference. We'll apply those truths to our everyday lives together. Living in the reality of truth is what enables us to find the fabulous in every day. That is a promise our Savior gave us: "The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows)" (John 10:10, *AMP*).

Why We Stumble

I believe women stumble into several common mud holes and traps. Since we are relational, we often follow each other into the messes. But if we know the truth about who we are, whose we are, who God is, and the rich life God has for us, we will be prepared to avoid these traps. Our lives don't have to be one regret or frustration after another!

Who Are You?

The first reason we fall into mud holes and traps is that we don't know who we are. We don't value ourselves as made in the image of our Father. We believe our worth depends on the checkbook balance, our careers, parenting success,

or a Pilates-sculpted body. Throughout our lives we have absorbed lies about ourselves—that we are untalented, unintelligent, irritating, unattractive, too skinny, too fat, unpopular, and ultimately unworthy.

Maybe you've made poor choices that contributed to the list of lies you now believe, so because of your past *and* present, you feel like a failure and the worst of sinners. And because your past is fact, it must be the truth of who you are. Right? Wrong. Remember Jeremiah 29:11 used words like *plans*, *prosper*, and *hope*. That verse is full of promise for the future. We are not victims of our past, whether we chose it or not. Our Lord has plans for us. Our part is to get on track with him and get going in his direction.

Another important factor contributing to knowing who we are is the insecurity we battle. I have never met an adult woman who doesn't struggle with insecurity on some level. Our insecurities take control of our intelligent minds and convince us to believe lies about ourselves, which in turn affect our decisions and actions. We see the results of this in our relationships. We worry about what other women are thinking about us.

- ◆ *Did I say the wrong thing?*
- ◆ *Did I wear the wrong thing?*
- ◆ *Why didn't I get invited?*
- ◆ *Did I handle that well?*
- ◆ *Did I offend her?*

Our insecurities and poor self-image cause us to falter. To fit in and be accepted, we try to be someone we are not. Self-doubt consumes us. Under the influence of our insecurities, we do and say things that might have been expected when we were younger. A young wife once shared with me how she enjoyed meeting with her girlfriends from high school for an evening of Bunco . . . until their conversation quickly turned into a discussion she knew she shouldn't be part of.

We all enjoy friends—it's the way God wired us. Nothing hurts more than to be left out or ignored. We assume we are the problem, and we doubt our value as a person and friend. Please don't wallow any longer in the lies whispered by insecurity. Keep reading, and you will see how loved you are.

Whose Are You?

The next reason we stumble into mud holes and traps is that we don't know *whose* we are. You are here on earth by God's divine and perfect plan. Not believing that truth leaves a long blank space in the description of who you are. Not knowing that the one and only, holy, Almighty God created you and designed you for a specific plan leaves you without direction and purpose.

If you believe you are here because a froglike creature crawled out of the water onto land that was produced by a big bang in the sky (even though no one knows where the necessary elements to cause the bang came from) and that the froglike creature evolved into a monkey and the monkey evolved into your ancestors and you were born at random—then no wonder you are floundering and lacking self-worth! We are not the result of millions of years of random science experiments. We have a loving heavenly Father who created us: “You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb” (Psalm 139:13). I will talk more about this in chapters 2 and 3, but know that you are not an accident. God was looking forward to your birth.

Who Is God?

The next reason we fall is that we don't know God. Most likely you have absorbed lies about God all your life. Even well intended half-truths can lead us astray. The secular world certainly has its interpretation of God, Jesus, Heaven, angels, and all things spiritual. Take a look in any national chain bookstore at the number of shelves provided for the “spirituality” and “religion” titles. The world is getting the attention of people who are curious about spiritual matters but who distrust the church.

Even in churches we may have been taught or absorbed information about God that is not true. It may have been presented as truth by teachers and preachers who believed it to be true, but have we checked out for ourselves what they were teaching?

Hey, they're the experts, right? But if we've learned about God through what others have told us, not by firsthand study and experience, isn't that what the secular world is doing? I am not saying we can't trust our pastors and Bible

teachers. I respect and honor the men and women who have taught me God's Word and how to apply it to my life. But it's OK to question them. We must compare what we are taught to the Word of God to ensure the accuracy of the teaching. Paul praised the believers in Berea for doing this: "The Bereans . . . received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11).

Suppose a writer wanted to write a book about you. This writer interviewed every person who knew you or interacted with you or just knew about you. He gathered their "facts" about you but never talked to you. Then he wrote his book. Would you trust his version of you? I wouldn't. I know people don't see me the way I really am. Some see me better, some worse. I wouldn't want to be judged wholly by what others said about me.

Yet that is what we do to God when we think we know him but have only listened to what others tell us about him. Their versions of God are colored by their views and life experiences. If we are going to get to know God, we need to get into the truth about himself that he has given us—the Bible. We need to establish and develop a relationship with him. Then we can know if what we are hearing about God is true.

Satan Wants You to Miss God's Plan

When we don't know who we are, whose we are, and who God is, we miss the rich life God has for us. We settle for status quo because that's all we (or anyone else) expect from ourselves. Like the shiny-eyed creatures in Jess's story, lurking in the dark perimeters, our enemy sets many traps for us and snickers when he gets us. Yes, you have an enemy if you are a child of God (see 1 Peter 5:8)! Our enemy will use whatever tools are most effective on each individual person.

Discouragement

Discouragement is one of Satan's favorite and effective tools. He knows it is often easier to disable us with discouragement than to sideline us because of sin. If we are living with a sinful habit, we develop a sense of denial inflated by pride;

pride keeps us thinking we are doing great and that God is lucky to have us working for him. When we are discouraged, however, we believe ridiculous lies about ourselves, we remove God from the equation, and we head for the bench with our heads down. We wonder why God thought it was a good idea to get us involved in his kingdom work. As we slump on the bench, the enemy whispers his famous line: “Did God really say . . . ?” (Genesis 3:1), and we drown in doubt—did we ever really hear from God? We question whether God meant our job, ministry, family, or dream for someone else whose conversation we overheard.

No way! God’s good plan for you *is for you*. I know how tempting discouragement is. I know what it feels like to think I’m unequipped for the task God puts on my to-do list. From parenting (my book *Queen Mom* tells the story) to writing books (who me?—a stay-at-home mom in the cornfields of Illinois?) to any number of ministry opportunities God has assigned to me, I have not felt like the best person for the job. But God loves using people who don’t feel as if they have it all together. Read through the New Testament and savor the way Jesus picked, transformed, and then used regular guys to spread the gospel throughout the world. Discouragement is a mud hole that sucks you down, disables you, and keeps you from your rich life.

Fear

The next effective trap is fear, the most addressed issue in the Bible! Fear keeps us stuck, paralyzed, afraid to move on or even to move sideways. *Why, who knows what will happen if I:*

- ◆ *take the class, job, or promotion?*
- ◆ *move to a new city?*
- ◆ *marry the guy who seems to be Mr. Right?*
- ◆ *start a family even though I don’t feel prepared?*
- ◆ *try to make friends?*
- ◆ *do that thing God has been talking to me about for the longest time?*

Fear keeps us from the life God planned for us. While I lunched with a group of women, one of them said, “I had a book contract once.”

“Ooh, really!” I was excited to hear about her adventure.

“Yes, but I got part way into it and then I couldn’t go on.”

“But why?”

“I just couldn’t. I froze.”

My heart broke for her. She had come so far! Her goal to be published had been within her grasp. Then fear grabbed her, and she couldn’t move. Fear stole her dream. She has gone on with her life and does other ministry well, but my heart still aches for the dream the enemy snatched while she was under his spell of fear.

Do You Want to Get Well? ☂

The enemy has other traps that are effective and socially acceptable, even in Christian circles. Many women use the poor-me syndrome so they can stay stuck. But this is just laziness and excuse making in disguise. When we surrender to the poor-me syndrome, other Christians are obliged to show mercy and grace. If they didn’t, what kind of Christians would they be? Who would dare challenge us with the truth of the Word that would get us out of our comfy mud holes?

Hmm, I’m thinking maybe Jesus.

In John 5:1-9, we see Jesus at the pool of water near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. Many disabled people lay there because “from time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had” (v. 4). Jesus walked up to one man and asked him, “Do you want to get well?” (v. 6). The man gave him an excuse. Then Jesus got to the root of the issue: “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” The story concludes, “At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked” (vv. 8, 9).

Dear Princess Unaware, I must ask you the same question: Do you want to get well? Do you want to get up out of your mess of laziness and excuses and move on with the exciting life God has for you? Are you willing to do as this man did and act on your desire, to “pick up your mat and walk”?

Perfectionism and Procrastination ☂

These last two traps can also be disguised acceptably in Christian circles.

Perfectionism is not the same as wanting to do our best. I am all for doing what we do with excellence. No, perfectionism is another form of paralyzing fear. Perfectionism demands that everything be perfect. The problem with perfectionism is that nothing we do will ever be perfect enough; therefore, we do nothing. We are so stuck in the paralyzing fear—believing our efforts won't be good enough—that we can't go on. Pretty effective trap.

Procrastination works as well as perfectionism. In today's fast-paced society, busyness is a status symbol. The excuses "I didn't have time" or "I'll get to it when I can" are accepted with graciousness and empathy. So when God lays an opportunity in our laps, we gently take it and put it to the side to do when we get time. And of course, we never do get time. We stay stuck in the mud hole of procrastination. We don't proceed, and we don't accomplish what God planned for us to do for the kingdom. The enemy snickers.

Princess Training

Before you start to think the purpose of this book is to help you feel good and be your best self, it is not. I took you through that spiritual noodle lashing to help you see that life isn't all about us. It's all about God—knowing him, having a relationship with him, and glorifying him by living the life he planned for us.

Have you thought about how the junk in your life keeps you from the real life God planned for you? Princess Unaware, we need to get a clue here, to get our eyes and ears tuned in to God to discover who he is, who we are, what he has for us—and then get at it. And while God's deepest desire is for us all to be his princesses, the truth is, it is our choice to become princesses or to remain peasants. (More about this in chapter 2!) This life on earth won't last forever. We can't afford to waste any of it.

Now it's your turn.

The study section at the end of every chapter, Finding the Fabulous, will lead you to sit at the Lord's feet and hear from him yourself—to help you talk to him and let him talk to you, directing, guiding, and changing you. In getting to know

God through reading and studying the Word, and thinking about how to apply it, we can make changes in our lives. We'll be challenged to examine the beliefs we have been operating on until now.

Included in Day One will be Looking Ahead, a short section to help focus on what we will learn and how you might incorporate it into your life. And on Day Four we'll take time for Looking Back on how we did during the week.

You can complete the Finding the Fabulous pages on your own or share in this study with your small group.

Finding the Fabulous



Looking Ahead

How would you rate the richness of your life—your worth as a child of the King? your relationships with God, family, friends? your purpose and direction in life? Do you feel stuck in any area of life?



DAY ONE: Self-Help Is No Help

The self-help mentality is everywhere. Much of the time self-help delivers a pseudo-Christian message. When have you been tempted to go to the secular gospel for answers and direction?

What part of the world's teaching have you believed and even incorporated into your life?

In our Princess Unaware story, Jess realized early in her adventure that she was not prepared for the mud holes she came upon or the traps of the Pit Weasels. What about you? What messy issues do you need to deal with?

Until now have you believed that you have an enemy who wants to keep you from the rich life Christ has for you? Why or why not?

Read 1 Peter 5:8. What mental picture do you get?

This is fact, not an analogy: our enemy is looking to get us. We need to be ready. Now let's look at Matthew 13:24-30, 36-39. In this parable Jesus shows us that an enemy actively works to counteract God's plan. When have you experienced trying to do better, to help someone, or to do a project for God but felt that you were getting nowhere?

One more nugget for you—read Ephesians 6:10-18. The study of this Scripture could be a book on its own, but let's look at verses 12, 13. Who is our enemy?

What is our battle plan? (vv. 13-18).



God is *for* us. He has not left us without a plan. We need to be ready with the tools he has given us: the truth (we are discussing some of that in this book); the righteousness we have because of Jesus; the gospel; our faith, which deflects Satan's attack; our salvation, which keeps us secure in God; the Word of God; and finally, prayer. When you think of your future, what comes to mind? Are you excited? depressed? not expecting much—just the status quo?

Read Jeremiah 29:11. Now read it again, knowing that God is speaking to you. What does this verse say that God plans for you?

If you really believed Jeremiah 29:11, how would it change the way you think about your future?

God is promising to prosper you—personally—who you are—with the richness and abundance of life mentioned in John 10:10. What do you think that might look like for you?

Princess Unaware, our futures are gripped by God's hands. He loves us, wants what is best for us, and will work everything that comes into our lives for our benefit. "We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (Romans 8:28, *NLT*).



Think About It

How do you feel knowing that your life is not a random event but that God has a plan specifically for you?

John 10:10 is the core inspiration for our journey together. I love the way the *Amplified Bible* states it: “The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows).” Ah, once again we see that we have an enemy whose goal is to harm us, even destroy us. But we have Jesus, who came not only to give us eternal life in Heaven but an abundant, rich life on earth. What do you think of as an abundant, rich life?

In Greek the word *abundance* in this verse means “superabundant (in quantity) or superior (in quality),” “excessive,” “exceeding abundantly above,” and “beyond measure.”¹ The word *life* here means “vitality” and “lifetime.”² When we put the two together, we have vitality of life beyond measure, superior in quality—a richness that can come only from God. This is not a promise of riches, comfort, ease, good health, or worldly success. But it *is* a promise that if we have Christ, our lives will have eternal meaning, depth, satisfaction, and fulfillment beyond what our finite minds can imagine. If you had to choose, which would you rather have—riches, ease, and success, or a life of eternal meaning, depth, and satisfaction? What’s the attraction?



The truth is that the world may promise riches and success, but it can't deliver. However, Jesus promises us abundant, rich life, and he can and does deliver. I'm going with Jesus.



DAY TWO: Lies, Lies, and More Lies

It's time to identify some of the mud holes we have been wallowing in for a while, maybe for years. We can get many negative messages from every area of our lives—family, friends, educators, the media, culture, and sometimes even from the church.

Identify the negative messages and lies about yourself that you have taken in as truth. I listed several examples in the chapter. (Please don't wallow in this and open past wounds. If you have healed and moved on, great! This exercise is not for you.)

If you have a past sin that you allow the enemy to beat you up with, confess it to God. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The sin is gone, and we can no longer let it hold us down. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Did you confess your sin to God? Good. Then it is history. It is neither your present nor your future. Remember Jeremiah 29:11—you have been promised hope and a future.

You are precious to God, and every part of you and your personality was designed by him. Read Psalm 139:1-16. Now read it again—taking it in as God speaking it to your heart, because he is. How do you feel, knowing you have this much attention from the Creator of the universe?

What do you think about yourself now that you know you are God's unique design—made just the way he wants you to be?

Knowing that God is with you every day and wants the best, what's one thing you could do today to bring your agenda in line with his plan for you?

Where have you gotten the majority of your information about God—from clergy, parents, books (secular or Christian), friends, people in your church, media personalities (secular or Christian), the Bible? List the main sources. Be honest.

How often do you check in the Bible to see if what you are hearing is true?

By spending time with people, we not only learn about them but also build relationship with them—we interact around a variety of issues. We begin to understand how they think and why they think the way they do. We observe how they handle situations. They pour into our lives and we pour into theirs. By spending time with God—letting him into our lives, reading the Bible, and talking with him—we get to know God personally.



**Think
About It**

How would you feel if someone formed an opinion about you based only on what others said, and never bothered to talk to you personally? Has this ever happened to you?



From what we have learned about God so far, have you identified any lies or misconceptions about God that you have believed? List those here.

Think of a time you felt left out, snubbed, or devalued by a friend. Again, you are not allowed to beat yourself up; just give the facts.

Recently I fell for this trap of the enemy's. I assumed friends were doing something together and I was not invited. I stewed over it for half a day. The fact is that sometimes these friends do activities together without inviting me. I don't know why they do, but I came to realize that it is not my issue. Taking these things personally only makes me miserable and insecure. I am the best friend I know how to be; that will have to be enough. The final fact in this situation—I later learned they did *not* get together for the event. I made a wrong assumption. Oops!

Let's think about God's plan for our lives one more time. Sure, God wants what is best for us in this earthly life, but is there more than just status quo—getting a degree, going to work, raising a family, retiring? There is nothing wrong with any of those things. They are good things, but the key here is God's plan for us in all of it. Without God we are just going through these seasons of life.

Do you feel like you travel through life on a conveyer belt—going from one thing to the next with no time to savor the moment or enjoy experiences? How have you observed this in your life in the past year?



**Think
About It**

Are you ready to sit at the Lord's feet and hear what he has for you? List the changes you will make to be in a mind-set to hear from God.



DAY THREE: The Enemy's Most Effective Traps

The enemy's goal is to keep us from doing what God put us here to do.

Discouragement is sneaky. It seems benign while we are wallowing in it, but nothing renders us useless faster than discouragement. The last time you were discouraged, what were the circumstances?

As you listed your circumstances above, did you include the presence and power of God in your life? Read Habakkuk 3:17, 18 and then respond.

Think back. Did you ever hear Satan ever so subtly put this thought in your mind: *Did God really say . . .*

- ◆ *he will be with you even if you don't marry?*
- ◆ *he will take care of your financial needs?*
- ◆ *your life will be full even if you don't have children?*
- ◆ *you will be a good mom?*
- ◆ *to follow him by faith to do the task he is pressing on your heart?*
- ◆ *to do business by his book, the Bible?*

I know some of those questions might have stung a bit, and I'm sorry. But we must know that God is compassionate and attentive regarding the tender issues in our lives. "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3). I can't possibly cover all that God has promised us, but let's get a good start. What does God say in Hebrews 13:5, 6 (about money and his presence)?



Matthew 6:25-34 (about all of your physical needs)?

John 10:10 (about the richness of your life)?

Isaiah 52:12 (about his presence in your life and ministry)?

Philippians 4:13 (about how he'll equip you for whatever he puts on your to-do list)?

Psalms 138:8 (about all he has planned for you)?

How can you apply any of these truths to the tender issues in your life?

The above verses are only a smidgen of the truth God has for you in his Word. I encourage you to write down any verses that God speaks to you through. Carry them with you and meditate on those verses and what God wants to teach you. I buy index cards held together with rings. Then I can carry them anywhere I go—in my purse, on my walk, even around the house.

Fear is kindred to discouragement; fear also sneaks in and looks benign. We tend to equate fear with wisdom and caution, but it's not the same. Let's call it what it is—leaving God out of the equation. Fear factors out God. I find I am more fearful of the unknown than of what I know is coming at me. I may dread a difficult situation coming my way, but I can prepare for it with the Lord. I feel fear overcoming me when I am faced with a situation out of my frame of reference or experience. I have felt the suffocation of fear come over me when:

- ◆ I have accepted new-to-me ministry opportunities.
- ◆ I have traveled alone.

- ◆ I took on a project totally out of my realm of talent or giftedness because I knew it was a mission from God.
- ◆ I get near anything involving technology that I have not yet learned.
- ◆ I started doing radio and TV interviews. (Hint: When doing a TV interview, never cross the leg facing the camera. It will look like a huge ham—not flattering!)

The cool thing is that God took me through each fearful event, and many times my fear was extinguished before I came to the situation. You may look at my list of fears and think, *What a weenie!* So what is your list of fears?

The key to handling fear isn't to not feel fear; it's what we do with fear and how quickly we deal with it. The Bible is full of stories of people who were fearful in new or difficult situations. Read these accounts; then briefly identify the cause of fear in each one:

Exodus 3:1-14; 4:1, 10-17

Judges 6:11-40

Luke 1:26-38

The strong, confident princess knows she will have fear throughout her life, and she prepares herself to deal with it by trusting God and factoring him into all her circumstances.



DAY FOUR: Mud Holes We Love to Wallow In

“Move over. I’m coming in!” We find lots of company in the mud holes we’ll look at



today. Not only are they easy to fall into; they are often considered acceptable. Most people won't challenge us to get out—they might even jump in and wallow with us.

The first mud hole is a mucky combination of laziness and excuse making. We can easily use these disguises to play down any hint of responsibility on our part, giving in to the poor-me syndrome. How do you define the poor-me syndrome?

Give an example of how you (*gasp*—of course not *you*, but a hypothetical you) might get stuck in this mud hole.

In what situations do you not only *fall* into the mud holes of laziness or excuse making but also intentionally visit them with your sunglasses and towel for a relaxing afternoon? I'm not talking about well-deserved time off to read, sit by the pool, or talk on the phone with a friend who lives miles away. I'm talking about the frequent temptation to waste time, to do nothing when responsibilities wait, or to make excuses to yourself and others for your behavior.

You are a princess! Get out of that muck! "Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically" (Romans 12:11, *NLT*). How does this verse challenge or encourage you?

Proverbs 26:13 says, "The lazy person claims, 'There's a lion on the road! Yes, I'm sure there's a lion out there!'" (*NLT*). Have you found yourself making these excuses for your laziness?

◆ "When we get more money, I will get the house in order."

- ◆ “When the kids are gone, I will get myself in order.”
- ◆ “When things settle down, I will get my relationship with the Lord in order.”

What is an excuse you use to delay doing the next thing God has shown you?

Some of the excuses we use could be the result of believing the lies of the enemy. For example, there are excuses that fall under the category of “I could never do that”:

- ◆ “I’m not talented enough.”
- ◆ “I’m not good with people.”
- ◆ “I’m not smart enough.”
- ◆ “I’m not disciplined enough.”
- ◆ “I don’t have the time.”

What handy excuses do you recite to the Lord when he presents you with an adventure? Be bold. List them here.



One More Thing



I know I’m being brutal here, but it is because I love you and want God’s best for you. Reread John 5:1-9. Jesus is asking you, “Do you want to get well?” What is your answer? Give it to him straight. He can take it. He cares deeply.

This next mud hole is a tidy one—perfectionism. Settling for nothing less sounds almost holy. Jesus taught us to strive to be perfect as God is perfect (Matthew 5:48).



In this verse *perfect* means “complete” or “completeness.”³ God is complete. There is nothing lacking in his character, thoughts, words, and actions. Perfectionism doesn’t strive to be more like God but to be the best above everyone. Its motive is not pure.

I know not everyone struggles with perfectionism in every area. My struggle has been to get everything perfect before guests come. Don’t get any idea that my dinners were ooh-and-aah special. Since I even obsessed over everyday food, of course my husband, Gene, was less than enthused when I suggested having people over! Once I realized what I was doing and that no one ever noticed the little things I was fretting about, I was able to relax and not go nuts over meaningless details. Now I plan my menus to be delicious to my guests and still allow me to enjoy their company. No more Martha dinners for me (see Luke 10:38-42)! How about you? Where do you struggle with perfectionism?

How does perfectionism keep you from doing what God asks of you in that area?

Take a minute to talk with the Lord about what drives that perfectionism.

We’ll end the week’s study talking about procrastination. Ick. I know. Procrastination can be made acceptable because it is dripping in good intentions:

- ◆ “If I had time . . .”
- ◆ “If I weren’t so tired . . .”
- ◆ “If my life weren’t so confusing . . .”

Is procrastination something you have trouble getting victory over? What is your main difficulty?

- keeping the house clean
- keeping up with paperwork and bills

- planning meals and grocery shopping
- saying no to an overcommitted schedule
- home improvement projects started but not completed
- something else: _____

Procrastination is a pit of quicksand that keeps us from what God has for us. Years ago I read Donna Otto's book *Getting More Done in Less Time*. I learned the techniques and skills I needed to get my home in order. Now it runs fairly smoothly, and I have time to pursue the ministry God has given me. What area of procrastination could be keeping you from the next thing God has for you?

Dear Princess Unaware, I know this has been a hard chapter. If we were in the same small group, I would give you a hug right now! I am thrilled that you will be part of our journey and honored to have you as a sister princess!



Looking Back

How did the week go? Are you moving ahead with your King, or does he need to pull you out of a mud hole or two and clean you up? Will you listen as he teaches you how to avoid your most common traps? I know this process will not be easy, but trust your King. He is *for* you.

