

# Why Christians Are Broke

The Bible says we are to be witnesses in all the earth. It's very important that we not only tell people about Jesus but also live in a way that testifies of His goodness.

No one witnessed to me about Jesus when I was in the world. My mentality was so far from God that if a person wanted to minister to me, he could not approach me from a religious standpoint.

Most of the people I knew who claimed to be saved painted an undesirable picture of salvation. I will never forget Mrs. Christina, a woman who lived five houses down from me when I was in the military at Fort Stewart, Ga.

She was a Christian who always told me that she had Jesus but never told me how I could get Him. Her living conditions were not the best, and she was always in desperate need of the simple necessities for herself and her children.

At the time, my goals in life were to have money and be famous. My exposure to the athletic world led me to believe I would find a husband who would sweep me off my feet and move me to Hollywood. Instead, the man I met swept me off my feet and moved me to a mental institution.

When Mrs. Christina sat at my kitchen counter telling me about her hard times, I was at a low place in my life. I felt as if I could not fight anymore. I was coming to the realization that I needed something, but I did not know what it was.

I remember that she would pause every now and then in the midst of her bad luck stories and shout, "Hallelujah," "Praise God," or "Thank You, Jesus!" I could not tell which one of us was in a worse condition.

I was a heathen and far from knowing Jesus. But Mrs. Christina

knew Him only from a religious standpoint. She had no concept of Jesus as her deliverer and provider.

My natural instincts told me that if she served a God who was so powerful and loved her so much, He would not allow her family to starve every night. Mrs. Christina would quote the few Scriptures she had memorized, but something on the inside of me knew she had no idea what she was saying.

My compassion for her was great because I could not imagine my babies being continually hungry. At least once a week, I cleaned out my refrigerator and gave her family all the food I could spare.

They lived in a house built by the government, so their mortgage was little or nothing. Still, their lights were often turned off, and their furniture had an odor that I'd smelled on her clothing. I am convinced that scent is related to the spirit of poverty.

Demons are referred to in the Bible as foul, unclean spirits. The definition of *foul* is "to be putrid, offensive and impure."

Today, I can detect the same odor that was in Mrs. Christina's house in many homes. My husband and I share the belief that there is a distinct odor that accompanies poverty and lack.

### **Poverty Complacency**

The spirit of poverty has elements that a person does not need a spiritual gift to detect. For example, in the neighborhoods where I grew up, it is common to live with roaches. Christians do not have to call down fire or speak in tongues to get rid of them; just call an exterminator!

Some have been offended when I've ministered in this area. However, I know from experience that the devil will trick a person's mind to make him or her think living in a roach-

infested house is normal.

My ministry has been very effective in what we call the "guttermost," but sometimes my messages have to get down and dirty. I remember hearing the Holy Ghost say one day, "There are demons in the dirt!"

When I started preaching on spiritually and physically cleaning house, a few people felt as if I was picking on them about something they could not help. I understood where they were coming from because I had been there and done that, too. But as an apostle of God, it was my responsibility to let them know they did not have to stay where they were.

Many people who have lived in ghetto environments and survived welfare were never taught basic principles of living. This is the mentoring aspect of evangelism. Sometimes we have to get involved in the private lives of people.

There is a spirit that will make you settle for less. I know the signs, and they all add up to what I call "poverty complacency." People get used to empty refrigerators, having milk once a week or having to get gas money from the people they are picking up for church.

These things should be dealt with immediately. They are unacceptable spiritual assignments that will keep people from fulfilling God's vision for their lives.

Staying on top of everyday issues, such as maintaining a good driving record, having auto insurance and changing the oil in their cars is not common in the lives of many of the people I deal with. No one ever took the time to teach them that these are priorities in life.

They are used to hustling. And when people conform to what they have always been exposed to, their potential for transformation is destroyed. Without transformation of the mind, there will be no transition to the next level.

Numbers 14:24 says that Caleb and Joshua had “another spirit,” one that was different from that of the others who were wandering in the wilderness. The word *spirit* in this passage is *ruwach*. One of the meanings of this Hebrew word is “mind.”

Joshua and Caleb did not focus on what they were up against in life. They said, “Not only are we able, but we are well able!” (See Numbers 13:30, KJV.) They went forward to possess what God had promised them.

The other folk in the wilderness had no hope of transition. Just like Mrs. Christina, they came out of darkness (Egypt), but they never entered the marvelous light (the land of milk and honey). After God delivers us from whatever our Egypt was, we must get a new attitude in order to enter into the fullness of salvation.

The word *salvation* means more than going to church every week. It is *soteria* in the Greek, and it means “welfare, safety, deliverance and health.”

I understand that people will have challenges in life, but we must consider the vicious cycle of the python spirit of poverty. It is so called because it slowly squeezes the provision out of a person’s life. It will allow much to go out and nothing to come in.

### **Financial Curses in the Word**

A sure sign of the poverty spirit is a lot of bills with no provision to pay them. These financial curses found in the Scriptures must be recognized and then renounced:

**The curse of Cain.** Because of Cain’s actions—withholding his best offering from God and killing his brother in a jealous rage—he was banished from the presence of the Lord and cursed in his ability to produce a harvest.

Cain was also subject to wander in the land of Nod, east of

the Garden of Eden. When we try to hold back on God, we end up with nothing. But Proverbs 3:9 says if we honor the Lord with all our substance and the firstfruits of all our increase, God will fill our barns with plenty.

**The curse of Malachi.** Malachi 3:10-11 tells us to bring all the tithes into the storehouse. When we obey this principle, God promises to open the windows of heaven over our heads and rebuke the hand of the devourer on our behalf.

Many are plagued with curses because they do not honor God in their tithes and offerings. These are holy unto God.

Some make the mistake of not releasing their tithes in their minds. Mentally, they follow the money to the offering room, the bank and even the board meeting, worrying about how it is spent.

The word *holy* means “separated unto God.” Our tithing is not pleasing unto the Lord until we have the right attitude about it.

**The curse of Haggai.** The people’s disobedience to God produced bad fruit and brought poverty into their lives in several ways:

- They expected much, but little came in. The little they brought in, God blew away (Hag. 1:9).
- Heaven withheld its dew, and their crops failed (v. 10).
- God decreed a drought on the ground and on the work of men’s hands (v. 11).

God was angry because His house was wasted. The people said that it was not time for the Lord’s house to be rebuilt; instead, they took care of the needs of their own houses (vv. 2-3).

**The generational curse of poverty.** Exodus 20:5 explains that the iniquities of the fathers can affect as many as four

generations.

If the fathers do not hearken to the voice of the Lord to do His commandments, poverty is one of the curses that shall be a sign upon their seed. Deuteronomy 28:46 says, "And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever."

**The curse of Ananias and Sapphira.** In a time of great revival, the people were laying their offerings at the feet of the apostles (Acts 5:34-37). But Ananias and Sapphira withheld from the church a portion of the profits from the sale of their property and lied about it to the Holy Ghost. Both of them received the same punishment—death—when Peter exposed their sin.

Through God's power, all these financial curses can be broken. I have seen people with tragic situations miraculously set free. But I get the greatest joy out of seeing a poverty-stricken person transition into the financial promises of God.

### **Liberty From Lack**

The keys to freedom from poverty are available to every one of us who is willing to do what God tells us in His Word. If you will start being faithful in your tithes and offerings; if you will honor God's house and seek to pass on a godly inheritance to the next generation, then you can begin to reverse the curses mentioned and, with God's help, break their power over your life.

As a preacher and an apostle to the nations, I feel that my ministry is not fulfilling the vision of Christ unless the lives of the people around me are changed for the better. I believe it is a sin to live below the standard that God has given us.

Jesus died so that we would not have to suffer from poverty

and lack. When He came to set the captives free, He took the chains off our bank accounts and unlocked our minds, too. Selah! (Pause and think on that.)

The church doesn't need any more Mrs. Christinas making Jesus appear unconcerned about a person's physical condition. You can walk in victory over the spirit of poverty and lack and give others a reason to hope for their own deliverance.

Allow God to bring the transformation in your life that will take you to the next level. Then His blessings will become a reality that everyone can witness.

Read a companion devotional.

**Kimberly Daniels** *is the author of From a Mess to a Miracle, published by Creation House Press, from which this article is adapted.*

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## **Prejudice Is More Than Black and White**

*If racial differences are not a stumbling block for you, great. But like me, you may be prejudiced and not know it.*

Most prejudiced people see through a black or white glass. But I grew up judging through a multifaceted prism the many races, cultures and ethnic groups that surrounded me.

I was born in Puerto Rico to a Cuban family, which makes me "Hispanic"—the general descriptor for people from all Spanish-speaking countries, regardless of racial background or ethnicity. Growing up Cuban meant that I learned at an early

age to be proud of who I am and where I came from. (I can trace my family history back through four generations in Cuba all the way to the Basque region of Spain.) It also meant that I inherited a good dose of prejudice—the sort of prejudice that becomes a way of thinking and clouds one’s perception of life.

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## **It’s All In How You Look At It**

One day while we were on vacation, my son Jonathan, my sister Leigh and I were visiting on the porch. Leigh mentioned that she needed to get up and put on her makeup.

Jonathan, 5, told his Aunt Leigh he liked her makeup. “It’s pretty,” he said. Leigh asked him if it made her look a little better.

“No,” he answered, “a lot better.”

**Kristi Shores**

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## **God’s Desire to Relate to You**

God actually desires to enter into a genuine interactive friendship with us.

We really are the children of God, and the dynamics of our **relationship** with Him are more similar to the relationship between earthly **parents** and their children than we might initially expect. We struggle with this because we all know that human parents don't have the same attributes and capacities as God. This, however, does not negate the similarities.

For instance, providing for the children is not a burdensome drain upon a loving and resourceful parent. Rather, it is a deeply satisfying pleasure and honor. So it is with God and His children (Ps. 50:15).

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). He, above all persons, seeks to experience this blessing (happiness).

God Himself has set the example of the **blessedness** of giving for us to emulate. Of course, this also means that "**receiving**" is a blessing; otherwise "giving" would be evil!

Therefore, God has ordained that we walk in the blessedness of receiving and also in the super-blessedness of giving. This is truly an ingenious basis for both an economic and a relationship system.

Just imagine what this world would be like if every person walked in the revelation of a **cycle of life** rooted in gratefully **receiving** and generously **giving**. It would be like heaven already is.

**Happiness** is not a limited commodity in the universe; it is like a **holy virus** that can and should be spread. Christians, above all other people, should be good advertisements for this quality of happiness.

At times earthly parents "test the desire level" in their children regarding the things that they say they want so much. Wise parents do not always respond to their children's

requests the first time the children ask.

Sometimes good parents might hold back to make sure their children are serious, or they might require them to save their own money to buy what they desire. This way it becomes worth more to the children when they finally get it.

If parents will sometimes require their children to wait patiently for their desire to be fulfilled, then the answer, when it comes, will evoke a greater and longer lasting joy and gratitude in the children's hearts. So it is with God and His children (Luke 11:13).

There are other situations in which parents will not automatically provide something for their children until the children specifically ask for that thing. When the children speaks up, and the desire is legitimate, loving parents quickly respond to the request without a trace of a begrudging or unwilling attitude.

The children receive what they've asked for, but they would have gone without it had they not asked. So it is with God and His children.

"You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). This has to be one of the most profoundly amazing and convicting principles in all of Scripture.

Yet again, there are times when children's persistence ultimately prevails over any reluctance in the parents to grant a specific request. The parents see the passionate desire in their loved ones, and they simply cannot withhold the request.

The parents will even rearrange other things to fit the answer to the request into their larger plans for their children's lives. The priorities of parents can potentially be altered by the expressed desire of their children.

God's children at times prevail upon Him through persevering prayer (Luke 18:1-8). It is God's will that we prevail over His permissive will through prayer in order to see His perfect will established. This is significantly what prayer is about by its very nature—God truly listening to the voice of human beings and genuinely responding to them (Josh. 10:14).

God likes that kind of bold “wrestling” in prayer—just as earthly fathers enjoy wrestling with their kids to affectionately bond with them and to help them develop their strength and agility. This is an amazing doctrine of Scripture that has been abused by many and ignored by most.

It remains true nonetheless. The almighty God actually desires to enter into a genuine interactive friendship with us—unmighty as we are.

Prayer is a conversation that really matters both in the heavens and on the earth. Certainly our relationship with God is the most important relationship we have.

Our Father wants us to experience the delight of an intimate relationship with Him, one in which we regularly see Him answer our prayers. Jesus said, “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

God is our Father, and He loves to hear our voices and respond to our stated needs. We must take the time and expend the energy to keep up our dialogue with Him.

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**Nancy Prince – A Missionary**

# Adventurer

Nancy Gardner was an African American woman, born free in Newburyport, Massachusetts, on September 15, 1799. She was known for her devout heart and lived an adventurous life in service to the Lord.

However, Nancy's life was not void of trials. Her mother was widowed three times. Nancy's father, her mother's second husband, died when she was just 3 months old.

Following her third husband's death, Nancy's mother, then responsible for eight children, suffered a nervous breakdown. Nancy was 8 when the family's three older children were put to work to earn their room and board. She and her brother George committed themselves to caring for their mother and their younger siblings.

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## The Simplicity of Praise

*God isn't looking a perfectly sung worship chorus but for the simple expression of our hearts.*

Hagan-Worship FILLER It always seems to begin and end the same—a torn envelope, then a tearful stream.

Birthday rituals, especially those between a papa bear and his cubs, have a way of doing that. I'm as normal, I suppose, as any papa bear at the moment when, just prior to the cake and candles, I begin the jubilee by accepting my birthday cards from the kids. Responding joyfully to their eager offerings, I quickly thumb open the cards with heartfelt surprise. Then,

without trying to look unappreciative for the coins spent, I swiftly glance past all the artwork and poetry.

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## **Overcome the Power of Prejudice**

Prejudice is sin. It is a form of sin that has kept God's people in bondage for generations and has created an unnatural separation among them. But I believe it is time for change. God is looking for a generation courageous enough to climb over every dividing wall.

Isaiah 61:1-3 tells us that the Messiah's ministry involves delivering people from prisons of various kinds. He was anointed to "preach good news to the poor," "bind up the brokenhearted," "proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners," "comfort all who mourn" and to "bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (NIV). Those He delivers, or rescues, will "rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated. They will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations" (v. 4).

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## **The Disillusionment of Elijah**

*Often God's most effective servants experience feelings of*

*defeat after a great victory. Learn how to avoid this trap.*

Derek had been invited to speak at a Christian conference. He was preparing for the conference with prayer and fasting when he and the conference organizer had a conversation that put the organizer at odds with Derek.

Derek heard that the organizer was talking to the conference leaders, trying to spread suspicion about him. By the time the conference rolled around, Derek wondered if he should even go. But he did, and the Holy Spirit showed up in a powerful way. People were touched and changed by the truth that was taught and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

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## **Hope in God**

As a young girl, living with mental illness was never easy for me. I went through years of needless anxiety, suffering and depression.

But in 1995, when I was 51 years old, my oldest daughter and her husband observed my paranoia and other symptoms and talked with me about seeing a psychiatrist. I was in denial about my condition at the time, and I refused help.

Later, an upper respiratory infection led to my being taken to the emergency room of our local hospital. While I was there, my daughter requested a psychiatric evaluation for me.

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# The Grass Isn't Always Greener ...

It seems that no matter what season of life we are in, we want to be in a different one. God wants us to appreciate where we are.

Perhaps you remember *The New Yorker* cartoon in which two monks in robes and shaved heads are sitting side by side, cross-legged on the floor. The younger one, with a quizzical look on his face, is facing the older, who is saying: "Nothing happens next. This is it."

That's exactly what it means to live in the here and now. We aren't waiting for something else to occur, we aren't distracted by anything around us, and we aren't trying to escape mentally to another time. We are "mindfully awake." Paying attention. Savoring the moment for all it's worth. We are fully alive!

I once heard Diane Sawyer say on television, "The most important thing in life is to pay attention"—and I would agree. But how often are we able to achieve that? Not often enough, unfortunately. Nevertheless, our richest times in life are those when we are completely present, consciously heightening our awareness because our journey has brought us here—and we choose not to miss it.

I feel this when I'm engaged in rich, meaningful conversation with an interesting person. Questions are enticing, listening is acute, and eye contact is direct. I love that; such focused attention makes me feel alive. I also experience this feeling when I'm alone in an art museum or lost in a good book.

When I'm all there—or rather, all here!—I never want the moment to end. It's wonderful. It's the "it" to which the wise old monk referred.

About a year after my mother died in 1971, my dad and I were invited to the wedding of a mutual friend. Daddy was living with my brother, Chuck, and his family, and I picked him up so we could go in my car. At 78 years old, Daddy wasn't driving anymore.

Since we had plenty of time, I suggested we stop off for coffee at a place along the way where we knew a couple of the waitresses. There we sat, dressed to the nines and sipping coffee in a little short-order restaurant.

After a while it began to rain, and we decided to let the weather clear up before traveling on. We settled back in our chairs and talked about childhood—Dad's and mine—and about Mother and his love for her through the 40 years they were married. I thanked him for being such a great dad to me and my two brothers.

When the rain became more intense, we gave up the idea of going to the wedding and nestled into one of the sweetest times my dad and I had ever had. We had always been close, but never more than that night. We were totally connected conversationally, not distracted by anything and absolutely in the moment.

Would that we were able to maintain that kind of connectedness all the time, with others as well as with ourselves. It's hard, almost impossible. So often we want to be somewhere else. We look at the "now" we are in and have this illusion that if we could just inch or leap forward on the journey, our lives would be richer or better or more "together." We don't want to be here.

Why is this? Why are we so rarely satisfied? Were we simply programmed to be this way, or is it that we just don't know ourselves or God well enough to recognize what truly satisfies?

**JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY** As I look back over my life, I see

that there are many times when I wasn't satisfied; I couldn't live fully in the moment. I was looking for the next thing to bring me fulfillment and, of course, I wanted that fulfillment to be permanent.

One of the hardest periods in my life was in the mid-1980s. It ultimately became one of the most transforming times because I was willing to attune myself fully to the here and now—even though it was painful. It turned out that my own discomfort contained critical information that formed a pathway to the next leg of my journey. But it was very hard to be as vulnerable as I needed to be to see the real roadblock.

In August of 1985 I experienced some heartbreaking misunderstandings with close friends. At the same time, I was trying to make a major decision—whether or not to take early retirement from Mobil Oil Corp. because of an impending collision between my “real” job and lots of speaking engagements.

I eventually decided to turn over all the turmoil to God. As days and weeks passed, it seemed as though I heard in my head, “Write things down.” So, I did.

The first thing I wrote was a letter to myself, in which I poured out all the feelings I had been dealing with for months or, perhaps unknowingly, for years. I cried out to God about the loneliness I felt and also about the anger, fear, regret, inadequacies, fault-finding, dread and despair.

When I finally stopped writing, it was as if the burden had started to lift. Everything that had been inside was now outside. I had dumped it all on the only One who could handle the whole truckload.

I soon saw positive things happening. For one thing, I came to the realization that my most annoying problem was me.

How could I be my own problem? Simple: I wanted control—of

everything—and I resented the fact that God wanted control, too. My desire for control outweighed my desire for connectedness, even with Him.

I felt lonely because I had attached all the desires of my heart to a tiny circle of friends and companions from whom I wanted all my needs met, and they just happened to have lives of their own! I had completely taken my eyes off the big picture of what God had in store for me.

I didn't want the life I was living; I wanted some pie-in-the-sky existence that wasn't possible. For some reason I was holding out for it before I would permit myself to be happy where I was.

The second thing I wrote, on September 1, 1985, was a list of goals: all the things I felt were important in life—for now and for later. My first objective was to determine if and when I could retire from Mobil Oil. Since the list was figured on a three-year plan, I aimed for a September 1, 1988, retirement date.

My list included other goals as well—large and small—each with its own objective to stretch me and enlarge my borders. Nothing was too “out there,” but all the goals required discipline—something I was lacking when I felt so frightened.

After the list was completed, I noticed it was entirely about things, not people. Hmmm, it seemed I was still disconnected from my deepest need.

The third thing I did was what rounded me toward home plate. I had been to a Mobil management meeting at which I came across a thought-provoking article on plotting your lifeline in a magazine called the Executive Female. It included instructions for charting one's life journey, including both personal and career experiences, on a graph, using plus signs for positive events and minus signs for negative or painful events.

I began plotting, and some interesting data quickly emerged.

What I saw was that for the most part, I had enjoyed a good life—happy childhood, meaningful relationships, professional singing, successful career, strong God-consciousness, writing books, travel and so on.

On the minus side, however, were three very difficult experiences that had indented my soul. One related to early problems with my mother and the hurt and sorrow that had been between us. The second was a traumatic move from Texas to California in the 1970s. The third was this current time of loneliness, brought on by insisting things go my way.

As I looked at the chart, I realized something that changed me deeply from that moment on: It was those three painful experiences that had given me my greatest strength and fiber—what I most needed to mature. Through them I was forced to rely on the Lord and deal with reality for what it was. In short, quit griping and grow up! The very things I hated had been the making of me. It was as if I took off a blindfold and walked into the light.

Though I had enjoyed all the good things in the plus category and had had lots of fun, there was no suffering or heartache there—nothing to build character or to provide the rich fodder needed for becoming a balanced adult. Nothing to extract from me the deepest, most revealing, and most transforming truths about myself. These painful experiences had actually helped me the most to become the person God wanted me to be.

When the exercise was finished, I felt I had hit a home run. I felt truly alive and had the guidance I needed to finally take constructive action in my life.

### **WILLING TO BE VULNERABLE**

The soul in each of us is imprisoned until set free by Jesus Christ. We all have shells around us, protecting us from being

eaten alive by the pain of life. And when those shells break, we believe we are at grave risk of being hurt, depressed or even dying on the spot.

To prevent this pain and loss, we guard ourselves by retreating deeper and deeper into the shell, being available only to what is pleasant, predictable and safe. But every person I've ever known who really had something to give has been burst open by the explosive force of God's soul-transforming lessons. Each has been willing to be vulnerable to the truth about himself, to admit behavior patterns that are destructive to his own soul.

If we aspire to pay complete attention to the present, we must get out of our own ways. Living fully in the here and now starts deep inside as we allow the self-protective shell to break open so the liberating grace of God can flow in to heal and renew and establish genuine meaning in our lives.

On September 1, 1987, I retired from Mobil Oil Corp.—one year earlier than planned. I also had achieved almost everything else on my goals list. Most important, some of the relationships I had agonized over were restored—and they weren't even on the list!

For a short time I worked as vice president of public relations at Insight for Living, the international radio Bible ministry of my brother, Chuck, but I soon found I spent more time traveling and speaking than I did working in the office. Once again I “retired” from an office job and began trusting God to meet my financial needs on His terms.

In 1995 I received an invitation to speak at several conferences the following year. The conference organization, now known as Women of Faith, was founded by author-entrepreneur Stephen Arterburn and was designed to be a source of encouragement to women across America. Steve wanted women to get away from their routines for a weekend to have fun,

sing and worship the Lord with other women.

Steve asked Patsy Clairmont, Marilyn Meberg, Barbara Johnson and me to be speakers. The next year, we were joined by Thelma Wells and Sheila Walsh.

Every time we spoke at another venue, we experienced fresh excitement. We could sense God was doing something. Thousands of women were discovering what it meant to be a "woman of faith," to trust God with their desires, their families, their problems, their lives.

Over the last seven years we have spoken to 1.5 million women. Who could have imagined it? I, for one, never dreamed God would swing open this door.

We never know how things will turn out, do we? Feeling stuck or overwhelmed makes us despondent and causes us to stay put a lot longer than we need to.

For me, writing that letter to myself so many years ago taught me things I'll never forget. Once I saw my effrontery and self-centeredness on paper, I could finally decipher the magnitude of my control problem. I knew change was necessary—and with Christ, possible.

God has shown me that wherever I am in life can be my very best place. I had no idea all the things God had in mind for me. That list I made in September 1985 was only a drop in the bucket to all He had in mind for my journey. And I'm still movin'—enjoying every minute of the here and now!

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**Luci Swindoll** retired from an executive position with Mobil Oil after 30 years of service and began speaking and writing. Her latest book is *Simple Secrets to a Happy Life*.

