

Her Redeemer Lives

Once a victim of abuse, Beth Moore is one of America's most popular ministers today. She says her life is 'living proof' that God's Word can transform lives.

If you aren't eager to stand for two hours in the 3,400-seat sanctuary of Houston's First Baptist while internationally known Bible teacher Beth Moore conducts her Tuesday night Bible study, you have to go early. The class, which is preceded by 30 minutes of worship, doesn't begin until 7 p.m., but the doors open at exactly 5:45, and when they do, women rush in from every available entrance and run down the aisles to claim their seats—as close to the front as possible.

It's not a good idea to get in the way, Beth's 23-year-old daughter Amanda Jones says. "I've been in front of the doors when they open, and it's scary!"

So many women come to the study, offered each fall and spring, that the parking lot can't accommodate all the cars, and Beth's staff has begun encouraging them to carpool, says Susan Kirby, her assistant. But the crowded conditions don't seem to deter them. Not even the men, who came for a while in large numbers, were put off—until the ministry limited them by asking them to sit in the back, and if necessary, give up their seats to women.

It is a women's Bible study, after all. And though men are not restricted from attending, they aren't encouraged, either.

The selectivity has nothing to do with the location. With her pastor's sanction, Beth teaches a co-ed Sunday school class of 600 to 700 in the same Southern Baptist church each week. But

her ministry “really is to women,” she says. “My love is women in the body of Christ.”

But the fact that men want to come is a testimony to the universality of Beth’s message—that, in her words, “it doesn’t matter what state you’re in, Jesus Christ wants you, and He wants to redeem your life”—and an indicator of why the audience is not all Southern Baptists.

Beth says: “Every denomination you can imagine is in that room.”

And denomination isn’t the only variable. The diverse group filling the sanctuary is a mix of young and old; professional and working class; mainline, evangelical and Pentecostal-charismatic; black, white, Asian and Hispanic.

Why do women with such diverse backgrounds flock to hear this energetic minister who once was known only in Southern Baptist circles? Easy. She’s bright and funny and incredibly transparent.

“The only reason I started teaching Sunday school here is that they rejected me for the handbell choir,” she says amid roars of laughter. “I figured: I might as well. I can’t get in the handbell choir.”

Dressed more like an aerobics instructor than a preacher, she meets the women right where they are—struggles and all—and lets them know she’s been there, too. And she doesn’t get caught up in divisive doctrinal issues. In fact, she purposely steers clear of topics that could widen existing rifts between different streams in the body of Christ.

“My heart is that we be unified,” she says. “We may interpret things differently, but we can have an appreciation [for one another’s view].”

But Beth’s biggest drawing card—the thing that attracts women to her study week after week—is her unabashed love for God and His Word, and her ability to share that love with her audience.

“You and I are so created for passion that we are going to find it, one way or another,” Beth tells the women. Her goal, and the thrust of her ministry, is to help them find it in their relationship with Him—through intense, ongoing study of His Word.

A Worldwide Impact

Beth, 46, has been wildly successful at meeting this goal. Women around the world are using her nine Bible-study workbooks (No. 10 is due out in December), which have sold more than 4.5 million copies since the first, *A Woman’s Heart: God’s Dwelling Place*, was published in 1995, to get into the Word and come to know God better. They are also reading her numerous other best-selling books; listening to her speak at Living Proof Live and other women’s conferences, and visiting her Web site ([www.bethsheart.com](#)) in large numbers. In the process, many of them have been saved, healed and set free.

One woman who shares Beth’s first and last name was so impacted by a streaming video appeal to come to Christ posted on the ministry’s online Bible-study Web site ([www.bethsheart.com](#)) that she gave her life to Him without hesitation. In a comment she posted on

the site's guest book, she wrote to Beth: "I wanted to say thank you because when I first heard about you, I was in the dark, away from God.

"In early November [2002], I came across your Believing God Web site. I listened to your invitation for me to invite Jesus into my heart. Sitting here in my living room, I was unsure if it could be that easy. But you said, 'Please, pray with me,' and I did. Beth, I can't tell you how much my life has already started changing just in two short months. God is good ... really good!"

Beth feels so strongly about helping women establish a relationship with Christ that she gives an altar call for salvation nearly every time she ministers. In fact, she rarely accepts speaking engagements that don't allow her to provide that opportunity.

"I'm after two things," she says. "I'm after the absolute priority of worship and being in God's Word. I also want an invitation for salvation."

For this reason, at least half the conferences she speaks at are her own. Organized and hosted by LifeWay, publisher of her Bible studies, Beth's Living Proof Live events—named after Living Proof, the ministry she founded in 1995—provide ample time for worship, teaching and an altar call. Working with LifeWay to determine the schedule gives Beth the liberty "to make sure those things happen," she says.

In the same way that her domestic speaking career has taken off, the demand for her ministry beyond the borders of the United States has also increased, due in part to her faithful

support of missions through financial contributions and donations of Bible-study materials. During the last few years she has taught in Israel, Greece, England, Germany, India, the Philippines, Singapore, Switzerland and South Africa.

Beth's ever-expanding ministry is unquestionably making a difference. In a recent survey conducted by Today's Christian Woman magazine, she was ranked third in a list of women who have had the greatest impact on the lives of readers during the last five years, preceded only by charismatic minister Joyce Meyer, author and host of the Life in the Word TV program, and Stormie Omartian, author of The Power of a Praying... series. And earlier this year, Christian Reader magazine gave her the singular title, "America's Bible teacher."

An Unlikely Beginning

What is Beth's response to all the notoriety and clamor for her teaching? She couldn't be more surprised. Both she and Keith, her husband of 25 years, are amazed at how God is using her, she says. "We know it is a miracle because our life has been pulled out of the pit."

When Keith read the cover story about his wife in a recent issue of Christian Reader, he began to sob, Beth says. They both got on the floor face down and cried out, "'God, help us not to embarrass the kingdom!'"

Beth explains: "We weren't expecting the article because I was not interviewed for that. I sorta want to think to myself, If I'm America's Bible teacher, America's in trouble!"

Beth's astonishment at her acclaim is understandable, considering her early days. Born, in her terms, an "army brat" in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and raised in the small college town of Arkadelphia, Arkansas, she gave very little indication of her auspicious future when she was young. The fourth of five children, she was so introverted she hardly spoke.

"I was the most insecure child you can imagine," Beth says. "I was very shy and on the verge of tears all the time and pulled my hair out by the handful."

Beth wasn't always that way. Her mother, Aletha Green, who passed away in 1998, once told her that in her very earliest years she was strong-willed and not afraid to speak her mind. And she had one habit that was perhaps a prophetic sign of things to come. She consistently filled up tablet after tablet of paper, which she begged her mom to bring her from the local grocery store, with squiggly lines she called writing. Even before she learned how to print, she made up her own cursive and composed original stories.

"They were not spiritual things. They were just stories," Beth says. "But I could take [them] out later and know what I wrote in my mind."

Her natural tendency to speak out was squelched when Beth began to be victimized before the age of 5 by someone close to her family. The abuse was intermittent, but it lasted until she was nearly out of elementary school.

Her experience had a devastating effect on her personality. "I completely clammed up and turned inside," she says.

Beth adds: "I also had wonderful things happen in my childhood. But when you are being victimized it undermines all of that. It happened so early in my life that it was in the fiber of the way I thought and operated and formed relationships. It formed how I felt about myself and how I felt about other people.

"By the time I was 7, I was terribly ashamed of myself and could not have articulated why. I remember sitting in church and holding my head down and thinking, I wonder if anybody knows. I wore a cloak of shame like a coat. It was terrible."

As if the abuse weren't enough to make her withdraw, Beth had a bad accident when she was 5 that caused her baby teeth to be shoved up into her gums. When her permanent teeth came in, instead of growing down, they stuck straight out. Already insecure, she became the object of so much teasing at school that her parents determined to take her to an orthodontist.

By way of justifying the time and expense required, Aletha told her husband, Albert, "You don't know that God's not going to use her mouth someday."

"I remember hearing her say that and thinking, Gonna use my mouth?" Beth says. "This was a child whose hands stayed over her mouth all the time. I never took my hands down. I did not like to talk out loud."

Commenting on the prophetic nature of her mom's words, Beth says, "I think it's so funny now because, boy, did my mouth open!"

From Defeat to Victory

Like most childhood victims, Beth kept the abuse to herself. Not even her family knew. Nor were they aware of the cycle of defeat she experienced in her teens and early 20s as a result—a habitual pattern of sin, remorse and repentance she now says was even harder to deal with than her victimization.

Beth tried to “push down” her past, she says, because for many years she thought that was the objective of the Christian life—to forget it and cover it with outward manifestations of piety. But when she reached her 30s, she was forced to “deal with [her] stuff,” she says.

“That monster I’d been trying to keep down as long as I could stood up like a nine-foot Goliath, and ... all my past came back to me suddenly. I went through a season [in which] I absolutely despaired of life.”

Interestingly, this season began in the late 1980s, right after Beth had written her first Bible study—but before it had been considered for publication. She had no idea that God was about to develop her calling as a writer and minister of the Word, but she believes the enemy did.

“Now I know without a doubt it was the enemy coming for me and that his goal was to destroy me,” she says. “He knows the biggest threat he has is anybody learning to wield the sword of the Spirit.”

Beth believes Satan was aware that her getting into the Word and encouraging others to do the same would bring healing, and he wanted to prevent her from continuing her work. But his attacks, rather than causing her to quit, only made her more

determined to pursue God.

By that time Beth had been studying the Scriptures intensely for about five years under the tutelage of Buddy Walters, now pastor of Triangle Community Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, who was teaching a Bible class at Houston's First Baptist. His passion for the Word so inspired Beth that after the first class, she ran to her car, shut the door, looked up toward heaven and said, "I have no idea what that was, but I want it."

The Lord responded instantly to her prayer. "It's like the Lord took a match and struck it across a stone and stuck it in my heart, and a love affair started," Beth says.

"Up to this day, I cannot get enough. I love God's Word. I love seeking Him through His Word. I love telling people about His Word."

This supernatural encounter "was the beginning of health for me," Beth says. But full deliverance didn't come until she learned, through her own research, about the significance of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life, something that was not commonly taught in her church when she was growing up.

It was what made the difference between living a life of cyclical defeat and walking in victory, Beth says. "Besides God's exposing the victim in my heart and working to heal me, He taught me the role of the Holy Spirit and the power of His Word.

"I began to pray that my self-destructive flesh would be crucified and that the Spirit of the living God would be

resurrected in me and begin to live His life through me, and it was the difference between night and day.”

Looking back, Beth is grateful that her healing was a process and not an instantaneous event. “That’s when I learned to live off Him. That’s when I fell head over heels in love with Him. That’s when I began to receive His Spirit like CPR into my lungs—and that totally transformed me.”

Her experience has convinced her, she says, that “the role of the Holy Spirit is absolutely crucial.”

“Yes, He inhabits us. Yes, He dwells within us, but we live in victory when He overtakes us. ‘Be ye filled with the Spirit.’”

Because God has so completely redeemed her broken past, Beth feels called to be “living proof” of the truth she preaches wherever she goes—that God transforms lives and that He will use anyone who will let Him.

“That is my testimony,” she says. “That’s what I’m going to scream from the mountaintop till the day I die, that God will redeem any life, save any soul and use anybody who will cooperate with Him.

“I know because I know what He did for me—and He didn’t have anything good to work with here.”

Since her healing, Beth has endured other heart-wrenching trials, including the loss of an adopted son whose birth mother wanted him back, the loss of her mother to cancer and the loss of a co-worker and dear friend whom God led to strike

out on her own in ministry. But she has never cycled back into the defeat she experienced earlier in her life.

Her victory sends a message loud and clear to women who are struggling, just as she has, with difficult circumstances and the suffering and bondage they can bring: God doesn't just have an answer; He is the answer.

As if to highlight the magnitude of what He has done for her, God recently took Beth back to her childhood home of Arkadelphia, where she made an appearance in her current role as writer, Bible teacher and head of Living Proof Ministries. Ten thousand people—about the same number who had lived in the town when she was young—came to hear her speak.

At a reception afterward, a woman approached Beth and said: “I want you to meet my friend. She teaches your Bible studies at your old church in Arkadelphia.” Beth was overwhelmed to learn that materials she had written were being used at the very place where she had suffered so much shame and embarrassment as a youngster.

It was a defining moment, she says. “It was then I knew that God had brought me full circle—and truly performed a miracle in my life.”

It's All in the Family

Beth Moore stands alone on the platform, but her husband, Keith, and daughters Amanda and Melissa play a crucial role.

Beth Moore's husband, Keith, does not minister alongside Beth when she stands at the pulpit. Neither do either of her daughters, Amanda or Melissa. But they all are a vital part of the ministry, Beth says, because of their support of what she does.

"My husband does not work for the ministry nor is he personally in any kind of ministry except to support mine," she says. "But he is on the board of directors, and ... he is the most supportive, wonderful husband to a woman who does what I do that you could even imagine."

According to Amanda, 23, her mother is not exaggerating. "Dad's her biggest fan," she claims. "He is in awe of how God is using her."

The only time Keith ever voiced any objection, both women say, was in the early days of the ministry when Beth, at God's prompting, quit teaching aerobics classes and began to write Bible studies. The aerobics classes had brought in at least "a little part-time money," Beth says. But at that time, the Bible studies were not for-pay publications; they were simply a tool she prepared gratis for the women who were attending her Thursday morning Bible class at Metropolitan Baptist Church in Houston.

Keith didn't understand Beth's willingness to invest so much time in a project she wasn't being paid for. "He could not imagine why in the world I would work that hard for nothing," Beth says.

In spite of his initial reservations, she has had "his

complete support and his joy” all along, Beth claims. Perhaps that’s because Keith feels as strongly about the message God has given Beth as she does.

“My husband would tell you what I will tell you,” she says. “We did not sign up for this. We did not seek this. We don’t know what in the world we’re doing here!

“We are two lives that have been pulled out of the pit. We just want people to know—and he feels as strongly about it as I do—that there is full redemption in Christ Jesus.”

Amanda, now on staff at Living Proof, and Melissa, 20, a theology student at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, grew up with the ministry and developed “a deep appreciation for it and a calling to it,” Beth says.

“Both of them feel very strongly about Living Proof Ministries, about what this family is called to represent, which is the grace of God to any seeker. ... We all feel equally strong about that.”

Amanda is particularly excited about the impact her mother’s ministry has on younger women. A recent graduate of Texas A&M University, Amanda saw firsthand the way Beth’s teaching changes students’ lives.

Even in their early years, the girls were accepting of their mother’s call. Part of the reason they never developed any resentment about it is that the initial impact on their lives was minimal. Though Beth had her first speaking engagement in the early 1980s when she was pregnant with Melissa, the bulk of her ministry in subsequent years took place while they were

in school. It wasn't until they were in junior high that she began writing full time.

"You could almost look at the growth of the ministry with the height of the girls," Beth says. "Literally, it grew up as they grew up."

Periodically on weekends when the girls were small, Beth traveled somewhere to minister, but she always left on Friday night and returned on Saturday afternoon so that she wouldn't be away from her family too long. The rest of the time she was "a regular stay-at-home mom," she says.

When she did have to go out of town, the girls' lives went on "completely normally," Beth says, because Keith stepped in and took over in her absence. By nature the outdoor type, given to hunting and fishing on the weekends, he was obliged to become a hands-on parent for the sake of the girls.

"We weren't getting baby sitters," Beth says. "This was Keith Moore and Beth Moore. He was the one keeping those young-uns."

The Moores' goal of maintaining normalcy during Beth's absence had only one glitch—and it had nothing to do with the girls' emotional well-being. "The only thing that was different [while I was away] was that their hair looked quite different," Beth says, jokingly. "How they looked is where the sacrifice really came in."

From the girls' perspective, there have been other sacrifices—particularly the loss of privacy. But both of them believe whatever they have given up is minimal compared with the benefits.

“As long as I can remember, my mom was teaching,” Amanda says. “Our family sacrificed, but the blessing we’ve received has been far greater.”

Melissa adds: “The testimonies of the women who have learned to find hope in the Word of God through Mom’s ministry will never cease to overshadow the few trials our family endured.”

To Beth, they’ve both “been wonderful” through it all. “I believe God chooses the children for a ministry like this as much as He chooses the spouse and the parents,” she says. The scores of women transformed by her ministry support her contention that the girls “invested in the kingdom every time they kissed their mother goodbye.”

Maureen D. Eha

A Message From the Heart

Beth Moore wasn’t sure her personal journey through the Bible would ‘translate’ to others—but today it is influencing women around the world.

Beth Moore had no idea when LifeWay asked her to submit the manuscript of her first Bible study, *A Woman’s Heart: God’s Dwelling Place*, for publication that it would be meaningful to anyone besides herself. After it became available in 1995, she was genuinely surprised to hear how it had touched other women’s lives. She has felt the same way about every subsequent study—nine in all.

“Each journey God has given me through His Word has been intensely personal,” she writes in the foreword to No. 5, *Breaking Free*, which was released in 1999. “So personal, in fact, I have always been unsure whether or not any one of them would mean anything at all to another traveler.”

But the fact that they do mean something to others is clear from the publishing history: A new Bible study has appeared every year since 1995, and total sales are in the millions of copies. First printings on fresh titles now top 200,000 because of the high volume of pre-orders LifeWay receives. And earlier titles continue to be reprinted as word spreads of the life-changing impact of Beth’s work.

Brenda Brooks, facilitator of three Beth Moore Bible studies at Northland: A Church Distributed in Longwood, Florida, near Orlando, indicates that the studies are as personal for the women who go through them as they are for Beth. Referring to the group she hosted in the spring for Beth’s 2002 offering, *Beloved Disciple*, Brenda says: “So many women came up to me after the sessions and said, ‘She was speaking directly to me today. That was just for me.’ It’s amazing how individual it felt.”

One woman whose mother and mother-in-law also attended the sessions called Brenda in tears and told her, “You have no idea how much this study has blessed my life.” The woman and her mother were one of three mother-daughter pairs who showed Brenda how broadly applicable Beth’s message is. “It is neat to see how it touches different generations uniquely,” Brenda says.

The increased demand for her in-depth Bible-study materials has led Beth and her team to develop creative new ways to

reach her growing audience. In the fall of 2002, she began hosting her first Internet Bible study, Believing God, which provides everything students need to complete it online—videos of Beth teaching, daily lessons in printable format and research tools—for a very low fee. According to Stephanie Lim, Internet producer of women's ministry for LifeWay, more than 34,000 women have signed up for the course to date.

Then in April 2003 Beth taught a Bible study that was broadcast simultaneously via satellite to 50 locations nationwide. Originating from Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston, the simulcast was targeted, but not limited, to women who had participated in the Beloved Disciple Bible study.

But Beth isn't hung up on how she does what she does. Her mandate, she says, is "to encourage people to love God through His Word and be changed by the renewing of their minds," and if God wants her to do that through publishing, that's great. If He doesn't, that's fine, too.

"The publishing has not caused me to write Bible studies," she says. "I wrote them because I was teaching a Bible-study class and they asked me to. If tomorrow all the publishing is over, 'ain't no thing.' I'll go back and do exactly what I was doing."

And what was that? Simply studying the Word and sharing what she learned—something Beth says she is compelled to do.

"The second I receive the least spiritual insight ... about the practicality of Scripture slapped on the hot pavement of real life, I want to make the world's biggest conference call," she writes in the introduction to Praying God's Word, a book so

popular it was recently reissued in a leather-bound edition. "I am not content to keep to myself any hidden treasure I've discovered."

But, she admits in *Breaking Free*, "I never have any idea in advance if my own trek through God's Word will somehow 'translate' to others. I simply know that if indeed it does, it could only be the merciful and gracious work of the Spirit of God."

For now, that Spirit is directing her to continue writing about the topics He puts on her heart, one at a time. A new Bible study, *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, was released in May, and *Believing God*, originally available only through the Internet, will hit bookstore shelves in December. Two new trade books, *The Beloved Disciple* and Beth's first children's book, *The Parable of the King*, will release in the fall, the most recent in a long line of Moore best sellers published by Broadman & Holman.

"Even as I'm writing, I'm in dialogue with Him," Beth told *Charisma*, "because He is the only thing working here. I have no natural talent for this. If the body [of Christ] is responding to anything, it is purely the anointing of God."

Called Out of Obscurity

How was an unknown Southern Baptist woman catapulted into ministry? Beth Moore says she was faithful in the little things.

Beth Moore surrendered to ministry at the age of 18. Today, at 46, she is considered one of America's foremost Bible teachers. How did she get from there to here? Simple. She was faithful to do what God told her every step of the way.

Raised at First Baptist Church in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, Beth gave her life to Jesus before she was 6. But it wasn't until she took a group of 6th-grade girls to a missions camp in her late teens that she abandoned herself fully to His call.

Early one morning when the girls were still asleep, Beth says, the presence of the Holy Spirit surrounded her. "I felt His presence on my skin. I did not hear a voice, but I knew what was being said into my spirit, and it was: 'You are Mine. I have called you.'"

It was more of an appointment than a calling, Beth says of the Holy Spirit's words to her. "It wasn't, 'Will you?'; it was, 'You are.'"

Instantly Beth knew that every agenda she had other than completing her political science degree—including following in her grandfather's footsteps as a renowned lawyer—would have to be relinquished. She also knew that everything she did from that point on would be ministry-related.

After this encounter, Beth's commitment to ministry never wavered, though she admits she did not know exactly what God wanted her to do. "I had to experiment," she says. "I still tell people the only way you find out what your spiritual gifts are is to get out there and do all sorts of different things in the body until you find your niche."

Beth's track record shows that she followed her own advice. A self-described "church girl" who believes strongly that Christians are to use their gifts in a local congregation, she began in the early 1980s by teaching children in a Mother's Day Out program at Houston's First Baptist, where she and her husband, Keith, had become members. She also led a Christian aerobics class there for 12 years as an outreach to the community.

Beth even tried working with youth in an effort to model herself after one of her mentors, Marge Caldwell, a longtime member and leader at the church. But Marge, now 89, saw something in Beth that the young woman herself didn't see—a gift for teaching and speaking. So in 1984, at Marge's request, Beth took over a Sunday school class for young marrieds.

"I could see that she was anointed in some way," Marge says. "I was amazed at her knowledge and her ability to speak."

But her first assignment was a disaster, according to Beth. Because she didn't have the necessary study tools, she would simply come up with a topic and then try to find a Scripture verse to support it. "I was a failure, and I was pitiful. I was terrible," she says, adding with a smile, "but I tried to be fun."

It was this experience that convinced Beth she needed more training. It was also what took her, she says, "from being a motivational speaker to discovering my true calling, which is, I love God's Word and I love to share it."

At the Holy Spirit's prompting, Beth enrolled in a Bible class

at her church. She expected to be bored, she says. But she was so impressed with the instructor's love for the Word that she studied under him for several years, learning how to do the kind of expositional research that has given her Bible studies the depth and life-changing power they are known for.

All the time she was learning, Beth continued to serve God in whatever way He asked her to, hosting luncheons and prayer breakfasts and teaching Bible studies at her church and others. She even accepted invitations to speak. But she didn't know God wanted her to write until He put pressure on her through a group of women who begged her to write Bible studies for their Bible class.

Beth wasn't sure she could do it, but the women stayed after her. It was the studies she eventually wrote at their request that LifeWay, the church resources division of the Southern Baptist Convention, began to publish in 1995, the same year Beth founded Living Proof Ministries as a covering for her expanding speaking ministry. Popular books, some based on the studies, soon followed.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Beth's Bible studies have become LifeWay's biggest sellers and are being used in churches around the world. Her calendar of weekend conferences, where she ministers to as many as 10,000 women per event, is booked a year in advance. And her Tuesday night Bible study at Houston's First draws more than 3,000 women each week.

None of it has come about because she sought big things but because she was faithful in the small ones. "I just did what I

knew to do," she says, "which is whatever I did, to do it with all the gusto I had to the glory of God."

Maureen D. Eha is associate editor of Charisma and SpiritLed Woman.