

3 Women Who Showed Me the Heart of God

My walk with God has been far from easy. I question my faith almost every step of the journey before I come around to Proverbs 3:5-6.

When I see others on fire with the Holy Spirit, I wonder if He loves me as much as I do Him.

At times, I cried out to what felt like nothingness, begging for His touch. But behind every moment of sorrow was a woman who stood firm in her faith and proved to me that God is God of compassion and adoration, of justice and mercy.

Without further ado, here are the three women who shaped my faith and showed me the heart of God.

1. Prophet Dawn Sweigart

March 15, 2009. I remember it so well because it was the first time in my life my pastor parents let me skip church. I was an 18-year-old high-school senior in the throes of depression. They cut me a deal: If I went to church Sunday night, I could skip it that morning. I happily complied.

When I arrived that evening, I saw a woman praying over my grandmother. That was weird because 1. My grandmother doesn't go to my parents' church, and 2. My grandmother doesn't really react in the Spirit, as least not to my knowledge. Nevertheless, I sat down beside the prayer group and proceeded to mind my own business. When they finished, a woman I'd never seen before looked me dead-on and said, "You're Jessilyn."

Meet Dawn. A few weeks before her time at my church, she'd been on her deathbed. But God refused to end her life because He had a message.

"You are to go to this church and talk to this girl named Jessilyn." At that time, Dawn was fighting for her life, not planning any speaking engagements. When we locked eyes and she began to speak over me, I crumbled.

"You are the apple of God's eye," she began, and I was gone. That night broke my depression and helped me refocus on pursuing the Lord. A few months later, Dawn and I met again for lunch. She prophesied I'd go to Jackie Pullinger's St. Stephen's Society in Hong Kong. Two years later, I did just that.

2. Joanna Gaines

I wish I had a personal story with Joanna, but alas, everything I know, I know from a possible HGTV addiction.

Joanna is everything I want to be in a woman. She's talented, hard-working, married to a ham, incorporates her kids into her work and builds relationships with her clients that go beyond professional politeness.

The first time I watched *Fixer Upper*, I knew immediately that she was a Christian—not because she talked about it, but because her faith radiated from her attitude and actions.

When Buzzfeed attacked her last year, she never retaliated, but rose above. I like to imagine she'd fixed her eyes on things above and not on things of Earth.

3. My mommy (duh)

If you categorized my mother as the stereotypical pastor's wife, you'd be wrong. She's not meek. She doesn't stay at home. We weren't homeschooled. My mom—her name's Melany, by the way—is vibrant and emotional. She's authentic in her every move. She doesn't conform to expectations, but exudes confidence.

Growing up, she spent her evenings reading to my sister and me

and praying for us as we drifted off to sleep. When I was a teenager, she bluntly explained the do's and don'ts of the world from a biblical perspective. I saw firsthand the damage the church can do to a pastor's wife, but my mother never wavered in her quiet faith.

In college, I had a dear friend die in a horrific car wreck. My mom crawled into my bed and sobbed beside me. Now, I call her every single day and drive her nuts with various questions, faith-based and otherwise.

My mom's faith taught me that music can connect you to the heart of God, that you don't have to be overtly spiritual to be a Proverbs 31 woman, that friendships can grow your walk with God just like one-on-one time in the Word.

This International Women's Day, don't just honor women with your words. Thank them for how they've impacted your life. I doubt I'd be where I am right now if these three didn't live their lives in ways that reflect Jesus. {eo}