

How God Shapes a Woman's Heart

My heart sneaks up on me when I least expect it. I remember one morning, after dropping off one of my sons at school, I was sitting at a red light, impatient for it to change, when suddenly I was overcome with sadness. A longing filled my heart, an ache, a desire for more.

My immediate response to this surfacing desire was to chastise myself. *What is wrong with me?* I thought. I have a good life. My family is healthy. My husband loves me.

I accused my heart of being difficult, needy, unreasonable. I tried to batter it into silence, to reason it into contentment. It didn't work. Frankly, it never does.

But then, the Holy Spirit nudged me. I felt the invitation of God to be merciful to myself and to come to Him with my aching desire for more. Then God reminded me of a story.

The sun was already blazing, the gnats biting. It promised to be an uncomfortable day. The wind was blowing gently from the south, a hot, soft whisper. It was still early, but the marketplace was alive with activity when another whisper was heard.

This voice blew through the crowd but spoke not of another relentless day, but of hope, of a promise fulfilled. The busy stalls became energized.

"Have you heard the news? That man Jesus has come across the lake! Jairus is with him! Let's go!"

Jairus, a leader in the synagogue, had gone down to the shore to greet Jesus. Well, not exactly to greet him, but to fall at his feet and beg for his intervention.

"Would you, Jesus, please come to my house and lay your hands on my little daughter? For she is dying."

The story is found in Mark 5 and holds a treasure for us today.

Jesus agreed to go, but He wasn't alone. A crowd went with Him. As He walked to Jairus' house, a throng of people surrounded Him, pushed against him, pressed in to Him. Suddenly, Jesus stopped and asked the crowd a question, "Who touched me?"

A woman came forward. She fell at His feet and told Him her story. She had been bleeding for 12 years and was getting worse. Doctors couldn't help her, but she knew that if she could just reach out and touch Jesus, she would be healed.

What was Jesus' response? Was He irritated with her? Was He offended by her boldness? Quite the opposite. Jesus was pleased. He told her that her faith had healed her.

Her faith in what? Her faith that Jesus had the power to heal her. Her faith that Jesus had the desire to heal her. Her faith that she could come to Him with all she was and all she was not and He would not withhold what she desired.

With everything in her, she pressed into Him ... and she was healed. The "more" that she longed for, she received.

Jesus is the same today as He was when He healed the woman with the issue of blood. He still offers to restore us as women—to heal us, to meet us in our place of deepest need. He still has the power and the desire to restore our femininity, which means to restore our hearts.

We have to start there because the heart is the center of it all. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (NIV).

The Feminine Heart

By God's design you were created with a feminine heart. It is His intention that you carry His image to the world using your feminine heart. And it's that that He wants to restore.

So what is the feminine heart? Well, think about what makes you come alive as a woman. What do you love to do? What songs do you like? What books? What movies?

To get to the human heart, we need to talk about desires. God placed unique desires in the hearts of Adam and Eve, and He has placed them in you. They are not a result of the fall; they are part of your glory.

Although every woman is a unique creation of God, we share an essence at our cores. We share desires. Every woman's heart holds three core desires: the desire to be romanced; the desire to play an irreplaceable role in a heroic adventure; and the desire to have a beauty all our own to unveil.

Because of the desires God placed in woman, every little girl is asking one question: "Do you delight in me? Am I lovely? Am I worth fighting for?" How that question was answered for you in your youth has helped to shape you into the woman you have become. It is the core question in every little girl's heart—and every woman's as well.

For me, the answer was a solid "No." I was the youngest of four children born too close together. I still remember the first time—though it was not the last—that my mother told the story of how devastated she was when she learned she was pregnant with me.

And my father? A traveling salesman, my dad would be gone for two weeks and then home for a weekend, gone for two weeks, home for a weekend. He often had a few drinks before entering our home. He was unavailable to me both physically and emotionally. I felt that I was a nothing but a disappointment to him and to the world.

Believing that I was nothing but a disappointment played out in my life in ruinous ways. I looked for affirmation and acceptance wherever I could find it. I turned to boys and then to men to feel wanted and beautiful.

Even after I became a Christian, the wounds remained unhealed, and I thought it just a matter of time before my friends and my husband discovered the truth about me and left. I believed I would ultimately end up abandoned and alone.

You see, our wounds and our sin work together in a very ugly way. The story of your life is the story of the long assault against your heart, the story of how you have been wounded, what you have believed about yourself as a result and how you have then chosen to live.

But the story of your life is also the story of the long and sustained pursuit of One who loves you most and best in order to woo and win your heart for Himself.

God wooed me into salvation. He woos me still. And having the eyes of my heart opened to that reality has changed everything.

Beloved of God

About 20 years ago, life “as usual” was no longer working for me. Sorrow and pain from unaddressed wounds in my past had risen to the surface, and I needed help.

I sought out a good counselor who walked with me into the deeper realms of my heart and brought understanding, clarity, hope. I began to learn about the normalcy of spiritual warfare and started taking a stand against the enemy and rebuking his work in my life. And then I became very hungry for more of God.

I have heard the word *beloved* many times. But I never understood that I am the beloved of God. I am the one His gaze

is fixed upon. I am the who has captured His heart.

But I am not the only one. You are His beloved, too. Ask Him to reveal your true identity to you. He wants to!

Listen. It was for you that the Ancient of Days snuck into the enemy camp disguised as a babe. It was because of His great love for you that Jesus submitted to death on a cross. You are the hope that was set before Him that kept Him on that cross, and you are the one He still pursues.

Every song you love, every memory you cherish, every sunset and scent, every moment that filled your heart with longing or your eyes with holy tears were sent to you by God. Love notes, written just for you, to romance your heart to His own.

Oh, you are romanced. And ever will be. Ask Him to open your eyes that you might see.

Somewhere in her heart, every woman longs to be like Eve, before the fall, to be a woman who is fully alive and captivating. But a lot happened in the world between the creation of Eve and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. And a lot has happened in your life between the dreams you had as a little girl and your life today.

Although we would love to be like Eve, most of us are more like the woman in Mark 5 who is wounded and desperately needs Jesus. Some of us have been bleeding much longer than 12 years.

I want to tell you that there is still hope—hope that you can become the woman God had in mind when He created you, the woman who is romanced, irreplaceable and beautiful.

Jesus still offers to restore us as women. His invitation is ever nigh to come close, reach out, invite Him in. We invite Jesus into our hearts at the moment of salvation, but that is only the beginning. There remain chambers in our hearts where

we are wounded and still feel so very young. Jesus waits for us to invite Him into those places and to ask Him to heal us.

Healing for the Brokenhearted

The offer Jesus makes is much larger than the offer of forgiveness. Oh, we desperately need that, again and again!

But He also offers to heal our broken hearts. He has come to set the captives free. Look again at the Scripture He chose to describe Himself and His mission when He began His earthly ministry: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners" (Is. 61:1).

Jesus came for the brokenhearted captives. That's me. That's you. And healing is possible in ever-increasing amounts throughout our lives.

The more that you long for is available, but in order to live the life you long to live, in order to have the intimacy with Jesus you long to have and in order to play the irreplaceable role that is yours to play, you will need your heart. You will need deeper healing and a deeper intimacy with your Lord.

One of the most healing things you can ever do as a woman is to ask God to answer the core question of your heart. You still need an answer. Ask Him, "Am I lovely? Do You delight in me?"

God is our True Father. We have been bought with a price, we belong to Him. Only God has the authority and the right to truly tell you who you are as a woman. Ask Him. He'd love to speak to your heart.

Sisters, we are not defined by our dress size. Neither our identity nor our worth is based on our pounds, our pain, our

ministry, our relationships or our finances. We are defined by the love of God.

The enemy of our souls whispers incessantly to us that it is all too hard, that we are not enough, that we never will be. He is a liar. Look to your God.

In His eyes, you have never been anything but a captivating woman who has captured His heart. Your identity is based on the fact that you are the beloved of the living God.

Still sitting at that red light, I invited Jesus into my sadness. I expressed my desire to Him for more—more intimacy with Him, more healing of my heart and more connection in my friendships.

Once again, I asked Jesus to come for my broken heart, to come for me. And although the sadness did not immediately lift, I knew I was no longer alone in it. My God had come for me, in that place, and hope began to rise.

What do you want to press into Jesus for? Ask Him to come to you. Ask Him to heal the places in your heart where you are hurting. Ask Him to reveal to you the places that need His healing touch.

He loves to come, dear one. Not because He's God and that's His job, but because He loves you with an everlasting love that we have only begun to understand.

He'd like to show you how much He loves you, again. Go ahead. Ask Him to show you. Ask Him to heal you. Ask Him to restore your desires. Ask Him to restore your soul.

His name is Faithful and True. Those who look to Him with hope will not be disappointed.

He promised.

Read a companion devotional.

Stasi Eldredge *has written* Your Captivating Heart *and* You Are Captivating. *She is also the co-author of* Love and War *and* Captivating.