

PASSIONATE  
*Prayer*



BRENDA WALSH

*with* KAY KUZMA



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## FOREWORD

by Kay Kuzma

I've always been intrigued with prayer. I've always prayed because that's what my mom taught me to do. But my prayers haven't always been answered. I haven't always gotten what I wanted.

So, I've wondered, *How does prayer work? Why does it work? Why doesn't it work? Why do some people get miracles and others don't?* If only I could understand God better.

Then over the years I began to realize that God never asked me to understand Him. The only thing He requires is for me to trust Him. To ask and to believe.

But it wasn't until I began to work with Brenda on this project that I started to understand another dynamic to prayer that my mother never taught me. And that's the spirit, the intense desire, the strong emotion, the passion that Jesus wants me to bring to my love affair with Him.

*Why pray?* It's not to move mountains. It's not to get a miracle. It's not to ace a test or find my keys or get rid of a sore throat—as important as these things may be. *It's to get to know Jesus better.* It's to fall more deeply in love with Him. It's to become one with Him so that His will becomes my will. Brenda calls it *passionate prayer*.

*Passionate prayer* and Jesus are synonymous. After all, the most intense emotion that anyone has ever experienced in this world was

Jesus sweating blood and praying to His Father right before He was brutally killed, “Father, not My will, but Yours.” It was Jesus calling out as He felt the oneness of His relationship with His Father being ripped away, “My God, why have You forsaken Me?” It was Jesus pleading, just before His heart broke with love for His prodigal children, “Father, forgive them!”

That’s why the suffering and death of Jesus is commonly called “The Passion”! Jesus was passionately in love with His Father. Their love was so intense that the separation killed Him. And at the same time, Jesus was so passionately in love with us that He was willing to endure the separation so we could be saved.

Jesus didn’t just pray. He prayed passionately! And so should we!

Prayer is not just words and requests and praise. Prayer is a relationship—a love relationship with the most incredible Lover this world has ever known. Our God! And when we passionately call out to Him, He’s not going to let us down.

This book is Brenda at her best. It’s Brenda glowing with the love of Jesus, shouting with joy, and exploding with praise! And it all happens as a result of *passionate prayer*.

May Brenda’s passion for Jesus become your passion. May you be inspired by the stories in this book, not just to pray—but to pray *passionately* and to trust passionately that He will open the windows of heaven and pour out on you so many incredible answers to your prayers that you will be totally amazed at the depth of His love!



## INTRODUCTION

### *My Prayer—God's Promises*

*Dear heavenly Father, please use me in a special way today to bring others closer to You. Make me a blessing in someone's life. I ask for wisdom to know Your will, and strength and courage to carry it out. O Lord, I want to be a powerful soul-winning tool for You! Thank You for being the awesome God that You are. I love You. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen.*

Every morning I passionately pray this prayer. And I have experienced the most amazing answers! So amazing that I can no longer keep them to myself. I just have to shout it to the world. God is so good! He is so faithful. Imagine, the God of the universe using me to share His love with others!

When I go to bed at night, I may be dead tired, but I'm joyfully praising God for the way He has led me through the day, even though I might not yet understand exactly what He has done or is in the process of doing. He has answered so many of my prayers that there is no doubt in my mind that He is busy working out His will through my willingness to be used by Him.

For years, I missed many witnessing opportunities because I didn't know how to pray. I wasn't praying and asking God to use me in a

mighty way to bring others closer to Him. I failed to realize that God won't force Himself on me. I must invite Him into my heart to work through me. And when I move over to the passenger seat and let Him take control, I'm in for an incredible joy ride!

You'll see what I mean as you walk with me through the pages of this book. Over the years God has given me so many miracle stories that I can't possibly tell them all. But I have chosen a few of the most amazing to share with you so that your faith will be strengthened and that you, too, will have the burning desire for the intimate relationship with Jesus that He talks about in John 15:7: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."

Imagine! It's that simple. If we just live every moment of our lives in Christ and maintain an open invitation for Him to live in us, there is no limit to what He will do for us! That's His promise. And the way to experience His promise is through prayer.

I am passionate about prayer. I pray all the time. Prayer has become my way of life. I pray with anyone who will pray with me. I pray about everything. I pray for everyone who needs a miracle. I just love to pray. Why? Because that's how I get to know Jesus better.

I believe Jesus. He has personally told me through His Word, "Brenda, I will give you whatever you desire if you do two things: First, abide in Me and invite Me to live in you. And second, Ask!" Read John 15:7 again. Isn't that what Jesus says? And if He is saying that to me, He is saying that to you, too! What a promise!

Why is Jesus willing to do this for us? Who are we to deserve this awesome pipeline to the treasures of heaven? Read on. The next verse makes it clear: Jesus is willing to do this for us because it glorifies His Father.

Now here's the part I love best. You've got to keep reading in John 15 to find it. Just a few verses later (verse 11) Jesus explains, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, *and that your joy may be full*" (emphasis added).

I don't know about you, but I love to experience that warm fuzzy feeling of happiness and contentment. I love to smile! I love to laugh! I love to burst out with shouts of joy and screams of delight when great things happen. And that's exactly what I've experienced since surrendering my life to Jesus. Almost every day, I'm infused with an explosion of joy over what God has done through me, around me, and for me! Someone I've talked to catches a glimpse of God's extravagant love. Someone is healed. Someone is encouraged. Someone decides to give his life to Jesus. Someone prays for the first time. Someone's faith is renewed. It's exhilarating! It's awesome!

I have experienced the fullness of His joy by willingly doing what He wants me to do. And it all happens because of prayer: *Passionate Prayer!* I know without a shadow of a doubt that if you will fall in love with Jesus Christ and passionately pray, you too, will experience God's amazing answers.

With the joy of Jesus,  
Brenda Walsh



## CHAPTER I

# MY JOY RIDE WITH JESUS

*Call to Me, and I will answer you,  
and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.  
—Jeremiah 33:3*

I haven't always prayed passionately! I was a great external Christian—just going through the motions. It wasn't that I was a bad person. My heart was always seeking to help others, to witness for Christ, and to serve wherever there was a need. Because I was involved in so many church activities, others probably thought I was leading a Christ-centered life. I was a Sabbath School leader, at one time or another, in every children's division from cradle roll to early teen. I coordinated elegant fellowship meals every week, served on nominating committees, was the social committee chair, was on the church board, and spent Sabbath afternoons singing in nursing homes. I raised funds for disaster relief, played the organ every Sabbath, and baked cookies for members too discouraged to come to church. But all the while I was what you might call a "dormant Christian." My heart was in the right place, but the main ingredient in my spiritual life was missing. I wasn't really connected personally with Christ.



Oh, I understood that Jesus loved me, that He died for me, and that He had saved me, but I didn't fully comprehend the depth of His love—for me. And the worst part of all, I didn't even realize that something was missing.

I thought I knew the Lord. I prayed every day. I said all the right words and *hoped* Jesus would answer, but I never prayed really *believing* with absolute certainty that He would. That is, until the day God used cookies to show me how much He loved me! When I finally understood how important I was to my Lord and Savior, I fully surrendered my life to Him. And my life has never been the same since. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

I grew up in a loving home. There were five of us kids—three girls and two boys. And since Dad was a preacher, I can't remember a time when our family wasn't in ministry. In fact, I will go so far as to say that I can't remember a time when I didn't love Jesus. We had family worship in our home every morning and every night. My parents truly believed in the power of prayer! And we experienced some incredible miracles. I believe it is because of the prayers of Mom and Dad that all five of their children are in full-time ministry today.

Then came that awful time when at eighteen years of age I foolishly married a man I didn't know or love. The violence that followed almost cost me my life.

That experience shocked me into the reality of renewing my relationship with God. Thankfully, He used my sister Linda to help me and my infant daughter, Becky, escape this man's demented control over me. At the time, I prayed passionately for deliverance—"Lord, save me!"—because I was in desperate trouble. And in His goodness and mercy, He did. But I still had no concept of what a complete life of prayer was all about.

A few years later God orchestrated events in my life to allow me to meet Tim Walsh, a distinguished passenger on an airplane, who later became my husband, friend, and soul mate. What a wonderful loving father he has been to Becky and Linda Kay. I could not be more blessed

than to be Mrs. Brenda Walsh! Then came the busy years of child rearing as we followed my husband's jobs—first to San Jose, California, and then to Boston, Massachusetts. All this time I played the role of a good Christian wife and mother. And I was! But I had no idea I was missing the exhilarating joy that only an intimate relationship with Jesus can give!



*I'm so thankful God has blessed me with such a wonderful husband. Tim is my best friend, soul mate, and incredible prayer partner!*

My total surrender to God and my dedicated commitment to do His will started in 1991. Tim and I were living in the Boston area, and our girls were doing well in school. Tim had a great job and was able to provide well

for our family. I was thankful I didn't need to work outside our home so I could be a full-time wife and mother. This also gave me time to help wherever needed at church. Life was good!

We decided to take a few days off and go down to see my family, most of whom worked at Little Creek Academy near Knoxville, Tennessee. My sister Cinda and her husband, Joel, lived only a few miles from the school, so it was an automatic Micheff family reunion whenever the Walsh family arrived!

That weekend, our childhood friend, Danny Shelton, president of Three Angels Broadcasting Network (3ABN), just happened to be at the church we attended. After Danny's inspiring sermon about witnessing, we all gathered around the dinner table to enjoy wonderful conversation and my mother's delicious food. I found myself spellbound as Danny related experience after experience of sharing Christ with people. He even told of individuals who gave their hearts to the Lord on airplanes!

That afternoon I should have been exhilarated as I listened to all those incredible witnessing experiences. Instead, I had the most empty

feeling inside. *Why isn't something like this happening to me?* On the way back to Boston, I was so quiet that Tim asked if I was feeling well. Not really. That empty feeling had turned into a raw ache for Christ. Instead of interacting with the girls and Tim, I was praying, *Lord, why don't You use me like that?* Danny had so many witnessing stories he didn't have time to share them all. *Why don't I have even one story? Lord, I've been serving You all my life!* And then I came under conviction and honestly questioned, *Have I really been a willing vessel, eager to do what God wanted me to do, or have I just selfishly done what I wanted to do—or what I have been taught?*

I literally prayed all the way home, *God, use me*, and continued to pray each day throughout the next two weeks, *Let me be a blessing in someone's life today*. Every waking moment I prayed, *Lord, give me a soul-winning story—like You gave Danny*. Yet nothing happened.

Then it came to me, maybe there was something in my life that was keeping God from answering my prayer. I asked God for a cleansing from sin and from every unrighteous act. I claimed the promise in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us." I agonized with the Lord. I pleaded for Him to answer my prayer.

That's when I first began to pray passionately for God to use me. I asked, *Lord, why aren't You using me?* I knocked on the gates of heaven: *Lord, I'm here; I'm willing to be willing. Please use me. It's been two weeks, and I still don't have a story to tell*. I even asked, *Lord, if it's not too selfish of me, just give me a sign that You **will** use me when You're ready*.

#### MY SURRENDER

The next morning, the girls were at school and Tim was at work. I hadn't even gotten dressed or fixed my hair when the overwhelming urge came upon me that I should bake some cookies. We had a huge butler pantry with large bins of flour, sugar, and all the ingredients for almost any kind of cookie. *I know what I'll do*, I said to myself, *I'll make some oatmeal cookies for Tim. In fact, I'll make a*

*double batch.* While those were baking, I thought, *Linda Kay doesn't like oatmeal cookies, but she loves ginger snaps. Maybe I should mix up a batch or two of those.* When those were ready to go into the oven, I thought about Becky. Peanut butter cookies were her favorite. And before I knew it, I had made a double batch of those, too. But I didn't stop there. I started looking through my cookbooks, and each recipe seemed to be equally enticing. Soon my kitchen was full of every kind of cookie you can imagine. By now it was afternoon, and I was still in my pajamas. I had become irrationally obsessed with making cookies.

By the time Tim walked in after work, there were stacks of cookies all over the house. It wasn't until he asked if we were going to have a party that I came to my senses. *What have I done? Why have I done this?* I had no idea. I individually wrapped each cookie in clear wrap, placed them in plastic bags, put them in the freezer, and forgot all about them.

Two weeks later, on a Sabbath morning, I went into the pantry and without thinking, took all the cookies out to thaw. Then I forgot about them until later in the afternoon. Why had I taken them all out of the freezer? I didn't know. But my mom had taught me that it wasn't good to refreeze food, so I knew I had to get rid of them. That's when the thought came to me that maybe I could take them to a soup kitchen. I didn't even know if there was a soup kitchen nearby. *Who would know if there is a soup kitchen in town?* I called the police station and found out that there was a soup kitchen in Clinton at the Methodist church, right across from the police station. They operated a soup kitchen and that they began serving at five o'clock every afternoon.

I looked at my watch. If I hurried, I would have just enough time to deliver the cookies before the meal began. Now here is where the story really gets interesting.

When I arrived at the church, only one woman was there, and she was wringing her hands. An emergency had come up, and the people

who usually served the food had merely dropped off everything and asked her to serve it. Since she had never done anything like that before she had no idea where to begin. “And the worst thing of all,” the lady lamented, “is that they forgot the dessert!”

“I’ll help you,” I volunteered. “I’ve got cookies.”

“But you don’t understand how many people eat here. We will need hundreds of cookies.”

“Don’t worry,” I assured her. “I have more than enough cookies.”

It wasn’t until after the people were served and I had given away the last cookie that I realized what had happened. My hands started trembling. God had used me in a powerful way. *Oh Lord, I prayed, You knew two weeks ago when You had me bake all those cookies that the people providing food for this soup kitchen today would forget the dessert. What an awesome God You are!*

My eyes were opened, and I could see that God had a wonderful plan for my life, and I felt His closeness. That’s when I realized just how much Jesus personally loves me, Brenda Walsh! It was at that exact moment that I fully surrendered my life completely to Him. *From now on, I’m going to serve You fully and completely, and I’m willing to do whatever You ask.* I praised God for allowing me to be there at just the right time to organize the food service at the soup kitchen—and to have all those cookies. But most of all I praised God for answering my prayer to be used. That commitment changed my life from a ho-hum existence to a vibrant, abundant life in Jesus.\*

Ever since I said Yes to Him, life for me has been a whirlwind affair with God. I talk to Him continually. And when I pray, I pray fervently. I pray with passion. I pray believing. I’ve experienced so many miracles that I can’t begin to record them all. And I’ve learned an important lesson: As long as we are willing to be willing to do God’s will, He will use us!

Matthew 7:21 has become my life script. “‘Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but *he who does the will of My Father in heaven*’ ” (emphasis added).

KIDS TIME

It was not long after the cookie experience that I was asked to host and produce the *Kids Time* television program for 3ABN. At the time, I wasn't qualified. I had never been a television producer. Nothing I had done in life had prepared me for this challenge. The Lord had given me success in a variety of other areas. I was a registered nurse and had my own floral and interior design business. Singing, playing the piano, and oil painting were my creative outlets. However, my television experience was limited to singing with my sisters on my dad's television show, as well as doing vegetarian cooking programs with my sisters that aired on 3ABN. But that was it! Being *behind the camera* is a whole different ball game!

That's why, when I was asked to produce *Kids Time*, even though my daily prayer had been, "Lord, use me," my immediate reaction was, "I can't do that!" I knew nothing about what it took to produce a good television program. Plus, I lived in the Boston area, more than a thousand miles from 3ABN!

As soon as I said, "I can't," it was as if God spoke to me. "*Do you really want to serve Me or do you want to do just what you want to do?*" Once again, Matthew 7:21 came to my mind—that only those who do the will of the Father shall enter heaven!

I fell on my knees. *Lord, I'm so sorry. Your plan is perfect. I just have a hard time always seeing what Your plan is for my life. If You want me to be a producer, I will—if You show me how. But I have to know without a doubt that it is Your will for me. Give me a sign. Give me ideas*



*On the set of Kids Time, taping praise music with Emily Traversy. Left to right: Emily's mom, Linda Traversy, Sonia Gott, PraiseTime production assistant/recruiter, and me with Emily.*



*about what I could do to make a quality children's program, because right now I'm clueless!*

I had so many ideas tumbling out of my head that I couldn't sleep for three nights. On the third night I was so exhausted that I prayed, *Lord, I'm so tired. Just shut off my mind so I can get some sleep.* And that's when it hit me, God had answered my prayer! By then I had Post-it notes hanging everywhere with enough ideas to produce



fifty programs! *I knew* God wanted me to produce *Kids Time*. The last thing I remember before falling asleep was claiming Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

*The set of Kids Time where the Bible stories are taped.*

That experience strengthened my relationship with

God. Once again I surrendered the driver's seat of my life to my heavenly Father. I don't even get out of bed in the morning without praying, *Precious Lord, please use me in a special way and make me a blessing in someone's life. Give me a divine appointment and lead me to the person You want me to witness to today.*

Riding with Jesus has been one incredible road trip! God led me to *Kids Time*, where every day I have the privilege of introducing children to Jesus and letting them know how much He loves them. Then, just when I was feeling comfortable with television production, God asked me to share my story of domestic violence, which I had never ever intended to share. He did it by impressing me to write the book *Battered to Blessed*. That was way out of my comfort zone! Although I had many creative outlets in my life, writing books was not one of them. Because of that book, God began using me more frequently at women's retreats where I am able to give a message of hope to abused and battered women around the world.

But that wasn't all. Doors of opportunity soon began opening for me to speak not only to women, but to people of all ages and from every walk of life. They need to know God has a plan for each of them and that if they will totally surrender their lives to Him, He will use them in incredible ways. God now has me speaking not only to churches, retreats, and schools, but also teaching students of evangelism about the power of prayer and making presentations to non-Christian organizations, as well!

Sixteen years ago, I would have thought, *It's impossible!* But now I know the truth of Mark 10:27: "with God all things are possible"!

In 1991 I felt God's calling on my life and responded, *God send me!* And He did. He is giving that same call to you today. His commission is clear: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

He has ordained each of us to be "ministers." God doesn't *need* us to finish His work, but in His love He allows us the privilege of witnessing for Him because He knows it will bring us the greatest spiritual and emotional high we can ever experience. This is His way of giving us the abundant life that He promised in John 10:10.

And here's the good news: When God calls us for a specific task, He will always provide what we need to accomplish it. Whether it's finances, opportunities, strength, courage, or holy boldness, His promise in Philippians 4:19 is clear: "And my God shall supply all your need according to



*My sisters and I traveled to Russia where we gave a concert. Julia Outkina, director of 3ABN Russian Television Network, translated as Pastor Vadim introduced us.*





*“The Micheff Sisters” on the 3ABN kitchen set, getting ready to tape a cooking program. Left to right: Brenda, Cinda, and Linda.*

His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Not only does God have an individual ministry for me to witness for Him, He also has called me to a ministry with my sisters—The Micheff Sisters—singing, recording CDs, speaking, and cooking. Yes, cooking! We demonstrate a healthier

way to eat via a cooking program on 3ABN and have authored two vegetarian cookbooks. What great joy it brings us to go wherever God leads us! There is no greater happiness or personal satisfaction than serving Jesus!

Just when I thought life with Jesus couldn't get any better, my sisters and I experienced an incredibly stimulating spiritual prayer-powered weekend that I must tell you about!



*My sisters and I write a recipe column for Vibrant Life magazine. We enjoy sharing culinary history and our cooking talents with readers. This photo of us with Vibrant Life editor, Charles Mills, was taken during the magazine's annual 5K Fun Run, an outreach project drawing runners from across the United States.*

#### ONE INCREDIBLE, HOLY SPIRIT-FILLED WEEKEND

My sisters, Linda Johnson and Cinda Sanner, and I had been asked to be the keynote speakers at a women's retreat in Liberty Hill, South Carolina. It was going to be held at Nosoca Pines, a beautiful youth camp nestled in the woods beside Lake Wateree.

Linda had flown from Wisconsin to Knoxville, Tennessee, where

Cinda and I live, so the three of us could drive together to our destination six hours away. Before pulling out of the driveway, we stopped to pray, asking God to protect us as we traveled and also for a powerful Spirit-filled weekend. We prayed earnestly that God would bless and touch the hearts of the women who came and that they would be drawn closer to Him. We asked Him to use us as mighty soul-winning tools.

Cinda drove, and I sat up front as the navigator. I came prepared with step-by-step maps I had downloaded off the Internet. And should we get lost, I could call my husband instantly using the speed dial on my cell phone. Tim can help anyone get anywhere. In fact, my whole family calls Tim when they're lost!

"Did you remember our music tracks?" Linda asked.

"Yes, I have them right here. Are you ready to practice singing?" We were being stretched at this retreat as we were supposed to sing for all the meetings. This meant that we needed every spare minute to practice. When three people sing together, it is especially important that all three voices blend and that we also sing the same words at the same time. For this to happen takes lots of practice! I took one of the CDs from its case and loaded it into the player. We spent the next six hours singing, sharing what we felt God wanted us to do at this retreat, and praying for the women who would be attending.

The time passed quickly, and before we knew it we had arrived at the camp. We easily found our cabin even though it was almost midnight, and soon all three of us were fast asleep.

The next day we finished final preparations for our presentations and then had a wonderful time meeting the women as they arrived. Cinda had a seminar in the afternoon on Christian entertaining, and then the three of us gave a cooking demonstration similar to what we do on our television program. The women loved it because they got to sample everything we made!

In the evening, I gave my testimony about my life as a battered wife in my first marriage and how God had saved me. I was able to share that

it is never God's plan that anyone be mistreated or abused and that Jesus is the only Healer of hearts! Afterward, Cinda and I sang a song that Danny Shelton wrote, "The First Moment of Eternity." This song has so much meaning, and hearts were touched by the words: "The first moment of eternity will be worth all the trials down here, and when I hear the King of all ages say, Come home, child; Come home to stay."

After prayer, many of the women joined us around the piano, singing songs until we all were too tired to sing anymore. I am always physically drained after giving my testimony because in order to tell my story I must relive each painful detail. That night was no exception. I fell asleep talking to God and thanking Him for the blessings He had already poured out!

One of the added delights of the weekend was having my friend Debbie Rapp stay with us in our cabin. Debbie is the Women's Ministries Director for the Carolina Conference, and we had become friends the moment we first met. I was excited to spend time with her again, and I wanted my sisters to get to know her, too. Debbie's friend, Marlene Schmidt, also stayed with us, and what fun we had laughing and swapping stories! In the evening, it was good to talk over the day's events and relate some of the testimonies that others had shared with us. It was obvious God was working in the hearts of the women present.

Sabbath morning, Cinda gave the early morning worship presentation on God's amazing love. She shared how God had helped during some of the darkest moments in her life and how He had carried her through. Cinda also emphasized how important it is to make Jesus your very best Friend.

Then Linda led out in the Sabbath School portion of the program. She emphasized the power of prayer and the importance of giving our burdens to Jesus. Various women in the audience read different Bible texts, and then we raised our voices in songs of praise. What happened next was a spiritual feast. Anyone who was carrying a burden was encouraged to stand and share it with the group while those sitting closest

were asked to embrace that person during prayer. Each petition was then presented to our heavenly Father as I played softly on the piano.

The first lady stood up and shared how she and her daughter were estranged and had not seen or spoken to each other for a year! Linda then asked if there was a volunteer who would like to pray for this woman. A lady from the back of the room stood up and came forward. All those sitting near this woman stood and embraced her as the volunteer asked God to heal the wound and bring reconciliation. She prayed specifically that the Holy Spirit would impress the daughter that her mother loved her supremely, and more importantly, that Jesus did, too.

Then another lady stood and presented her need, and the same process took place. This happened over and over again. The next hour became a prayer service such as I had never experienced. I could feel the Holy Spirit in that room! It was awesome! The time went by so quickly; we didn't want it to end. So many people stood that there wasn't enough time for all 425 women to share their individual burdens. When Linda closed the service, she asked the ladies in the audience to softly say the name of their loved one out loud as she prayed the last prayer:

*Our precious heavenly Father, thank You for loving us so much that You gave Your only Son to save us from our sins. Not only did Jesus pay the price for our transgressions, but His gift opened the door to Your throne room. We come into Your presence through our Lord and Savior, lifting up to You our families and friends who need Your healing touch. We claim Jesus' blood for them. As these names go up before You like a cloud of incense rising like smoke of the most beautiful colors, we thank You that You have heard us and will answer our prayers according to Your will. Thank You that it is always Your will to save our loved ones. We praise You and love You and ask everything in Jesus' name, Amen.*

I spoke for the worship service on the importance of prayer and letting God use us the way He wants to use us. I talked about how we need to step out of our comfort zones and fully trust God to lead in our lives. There is no greater joy than serving Jesus. But He won't force Himself on us. We must let Him in before He will work in us and through us.

In the afternoon, Linda's seminar, "Finding the Joy," continued the theme of God's will, not our will, being done in our lives. Only as



*Women at the Nosoca Pines camp, kneel to pray during the "Crushing of the Rose" ceremony.*

we let Jesus live in our lives moment by moment will we be able to find true joy. Joy has nothing to do with the choices our children make, our professions, or our relationships with husband and friends. Joy is a gift God gives us when we allow self to die. It is only when our hearts look beyond ourselves that we can

see others through Christ's eyes. It is then that we are able to share His love with the lost and hurting. When people fully grasp God's love, that is our Lord's joy! That is how we find real joy!

Later that evening, when the women entered the gymnasium for the vespers service, the mood was set with dim lights, and on the stage was a brightly lit cross with a crown of thorns hanging from it. Just below lay a scarlet robe. Each lady was given a long-stemmed red rose and then took their seats while I softly played the piano. When Cinda sang "Beneath the Cross of Jesus," Linda quietly made her way up the center aisle barefoot and dressed in Bible costume to reflect the character of Mary Magdalene. She knelt at the cross until Cinda had finished her song. The room was still, and we could feel the Holy Spirit's presence.

Then “Mary” gave her testimony of what Jesus had done in her life—how His love had changed her forever and how she was now free. When she realized that the cost of her freedom had been paid with the blood from her precious Lord and Savior, Mary fell at the cross and wept. It was at the cross that she began to grasp the depths of His love.



*Linda Johnson portrays Mary Magdalene as I play “Near the Cross” softly on the piano.*

As Mary stayed kneeling at the cross, Debbie Rapp gave a call for each lady present to surrender all and come to the cross. Christ had paid not only for Mary’s sins, but for the sins of each person. We then sang the song, “Above All,” by Michael W. Smith:

*Crucified, laid behind a stone,  
You lived to die rejected and alone.  
Like a rose trampled on the ground,  
You took the fall, and thought of me . . . above all.*

As we sang this song, each woman walked to the platform with her rose in hand. Reaching the cross, each crushed the rose until the petals fell on the ground, and then she laid the lifeless stem there as well. Many knelt at the cross in prayer beside Linda before returning to their seats so that the next lady could do the same. I watched the faces of the women as they filed past the piano. Many were openly crying; others wept softly, wiping the tears from their eyes. This “Crushing of the Rose” ceremony was so very meaningful and heart touching. It symbolized Jesus our Savior, the Rose of Sharon, who gave His life so that we might live. He paid the ultimate price with His blood.





*Debbie Rapp, Carolina Conference Women's Ministries director, started the "Crushing of the Rose" ceremony with prayer. My sister, Cinda, is sitting next to Debbie.*

The next morning while getting ready in our cabin, Debbie warned us not to be disappointed if not many women stayed for the final meeting. "In the past, many have left right after breakfast because they have a long drive home," she said.

We assured her that if there were only one person in the audience, we knew God would have a message

just for her! You can imagine our surprise to see that almost every seat was filled! God obviously had something special planned.

As I was walking toward the platform, a woman stopped me. Her face was glowing. "I've got to tell you what God did for me last night! It's a miracle. It's an absolute miracle!" I must have looked a little startled because she quickly asked, "Do you remember me?" And without giving me a chance to respond, she added, "I'm the one you prayed for yesterday. I'm the first one that stood wanting prayer. I'm the one who hasn't had any contact with my daughter for over a year. Remember?"

She took a quick breath and plunged on. "I can hardly believe this, but God has already answered my prayer! Last night, after the program, my cell phone rang. It was my daughter, and she's coming home! I had no way of reaching her. I didn't even know where she was. Can you believe it? Less than twelve hours after we prayed, she called me! Prayer really works! It really works! I don't know how to thank you enough." We hugged and praised the Lord and hugged again. I was filled with thanksgiving to our precious heavenly Father that He had granted this woman an answer to her prayer so quickly.

*What a way to begin the morning!* I thought. *It can't get much better than this!* But I was wrong.

The meeting started. I spoke about God's plan for our lives and how His plan is always better than ours, but that we can't begin to know God's plan for us if we haven't fully surrendered our heart and life to Him. To do that, we need to know Him as our personal Savior. Prayer is our connection with God, and unless we have a love relationship with our heavenly Father, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. It isn't enough, I stressed, just to be a "good" person. We have to *know* Jesus. And every time we pray we are advancing God's purpose for us. God is calling each of us to surrender all selfishness and pride at the cross and follow Him. He longs for us to come to Him, not just when we are in trouble, but for praise, honor, and worship. Jesus wants to be close to us, and He desires that we have oneness with Him.

Sometimes people ask, "Why should I pray? God knows what I'm thinking anyway." This is true. God knows our thoughts, but He responds to our prayers! Everyone can pray. If you can *talk* you can pray; if you can *think* you can pray. You don't have to pray a long beautiful prayer full of eloquent and fancy words. The most powerful prayer you can ever pray consists of just three words: "Jesus, save me."

Then I asked my sisters to join me, and we sang, "Have Thine Own Way Lord." While we were singing, we experienced something that I had never experienced in my life. First one person and then another throughout the audience stood to her feet. Tears were rolling down their cheeks as one by one they made their stand for Jesus.

It was nothing short of miraculous! I could hardly continue singing as tears flowed down my cheeks as well. I looked over at my sisters and could see they were struggling, too! It was incredible! *An altar call by the Holy Spirit!* I had not made a call for the women to come forward, yet here they stood! The Holy Spirit's presence was so strong in that room that I could feel it. It was awesome! Being a preacher's daughter, I have witnessed many altar calls in my lifetime. I have played the piano and organ for many evangelistic meetings; over and over again I



have played “I Surrender All” as the preacher pleaded for people to come forward. But that day there had been no pleading, no long drawn-out urging, only hearts responding to the calling of the Holy Spirit!

After the meeting was over and we were reluctantly saying our goodbyes, a middle-aged woman approached me with this story. “I’m quite sure my new daughter-in-law consented to come to this retreat only so we would have a chance to spend time together. But God has been working a spiritual transformation in her all weekend. She told me that she is giving her heart to Jesus. She wants to have a closer relationship with God. Isn’t that wonderful?” Praise the Lord! God is so good! This was just one of many testimonies we heard that day—and continued to hear in the weeks that followed.

I will never forget the Carolina women’s retreat. It was one incredible Holy Spirit-filled weekend! We had called on God before we started driving there, and we continued calling on Him during our time together, and He showed us great and mighty things, just as He has promised to do (see Jeremiah 33:3). It’s a humbling, joyous, exhilarating experience being used by God, whether it’s baking cookies, producing children’s television programs, or witnessing firsthand the awesome life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit. But the greatest feeling of all is the overwhelming love of Jesus I feel when I know I’m right in the middle of *His will* for my life. Every time my heart responds to the calling of His Spirit, I am flooded with His love. There’s nothing quite like it this side of heaven. I call these experiences “Holy Spirit hugs”! And it’s all the result of passionate prayer.

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\* You can read the entire cookie story in my book *Battered to Blessed* or see it on video from 3ABN by calling 1-800-752-3226.