



Daily Devotions for Women
10 days of devotions by women^{of}faith



Inspiring devotions by Women of Faith 2013 speakers: Christine Caine, Lysa TerKeurst, Patsy Clairmont, Lisa Harper, Ann Voskamp, and Sheila Walsh

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humble grace

God blesses those who are humble,
for they will inherit the whole earth.

Matthew 5:5 NLT

I'm standing in a mudroom, sorting children's dribbled shirts, grass-stained jeans. I live in laundry. How to be Little-One in now's wonderland, in Kingdom of Heaven coming? How to *live* in a state of awe when life is mundane and ordinary? I know layers of the *eucharisteo* answer because I have felt the miracle—but there are layers I don't yet understand.

Light falls in gold bars across laundry.

The watch on my wrist chimes the hour, modern bells to prayer. I stop the spinning thoughts, the probing questions, the hands sorting, the laundry work, because God needs knees more than hands. Bowed like Daniel, I move to the other side of prayer with on-the-hour prayers of thanks.

Thank You, Lord, for the perspective of a child . . .

Thank You for door frames and doorknobs . . .

Thank You for soaring ceilings and bed barges and tables that loom large . . .

For her laughter and her wonder and her eyes that turn the world inside out and stretch it large and leave me again in surprise . . . in awe . . .

I murmur *eucharisteo* thanks in a pile of laundry and the world

expands and heightens and deepens and surges with the glory of God, and I can feel the body decreasing and the soul increasing and joy filling the breadth between. This, *this* is like a child happily capturing pixels, our daughter giddily grasping the ball—the perspective of smallness that cultivates surprised wonder, that grows gratitude, that yields joy. The orb awe of a moon that makes the eyes see, the kaleidoscope of a bubble that makes the time slow, this is *eucharisteo* working its change on a life, but here, isn't this here another layer of *eucharisteo*? *Eucharisteo* makes the knees the vantage point of a life. I shake my head, my quiet laughter remembering her glee, because isn't that how children live? Life as a large surprise. A child has no expectations . . . *A rolling ball? Surprise! A laughing aunt? Surprise! Again and again? Surprise!*

That's what a child doesn't have—this whole edifice of expectation. Without expectations, what can topple the surprising wonder of the moment?

My mama, valley wise and grief traveled, she always said, "Expectations kill relationships." And I've known expectations as a disease, like a silent killer heaping her burdens on the shoulders of a relationship until the soul bursts a pulmonary and dies. Expectations kill relationships—especially with God.

I think of it only a couple hundred times a year, that single wide-eyed night by the bed of one of our sons in the pediatric wing of a city hospital. The moaning of babes, the crying of sick children, the murmur of nurses with grim prognoses on lips and morphine in hand, these haunted through the endless hours. I did not sleep, the pain of that place begging me to pray.

After our son was given the thumbs-up and signature of release, I came home to bedrooms and bathrooms and kitchen and fridge and windows and unmerited, luxurious health and I threw up my arms in relieved gratitude.

Here? This place? Surprise!

I was a woman who saw what her life could well have been. And things but forty-eight hours earlier I entirely took for granted—even rather half-resented as flawed and less than—I spun around: *All surprising grace!* And there has not been a single night the nearly ten years since, that my son and I haven't whispered in bedside prayers for those who cry out in the dark, for we witnessed and we remember and we will always carry ...

Is it only when our lives are emptied that we're surprised by how truly full our lives were?

Instead of filling with expectations, the joy-filled expect nothing—and are filled. This breath! This oak tree! This daisy! This work! This sky! These people! This place! *This day! Surprise!*

C. S. Lewis said he was “surprised by joy.” Perhaps there is no way to discover joy but as surprise? This, the way the small live. Every day.

Yes, the small even have a biblical nomenclature. Doesn't God call them the *humble*?

The *humble* live surprised. The *humble* live by joy.



Lord, I repent of it all: the expectations that kill relationships and the entitlement that steals all joy. Please, Lord, today, make me small and surprised by staggering grace! Make me remember that humility comes before happiness.

Today I will ask you to help me take a step toward releasing bitterness and extending forgiveness.

HAVE YOU NOTICED—IN YOURSELF OR in others—that the bitter lack of forgiveness can poison a soul and ruin a life? You and I can hold on to that toxic emotion until it's hard for us to know where we end and where the bitter unforgiveness begins. We become hostages to the pain of the past, and that pain can take a toll emotionally, relationally, spiritually, and physically. Yes, physically. That fact, confirmed by twentieth-century doctors, was also discussed long ago in the Torah and other Jewish literature. In those ancient writings, for instance, the gallbladder is thought to be the seat of all diseases. In Hebrew, the word for gallbladder is *marah*, meaning "bitter." The word *marah* is also given a numerical value—*machalah*, meaning "eighty-three." Jewish culture believes that eighty-three illnesses have their source in the gallbladder, which, when stressed by unresolved anger and bitterness, produces too much bile. Think about the last time you were angry and your stomach tightened—a physical reaction. You get the idea.

But forgiving—letting go of the right to get even—can be very hard. After all, it's human nature to want to hurt the one who hurts us. So often we hold on to our unforgiveness because we just can't relinquish the idea of retribution. But God claims vengeance for himself (Deuteronomy 32:35). We can't expect a feel-good ending for all our woes. We simply have to trust that justice will take its God-ordained course.

When have you experienced physical symptoms of a lack of unforgiveness?
Why do you think God created us that way?

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Why does our Creator God, our loving heavenly Father, command us to forgive?

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Holy and forgiving God, you know the bitterness and unforgiveness I am holding on to—and I want to be free. Help me let go of my right to get even with the one(s) who hurt me. Help me choose to forgive despite how I feel inside because you command it—and you do so for my good.

We know Him who said,
“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.
And again, “The LORD will judge His people.”
It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

—HEBREWS 10:30–31

Never Off Duty

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. —ROMANS 13:8

Will you scratch my back, honey?" my husband asked one evening.

"Barry, I'm tired. My back's sore too, you know," I replied.

"You know, Sheila, sometimes I think I would get more of your time if I stood in one of your book lines."

He didn't say it with any venom. It wasn't a low blow, just a simple statement of what seemed real to him.

I thought about that for a long time. He was right. It is easy to be loving and kind for twenty-four hours to thousands of complete strangers knowing that I'll fly home shortly. But my lifelong commitment is to my husband. Our son, Christian, will one day head off and make his own life, but Barry and I have chosen to be together until God takes one of us home. We have accepted the call to love as Christ loved.

Jesus loved expecting nothing in return. That's hardest to do with our families and closest friends. We feel like they know us so well that they should anticipate our needs and feelings and, perhaps, not expect too much. But that is not the gospel. Christ calls us to give out of full, grateful hearts with no thought for ourselves. We are never off duty as believers. We have an outstanding debt to love and love and love.

So, if you come to a conference and I'm not at my book table, I'm off somewhere scratching my husband's back!

*Heavenly Father, teach me to love as you love, to give
as you give, to live as you lived amongst us. Amen.*

Sheila Walsh



Weak Places, Strong Places

*The Spirit helps us in our weakness.
We do not know what we ought to pray for,
but the Spirit himself intercedes for us
with groans that words cannot express.*

(ROMANS 8:26)

Thought for the Day:

With the power of Christ,
all things can be made new.

We all have them. Weak places. Places inside us that make us wonder if we'll ever get it together like the together people. Places that make us feel less than — less than victorious, less than a conqueror, less than strong.

My weak places frustrate me, And yet I refuse to believe they can't ever be changed. With the power of Christ, all things can be made new and all broken things can be restored. But sometimes I get so tired of feeling weak.

Weak places are like the lever that flips open the drain in my bathtub. My whole world can feel full and warm and clean until that little lever is pulled. Suddenly, the warm comfort is sucked away, leaving me shivering in a cold, hard, residue-filled space. Cold, hard, and residue-filled is exactly what those weak places make me feel inside.

What is your weak place? A temper that flares? An insecurity that stings? A family dysfunction that is always brewing?

May I breathe a little life into your weakness today? Whatever it is, however large it may loom, know that “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Romans 8:26).

We don't have to have all the answers. We don't have to make suggestions to God. It's okay to be so tired of our weak places that we run out of words to pray.

Listen to the beautiful verses tucked all around this verse about weak places:

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
(Romans 8:1)

You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit. (Romans 8:9)

If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

Maybe we need to sit still for just a moment or two today. Quiet, without the weight of condemnation or the swirl of trying to figure

things out. Quiet, with nothing but the absolute assurance that the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

He knows what to pray. He understands our weak places. There is a purpose to this weak place. Though it doesn't feel good, we can trust that good will come from it (Romans 8:28).

In that quiet stillness, while the Spirit prays for us and we just simply soak in truth, there will be a flicker of light. A slight trickle of hope. A grace so unimaginable, we'll feel His power overshadowing our weakness. Even the smallest drop of God's strength is more than enough to cover our frailties, our shortcomings, the places where we deem ourselves weak.

And we'll reject that label — we aren't weak.

We are dependent. Dependent on the only One powerful enough to help us. The only One sufficient enough to cover us in grace throughout the process of growing stronger.

Our relationships may not be sufficient. Our circumstances may not be sufficient. Our willpower may not be sufficient. Our confidence may not be sufficient. But God is sufficient—and forever will be.

Hear Him speak this promise straight to your heart: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

So instead of wallowing in my weak place, I will let the Spirit reveal the one positive step I can take today. I will wash away the condemnation with the warmth of His grace. I will receive His power. And I will rename the weakness my strong place. "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Dear Lord, I am so grateful that when I am weak, You are strong. Help me to see positive steps I can take to grow stronger in my weak places. In Jesus' name. Amen.

A Soul Longing to Be Filled

*I spread out my hands to you;
I thirst for you like a parched land.*

(PSALM 143:6)

Thought for the Day: When the desire for treats is triggered by difficult emotions, it's not really a desire for treats. It's a thinly veiled attempt at self-medication.

A starved soul is like the vacuum cleaner my mother used when I was a child. It had a long metal tube that ravenously sucked up anything and everything set before it. It sucked up dust bunnies with the same furor as a \$10 bill. I know that one from experience.

Our souls have the same ravenous intensity as my mother's vacuum cleaner; that's how God created us — with a longing to be filled. It's a longing God instilled to draw us into deep intimacy with Him. The psalmist expresses this longing as an intense thirst:

*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you,
my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can
I go and meet with God? (Psalm 42:1 – 2)*

I spread out my hands to you; I thirst for you like a parched land. (Psalm 143:6)

Indeed, our souls are thirsty and ravenous vacuums. If we fail to understand how to fill our souls with spiritual nourishment, we will forever be triggered to numb our longings with other temporary physical pleasures. When those pleasures are food, the resulting behavior is what we often hear referred to as “emotional eating.” But this issue is bigger than emotions; it’s really about spiritual deprivation.

My boyfriend breaks up with me. I want a tub of ice cream.

That big business deal falls through. I’ll take the super-sized fries, please.

I don’t feel pretty. I need some chocolate to soothe and delight me.

My kids are driving me crazy. I deserve a piece of cake. I deserve three pieces.

I hate cleaning my house. When I’m done I’ll treat myself to as many chips as I want.

It’s my birthday and I don’t really think anyone cares. I’ll just eat my way into happiness or numbness.

Same difference, right?

I hardly think it ironic that I’m struggling even as I write these words. There’s a situation in my life that has wormed its way straight to the most vulnerable of places in my heart. This situation has made me feel hurt and rejected. Years ago a little crack in my strong resolve was created by the extreme rejection of my biological father. And while I’ve found amazing victory in understanding I’m no longer a child of a broken parent but rather a child of God, revisiting rejection is never fun.

I'm not saying we shouldn't allow ourselves the occasional treat. We should. But I've realized when the desire for treats is triggered by difficult emotions, it's not really a desire for treats. It's a thinly veiled attempt at self-medication. And self-medicating with food even once triggers vicious cycles I must avoid.

When difficult emotions come, I must realize stuffing myself with food only serves to compound the bad feelings later. What I need in this moment is to do something good, positive, and healthy for myself. Take a walk, read an inspirational book, write an encouraging note to a friend, memorize an uplifting verse, or play some of my favorite praise songs really loudly while driving through the country. This is just a start of my list of positive things to do that refresh me. What would be on your list? What refreshes, refuels, and refills your soul?

Dear Lord, I have connected emotional emptiness with a desire for more food. Please help me to deal with these triggers so I can recognize them for what they are and put them to rest. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Lambs Grazing on God's Love

Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.

—PROVERBS 30:8 NIV

When, as a young adult, I first cried out to Christ to rescue and forgive me, I soon recognized my need to study the Bible. As I did, life-giving words tumbled out: *peace, prayer, power, and provision*, among others.

I was a desperate woman with a heart full of brokenness and too little biblical enlightenment to know what to do with it. So I did a lot of word studies in the light-bearing Scriptures during those emotionally spinning years as I searched for steady-*ing* answers. Initially my study style was splintered at best, but because of God's heart for his seeking children, he helped this wobbly lamb find pasture in his stabilizing Word.

It took me years of grazing to realize God's Word was its own commentary. The more I read and studied, the more I saw how one portion of Scripture defines other portions. I found that exciting. That isn't to say I'm not aware of the benefits of researching what others have learned through their lifetimes of education and efforts in biblical studies. I'm a fan of Spurgeon, Chambers, Moody, and others.

Maybe you too are a lamb in search of good pasture, wanting to graze on the hillside of God's love. I pray that as we feed on his Word, our Shepherd will give us hearts full of wisdom so that we may face the choices that come to us daily.

Life is textured. May we be sturdy people, up to the task of living with joyful integrity.

—Patsy Claimont

Dear Savior, I love to study your Word! Thank you for making it a source of spiritual nourishment for me, offering new perspective and wisdom to this limping, hungry lamb. In your precious name, I pray. Amen.

A Beautiful Heart

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

—1 SAMUEL 16:7 ESV

We judge others. We look at what others wear and form an opinion about their affluence, economic status, and even their potential as a friend. But friends actually come in surprising packages, don't they? Think back on your friendships. What friends seemed to be perfect for you initially but then didn't work out? What people did you initially avoid but who became invaluable allies?

God doesn't look at appearances. He knows us all from the inside out. While we may make judgments and inaccurate perceptions about others, his opinions are always right. And they don't deal at all with what's on the outside.

How can you be more like God in the way you evaluate people? By simply remembering that the heart is what matters. By pursuing people who don't always fit your preconceived notions. By listening well. By watching behavior before you make a judgment.

And alongside that, strive to be—through the strength of the Holy Spirit—a person whose heart is beautiful.

Jesus, I want to see people as you do, from the inside out. Help me look beyond appearances to the person on the inside. And, too, would you clean me up on the inside? I want to have a beautiful heart. Amen.

~ Patsy Clairmont

Permeating Our World with God's Glory

LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

—PSALM 8:9 NIV

Sometimes I think about the sorry state of our world and feel the burden of being responsible for others. The appalling smut passed off as entertainment, the horror of women and children sold for their bodies, the uncertainty of how best to care for the planet—I can't decide whether to build a bunker in the backyard or race out in full battle regalia. Perhaps you, too, have felt overwhelmed by the sight of hungry faces on the evening news or have been moved to anger by the casual attitude others have toward God's gift of life.

The good news is that a little bit of elbow grease on our part goes a long way when coupled with our heavenly Father's compassion for humanity. Just a smidgen of love will often sweeten a bitter relationship. A morsel of mercy can soften the most callous criminal. And a teaspoon of biblical truth, seasoned with grace, has the power to enlighten those who've been duped.

We must not forget that when God handed humanity the authority to manage his creation, he didn't intend for us to govern with an iron fist. We won't change society for good through autocratic bullying, scowling in disapproval, or waving protest placards. Instead we can permeate our world with God's glory by engaging our culture—by sharing microwave popcorn with a Muslim co-worker; by voluntarily cleaning up an abandoned lot in town; by chatting with the lonely, blue-haired ladies in church; or by simply dropping off a casserole to a frazzled single mom who works two jobs to support her family.

We will lead the way God intended when we love well the other messy image-bearers he weaves into our stories.

—Lisa Harper

Heavenly Father, I pray that I will have a strong desire to show others compassion in everything I do. I ask that you surround me with people and opportunities where I can show your glory. Amen.

He Holds Your Hand

The steps of a man are established by the LORD, And He delights in his way. When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong, because the LORD is the One who holds his hand.

—PSALM 37:23–24 NASB

There is great peace in truly realizing that God establishes our steps. Nothing we've done takes him by surprise. And he knows the way we will take tomorrow. Not only that, but this verse says that he delights in the way we take.

It's hard to believe that God loves us that much, that he delights in our future journeys, even though we're bound to fail and stumble. But beyond that, God also promises that he will catch us as we fall because he holds our hands.

Picture an older woman trying to cross a busy street. Alone, she is tentative—maybe even a little scared. Now watch as a younger man dashes into the street to take her hand and steady her across the street. The woman now feels safe and has confidence she'll make it to the street corner.

That's a picture of God with us. We can't do life on our own. We feel scared, isolated, and worried, so God dashes into our lives, grabs our hand, and helps us to the next spot on our journey.

Jesus, thank you that you know the steps I take even before I stumble to take them. Thank you for holding my hand and protecting me. Thank you for always being with me. Help me to live joyfully in light of that ever-present truth. Amen.

— Lisa Harper

Undaunted: Daring to Do What God Calls You To Do
session 1

The Call

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever walked into a place and been shocked as people popped out from behind the doors and furniture and shouted, "Surprise!" at the top of their lungs? If you have, you know the feeling of being both startled and delighted at the same time. Once your heart rate drops to normal, the adrenaline stops coursing through your veins, and you realize what is happening, you are delighted that these people have gathered to celebrate your birthday or other special event. They have planned, communicated, and gathered to surprise you and let you know you are loved.

Everyone enjoys a surprise . . . when the news is good.

Sometimes we face a moment when we receive news that startles us and redefines our life. With one line, a letter in the mail, a text message, or conversation, the landscape of our future looks completely different.

A woman receives a call from her doctor's office asking her to come in so they can review the results of the mammogram.

UNDAUNTED STUDY GUIDE

she had a few weeks earlier. She senses the news is not good, but has to wait two days to meet with the doctor. When she gets the report and learns that she has cancer, she enters a time of asking, *Who am I, and what does my future hold?*

An employee who has devoted fifteen years to the same company opens an envelope from his boss which begins, "We want to thank you for your years of service," and ends with, "we are downsizing, and your position has been removed." The words on this single sheet of paper cause him to wonder, *Am I the same person now that my job is gone?*

How should we respond when we face a moment that makes us feel we are not who we thought we were? Where do we look when the foundation of our life seems to shake, crack, and crumble beneath our feet?

TALK ABOUT IT (5 MINUTES)

Tell about a time when you were surprised with good news or by something that brought joy to your life. How did this surprise impact your life?

Or

Tell about a time when you were surprised with hard news or faced a painful situation that seemed to redefine your future.

VIDEO TEACHING NOTES (15 MINUTES)

As you watch the DVD teaching segment for session 1, use the following outline to record anything that stands out to you.

The day Christine's life turned upside down

Building your life on the truth of God's Word: John 8:31–32

Fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God:
Psalm 139:13–14

God has a plan and a purpose and a destiny for us

We are who God says we are

Stability in changing circumstances: Romans 8:37–39

Bringing love to a lost and broken world

3. What are some of the things that people in our world tend to use to establish their sense of value, identity, and purpose in life? Why is it dangerous to base our worth on these sorts of things?

Christine talks about how in a single moment, when she learned she was adopted, everything in her life changed. Yet, in a very real sense, nothing changed. Her fundamental identity was still the same. What are the things about you that will never change, no matter what you face, because of who you are in Christ?

When you believe God is who he says he is, when you hang onto him and his Word in faith, his truth sets you free. The truth you store up in silence comes back to you in the storm, and it lifts you away as on a life raft from the fears and disappointments that would otherwise pull you down.

4. **Read:** John 8:31–32. Jesus told his followers that the truth would set them free. What are some of the things that God declares are true about you and me? How can holding to these truths in the tough and uncertain times of life help us maintain a clear sense of who we are?

UNDAUNTED STUDY GUIDE

5. The Bible tells us that God's works are marvelous. God made you and me. This means we are marvelous! Tell something marvelous about yourself. Why is it so hard, in a day-to-day way, to see ourselves as marvelous in God's sight and truly valuable?

If your group is familiar with one another, share something marvelous you see in the person sitting to your right.

6. **Read:** Genesis 1:24–31. The pinnacle of God's creation is people. In Genesis God makes the stars, seas, plants, and animals and calls them "good." On the sixth day, when God created people, he said they were "very good"! God has a plan, purpose, and destiny for your life. How can you learn to identify and begin following God's plan for your life? What gets in the way of your doing so?

If you have gained some direction and clarity concerning God's plan and destiny for your life, share what you have received with your group members. Let them know how they can encourage you and pray for you as you seek to follow God's plan.

The pinnacle of God's creation is people, every single person on earth. We are God's sons and daughters created in his image with a plan and a purpose for our lives.

7. When Christine says, "We are not a product of time, we are a product of eternity," what is she getting at? What does it mean to know you are a product of eternity?

How can this outlook change the way we view ourselves?
How can it shape the way we love and treat others?

God has plucked us out of eternity, he has positioned us in time, and he has given us gifts and talents for the purpose of serving our generation.

8. **Read:** Romans 8:37–39. What are some of the things the enemy tries to use to separate us from God's love? What truth can we speak to combat these lies?

GROUP PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

Spend time in your group praying in any of the following directions:

- Thank God for being with you in the surprising and painful times you have faced in your life.
- Praise God for loving you even when you feel unlovely and in the times when others have treated you as if you are not valuable.
- Pray that you will see yourself as God sees you and ask for an unshakable confidence that you are loved by God and precious in his sight.
- Ask God to help you see others the way God sees them. Pray that you will value others as "very good," and that you can help them see how beautiful they are to God.
- Thank God for the members in your group and pray that they will know how marvelous they are in God's eyes.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to God's plan for your life and pray for the power to follow this plan no matter what the devil tries to throw in your way. Pray that you will be undaunted in your passion to pursue God's purpose for your life.

Even if our circumstances on earth change, it doesn't mean that God's eternal plan for our lives has changed.

PERSONAL REFLECTION (5 MINUTES)

Complete this activity on your own.

In the space provided, write down four words that describe how you think about yourself in the flow of a normal day, followed by a short sentence that tells why you feel that way. Be honest. The words you list can be positive or negative.

EXAMPLE:

Word One: Driven.

I love to accomplish tasks, but sometimes my relationships suffer because of it.

Word One:

Word Two:

Word Three:

Word Four:

Do you see yourself as fearfully and wonderfully made, of tremendous worth to God? What keeps you from seeing yourself this way? What helps you to see yourself as valuable and precious in God's sight?

GROUP PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

Spend time in your group praying in any of the following directions:

- Thank God for being with you in the surprising and painful times you have faced in your life.
- Praise God for loving you even when you feel unlovely and in the times when others have treated you as if you are not valuable.
- Pray that you will see yourself as God sees you and ask for an unshakable confidence that you are loved by God and precious in his sight.
- Ask God to help you see others the way God sees them. Pray that you will value others as “very good,” and that you can help them see how beautiful they are to God.
- Thank God for the members in your group and pray that they will know how marvelous they are in God’s eyes.
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Believe God Can Do Anything

— 2013 TOUR —

MUSIC THAT MOVES

STORIES THAT STRENGTHEN

TEACHING THAT TRANSFORMS



SHEILA WALSH



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MERCYME
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