

Seasons of a Woman's Life

Seasons of a Woman's Life

Lois Evans

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LOIS EVANS

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DEDICATED TO

My parents, James Basil and Annie Eleen Cannings, for investing your time, dedication, love, and longsuffering in bringing me face-to-face with my Savior. Then modeling before me a confidence in an all-knowing God. Thanks, Daddy and Mommy.

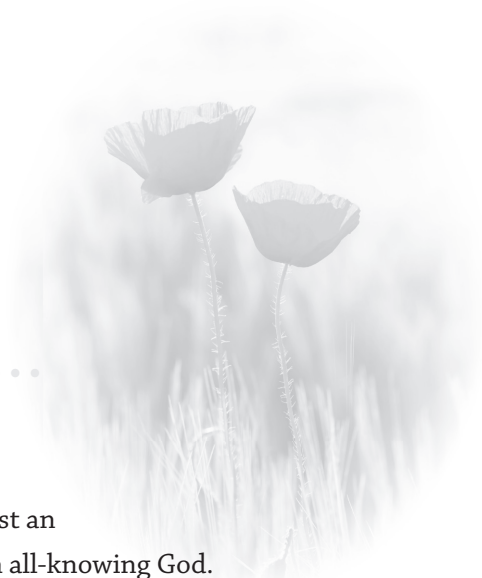
Also my husband, Tony, who always encourages me to grow and develop. He takes the time to listen, challenge, and patiently advise in my continued growth. Thanks for giving me an opportunity and for being there for me as we continue to grow through the seasons together. I know as long as God gives me life, you will be my cheerleader.

Thanks to my faithful sister, Elizabeth, for being there for me and our four children and ten grandchildren, who have given me the joys of motherhood many times over.

Thanks also to Mrs. Ann Waldie, whose encouraging words, "This is only for a season," redirected and realigned the focus of my life's journey.

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Never be afraid to trust an
unknown future to an all-knowing God.
He who believes in God
Is not careful for the morrow,
But labors joyfully and with a great heart.
He must work and watch
Yet never be anxious or careful,
But commit all to Him,
And live in serene tranquility
With a quiet heart, as one who sleeps
Safely and quietly.

—MARTIN LUTHER

Foreword

I have had the awesome privilege and joy of being married to Lois Evans for over forty years. As her husband, I have watched her move through the seasons of a woman's life. I have seen her endure with strength the trials of winter. I have seen her grow and flourish in the beauty of springtime. I have seen her struggle in the heat of summer, and I have seen her change with the cool of fall.

It is because I have personally observed Lois address the seasons in her own life that I know every woman will be blessed who reads this book. You see, Lois is not writing about what she has heard or read but what she has personally experienced. It is because she has tried changing her experiences to the changelessness of God's Word that she has been able to live such a consistent, stable, and victorious Christian life.

What Lois shares in this book will be a blessing to every woman who reads it because the principles, thoughts, and challenges she shares come from a genuine heart and a very real person. Raising a family, supporting a workaholic husband, helping to develop a local church, and managing a national ministry gives Lois the credentials to share what she shares in this work.

It is because I know that what you are about to read is laced with the blood, sweat, and tears of real life that I know it will not only inform you, but encourage your heart. Many people know Tony Evans the preacher; far fewer know Lois Evans the singer and speaker. Many know Tony Evans the leader; fewer know Lois Evans the inspirer. Many know Tony Evans the ministry builder; fewer know Lois Evans the ministry organizer. Many know Tony Evans the visionary; few know Lois Evans the prayer warrior. Many know Tony Evans the family man; fewer know Lois Evans

the homemaker. It's time I move to the shadows so you can get to know the real reason why so many know me. It's because God gave me a woman who knows Him and who has experienced Him as she has moved through her seasons of life. It's the same God who will walk with you as you move through your seasons of life.

—TONY EVANS

Introduction

All around America and all around the world, God has blessed me with wonderful opportunities to speak to women—women of all ages, races, and social status. After I speak, when I’m able to talk to these women one-on-one, I am privileged to hear about their wishes, their wants, and their worries. I hear their longings for blessing— blessings for their families as well as for themselves. I hear the cry of their hearts because of unexpected disappointments, heartaches, and frustrations. And wherever I talk to women, I hear the same question asked in many different ways. Whatever their age, whatever their responsibilities, women want to know,

Will it always be like this?

The answer to that question is almost always “No.” And the reason I can safely say, “No, life will not always be like it is today,” is because of a very important principle. Sometimes we hear the saying “All things must pass.” That is true, at least in earthly terms. But there’s a more specific principle at work than that. The Lord has shown me that women are seasonal creatures, and when we look at our lives in light of the season we are in, we are better able to cope with some of the challenges and are more likely to appreciate the blessings—while we still have them.

For example, it may seem that we’ll never reach the end of changing diapers, driving car pools, or dealing with teenage upheaval. Then all at once we find ourselves in a new situation. The children have grown up a little or a lot; they’ve gone off to kindergarten or off to college. Suddenly we have time on our hands. We have less to do; we have different things to face. God has brought us into another time of life during which we will have new discoveries to make, new roles to play, and new blessings to enjoy.

In short, the season has changed.

I've found out a great deal about seasons in my own personal life. I grew up in a Christian home, and although I did not receive Him personally until the age of twelve, from an early age I heard the good news of Jesus Christ. I have godly parents who raised us in the Word and in church. My parents prayed for all of their children, that each of us would come to know the Lord and serve Him.

I remember how hard it was for Mom to raise us. Dad's job involved a lot of travel, so Mom was often alone at home with eight kids. I remember the times when she was tired of all the hard work and the lack of material things. Despite the hardships, she faithfully honored her season of life, and I often heard her say, "For the Lord's name's sake . . . I am going to keep my commitment to Him and to you kids."

Even now, when things become overwhelming for me and I hear myself asking the age-old question, "What for?" I hear that familiar voice answer, "For the Lord's name's sake."

Even with such a large family, our mom still found time every day to have devotions with us, and the Scriptures that I remember most clearly today are the ones I learned at her knee and in Sunday school. Dearest to my heart is my Life Verse, found in John 15:5. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

I know Scripture is true; I believe it with my whole heart. In fact, the meaning of that verse is buried so deeply in my heart that I never tackle anything unless I get clear direction from Him. Why? Because only then can I be sure that He will see me through.

I'll tell you more about my own experiences later in the book. But besides learning about life's seasons from my own walk with God, I've also learned many lessons from the biblical story of Esther. God had an important plan for Esther's life, and He led her through a specific process of preparation until she was ready to fulfill His will. Only after He had prepared her properly was she able to say yes to His will and to see that she had come into the kingdom "for such a time as this."

What do I mean by seasons? We often think of the word in terms of spring, summer, winter, and fall. But I like to think of our life seasons as seed-planting, growth, and harvest.

During the Season of Seed-Planting, the Lord calls us to Himself. We commit ourselves to His service, and we enjoy communion with Him. This often takes place while we are still single, before we meet the man God has chosen for us. While we are single, we can devote ourselves to building our personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, cherishing Him as our First Love.

The King's court is made up of single and married women. God chooses women in each state and leads them into the Season of Growth, which encompasses lessons in obedience, service, and preparation. Just as Esther was taught to be a proper wife to a great king, we also grow up in the King's court being tutored in self-discipline, sacrifice, and serenity. That is God's way of preparing us for our particular future in Him.

At last we enter the Season of Harvest. We are finally ready to step into the primary responsibilities for which we have been prepared. During this season, we learn to be content without becoming complacent; we learn to say yes to God's direction, even when it means stepping out of our comfort zone. And we learn the blessings of fulfillment as we see God's plan for our lives being brought to pass.

What is God's purpose for your life? Have you discovered it yet? Just as Esther found herself in the unique position of saving her people from certain death, I am grateful to say that God has made it possible for me to reach out to others whose lives are at risk spiritually, emotionally, or even physically. But without His guidance, without abiding in Him, without learning the lessons implicit in each season of my life, I would be of little use to Him today. Apart from Him, I can do nothing.

It is essential for God's women to learn about their seasons because He has a unique plan for each of us. In Psalm 139 we read that God ordered our days before we were ever born. And submitting to His unique path for us will help us keep our balance as we navigate through the many choices that make themselves available to us throughout the years.

Today's Christian women are being pressed on every side to conform to standards of this world. Unique opportunities in the areas of education and business have opened doors to women that were not available even half a century ago. While on the one hand Christian women should enjoy the benefits of these opportunities, we must be careful not to let this world system rearrange our biblical priorities.

Our first priority as women is to maintain a vital personal relationship with God. Proverbs 31:30 says, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised." This "fear" is awe-filled respect that flows out of an ongoing relationship with God. Our jobs, careers, and degrees must never overrule our daily intimacy and interaction with our Savior. An ongoing awareness of His Presence and a devotion to His Word will give us stability, confidence, and direction as we pursue the various ministries God calls us into during each season of our lives.

The second priority for us as Christian women in this quickly changing society is our commitment to our families. The family is too easily being written off the world's agenda. Nonetheless, our status in society must never overshadow our responsibility to our status at home. Titus 2:5 clearly states that women should "be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed."

This does not mean that women have to stay home (the virtuous women of Proverbs 31 had a job). Rather, it is saying that above all else we should make sure that the home is being properly taken care of. How many times have we seen a woman with a great career who has not provided a strong, loving home for her children? That kind of ungodly prioritizing always ends up in a great mess for all concerned.

Finally, we Christian women should seek to be the best we can be no matter into what field of service God has called us. We should use our privileged position in society to further the cause of Christ in the world. Esther is a good example of this. God gave her an unparalleled position as queen of a mighty nation, and she chose to use it to bring deliverance to

the Jews. Have you ever asked yourself how you could use your position in society as an opportunity to further the cause of Christ?

By being the best for God that you possibly can be in the midst of your responsibilities, you will “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). In this quickly changing world, God needs strong, stable Christian women who demonstrate a divine orientation to life. Can you think of a more wonderful, more rewarding calling?

In the pages that follow, we’ll consider Esther’s life and I’ll share with you my own experiences and those of other women. I think you’ll find helpful principles, familiar feelings, and encouraging promises as you read. Together, we’ll consider the kind of seeds He is planting in our hearts, the type of growth He anticipates, and the abundant harvest He expects from us as He leads us through the seasons of a woman’s life. For He has said,

I know the thoughts that I think toward you, . . .
thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.
—JEREMIAH 29:11

Part 1

The Season of Seed-Planting





.....

Chapter 1

The Call

In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai. . . . And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

—ESTHER 2:5, 7

The first seed that should be planted in the heart of a godly woman is the seed of God's call. But what does it mean to be called by God? Every woman who walks with the Lord has a different story to tell about how He reached out and drew her to Himself. My own story centers on the influence of my family.

If you read the story of Esther, you'll see that she came from the culture of the Jews. They were believers in the Lord with a rich tradition of faith and godliness. Like Esther, tradition and spiritual mentors also surrounded me. My parents and family lived a devout life in front of me, so it was easy and natural for me to believe and accept the importance of God's call.

At the age of twelve, when I said yes to Jesus Christ, I made a decision to be His disciple. I knew that meant that I would be different. I knew I would be required to have a testimony for Him. I knew that He wanted me to make a difference in the world. And where did I receive that type of information? Again, I received it from my traditions—from the words and actions of my parents.

Listening for Your Call

Why does God call us, planting the seed of discipleship in our hearts? He calls us because He loves us. He calls us because, before the foundation of the world, each of us was foreseen and designed in every intricate detail. If you haven't read Psalm 139, this would be a good time for you to do so. You'll discover there that God had your days ordered before you were ever born.

Once you answer His loving call, at the point of salvation, you enter into that glorious, divine plan, devised especially for you by our Sovereign God. Salvation calls you into a new relationship with God for all eternity. You are not a chance happening. You are one of a kind. There is no one else

on this planet that has your plan. That's why you can relax in the face of trouble and temptation, because you are more than a conqueror in Jesus Christ.

There are many wonderful Scriptures that speak of our salvation. In Romans 5 we read that even though we were doomed for a lost eternity, God reached down and saved us. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Despite our sin, He made a way out of no way.

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. —Romans 10:9–10

Some people will not make it into God's heaven, even though their pardon has already been signed. Jesus has signed it, but we have to personally receive it. That means answering His call. And once you have received Him, you are transformed into a new creation. Do you realize how exciting that is to have another chance, and this time to do everything with the help and encouragement of the Holy Spirit?

Maybe you have forgotten who you really are. If so, please let me remind you. If you have received Jesus Christ into your life, you are a joint heir with Him. That means everything that happened to Jesus is afforded to us as believers. He died, and we, too, have to die daily to the things of this world. He Himself told us that we would suffer persecution. But that's not the end of the story. He arose, and we arise with Him in victory and power. If we live life focusing on who we are—joint heirs with Christ—we can get through the difficult times, because there is hope. There is joy ahead. There is a promise waiting to be fulfilled.

Just as God has chosen each of us for a particular plan and purpose, God also chose people in the Old Testament. They sometimes found themselves in trouble due to their disobedience. In the book of Esther,

the Jews were in bondage, having been taken captive by the mighty Persian kingdom. But Mordecai, Esther's cousin and guardian, was a godly man who continued to wail and bemoan before God his people's desperate need. He knew he could call on God because God had called on him and the rest of the Jews to be His people.

When desperate needs come up in our lives, we tend to forget who we are and to whom we belong. If we have responded to His call, the Lord can take care of our problems. He can even use the bad and the ugly issues of our past and begin weaving them together into His kingdom plan.

God had a significant purpose for Esther in history. She lived every day knowing that she was His child and that something good was going to come out of the Jews' difficult circumstances. She placed her confidence in God and trusted the wisdom of her cousin Mordecai. We, too, should place all our confidence in an all-knowing God. And we should spend time listening to those who know God really well, those who will go to God on our behalf.

Our Higher Calling

Many women are satisfied to be saved and on their way to heaven, not realizing that the Lord has a divine purpose for them on earth. Each woman the Lord calls to Himself is designed to use her gifts, talents, and skills to promote His kingdom. God does more than call us into salvation. He calls us into His service. Salvation offers to each of us a new purpose in history.

But maybe you're asking yourself an important question: What exactly is God's call? Is it a voice in the night? Is it a sign in the heavens? How can we recognize God's call?

I believe that God's call is a compulsion you just can't shake. No matter how hard you try, it keeps coming up. Is there something like that in your life? Is there something you keep avoiding? Why don't you talk it over with your Christian friends and ask God for confirmation of it? Then, once you're sure it's His call, say, "Yes, Lord!" You needn't worry. Whatever His call requires of you, He will provide you with the resources

to get the job done. What's more, you will experience the matchless joy of knowing that you are right where you belong.

Besides that unrelenting call, God also orchestrates people, places, and things in our lives in order to lead us to the place He has for us. As we focus on Him, He steers us into His perfect will (Proverbs 3:5–6). God orchestrated events for Esther so that she was in the right place at the right time. Then Mordecai's wise guidance helped her look beyond herself to something much bigger. In my own life, God used godly parents to bring me into His plan for me. Every aspect of my call, from personal salvation to practical service, was uniquely orchestrated by God.

Salvation gives us resurrection power. Salvation brings us into God's adopted family. Salvation also delivers us from a purposeless existence. Esther could go on, overcoming her fears and following her instructions, because she had a goal in mind. By God's grace, individuals who held the same principles surrounded her.

Our call is an invitation into a uniquely designed life role, a role that God has equipped us to carry out. When Esther ascended to the Persian throne, it was more than a Cinderella story come true. God had moved her into a strategic position for His purposes. Not only had Esther's physical and temperamental loveliness propelled her far beyond the competition, but she also went on to show that she was mentally tough enough to handle a position of responsibility.

The Smart Black Book

In order to effectively respond to our calling, it is essential that we walk with God on a daily basis and that we build ourselves up in His Word. This will prepare us for the unknown, unpredictable, and unexpected events that will surely come along in our service to Him. Every one of us who is called by God to serve is also called to "be diligent to present [himself] approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

One of the women on staff at our ministry, The Urban Alternative, was once in the army. She told me about some of the strange tasks she

was given to do during military training. “Sometimes,” she explained, “we were told to take boxes from one side of the room to the other and then back again. We were supposed to place the boxes back where we got them from, and then repeat this same process. When we asked the sergeant why, he would yell, ‘Just do what I say!’”

The purpose of this exercise was, of course, to see if the recruits could follow orders, even when the orders didn’t seem to make much sense. Sometimes the things that happen in our lives don’t seem to make sense, either. That’s why it is so important for us to store up the Word in our hearts and to build strong confidence in an all-knowing God. That way, we will obey Him without doubts and questions because we will have learned to trust Him implicitly.

This same woman went on to tell me about the “Smart Black Book.” The army provides this book of instructions to be kept within reach by all personnel. Even when the soldiers were asleep, the book was always next to their beds because they had to be able to find instructions and information in case of an emergency. If the soldiers did not have the smart book with them, they were punished by having to do a large number of push-ups.

God’s Word is much like that black book. Everything we need to know about life is inside. Do you have the smart book with you always, both in your hand and in your heart? Or will you have to do a lot of spiritual push-ups because you have been negligent? We need God’s Word to continually remind us that the One who can save us can also keep us. And He has promised to bring to fulfillment the desires of our heart.

Now, that doesn’t mean we always feel like our desires are being fulfilled. One of the challenges we face as we pass through the seasons of our life is our own impatience. We are always yearning to move on, to get to the next season, to arrive at some future goal, to settle down into some kind of joyous fulfillment. When we are single, we long to be married. When we have little children, we long for them to grow up. When we are working in a career position, we long to stay home and care for the home and family. When we are homemakers, we long to be moneymakers.

There are four seasons in the year: spring, summer, fall, and winter. Now, you can sit in on a particularly hot day and complain about how hot it is, or you can make the necessary adjustment to be comfortable. The summer day is not going to change; you have to adjust in order to make it through the day with reasonable success. It boils down to a decision of the will.

The same is true of the seasons of our lives. They always come and go. But some seem to last forever, while others pass quickly, and we are able to say that we had a short winter, or that “summer was gone before it began.” In God’s grace, we are given only what we can handle. And nothing that we are going through is new to God. In fact, it is not even new to man. God has been in this business a long time, and He knows exactly what we need and how much of any given season is enough. That’s why it is so important to make the best use of our time, no matter where we find ourselves. A writer long ago said,

This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.
Through the Lord's mercies
 we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.
—LAMENTATIONS 3:21–23

Submitting to Our Seasons

Esther was a woman of intelligence. She depended on the Holy Spirit to direct her way. If Esther had gone into the king’s courts one minute earlier than the appointed time she could have caused great harm to herself and to her people. Everything has a time and season. The more time you spend in God’s presence and in His Word, the more pleasing you will be in the King’s sight and the more requests you will get answered (Esther 5:3–8).

When the king saw Esther, she was beautiful and perfectly prepared for him (Esther 5:1–2). When the Lord looks at you or me, what does He see? Does He see someone He can use? Does He see someone who is presentable? Does He see someone in whom His seeds of calling are taking root and beginning to grow?

When I think about women and their calling, I am often reminded of the Proverbs 31 women. Now this lady is hard for us to identify with because she just seems too good to be true. She's more like a fairy-tale heroine than a Bible story character. Is it really possible to have a life that falls in place to such a degree? I believe that it is indeed possible, particularly today when women's opportunities are so varied. I am sure the Proverbs 31 woman had her challenges, but she charged ahead in the principles of the Word and she carried on with confidence in the Word. She was an educated, healthy businesswoman who had the gift of philanthropy.

Yet in spite of her thick résumé, she took care of her home first. Her husband could trust her because she was a woman of wisdom. All of her abilities and gifts were put to work, she was fulfilled, and her husband was known in the gates of the city as a community leader. Be careful as you bring home the bacon and fry it up in a pan, that you also wash the pan—that is all part of being a supernatural woman. This godly woman never gave up her home for the marketplace. With God's help, she was able to accomplish everything she wanted to do and live a full life without compromise.

God will not rob us of what He has appointed us to accomplish. He is the One who threw the stars in space; so just maybe He knows how to take care of you and me! He feeds the sparrows; not a single one drops to the ground without His knowledge (Matthew 10:29). A sparrow is worth less than a penny, but our value is much more because we cost Him His life.

What is God calling you to do? To be? Are you avoiding something He's asking you to accomplish? Or are you simply not sure of what He wants? God told the Jews living in the wilderness, "I will lead you with a cloud by day and fire by night" (see Exodus 13:21). As your life unfolds, you will get clear direction from the Lord as to what He needs you to do.

But He leaves you with a choice. You can decide to pitch a tent, always with the mind-set of folding and moving. Or you can pitch a tent saying, "Hey, I like it here. The Lord couldn't literally mean for me to move." I'm sure that's a temptation the Israeli women faced.

Whatever your season, whatever your call, please don't be willful. And don't try to do anything in your own power. His strength is made perfect in your weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). It's true that these aren't popular ideas in our culture. Listening to God, waiting for His call, allowing Him to be your strength, and choosing to fulfill your season can put you in a lonely position. However, nothing is more rewarding than being in God's will and experiencing His peace.

In order to accomplish the things God has planned for you, you have to be in His Word and in fellowship with His people. And if we are wise, each of us also needs a mentor who is wise in the ways of the Lord. Each of us needs a Mordecai or a Naomi or a Miriam in our life to encourage us when God's call comes, because His call doesn't always look or feel great. Sometimes it is the last thing we want it to be. For example, I grew up in a cultured environment and some of the lessons of my youth about manners and propriety were not at all pleasant for me.

I could never have imagined when I first met my husband that I would be thrust into situations all around the world in which I would need the social graces I had been taught. But in God's sovereign plan, He determined that my foundational training would help touch the world for Jesus Christ. Since that time, God has used my upbringing to complement Tony in many ways. As we have opportunity to travel, I am able to assist Tony in relating to the different cultures we encounter.

Another example of God's calling and instruction in my life took place during a summer camping experience when I was fifteen years old. I directly heard from Him, saying, "Follow Me." I remember walking down the aisle saying yes to the Lord but with a whole lot of stipulations.

"Yes, I'll follow You . . . but I don't want to be a missionary."

"Yes, I'll follow You . . . but I'll never be a pastor's wife."

Be careful never to say "Never." The Lord has a sense of humor.

The call means that there is a divine purpose for your life that is bigger than you are. Esther's purpose was to save a nation. My purpose is to be a wife—yes, a pastor's wife—to Tony Evans. How tragic it would be for us to settle for a mundane life that never makes the most of our gifts, talents, and interests.

God showed me at fifteen that He had a purpose for my life. I let the Lord know that I was available but scared. Despite all my worries, He took the little seed of faith I carried down that aisle, planted it in good soil, and began the Season of Seed-Planting in my life.

What about you? Have you heard and answered His call? Are the things He's asking you to do too big, too unfamiliar? You have a choice. You can follow the example of Esther, obeying, listening to her mentors, believing in the calling she had among her people. Or you can resist Him, questioning the "senseless" orders He seems to have given.

I hope you'll say yes when He says, "Follow Me." The road won't always be easy, but He will never leave you or forsake you. And as you step into the Season of Seed-Planting, He will not be silent. He has promised, as you move through the seasons of your life, that . . .

Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying,
"This is the way, walk in it,"
Whenever you turn to the right hand
Or whenever you turn to the left. —ISAIAH 30:21

Personal Application Questions

What is your story? Do you know your unique call? What is it? Journal how God reached out to you and provided a personal call.