

Foreword

If anyone (especially a new author) ever hands you the manuscript of their book, realize you have been entrusted with the raw version of their blood, sweat and tears. Really, it's sometimes the unseen and unedited parts of their lives. Book-writing is therapeutic; you dig deep into places that have often been covered, left behind and forgotten for years.

My friend and long-time collaborator in ministry, Celeste, not only handed me her manuscript, but in the pocket of the three-ring-binder was an ink pen. An ink pen. She said, "Take out whatever you think needs to go." I edited nothing out. I used that ink pen to draw stars and check marks and wrote "Great point" and "100" throughout the God-inspired and thoughtfully written pages. I can't escape the inner elementary teacher that I still am!

The curse and the blessing of leadership is that you often see the potential of people before they see it in themselves. The curse part is you watch and try to coach them into their purpose, but many will never get out of their own way and do the hard things to get themselves to the other side of what holds them back. The blessing of leadership is when someone not only lives up to what you see as their potential, but they live beyond it, through the power of Christ and through their commitment to growth and discipleship, and allow the pains and insufficiencies of their past to be redeemed.

In 2003, this twenty-two-year-old girl and her husband walked into our storefront church, and she would barely look me in the eye. She would have preferred to work in the nursery (not because she had a passion for kids, but because she wanted to be hidden), and now she leads and proclaims God's Word to thousands of people, leads our women's conference in Texas, in women's prisons, and around the world. As a leader who sees potential in people, I hate to admit this, but even I didn't see all of that in the young woman who wouldn't make eye contact with me almost two decades ago. I definitely saw more in her than what she was showing at the time, but not the above-and-beyond doors that God would open to her.

The difference is this: Few people hand the manuscript of their lives to God or to others with an ink pen included. People ask God to mold them and make them, then say, "Nevermind" when it actually requires something of them that they want to hold onto or when it causes them to step out of limitations that comfort them.

I've had a front row seat to the journey documented on the pages of this book. No, this is not an autobiography of Celeste. It's a story of how to trust God with everything so that you can become more than anyone else, including you, could have ever imagined.

—Lori Champion
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