

THE
RESOLUTION
for WOMEN

DELUXE LEATHER EDITION

THE
RESOLUTION
for WOMEN

BASED ON THE
NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLER



THE
RESOLUTION
for WOMEN

PRISCILLA
SHIRER



NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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For the women of resolution who have shaped my life—

My mother, Lois;

My grandmothers, Evelyn and Eileen;

And my aunts, Ruth Ann, Elizabeth, Bernice, and Beverly

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Jerry Sr., Jackson, Jerry Jr., Jude. My life's seminal aspiration is to serve you well as a wife and a mother. I pray that when the curtain closes on my time here on planet earth, you will be able to confidently say that I was a woman of resolution. I am nuts about you.

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FOREWORD

After a year of prayer, God birthed the vision for the movie *Courageous* as well as the Resolutions for both men and women. We began to ask what would happen if the men and women of this generation fully resolved and committed themselves to live for what matters most. What if we let go of the baggage of our past, clarified our convictions, and then pursued faithfulness to God, our marriages, and children for the rest of our lives? Many great men and women in Scripture and in recent history have defined and then lived by their own personal resolution. Now it's our turn!

As we began developing the *Resolution for Men*, we also prayed for God's direction concerning who should write the *Resolution for Women*. He clearly led us to Priscilla Shirer, whose unique calling, grasp of Scripture, and testimony are a picture of multigenerational faithfulness.

Priscilla dove into this project with prayerful passion and the understanding that God is calling all women to a new season. Women who reflect their full purpose and potential. Women who embrace life with joy and fulfillment and are known for being faithful in each area of their lives. Women who understand that this involves discipline and self-sacrifice, but that it can happen as they allow the Word of God to nurture them and the Spirit of God to take control of them and have His way.

This *Resolution for Women* will both stir and challenge you. It will speak to the best part of who you are. It will remind you of your priceless value and the wonderful, God-honoring reasons why you were created. Then it will push you to embrace your current season of life by defining what matters to you most in the midst of it. This book will encourage, inspire, and even provoke and irritate you. But at every place, it will lead you to devote yourself to making and

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keeping commitments that will bring you all the blessings and joys of a life in pursuit of God's best.

As you read, you will find yourself analyzing the choices you make and the perspectives you hold. You will begin refining your worldview and slowly reshaping much of what you believe about your various roles in life. And that's exactly what we hope you do. We believe this book could transform your life, your marriage, your children, and your friendships. Why? Because it's based on biblical truth. And His Word is living and powerful and never returns void.

It's true that you can't do this in your own strength. Be freed to admit that up front. But everyone wants to believe there is a better person inside of themselves. And with the Lord's guidance and involvement, this is not only possible but is realistic and obtainable! He has already promised to complete the gracious work He has started in you (Philippians 1:6).

As Priscilla shares her personal stories, you may find yourself laughing with her, crying with her, and nodding your head in every chapter. You will also cringe a few times as the Lord uses the truth in this book to mold your own character and spiritual maturity. But don't be afraid to let that happen. It's part of becoming the godly woman of grace He wants you to be! And she is amazing!

So find the place in your home or your day where you enjoy reading the most. Open up your heart, your mind, and even your journal, then ask the Holy Spirit to help you fully interweave God's principles into your daily life! We recommend praying before you read each chapter, asking God to speak through the Scripture passages and testimonies written in this book.

Then watch what He does to the person you know as *you*. There just may be some changes on the horizon—good ones whose time is now. And it will all be for His glory!

Fasten your seat belt! God's about to go to work!

May the Lord bless you as you begin.

Alex Kendrick
Stephen Kendrick

THE RESOLUTION REVOLUTION

Resolution: [rez-uh-loo-shun] n

- a. *the act of resolving or determining upon an action or course of action, method, procedure, etc.*
- b. *the mental state or quality of being resolved or resolute; firmness of purpose.*

I'll admit, I'm sensitive about resolutions. Frankly, the whole word and its meaning disturb me a bit.

Maybe it's my naturally spontaneous, carefree, impromptu personality that's offended at the thought—binding myself to a set of decisions I'm going to feel obligated to keep even after my enthusiasm has waned, which I know it will. Something about putting a plan on paper and being held accountable to it seems so definite and concrete. Scares me a little.

Or quite possibly it's the mere fact that I've made so many of these goals and promises before and haven't always followed through on them. Resolutions about diet and exercise, budgeting and financial planning, priorities and balance, or just completing a to-do list by the end of the day. Fail enough times, and you don't feel like trying again.

And yet once a year, around mid-December, millions of us start to think about the fresh resolves we need to consider, even if these new leaves and high ideals make no more than a cameo appearance on the stage of our mind. Some of us, for our own varied reasons, ultimately decide they're not worth the effort. And yet some people find the strength to gird up their druthers, steady themselves, and

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tenaciously forge into the new year with a particular set of plans in tow.

I'm always impressed by the diligence of those who make their promises stick, whether at New Year's or at any other time. And the longer it takes for their investment to turn into tangible dividends they can see and enjoy, the more awestruck I am by what they've accomplished—what I've accomplished by being dedicated to my commitments. For even though I may have an adverse initial reaction to the term, I do have an appreciation for resolutions.

In fact, I make them every single day.

So do you.

Right now—whether you realize it or not—you're choosing to treat people a certain way, to stay committed to certain activities, to live a certain life, to be a certain kind of person, to *not* be a certain kind of person. Either way, you've made a decision. A spoken (or unspoken) declaration. A defining banner hangs over your life, written in the ink of your own choices. Others can read it, even if you can't.

You're *already* a woman of resolutions.

They're making you who you are. They're determining the life you'll end up living, the tomorrow you'll end up shaping.

So since making resolutions is something we all do anyway, the question for us to grapple with is not whether we'll ever dare to make any more of them but whether we're going to be intentional about the ones we do make. We need to make sure the banner that flies over our lives and announces to the world who we genuinely are is one that says what we want it to say, one that changes things *in* us and *around* us for the better.

That's what this book is all about.

I feel responsible for telling you this, even as you turn these first few pages. I want you to know what you're getting into, just in case you'd rather opt out and close the cover before you get any deeper. This book isn't for pleasure reading. In fact, some of it may not be very pleasurable at all. You'll most likely find it a bit antagonistic and convicting in spots. Every single chapter and entry you're about to

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lay eyes on is going to compel you to decide whether you will or you won't, whether you do or you don't, whether you can or you can't. The choice is yours.

But I'm praying right here at the forefront that you'll make the choice to continue on with me, because I'm convinced this one is worth it.

Even if you're not the resolution-making type.

Even if you're in relationship with someone who doesn't respect what you're doing and has no intention of making any resolutions of their own.

Even if you're a tad unconvinced that any of this will make one bit of difference in the life you're currently living.

Even if you're not in the mood for it and don't have the track record to back it up.

Come with me on a resolution revolution journey that will be worth every step we take together. Why?

First, this resolution is with God. Unlike many of the New Year's variety, these resolutions are founded squarely on principles that God Himself has established. These are more than just determinations you make within yourself; they are girded about with the power of the Holy Spirit—encouraging you, comforting you, equipping you, empowering you with the strength you need to carry them out. Essentially, these are His resolutions for you.

And second, this resolution will impact the people you love. If you're married, I'm talking about your husband. If you're a mom, I'm talking about your children. If you're single, I'm talking about your friends and family. Even if none of these people appear to actively admire or support your efforts in making this resolution, you're going to be doing business with God and making decisions based on His Word. And the deep impact this will have on your life will overflow into the experiences of those around you. Sometimes the greatest miracle of all is the one that happens in your own heart, the change that takes place in you and then surprises you as it filters into the seams and fabric of your whole life. The effects of a changed person on her surroundings can be staggering.

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You may find yourself tempted as you read along to point a finger of blame and frustration in other people's direction. "What about my husband? Why isn't *he* inclined to change? Why is it always about what *I'm* supposed to be doing, instead of my family, my children, my coworkers, my friends? Aren't they a part of this equation too?" You may feel like rolling your eyes at the seemingly one-sided skew of some of the conversations we're going to have.

So let me just be clear. This book *is* slanted. It's decidedly and purposefully designed not to take into consideration the actions (or inactions) of the other members of your family or the people who live and work and go to church with you. I'm not going to be addressing your husband or how he should behave. This is about what *you* will do, what *you* will become by God's grace from this day forward. This is the *Resolution for* WOMEN. More specifically, one woman. You.

And all you need to know and care about is that in God's impeccable timing and design, He has brought this book into your life for this particular season. He is calling you to make the hard yet necessary decision to face these chapters and the themes they present with a strong dose of courage, a prodigious amount of willingness to look inward, not outward, and a steady confidence in His Spirit to empower you to follow through on these resolves, regardless of how little your spouse or others may seem compelled to follow your example.

So take a moment, right now, in the quiet of your own heart to gloat. Go ahead. You know you want to. Pat yourself on the back. Give yourself a high five. Celebrate the sterling woman you must be to brave a book like this, one that demands nothing less than a radical response from anyone who reads it.

Did you do it? Good.

Now get over yourself and let's get on with it already.

There's work to be done and resolutions to be made.

Please know I'm well aware that life rarely shows up with three hours of quiet and a throw to drape across your lap. Such curled-up moments are made for catalog pictures and daydreams, not usually

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for us. So I've deliberately written this book in a cadence that I hope will match your reading realities. Here a little, there a little—whenever there's an opening. I'm hoping you'll never pull it out and wonder, *Now where was I?* because just about every bookmark placement is its own new experience. A beginning thought. Fresh for you, right for that moment.

My hope is that you'll read this book slowly and purposefully—not with the intention of finishing but of engaging with each segment. So at the end of each little section or chapter, you'll find some questions or concepts to consider, perhaps a suggested, practical application for you to implement. I encourage you to take your time, maybe even a full day between segments so you can put into practice what you're reading within the rhythms of your own life. Again, resist the urge to “just finish.” Choose instead to consider carefully where you stand with each suggestion and biblical principle, and then spend time practicing what you're resolving to implement into your life. These same questions could also be adapted for use in a small group or a regular gathering of friends, enabling you to work through these points with some sisters who can keep you accountable. That's how a resolution becomes revolutionary. Life changing.

Ultimately, the experiences we have together within the pages of each section will lead us to a moment of decision: the crafting of a new resolution statement. A promise. An action. A purpose to be wrapped around our lives until we are more thoroughly shaped into the image of God's will and desire. I'll ask you to read it over prayerfully—to speak it out loud—and then sign your name to it. I think it would be good, too, if you'd consider making these resolutions with your family present or with a group of godly friends who can help you (while you also help *them*) to become everything these pledges are meant to accomplish. By no means are you promising to be perfect; rather, you're making a commitment simply to begin—to journey forward in the direction that particular resolution is pointing you.

You'll find thirteen resolutions in this book:

1. **I DO SOLEMNLY RESOLVE** to embrace my current season of life and will maximize my time in it. I will resist the urge to hurry through or circumvent any portion of my journey but will live with a spirit of contentment.
2. **I WILL CHAMPION** God's model for womanhood in the face of a postfeminist culture. I will teach it to my daughters and encourage its support by my sons.
3. **I WILL ACCEPT** and celebrate my uniqueness, and will esteem and encourage the distinctions I admire in others.
4. **I WILL LIVE** as a woman answerable to God and faithfully committed to His Word.
5. **I WILL SEEK** to devote the best of myself, my time, and my talents to the primary roles the Lord has entrusted to me in this phase of my life.
6. **I WILL BE** a woman who is quick to listen and slow to speak. I will care about the concerns of others and esteem them more highly than myself.
7. **I WILL FORGIVE** those who have wronged me and reconcile with those I have wronged.
8. **I WILL NOT TOLERATE** evil influences even in the most justifiable form, in myself or my home, but will embrace and encourage a life of purity.
9. **I WILL PURSUE** justice, love mercy, and extend compassion toward others.
10. **I WILL BE FAITHFUL** to my husband and honor him in my conduct and conversation in order to bring glory to the name of the Lord. I will aspire to be a suitable partner for him to help him reach his God-given potential.
11. **I WILL DEMONSTRATE** to my children how to love God with all their hearts, minds, and strength, and will train them to respect authority and live responsibly.
12. **I WILL CULTIVATE** a peaceful home where everyone can sense God's presence not only through acts of love and service but also through the pleasant and grateful attitude with which I perform them.
13. **I FULLY RESOLVE** to make today's decisions with tomorrow's impact in mind. I will consider my current choices in light of those who will come after me.

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No matter how well you're already doing in each of these areas or what season of life you're in, the Lord is always calling and challenging you to grow because His ability to make your life more radiant and abundant is absolutely endless. The more you grow, the more His power is able to flow through you, satisfying your heart and transforming your world.

It's a revolution. One that will affect your life in every way.

And I'm confident, my fellow sister on the journey, that in this place and through these pages, your life will start to intentionally change. With God. With abandon.

So are you ready?

Then let's go!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Priscilla". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop at the start of the "P".

PART I
THIS IS WHO I AM.



SURPRISINGLY SATISFIED



A resolution to be content



Every Bite Counts

"This is going to be a good year for you, my friend. Thirty-six is a great age."

Thirty-six.

It was the end of December, and that's how old I was about to turn. I sat across the table from a friend who'd long since passed that decade of her life and watched her brown eyes glimmer with a tinge of remembered excitement.

I'm not sure why, but something about what she said really got to me. Maybe it was just the way she said it. Maybe it was the expression in her eyes as she looked at me. Maybe it was the little smirk that curled up at the corners of her petite lips. Whatever it was, it drew me in, got my attention, and settled into my mind and heart for consideration.

I thought about this birthday of mine from her perspective. On occasion we'd discussed the happenings of her twenties, the surprises that interrupted her thirties, and the settledness that had held her hand, gratefully escorting her into her forties. She'd now been married for twenty-five years, raised three incredible children,

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dealt with the unexpected twists and turns of life that most any person standing on the cusp of her fiftieth year has probably lived through. She'd seen disappointment, experienced incredible joy, and was now living a full life complete with deep friendships and an even deeper faith.

And here at a Christmastime restaurant table adorned with a delectable molten chocolate cake that we were ravenously sharing, she sighed the full breath of a woman satisfied. She swept her blonde bangs off her eyelids, cocked her head slightly, and told me that the season I was about to enter was a good one, that I should face it with expectation and enjoy its blessings. The kids are a bit more self-sufficient, marriage a few years more mature, the body still pretty much pointed in a northerly direction.

Yup, recalling that year in her life made her smile. It had been good.

And with that simple comment spoken, she went back to her eating—fork to mouth dripping with chocolate goodness.

She must not have noticed my reaction. Didn't notice the weight of her comment hitting me with a full blow, like a baseball player swinging and connecting with the pitch. With one abrupt flick of the wrist, she had sent my heart sailing into the outfield of conviction. The thing she was suggesting, implying in so many words—the way she was proposing for me to approach this next phase of life I was entering—was exactly opposite of what my proclivity had been.

I'm the type of person, you see, who rushes ahead, who often just goes through the motions of any current activity on my way to the next one. My heart and my body haven't always been good about sharing the same space. Instead of relishing each moment, each year, each opportunity, each step on the journey, I'm constantly overeager to get to the next thing, which always looks more enticing than what's currently before me. I'm rarely satisfied in full with my present station.

A quick mental inventory revealed the facts, presenting ample evidence to support the claim that I hadn't really been in attendance for large portions of my life. As a teenager, I'd impatiently rushed

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toward young adulthood full throttle. As a single university student, I couldn't wait to be in a committed relationship and out of college so that life could "really begin." Then with a loving mate promised for life, I enjoyed our first years of marriage, but during some of them I secretly harbored discontentment with our childlessness. And when the kids started coming, the nights were long and the days even longer, and I prayed through each of them that bedtime would come more quickly today than I'd remembered it coming the day before. I was *present* for all of those years of my life as a student, a wife, a mom—a woman—and yet there was so little I could really remember, few emotions I could recall that accompanied some of the events of life. Why? Because I'd been there, but I hadn't really *been there*.

And with my thirty-fifth year coming to a close, it occurred to me that I hadn't engaged fully in *that* one either. Oh, I'd enjoyed it for the most part, but I hadn't soaked in it, relishing it, cherishing it, celebrating it, appreciating it for what it was—the only thirty-fifth year my life would ever know. Now it was nearly over, and before me stretched another year, populated with all the things, people, events, relationships, and milestones that would make it a once-in-a-lifetime experience—my only chance to fully be the person I'd be at this age and in this season. Only for the coming year would my husband be exactly like *this*. Only for these fleeting moments would my children talk, look, and act exactly like *this*. And if I chose to hurry through them in an attempt to avoid the parts I didn't like, I'd simultaneously miss all the things I *did* like about this season.

I recognized that by rushing through life, I'd been subtly devaluing those around me and the experiences I was involved in, not appreciating the importance and significance they bring to my life at this very moment, not grasping my responsibility for holding dear and treating well these gifts God has entrusted to me. Instead of embracing the privilege of being a blessing to my husband, my children, my friends, and others, I'd been quietly communicating that I wanted them to change and speed up, to get busy being somebody else, someone who's more in line with what I want and

SURPRISINGLY SATISFIED

need, to hurry along to a place where they could make me happier than they currently do.

That's been me. Always looking toward the next moment, the next month, the next event, rarely allowing myself the privilege of fully participating and embracing the happenings that were right before me for that day.

And with one final bite of the most eye-opening dessert date I may have ever had, I realized this feeling had a name: *discontentment*. He shows up at your doorstep just like mine, eager to step inside and make himself at home. But instead of only coming for short visits on rare occasion, he refuses to leave, spreading his baggage everywhere, filling up corners of your space that you thought you'd locked up to this odious intruder. He comes. He lingers. He robs you of your years. Then before you know it, you've missed out on the joys in the journey, the growth that comes from battling through the difficulties, the sweet and savory experience of creating the memories.

I snapped out of my momentary trance and looked down at my plate. No more full bites left. Just chocolate syrup lacing the bottom, along with tiny crumbs of spongy cake dotted with miniscule dollops of whipped cream. With new resolve I started scraping up everything I could salvage, not wanting to leave behind any part of this delicious experience. Mmmmm. It had been worth all the hard work. Tasted just as good as the first.

Glad I didn't miss anything on my plate.

Promising never again to miss anything in my life.



- *Carefully consider what the Bible says about contentment:*
 - “True godliness with contentment is itself great wealth.” (1 Timothy 6:6 NLT)
 - “If we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content (satisfied).” (1 Timothy 6:8 AMP)

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- “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.’” (Hebrews 13:5 NASB)
- *What have you been hurrying through?*
- *What have you been hurrying to get to?*
- *What are some of the good parts of your experience that you’ve missed in your attempt to rush through the more difficult ones?*
- *What can you do differently today to “scrape the plate”—to gather up all the good things around you and begin enjoying the journey of your life?*



The Secret

My boys like secrets. In fact, we have a whole game we play that's centered around them. Sometimes when their friends come over, we'll all stand in a single-file line. The person in front whispers a secret to the one behind him, and then the mysterious dialogue is sent from one to another until it reaches the end. Almost always by that time, whatever was shared between the first two participants has become misunderstood, misinterpreted, or otherwise manipulated along the way. Somehow the message just never gets translated clearly all the way back.

And judging from our current position in line as women today, in this culture, the same thing has happened to us. What we hear described as the secret of our satisfaction sounds a lot different than it did when it was first spoken and handed down many centuries ago.

Today we hear a philosophy of happiness that's actually been training us for a long time *not* to be happy. It says there's always something else, something more, some additional requirement we need before we can really enjoy life the way it was meant to

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be enjoyed. So the advertisements bombard us with suggestions, dripping with recommendations intended to whet our appetites and tantalize our taste buds, encouraging us to get rid of the old and acquire the new, to be dissatisfied with what we already have.

If you're single, you should have the security of marriage.

If you're married, you should have the freedom of singleness.

If you live in an apartment, you should own a home by now.

If you own a home, it should be bigger than the one you've got.

Getting the message?

Your clothes should be from *this* vendor.

Your appearance should look like *that* trend.

Your kids should be more like *those* kids.

Your standard of success should be measured by *these* standards.

The fallout from this is inevitable. Fed by such a steady diet of unclaimed desires, we can hardly help but develop a level of disdain for our current circumstances. Caught in this vicious cycle, we consequently feel incomplete and substandard. Unhappy. Uncontrolled. Unfulfilled.

Dissatisfied.

This is precisely why a satisfied woman is such a surprising woman. She is shockingly noticeable to a world that lives on a watered-down version of the secret—a secret that she obviously got the truth about. You can tell it by her peace and serenity, by her solace and restfulness, by the mysterious sense of ease that accompanies her. Her presence alone delivers an air of refreshment to any setting she enters, to anyone she's around.

The rarity and uniqueness of a woman who has chosen to be satisfied with what she has, with who she is, and with where she lives is as uncommon and worth celebrating as a Texas snowfall at Christmas. She's caught the faint whisper of a secret passed down through the ages, and she's chosen to trust its wisdom and to frame her life according to it. She's a woman of substance because she's a woman of satisfaction, a woman who's chosen contentment over displeasure.

Just like the person who first put the secret into words.

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Contentment wasn't some unique gift the apostle Paul had been given. It wasn't an automatic facet of his personality. It was a skill he had chosen and adopted, then had mastered and applied to his tumultuous life experience. As a result, he could say with biblical assurance, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Philippians 4:11).

He'd learned.

Come to realize.

Acquired the skill.

Developed the discipline.

Honed the ability.

And it all started with a "secret" (4:12)—a mystery that held strong and true even when his external circumstances were hardly conducive to living with a relaxed sense of well-being. He was well acquainted with disappointment and lack. He'd been beaten, stoned, and hounded by his enemies. In fact, when he wrote these words in a letter to Christian believers in the ancient Macedonian city of Philippi, he was in prison facing death, enduring some of the most extreme circumstances a person can imagine. Nothing was going well for him.

He wasn't in denial. He readily admitted that things looked bad. Neither was he playing the persecution card, acting like a martyr, trying to draw some measure of satisfaction from knowing he was going through more than everyone else.

He just knew a secret. And the secret gave him peace and serenity in the teeth of his ominous difficulties—the same secret we also can reach out and grab and hold on to when things are as bad as they can get, or perhaps when they're simply just not what we prefer. It's the key to unleashing a flood of joy into our hearts, the kind that rages within no matter what is raging without.

Paul's secret was this: he had *resolved* to be content.

I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well

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fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11–13)

The Greek word he originally penned in verse 11 to communicate our word *content* referred to an inner sufficiency—a satisfaction found through the depth of one’s own life with God, independent of our surroundings. When unearthed and put to use, this “secret” sufficiency is able to bring a full measure of enjoyment and emotional stability to any kind of life experience, no matter how dull or distressing.

Not just for Paul.

For you. For me.

And that puts women like us in a position to be amazingly free.

When you’ve concluded that what you already have on hand is enough, that it’s adequate—that it’s been deemed by God as *sufficient*—then you’re equipped and empowered to participate fully in the tasks set before you during this season of life. Paul described it like this:

God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work.

(2 Corinthians 9:8)

One thing leads to another. The more you believe that God’s grace to you is overflowing, the more you’ll be convinced that you will always have everything you need. And the more certain you are that you’ll never lack, the more willing and able you’ll be to give of yourself and your resources when called for because you’ll be certain God will always replenish your supply.

You can just bank on that. Your God can be trusted to grant you the supply you need to excel at His purposes. So if you don’t have *it*—whatever *it* is—it’s because you don’t need it. You may *want* it, but it’s not necessary in order to accomplish what He knows is most important for your life today. Otherwise He’d have given it to you.

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He loves you too much to “withhold the good from those who live with integrity” (Psalm 84:11).

Whatever He’s given or not given, He’s done for a specific reason—a reason known only to Him perhaps but one you can trust with full confidence, sight unseen. Every decision you need to make, every task you need to accomplish, every relationship you need to navigate, every element of daily life you need to traverse, God has already perfectly matched up with an equivalent-to-overflowing supply of His grace. If you don’t agree with that, then you either lack a proper appreciation for what you have, or you are doing things that you’re not supposed to be participating in right now.

You can always tell people who operate from a position of perceived lack and deficiency. They’re stingy with their time. They’re selfish with their resources. They’re tight fisted with their energy. They’re reluctant to sow of themselves into the lives of others because they’re afraid they don’t have enough to do it with and still have enough left over for themselves. Not enough time, energy, talent, money, skill, patience. They’re like my two-year-old, unwilling to share with his friends for fear he’ll run out of what he’s got.

But whenever we operate that way, the “every good work” that Paul outlines—the truly important tasks and relationships of life, the ones that promise blessing to us as well as to others—go unattended and undone. We’re not able to fully participate, much less excel in something, when we don’t feel like we have the proper amount, the proper brand, the proper type of resources with which to participate in the first place. So the “work” misses out on our touch, and we miss the many ways the “work” could touch us—the impact, the memories, the lessons, the experiences that God is knitting together to become a key part of our story.

God has already given enough. He always does.

And when you and I choose to recognize this and trust in His continued supply, we’ll be able to engage in life in a way we never have before. We’ll finally be living life to the fullest.

You’ve found the secret.

Now you can pass it on.

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- *A woman of contentment is aware of her needs and what God has already supplied to meet them. Begin your journey to contentment by making a list. Label one side “My Needs.” Label the other “God’s Provision.” Then match up your needs with the way God is currently meeting them. Place your list in a handy place for the times you are tempted to lean toward dissatisfaction.*
- *What might God be trying to grow in your character or cement in your relationship with Him by keeping you separated from some of the things you want but don’t yet have?*



Overflowing Blessing

Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back. (Luke 6:38 NLT)

“Use *exact measurements*.” That’s what my recipe card says. Emphasis on the word “exact.” I was given this list of instructions by a friend who not only shared her technique for baking the best bread I’ve ever tasted but also a jar of bread “starter” for me to keep in the refrigerator. Now I had the chance to see if I could match her abilities. To amaze my family with homemade bread. *That* kind of homemade bread. Like hers.

Once a week I go to the refrigerator and pull out the starter—a bubbling liquid concoction that serves as the foundation for this fabulous bread. Then I unfold the tattered piece of paper she gave me, and I carefully follow the written guidelines. These are extremely important, she told me.

Boy, was she ever right.

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This bread is moody. It has a bit of an attitude problem. You're never quite sure what sets it off, but one little bobble in the preparation process can keep the dough from rising properly or baking to a perfectly golden brown. You have to be careful.

As time has gone along, my kids have begun to help me with this, pulling their stools over to the counter, eager to dirty their hands in the kneading process. But before kneading, the flour must be added. Six cups, to be exact. And "exact" those scoops must be. I can now entrust this step into the hands of my six-year-old, who's seen with his own eyes the kind of mood swings a loaf can exhibit when fed with too much or too little flour. He's gotten this down to a science—a Luke 6:38 science: "a good measure—pressed down, shaken together."

He reaches the utensil down into the airtight flour bin and collects "a good measure." Nothing skimpy about the serving he's gathered. Thankfully he's still holding the measuring cup over the container because flour is spilling from the sides of his scoop. But knowing the need for just the right amount to be added to the ingredients, which are already poured and waiting in a nearby bowl, his tiny fingers secure a good grasp on the handle, and he gently "shakes" the cup.

I've explained to him that this shaking action eliminates the air pockets that can form underneath, occupying space that can still be filled with flour. By shaking it enough, he can be sure that every square inch of measuring cup is being used for his purpose.

Finally he puts his other hand on top of the mound and pats gently to make sure it is "pressed down." Inevitably he finds that the cup can now hold more than before. So he continues to add flour, leveling it off until he determines it's as full as possible. Then he pours the scoop into the mixing bowl.

Six times he does this. Scoop, shake, press down. Scoop, shake, press down. There's only one part of the biblical directions his illustration is lacking. And it's the part that compels us to choose contentment over discontentment every day: "a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and *running over*."

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It appears there's nothing exact about God's recipe of return to us. His gifts are overflowing. He's not stingy with His goodness or ungenerous with His supply. When you choose to give, He promises you'll have enough—more than you think—filling you back up with even more than you had to begin with. Not just a good measure, not just one that's been pressed down and shaken together—not even one that's fair, equal to what you deserve—but one that is brimming over, unable to be contained by its recipient.

Now, by no means am I suggesting that you should always and without question give of yourself at the expense of the relationships and purposes that should be prioritized in your life. Sometimes the best, most empowering word you can learn to utter is *no*. But on those occasions when you do feel genuinely led by God to give, you needn't be worried about what appears to be a dwindling amount of personal resources to suit the task. If He has endorsed your involvement, you can proceed with complete contentment and willingness, knowing He will always give back far more than you ever expended. The contented woman, when required to give of her time, her love, her resources . . . herself . . . is secure in the knowledge that she possesses enough to do it. And she looks forward to experiencing the promise of an outlandish return on her investment.

I can imagine what you may be thinking because I've thought it too . . .

- My energy level is so low.
- My “love tank” is running so close to empty, I'm sure I'm about to stall.
- It's only Tuesday, but my patience quota has already been used up for the week.
- My wallet is even emptier than I remember, and my financial needs aren't going away.

Yet just when you feel as though you're completely void of anything worthwhile to offer, or when your situation makes you feel

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justified in not being the one to participate, you'll often hear Him whispering . . .

"Give, and it will be given to you."

And when He scoops up the dividends that He'll be sending back your way, He won't be short and scanty about it. He won't skim off the excess or be bound by an "exact" measurement. He will supply you a portion that is abundantly good and beyond what is warranted. He'll shake and press, shake and press, to make sure no pockets of air are taking up space reserved for His blessing. And then He'll pile up His favor and grace into such a rounded heap that it will spill off the sides, more than you can hold. Your hands and heart will try to grasp every morsel that falls from your full container, but there will be too much coming, far too fast.

Good thing you've got a lap. For on it will fall the abundance you cannot gather any other way, the surplus for which there is no more space. And it just keeps coming and coming.

This is the reward for the woman resolved to contentment.

So "give, and it will be given to you; a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over—will be poured into your lap."

It appears that the best way to get more of what you need is to give away the little you think you have left—at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way. Yes, the best way to be surprisingly satisfied is to be irrationally released to respond to God's promptings to serve, even when doing so seems impossible because of your perceived lack.

So make the resolution—the resolution to be content. Then look toward heaven with holy anticipation, and sit with your long skirt gathered up in folds and draped loosely across your lap, prepared to catch the overflow in the welcome pockets of room you've created. Live this moment. Pour yourself out. Drain the experience of each precious day. And be prepared for God's overflowing blessing.

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- *When you consider your level of willingness to give of yourself, does it reveal more contentment or discontentment residing in your heart? In what way?*
- *Based on God's provisions that you listed at the end of the last chapter, what is one thing you could close this book and go do for someone else out of that resource?*
- *Record your thoughts regarding this statement: "Sometimes the best, most empowering word you can learn to utter is no."*



The Balancing Point

Hopefully your eyes have been opened to realize how many needs God has already met in your life that you've been discounting. Yet I'm fully aware that your list of unmet wants may still be extensive as well. So possibly this clarion call to live satisfied with what God has already given feels almost like admitted defeat—a resignation to the status quo, a life of mediocrity. Maybe it feels as if choosing contentment is a simultaneous choice to quell your desires and silence your future aspirations, to quit ever hoping for more.

On the contrary, contentment is the equilibrium between the enjoyment of life now and the anticipation of what is to come. Contentment serves as a guard against desires gone wild. It is the key to unlock you from the bondage of unrestrained longing that wells up within your heart and inevitably begins to control your life, making you a slave to what you *don't* have instead of a fully engaged participant with what you *do*. It is the faith-filled belief that what God has bestowed now is worthy of gratitude and appreciation, not merely because it is enough but because it is *good*.

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By choosing contentment, you're not getting rid of your desires; you're just demanding that they assume an appropriate, humble position in your life, not bossing you around like a tyrannical dictator forcing you to submit to his ever-growing and ever-changing list of demands. It means you no longer allow your yearnings and aspirations to control you, to rob from you the full use of and gratitude for what you've currently been given, leaving you unable to enjoy *this* because He hasn't seen fit to give you *that*.

Making this resolution of contentment will offer you an opportunity to look forward to tomorrow with peace and ease and an appropriate level of anticipation instead of the frustration and hurriedness that often accompanies our glances toward the future. It will be your ticket to live with goals and ambitions inspired by His expansive, mind-blowing will, without having to sacrifice today's blessing.

In staying *surprisingly satisfied*, you actually receive the best of both worlds. You give yourself permission to enjoy fully the things you have, the person you are, and the life you're currently living while continuing to harbor the dreams that keep you growing and stretching into the future.

So the businessperson gets to relish today's accomplishments while at the same time having high expectations for tomorrow. The homemaker learns to thrive on the joyful chaos of today's tasks while calmly, patiently looking forward to the slower pace her future may hold. The single woman is actually able to enjoy her independence—not just pretend she does—and yet be equally excited about what sharing life with a future mate may be like. She neither has to abandon hope of marriage nor cave to those depressing tinges of self-pity and emptiness.

It's a balance. A holy equilibrium. A genuine gratitude for what the day brings, all the while maintaining a controlled anticipation for what tomorrow may offer.

That's the safe, healthy place where contentment allows you to take root and take up residence. Instead of being manipulated by unrestrained discontent, instead of allowing restlessness to hustle

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you into decisions, relationships, and opportunities that you're unable to recognize as being faulty from the outset, contentment keeps your mind clear. Peaceful. Settled. Undisturbed. Happy to be *here*, and when God determines the time is right, happy to be *there*.

It's a resolution to be satisfied.

It's a resolution that will change your life.



- *Go back and reread your answers and comments from the questions in this section. Then read the resolution you are about to make. Pray about it. Sit with it a while. Rest in it. Even if you're exhausted from life's challenges and demands, make this a moment to breathe deep and savor what God is inviting you into, what He's asking you to give and what He's promising to supply you in order to do it. When you're ready, make this resolution out loud, maybe even in the presence of someone who can help hold you accountable to it. Then sign your name below it.*

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I do solemnly resolve to embrace my current season of life and will maximize my time in it. I will resist the urge to hurry through or circumvent any portion of my journey but will live with a spirit of contentment.
