

# MANAGING YOUR RESTLESS SEARCH

*Finding Your Place of Service in God's Plan*

**JANET CHESTER BLY**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Having It All, God's Way**

*I would rather  
clutch my invitation  
and wait my turn  
in party clothes  
prim, proper  
safe and clean  
But a pulsing hand  
keeps driving me  
over peaks  
ravines  
and spidered brambles  
So, I'll pant  
up to the pearled knocker  
tattered  
breathless  
and full of tales*

This book isn't for everyone.

It's for women ...

Women of faith ...

Women who have chosen Jesus as their Guide and Master for life ...

Women who're dissatisfied with pew-sitting and want to get involved ... who want a purpose ... some project that uses the spiritual knowledge they're accumulating week after week. They're after a challenge, a work that promotes the heavenly kingdom here on earth.

The usual routine of appointments, meetings, and meals to plan leaves her restless. And searching. But for what? She feels she should be doing something that she's uniquely set aside to do.

At times she shrugs off these impulses as worldly ambition or self-centered discontent. But the feeling quietly returns or persists with vigor. That's when she wonders if she's been tugged by the Spirit, tapped on the shoulder by the Divine.

Daniel Taylor, in his article, "The Fear of Insignificance," wrote that humans have a need to "feel that we count, that our lives have purpose, that we are not just a temporary configuration of atoms."\* This very need thrusts us into the search for God in the first place. Shouldn't we be satisfied? Shouldn't we experience complete contentment at the core of our being?

"I cannot live," cries a character in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, "without knowing what I am and why I exist." He vacillated between prayer and rejection of God. He studied philosophers and considered suicide. And suddenly revelation comes to him—a simple peasant who reveals to him: "We must live not for ourselves but for God."

The woman to whom this book is written struggles at the same impasse, and embraces the same truth as Tolstoy's character. She claims the cross and resurrection of Jesus to secure her place before God's throne. But, beyond her salvation, she senses something more ahead—an assignment to fulfill, a part to play, a mission to accomplish. Is this a holy summons? Or something much less?

These feelings can be tested. What is the witness from Scriptures? How has God worked in the past through other women's lives? What evidence do we have that He still actively interacts with women today?

## **HOW DOES GOD COMMUNICATE?**

Sarah heard God's prophecy through her husband: she would bear a son of great promise.

Ruth was given a compelling love for her embittered mother-in-law. Her lifelong commitment was the gateway to her place in God's design.

Hannah railed against her unbearable barrenness. God answered her cries with a special child—a great leader of Israel.

Esther was challenged by God through the exhortation of her cousin, Mordecai. She was in the right place at the right time and just needed courage to do the right thing.

God spoke to Mary through a startling announcement from the angel Gabriel.

But dramatic, historic episodes like these are not requisites for knowing God's will for us. The Scriptures say we are to do everything, even the common daily duties of life, in the name of the Lord Jesus. That's just as important as producing famous offspring or saving a race from extermination.

"There is no such thing as Christian work," says Elisabeth Elliot. "That is, there is no work in the world which is, in and of itself, Christian. Christian work is any kind of work, from cleaning a sewer to preaching a sermon, that is done by a Christian and offered to God."

Chores never end. Our lives are filled with unending, seemingly trivial busyness related to home, church, community, and work. These responsibilities are dictated by our environments. However, faithfulness to our daily obligations does not preclude the possibility that there is a divinely appointed task in addition to and including these prescribed responsibilities. It may ease some pain or distress, incite action for some necessary cause, or possibly communicate an avenue of hope or encouragement to those at a critical turning point in their lives.

The task will demand full allegiance to its Author and diligence to particular details. Otherwise, we may miss the opportunity, be unprepared for the task, or misinterpret it altogether. However, careful attention to God's nudge, prod, or His prophetic word in singling

us out for a task is not meant for our self-aggrandizement, but rather to train us to pay close attention, to learn to hear His voice and quickly respond, and to ready us for specific service.

God warns and prepares in advance when He has a future plan that involves human cooperation. There may be some training sessions, some testing periods, or adjustments in thinking needed. This may take years to accomplish as the particular project is unveiled according to God's timing, in a special place, for a definite people.

We may know some of the specific particulars initially, such as Mary did, or we may not. In either case, there still remain vague speculations about the unknown, interspersed by moments of absolute certainty as well as total disbelief.

What signs can a woman look for to confirm she's following a heavenly cue?

1. *The sense of an unfulfilled task persists.*

No matter what happens to distract you, or what turns your circumstances take, certain dreams, ideas, visions, or desires keep returning.

A teenaged Harriet Beecher Stow listened with rapt attention to her father's sermon: "Each of us was made for a purpose. Our sovereign God has a task for all. I don't know what your assigned task may be. Perhaps it's to put an end to slavery. I don't know. But I do know that if we'll get busy, God's providence will come to our aid."

That challenge began for Harriet a relentless search that wasn't satisfied until more than twenty years later as she feverishly wrote the account of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

2. *The restless seeking draws you closer to God.*

You want to know Him better and serve Him more faithfully by understanding spiritual principles and obeying His commands.

In the midst of years of seeking to find her God-given task, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote to her brother, Edward, "He [God] has given me talents and I will lay them at His feet, well satisfied if He will accept them. All my powers He can enlarge. He made my mind and He can teach me to cultivate and exert its faculties."

3. *God provides people who affirm or exhort you in the task.*

Corrie ten Boom lived the first half of her ninety years in Holland with her clockmaker father and maiden sister, Betsie. As World War II raged, she and her family bravely hid Jews fleeing the Nazis. This kindness led to many years in the infamous Ravensbruck concentration camp in Germany.

Betsie died there, but not before she vividly described a vision of future ministry for Corrie: "Don't forget—a home for the broken ones ... and our message about God's love that we discovered in this brutal darkness."

Those words haunted Corrie as she emerged miraculously from Ravensbruck, weak but alive. After her recuperation, Corrie set out to speak to others about Betsie's dream. In time she was given use of a fifty-six room mansion where concentration camp victims came for healing of body, mind, and soul.

4. *You will recognize a personal historical pattern.*

Looking at your past experiences in ministry helps you to focus your future ministry. One main pursuit, one skill to develop, or a specific people to aid will emerge as a theme in a formerly scattered view of your service to the Lord.

Catherine Marshall explained how it happened to her, shortly after her husband Peter's death. "I felt a tingling at the top of my spine. Dared I entertain a hope that He could actually be calling me for a purpose of His own; was there some special work for *me* to do?

"A sense of adventure crept in. It would be exciting to see what God wanted me to do with my new life. I sensed that when His grand design for me was revealed in its entirety, it would

include so much more than provision for economic needs ... Could it be that my dream of being a writer was part of this plan?

"Several days later a friend wrote to me: '...the following matter is on my heart and a like sentiment has come my way from various people in the congregation. I, along with thousands, earnestly hope that you will see to it that Peter's sermons, his prayers in the Senate and from his pulpit, will be published.'"

5. *God will burden you for a group of people or even a select individual or two.*

You will undeniably be drawn to these people by the Holy Spirit. You will pray for them, feel compassion toward them, and look for ways to serve them.

In 1842 the long-suffering poor of England were living through the worst hardships they had known for years. Times were bad. Wages were low. Unemployment was widespread. Poverty and hunger stalked the country. As Florence Nightingale and her wealthy family drove about London, she became completely distressed by what she saw from the carriage window. It seemed to her that half the population of London was either freezing or starving to death.

Gradually it became clear to her that God's plan for her future was to relieve these sufferings.

6. *You may receive special insight on performing your task.*

Frances Willard, the feisty leader of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in the 1800s, said: "While alone on my knees one Sabbath, as I lifted my heart to God crying, 'What wouldst Thou have me to do?' there was born in my mind, as I believe from loftier regions, this declaration, 'You are to speak for woman's ballot as a weapon for protection for her home.' Then for the first and only time in my life, there flashed through my brain a complete line of arguments and illustrations."

7. *Your motivations for service mature.*

At first, the thrill of being singled out by God may cause you to become self-absorbed. But His Spirit will gradually turn your heart toward the person of Christ and the cause of His kingdom.

## **FOUR LEVELS OF MOTIVATION FOR SERVICE**

### ***Motivated by Emotions***

Determining to accept a special task from God brings on emotions that range from exhilaration to fits of despair or feelings of unworthiness. An emotional intensity characterizes your contacts with people and situations, as you wait to hear God's voice, expectant that some miracle is just around the corner. You are determined to find God's will.

Coming to Christ brought emotions such as these to Jill Briscoe: "I wanted to serve! Me! ... But, what was I expected to do with all of this spiritual energy which was striving to release itself? ... With eyes screwed up like wrinkled sand and body shaped into a ball of tense expectancy, I strained to hear the VOICE which never came. It never came because it had already come. The law—the Law of the Eternal and not some mystic voice was to instruct my open mind."

Jill realized that God's instructions would come as she applied herself to diligent study and practice of biblical truths each day.

### ***Motivated by Needs for Fulfillment***

In addition to an inner knowing, others will affirm you and provide opportunities for service. Your need to feel wanted and needed is fulfilled as past hurts are healed and you gain confidence. You realize God's personal care and love for you through the encouragement of others. This affirmation may serve as positive reinforcement but should not remain your primary motivation for service.

Letha Scanzoni determined to be a professional trombonist. "Someday," she vowed, "I'm going to be as good as Tommy Dorsey!"

She practiced many long hours to reach that goal. One day she picked up a copy of Charles Sheldon's book, *In His Steps*. She was intrigued by this fictional account of people who asked themselves, "What would Jesus do?" in every situation they encountered. In particular, she identified with Rachel whose commitment to Christ led her to social work in rescue missions.

Rachel had been a musician too. For weeks, Letha pondered the idea of giving her musical abilities to Jesus Christ. She often played solos in churches. Wasn't this using her talents for God? Finally, she came to the painful realization: in her case, music provided personal honors more important to her than glorifying God.

Letha determined to use her talents in whatever way God directed. As it turned out, she didn't become a professional musician. Instead, she became an effective leader and speaker addressing critical contemporary issues on college campuses and at women's conferences.

### ***Motivated to Perform God's Task***

Somewhere along the line you will encounter a severe personal crisis in which the whole idea of God giving you a task will be tested. Then, you will resolve to hibernate from active service altogether, or persevere through this difficulty to the end. A logical, reasoned response of faith will replace spiritual ecstasies and fulfillment needs. Feelings of uncertainty will come less frequently, though some days you may quake like Elijah hiding from Jezebel. But you will move steadily forward despite any obstacles because of a sure faith in God and a firm commitment to His task to be performed through you.

Gladys Aylward was determined God had called her to be a missionary to China. She was told, "You'll be thirty years old before you'll be eligible to go to the mission field—too old and too poor a student to be learning Chinese."

Nonetheless, certain that God wanted her to go to China, Gladys handed her last three pounds to a travel agent toward the ninety pounds needed to sail to China. That down payment helped her feel she was almost there.

Later, she learned of Jeannie Lawson, an elderly missionary in the interior of China, who needed her skills. After months of correspondence and deliberations, on Saturday, October 18, 1930, Gladys Aylward stepped on the train at Liverpool Street station in London for the first leg of her long journey, and many astounding, fruitful years among the Chinese.

### ***Motivated to Glorify God***

This stage can come quite suddenly, even overnight, or evolve gradually through a series of trials and confrontations. Mother Teresa often said that she cared for the dying and unwanted of Calcutta, "with Jesus, for Jesus, to Jesus. That helps us put our whole heart and soul into doing it. The dying, the crippled, the mentally ill, the unwanted, the unloved—they are Jesus in disguise."

Her response to worldwide fame was simple: "I am like a little pencil in his hand. That is all. He does the thinking. He does the writing. The pencil has nothing to do with it. The pencil has only to be allowed to be used. In human terms, the success of our work should not have happened, no?"

When you view your task as a means of bringing God pleasure and spreading the knowledge of Him *no matter what the cost*, you are motivated by glorifying God. Love for God and an unshakable trust in Him permeate every circumstance. Disappointments are taken more easily in stride. So are successes. Contentment with life's uncertainties rules. The will of God, the honor of Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit are the focus of each day.

"Within me there is no good thing," "Without Him, I can do nothing," are heartfelt sentiments, rather than biblical clichés. You will be marked by a graciousness and godly

sensitivity, and people in need seek you out—most often the people you’re called to serve. You will want to truly worship God with deep love and gratitude, rather than making persistent requests. To be alone with God is pure delight. To give your energies and sacrificial devotion to imperfect humans is a high privilege.

Does this mean that any task not motivated by glorifying God is ineffective?

Not at all.

The Holy Spirit works through servants at any stage, and uses both failures and victories for their training and His glory. However, the spiritually sensitive woman will ask God’s help to purify and raise her motives for service for its greater effect. Meanwhile, no one can fulfill your task in quite the same way as you, because you’re handpicked, carefully tutored, molded, and ready for God’s use.

But the task you perform will have its most powerful effect when your motive for service is to glorify God.

### **BUT, WHY ME?**

“I still have a very ordinary, simple person trapped in this rich, gorgeous, successful body ... but everyone thinks of ‘ordinary’ as some kind of skin disease,” quipped well-known comedian, Erma Bombeck.

We all feel ordinary. Gail Denham of Newberg, Oregon remarked, “All our teaching and doctrine tells us we are chosen by God and here for a special reason. While intellectually I believe this, it is hard to believe I am part of a ‘very special purpose’ because I don’t FEEL special at all.”

We may not feel special or fitted for a task, but that’s alright because it is God who will equip us to perform the chosen work. He delights in blossoming ordinary, fallible children of His into glorious, competent ambassadors. Or He may convert beautiful, spoiled, or otherwise beings into rare souls who champion humble causes. All types of personalities can be used as martyrs, role models, or movers in His grand design.

God uses workers who are available to listen and act and are trustworthy and trainable. God needs servants like this.

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few,” Jesus said. “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field” (Matthew 9:37-38).

Of course, the *world’s* history books will make little mention of these heroines. God’s chosen are the secret, hidden stories waiting to be unveiled in a future heavenly awards ceremony. And most of these unexpected recipients will be very ordinary by anyone’s standards.

So why you?

Why not you?

You can have it all—salvation, fulfillment on earth, and treasures in heaven—if you’re willing to do it ... God’s way.

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### **CHALLENGE TO ACTION**

In *The Baronet’s Song* by George MacDonald, Gibbie perceived “that the only hope of understanding lies in doing. He would run to do the thing he had learned yesterday ...” Each chapter in this book will end with exercises that will help you “run to do the thing you just learned.” At whatever stage you are in your task-finding and preparing, there’s something you can be doing right now.

1. PRAY. Ask God to open your heart and mind to what He wants you to understand about your service for Him.

2. READ. Meditate on Ephesians 2:10; John 17:4; Hebrews 10:24; and Jeremiah 29:11. What do these verses tell you about finding your task?

What do these verses tell you about your responsibility for others finding their tasks?

3. PRAY AGAIN. Ask God to bring to your mind other women who need to understand the principles of task-finding. Invite them to study this book with you.

4. List at least one question you hope will be answered for you through this study.

5. Do you feel you've been chosen by God for some special purpose? If so, do you know what it is?

6. If there were a huge billboard just outside your town with space available to you to advertise some service you could perform for your community, what would it be? Draw a sample design.

What did your *first thoughts* say to you about your inner motivations?

7. Read quickly through the "Four Levels of Motivation for Service" again. What stage most accurately describes you right now?

Where would you like to be?

### **DEEPER CHALLENGE**

Read Hebrews 5:4-5. Think through your observation of and experience with women in our society and how they strive to find their place and purpose. How does that compare with the biblical way? How does that compare with your way?

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