

**press play**



press  
▶ play

Patti Gordon

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To Mom and Dad:  
the other great teachers of my life.



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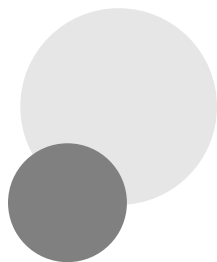
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thank you...

▶ When God gives us an assignment, He always blesses us with exactly what we need to accomplish it. Paramount in the blessings God provided as I worked on getting this book into your hands were people to help and support me along the journey. We all have our limitations and weaknesses, and God knew just who I would need to shore up mine. Many are old friends I have known for years. Others are new friends I met in the process of writing. But old or new, each played a crucial role in bringing this book to fruition. I will treasure each in my heart for many years to come.

First, I would like to thank Lorraine Pintus, a talented author, speaker, and friend who was by my side from the very beginning. She saw something promising in the first few pages I sent her. From that point on, she was always there asking the same wonderful question: “What can I do to help you?” Despite her own frantic schedule of writing, speaking, and taking care of a husband and

family, she reviewed chapters, shared her incredible insights, helped me brainstorm, prayed with me, and listened to me cry. Thank you, Lorraine. So much of this book is a tribute to you. I will always be grateful for your generous heart and years of precious friendship.

I would also like to thank Donna Moody, another gifted writer and friend who has made priceless contributions to my life and to this book. Donna met with me on many mornings over a cup of coffee and a glowing computer screen, looking for that elusive “something” that makes a chapter work. Her sensitivity, honesty, remarkable writing ability, and treasured friendship have been such an encouragement to me, not only during the process of writing, but also throughout the years I have known her. Donna has always been there for me—even though I am sure it has cost her countless hours of sleep.

Penny Whipps is a gift from God. I have no doubt that God set up the strange set of circumstances that brought Penny into my life. In the middle of it all, Penny introduced me to Multnomah. She encouraged, supported, and made me laugh like no one but Penny could. I praise God for my wonderful, wacky friend with a precious heart for God and one of the greatest talents for promotions and PR that I have ever seen.

I also want to thank David Sanford, a literary agent par excellence with a passion for God and people. After an amazing whirlwind of events, I ended up standing dumbfounded with a book contract in my hands. I didn't know a thing about publishing and didn't have a literary agent, so David volunteered to review my contract for me. He made sure all the i's were dotted and t's were crossed. Then he wouldn't let me pay him. I am honored to know a man who demonstrates, in so many ways, that his life is all about glorifying God.

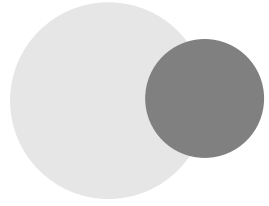
Dorit Radandt Dacre is a precious friend and one of the sweetest people I know. Dorit opened up the world of publishing for me. Many thanks, Dorit, for all you have done to bring this book to fruition. But the greatest gift you have given me is your steadfast love and acceptance through the years. You have seen me at my very best and at my very worst. Thank you for loving me anyway.

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There are many more people I need to thank, but there simply aren't enough pages. So many friends and family members have prayed for me, encouraged me, given me their honest feedback, and stood by me through thick and thin. I have learned much about love from their lives. Thank you all for every word of encouragement, every prayer, and every time you told me you loved me. You are an integral part of each line in this book, and I thank and praise our awesome God for you.

*Patti*





# foreword

▶ Oswald Chambers said that “the author who benefits you most is not the one who tells you something you did not know before, but the one who gives expression to the truth that has been dumbly struggling in you for utterance.”<sup>1</sup>

Before you dive into the first chapter, I want you to know: You are going to love this book. And you are going to fall in love with Patti as you read, *not* because she tells you something new, but because she poignantly captures in words the elusive rumblings of your soul, the fears and dreams of your own life.

As you read, you will laugh (oh my gosh, the humiliation of her first class speech makes mine look like a piece of cake). You will cry (I could so relate to the agony Patti felt when she learned that not only her dad had been killed in a tragic accident, but her two sisters as well). Often you'll feel a sense of gratitude to Patti because as she seeks to follow God to the core of her being, she expresses the doubts you have feared to say out loud, doubts that are burningly honest: *God, I've prayed and prayed to You. Are You deaf? Why don't You answer my prayers?*

Sometimes the doubts Patti expresses are angry: *I know why this happened, God. YOU set me up!* Sometimes they are hopeful but uncertain: *Okay, God, this doesn't feel good, but I'll do it because You seem to be leading me in this direction.* But always the doubts are searingly honest: *Lord, how is it that You continue to deny me my dreams when I have followed You with every ounce of devotion I can muster?*

I know that this book will encourage you—that Patti's life will encourage you. How can I be so certain? Because I've known Patti for over thirty years, and so often she has been an encouragement to me.

I'll never forget the first day I met Patti. I was struck by her large doe eyes and gentle cooing voice. I sensed in her a strange mixture of velvet and steel. Several times I thought, *This girl is just too nice. She can't be for real.* But then I got to know Patti, *really* know her. I met her family. I saw her on good hair days and on days when she would say that a sheet over her head would have been an improvement. I listened to her dreams. I heard her anguish over deep losses and disappointments. I watched her walk through all kinds of circumstances, from the wildly weird to the mundane routines that entrap us all. And through it all, I witnessed firsthand the authentic way Patti lives her life and her relentless pursuit of God in spite of genuine doubts.

Patti is the real thing, and these days that is a rare commodity. I don't know about you, but I want to hear and learn from someone who is real. I don't have much use for mirages and theories that tickle the ears but don't stand up against the violent gales of real life.

There is one more thing I think you should know before you venture into these pages. Patti has a heart, a big one. And she cares

about *you*. Oh, she may not know you by name or be able to describe your face, but she feels your longings, and her heartfelt prayer is for God to satisfy your deepest desires. I know because I have been with her, on my knees, and I've listened as she has cried out to God on your behalf, asking Him to touch you as you read and to speak to you in your present situation.

Patti's reason for writing this book has nothing to do with vain imaginings. Writing this book has cost her—a *lot*—but she knew her sacrifice would be worth it if in some small way God would touch you through her words. So go ahead. Turn the page. But first, may I say a prayer on your behalf? Because it is my desire as well to see God work in your life. And God's Word makes it clear that enjoying the good things of God begins with a simple request to ask Him to work (Matthew 7:7–8). So pray with me...

*Lord, I don't believe it is an accident that I now hold this book in my hands. I believe that You have directed me to pick it up because You want to say something to me, to encourage me, to teach me. So right now I open my heart to You. I lay aside anything that would hinder me from hearing what You may want to express to me. Please, Lord, speak to me. I am listening...*

*Lorraine Pintus*

Speaker and coauthor of *Intimate Issues* and *Gift-Wrapped by God*





# how it all began

▶ I was in my midthirties and had been fighting off a bad case of midlife crisis for about a year. I'd never married, had a job I didn't like, was broke, and in short, felt like a failure. All those dreams of a happy life with a man I loved seemed even more remote than they did back when I was sitting in Mr. Massey's algebra class stealing a peek at Jim Johnson to see if he was stealing a peek at me.

Ever since I was old enough to bat my eyes at the neighbor boy, I had prayed for a husband. Once I got a husband, life would fall in place. I would wrap my life around his, help with his ministry, make him happy, and spend his money. It was all quite simple.

But even though I showed up at what seemed to be every singles event the church sponsored, a ring never appeared on my finger and a man never appeared at my side. I was left counting the candles on the cake each year, wondering if I would be the one sitting in the nursing home watching all the other old people's children and grandchildren scurry by. Would I be the one huddled in the corner clutching the little green afghan given to me by some

tender-hearted lady at Christmastime—the kind who asks the staff nurse, “Who can I cheer up that doesn’t get many visitors?” Would I be the one they quietly whispered about as they tried not to stare? “She never married. What a pity.”

Those were the places my mind would wander. Those were the days when I was miserable. No purpose, no future, no hope. Those were the days when I cried out to God and begged Him to change my life—to *do* something, by golly—to give me love, security, and peace.

And He did.

Oh, I got what I wanted. But it was not in the package I expected. I did not get a husband, a fat bank account, and a purpose—all on a silver platter. It was even better. I got love, security, and peace that did not rely on something that could change, die, or leave me. I got a hope that could go the distance.

And the package wasn’t even delivered in a way I would have guessed. It came in a series of life lessons that only God could have engineered—lessons about the truth. This book is about those lessons and the new life they brought.

A life where everything was different—but the only thing that changed was me.

*Patti Gordon*

section

1

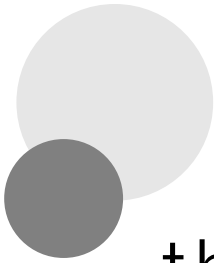
finding a  
▶ family

Love always means going to others,  
not demanding that they come to us.

PAUL TOURNIER, *ESCAPE FROM LONELINESS*

The bond that links your true family is not one of blood,  
but of respect and joy in each other's life.  
Rarely do members of one family grow up under the same roof.

RICHARD BACH, *ILLUSIONS*



# the promise

▶ The engine coughed. Then quiet.  
I was going to see Mark.

I pulled the key from the ignition and slipped it into my purse.

Powdery light from the street lamps sifted through the chilly night mist painting shimmering rings along the ribbon of asphalt. Iridescent puddles of rainwater danced on the pavement. The moon was full.

My shoes clicked a steady cadence that echoed along the car-lined street. I was running late, again. I had managed to get home from work at a fairly decent hour, but by the time I made dinner, breezed through the mail, and rifled through my closet for something appropriate to wear, I was running a good twenty to thirty minutes behind.

I wanted to see Mark. He would be there tonight, along with a host of friends and acquaintances—all with stories of days gone by, yet each with a new life fashioned from old fears, new loves, and persistent prayers. I longed to see them all again, but it was Mark who drew me there that cold and rainy evening.

It had been almost three years since a friend from church introduced me to this legend of a man. For months before I met him, I had heard wonderful things about Mark. From the moment I met him, I knew they were true.

Mark was a tall, dark-haired runner whose heart of kindness reflected in his gentle smile. The contentment of another world seemed to rest within him. He was at peace—totally, completely—with himself and with his world. Everyone I knew was drawn to Mark, young and old alike. Someone was always waiting to talk with him whenever I saw him at church or in a crowd. Waiting for that encouraging word that he so guilelessly gave.

Mark and I enjoyed mutual friends, chatted when we saw each other after church or at Bible study, and had a couple of hour-long conversations on the phone. I loved to talk with him. He was not the type to stay on the surface for long. He always listened, yet he always knew just when to share treasures from his own life. He challenged me to see the world from a different perspective and search through the clutter of life for the things that would last.

I was drawn to Mark, but something inside me kept him at arm's length. Several times he asked if we could get together. I longed to say yes and chat over dessert or a hot cup of coffee. Yet somehow I could not write his name on my calendar. I wanted to listen to him laugh as we fed ducks in the park down the street. But all I could hear was the echo of a promise I had made many years before.

I was fifteen years old. Summer rain pelted the sliding glass door. The creek swelled until it overflowed onto the grassy banks of our backyard. The thunder rolled. But we were safe and sound inside

our beautiful Tennessee home. Mom sat in a kitchen chair. I stood behind her, my hands on her shoulders. Two of my sisters stood by our side. Dan and Carol Toner, our neighbors and dear family friends, stood before us. Slowly and haltingly they found the words. There had been an automobile accident. My father was dead. Two of my sisters were dead.

I stood—stunned.

This couldn't be right. Not them. Not us. Not me.

Yet their words continued, beating their awful truth into our lives. Suddenly. Fiercely. Unfairly. I wanted to run. Somewhere...anywhere...to a place where none of this had happened, where our front door would open and my sisters would bound through, where Dad would hold me tight and tell me they had lied.

But I couldn't run. There was no place to go. Instead, I stood behind that kitchen chair, numb, helpless, disbelieving.

For a while I thought I was strong enough to beat it, to never feel the pain of following three silent hearses as they wound their way past my father's childhood home. Yet as the numbness waned, the pain began to seep beneath the veneer of my smile. Longings stirred, and memories found their way into each moment.

But I had to fight.

I had to be strong.

I knew that if I let just one small drop of feeling slip into my hollow heart, a tidal wave of pain would follow, and I would surely drown.

Then no one could save me.

I had shared a room with Barbara. She was eleven when she died. I remember the first night I lay awake and stared across the moonlit room at her empty bed. It was neatly made; the pillow placed just so, just the way she always left it. She should have been

lying there, her silky blond hair falling across her forehead, the softness of her breathing gently reminding me that I was not alone. I wanted her to know how sorry I was that I had fought with her the last time I saw her. I wanted to tell her that I loved her and missed her very much. I wanted to thank her for her unselfish willingness to always let me have the last M&M.

Janet was ten when we buried her. She had tried so hard to be my friend, but I so rarely found time for her. I would brush her aside as I left to take a walk with a neighborhood friend or refuse to play with her as I retreated to my room to read a book. I wished that I could tell her how sorry I was for the tears I had caused. I wished that I could let her know how much I really loved her. Now I would give anything to help her with her homework, brush her hair, or let her beat me at another game of Hearts. It was especially hard to know that Janet would not be coming home.

Then there was Dad. *Oh Dad, how can I possibly face this world without you?*

Two years later I finally cried. The pain broke through. Great waves of sorrow pounded on my heart, and I did the only thing I knew to survive.

I made the promise.

I'm not sure exactly when. It might have been on graduation day. I longed to see Dad's beaming face peek from behind the camera as I walked across the stage. I had studied hard for him. Or it might have been on a Saturday night when I needed him to shake hands with a boy I was dating and let him know he was expecting me home by twelve. Or maybe it was when I missed his laughter at Christmas or his arm around my shoulder at the Tri Delta parents day dinner. I don't remember exactly when, but I made a decision, a promise if you will...

*Never again will I let anyone so deep into my heart that they can hurt me this badly when they leave.*

Across the street, another lone figure threaded its way along the sidewalk and through the row of cars parked like motionless soldiers guarding the building ahead. I stepped to the curb, looked both ways, then dashed across the street. Warm golden light streamed from the windows and beckoned me up the steps to the front door. No need to knock tonight.

Inside people were everywhere—one hundred, maybe two. Lots of warm embraces as old friends greeted each other for the first time in years, a steady hum of voices catching up to the present, telling tales of the past, remembering.

I plunged into the sea of faces and began my search. Where was Mark?

My eyes came to rest on an old roommate stationed contentedly with her new husband only a few feet away. I slipped in beside her to deliver a smile, a few words, a quick hug, then moved to the circle of another dear friend. And another...and another. Like wandering through the pages of an old, familiar book, I made my way through the crowd, immersed in the comfort and familiarity of people with whom I had shared so many chapters of life. Their voices stirred forgotten memories sweetened with the tempering of time. Yet another voice whispered softly from within, reminding me of unfinished business to which I must attend.

*Where is Mark?*

I inquired, then followed a pointed finger to a cluster of people standing by a wall. Of course. I should have known that Mark would be surrounded, as always, by people who loved him. As I

gazed at the huddled group of his friends, my resolve weakened. I wasn't sure I was ready for this, but it wasn't my choice, or my timing, for that matter.

"Excuse me. Pardon me. Oh, I'm sorry, excuse me."

I reached the group and stood silently behind a solid wall of shoulders—faithful friends, side by side, oblivious to the swarming crowd behind them. I rose to my tiptoes, straining for a glimpse. A head turned, kind eyes met mine, and a step aside sent a ripple through the gathering as each surrendered a tiny space that made room for one more. As I stepped into the opening and found the countenance of my friend, a flood of emotion was pierced by a tiny ray of relief.

At least the casket was open.

Mark's face was peaceful, as always, but the cancer they had found just before I met him had taken its toll. His cheeks were hollow and pale. His thinning hair revealed a crooked scar—evidence of the many attempts this world had made to keep him. His eyes were closed in a final farewell to the pain that had etched his soul and then, in turn, touched the depths of ours.

The lines of his face softened as a watery veil appeared before my eyes. I stood, transfixed, silently gazing at what was no longer the Mark I knew. His voice was silent. His smile had disappeared. I stared at a shadow of what had been—an empty vessel with the indescribable privilege of having held, for a place and time, a truly remarkable soul.

I stood. I waited. I hoped against hope that the softness of his lashes would flutter open again to reveal eyes that could see through souls. I prayed. I remembered. Then I swallowed hard, reached up to brush the cool trickle from my cheek, and drank in one last memory of the friend I almost knew.

Turning, I silently made my way back through the crowd—lost in the darkness of a world of regret. I had known that Mark was dying when I met him. He had beckoned me in, but a promise to protect my heart had robbed me of a treasure.

I would never know the richness of hours across a table sharing stories of our childhoods. I would never feel the breathless joy of struggling to keep up with the long-legged runner as we raced across the grocery store parking lot. I would never hear him tell me all the lessons God had taught that helped him live and die so well.

He would never laugh with me until we cried. He would never taste my apple cobbler on a Sunday afternoon. He would never know the comfort of my hand in his as he struggled for his breath upon that hospital bed.

I turned the metal knob and stepped into the misty evening. The door clicked. The hum of voices ceased. The frosty world enveloped me—colder, emptier than it had been before my last good-bye.

The silence of the night was broken only by the staccato of my heels as they tapped their familiar rhythm along the street. The world drifted by, a sentinel of soft gray buildings shrouded in a dreamlike haze.

It was finished. Mark was gone. Yet his memory echoed through the emptiness of my life. For Mark was not the only one I had kept outside my world.

How many lonely evenings had I longed for someone who really knew me? How many tasteless meals had I eaten all alone? How many Sunday mornings had I watched them leave—two by two, three by three, family by family—while I stood smiling, bidding them farewell until another week passed and I would once again sit next to them, inches away yet worlds apart?

How many times had I looked away, out of fear of rejection, when a glance and a smile could have encouraged a soul or opened the door to a new world of friendship? How many times had I covered my feelings with quick wit and laughter, only to steal the precious honesty that binds heart to heart? How many times had I refused to feel the love that I was afraid I would lose?

I reached inside my purse and fumbled for my keys. Opening the door, I sank into a crumpled mass on the seat. Dejected, exhausted, longing for another chance to stand behind that kitchen chair and live my life, from that point on, so differently.

I now saw my promise as the traitor it was—a sepulcher of safety, a prison fashioned from my fear. I'd trusted it to keep my heart safe, but it had never sheltered me from pain. Pain had always found me. The only thing that promise had ever kept from me was love.

And love was all I had ever wanted.

I sat. I wept. I wondered.

Would I ever find a place of safety—a fortress from the misery that love would leave behind? Was I to spend my days without the hope of comfort...or healing...or peace?

Then, as if to answer, a still and quiet voice awakened in my heart and whispered, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

I raised my head.

I knew that voice. It was the voice of One I trusted. He understood my grief and sorrow. He Himself had born the cross of pain and died for me and rose again. And He had told me:

"I will not fail you or forsake you." (Joshua 1:5)

Such beautiful words. But were they true?

Where had He been those many nights when I lay crying, longing, praying for my family to be whole again? Where had He been those countless evenings when we sat down to dinner with three empty chairs? Where had He been those Christmases when no one could hang the lights quite like Dad?

Where was He now when all of life seemed hopeless?

Softly...gently...I sensed a stirring in my heart, a tender touch. Then I sensed His presence. I felt His peace that passes understanding. It blanketed my soul and calmed my heart. Unexplainable. Undeniable. He was there, beckoning me. In His still and quiet voice, Jesus called to me that night...

And I came running.

His peace washed over me like waves upon a shore, and with it came a simple understanding that He had always been there, waiting, wanting me to turn to Him for comfort, longing to heal my broken heart. I knew that He was there and that He loved me.

I would never have to look upon His body in a casket. I would never hear His last good-bye. I would never have to weep without Him. He was my God and my bastion of safety. For I was His daughter, and He was the Father who would never leave.

Six years have passed since Mark's death, and God has proven faithful. He has become my rock, and from that rock I can reach out and risk rejection. God's perfect love gives me strength to open up my heart, for now I know that He can heal the pain that love might bring. Through His love He teaches me to love, and life has meaning.

I know I will see Mark again someday, face to face. We will talk and laugh, and I will thank him for the many ways he changed me.

I will tell him stories of fears I have surrendered and of love I have found. But most of all I'll thank him for that cold and rainy evening when, even in his silence, he proclaimed the truth. And in that truth I found a new beginning,

a new love,  
and a broken promise.



“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden,  
and I will give you rest.”

MATTHEW 11:28