

She Did
What She
*Five words
of Jesus
that will change
your life*
Could

Elisa Morgan



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at www.tyndale.com.

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

She Did What She Could: Five Words of Jesus That Will Change Your Life

Copyright © 2009 by Elisa Morgan. All rights reserved.

Cover photo of jar copyright © by Imagestate/photolibary. All rights reserved.

Cover photo of oil copyright © by ilker canikligil/iStockphoto. All rights reserved.

Cover background photo copyright © by Jacom Stephens/iStockphoto. All rights reserved.

Designed by Jacqueline L. Nuñez

Edited by Susan Taylor

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920, www.alivecommunications.com.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Morgan, Elisa, date.

She did what she could (SDWSC) : five letters that will change your life / Elisa Morgan.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4143-3378-6 (hc)

1. Christian women—Religious life. 2. Social justice—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Mary, of Bethany, Saint. 4. Bible. N.T. Mark XIV, 3-9—Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Title.

BV4527.M635 2009

241'.677—dc22

2009022879

Printed in the United States of America

15 14 13 12 11 10 09
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book makes me want to get up and do something. Now. Today.

—**Dr. Kevin Leman**, author of *Have a New Kid by Friday* and *Have a New Husband by Friday*

This book is not only inspiring and thoughtful, but it's a profound challenge to each of us to stop focusing on what we can't do and invest our lives and energies in what we can. *She Did What She Could* is empowering to anyone who has ever asked, "What difference could I possibly make?"

—**Margaret Feinberg**, national speaker and author of *The Sacred Echo* and *Scouting the Divine*

Elisa Morgan has been unleashing power in people for a long time. This book is a little time bomb that will go off when you know your gifts and your limits and say yes to God in the midst of them.

—**John Ortberg**, pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church and author of *Faith and Doubt*

I loved *She Did What She Could!* What is amazing to me is that one little phrase issues such a profound challenge for the heart and at the same time gives a deep and abiding peace. Thank you, Elisa, for this beautiful Bible teaching and the tender stories that call me to live a great big life, doing what I can today and believing God for what I can do tomorrow.

—**Angela Thomas**, speaker and best-selling author of *Do You Think I'm Beautiful?*

What an empowering book! *She Did What She Could* made me yearn for a deeper, more loving relationship with Jesus. It caused me to take a hard look at what I can do—me, an ordinary woman, profoundly and passionately loved, and to act out of that love. Simply, with a sincere heart. Not to be seen, not out of duty, obligation, or guilt, but to please and serve the One who loved me first. I want to “live loved.”

—**Fern Nichols**, founder and president of Moms In Touch International

Elisa Morgan paints a vigorous picture of life on the front lines. This book is a convincing reminder that we all have Kingdom work to do, that the opportunities are all around us, that God is powerfully accomplishing his purposes for the world through us, and that more—much more!—will be accomplished when his sons and daughters serve him together.

—**Carolyn Custis James**, president of Synergy Women’s Network, Inc., and author of *The Gospel of Ruth*

I love this book because it challenged me in such a way that I am now compelled to respond. And really, isn’t that what we all want in a book? Elisa brilliantly weaves truths from biblical examples into our modern-day opportunities and spurs us on to action. It brings me great joy to recommend this amazing book.

—**Lysa TerKeurst**, speaker, president of Proverbs 31 Ministries and author of *Becoming More Than a Good Bible Study Girl*

To the Marys.
You have each shaped my “she.”

Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	xiii
Part 1: She Did What She Could	1
1 She Did What She Could	3
2 She Did What She Could	11
3 She Did What She Could	15
4 She Did What She Could	21
5 She Did What She Could	29
6 She Did What She Could	35
Part 2: What If I Did What I Could?	39
7 What If . . . I Did What I Could?	41
8 What If . . . I Did What I Could?	47
9 What If . . . I Did What I Could?	55
10 What If . . . I Did What I Could?	63
11 What If . . . I Did What I Could ?	73
12 What If I Did What I Could?	81
Part 3: What If We Did What We Could?	87
13 What If . . . We Did What We Could?	89
14 What If We Did What We Could?	99
Afterword	111
Notes	113
About the Author	115

Acknowledgments

She Did What She Could came to me in a gradual, reverberating ripple until its message lodged itself solidly in my heart and now motivates my every day. I didn't expect it. I didn't ask for it. At times, I'm not sure what to do with it. But I do believe *She Did What She Could* is from God, and my commitment is to seek his leading in its expression and investment.

Others have been tenaciously at my side through the development of the concept, the writing, and the final expression of this book. There were many times when I couldn't seem to move ahead or didn't even know if I was supposed to. I am so grateful for their "picking up a corner of my mat" and taking me to Jesus as the paralytic's friends did for him in Mark 2.

To those who read and advised, thank you for your wise input. Kenna Barron, Valerie Bell, Dr. Craig Blomberg, Carla Foote, Carol Kuykendall, Karen Marchant, Evan Morgan, Naomi Cramer Overton, Kendall Parkhurst, Karen Parks, Shelly Radic, Dr. Liz Selzer, Georgia Skiles, Dr. Brian Stafford, and Philip Yancey, your investment made *She Did What She Could* tighter, clearer, more applicable to more people, and better biblically.

To Rick Christian and Lee Hough, thank you for representing *She Did What She Could* with such passion. And Lee, thank you for your valuable writing input in readying the first draft for the eyes of others.

To my friends at Tyndale—Carol Traver, Sue Taylor, Becky Nesbitt, Maria Eriksen, and Ron Beers—thank you for embracing *She Did What She Could* with your whole hearts. Wow!

And to the board, staff, field leaders, and volunteers of MOPS International, thank you for first receiving the message of *She Did What She Could*, then reproducing it in a movement of individuals whose lives were changed, and now wanting to make others different by SDWSC-ing every single day.

Introduction

SDWSC: Five Letters That Can Change the World

Most of us care. We really do. We care about our own lives, for sure, and also about the lives of those around us. We care about poverty and injustice, about orphans and the sick. We care about the folks who live and work alongside us and about what happens in their families, in their hearts, and in their heads. And yet, weighed down by everyday responsibilities—bringing home a paycheck, putting food on the table, shuttling kids around—we question our ability to make a difference. When we're bombarded by the latest celebrity-help-the-world-athon, we shrug our shoulders in futility. *Me? How?* Faced with the seeming insignificance of what we have to offer, we don't offer anything.

Maybe it's because we think that in order for it to count, to make a difference that matters, we have to do something *big*, or *everything* we could do, or something no one else has done.

But that's not true.

The Backstory

What can we do?

I came to ask this question one night while watching the *NBC Nightly News* anchored by Brian Williams. My kids were

off doing their own things elsewhere. My husband was traveling. I was sitting on my couch with a stack of files from work by my side and my dinner in front of me on the ottoman. It was a normal night of multitasking: eating dinner, working, and watching the news.

I heard Brian say something about a special report from Ann Curry of the *TODAY* show that was important enough to re-air in the evening. I looked up from my reading as Ann apologized for the pictures she was about to show—not exactly appropriate for the dinner hour. Then she launched into a tale of torture, describing the conditions of mentally retarded adults in Serbia, who were kept in cribs their *entire lives*. Across the screen came pictures of grown men in the fetal position, sucking their thumbs and rocking back and forth in frozen contortions.

“Some of these men have never been released from their beds,” Ann commented.

How can this be? I found myself standing in the middle of my family room, hands raised in the air, *howling*. Then a sob erupted, and tears started down my face.

Now, I’m not a stranger to tragedy. I’ve sat at the bedsides of the elderly as they loosened their grip on their dignity—and on life. I’ve preached in rescue missions and prisons. I’ve traveled to Central America, South America, and the Caribbean and have witnessed firsthand the poverty and deep needs of the people there. Once I viewed the head of a horse, discarded by a butcher, in a muddy, rutted row of shacks. Another time I trudged through a jungle to visit a family consisting of three children, the oldest of which was seven

years old. I gaped at the four-year-old cook stirring their dinner of beans while shooing flies off its surface. I've seen hard stuff before.

But something cracked me open that night, and like a foot jammed in a doorway, it wouldn't let me close back down.

Do something.

A week later I saw another story of human tragedy on CBS's *60 Minutes*: hundreds of thousands of Congolese women who were victims of multiple rapes.

How can this be?

And then I heard the head of the International Justice Mission, speaking about sex trafficking, say that twenty-seven million people have been sold into forced prostitution.

What?

During these unsettling weeks, as I heard of these soul-troubling tragedies, I had been working my way through a book in which one particular story demanded my return day after day. It wasn't a new tale. Actually, it was one I'd read many, many, *many* times. But in this particular season it somehow grabbed on to my soul, squeezing it tight and wringing from it a reaction that required attention.

The Story

She saw him across the room and immediately sensed a familiar awareness in the very core of her being. It wasn't romantic. It wasn't sexual. It wasn't "needy." It was more like a primal pull, a "knowing and being known" kind of drawing. From within her arose a conviction that here she faced a defining

moment, an opportunity to somehow be better than she'd ever imagined she could be.

The room was thick with aromas from the meal, smoke from the grilled lamb rising in tendrils toward the ceiling. Conversation buzzed about her, punctuated by laughter and accompanied by background music.

Clutching the present she had prepared, she wound her way through the group that had gathered around him, approaching with confidence but not without concern. When she reached him, he looked up at her and smiled. The crowd shifted to make room for her but then drew in a collective breath as she presented the beautiful flask, a work of art in itself.

Without hesitation, she snapped the long neck off the vessel, and richly perfumed oil bubbled from the opening, dripping onto her hands. Then she raised the bottle and extravagantly tipped its contents fully on his hair. The fragrant potion oozed down his temples, his cheeks, and onto his neck. Lifting his gaze, he met her eyes and received her offering with gratitude.

A hollow silence, awkward and stiff, descended on the room. One from his inner circle of friends barked out an objection: "What a waste! Think how many hungry people could have been fed with what it cost!" His words gave permission to the other stunned observers so that murmurs of disapproval traveled through the room. Rejection and judgment rained down on her.

Again he met her eyes, understanding the meaning of her gesture better than anyone else present. "She has done

a beautiful thing. Yes, her gift was expensive, but the money that went for it would never pay for the food needed for all the hungry in the world. She meant this as an offering uniquely for me, to prepare me for what I am facing. She did what she could. And because she did what she could, what she did will be remembered as long as I am remembered.”

Everyone’s Story

Jesus said that because “she did what she could,” her action would be remembered as long as he was remembered. **She Did What She Could. S-D-W-S-C.**

How many times had I read this story, heard it taught, or sat through a sermon about it and missed that sentence? I remembered the woman and her discomfort, her exposure. I remembered Jesus and his love for her. The perfume and its expense. The critical disciples and their judgmental comments. But this sentence—“She did what she could”—how had I missed it so many times?

As I read and reread it, I began to see Jesus’ response to the woman in a way I hadn’t before. He had defended the woman’s action and pronounced that it would be paired with the Good News wherever it is preached throughout the world. It was so worthy, so accepted, so descriptive of God’s love, that what she did would be permanently—eternally—attached to the Good News of God’s gracious care for humanity.

Where else in Scripture is such a statement made? What was this beautiful thing that Jesus paired with the gospel? What did she do?

She did what she could.

Those five words hit me—hard. Rising up inside me and standing my heart at attention, they grabbed me and pushed me to a permanent paradigm shift.

She did what she could—SDWSC.

Whether it was related to the mentally retarded adults in Serbia, the ravaged Congolese women, the children enslaved by sex traffickers, the AIDS orphans, the starving millions, or any other seemingly unfixable need before me, I had caught a glimpse of a life-shaping concept in this story about a woman who did what she could.

I lifted the corner of this thought to discover a fuller, broader, more challenging, and yet more realistic question than I'd ever considered before. A question that promised an answer within my grasp, not beyond it.

What if?

She did what she could. What if I did what I could? And you did what you could? So that we did what we could? Not necessarily in the Congo or in Serbia, but right here, right now, wherever God has planted each of us—all of us?

What if?

PART 1

She Did
What She
Could

She did what she could.

She was a girl.

God chose a girl to act.

God chose a girl to change the world.

1

She Did What She Could

God chose a girl.

Mary of Bethany. We know her from Scripture as the sister of hardworking, hospitable Martha, in Luke 10, and of “up from the grave” Lazarus in John 11. The setting is their home in Bethany, about one and a half miles from Jerusalem.

The event takes place just days before Jesus’ Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem, where he was hailed as King, fanned with palm branches, and celebrated as Messiah, and a little more than a week before his death for the sins of all humankind:

Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had previously had leprosy. While he was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful alabaster jar of

expensive perfume made from essence of nard. She broke open the jar and poured the perfume over his head.

Some of those at the table were indignant. “Why waste such expensive perfume?” they asked. “It could have been sold for a year’s wages and the money given to the poor!” So they scolded her harshly.

But Jesus replied, “Leave her alone. Why criticize her for doing such a good thing to me? You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But you will not always have me. She did what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time. I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman’s deed will be remembered and discussed.” (Mark 14:3-9)

Though Simon could have been just another follower of Jesus, he is more likely the elderly—and healed—father of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. According to John 12, the criticizing voice comes from Judas Iscariot, who, known to have been greedy and a thief, helped himself to what was in the disciples’ money bag. Other references indicate that some of the disciples were critical of the extravagance of Mary’s act.

Although the story is told from different perspectives and gives different details, depending on which Gospel account you read, one important detail remains the same: Here, at this juncture in human history, God chose a *girl* to pair with the preaching of the Good News for all time to come.

Do you realize what a *big deal* this is?

We expect God to use men. He has chosen men

historically and purposefully. Men to prophesy. Men to rule. Men to lead. Men to follow a star across the wide world in search of the Christ child. Men to fish for other men. Men to form the church. Men to preach in the streets of early Christianity. The Bible is jam-packed with narratives and biographies and psalms of men, punctuated by an occasional female rendition.

That's fine. It's good—no—it's *great*! Humankind has much to learn from men. Men are *essential* to the expression of God's image in our world and to his purpose for the planet. And to be really clear—just because God chose a woman for this particular story doesn't mean that he *didn't* choose men to live out the message of this passage. As you read on in this little book, you'll increasingly understand how the point of the passage is that we—any of us—can change our world when we finally “get” how much we are loved in a relationship with God. God's love changes us. Radically. All of us. And when *we* are different, we make a difference in our world.

But *oh* how refreshing it is to hear a story sung in soprano! How healing and hopeful to see the curve of our own reflection in the turn of a tale. How much easier to understand a message spoken in our “first language.” Sans translation. Often, women have to interpret stories, teachings, and illustrations from male to female—in church, in business, and in life. Such “bilingualism” is part of our everyday lives. But not here. Not this time. This story is first-person-female. The main character is a girl. A heroine. A *she*.

God chose a girl. A woman. A sitter at Jesus' feet, in contrast to a dissenter who betrayed him. And he paired her

with the telling of the gospel for all time to come. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman’s deed will be remembered and discussed” (Mark 14:9). God chose a woman who acted on her love for him in response to his love for her.

If this grabs your attention today, just imagine how God’s choice sat with the crowd just after the crossroads of time between BC and AD, when women were little more than property. Slaves. Chattel. In fact, tradition held that each morning, Jewish males offered a blessing that thanked God for not making them Gentiles, slaves, or women.

The fact that Jesus invited women to accompany him on his journeys around Israel was shocking in itself. But to actually receive his livelihood off their generosity, to include them in his teaching, to equip them to serve and share in his post-Resurrection Kingdom work—that was *radical*. That he paired a girl and her gesture of love with the telling of the gospel for all time forward—such a choice slid beyond the comprehension of those present then—or even of many people now, for that matter.

But *God chose a girl*. Mary. We know her from passages contained in several of the Gospels. The apostle John seemed closest to her, as he included her most often in his chronicles of Christ. She chose to sit at Jesus’ feet and learn from him rather than scurry about preparing food for him and others, as did her sister, Martha. Of course, there’s nothing wrong with cooking. It’s just that Mary innately desired the connection of communication, of learning, of presence.

In receiving the relationship Jesus offered her, she

discovered access to a faith-filled kind of living, one that teetered between blind hope in some moments and tangible returns on her trust in others. She saw her brother, Lazarus, become ill, and she wailed for Jesus to journey to him and heal him. She knew he could. When he did not, she stood, waiting to learn from him yet again. Having already seen Lazarus's lifeless body sealed in a tomb, she watched Jesus weep at the loss of her kin—his friend—and absorbed in her soul how very much he truly cared. And then, stunningly, unexpectedly, beyond her comprehension, she witnessed the miracle of Lazarus alive before her, clearly breathing, although his grave clothes were still intact. She would likely remember this moment later, on a bright morning at sunrise, outside another tomb.

God chose a girl. He had certainly called women forward to his Kingdom purposes before. Through Eve, life was born into the world. In Deborah, justice reigned over Israel. Through Bathsheba, a great king was brought forth. Rahab served to save God's people, as did Esther. Mary birthed God's son. Tabitha (Dorcas) and Priscilla carried forward efforts in the early church. And Mary, this Mary of Bethany, was paired with the gospel forever.

God chose a girl. A woman. Like me. Like you. Like your coworker or your subordinate or your boss. Like your neighbor or your child's best friend. Like your mother or your sister or your daughter or your aunt or your niece or your granddaughter. God chose a girl to pair with the gospel forever. Look over your shoulder at her. Look in the mirror at her. Elevate her

voice, her heart, her actions to the Kingdom possibilities they contain.

God chose a girl—and *she* did what she could.



She'd adopted him as a baby. Dimpled, chunky, and beautiful, he thrilled at the sound of her voice, her smell. He'd been a challenge to raise. Bright, creative, unendingly energetic, he delighted in the smallest life moments: discovering a caterpillar humping along a sidewalk on a summer afternoon, careering his plastic Big Wheel down the driveway, swinging higher and higher and higher at the park.

As he grew into his tween and then teen years, his talent for sports emerged: a stunningly fast fifty-yard-dash time. He made friends easily but had not been able to keep them without her help. Schoolwork demanded an attention and focus he didn't possess without the help of medication. He finished high school, finally, and flitted from this to that, from waiting tables to construction to trade school, all the while roller-coastering his moods with drugs and alcohol.

He was arrested for drunk driving and released without much penalty. Again. And again. He did jail time.

She knew he was still drinking. And driving. A danger to himself and to those around him.

From across the country, she called the Virginia Highway Patrol and reported his license plate and his habit. They noted her concern in their state's database, leaving her completely unsure whether or not her "mother's plea" had made any difference.

But she did what she could.

Afterword

The SDWSC stories in this book are real stories. In some, the names and certain details have been changed to preserve anonymity. Other stories remain unchanged and have been included with permission.

The purpose of these stories is to demonstrate just how simple and yet profound an SDWSC moment can be.

As these five letters, representing five words, take root in your heart, you may discover one—or many—SDWSC stories of your own. When you do, please consider sharing them at www.shedidwhatshecould.org.

A relationship with Jesus results in a response.

Notes

Chapter 3: She Did What She Could

1. J. D. Douglas (revising ed.) and Merrill C. Tenney (general ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Bible, Pictorial Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 804.

Chapter 4: She Did What She Could

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 326.

Chapter 13: What If . . . We Did What We Could?

1. Richard Foster, "Spiritual Formation Agenda," *Christianity Today* (January 2009): 33.
2. "The Greatest Social Need," editorial in *Christianity Today* (January 2009): 18.
3. Rick Warren, as quoted by Bill Hybels.
4. Kay Warren, "My Heart Has Been Broken by the Suffering of AIDS," interview by Connie Willems, *Discipleship Journal* (March/April 2008): 54.

Chapter 14: What If We Did What We Could?

1. See http://www.worldvisionexperience.org/learn_crisis.asp, accessed May 20, 2009.

About the Author

Elisa Morgan is one of today's most sought-after authors, speakers, and leaders. She is the author of more than fifteen books on mothering, spiritual formation, and evangelism and is the publisher of *FullFill* (www.fullfill.org), a leadership-development resource for women of all ages, stages, and callings.

For twenty years, Elisa served as CEO of MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) International. Under her leadership, MOPS grew from 350 local groups to more than 4,000 groups throughout the United States and in thirty other countries and having an impact on more than 100,000 moms every year. In 2009, Elisa moved from her role as CEO to that of president emerita.

Educated at the University of Texas, where she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology, and at Denver Seminary, where she earned a Master's of Divinity, she has served on the board of ECFA (Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability) and offers one of the few female voices in professional Christian leadership today.

Elisa is married to Evan (vice-president of strategic development for RBC Ministries—known internationally for *Our Daily Bread*—and founder of christiancourses.com). They have two grown children and one grandchild and live in Centennial, Colorado.