

willing to walk on water



STEP OUT IN FAITH
AND LET GOD
WORK MIRACLES
THROUGH YOUR LIFE

Caroline Barnett

Willing to Walk on Water is a practical and profound invitation to all who hesitate on the shores of the miraculous. Not only is this book engaging, it's empowering. You will be encouraged by stories from Caroline's life and the lives of so many others who consistently make a difference to the beloved broken. Read and believe that your life will open up and touch thousands.

LISA BEVERE

Author and speaker; cofounder of Messenger International

In the face of staggering statistics of hurt and pain in the world, Caroline Barnett helps us see that we are part of God's answers to the world's problems. Be inspired. Step out in the direction of God's calling in your life. Be *willing to walk on water*.

STEVEN FURTICK

Lead pastor of Elevation Church; author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Greater*

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Caroline Barnett
with A. J. Gregory



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Willing to Walk on Water: Step Out in Faith and Let God Work Miracles through Your Life

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Introduction

I AM, BY NATURE, a shy person who is perfectly content serving in the background. I never had a desire to speak publicly or preach from a pulpit. In fact, I ran from such things for the first ten years I was in full-time ministry. I wanted to throw up whenever Matthew, my husband, asked me to stand up front and simply greet the congregation. Once on stage, I would tremble like an exercise Shake Weight.

But not anymore. Now I can stand confidently in front of a crowd of people to tell my story or share God's message.

The change didn't happen overnight. But it did require a simple understanding of God's plan for me. I had to stand and speak to others in order to do the work I knew He was calling me to do in my community. And I was *willing* to do whatever it took.

It is with such willingness that I approach my ministry today. I am humbled by how God has used me and countless others to make the Dream Center a place where lives are changed for His glory. I am humbled by how He has blessed my own life. These were the driving factors behind my desire to write this book.

What I've learned is that once we make ourselves available to God, we can make a difference in the world's brokenness (no

matter how large or small the problem we take on). When we act within God's plans for our lives and are open to taking a risk, we can make a positive impact on social injustice through service.

I didn't always think of service and social justice this way. As with most things, God had to open my eyes to see the connection between my life's work and His work. Even though I had been in ministry for years, I always assumed that our best efforts would only scratch the surface of the problems in our communities and in the world. The problems were just too big. Many times I felt like I was trying to save a sinking ship by scooping out the water one Dixie cup at a time.

I had no expectation or hope that the work I did alongside others could eliminate certain social injustices. I couldn't see that I was, in fact, a part of God's answer to the world's problems. And then God began to teach me about Himself and His purpose for my life. I began enlisting supporters for the Dream Center's women's ministry. What God had put on my heart to accomplish needed an army to make it happen. And sure enough, just over five years later, what our women's ministry has accomplished is remarkable. You'll read about this amazing ride throughout this book.

One of the key stories from the Bible that God used to prepare me is found in Matthew 14. Jesus' disciples are caught in a storm in the middle of a lake, fearfully battling strong winds, waves, and rain. Then Jesus shows up in a most unbelievable way.

About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!"

But Jesus spoke to them at once. “Don’t be afraid,” he said. “Take courage. I am here!”

Then Peter called to him, “Lord, if it’s really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water.”

“Yes, come,” Jesus said.

So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus.

MATTHEW 14:25-29

Even though he is terrified, Peter takes Jesus at His word and literally walks out his faith with courage—courage to climb out of the boat. I feel God wants us to do the same thing. He wants us to face our fears and do the seemingly impossible. What it requires is desire and availability.

In his description of the same scene, the Gospel writer Mark adds a stunning piece of information. He recounts that Jesus “saw that they [the disciples] were in serious trouble, rowing hard and struggling against the wind and waves. About three o’clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. *He intended to go past them*” (Mark 6:48, emphasis added). As I meditated on this passage I couldn’t get the sentence “He intended to go past them” out of my mind.

Jesus knew the disciples were in trouble. And yet although they struggled in the storm, none of them cried out to Him for help. As they unsuccessfully scuffled with the elements, pitting their puny human efforts against raging winds and crashing waves, one thing was clear: they couldn’t do it on their own. They weren’t strong or capable enough. The storm overpowered them. In His mercy, Jesus moved closer to them. But He waited until they called out to Him before He intervened. Had they not cried out for His help, I believe He would have walked past them.

God Wants to Use You

This walking-on-water illustration is applicable to us today. God knows the world is in trouble; the news is full of it every morning. If you're like me, when you hear about people in need, you deeply desire to get involved or take a stand. But we rarely act on those feelings, right? When we hear stories about modern-day slavery, sex trafficking, hunger issues, homelessness, or child abandonment, do we stop and say to God, "Show me how to solve this problem"? No, we don't.

But we should.

God wants to use us. However, He won't force ministry or a life of service on anyone. What He will do is partner with us and make it possible for us to find solutions to the problems plaguing our communities the world over. We just have to be willing to do the work. We can get it done if we trust God and follow His plan.

I believe if every Christian in the world were willing to make a positive change, we would make a significant impact in remedying and mending the brokenness that runs rampant in our local and global communities. The numbers are in our favor.

According to the most recent *Atlas of Global Christianity*, there are 2.2 billion Christians (that's a third of the world's population) and 4,850,000 congregations in the world.¹ With an army this large, is any problem insurmountable? Some people may look at the statistics and say it is.

- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that a total of 925 million people in the world go hungry.² Every day almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes.³

- An estimated 12 to 27 million people are caught in some form of slavery. Between 600,000 and 800,000 people in the world are victims of human trafficking.⁴
- 18.5 million children around the world have no parental care.⁵

No matter how overwhelming the amount of suffering or number of people in need all over the world, I believe that we, the Christian army, led and empowered by the Creator of the universe, can overcome these atrocities. Sure, it will take effort. It may take getting involved in the government's efforts or galvanizing a team of people or starting an organization. It may mean joining forces with the many Christian organizations around the world that have already started conquering these issues. It may require something as simple as sending a few dollars to a charity or knocking on the door of someone in your neighborhood who needs help. But all it initially requires is your willingness.

Lasting Rewards

For me, living my life with eyes and heart open to God's leading has brought fulfillment and joy. It has deepened and increased my faith. It has helped me focus less on my insecurities and on what I lack, and more on Jesus and what He can do through me. It has taught me about the love of God on a personal level. And it has resulted in countless miracles for those we have reached.

I know God has the same desire for your life. He wants you to change the world and make a strong impact in the particular area of injustice that speaks to your heart, whether it's helping the poor, feeding the hungry, adopting a child, preaching to

the lost, healing the sick, mentoring a troubled youth, helping out a single mother, or teaching basic life skills to someone who needs them.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you do. Whether you're a pastor, a "domestic engineer," a student, or a CEO, God wants to use your willingness to do great things simply because you are His child and it's your responsibility to help to run the family business. He wants to ignite in you a passion to start doing something about the brokenness in the world.

My hope is that after reading this book, you will become convinced that you are part of the miracle God is looking for to help change the world. I pray that whatever has held you back from taking that first step of action to walk on water—whether lies, insecurities, doubts, or fears—will be brought to light and shattered.

I've divided the book into three parts. I begin with my own journey into ministry and how God has helped me understand and define my missions for His Kingdom. Then we'll look at the roadblocks that cause people to hesitate to serve, and I'll suggest ways to get past them. Finally, I'll share several lessons that I have learned over the past ten years and how they could benefit you. Hopefully the stories, Scripture, and practical ideas will help you identify your unique passion for service and clarify what God asks of you.

Before getting started, consider these questions:

Do you think you're too inexperienced to make a difference?

Do you think you're too busy to make a time commitment? Does even considering it make you nervous?

Do you think you're past your prime and these issues
are best left to a younger generation?

Do you feel you lack the necessary skills, education,
or network to relieve social injustices?

If you answered yes to at least one of these questions, I hope
you'll continue reading so God can begin to speak to your heart.
When you couple your willingness to walk on water with God's
desire to perform miracles in people's lives, an exciting and ful-
filling future awaits you.

Ready to start walking?

Caroline Barnett

PART I

DISCOVERING

*Preach the gospel at all times
and if necessary use words.*

FRANCIS OF ASSISI



WILLING

I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink.

I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.

I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me.

I was in prison, and you visited me.

— MATTHEW 25:35-36 —

I COULDN'T HELP but notice their eyes—extremely made up, but empty. These scantily clad young women were selling their bodies on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. It seemed as if they had already sold their souls.

I had moved into the Dream Center as a full-time volunteer in the beginning of 1997, a few months after I turned eighteen. I wanted to focus on ministries that pulled at my heartstrings, so I volunteered on many different outreaches to find the right fit. I had heard about the prostitution outreach and wanted to see what that was like. The team headed to the streets every Friday and Saturday night. Volunteers met at the Dream Center parking lot at midnight to get instructions from the leader as well as an overview of what to expect, and then the team would drive toward Sunset Boulevard. Once there, they would spend a few hours praying with and encouraging the prostitutes.

I went on my first outreach a month or so after I moved on campus. There were about sixteen of us paired up, within sight of each other. It was 2 a.m. and the “night shift” was in full

swing. As police sirens blared in the distance, the prostitutes leaned provocatively against streetlights or slowly cruised the sidewalks looking for their next trick of the night.

Our team, consisting of men and women, spread out to talk to as many of the women as we could. We handed out roses and told them they were beautiful and that God loved them. Some politely smiled, while others rolled their eyes, their hearts hardened by years on the streets. I realized that they were numb to the possibility of another kind of life. How could I convince them they were worth so much more? How could I make them understand they had a loving Creator who could heal their hurts and give them a future they could look forward to?

I started talking to one of the prostitutes and told her about the Dream Center and the opportunity she had to get off the streets. After leaving her with a flyer with more information about our program, I walked farther down the block and glanced toward the street. A car approached, slowing down right alongside me.

The driver leaned over, hungrily peering out of the front passenger's window. He assumed I was one of the working girls. We stared at each other for a second. He didn't say anything, just stared me up and down. The evil that washed over his face—the lust, the insatiable appetite for pleasure no matter the cost—radiated so much wickedness, it made me feel sick to my stomach. *Every night, hundreds of women get into the cars of these kinds of men.* I shuddered to think of the dangers that lurked on the streets. And my heart broke when I imagined the emotional decay that grows deeper after every trick turned. *It's no wonder these women feel hopeless.*

As a full-time volunteer at the Dream Center, serving in some of the worst communities in the heart of Los Angeles, I felt I was being faithful to God and His call on my life. I wasn't looking out

only for me. I was following the apostle Paul's exhortation to "take an interest in others, too" (Philippians 2:4). I wasn't oblivious to the suffering that existed in the world. I was doing my part to change it. From ministering to prostitutes to feeding the homeless and building relationships with struggling youth in crime- and gang-infested neighborhoods, I was making a difference.

And then God opened my eyes.

Roots

My family had immigrated to California from Sweden in 1980, when I was two years old. My parents wanted to live the American dream of starting a Swedish crystal chandelier and area-rug business called Scandinavian Handicrafts. Before coming to the States, they had sold their home and invested all of their savings to buy the inventory for the store, which they had shipped from Sweden to America. My dad left a successful job with an insurance company to follow his dream. He was the youngest of four boys, so it was hard for him to leave behind his mother and siblings. Moving was also difficult for my mother; she didn't speak English and didn't know anything about American culture.

Though they started out hopeful, it became apparent that crystal chandeliers weren't hot sellers in the early 1980s. Eventually, my parents liquidated their inventory at swap meets. Times were tough. My dad took any job he could find to make ends meet, including working as a truck driver. Yet my parents never regretted their decision to move to the United States; they loved the freedom and opportunities America had to offer.

I grew up in a strong Christian home. My parents were very involved in church and volunteered for everything, from the worship team to children's church. My mom sewed all the costumes for the Christmas pageants as well as vests for the choir

members singing in the Christmas cantata. She also helped with costumes for Easter-related sermons. And she was an incredible cook and baker who baked desserts for every event.

My parents always opened our home to Swedish missionaries and ministers passing through town, usually on their way to South America. It didn't matter that my parents, my three sisters, and I lived in a two-bedroom apartment. We loved having the missionaries stay with us. I was always fascinated with their stories and hearing my parents talk about their own experiences as traveling evangelists in Sweden.

Both my parents have worked for God their entire lives, while they were single and married. My dad had started traveling as an evangelist when he was sixteen years old. Once he got married and held a full-time job, he had to limit his time on the road. He did, however, continue to hold tent revivals, lead worship, and preach at his church while he lived in Sweden. My mom has been devoted to the church since she was a little girl and has always volunteered as much as she could.

Through their strong faith and their devotion to service, our parents taught my sisters and me to generously serve others for God. However, the thought of going into full-time ministry never crossed my mind when I was younger. Growing up in a family whose finances were always tight, all I wanted was to be successful in business.

I was a good student. I went to a public school and had lots of friends with different backgrounds. During my junior and senior years of high school I started going to parties, dancing, and drinking every now and then with my friends, some of whom were Christians. As a cheerleader, I partied with most of the girls on my squad. I'm not trying to justify my behavior, but I was just curious, having fun with my friends.

I still went to church regularly, attended youth group meetings, and participated in all the youth camps. My parents were unaware of my double life. When my friends invited me to a party, I would tell my parents that I was staying overnight at a friend's house. Mom and Dad trusted me and never gave it a second thought. Though I felt convicted and would repent to God privately afterward and at the end of every Sunday morning church service, I continued.

Is There Something More?

Toward the end of my senior year I began to change. The parties were getting old; I wasn't having as much fun. *There has to be more to life than this*, I thought. I started searching for answers in the Bible.

Reading the words of Jesus fired me up—I was intent on finding God's plan for my life. I ended up confessing to my dad about my partying habits and even asked him to ground me. He was more than happy to oblige. I didn't feel strong enough to say no to my friends and figured saying I was grounded was an easier way out. I stopped caring about the things that most of my former friends did, like worrying about what to wear or scoping out cute boys. Instead I focused on seeking the Kingdom of God (see Matthew 6:31-34). I was particularly moved by verse 32, which says that unbelievers tend to worry about day-to-day things. As I read the Gospels, I was inspired by the wonderful miracles Jesus performed and His commission to His disciples to further His Kingdom (Matthew 28:18-20).

Suddenly the things I had previously considered important didn't matter to me anymore. The thought of pursuing a business career seemed empty. I didn't want to have to work just so I could pay for a car, gas, food, and a place to live. I wanted

something more. I remember praying, *God, I know You have given me a free will to have a dream, but all I want is to be Your hands and feet to find the lost and heal the sick and the broken-hearted. I don't have to have my own dream; I want to be a part of Your dream.*

Looking for a Place to Serve

I was hoping He was going to call me to serve Him somewhere exotic and far away. I couldn't wait to turn eighteen so I could leave Los Angeles. I hated the city at the time. We lived in an area where gang violence was rampant. As a matter of fact, the Rodney King riots occurred near our neighborhood. The high school I attended was also riddled with violence, most of the time racially motivated. There were many times when teachers were concerned some of my friends and I would be targets and hid us in a classroom if a riot broke out on the school grounds. I viewed Los Angeles as a city of limits. Life seemed such a struggle for most people, and it was hard to get ahead. I assumed it would be easier to make it anywhere else.

I passionately wanted to work for God, but I wasn't bold enough to preach the gospel on a street corner. I desperately wanted to make a difference for Christ and was frustrated because I didn't know *what* to do. Around this time two pastors from Norway came to stay with our family. They had heard about Los Angeles International Church and wanted to visit. My dad had never been there, so they all went and toured the facilities. When my dad came home, he was so inspired that he was beaming. (In 1996, the Los Angeles International Church became the Dream Center, named by the people on the streets because it was a place where they could start to dream again.)

Not long after my dad's visit, Pastor Matthew Barnett, one

of the founders of the Dream Center, spoke at our church. My mom knew about him and believed I would be inspired by all he was doing, especially since he was young. I went with a friend and was moved by Matthew's strong desire to rescue the spiritually lost and to help those in need. I remember telling my friend, "I could marry a man like that one day." She was shocked by my comment since I had never had a boyfriend, though I had been on a few dates. My friends always said I was too picky and joked that I would be single my whole life.

A month later I attended a Thursday night service at the Dream Center. It was my first time there, and as soon as I walked on campus I knew that was the place I was called to. It's hard to describe, but I had an incredible peace in my spirit that I was called to be a part of this organization. During the service and in later conversations with people who were part of the ministry, I discovered more about the work they were doing. They followed in the steps of Jesus, imitating His example through tangible acts of service. Everything I wanted to do was being done there. I had found an outlet for my passion to serve.

I started volunteering as much as I could. After I graduated from high school, my parents moved an hour away from Los Angeles, but the distance didn't stop me. I found a way to volunteer almost every day of the week. Every morning, I'd drive to work as a receptionist for Farmers Insurance, and after my workday, I'd drive over to the Dream Center. I'd volunteer for a few hours starting at around six thirty in the evening until about ten. More and more, I couldn't wait to finish my job in order to get to the Dream Center to help any way I could. Within a couple of months, I was offered a full-time volunteer position, so I resigned from my insurance job and the Dream Center became my new home.

My heart longed to minister to people on the streets, but I wanted to start serving immediately, so I wrote on my application, “Put me wherever you need me.” The Dream Center was an exciting place to be in the early years, a place of beautiful chaos. In the beginning, our team was unseasoned and not as organized as we are today. Though we had much growing and learning to do, we made up for it with passion. There were about two hundred different ministries running simultaneously—from the residential programs to help people get back on their feet from homelessness, addictions, prostitution, and depression, to the various street outreaches. Our radar was always tuned to different needs in the community. We were itching to help where we could. Our zealotness helped spur many new ministries—some worked, others didn’t.

I wore many hats when I started out, mainly working in the business office, doing a little bit of everything—helping each ministry define its mission statement, meeting with people to brainstorm new ideas for ministries, planning events, giving tours of the facilities to potential donors. Wherever there was a need, I plugged myself in. I worked in our accounting department, our registration office, and the reception area. I chopped vegetables for meals, helped put on neighborhood carnivals, and organized church services in our local convalescent home every Sunday afternoon.

When I came on board, 350 people lived on campus: 100 volunteers working with 250 people in the programs. Today, 700 people call the Dream Center home: 115 interns, 75 staff members, 40 graduates from our programs who volunteer to give back, and 470 men, women, and children who are getting help for a particular need. The need keeps growing.

Over the last sixteen years, I have seen so many hurting people. I have smelled the acrid stench of urine and feces that

permeates downtown crack hotels. I have delivered thousands of bags of food to families at risk of malnourishment. I have served hot meals to people dying of AIDS and later helped make funeral arrangements for them. I have spent nights on street corners reaching out to prostitutes hardened by years of abuse. I have spent time in skid row, inviting people to church and building relationships with kids who have witnessed murders, who have seen victims of drug overdoses, and who have been regularly raped themselves.

I wasn't naive. I saw firsthand the oppression, darkness, and brokenness that evil casts in this world. And I knew I was helping in some way. Working with the different ministry teams, I was doing my part. We were making a difference.

Yet God was about to take me to the next level. He was about to challenge and change my entire perspective on making a difference, on serving others, and specifically on working in the arena of social justice.

Turning Point

In early 2000, there was a strong push from people in our church to start a women's conference. I personally had no desire to do it, but I decided to attend some other women's conferences to learn more. In 2006 I attended the Colour Conference led by Bobbie Houston and the Hillsong Church in Australia. More than 30,000 women attended. It was spectacular and so motivating! One of the highlights was seeing the documentary *Invisible Children*.

The film focuses on the twenty-year civil war in Uganda that has destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of that country's children through abduction, torture, and even murder. Thousands of the "lucky" ones who evaded capture fled the

country and spent the rest of their young lives on the run—homeless, hungry, and alone.

I cried through the hour-long documentary. It wasn't because I hadn't seen extreme brokenness in my work at the Dream Center. But now, for the first time, I sensed the evil that permeated not just the dark corners of one African country but the global community as a whole. *The world is beyond wicked*, I thought. I felt heartbroken and defeated. It seemed the devil was winning the war on souls, and I didn't feel like God was doing anything about it.

That night I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned, haunted by the images I had seen on-screen. The ten-year-old boys tearfully talking about the murder of their parents, their eyes full of pain, remembering. The hundreds of children hiding from rebels in dark, damp basements, so closely packed together they could barely breathe. The lifeless eyes of the kids who had given up, who were tired of running.

I'll be honest. I was mad at God. "Why are You letting this happen?" I cried out. "Why aren't You doing something? Why don't You care?"

In the depths of my spirit, I heard His gentle reply. His words weren't shaming or condemning. They overflowed with love. *Caroline, I sent My Son, Jesus, to pay for the sin of what you just saw so that there would be hope for redemption. I sent My Son, Jesus, to pay for the healing that will need to take place. In My Word I have promised to provide and to protect. I have done and given you everything you need to change it. So, Caroline, why are you allowing this to happen?*

Though I wasn't compelled to start a women's conference after I got home from the event, I was inspired to start a women's ministry and to accomplish the things God would orchestrate.

It's Our Problem

I was stunned and needed time to process what God had said. I had so many questions and was overwhelmed with conflicting emotions. In essence, I felt that God was saying that the devastation documented in the film was my fault. I couldn't get that idea out of my head. Was I, were we as Christians, partially or even fully responsible for not preventing the wrongs being done in the world? And if so, what was I supposed to do about it?

I had been working nonstop in my own community for nine years. Besides, I was just one person. What difference could I possibly make, especially in a place as far away as Uganda? Weren't those monumental issues the responsibility of governments and global organizations to deal with? I was anxious for God to explain it further.

After seeing the documentary, I began to look at the world immediately around me, the people in my own backyard. I could clearly see we were surrounded by social injustices that hindered people from reaching their full God-given potential. But where to begin?

The Power of God's Word

I picked up my Bible and started reading the stories of Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and others—ordinary people who accomplished audacious feats for God, empowered by His Spirit.

Later that week, I shared what I was reading with my hairdresser while she worked her magic on my hair. Describing how God intervened in people's lives, I asked her, "Do you believe God can do those kinds of miracles today to save His children?" Pausing for a minute, she answered, "Well, maybe not literally, like in the Bible."

Her words struck me. One of God's biggest frustrations

must be how lightly some of us interpret the Bible, thinking of His Word as merely a storybook filled with moral lessons to follow and teach our kids. *Obey your parents. Do unto others. Turn the other cheek.* The Bible, however, is filled with stories of how God, through one person, made the impossible happen. And He wants to do the same thing through us.

It's time for us to live out our lives like we believe God's Word with all our heart, soul, and mind. We must study and apply His promises every day. We must use the Bible as a guide to living the abundant life He has intended for us. God may not duplicate the same biblical miracles we read about, but He can and does perform new ones.

I believe there is no limit to what God will do to save His children. There is no prayer so great that He cannot answer it. There is no injustice so overpowering that He cannot put it right. God can bring healing to our souls and our bodies.

Discovering the Secret

While I was excited about the truths God was stirring in my soul and encouraged by the Scriptures that showed His faithfulness and provision, I still didn't see how all this applied directly to alleviating social problems today.

That is, until I started studying the book of Exodus and came to chapter 35.

Moses called the people of Israel together and explained that God wanted them to build a dwelling place for Him in the wilderness, His Tabernacle. Issuing specific instructions through Moses, God used every individual to accomplish His will; everyone had something to offer.

Moses asked the people to give whatever material possessions they could—items like linens, oils, and spices (verses 5-9). Most

households could contribute something. Moses also called for volunteers, “gifted craftsmen” (verse 10), to help in the actual construction of the Tabernacle, whether making tent pegs, curtains, or the altar. God wanted experienced men and women, but also any and everyone who was willing to help carry out His plan.

And come they did. “All whose hearts were stirred and whose spirits were moved came and brought their sacred offerings to the LORD. . . . Both men and women came, all whose hearts were willing” (verses 21 and 22).

Not only did these people give and do what they were commanded, they were so inspired that they “continued to bring additional gifts” (Exodus 36:3). Eventually, Moses had to tell the community to stop giving because there were more than enough materials to finish the entire project. Isn’t that amazing? And it happens today, too. When people who are willing to give come through and those who are willing to do spring into action, miracles happen. The key is willingness.

Be Someone’s Miracle

It finally clicked for me. God is looking for *willing* people He can use to do life- and even world-changing things. I love what my husband, Matthew, says: “Find a need and fill it.” Serve others and make a difference. The Bible mentions helping the poor and needy 358 times. And yet we don’t need to wait for God’s approval or His confirmation to relieve injustice and the burdens of others. We just need to begin somewhere.

If you are willing to use your time, your efforts, your resources (limited or unlimited), you can be a walking-on-water miracle to another person. From there, it may grow into affecting an entire community.

Here’s how simply it can begin. What are you planning to

have for dinner tonight? If you don't plan a weekly menu in advance, you may spend a few minutes deciding between one choice or another. Now think about the single mother who is out of work, who has no money and empty cupboards. What are her options? If you showed up at her home with a prepared dinner and a bag of groceries for a few more, don't you think she'd consider your generosity a miracle?

How about a young man with a troubled past who has always felt neglected and unloved? Hopefully, your experience has been the exact opposite—your parents have encouraged you all your life. What a miracle it would be for that young man to be mentored by someone who loves him and speaks life and truth into his soul. Imagine the amount of self-worth and possibilities of a better future that can be birthed from that relationship, as well as the multiplying effect for generations to come through this young man's offspring.

Once you experience the thrill of being God's hands and feet to someone in need, you will look for more and more opportunities. Your reward? Indescribable joy.

The Truth about “Good Works”

Our willingness is more than enough to accomplish God's will. So what's His will for us today? Many people spend their entire lives trying to figure it out. First and foremost, God desires that every human being accept His gift of salvation. John 3:16 tells us that God does not want anyone to perish but to have eternal life. First Timothy 2:3-4 says, “This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.”

When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, He reconciled us with God and gave us an example to follow. Jesus lived a life of

service, showing and giving love, grace, and mercy to others. We are called to do the same—to use our time, resources, and talents to build His church, the body of Christ—you and I and everyone who is added to God’s family by the work that we do.

I want to make one thing clear: doing your part to help the needy, the hungry, and the oppressed isn’t your ticket to earning salvation. You’re not going to get to heaven because you helped a family in need. Being willing to make a difference is not about tallying religious brownie points or doing enough good deeds to be considered worthy enough to be saved.

Also, God will not love you any more or any less if you help the poor or if you don’t. His love for you has always been complete and perfect—before and after you were saved, before and after your mistakes, even whether you are obedient or not.

Despite my best efforts at living a Christian life, I had a hard time accepting grace. I didn’t understand that I didn’t have to keep asking God to forgive me for the same things I had asked forgiveness for a day, a week, or a month ago. While we have to constantly live in a place of repentance because we sin every day, we don’t need to repent for the same sin we’ve already repented for.

For a year, after every church service at the Dream Center, I’d go forward and tearfully ask God to forgive me for things I had already asked him to forgive.

Finally, I felt the Lord speak to my heart.

Caroline, are you done yet?

“Oh, God, I just need You to forgive me.”

I forgave you the first time you asked.

“But I need You to see how sorry I am.”

Are you trying to earn your salvation, Caroline?

Well, yes, I was. I was trying to punish myself enough to

feel I had the right to be forgiven. Receiving God's grace and being saved, forgiven, and accepted is not something that makes much sense. But that's how much God loves us. We don't need to prove our worthiness to Him. Because Jesus became our sacrificial substitute, God accepts us in our unworthiness. He is merciful toward us. And He forgives us.

That incredible gift is worth sharing.

How to Begin

Throughout this book I'll share stories—my own experiences as well as those of others who are committed to serving those in need.

You might be wondering where you can start. Remember, you are not responsible for changing the entire world or doing grand acts of service. Every bit of willingness matters to God.

Just to spark your own thinking, here are some simple yet life-changing ideas you can consider putting into practice:

- ▶ Babysit for a single mom. It's amazing how even a few hours will refresh her.
- ▶ Make dinner for a family in need in your neighborhood.
- ▶ If you have couponing skills, go grocery shopping. Donate both the money you save and the items you buy to a local food pantry.
- ▶ Mow the lawn of a widow who just lost her husband.
- ▶ Invite a struggling teenager from your church or community to a fun activity.
- ▶ Offer rides to the grocery store or medical appointments for someone who has no car.
- ▶ Plan a Christmas or holiday party for kids in an impoverished neighborhood.

- Take someone with little means out for a birthday celebration.
- Ask someone if you can pray for his or her specific need.
- Help a tired mom clean and organize her house.
- Make care packages for troops overseas.
- Plant flowers in a neighbor's yard or in a window box to give the person something beautiful to look at.

If you feel called to make a greater commitment that may require more time, here are other ideas:

- Become a mentor.
- Hold a neighborhood food drive.
- If you have a vegetable garden, share your bounty.
- Regularly prepare, deliver, and serve meals to families.
- Apply for a license to become an honorary aunt or uncle to a foster child so you can babysit or provide other care as needed. Your experience may possibly lead you to consider adoption in the future.
- Donate your skills to help someone who can't afford to hire a plumber, house cleaner, or handyman.
- Volunteer at a local organization such as a soup kitchen, youth center, or homeless shelter.
- Grab some trash bags and help clean up a local neighborhood.
- Raise funds for an organization to help victims of a particular injustice such as human trafficking.

Do you see a common thread running through these ideas? They work only if you know there is a need to begin with. That means you need to listen, be observant, respect people's privacy,

and not give up if your request is turned down. When you start looking for opportunities to serve, you'll be surprised at how many times opportunity will knock.

I hope the excitement is beginning to build in your mind and heart. You may still wonder if it's even possible for you to walk on water. Let me encourage you. Yes, it's possible. And yes, you can. The God who parted the Red Sea is the same God whose Spirit lives inside you and empowers you. The God who fed a crowd of five thousand people with merely five loaves and two fish is the same God whose Spirit lives inside you and empowers you. The God who brought Jesus back to life after He was in the tomb for three days is the same God whose Spirit lives inside you and empowers you. You are asked only to be willing to go and do what God is asking of you. You are the hero He is looking for to partner with Him.

You no longer have to look at our world and be brought to tears by the devastation, as I was when learning about the plight of child soldiers in Uganda. You don't have to look at injustices and turn away because it hurts too much or you feel powerless to do anything about it. You no longer have to live with the fear of what the world will bring to your children and your children's children.

Everyone's willingness put into action will look different. Some may volunteer for a cause. Some may create an organization to fill a need. Some may lead a particular movement. You are not called to serve others on the same level that someone else is. You are required only to be willing to go or do what God is asking of *you*. When we position ourselves in the body of Christ in this way, the problems of this world don't look so overwhelming anymore.

Are you willing to go?

CAROLINE BARNETT

Are you willing to take a step forward?

Are you willing to never look back?

If you are willing to say yes, I guarantee that God will give you whatever you need to accomplish the task.