

RIPPLE EFFECTS

*discover the
miraculous motivating
power of a woman's
influence*

foreword by **TIM TEBOW**

Pam Tebow

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Ripple Effects: Discover the Miraculous Motivating Power of a Woman's Influence

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Designed by Dean H. Renninger

Edited by Karin Stock Buursma

Published in association with the literary agency of The Fedd Agency, Inc., P.O. Box 341973, Austin, TX 78734.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Tebow, Pam, author.

Title: Ripple effects : discover the miraculous motivating power of a woman's influence / Pam Tebow.

Description: Carol Stream, Illinois : Tyndale Momentum, [2019] | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018047466 | ISBN 9781496431318 (hc)

Subjects: LCSH: Christian women—Religious life. | Christian women—Conduct of life. | Influence (Psychology)—Religious aspects—Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4527 .T4523 2019 | DDC 248.8/43—dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018047466>

Printed in the United States of America

25 24 23 22 21 20 19
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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FOREWORD

The only reason I'm here today is because Mom gave me a chance. Thirty-one years ago, when she was pregnant with me and really sick, a doctor told her I was a mass of fetal tissue. In fact, this doctor strongly recommended that Mom abort me, telling her that if she didn't, she would probably die. But Mom chose to trust God with her life and mine. While you know how that story ended, in this book you'll get to read about the details of what she went through in the process.

Not only did my mom give me a chance at life, but through her example she also gave me a chance to live my best. She cared for me and my four siblings through her love for Jesus. She engrafted the Word of God into our hearts by singing Bible verses to us. She loved us selflessly, even when life was hard. Mom was always encouraging, cheering for me from the sidelines, encouraging me after losses and humbling me after wins. The impact Mom had on me and my brothers and sisters is almost indescribable. No words can adequately express the depth of her love, the power of her example, the strength of her spirit, the beauty of her soul, and her commitment to God in words and in action.

From having the courage to be one of the first parents to home-school their children, to moving her family with Dad to a mission

field in the Philippines, far from the comforts of home, to living out her faith day in and day out as a wife and mother, Mom has shown me what it means to love God and serve others. She is truly one of my biggest heroes. I thank God for her every day.

In the pages that follow, you'll read story after story about how God showed up through Mom's willingness and her leaps, and sometimes tiny steps, of faith. You'll learn about the building blocks of becoming a woman of influence—like realizing the importance of prayer, studying the Bible, using words to uplift others instead of to complain or criticize, trusting God when nothing makes sense, finding strength in spaces of weakness, and above all else, cultivating a deep relationship with Jesus. I am confident that as you read this, you'll be encouraged that God can use you, no matter what season you're in, to affect those around you.

I am so proud of Mom. Seeing how her influence has grown over the years as she's reached countless women through the power of Jesus is awe-inspiring. I don't know God's complete plan for your life, but I do know that He has called you to live an extraordinary life. As Mom has taught us at home and will teach you in this book, it starts by living for Jesus. It starts by realizing life isn't about you. It's about making a difference that will last beyond your life on earth and throughout eternity. If you use whatever God has given you—your experiences, your talents, even just your willingness—and share it with others, you can truly leave ripple effects on this world that will have a lasting impact.

Tim Tebow

INTRODUCTION

When I picked up the phone, the caller introduced herself as a producer from *Good Morning America*. “We would love for you and your son to be our guests on the show,” she said.

I was both stunned and honored. Never in a million years could I have envisioned this moment. Not when I was a young pastor’s wife trying to make ends meet and keep up with all my responsibilities. Not when family and friends thought I was crazy for having so many kids and then homeschooling them before *homeschool* was a word. Not when I was an anonymous missionary in a place no one had heard of. Not when the baby in my womb and I were both expected to die.

It was 2012, and my youngest son, Timmy (known outside our family as Tim), was playing football for the New York Jets. His Heisman Trophy win in 2007 had pushed him into the national spotlight, and he had made a number of television appearances. But this was the first time I’d been asked to join him in a high-profile interview.

The two *Good Morning America* segments were filmed in Jacksonville, Florida, where I live. *GMA*’s whole production crew came to us. Our four older children and our grandchildren arrived

for the second segment, since they were attending Timmy's football game in our hometown that weekend.

Anchor Robin Roberts is delightful and puts everyone at ease. She and Timmy seem to have a special rapport, and I was surprisingly relaxed as I sat beside Timmy on the set. Then Robin asked me about my well-documented pregnancy with my youngest son. In between questions and answers, I flashed back to my experiences of living on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao in the 1980s, when signs of civil war were rampant. While Timmy was joking with Robin about his siblings referring to him as "Timmy the Tumor," I remembered the not-so-funny details: I was told to abort my son because he was a "tumor," and I would likely die if I carried him. But I chose to trust God for my life and the life of the child we had prayed for by name. For most of my pregnancy, I was very sick and had no medical care, while Timmy fought to survive in the womb. Yet, in what the doctor called the biggest miracle he had ever witnessed, we both survived. Our baby boy was malnourished, though, so we asked our family and friends to pray that he would grow big and strong. God answered their prayers—and mine. That big and strong miracle baby was sitting beside me.

Timmy had clued Robin in that she should ask about the necklace I was wearing—one I rarely take off, because it's so meaningful to me. When Timmy got his first real job playing quarterback for the Denver Broncos, it was the first time he received a real paycheck, and it enabled him to buy generous Christmas gifts for everyone in the family. His special gift for me? A beautiful, sparkling diamond key necklace. On national television, my son sweetly shared that I was the "key" to his success. It wasn't because I taught him how to throw a football, but he believed my words, actions, and prayers over the years had an impact, helping to shape him into the man he'd become. I'm so thankful for the privilege of influencing my children!

Through these flashbacks and more, with my children and grand-

children standing in the background, I saw the big picture of influence unveiled before my eyes. Over time, through challenges and setbacks, stretches of monotony and anonymity, we each have the opportunity to positively influence others. Even when we don't realize it.

But my hope is that you will, indeed, realize it. That you will comprehend your God-given opportunities for influence—the ripple effects of how you live your life—and be inspired to influence on purpose.

RIPPLE EFFECTS

Seven pairs of eyes strained with anticipation to see what awaited us at the end of the long private road. It was 1992, and in an implausible “God story,” our family had just acquired a home and acreage at a government auction a few days earlier. Even before we unpacked our boxes, our three little boys impatiently begged to explore our property.

It took me a while to understand my male counterparts, especially since our first two children are more like me—females. But by this point in my life, after years of living with a husband and three boys, I wasn't surprised when my little guys' first priority while exploring our new domain was to pick up rocks and throw them. Thankfully, on this occasion, their target was our lake and not each other. (My husband, Bob, refers to the small body of water adjacent to our woods as a pond, but *lake* sounds much classier to me.) Observing the boys' delight at the resulting ripples as they threw one rock after another into the lake, I took advantage of a perfect teachable moment. It's a mom thing!

Long before I discovered numerous inspiring quotes about “ripple effects,” I used simple terminology to teach this truth to three impressionable little boys. While I don't recall all the details of

the conversation, it probably went something like this: “Just think, if ripples spread out across our lake when you throw your rocks into the water, how do the words you say and the things you do affect the people around you? And then, how do those people affect the people around them?” As the boys continued to toss whatever they could find into the water, we talked about simple examples they could understand. “If you say something unkind to your brother, he will feel bad and might be unkind too. The unkindness spreads. We want to spread good things that honor God rather than bad things that don’t.” I knew the boys would be tossing things in the lake for years to come, and I hoped the “ripples” lesson would come to mind every time they did.

Years later, I had the opportunity to explain ripple effects to one of our grandsons. Just as his uncles did at his age, he instinctively threw whatever he could find into our pond, causing the fish to duck. “Just as ripples spread out when you throw a rock into our pond, the things you say and do affect the people around you,” I told him. My young grandson looked up at me with his big blue eyes, armed with rocks in his bulging pockets. Even if he didn’t have a clue about reverberating ripples, his mother would later teach him about the consequences of his words and actions. It’s a mom thing!

When our three boys were older, two in college and one in high school, I wrote each of them a letter about the ripple effects of influence. (Although my daughters were already married when I composed the letter to their brothers, and they never felt compelled to throw rocks in the lake, there were many other opportunities while they were growing up to illustrate the ripple effects of how they live their lives.) The original letter is on some prehistoric hard drive buried under outdated paraphernalia in our storage room, and the boys’ copies were most likely tossed along with college textbooks they were unable to resell. But even if they no longer have my exact words, I trust they remember our lifelong focus on positive influence

reiterated through stories, verses, and visuals during their years in our charge.

In my lost letter to my sons, I illustrated ripple effects with the life of Daniel. One observation that struck me while studying this Old Testament prophet is that positive influence is not about living to please those around us. I have the tendency to be a people pleaser, and my heart ached to think that my people-pleasing ripples might negatively impact my boys. Thus, the goal of my letter was to encourage my sons to be God pleasers. To stand for what is right, even if they stand alone.

As kids, all my children loved the story of Daniel's courage when he was unfairly banished to the lions' den. Like Daniel, every one of us needs courage to face the temptation to compromise and conform to a world that rejects God. Although Daniel lived in a godless culture, he impacted nations, kings, wise men, and his friends by living a life that pleased the Lord. His ripples of influence expanded incrementally, leading to an impact he never could have predicted—one that extends to my family and yours almost three thousand years later.

When we reflect God's character through the gifts and opportunities He gives us, we are like rocks tossed into a pond, producing ripple effects that inspire those in our spheres and beyond to think and act differently. My prayer for you is the same as my prayer for myself and the people I love—that we would aspire to this God-sized goal of far-reaching influence.

Our life choices are like rocks tossed into a pond, producing ripple effects that inspire those in our spheres and beyond to think and act differently.

Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever.

DANIEL 12:3, NLT

I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone
across the waters to create many ripples.

MOTHER TERESA

CREATED FOR INFLUENCE

Who has the power to impact a decision, inspire a positive action, prompt a helpful change, turn a life (or many) around for the better, and leave an eternal imprint? You do!

You do not have to be famous, rich, or successful. You don't need an impressive degree or lots of followers on social media. A specific age, nationality, or personality is not a requirement, and you're not limited by your job, location, or marital status. You, my friend, have the power to positively influence others.

"How can I ever influence anyone for good?" a young woman called out to me as I was leaving a speaking event.

At that moment, nothing was more important than responding to her question. "Influence" was not my topic that day, but I believe so strongly in a woman's need to make a difference in the lives of others that I intentionally weave it into my messages and conversations. Why is bringing up our potential for influence a priority? Because even the mention of how influence is both our privilege and our purpose seems to stir up a longing that already exists within the heart of every woman.

I was the first person this young woman told about her story, and I listened attentively. She had suffered from a heart-wrenching experience and continued to struggle so much that she wondered how God could use her. We talked and prayed and hugged, and then I encouraged her, saying, "God will use your story to powerfully tell His story." I quickly introduced my new friend to a woman I knew would care for her and stay connected. As I left, I glanced back to see the two women hugging, and I felt free to go. Later that night when

I returned to my hotel, tears formed even before I could slide my key card into the door. I wept out of gratitude for God’s love and purpose for the precious girl I had just met—and for His love and purpose for you and me. Like this woman, we all need to know that we are part of a bigger plan. There is more to life than the daily routine; we are created to have an impact that echoes into eternity. God gives us the privilege to positively impact the lives in our spheres of influence and to motivate others to do the same.

You may be like the woman in my brief encounter who doubted her ability for positive influence. Maybe someone who should have encouraged you labeled you “good for nothing,” and you’ve believed their “destined for failure” prediction. You might suffer from a poor self-image, crushing past experiences, or a barricade of overwhelming challenges—maybe some of your own making and others imposed on you through no action of your own. I understand, and I’ve been there too. I only had a moment of influence with the woman in this story, but for the first time, she understood her potential as I shared, “God uses flawed people like us to impact other flawed people.” She got it! All I did was briefly share a biblical idea. Influence is not original with me. It is a contemporary word that expresses a timeless truth.

We are created to have an impact that echoes into eternity.

Our influence is not about whether we are adequate. It’s about allowing God to use us and our experiences to leave an eternal imprint on the people we encounter in our lives.

GIRLFRIENDS

“You are just like us!” the spokesperson for the cute group of ladies commented. “We expected you to act like you are on another plane, but we think you are real and down-to-earth and could be our girlfriend. Can we take pictures with you?” It was nearly 11 p.m. when

Julie and her friends approached me. I was tired and hungry. I had arrived at the event before six for a “meet and greet,” and I didn’t speak until nine. I never eat before I speak; salad would surely stick in my teeth. It seemed as if I had been standing and talking for hours, but their comments perked me up. *They see that I’m just like them? Wow! Thank You, Lord,* I silently prayed.

Julie’s reaction is always my goal, but at the huge event in New York City, this Southern girl felt a little out of place. As we talked and took pictures, I forgot all about my growling stomach. I was so encouraged by the response from this group of energetic, talkative young women.

I hope that like Julie and her friends, you think of me as a girl-friend, someone you can identify with. Someone just like you. We may be in different seasons and circumstances, but we are alike in that, in the midst of the challenges of life, we need purpose. A purpose that drives us. I cannot imagine any greater purpose than to have a positive impact on the people in our spheres of influence.

I believe that within the heart of every woman is the desire to be influential. My prayer is that you will be inspired as we uncover and explore the miraculous motivating power of influence women can have on this generation and the next, no matter where we are planted in life. Whether submerged in the trenches of endless diaper changes, climbing up the corporate ladder in stilettos, or serving the “least of these” here or abroad, we can engage our God-given opportunities for positive influence. And I believe that we women have the unparalleled opportunity to influence this generation and those to come.

We all need to know that our lives count. For more than just showing up at work, checking off items on a to-do list, or passing a class. For more than taking a dream vacation, achieving a “steps” goal, or crossing off items on our bucket lists. There is more to life, much more.

In the following chapters, I share stories from my own life as

well as from many friends who are living with influence. All of these would have had different outcomes if God had not been involved. He uses ordinary women like you and me to star in extraordinary God stories—real-life narratives of purpose and influence. Although we're all imperfect and inconsistent, we can still be influential because of God's grace. We echo what Jesus said: "Apart from Him, I can do nothing" (see John 15:5). And apart from Him, you would not want to be my girlfriend.

FOUNDATIONS FOR INFLUENCE

For many years, I have had the privilege of encouraging women to use the incredible influence God has given us to eternally impact our world. My goal has been to explain what I believe are the key foundations that equip us for a life of influence and to clarify each point with Scripture, personal stories, and life application.

When I first began to develop my message on influence, I wrestled with constructing an outline. I agonized over the main points, scribbling my thoughts and crumpling pieces of paper as I worked. I love order, but I desired more than just witty organization. Every component needed to line up biblically. To make sense to women in all seasons of life. To fit in an easy-to-remember, take-home outline. To communicate the essentials of influence, not just in words but also in reality. To point women to the God who created us to be influential. In time, six major points on influence evolved: Master, Manual, Prayer, Mindset, Mission, and Passion. If we can do nothing without the Lord, then the key to having positive godly influence is to know Him and be connected to Him. All six of these points reveal how to increase our influence by drawing closer to God and allowing Him to change us and use us to impact those we come in contact with. We'll look at each of the six in more detail in the chapters to come.

In my quest for a short phrase to clarify the significance of

influence, I repeated the first letters of each of my points over and over: *MMP, MMP*. In an unexpected burst of inspiration, I came up with a catchphrase based on this simple acronym that to me defines positive influence: *miraculous motivating power*. By God's grace, our positive influence has the potential to motivate others to do the right thing, make good choices, and—most important—seek Him. Whether or not we see results from our efforts, the Lord gives us the privilege to be part of the life-impacting process, which really is miraculous motivating power.

Ready or not, I began to speak on influence. As humbling as critiques can be, I welcomed constructive feedback, because from day one, it was essential to constantly improve my message—and it still is. In order for my life and my influence to change for the better, I must be a lifelong learner.

Years ago, a local television reporter, armed with a camera and microphone, cornered me as I walked into the Jacksonville convention center. He noted that I was the speaker for the main event later that day, but he questioned why I arrived hours early to attend other sessions. Then, without seeking permission for an interview, he positioned the microphone next to my lips and asked why I would bother to hear other speakers. My response to random questions is not normally quick or impressive. In this instance, however, my daughter Christy had called minutes before I entered the building and shared a quote from her favorite grad school professor, Dr. Howard Hendricks. I echoed his words as I replied, "I want to continually learn, so that I can be a fresh, flowing stream rather than a stagnant pool." A few friends who happened to tune in to the news that night commented on my "eloquent" remarks. I readily shared the humorous backstory with them as well as with the group I spoke to later that day. It made for a great introduction and a good laugh.

Although I am not as articulate as Dr. Hendricks, I agree with his premise. In my own words, continual learning really is a goal

INTRODUCTION

for my message and my life. You are smart women, so you get my point: I have only learned a fraction of what there is to know about our potential for life-impacting influence, but I'm grateful for the privilege to share what I have learned thus far with you!

Thank you for investing your time to read this book. My sincere prayer is that God will encourage you as only He can do, and that He will use you to impact countless lives for eternity with your miraculous motivating power of influence.

May He grant you according to your heart's desire, and fulfill all your purpose.

PSALM 20:4, NKJV

Chapter 1

FINDING OUR PURPOSE

You may think that only a high-profile person can be influential, but as John Maxwell wrote, “If your life in any way connects with other people, you are an influencer.”¹ And influence spreads. Whether it’s your children, your husband, coworkers, or people you interact with at the grocery store, gym, school, church, office, or PTA, you have the potential to inspire those around you in a positive, life-giving, and God-glorifying way. Why? Because people are always watching us.

My youngest son discovered this truth when he was in high school. One afternoon, I picked him up after football practice, and on the way home we stopped at a nearby store. Timmy walked beside me as I pushed the red shopping cart up and down bright aisles. My eyes bounced from the grocery list to the white labels on the edges of the shelves, looking for evidence of a sale.

With a strong desire to be the best possible athlete, Timmy has always been nutrition conscious. And, like his mother, he has always

been frugal. As we strolled down the cereal aisle, my focus still attuned to markdowns and clearance items, I noticed my son grab something from a shelf. With a sheepish look on his face, he tossed a brown box with three colorful elves on it into the cart. It happened to be selling at a super-low price.

When we rounded the corner, a father and his son passed by. The boy, a kindergartener at the school near where Timmy played football, recognized my son. He stopped and stared for a minute, his eyes bulging out of his head like a cartoon character's. I didn't know it at the time, but the boy snuck a peek at our shopping cart before he took off with his dad toward the other end of the aisle.

The very next day, this little boy stood up in front of his kindergarten class during show-and-tell. Holding up a box of Cocoa Krispies, he said, "*This* is the cereal Tim Tebow eats for breakfast!"

Well, it didn't take long for my phone to start blowing up with texts and calls from annoyed parents thanking me—sarcastically, of course—for influencing their kids to demand Cocoa Krispies for breakfast. In typical mom fashion, I used the Cocoa Krispies experience to teach Timmy about his potential for influence. I reminded him of the picture that hung in the bedroom he shared with his brother. A young boy in an oversize football jersey holds a football under his arm as he watches a group of high school-age boys studying the Bible under a nearby tree. The picture, printed by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, is entitled "Influence."

Timmy and I both enjoy poetry, so I was thrilled to find the perfect poem to accompany the picture, and I placed them together in a frame. This visual duo has traveled with him to every dorm room and city where he has played ball.

*There are little eyes upon you,
And they're watching night and day;
There are little ears that quickly*

*Take in every word you say;
There are little hands all eager
To do anything you do;
And a little boy who's dreaming
Of the day he'll be like you.*

*You're the little fellow's idol;
You're the wisest of the wise;
In his little mind about you
No suspicions ever rise;
He believes in you devoutly,
Holds that all you say and do,
He will say and do in your way
When he's grown up just like you. . . .*

*There's a wide-eyed little fellow
Who believes you're always right,
And his ears are always open
And he watches day and night;
You are setting an example
Every day in all you do,
For the little boy who's waiting
To grow up to be like you.*

EDGAR GUEST, "HIS EXAMPLE"

This memorable poem served to remind Timmy that he is accountable to positively influence those little boys, and others, whose eyes are on him. Even at his young age, he understood that having influence also meant he had a purpose more life-impacting than winning football games. Whether we are fifteen or eighty, eyes are also on us. Our children watch and mimic us. Our neighbors, coworkers, church members, classmates, friends, relatives, and more

observe us. What will they see? Because people are watching us, we must be intentional about the way we live if our purpose is positive influence.

INFLUENCE ON PURPOSE

When we know in our minds and believe in our hearts that God created us for a significant purpose, we are inspired to live differently. We need a purpose bigger than ourselves, one that gives meaning to the mundane tasks of life. A purpose so big that it is worth all

Because people are watching us, we must be intentional about the way we live.

the effort required to love and train one or many kids, work on our marriages, get to know neighbors, give our best to the job, prioritize our education, invest in grandchildren, serve at church, or volunteer time and give generously to worthwhile causes.

An important purpose changes everything! It not only motivates us but also has the potential to make an eternal difference in the lives of the people we connect with.

I was in the midst of writing about this subject when I met friends for breakfast before I flew home from a speaking event in Oklahoma. Months earlier, I had spoken at the kickoff for a new pregnancy center in that city. Although this couple had been unable to attend the fund-raiser, I'd told them all about the center director. Her strong courage and faith reminded me of my husband's, but she lacked experience. The young woman and her ministry remained on my mind and on my prayer list long after the kickoff event was over.

My friends had experience working with nonprofits. The husband had run hospitals for years and had served on the boards of pregnancy centers, while his beautiful wife was gifted with creative and practical skills and had a genuine love for others. They also had some time on their hands as they tried to adapt to their new life as

retirees. I knew they could be a wonderful resource, so I tried to connect them with the young director. When my first attempt failed, I debated whether to try again. But I sensed God was involved, so I made another effort. A special relationship resulted, and I received multiple texts of gratitude from everyone involved. The director had the passion and determination required for her job, but she needed my friends' wisdom and experience on her board. And the relationship wasn't one-sided; the retired couple also had a very real need that was fulfilled by their union.

As we enjoyed breakfast that morning, several months after I helped them connect, my friends shared details of their involvement with the pregnancy center. Then, as the waitress cleared the table, the husband paused, looked directly at me, and sincerely thanked me for giving them what they had lacked in their current situation: "God-ordained purpose."

My friends dropped me off at the airport to fly home, and I went straight to the restroom to check my mascara. As I pondered yet another God story, I couldn't stop the tears. For my friends, having a significant purpose gave their lives new meaning, erasing the ho-hum, let's-just-get-through-the-day attitude they'd been fighting since they'd moved. Retirement means that paychecks quit coming, but none of us really plan to retire from having purpose in our lives. Intentional purpose charged my friends' batteries and brought them joy. A few weeks later, I received the Christmas letter they sent to their friends and family. I smiled as I read the middle paragraph: "My friend Pam Tebow spoke at the opening banquet for the new pregnancy center. Long story very short, we were asked to be on their board. Way too much to tell, just know we're so excited to be part of what God is doing in these lives."

God gives us abilities for a purpose, and He weaves our abilities with His purpose into opportunities for meaningful influence. In other words, miraculous motivating power! God is the author of

incredible stories. He wrote this one for my friends, and we can trust Him to write stories of purpose and influence for us, too.

In our Sunday newspaper, I was surprised to find an article reprinted from the *Chicago Tribune* on the importance of purpose: “A job’s meaningfulness—a sense that the work has a broader *purpose*—is consistently and overwhelmingly ranked by employees as one of the most important factors driving job satisfaction. It’s the linchpin of qualities that make for a valuable employee: motivation, job performance and a desire to show up and stay.”²

The same article cites a study published in 2012 in the *Journal of Career Assessment*. According to research, the primary reason people skip work is not because they intend to quit or aren’t satisfied with the job. It’s because they find the work meaningless.³

Purpose makes a difference not just in a job but in all of life’s activities. It prevents us from slowing down, giving up, or opting out, even when we face daunting challenges. Purpose rearranges our goals, mindsets, countenances, to-do lists, speech, and more. When we truly understand the power of our influence, like my son Timmy did when he was in high school, we understand that our purpose is to impact the lives of the people who are watching us. A significant purpose energizes us. It transforms our work ethic, inspires creativity, and wakes us up with more to look forward to than a cup of coffee. Like my retired friends, we are motivated to love, serve, give, pray, and keep on keeping on until our heads touch the pillow, encouraged to do it all over again tomorrow. How we live our lives matters—especially if we recognize our God-given purpose to use the influence He gives us!

DISCOVERING OUR PURPOSE

Do you have purpose? Have you identified people around you who might benefit from your influence? For some of you, your purpose and your audience are obvious. A baby is crying in the next room.

Your students await tomorrow's lecture. You serve preemies and their anxious parents as a pediatric nurse in the NICU. You care for an elderly parent who often forgets your name. I have close friends in each of these situations, and their purpose is apparent to them and to those they influence.

Or you may be overwhelmed with too many tasks and people you're responsible for, making it hard to hone in on one area of purpose. You are nodding your head in agreement if you are a working mom, one who returned to school, one who homeschools her kids, or any woman who wears more than one hat. I have been there and done that, and you may be there now! In a later chapter, I share how I survived that challenging season, one that stretched my faith and prepared me for greater influence.

For others, your season of life has changed. Your kids grew up. You retired from your job. You are no longer married. Health issues limit your activity. You may wonder who you can influence in these new circumstances. My friends in these situations are seeking new purposes or revised versions of their former ones.

Or you may be like my mom. She didn't think she had purpose. For most of her life, she believed the lie that she wasn't capable of influence, because the influential people in her life enslaved her with doubts about her self-worth. Even when she began to attend church and Bible study later in life, her fears and doubts quickly stamped out any sparks of truth and purpose—until she turned seventy.

To celebrate my mother's seventieth birthday, my two daughters and I planned a special luncheon at the charming women's club where she was an active member. We sent out hand-engraved invitations, purchased decorations and ingredients for our lunch menu, and traveled several hours to her home. Our plan was to arrive early to prepare lunch, decorate, and tend to all the other details, but the Lord had a bigger plan.

While I was busy with food prep in my mom's kitchen, I could

hear my daughters talking to their grandmother about her involvement in various organizations. Mom lamented because, although she was busy, there seemed to be no point to all of her activities. She wondered if her life mattered. I listened and prayed as the girls encouraged her with ways she might make an impact on the groups she belonged to. One daughter suggested inserting a section for prayer requests in the club newsletter, since Mom was in charge of the club's member relations. And because she enjoyed sending cards to her grandchildren for every occasion, my other daughter suggested she send cards with handwritten notes to the club members who had birthdays, were sick, or had lost loved ones. And she could even add applicable Bible verses. Mom perked up!

Within a few months, both ideas resulted in significant influence. The prayer list became a staple in the newsletter, and club members were enlisted to pray. Then women began to share answers to their prayers, which inspired more women to ask for prayer. In an obvious God story, Mom's sophisticated, secular club eventually set aside a specific time each month for women to share how their prayers were answered. And the many cards Mom wrote to encourage members paved the way for meaningful conversations. Some of the ladies even joined Mom's Bible study. A few years later, my mother, who was once shy about discussing faith matters, began to leave little gospel tracts in the places she frequented. Members of another club she belonged to voted for her to be their chaplain, and she often discussed with me the devotions she was working on for her meetings. Mom's joy and fulfillment were evident during our regular phone calls, as she updated me on what she called her "ministry." It really was influential!

Purpose changed my mother. Our infinite, creative God wove together her opportunities, her personality, her gifting, and her season in life into a tailor-made way for her to significantly influence others. She had purpose, which eventually enabled her to believe

that her life counted. Mom proved that it's never too late to discover our purpose, and she always insisted she found hers that day as we prepared for her seventieth birthday party.

While we were cleaning up after that party, she shared through her happy tears that it was the first birthday party she ever had. I did not, however, want it to be her last. We celebrated Mom's eightieth birthday with another party. My daughters couldn't make the trip because by then they were busy with families of their own. What a special occasion it was, though, with many sweet ladies attending the birthday luncheon. This time, a restaurant did all the work, while each of Mom's friends shared what my mother meant to her. I thought my heart would burst as I listened to stories of her influence on each of their lives. In my mom's words, her influence began when she turned seventy. In my words, it continued long after she went to heaven at eighty-six.

Mary's Influence on Purpose

I refer to Mary as my "alterations lady," but she is so much more. Mary is seventy-six, and she has loved and cared for the babies in our church nursery for more than forty years. Parents are able to enjoy the worship service because their little ones are safe in Mary's tender care. She understands that her service is influential, even though she doesn't receive a salary and churchgoers without babies probably don't know her name. A paycheck and accolades do not motivate Mary. Her purpose does.

Mary also does alterations, as you probably guessed from her nickname. Her dear husband of fifty years passed away about six years ago. She could retire and take it easy, but Mary continues to work. Why? Because her other driving purpose is to love on all the people God sends to her with their alterations. Over the years, Mary has led more people than she can count to a relationship with Christ. For those who visit the sewing room in her garage, Mary is often the

only person in their lives who will listen, care about a health issue or a family problem, inquire about their relationship with the Lord, or offer advice when needed. She keeps her Bible near her sewing machine so she is ready for the people God brings her way. She is always busy. There is a bench outside her sewing room where customers wait their turn, and it is worth the wait.

Mary prays for the Lord to keep her mind sharp so she can continue to alter clothes—not for the income, but for her ministry. She is driven by her purpose to love lonely, hurting people. Mary’s purpose has yielded positive influence for more than half a century! I’m glad when I have a dress that requires altering, because it means that I can listen to some of Mary’s stories. My husband, who, like Mary, is passionate about the gospel, thinks she is one of the coolest people he knows. Even he does not mind waiting for an alteration or two.

Cristin’s Influence on Purpose

Cristin is decades younger than Mary, but her purpose drives her, too. Cristin served as my hostess when I spoke at a women’s conference, and I was immediately drawn to her joy. From her positive outlook and sweet spirit, one would assume all was right in her world. Years before, however, she suffered the consequences of an abusive homelife as a child and again as a young wife and mother. Instead of throwing a pity party when she became a single mom, Cristin turned her focus away from her challenges with a purpose to serve and encourage other struggling single moms with theirs. In her words, “God would give me a purpose through all the pain and abuse I had lived through.” She started a support group and created a website for the single moms in her community. And Cristin organized and raised funds to treat every interested single mom in her area to a free event she calls Dare to Dream, a Saturday of fun, food, speakers, lovely gifts, and activities for children of

every age. Cristin is a woman of purpose and influence who shares, “I want to use every last bit of my story for His glory!”

Every woman needs purpose. We have the privilege and responsibility to use our God-given gifts and opportunities to influence this generation and those to come. A purpose this big changes us from the inside out. The result: We will overflow with purpose, joy, and gratitude, because our mighty God uses our influence to impact people—for all eternity!

We have the privilege and responsibility to use our God-given gifts and opportunities to influence this generation and those to come.

BIG PURPOSE, BIG IMPACT

The streaks of orange and blue lit up the harbor in the early morning light. From the hotel balcony, I watched the sunrise on Plymouth Harbor, trying to imagine how the Pilgrims felt when their ship neared this historic coast in 1620. The voyage from England had been incredibly long and difficult, yet they anchored offshore. Why would 102 men, women, and children, who had lived in the hold of the ship for months, not use what energy they could muster to make landing the priority? My husband, the history buff, explained that the *Mayflower* anchored offshore while its passengers debated the rules their settlement would follow. The sea-weary Pilgrims spent one more week aboard ship while they wrote the Mayflower Compact, their guidelines for living in the New World. The enormity of their future influence was considered before a single Pilgrim’s foot stepped onto Plymouth Rock.

These courageous men and women made a covenant “in the presence of God and one of another” to join together “for [their] better ordering and preservation.” Looking ahead to life beyond their ship, they determined to write, enact, and obey whatever laws were needed for “the general good of the colony.” The group’s stated purpose in

settling this land was “For the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith.”⁴

To say that the Pilgrims were influential is an understatement. Many historians believe that the Mayflower Compact influenced the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. The Pilgrims’ purpose to honor God in both their public and their private lives had a long-range influence on future generations of Americans.

What a lesson about influence for us! My husband and I did not come from Christian homes, and neither did most of our close friends. We weren’t privy to any secrets for a successful family, so we asked questions. Observed people we admired. Read recommended books. We did not have a “Tebow Compact” or anything close, but we thought a lot about the importance of our future influence. Even though we were not nearly as mature or forward-thinking as we thought we were, God gave us the grace to realize that generations would be impacted by our present choices.

Years later, when Bob and I were speaking together in Boston, we chose to take an extra day to see nearby Plymouth, nearly four hundred years after the Pilgrims anchored in the harbor. During our brief visit, we explored the small historic community, hoping to find evidence of their spiritual influence. Not one of the promotional brochures in the small visitor center made any reference to God. The lovely old church founded by the Pilgrims was now a museum. Our hotel, one block away from where the Pilgrims landed, was the first hotel I ever stayed in that didn’t have a Bible in the bedside drawer.

Even if modern historians attempt to negate the long-range spiritual impact the Pilgrims had on America, their courageous determination to influence on purpose still lives on in our laws, our churches, and our lives. The Pilgrims took their influence seriously, and because of that they set the tone for the rest of our American history. The Pilgrims set sail to further the “advancement of the Christian faith”

in a new home. Like the Pilgrims, we can purpose to influence future generations by the intentional way we live now.

How does such a lofty goal become reality? Perhaps we start by thinking through what we believe. Are we willing to lay aside lesser goals in order to advance the glory of God? Should we think through our own versions of a Mayflower Compact? What would that look like? It could be active involvement in a local church. Reading the Bible as a family. Setting aside funds for local and foreign missions. Praying for our officials. Establishing family traditions to build strong bonds and keep members connected during the challenges of life. Serving people in our communities. Promoting character in our homes, schools, and workplaces. We may not spend a week in the hold of a ship or the basements of our homes to formulate a plan of action, but our personal and corporate accountability is worth contemplating.

This true story of the courageous Pilgrims should inspire us to take our potential for influence seriously. To pass on to our children values, beliefs, standards, morals, and ethics we hope they will pass on to theirs. One of my favorite Scripture prayers is Deuteronomy 30:6: “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.” After my history lesson on the Pilgrims, I’m more determined than ever to pray that our family’s influence will be long-range, impacting generations to come.

In 2020, the *Mayflower II*, a restored replica of the Pilgrims’ ship, will sail into Plymouth Harbor. A \$7.5-million makeover has been in the works, preparing the ship for festivities marking the four hundredth anniversary of the Pilgrim landing. There will be media attention and fans awaiting the ship’s anticipated arrival. I hope there will also be mention of the Pilgrims’ determination to influence their new world on purpose.