



“Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Psalm 90:12 (NIV)

PURSUE THE INTENTIONAL LIFE

JEAN FLEMING

“Because we as believers will soon see Jesus face-to-face, we need to live intentionally for Him. *Pursue the Intentional Life* has stimulated me to think and act more intentionally so I can serve Him with my best until He calls me Home.”

—DAVID RAE, president, Cables and Kits; former president, Apple Canada

“No one is better qualified to write *Pursue the Intentional Life* than Jean Fleming. Her single-hearted quest of ‘becoming the person God had in mind when He created me’ is exemplified in her life and writings. Over the years, Jean has kept an Old Woman File, and it is out of her ‘rumblings and stirrings’ as she pondered life on earth that we have this rich compilation of profound insights and lessons learned. In her words, ‘the book is a collection of mooring cables attaching me to my Anchor.’ You will find strong mooring cables here to challenge and encourage your relationship with Christ no matter where you are in your journey with Him. Jean’s underlying theme addresses the question ‘What does it look like to live Christ to the very end?’ Read this priceless book to discover the answer.”

—CYNTHIA HEALD, author of the BECOMING A WOMAN OF . . .
Bible study series and *Intimacy with God*

“This book is vintage Jean Fleming. Its message addresses my recent reflections about finishing well, maximizing spiritual fruitfulness, and living for the glory of God in the fourth quarter of life. The biblical wisdom Jean shares in these pages would be profitable for anyone, regardless of age, who fears spiritual drifting and wants to pursue an intentional life.”

—DON WHITNEY, associate professor of biblical spirituality and senior associate dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; founder and president, The Center for Biblical Spirituality

“Jean is a gifted writer and a passionate lover of Jesus. Her artistry shows clearly in her compelling word pictures that remind us of the joy of living our lives to the fullest and for God’s glory at any stage of life and even into old age. You will be blessed and spiritually energized as you follow Jean’s journey of reflection that prepares you for the future.”

—MARY WHITE, coauthor of *Unfinished*

“*Pursue the Intentional Life* deals with a critically important life principle that deserves much more literary attention. This book is not only timely but also succinct, biblical, well referenced, practical, and often profound. That Jean Fleming is such an unusually gifted author gives this book value not only for the ideas expressed but also for the expression of those ideas. These words will not wear out.”

—RICHARD A. SWENSON, MD,
best-selling author of *Margin* and *The Overload Syndrome*

“Do you want a book that is not so much a teaching book as it is a searching, asking, walk-with-me book that encourages you to ponder your life? Then this book is for you! Like Jean, I celebrated my seventieth birthday this year. I loved reading *Pursue the Intentional Life* as an older woman but would also have delighted in it at age thirty. I highly recommend it to you and believe that these pages will encourage, motivate, and inspire you just like they did me!”

—LINDA DILLOW, author of *Calm My Anxious Heart*;
coauthor of *Passion Pursuit*

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For the generations that come from us —
to the glory of God

“The children of your servants will live in your presence;
their descendants will be established before you.”

Psalm 102:28

Matt and Lashawna
Beth and Lyle
Graham and Yasuko
And our grandchildren

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FOREWORD

It is early March in Colorado when I meet with Jean Fleming for the first time. We're sitting at Backstreet Bagels near First and Townsend. She sketches a tree on a paper napkin, putting heart-shaped leaves on the branches and writing "CHRIST" down the trunk. I know this tree; it's the one she wrote about in chapter 3 of *Between Walden and the Whirlwind*. This is our first face-to-face meeting, but I first met Jean through her writings. Now fourteen years into motherhood, I keep returning to *A Mother's Heart* (where the applications go beyond parenting). I've been reading and studying the Bible daily for some time, but *Feeding Your Soul: A Quiet Time Handbook* still guides me. Her "Open-Heart Bible Study" (in *Discipleship Journal's* online archives) is an article I routinely distribute in my Bible-study groups. And I could never adequately express how much *The Homesick Heart* deeply ministers to my own.

Back to the bagel shop. Jean is drawing leaves, and I notice that her hand shakes a little as she writes. Her hair is white. Her children are my age. She tells me she's turning sixty-seven next month. I look over my coffee at this woman, thirty-one and a half years my senior, and wonder, *Why does she seem so . . . young?*

The Jean Fleming I have come to know, now in her seventies, is

not old. A vitality radiates from her countenance and posture. She always greets me with an exuberant “Hey!” With alert eyes and listening heart, Jean seems to catch everything: the hidden meaning in my words, the unspoken emotions in my spirit. Winsome, attentive, and energetic, she attracts people to Christ. She thinks strategically about ministry concerns with youthful fervor. If Jean were a tree, she would be “full of sap and very green” (Psalm 92:14, NASB).

If a woman like this writes a book originating in the questions “What kind of old woman am I becoming?” and “Lord, how do You want me to think about the rest of my life?” then I am certainly going to read it.

Pursue the Intentional Life has future as well as immediate practical impact. Though you’ll find phrases like “old woman” and “ending wisely” and “fiftieth year in Christ” in the following pages, this book is not specifically for “old people.” *Pursue the Intentional Life* is for you who want to see the big picture of your life and God’s purposes. It is for you who don’t want to revert to default or live a haphazard life on cruise control. It is for you who seek to live meaningfully and intentionally in the present while preparing well for the future. This book could be for the middle-aged parent facing transition or crisis, the elderly considering his last days, or the twentysomething excited about a full life ahead.

Essentially a private journal made public, each chapter lets us listen in on Jean’s conversations with herself and with God. Though Jean is a gifted teacher, here she doesn’t teach so much as invite. “Welcome,” the front cover conveys. “Come in and see what the Lord is showing me.”

A two-mile path loops around Jean’s neighborhood. “Want to go for a walk?” she asks. She shows me her collection of heart-shaped rocks, each one found among the gravel in the driveway or around the house. She points out an enchanting, narrow wooded place by the path and tells me it reminds her of something out of Narnia. She says that herons nest in those trees. She abruptly stops our walk and

conversation to grab my arm and say, “Look!” I then notice an owl flying silently over the big pond.

“Did you see it?” she asks.

Yes, Jean, I did.

This is not a teaching book that claims to have all the answers; it is a searching, asking, walk-with-me book that stimulates my own thinking and hunger for God. It keeps me on my toes to maintain a healthy melding of consistent patterns and Spirit-sensitive flexibility. These chapters have brought me from fear to courage, from timidity to enthusiasm, from fatigue to refreshment. In considering the rest of life, Jean imparts a sense of urgency without panic. Her alertness makes me alert too, and she draws my attention to truths from God’s Word that I may not have noticed otherwise. I might have missed the heron’s nest, the heart rocks in the gravel, the owl on silent wings.

I’ve found that reading this book is a lot like my friendship and discipleship with Jean. In these pages, I learn by watching and walking beside her as she follows her own path with Christ. Her wit is endearing, her spirit humble, and her intellect sharp. Often, the indirect and subtle parts are the ones that help me most powerfully. Her life is in the words, and she shares this life with me. Reading this book is like going with Jean on the two-mile loop.

Want to go for a walk?

Monica Sharman

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'm blessed with friends who care and pray. Thank you for your part in this book:

- Monica Sharman, who knows this book well
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- My small group and Bible-study friends
- Most of all, Roger

TAKE A WALK WITH ME: ASKING TWO BIG QUESTIONS

It all started when I turned fifty. I considered that most likely I was at least at the halfway point in my life, a thought I found both sobering and thrilling. On a long walk among the uplifted red-rock formations in Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs, I prayed about what kind of old woman I would become and how I should think about my remaining years. I didn't have any great aspirations for that walk; I just didn't want to back into whatever was left of the rest of my life.

I walked under the strong blue sky and bracing April air. The wind lifted my hair and rustled the paper I carried. I stopped and jotted thoughts and made that folded page the first entry in my "Old Woman File." At the time, I had no idea that I had defined a groove of thought that I can profitably build on, refine, and live in all the way to the grave.

For twenty years, I've fed that file. I've studied Bible passages, collected quotes, and hoarded odd pages, snippets of conversation, and insights from books I was reading—whatever held the slightest

promise of stimulating my thinking on this topic—all the while holding up one idea after another to the Scriptures, pondering and praying.

My spiritual siftings that April day served a concern: I feared living my remaining years vaguely, merely drifting in the wake of those living unconsidered lives. I desired to move into the coming years with vigor and focus. Then, too, I feared becoming a pinched and grouchy old person. The truth is that, all things unchanged, the women we will be at seventy, eighty, and ninety are the women we are at forty and fifty—only distilled. Have you noticed that the flaws and weaknesses of a forty-year-old concentrate with age? A complainer at forty will, with much practice, engrave the response in his or her bones by seventy. Self-centeredness will intensify. Bitterness, allowed to take root and grow over decades, engulfs and consumes in advanced age. Anyone living a frittering existence at thirty will, apart from a serious course correction, end up frittering away an entire life. It is just as true that a person doesn't suddenly become a wise, kind, gracious, fruitful old person just by reaching, say, seventy years. Of course, it's not too late to grow and change (I take comfort in that), but, more important, it's never too soon to begin.

This journey has unearthed some surprises. A young woman, a pastor's wife from the East Coast, asked, "When I come next time, will you take me through your 'Old Woman File'?" Why was I surprised at a young woman's interest? It is never too soon to prepare for the rest of our lives. The truth is that everyone, regardless of age, is already setting patterns for the shape of his or her life. These patterns of thought and practice will either serve the glory and purposes of God or hinder them.

I suspect that the material in my "Old Woman File" will benefit the young reader most of all. Even though a young person may be only mildly motivated by the question "What kind of an old person am I becoming?" he or she will recognize the value of preparing for the future. The issues I'm pondering make a difference today, next week,

and next year—and into whatever time remains. These topics and truths impact life with God now—our joy and usefulness to the body—as well as our entry into the Lord’s presence at death.

This book is the tangible result of my rumblings and stirrings as I’ve pondered life on earth, life with an expiration date, and life eternal with Jesus in heaven. It is the material evidence of my longing and intention to live in Jesus, with Jesus, and for Jesus to the end of my life. After all these years, I still find two questions motivating and challenging; more, I see them as infinitely consequential: What kind of old woman will I become? How will I live the rest of my life?

It’s certain that I’m heading into the rest of my life with greater prospect because of my years handling the material in my “Old Woman File.” The colors are brighter and clearer, the range of possibility greater than it would have been. My anticipation and attentiveness are increased. My antennae are up. I’m on a steep learning curve. The questions and seed thoughts that tumbled in the dryer drum of my mind that windy April day still intrigue, motivate, and sometimes unsettle.

And isn’t that a good place to be as I head into the rest of my life?

Father, dear Father, only You know how many days I have left on earth and what joys, opportunities, and challenges are ahead for me. I give myself to You again. Lord God, I want my remaining days to be days of ascent, days of learning You and knowing You better. Bless me and guard me for the day I make my final ascent into Your presence. Please don’t leave me to myself.

