

Caroline

The Backstory

Now in her early 60's, Caroline is the mother of four children and four grandchildren. She has known more heartache than most, yet she is an amazing woman of resilience and authenticity, with a compassionate ability to see past the surface to help people with their root issues. Caroline's call is to "lead people in Emmanuel prayer that brings people into an encounter with Jesus that changes everything."

"Years ago I lost two children in the span of 18 months. I was taking a nap when my young son Eddie drowned in a hotel pool. My husband was there but was unable to save him. Through God's grace I was able to say to my husband, 'I don't blame you and I never will.'

"A year later our daughter Marie was born three months premature, and after months in intensive care never came home from the hospital. We grieved her the best we knew how, but this brought me to a crisis of faith. I had this moment where I was standing in the kitchen, ready to throw in the towel, trying to decide whether to keep walking with Jesus or not. God didn't feel trustworthy in that moment, but I decided to trust him anyway.

"However, this isn't the issue I need to talk about. My biggest unresolved issue has to do with a pastor's wife from a previous church. An overriding theme for me is that when people make me the problem or project their issues onto me, I react strongly—it triggers me. I find myself saying, 'Don't put your stuff on me!'

"I call this season 'A Life Sucking Desert Time.' I felt that God put it on my heart to support Debbie, but the relationship was a challenging one and it was affecting the church. I felt like my heart was questioned a lot, or she would go off on me if she did not agree with me. When we would get together to attempt to address her issues, Debbie would turn it around and blame me and nothing would ever get resolved. I kept asking myself, 'What's wrong with me?'

"It was a gift when I was released from being a part of that church. It's wonderful to not have to see this person anymore, but why can't I be done with it affecting me? It really messed with my ability to trust, just like the season of losing my kids. I believed I ought to be able to trust my pastor and his wife to trust my heart. But after being there for 16 years, I realized I still wasn't trusted and that I couldn't trust them to lead me. We couldn't talk about real issues or have a meaningful relationship. I expected to be safe and it wasn't.

"My mother used to take her frustrations out on me physically, even when it was not my fault. I had forgiven my mom, but this made me realize I still had unresolved issues.

"During this season, I would just sit in Jesus' lap and he would tell me he had all the time in the world to hear what I had to say. He was very in tune with my heart and I could trust him completely. So I invited God into my memories, and he began reminding me of the abuse from my mom. As my past hurts were triggered, I was able to see where Jesus was in those memories. My relationship with him during that time became more about being with him than what I was doing.

"Since then, I find I'm more compassionate with people in their pain, and I understand it's not who they really are when they respond so out of character or speak out of their pain. I have more grace for myself, my husband and for my former leaders.

“Before this season, whenever people would put their stuff on me I would just pray, ‘God, get me out of this craziness.’ It was really hard to see God’s perspective when I was responding out of my own pain. But he was there with me, teaching me things I couldn’t have learned otherwise. The very things I didn’t like about my former leader—putting her issues on me—I realized I was doing to my husband! I caught myself and realized I was just like her. It wasn’t my husband’s fault—it was my issue. That was a big breakthrough in our marriage and a significant turning point. Now I am able to talk about what’s really going on between us instead of reacting. I’m finally able to get to the heart of the matter.

“I had never felt like I’d been cared for, but once I was able to experience God’s care, it took a lot of pressure off my husband. As I learn to value myself, I’m also learning to take care of myself physically. I’ve always had weight issues and know the source: I was sexually abused at five years of age. My family never talked about emotional stuff, so I stuffed my pain and my emotions. I didn’t even remember the abuse until I was in my 40’s. Even when I wasn’t overweight, I saw myself that way.

“So now, I want to be at peace about that. I’ve always felt if I could conquer this area, I could overcome anything.”

Caroline Flowers

My Beautiful Vessel of Honor

My Precious Caroline,

I've created an endless variety of vessels since I started making this thing called the human race. They have come in all shapes, colors and sizes, all for different purposes—and I have delighted in each and every one. But every now and then I create someone truly special—someone I put on the center of my mantel in heaven for all to admire. I regularly point them out to the angels and the heavenly host. You are one such vessel, Caroline. Sometimes I just sit and admire you with a huge smile on my face. Other times I can't shut up to the angels about the wisdom and beauty of who you are! But my favorite times are when your children Eddie and Marie and I sit together, loving and admiring you from here. They always thank me for allowing them the privilege of having such an amazing mom—and for the privilege of getting to play their part in making you into the person you are today. So, Caroline, I need for you to put everything down for a few minutes, curl up in my lap and let me show you what we see when we look at you.

We are eternally proud of you, my dear. You have allowed the agony of loss, abuse and disappointment to mold you into a carrier of my glory. Do you have any idea how many of my children suffer far less loss in life and yet never press into the power of my presence to make all things well? Instead they become hard and calloused, filled with bitterness and disappointment. They choose to no longer trust Me. They shut their hearts off and live to just survive. They want Me to behave as they would and when I don't, they can't see past it.

But not you! You found my window of opportunity in the midst of earthly pain, and you trusted me again. Do you have any idea what that does for my heart? That is the very essence of the walk of faith I have called my children to. Thank you for not settling for the view of me that is made in the image of humanity. Stop right now and picture it: my delight in who you are and the hard choices you've made to keep following me, especially when it made no earthly sense.

I want to let you in on a secret. I know just how you felt when you became a “whipping post” for your mother and then for Debbie. I was a whipping post once too. I asked the Father a number of times if there was something I could have done differently to keep them from treating me the way they did. He assured me there wasn't. But he had a plan and I trusted him with it, just like you chose to do.

As I hung there on the cross I had another choice. I could focus on the people who put me there—oh, the injustice and the pain of knowing one of my trusted friends was responsible for the betrayal! Not to mention the people who, thinking they were representing my Father, partnered with the enemy to put me to death. If they only knew who I was then they would have treated me differently.

*But they didn't know, and I saw that. I've allowed you to see it too. Hanging there I made this choice: to endure the cross for the joy set before me. I chose to look ahead to glory, and not behind at the people who put me there. I knew that by entering into death, there would be life again on the other side; life for you and all of mankind. You see—**you** were the joy set before me! I knew if I could overcome this unspeakable pain, you'd be able to as well.*

And it was worth it. In my economy, when you choose to enter into pain and suffering with me, and enter into the death of that thing, I have resurrection life waiting for you on the other side. That's why I could look at them and say they didn't know what they were doing. What you thought was a huge loss of trust, safety and peace, I used to impart a precious piece of my heart that few are qualified to carry. I used the very things the enemy thought would destroy you to bring redemption and intimacy into your marriage!

It broke my heart over and over again to watch you suffer. I would have stopped it if I hadn't had a plan to use what the enemy meant for evil and turn it around for good. Instead of being destroyed, you have now been called to display authenticity, to dig out the lies and darkness and to walk in the light of my love and truth. You would not be equipped or qualified to do that unless I had allowed this process in your life. It was a severe mercy, but it carried the gift of life for you!

*You are my beautiful vessel of honor, Caroline. The way you have allowed me to form you and to burn out the impurities has positioned you as my royal queen, filled with my love and glory. You have not allowed your heart to become bitter, but you have allowed me to fill it over and over again. You will now look on those who know not what they do, and they will be changed because they know **us** through you. You will show them that narrow window into my presence where I can redefine everything they thought was true about themselves and me. You can only do that because you followed me there.*

So thank you for hosting me so well. Thank you, not only for allowing me to reside within you, but for welcoming me in to abide—to become one with you. Together, we will transform the lives of those I bring to you!

Happy graduation day, my dear one! Wait until you see the joy I've set before you—you are now ready to enter into that place. We will go there together, overflowing with my joy and peace!

So rest assured, my Darling: the process has been worth it. You are an overcomer. Your marriage and all your relationships from here on out will be fundamentally different—fulfilling and rich because of your choices to let go of what you don't understand and embrace Me instead. I'm only just beginning to put you on display on earth. You radiate my love and I'm able to love people through you—just the way you are. Trust me, your joy and reward are just beginning! And oh, what we have planned for you when you finally arrive here!! Eddie, Marie and I talk endlessly about our plans for you on that day. What a party it will be!

In the meantime, all of heaven resounds with this: Live, sweet Caroline. Just live!

With undying love,

Your Jesus

The Outcome

“After reading my Jesus letter the first time and then letting it sink in, I felt like Jesus was my biggest cheerleader. He loves how he made me, inside and out. He delights in me so much and cares for my heart so much that He chose to give me a clearer picture of how amazing heaven with Him and my loved ones will be.

“He loves the effect I’ve had on others’ lives, and he’s confident that the fruit continue to grow. Jesus’ heart was blessed that I stayed in the journey; that I didn’t give up. I appreciated how he validated how hard the journey was and could identify with aspects of my journey—especially the whipping post. I was touched that He admires me and my wisdom and beauty (those were things I hadn’t realized before.) I was better able to see how my story and what I’ve learned on my journey are a gift I can give to others. I have more to give than I had allowed myself to believe. My ability to be authentic is refreshment to others.

“I have increased capacity because I know who I am created to be and can walk in my true identity—who Jesus says that I am. I don’t need to carry other’s burdens or other people’s junk. I’m seeing clearer, even more, how I was transferring my pain onto others, just as I had experienced them doing to me. Now I can trust Jesus to help them see how they have to put their stuff at his feet and not transfer it to someone else. It allows me to Forgive as I want to be forgiven “for they know not what they’re doing.”

“All this has given me a greater capacity to speak God’s truth of who I am and see how my identity comes from being with Him. There’s greater joy in my daily life because of what Jesus has healed in me as I’ve been able to have new experiences of His perspective. God is so for me, and He has been and still is redeeming circumstances to form me. It’s an amazing plan that is a process that I can continue to actively participate in.

“Now I get to be a part of an honoring environment where people are built up. More and more, people share their stories with me as they see a greater peace and joy and know I have the capacity to listen, not focusing on giving answers, but pointing them to continue to lean in to the journey Jesus has for them. Which is what I will continue to do as well.”