

Introduction

Hello friend. Welcome to Drawing Near, with Mary Ethel Eckard, author of The Making of a Dragonfly, available on Amazon. You can also visit me on Facebook or on my website, maryetheleckard.com.

I am very thankful and humbled you have invited me into your world. This program is called “The Wall, the dance, the breakthrough”. Stay with me.

My last show, God’s Dragonfly, took me quite a while to record. As a matter of fact, it took 7 hours to record 20 minutes of words. Equipment failures over and again. It was a bit frustrating, but I knew in sharing my testimony, I would hit a few brick walls, because the enemy of our souls does not want us sharing our faith story. I’ve hit seemingly unbreakable brick walls before in sharing my faith ... yet I have learned to trust God and push through.

One such occasion of hitting a wall that seemed impenetrable happened when I was leading a women’s weekend retreat. As the retreat speaker, I never take the responsibility lightly. In being invited to this event, I knew the Lord wanted to speak to the hearts of these women, using me as His vessel. So, I asked, ‘Lord, what do you want to say to these women?’ The retreat committee had given me the theme of the retreat, but it was up to me – well, the Lord through me – to come up with the scripture, stories, challenges and applications. So, I sat with the Lord and asked Him to write the sessions. For the Friday night session, He did something very unusual in our relationship. I wrote out the words for the session as they flowed through my spirit. I had the very clear impression that I was to stay on script for the Friday night session. This was new for me – He had usually given me outlines for sessions and this time, He gave me word for word for the session.

The Friday night sessions are always the most difficult because the speaker comes into a room filled with a group of women who don’t know one another. The speaker is immediately judged by their outward appearance and the first few words used in breaking the ice sets the tone for the rest of the weekend. This particular weekend, a dinner was served before the Friday night session, so I went into the dining hall and immediately began talking with the women around the room. They had no indication I was their speaker – I didn’t wear a tiara or a sash that read, SPEAKER. I just worked the room, so to speak. I didn’t know anyone at the event, so I really didn’t have anyone in mind to sit with and the tables were not assigned. It was interesting that some women engaged in conversation with me and some ignored me. One woman invited me to sit at her table. But the atmosphere of the dining hall was stiff, and I could sense the evening session was going to be a challenge.

After dinner, we made our way into the meeting space. As I stood to give God’s message to the women, I saw looks of shock come across the faces of the women who had ignored me during dinner time. I also saw smiles from the women who had engaged me in conversation. The atmosphere in the meeting room was a cold reception, and as I stood on the platform behind the podium speaking, it was as if the words coming from my lips hit an invisible wall and bounced back at me. It was as if there was an invisible wall between me and the women.

I could hear Ronald Reagan in my head saying, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.” So, I silently asked the Lord, “What am I to do?” His response – “Do the dance.”

Well, I had just returned from a mission's trip to Ghana, Africa where I had learned the native dance of the country. The Ghanaians are proud of their culture and insisted I not only learn the dance, but that I perform it over and over. "Are you sure Lord?" He repeated His instruction, "Do the dance."

So, I stepped away from the podium and explained to the women, "I was in Ghana, Africa last week and while there, I learned their traditional native dance. For some reason, I think you need to see it." Talk about being stretched outside the comfort zone. Well, these are the Lord's women and He knows better than I do how to tear down a wall. So, I did what any red blooded American women's retreat speaker would do. I did the dance.

And then I laughed. And the women stared in disbelief. A few smiled, but I didn't get applause or giggles or anyone wanting to learn the dance – just stares as if to say, why is this woman here?

Not the response I was looking for – but a few bricks in the wall seemed to come down. So I grabbed my Bible, stepped off the platform and onto the same level as the women, and shared with them the exact words God had given me beforehand. Verbatim.

Which is something that has never happened in my entire speaking life. After the session, the women exited the room and I was left standing there, alone.

I felt foolish, invisible, and vulnerable. The Lord put me on display, and I wanted to run home – to go into hiding, to have a re-do and do it my way instead of making a fool of myself.

I went to my room and questioned God. What was that? Where were you? Why was I made the fool? He quickly convicted my heart and invited me to lose myself by trusting Him and rather than going into self-awareness to pray for the women. So I remember going to sleep, praying for the women's hearts to be softened toward God and the message He had for them.

The next morning, as I stood to speak, I stood on the platform behind the podium, and the wall was down. I shared more with the women about my trip to Africa and how they had been my prayer focus while I was there, as I prayed "Lord, what is your word for these women?" Throughout the remainder of the weekend, the women asked me to do the dance again – it became a sweet connecting point for us. The remainder of the sessions, the Lord's voice was free to move through me into the hearts of the women.

God worked much healing during that weekend retreat; I saw many lives touched and changed; many women's faith redirected; relationships healed. But it took a huge leap of faith in God's direction to "do the dance."

Back to the story about the recording equipment. Yes, it took 7 hours to record 20 minutes of word, but in those 7 hours, the Lord reworked the story many times and I even did a bit of a dance as I recorded it the final time, knowing the delay was intended to shut me down in frustration, but my leaning into the Lord allowed Him the opportunity to position the telling of my story in a different way.

It's his story, after all, and He gets to fashion it for the audience He sends to listen, right? My lips and words need to always be surrendered to Him so He gets His message across, even if it means it causes

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me frustration, or as in doing the dance, it makes me question the action. Obedience – even when it doesn't make sense – tears down walls, especially invisible spiritual walls.

I am a teacher and a storyteller, and somewhere in the midst of a story or lesson, the Lord gives me a word of wisdom. I know the Lord is about to hand out a bit of wisdom when the word "LISTEN" comes from my mouth.

My daughter, Aubrey, tells me, "Mom, when you say LISTEN, my ears perk up because I know you're passionate about what you're saying, and I don't want to miss the wisdom God has placed on your heart for me."

If you recall, in the last episode, I repeated several times, Listen. And then a bit of a "preach" came out to provide direction for your path ahead.

When we humble ourselves to share our stories with others, we can trust that God will provide the words we need. In Matthew 10:19, we read, "Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Though this scripture applies to believers who are being persecuted, I also know it applies to us when the Holy Spirit prompts us to share our story with someone. He will use our words to shine His light – He just wants our obedience in allowing Him to speak through us.

You can, however, prepare yourself so you're ready when the time comes. How?

I worked for a women's evangelical ministry for a season. One of my responsibilities was to help women develop their faith story. I asked them to answer 3 questions. What was my life like before Jesus? What happened when you came to know Jesus? What is one thing God has done in your life since you've come to know Jesus?

Then I challenged the women to practice telling a story based on these three things. I challenged them to process their story, out loud, so they could become accustomed to their voice talking about Jesus. Then I challenged them to practice sharing their story with a trusted friend and to keep it fresh in their minds until they became comfortable with the story.

The first few times sharing a story about spiritual things will make you feel vulnerable and raw. You open yourself up to mockery and ridicule. But over time, the truth of your story becomes more important than the opinion of others. Listen – I was a people pleaser for many years, so I get it. And I say boldly, those insecurities eventually fade ... sometimes we have to work overtime to make them fade – as I did last week.

After I published the episode, God's Dragonfly, I immediately began second guessing myself because the stories I shared were about my faith journey where God truly got my attention because my spirit turned toward him and asked the question, "is this all there is?" The stories I shared were stories of my friend Patty, a four-year-old boy and a kidney donation, and a dragonfly.

As I shared those stories, I was aware I've told those stories multiple times. For the listener who has heard or read those stories, the stories may grow old and tired. For me, sometimes I do get tired of telling the stories that are 18 years old, but they are the beginning of my faith journey. They are stories of the way God used my life circumstances to turn my heart toward Him.

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I almost took the podcast down several times, thinking the stories are old and I need to tell new stories. Then I heard a bit of mockery saying, “You only tell old stories because you don’t have anything new to tell – you’re stuck in the past.” Well, that’s when I knew the enemy was messing with me. In case you’re new to this faith walk, let me clue you in – the enemy will do everything to shut down a testimony. But let me give you God’s words about repeating an “old” story.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7 says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Though Moses was talking about the ten commandments, this also applies to sharing our stories of God’s faithfulness to all who will listen. I Peter 3:15 challenges us, “Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

In the episode, “God’s Dragonfly”, I shared how Patty’s faith testimony stirred within me a desire to know God. Your testimony shared with others will stir their hearts as well.

One of the oldest testimonies that still stirs our hearts to know God is from scripture and is told by John, a disciple of Jesus. I’m going to read to you four verses. From I John 1:1-4.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the word of life. The life appeared. We have seen it and testify to it and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so you also may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the father and his son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

For many years those verses were confusing to me – it sounded like a riddle and a lot of words strung together that didn’t make much sense. I’ve since learned to take scripture verse by verse – sometimes word by word – to see what God wants me to glean for that particular time.

John was one of the disciples in the inner circle of Jesus. He was the only disciple present when Jesus was crucified and died on the cross. He loved Jesus and knew Jesus loved him. Scripture shows that John would lean on Jesus when they were together. He surrendered his life completely to Jesus and in the scripture I just read, John shares his testimony. Did you hear it? Let me summarize his testimony for you.

In these scriptures, John shares that he Jesus is real. He says I heard him with my own ears, I saw him with my own eyes, I looked at him, watched and observed his life. I touched him – put my head on his chest and leaned into him. I touched his nail scarred hands and feet. I know this man I speak of. He is real to me. I know Him as the Word of life, as God’s son, and as our Eternal Life. I have a firsthand relationship with Jesus. I walked with him and served with him. This is my testimony.

I want to stop there and add this – I, Mary Ethel Eckard, know this Jesus that John talks about. I have heard him, I have seen him, I have observed him, and I have touched him. Not in physical form, but in the spirit.

I have used my imagination to walk with Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem, through the deserts of Israel, to hear him preach the Sermon on the Mount, to watch him baptize in the Jordan River. As I read

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from John 9:6, I'm with Jesus as he heals the man who was born blind by spitting on the ground and making mud with the saliva before putting it on the man's eyes.

I wasn't personally with Jesus as John was, but I can read the stories in the Bible and use my imagination to put myself there. Then I can look back at my own life and picture Jesus with me in every situation and emotion I've been through. This gives me more of a firsthand understanding of God's faithfulness and my faith and testimony grow.

When we become believers, a seed of faith is planted in our heart and it becomes our responsibility to water and feed the seed, to make sure the soil stays turned and fertilized for the seed to grow. I don't know about you, but I want the seedling of faith in my heart to grow into an oak tree that will not be swayed by the wind and rain of life.

My challenge to you this week is to begin preparing and practicing your testimony. Have you seen Jesus, touched Him, heard Him, learned from Him? Ask God to reveal to you the many ways He has been present in your life through every circumstance and situation. Put some mileage on your faith feet. Be willing to step out and do a dance to break the walls of hesitancy and fear. Listener, tear down that wall that hinders you from sharing your faith with others.

In sharing your testimony, will you be able to say, like John, that you have discovered life – you have touched, seen, looked upon, and witnessed the life of Christ in your life? What things will you share with others, when they ask you what to share your story of faith. Will it be a story of a firsthand relationship with Christ, or will it be a second-hand knowledge of Christ that comes from what you have read and learned from others? Personal stories carry passion and truth with greater force and power!

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May the grace of God cover you each day, may you feel His love, sense His presence and may you know the truth of who you are in Him.

Remember, God's word – even the spoken testimony – accomplishes the purposes for which it is sent – so send this to someone who needs a word of encouragement today.

Thank you for tuning in to the show. This is Mary Ethel Eckard, signing off.