

10
Secrets of
extraordinary
women

Julie Clinton
with Mary M. Byers



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*To the women who hunger after God
and dare to be bold in their faith
and to the loving memory of my father
Clayton Ray Rothmann
(1938–2000)*

Acknowledgments

Since I've been little, I've always wanted to write my thoughts and share my heart in words. But I had no idea what kind of effort writing a book like this would require! God has been so good to me! He has surrounded me with a wonderful, godly family while I was growing up, including a loving father who left this earth for heaven far too soon. I miss you, Dad, and I deeply appreciate your love and the life lessons you taught me.

I want to thank my heavenly Father for bringing into my life the people, the resources, and the opportunity to complete this work, and I offer it to Him for His glory.

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Thanks to the women who filled these pages with heartfelt stories of their love for life.

To team Extraordinary Women, God is awakening the hearts of women to do His good work all over America. The best is yet to be!

Thanks to my mother, who faithfully prays for me and has taught me the holy Scriptures since I was little.

And to my loving husband, Tim, and to our two children, Megan and Zach—you bring so much joy to my life.

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Foreword

I first met Julie Clinton at an Extraordinary Women conference. Her passion for God and her deep desire to point women to an eternal perspective instantly bonded my heart to hers. She is an extraordinary woman of influence for God's glory. I know her spiritual authenticity, her knowledge of God's Word, and her commonsense practical applications throughout this book will provide you and thousands of other women the life lessons and practical how-tos we all long to know in order to be more effective Christian women.

As a teenager I told God I wanted to live for things that mattered. I wanted to come to the end of my life knowing I had lived with purpose, with conviction, and with a heart determined to follow His call, regardless of where it took me. At that time I thought my commitment might mean overseas missions or perhaps teaching highly motivated students. I didn't know that path would lead me to writing books and speaking at women's conferences. As I've followed His call, I've learned that life is not always idyllic, tranquil, and without problems. But this book teaches you how to be an extraordinary woman even when circumstances are less than ideal.

As you read, you'll learn how the supernatural person of Christ gives us the ability to see with different eyes, to perceive purpose and meaning in the middle of our daily, imperfect, and disappointing life experiences. Julie has unlocked the secrets to capturing the dream God has in mind for you. This dream may not look like the one you once wrote on a goal chart with carefully developed smaller steps that led to the big picture. The real secret of this dream is that God looks at you, flaws and all, and says, "For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope'" (Jeremiah 29:11 NLT).

Thinking of yourself as an extraordinary woman might seem arrogant

to you, but that's how God designed you. You are a one-of-a-kind woman with a distinct personality, unique gifts, and the potential to make a mark in this world that is different from any other. God loves you with an everlasting love, and He will never walk away from you. Unlike many people you've encountered, He offers a love that is sticky, resistant to rejection, long-suffering, and pure.

Extraordinary women have many things in common. They look at the world differently. Instead of seeing roadblocks, they visualize the finish line. They replace negativism with optimism. They instinctively realize that problems are solvable and that difficult people are rarely "out to get them"—they're just struggling with their own issues. Extraordinary women know how to dream beyond their current challenging circumstances and believe God has a plan for them that surpasses the finest scenario they could imagine.

The book is uniquely designed to teach you how to embrace God's love, discover His purpose for your life, develop meaningful relationships, understand men, get through tough times, and live with passion, balance, purpose, and joy. The surprising truth is that extraordinary women don't necessarily live easy, uncomplicated, predictable, and financially wealthy lives. But they do respond in extraordinary ways when life hands them extraordinarily difficult circumstances. (You'll learn about my own challenge in this regard when you read my story, which begins on page 161.)

This book gives you opportunities to write out your thoughts, meditate on biblical truth, dialogue with God and others, and make new decisions about how you will live for things that matter. As you grow in your faith, you will discover how to capture the dream God has for you.

Extraordinary women go beyond what is usual, regular, or customary. As Christian women, we have the "real" secret: the supernatural power of God Himself invading our lives with His desires. In the process of loving Him and following His heart, we get balance, vision, and everything we need to fulfill His call on our lives. I hope you will encourage other women to experience this book with you as you learn how to become an extraordinary woman of God.

Carol Kent, author of
When I Lay My Isaac Down (NavPress)
A New Kind of Normal (Thomas Nelson)



Introduction

“Why do we try so hard to fit in when God created us to stand out?”

My 17-year-old daughter, Megan, was chosen this past year to be one of five candidates on the Winterfest court held at her school. Winterfest is similar to homecoming except five juniors are chosen and crowned at halftime of a basketball game instead of a football game. The day before the crowning, each contestant delivers a challenge to the student body. As Megan and I cuddled on the couch, preparing her speech the night before, we got on the topic of God’s dream for our lives. We talked about His plans versus our desires, His love versus our mistakes. As we lay talking about God, life, school, and boys, Megan stopped. She looked me in the eyes and asked the question I just raised to you.

At home on that cold January evening, my daughter challenged me. And as I pondered the question, I realized life is not about drawing attention to ourselves and what we do. It’s about drawing attention to Him and lifting Him up. Even Jesus declared, “I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and He is the judge” (John 8:50).

As you read through the pages that follow, understand and constantly remind yourself of this truth: God loves His daughters. That’s right, God loves *you*. And He is in the business of making *you* extraordinary.

How do I know? Prior to His death and resurrection, Jesus promised the disciples He would send the Holy Spirit to them.

If you love me, show it by doing what I’ve told you. I will talk to the Father, and he’ll provide you another Friend so that you

will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can't take Him in because it doesn't have eyes to see Him, doesn't know what to look for. But you know Him already because He has been staying with you, and will even be in you! (John 14:15-17 MSG).

The promise Jesus made to His disciples so long ago is still relevant to His disciples today. The Friend, Counselor, and Helper Jesus promised to send resides in you at this very moment. This Spirit of Truth is the same Spirit that enables ordinary women—like you and me—to become extraordinary.

In this book you'll read about women who've had extraordinary encounters with Christ. You'll meet everyday women who are using their passion and skills to make an unimaginable impact in the world. You'll learn about regular women who are allowing God to use them in the midst of trying circumstances. And most importantly, you'll be challenged to ask yourself how you can actively work with the Holy Spirit to complete your own personal transformation into an extraordinary woman.

Some of what you read might be unsettling. Some may cause you to question your own motives and decisions. That's purposeful. I want you to be challenged as you read. I know you are interested in being the best you can be for your family, your church, your community, and God. Sometimes that means taking a close look at yourself and deciding what and how you need to change.

Life is all about change. It's a process I've been through, am going through, and will continue to go through for the rest of my life. I'll share with you a little about my journey in this regard as we move through the pages of this book together.

In addition to learning about the power of the Holy Spirit that resides in you, we'll be learning the secrets of extraordinary women. By my dictionary's definition, secrets are "beyond general understanding; mysterious; concealed from sight and hidden." With a little help from the Holy Spirit, however, I believe we can uncover these secrets, thereby tapping into their power.

I've designed this book as a ten-week study. Each chapter is intended to take a week, with five daily readings each revealing a secret. Look for Live the Dream at the end of each reading, which summarizes what

extraordinary women know, do, and practice. You'll also find Journal Prompts—questions to get you started writing in your journal in order to help you learn more about yourself and what you need to do personally in order to bring the extraordinary into your life.

The daily readings are short so you can fit them into your busy daily schedule. But don't worry or get hung up if you get behind. Our time together isn't meant to be a chore or one more thing to add to your to-do list. Instead, I hope your reading time provides encouragement and refreshment each day as you tend to all the responsibilities that come with being an extraordinary woman in today's merciless society.

Everything in this book is designed to draw you closer to the heart of God, to those you love most dearly, and ultimately to the extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit. My hope is that your walk with the Lord and your relationships with those you love will be deepened with every page. If so, you'll be well on your way to living the extraordinary life God has prepared for you. It's time to stand out!

Blessings,
Julie Clinton



Week 1

Secrets to Living God's Dream for Your Life

Dreams...all girls grow up with special dreams, like becoming a princess—a Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty. We want to be chased. Rescued. Desired. Little girls often play house with dreams of finding someone who will love them and kiss their face, who will tell them how beautiful they are. Or they dream of becoming a special mom with little babies who will grow up and change the world.

Being special in someone's eyes matters to us. That's why I love Jeremiah 29:11 (MSG): "I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for." The Dream Giver Himself has a dream with *your* name on it. He always has. He's been dreaming about *you* since before you were born. And because He loves you with "an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3), His dream for you is bigger and better than the one you have for yourself! He wants to use you for His glory.

The tragedy in life is that our dreams often get tarnished at the hands of life and other people. In fact, self-reported surveys show that up to 80 percent of people are not living out their dreams.

It's no secret that God has a plan for your life, but the details of His plan and the way you are to live it out may be secrets to you. God's plan may feel like a mystery, but God doesn't mean for it to be. In fact, He intends for you to determine what His dream is for you and to live it fully and abundantly.

This chapter is designed to entice you with the possibility of living God's dream for your life, to help you understand why it is important to God that you do, to assure you that God can use you where you are right now, and to encourage you to focus on what you're good at when it comes to doing kingdom work.



Day 1

Life Is More than Just Getting By

*Dream as if you'll live forever;
live as if you'll die today.*

JAMES DEAN

Are you going to merely live? Or are you going to live your dreams? These are questions that every woman must ask herself and answer at some point in life. If you haven't asked yourself these questions, now is the time. How you answer them will determine what the rest of your life will look like, starting today.

The difference between merely living and living your dreams is greater than you might think. Merely living includes behaviors like these:

- ☞ Going through the motions without much thought or concern for the future
- ☞ Getting through the day without carefully noticing how you spend your precious time
- ☞ Trudging through each week and month without any joy or peace
- ☞ Ignoring the areas of your life that cause you pain
- ☞ Assuming you don't really have the power to change your life—or your response to it

Living your dreams includes much more intentional actions:

- ✧ Taking the time to identify what God wants you to do and then making plans to do it
- ✧ Allocating your time in a way that helps you meet your needs as well as the needs of those around you
- ✧ Embracing the joy and peace that a relationship with Christ offers
- ✧ Acknowledging and addressing the issues that cause you pain
- ✧ Learning how to let the Holy Spirit work in you and through you so you can live more abundantly

Every day I get the chance to meet with, talk with, and work with exceptional women from all walks of life. Some are married, and some are not. Some are parents, and some are not. Some work outside the home, and some work from it. Some run marathons, and some are challenged by chronic illness or pain. Some have gotten everything they wanted in life, and some have not. Most fit into more than one of these categories. But all have made the same decision: They choose to live life fully and abundantly, the way Jesus wants them to. Jesus says, “I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of” (John 10:10 MSG).

Some people may say that circumstances determine whether you can live out your dreams, but I disagree. I’ve met women who are challenged by the most difficult situations and yet manage to live abundantly. Joni Eareckson Tada is a great example. She has learned to live life to the fullest despite a diving accident that left her paralyzed and completely dependent on a wheelchair. And I have met women who have it all and are living small, unhappy lives. The difference is not in the circumstances. The difference is in the attitude. And the only difference between a positive attitude and a negative attitude is the decision to choose one over the other.

Extraordinary women decide that they will hold onto and live their dreams regardless of their circumstances. In the weeks ahead you’ll see that living your dreams requires making the decision to do so every single day. You cannot make this choice once for all time. You must make this choice every day—and then consciously choose again every time life throws you a curve

ball. Consequently, I believe that a full life is *lived in the moment of decision*. Let me explain.

Extraordinary women decide that life's disappointments, whether unemployment, the marriage proposal that never came, or the promotion that was never awarded, will not dampen their enthusiasm. They decide to continue to do their best and work to become better, not bitter.

Extraordinary women decide that a husband's death, disability, or infidelity will not cause them to give up. They decide to bravely face their circumstances.

Extraordinary women decide that a child's illness, physical or emotional limitations, rebelliousness, or waywardness will not completely bury their gift of mothering. They decide to persevere in loving and praying for each of the children entrusted to them.

Extraordinary women decide that physical limitations or illness will not rob them of joy. They decide to find the silver lining (as sparse as it may be) in every cloud.

Extraordinary women decide that money or lack of it will not determine their level of happiness. They decide that money is simply a means to an end and not an end itself.

Extraordinary women decide not to dwell on what they do not have. They recognize what they do have and are grateful for it.

Extraordinary women decide not to be overwhelmed by the tough choices and life-changing decisions that they will be called to make. They call on the power of the Holy Spirit to help them make wise judgments.

In short, extraordinary women *decide*.

Life is lived in the moment of decision. What kinds of decisions have you made lately? More importantly, what kinds of decisions do you need to make?

Do you need to get out of any bad relationships? Set boundaries with friends and family members? Start new habits or drop old ones? Do you need to change jobs? Do your children need more (or less) discipline? Has your marriage grown stale?

You may not know the answers to these questions right now. But I hope you'll be challenged to think about them as we journey together. Ultimately, the questions you ask yourself or refuse to ask, and the decisions you make or refuse to make, will determine the quality of your life.

Life is more than just getting by. Ordinary women get by. Extraordinary

women live life to the full, as Jesus desires. As you read on, I hope you will clearly see where your life is full and perhaps where it's not. I also hope that the secrets we explore will encourage you to see that you *can* have a full and abundant life rather than one that's characterized by emptiness and scarcity.

Jesus came so that you too can be an extraordinary woman. Read on to find out how.

Live the *Dream*

Extraordinary women decide to hold onto and live their dreams regardless of their circumstances.

Journal Prompts

- ✂ What did you dream of becoming when you were a little girl? Has that dream come true for you?
- ✂ What obstacles are holding you back from experiencing your dreams?
- ✂ What decisions do you need to make in the coming days and weeks that you can ask the Holy Spirit to help you fulfill?



Day 2

Something Bigger

Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.

MOTHER TERESA

Extraordinary women are faithful in the small things, and that enables God to entrust more to them as they mature and grow in their faith.

I'm sure that noted Bible teacher Beth Moore didn't know what God had in mind for her when she began leading Christian aerobics years ago. Since then, God has called her out of her spandex and around the world to teach His Word. She teaches a 700-member Sunday school class at her church and hosts an interdenominational Tuesday night Bible study for women in her city. She's also authored multiple books and Bible study curriculums.

Allison Bottke was born and raised in Cleveland. She ran away from home at the age of 15 and married a young man whose abuse nearly ended her life. Divorced and a mother at the age of 16, her tenacious spirit saw her through three decades of turmoil and addiction before she came to know the Lord. Now she's the editor of the inspiring God Allows U-Turns non-fiction book series.

Heather Whitestone McCallum lost her hearing due to a virus she contracted at the age of 18 months. Though profoundly deaf, she studied hard and graduated from public high school with a 3.6 GPA. Due to financial

hardships at home, she started competing in pageants in order to win scholarship money for college. She competed in the Miss Alabama contest three times before winning the title and heading to Atlantic City to be crowned Miss America. She was the first woman with a disability to do so. Since then, she has written two books and traveled extensively, sharing how Jesus' influence in her life is the key to her success.

What if God's dream for your life was something bigger than you ever imagined?

If you knew God had bigger plans for you than you have for yourself, how would that change things for you? Would it scare you? Make you nervous? Excite you? Energize you? Make you want to lay down and take a nap?

Thankfully, God doesn't reveal His plans for us all at once—as if Publisher's Clearing House came to your door with balloons and flowers and a big check for a million dollars. Most of us would be overwhelmed by that. Instead, God gently takes us by the hand and leads us, a little at a time, to the future that only He can see. By moving us along gently, He gives us the time we need to mature, to develop the skills we need for the work He's planned, and to get used to the idea that all that's happened in the past may in fact be part of His grand plan for us.

By revealing His plan a little at a time, God helps us adjust to the idea that His plan may be bigger than we ever imagined.

When I was growing up as a young girl in Montana, I never dreamed God had plans for me to be serving Him the way I am—as president of Extraordinary Women, an association committed to drawing women closer to the heart of God. (Visit Extraordinary Women online at www.ewomen.net.) Standing in front of audiences always unnerved me. It still does today. But I've had to learn that God's dream for my life did not necessarily match mine. I'm still amazed when I consider the way God blesses this ministry and empowers me to lead the team of wonderful people who make it all happen. God's dream for me was certainly bigger than the one I had for myself!

At one point, I planned to be a lawyer. Then I was going to be a doctor. I ended up as a math teacher. But that was the perfect preparation for the next stop on my journey. I became the executive director of the Liberty Godparent Home, a home for unwed mothers. In that capacity, I was in charge of budgeting, operations, policy making, funding, and other tasks. I also helped girls select adoptive parents for their unborn children. That

too prepared me for what I'm now doing. And I believe that whatever you are doing now is perfect preparation for the future that only God can see.

Like me, Beverly LaHaye, author and chair of Concerned Women for America, did not envision what God had in mind for her. She shares, "I could never have dreamed that as an ordinary girl from an ordinary family I would one day testify before the Senate Judicial Committee in support of a nominee for Justice of the Supreme Court. Or that I would meet privately with three presidents of Central American countries to speak about helping their families. Or that I would be able to minister in seven different refugee camps over a five-year period during the Nicaraguan Sandinista war where the refugees fled to Costa Rica for safety."

In Matthew, Jesus shares a parable about a master who entrusts part of his treasure to three servants while he is away on a trip. When he returns, he calls the servants together to see what they've done with his money. Two have made the money grow; one simply hid the money for fear of losing it. The master commends the two who made the money grow and condemns the other. The master's commendation consists of these words: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matthew 25:21).

Beth Moore was faithful while she was teaching aerobics. Allison Bottke struggled through her own turnaround before becoming the poster girl for life-changing U-turns. Heather Whitestone McCallum took six years to correctly pronounce her last name, and now she can introduce herself as a child of the King.

These women were all faithful in the little things, and that led to them being entrusted with bigger things.

God's plan for your life is bigger than you can imagine. Ask Him today to start revealing it to you. I'm confident you'll be surprised by what He has planned. And I know it's better than anything you have imagined!

Live the *Dream*

Be faithful in the small things, and God will entrust more to you as you mature and grow in your faith.

Journal Prompts

- ☞ Are you presently doing the task God has called you to do in this moment? Are you doing it to the best of your ability for Him, or do you simply do the minimum to get by?
- ☞ In what ways and areas of your life is God calling you to be faithful right now?
- ☞ When you begin to believe God has something big planned for your life, what changes will occur in the way you live?