

YOU ARE

Dee Brestin's 30-Year Passion for Sharing God's Love with Women

By Stephanie Rische

If Dee Brestin's message for believers could be summed up in six words, perhaps it would be: "You are beautiful. You are loved."

For her, these are not simply sweet-sounding maxims or self-esteem boosts. When they are rooted in the truths of God's Word, they are words that bring life and hope and transformation. And that's exactly what readers find when they read Dee's books.

The Beginning of God's Wooing

Dee Brestin has been teaching Scripture and writing Bible studies for three-and-a-half decades now, but the years haven't dulled her enthusiasm. Rather, her life experiences have only served to deepen her passion to reveal truths about God's character and His Word to fellow pilgrims — particularly women.

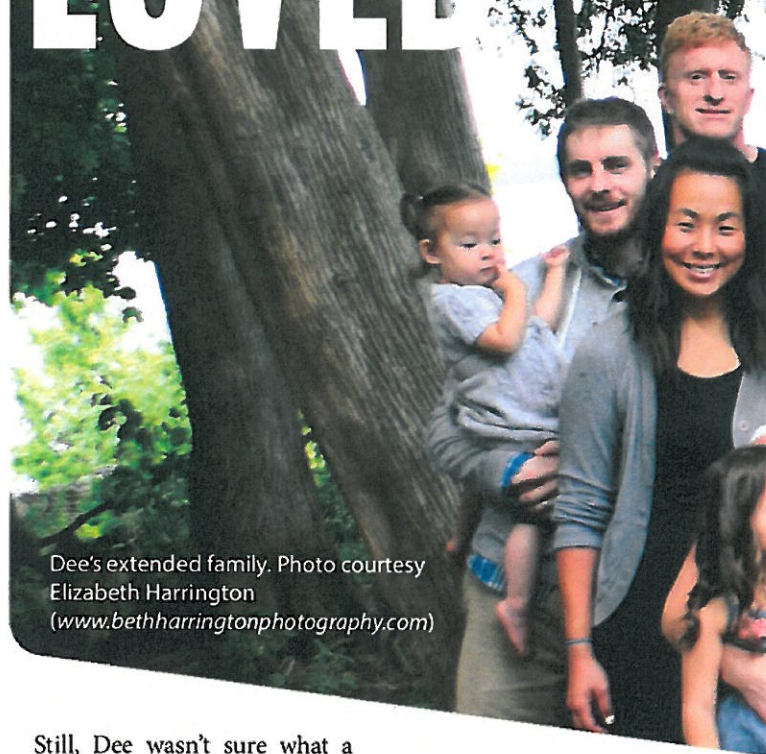
Following the Lord was not on Dee's radar as a young woman. She and Steve married young and set their sights on achieving the status this world has to offer. They dreamed about and planned for the home they would have after Steve became a surgeon, and they weren't looking for deeper meaning or purpose. That's when God intervened in the form of a bold family member and a timely snowstorm.

"I was a new wife and mother, 21 years old, when my older sister came to Christ," Dee explained. "She visited our home for the weekend, following me around with her big black Bible. I just wanted her to go back to Iowa!" But just before she left, a blizzard struck, and she ended up staying with Dee and Steve for three more days. "During that time, the Word began to do a work in my heart," Dee said.



Dee (right) and singer Kathy Troccoli (left) traveled together for five years speaking on the *Falling in Love with Jesus* trilogy.

LOVED



Dee's extended family. Photo courtesy Elizabeth Harrington (www.bethharringtonphotography.com)

Still, Dee wasn't sure what a commitment to Christ would require of her. She asked her sister, "If I become a Christian, will God make me give up our dream house?" Her sister was a new believer herself at the time and wasn't sure. But she said, "In your case, the answer is probably yes, because that house has become a god in your life." Dee said with a laugh, "My sister now claims she did everything wrong when it came to evangelism, but in retrospect, I'm glad she encouraged me to count the cost. There is a cost to following Christ, even though salvation is free." Dee spent the next few months reading the New Testament and the copy of *Mere Christianity* her sister left with her. "That was the beginning of God wooing me," Dee said.

A Call to Share God's Word — and His Love

Dee quickly realized she wasn't alone in her hunger for more of God and His Word. "When I first became a believer, there weren't Bible studies like there are today. The few guides out there were really basic — there wasn't much room for discussion. There were just questions like 'Count the number of times the word *salvation* appears in the passage.'"

At the time, Dee's husband, Steve, was a resident in medical school, so Dee decided to start a small group for residents' wives to study the Bible together. "I wanted something these young wives and moms would resonate with, so I wrote a Bible study guide just for them called *Proverbs and Parables*. The Proverbs part helped them with mothering, and the parables



were an easy way to communicate the gospel, especially to people without much background in the Bible.”

Dee thought that would be the extent of her writing, but a friend encouraged her to send in the study for publication. It was accepted, and that sparked an even deeper desire in Dee to dig into God’s Word and share the truths she found with others. “I was learning so much at the time, and I wanted to write more commentary,” Dee explained. “That’s when my editor suggested that I write something longer.” The result was her best-selling book *The Friendships of Women*.

The Bible’s Most Misunderstood Book

In the 30 years since her first book was released, Dee continues to be energized by helping women experience a deeper understanding not only of what God’s Word says but also how it can transform their lives. Dee’s most recent book, *He Calls You Beautiful*, is an exploration of the Song of Solomon, also known as the Song of Songs. This is a daunting book of the Bible even for the most seasoned of preachers, so what prompted Dee to tackle such a challenge?

“I think I’ve always been attracted to poetry in the Old Testament, but Song of Songs was a mystery to me,” Dee said. “Then I listened to a sermon that opened my eyes. Mike Reeves said that

up until the early 1700s, the Song of Songs was the most preached on book in the Old Testament, but now, if it’s taught in churches at all, it’s treated as a marriage manual.”

Dee believes there’s a tendency for Christians to err on one extreme or the other when it comes to the metaphorical nature of Song of Songs. “In the past, the church tended to gloss over the human marriage aspect of this book, either because they were embarrassed by it or because it seemed self-evident,” Dee said. “Today, we have all but forgotten the spiritual side of the book — and we have lost so much! I’m eager to show people through the Bible study in the book how parallel passages from Psalm 45 and the prophets show that indeed, earthly marriage is a pointer to Christ’s great love for us, His Bride. When both views are held together, they enhance each other!”

Dee believes that one of the main themes of Song of Solomon is “You are beautiful.” When the man sees his bride, he says, “*You are altogether beautiful*” (Song of Sol. 4:7 NIV). “When God looks at believers, it’s not with anger. He’s not seeing all the sins He’s forgiven. No, he sees us as beautiful. He has made us beautiful now, and we will be completely beautiful when we see Him face to face.”



Above: Dee said “girls run in my family, and I certainly have learned much from them about the friendships of girls and of women!” In the summer of 2010, all of her daughters and her daughter-in-law gave birth to baby girls.

Before the book was published, Dee led a study on the Song of Songs in a prison. When the women read this passage from chapter 4 aloud, one woman was so moved she began to weep. “All her life, this woman wanted to believe that someone would see her as beautiful,” Dee explained. “Now she was hearing for the first time that God saw her as beautiful.”

It’s not just people in prison who need to hear this message about the way God sees us — and the message isn’t just for women, either. “The whole body of Christ is the bride of Christ,” Dee said. “Men may have a harder time seeing how that metaphor applies to them, but the truth is that all of us — men and women — long for intimacy with Christ.” When we’re convinced of God’s love, it helps us run to Him in the midst of trials. Then we can experience His presence no matter what storms are raging around us.

Encountering the God of All Comfort

Dee is no stranger to life’s storms. Her husband died of cancer 12 years ago, at the age of 59. “I knew in my head that God was the God of all comfort, but at some level, I felt like He wasn’t acting quickly enough, like His comfort was too slow in coming.” In that difficult season, Dee found herself turning to food for comfort. “I went to the pantry to stuff my mouth,” Dee said. “It comforted me quickly, but it came back and bit me. I ended up gaining 20 pounds, and the comfort was fleeting.”

In her book *The God of All Comfort*, Dee describes what helped her turn to God in the midst of her grief. “There’s a quote by Martyn Lloyd Jones that says (and I’m paraphrasing here), ‘Don’t listen to your soul; speak to your soul.’ At the time, my soul was telling me, ‘You won’t survive this. Your kids won’t survive this.’ The truth was different: God promises in His Word to be a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless.” So Dee made a conscious effort to speak truth to herself through Scripture and the words of hymns. “His Word pulled me through that river of grief.”

At some point in our lives, we will all face a crisis that is bigger than we are, whether that’s finding ourselves in a prison cell or dealing with the loss of a beloved husband or coping with another trial altogether. In that moment we will have to make a decision about who God is and who we are. Is God trustworthy? Will He

Below: Dee works with Discipleship Unlimited, a ministry that has reduced recidivism by 70 percent in the prisons where they have “faith dorms.” They also continue to minister when the women are released. Here is Dee with four ex-offenders who are doing well on the outside and came back to encourage the women on the inside that they can, indeed, stay out of prison and have productive lives. Photo courtesy Nellie Lisenby



meet us in our pain? If we recognize that He loves us unconditionally and that we are beautiful in His eyes, we will be able to go through these times with the assurance that God is by our side, no matter the circumstance.

God is offering all of us an invitation to greater intimacy: “*Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me*” (Song of Sol. 2:10 NIV). Will we accept His invitation and His love? †

For more about Dee Brestin, her books, her speaking, her prison ministry, and her Bible study blog, visit www.deebrestin.com.

RESOURCES BY DEE BRESTIN

He Calls You Beautiful: Dee’s most recent book (releasing in July 2017) explores the Song of Songs and unveils how God truly sees you — as his beloved bride, beautiful in His eyes.

The Friendships of Women: In this classic best-seller, Dee uses biblical principles to show how you can experience deep, soul-level friendships and find healing from painful relationships.

The God of All Comfort: In this book, Dee invites you into her journey of grief following her husband’s death and how she experienced God’s comfort and healing in the aftermath.

Idol Lies: Idolatry is not just bowing down to a statue; it’s about the deepest desires of your heart. In *Idol Lies*, you can find hope and deliverance from the idols that are holding you back from true freedom.

A Woman of... (series): These Bible studies take you through a book of the Bible or a particular topic, such as faith, beauty, hospitality, contentment, or wisdom.