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Thank you. It's so very special to be here and just see your faces. I just bought another pair of shoes so when I speak I can put on something really comfortable, and just be here as long as you're here...just meet you and greet you. I've already been blessed by the interaction with some of you.

I didn't know what I was going to share with you today. Maybe I was just going to do what you've done several times. I don't want to ask by name who *wasn't* here this morning, but if you *were* here this morning for the worship service would you just raise your hand? So, then the rest of you were not here. I just have to make a mental adjustment and build on what I shared this morning, or see if I have to start fresh. And so I'll just try to start fresh. Before we have what I feel God has put on my heart, would you just pray with me a moment?

Father, we thank you so much for Your presence in this place. Thank you for each one who has come. We know that he or she represents so much activity, so many things going on, and so I just thank you for the decision that was made at some point to accept Rick's invitation to draw aside and begin the week by focusing on You, and renewing friendships, and just being quiet for a few moments. And so we ask now that in the quietness, Your Spirit would come into our midst, and that You would speak to our hearts. And Lord that we would choose, like little Samuel, to open our ears and listen to

what the Spirit says. And we ask that You would bless us and that You, our Heavenly Father, would speak as your children choose to listen. And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

It was quite a few years ago that F. Lee Bailey, best-known as one of O.J. Simpson's lawyers, used to have a television talk show. And years ago when he had his talk show he asked mother and daddy if he could come up to the house in Montreat and do a television interview with them from the living room. So they agreed. A couple of weeks before he was to come, my mother did what any one of us housewives would do, she began to clean the house. She scrubbed and polished and waxed. The day that Mr. Bailey showed up with his camera crew my mother was very confident that the old log cabin that my mother and daddy lived in would be very presentable. So she met Mr. Bailey and his group at the door and ushered them into the living room. She sat on the sofa with my daddy. Mr. Bailey went over the questions he was going to ask in the interview while they were setting up the cameras and the lights and all that. They just transformed the living room into a television studio. I know that some of you have seen what they can do. So when they finished the cables were criss-crossing everywhere, the big lights were up and the big cameras, and finally the director was ready. He said, "All right. Lights! Camera! Action!"

My mother was sitting on the sofa and she was so serene because she knew her house looked so beautiful. And she said once they had on those big television lights, she saw little cobwebs up in the corner, dust bunnies under the chairs, and dirt that she hadn't

seen under ordinary lighting was exposed with the brilliant television lighting. That's the way I feel when I come into God's word.

I look at my life and under ordinary lighting and I think, "I'm okay." I compare myself with other people and I'm a little bit better than some and not as bad as others. So I think, "You know, I'm okay." If I live according to the standards of this world then I'm probably a little bit better than most people because the standards of this world have been so lowered. But then God shines the light of His word into my life and reveals things in my life that I didn't know were there except that I would have the light of His word.

So I want to use this as a framework. Rick said I could share just a bit about myself, but I want to do it in a framework of Scripture. I might share a testimony from (you'll be so glad it's not from birth to death!) just a few things that God has seemed to teach me from Scripture. And I'm going to draw on our recent experience. Because we did have what my son-in-law calls a wonderful vacation, but I said "No, Traynor, this is a dream we're living."

I took my daughters and their two husbands on this tour in Greece and Turkey and it was my privilege to lead it. I had been invited to be a part of that tour two trips before (somebody had just given that to us). Then the person who arranges the trips called to ask us if I would actually lead a tour (which I'd actually never done before). There were 55 of us on this tour; there were only maybe 25 or 30 of us on what we call the Prelude. We went to the seven churches of Revelation in Turkey. And so we climbed over the rocks

and the hills, down the little paths and up the mountains and experienced something that is life-enriching, life-defining, and I think for some of us on the tour – life changing.

We went back to some of these sites that had been excavated, where the cities hosted churches that Jesus wrote to in the book of Revelation. There are seven of these churches. And you'll also be glad to know that I'm only going to touch on three (maybe four) and share with you how God has seemed to speak to me from these letters.

The first one in the list in Revelation is the church at Ephesus. Ephesus was interesting because Ephesus had been established by the apostle Paul, and the apostle John had been a pastor there. Timothy was a superintendent at a certain point, and so Ephesus had been under excellent leadership. And not only that, but when Jesus wrote this letter they were in their second generation of knowing Jesus. So most of the people in the church had been born and raised in a Christian home. Immediately I identified with the church at Ephesus because I've been exposed to some excellent Christian leadership since I was a little girl. I've been exposed to Bible teachers, preachers, the people in our home, and the people that we've interacted with. I feel like I'm enormously blessed that way. And I was, of course, raised in a Christian home and been in church all my life. And so I felt already I identified with the church in Ephesus. And so, the Lord, when He shined His light into my life the things that He saw in my life were some of the things that He saw in the church at Ephesus.

And so if you have your Bible, and you may not have thought to bring it to a smoothie event. I have to tell you I have a great big one, mine is falling apart and it's being rebound. Zondervan is so gracious. I use a '73 NIV and somehow they found me another one. They just found me a great big one! So this is very big, but anyway...

Chapter 2 of Revelation, verse one, "The angel of the church in Ephesus writes..." So this is Jesus speaking to John, telling him to write this letter to the church at Ephesus. All these letters have the same pattern, and it begins by saying, "Look at me." Here is Jesus telling them to, "Put your focus on Me. Don't get out of focus." These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks amongst the seven golden lamp stands. We know from the first chapters that the stars are the leaders of the church and the lamp stands are the church. And I felt like He was saying, "Anne, put your focus on Me. I want to hold you in My right hand and I want to use you." Things I hold in my right hand – a fork or my brush – are things I want to use. And He is saying, "Anne, I want to use you. And I'm moving amongst my people. I want to use you in my church among my people today. Keep your focus on Me."

I think it's very easy if you're in Christian ministry or if you're in Christian retail or if you're involved in publishing, the film industry, whatever it is, it's so easy to get out of focus. Isn't it? Every time I go home I think about it and I compare myself with other ministries represented in my family and I can feel so small and so inadequate. Again and again the Lord says, "Anne, put your focus on *Me*." So where's your focus? On somebody sitting in front of you, or in back of you, or around you...or somebody who

didn't show up? Somebody you invited and they're not here? Or somebody that did show up and you can't believe they're here? But Jesus says, "Put your focus on Me." So I say, "Yes Lord." I keep my focus on Jesus and then give Him the privilege and the freedom to shine the light of his truth into my life. Because He sees things that I don't.

First of all He says, "Anne, you've done some really good things." And He said, "I know your works. I know your hard work, your deeds, your perseverance. You're doing more today than you were doing before." When He first seemed to speak to me like this it was when I was beginning my itinerant ministry and I had been teaching my Bible class for 12 years. And I went into an itinerant ministry, and the first thing I did was go to Fiji to do a pastor's conference. I had six sessions and there was another plenary session teacher who wanted to sit on the beach and so he dumped his sessions on me. So I did 12 sessions instead of the six I'd agreed to. Then I came back. I went to Brazil, did a pastor's convention and then they heard I was there. So in the south of the country they wanted me to come to a youth conference. I went down there and did that. I came home and I was running all over speaking, teaching, trying to get people to pay attention to the Lord—wake them up in their relationship with God! Busy. Busy. Busy. That's where I was.

I think the Lord said, "Anne, thank you! You know, in a world of complacency and apathy and so many people just letting somebody else do it, thank you for stepping out and being willing to pour yourself out in service to Me." Is there somebody here, somebody like myself or like the Ephesian Christians – so busy? I actually think the

email, cell phones, fax machines—you know, all the conveniences we have today—instead of making life easier, they just make life busier. And I'm one. But I think for some of us, the Lord would say, "Thank you for being busy for Me."

But then He said, "Anne, I have something you need to correct." Something I had not seen in myself. "In all of your busyness, you're losing your love for Me." Then I went on to the next verse because I knew that wasn't me because I go around telling other people how to love Jesus! But you know what He does when He is convicting you (or at least He does this for me). He just doesn't let me get away from that thought. He kept bringing it to me from every different corner and area and just convicting me, "Anne, you're losing your love for me." So finally I just fell down on my knees. Tears were falling down my cheeks. I said, "All right Lord, you're showing me something in me that I hadn't seen in myself." I knew that when I went to church I no longer entered in to worship. And I knew when I prayed and when I read my Bible, God no longer seemed to speak to me. But I thought I was just tired (you know jet lag and all that kind of stuff). But He said, "No, Anne, it's more than that. You're neglecting me and you're losing your love for me." And I knew He had seen something that I hadn't, and He was right. So I wasn't going to argue with Him. So I just said, "All right Lord, what do I have to do?"

He said, "You've lost your first love — your *first* love." Do you remember when you first fell in love? I remember when I first fell in love with my husband. He's all you can think about, talk about, you want to be with him all the time. And when I first fell in love with Jesus I told other people about Him. You know, you want to be with Him all the

time. Be with Him in prayer. You can't get enough from Him. You read your Bible all the time. Somewhere along the way I had lost the first love for Jesus. Do you remember what it was like to love Him with all your heart and mind and soul and strength? Because He says in verse 5, "Do you know what I want to do about this, Anne? Remember the height from which you've fallen." I think being in love with Jesus is the pinnacle of the Christian life. If you don't know what I'm talking about, you've missed everything. God doesn't want you to just come into the Christian life and "do this" and "don't do that." You know — when you keep a set of rules — and that's how you're accepted. He wants you to *love Him*. It's a love relationship that you're invited to enter into. Jesus said in John 17, "This is eternal life and eternal life is knowing God and the One who He has sent." And the word He uses for "know" is for an intimate relationship between husband and wife. You're invited into an intimate, permanent, personal love relationship through Jesus Christ. But we're so busy, busy, busy serving Him, we can't enjoy Him. So He said, "Remember what it was like when you loved me with all your heart?" I could remember.

I received Him by faith when I was a little girl — seven-years-old. I was watching Cecil B. DeMille's film, "King of Kings." Some of you may remember way back then. It was black and white; it wasn't even a talkie. Now, that's not even how old I am, I would just say it was a classic they would show every Easter. I was watching it one Good Friday, and I was so convicted of my sin at that crucifixion scene. I confessed my sin, told God I was sorry, claimed Jesus as my Savior and I was born again into God's family. I believed as a little girl, and being in Billy Graham's family doesn't mean anything when it comes

to getting into heaven. Isn't that right? Maybe you made the decision earlier because of the atmosphere in the home. But I had to make my own decision about Jesus. But then I had received Him. I fell in love with Him. I read my Bible through by the time I was nine. I just loved His Word and I loved sharing Him. When I became a young mother with small children I got so busy, busy, busy. I just neglected Him. I came back into that love relationship as I taught my class. I taught my class for 12 years and then went out into this itinerant ministry. And once again: busy, busy, busy. I lost my love for Him. And I can remember what it was like to be in love with Jesus. Can you remember?

I said, "Lord, I can remember but what do I do about it?" And He said, "You need to repent. That means stop not loving me." And I said, "How do you control your emotions? You know, loving You with all my heart is an emotional, affectionate, passionate experience. How do I stop not having that?" And He said (and these are the three things in verse five), "Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent (be willing to stop) and then return to the first things." And I said, "All right Lord, what first things?" And He told me to return to the Cross, where I would confess my sin and tell him I was sorry for being so busy that I was neglecting Him. And so I did that. I got on my knees. I went to the Cross by faith and told God I was sorry. And confessed busyness as the sin in my life that it was, it still is. And then He said, "Return, not only to the first things, but what were you doing when you were in love with me that you are not doing now." I knew exactly what it was.

When I was in love with Jesus I was studying my Bible, taking it in, internalizing it, then I would give it out. When I was busy, busy, busy, running around giving messages, I was giving messages I'd already prepared. I wasn't doing any fresh study of the Scripture. So I knew exactly what I needed to do to repent. I needed to put that first thing back into my life. So, I picked up a legal pad and a pen and I began an in depth study of the book of Revelation. Actually this became my first book, "The Vision of His Glory." That book is the fruit of my repentance.

And for you, I don't know if you can remember what you were doing when you were in love with Jesus that you're not doing now? It can be something different for each one of us. Maybe it's time spent in prayer every day. Maybe you were actually sharing the gospel with unsaved people. Maybe you were in a church fellowship that was richer than where you are now. I don't know what it was. But whatever it is, could you return to those first things and put it back in your life? Maybe there's something you've allowed to creep in your life that wasn't there when you were in love with Jesus. And I'm going to tell you—a sin, a wrong relationship, a habit that's displeasing to God will rob you of the sense of His presence, and awareness of His love — and that joy, that peace in your heart quicker than anything. So, maybe there is a sin or an attitude or relationships or habit. Something that needs to be put out of your life so you might once again experience that love for Jesus. You know, within a week's time of picking up my pen and pad and reworking the Scripture and taking it deep into my heart the sense of His love was back. The awareness of His presence, the joy was in my heart, the worship was there. You

know, my first love had returned. I don't ever want to lose it again. And I'll tell you what — I have come so close — because of the busyness of life.

People ask me what is the hardest thing in my life, the thing I struggle with the most, the greatest challenge is busyness. Busy. Busy. Busy. That keeps me from having a quiet time alone with God every day. So Jesus said, "Anne, you need to repent of your busyness. Put me back first in your life." So I said, "Yes, sir." You know, if He gives you a command like that, you do it.

The principle is this, listen to me; the principle is that He wants your love for Him more than He wants your service. Isn't that sweet? He doesn't want all the things you *do* for Him. I mean you're going to do things for Him if you love Him, but he wants your *heart* first. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind soul, and strength. And if you love him with all your heart, the service is going to flow from that. Just watch out! Because when the service starts to flow, and then you fall in love with Him and you want to do something more for Him, pretty soon—if you're not careful—you're going to get busy, busy, busy. So it's a constant tension in my life to control the busyness that comes up out of a heart that's overflowing with passionate love for Jesus. And make sure that the busyness doesn't overtake me so that my work comes before my worship. The principle is: He wants your worship first. And then your work comes from a heart of worship. The promise is that, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying." And if you overcome that busyness in your life then He said, "I'll give you the right to eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God." And the Tree of

Life represented eternal life. Eternal life is that love relationship with God. He's saying if you will repent of this and overcome, then you can eat of the Tree of Life. You will be deeply satisfied in your personal relationship with Jesus. Are you satisfied? Are you saved but not satisfied?

I think when you look at the Pew Research Forum poll and you see all the statistics about what Christians are doing today; you know there are a lot of them that are not satisfied in their relationship with Jesus so they're looking elsewhere. That's because they're not taking the time to get to know Him, and to love Him and put Him first in their lives. And put worship as their number one priority so their work flows from it. If you do, you'll be satisfied in your relationship with Jesus. And right in the Paradise of God, in His presence, you will know His presence in your life. And I'm going to tell you honestly there are many times I have not felt His presence in my life, especially in the last couple of years, when I've felt abandoned by Him. But you know my faith goes deeper than my feelings. And so I *know* He's present in my life. I know He's real. I know He loves me. I know that His hand is on my life. And it's not because I feel it. The faith is a deeper conviction than feeling. Do you understand? And so He says I can eat of the Tree of Life. I can be satisfied in Jesus right in the Paradise of God. I can know that I know that I know I am in God's presence and He is in me. Rick and Debbie and I discovered that the Ephesian church does not have ears to hear, and we walked among the ruins. There is no church in Ephesus today.

The second church that had impact on my life—not so much on this trip but prior to this trip—was the church at Sardis. And the church at Sardis was interesting, and I know Rick and Debbie will remember this. But when we walked among the ruins at Sardis (they have all these excavated foundations, all these temples), the excavated foundation of a church is right there. The interesting thing in Sardis is the church. The foundation of the church was attached to the foundation of the pagan temple. So that, I'm assuming, you could go through the temple and enjoy your idols and all the promiscuity that went with it and then go through the back door and you'd be right in the church. You could have your church experience and you could have God in your life. You could read your Bible and you could pray. And then on Monday I guess, you could slip right back into the temple and you could have your idolatry. Just the visual of seeing that church attached to the temple! Sardis was a place of compromise and a place of hypocrisy. And so Jesus says in Chapter three verse one, "The angel of the church in Sardis. These are the word of Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars." And He says, "Look at Me, put your focus on Jesus." And then we see Him as somebody holding the balance scales, holding up the scales on both sides. And I know you've heard when people say when they get to heaven God will weigh their good works against their bad works, and if their good works outweigh their bad works they're going to get into heaven. And this is true, God does weigh your works. But it's not so much your individual works as your whole life gets weighed against the perfection of the Holy Spirit. And He told the church at Sardis, "I have weighed you in the balances and you don't measure up."

Several years ago the Lord spoke to me through this passage. I could hardly believe He was speaking to me like that. And He said, “Anne, I have put you in the balances and I have found you wanting. There is something missing in your life.” And so I read the rest of verse 1. And He said, “I know your deeds. You have a reputation of being alive, but you’re dead.” And, this is after I was in ministry. “You go around the world teaching people about me and sharing my word, and waking other people up in their relationship with me. But I am looking on your heart and see that you are dying. Your deeds are not complete.” And you know what he was talking about in my life? Prayerlessness. He said, “Wake up!” I knew exactly what he was talking about.

I remember good old Dr. Alan Redpath. Anyone here remember Dr. Alan Redpath? He was a great Bible teacher and a great man of God. He believed that what American Christians needed more than anything else was “blanket victory.” Just victory over those blankets in the morning. We just need to wake up! And the Lord was telling me, “It’s time you woke up and spent time with me in the morning.” And I’m such a sleepy head; I’m so lazy. I’m not a morning person. And He was telling me that’s what was wrong. Not that *you* have to pray in the morning — please don’t misunderstand me. But I wasn’t praying in the morning, I wasn’t praying at noon, I wasn’t praying at night. But you know what? As soon as you hit your day, at least as a wife and mother I mean, it’s gone. For me, if I don’t make time early in the morning before my day begins; pretty much I’m not going to get back to it. And so He was telling me, “wake up!”

So I went straight down to the mall. And He tells me to repent of my prayerlessness. I bought an alarm clock that when it went off it sounded just like a bazooka going off in the room. It goes off so loud your heart is just thumping, and then my husband was just hollering at me. And you just bounce out of bed and you could never go back to sleep because your adrenalin is rushing. And then I would get up and spend time with the Lord. And I've been doing that for so long I don't need an alarm any more but still I'm a sleepy head. So I go walk about three miles and go get my Starbucks coffee. I come back and hopefully my husband is not up yet and I still have a few minutes to have a quiet time with the Lord. Because the Lord has commanded me, "Anne, I want you to spend time with Me." You know we can say we put Him first, and do the things we did at first and go back to the Cross. But if you leave prayer out of your life, if you're not ever talking to the Lord, what kind of relationship would you have?

You know, I think of the relationship I have with my children or my husband. What if I never communicated with them? What if they never talked to me? And sometimes it's not just to tell me what's going on, I just want to hear from them. If you're a parent you understand. You just want to hear their voice, hear them describe their day, you want them to tell what's on their heart, what they're afraid of, what their dreams are, and just communicate. And as you do that you're developing relationship with that person. And Jesus wants us to pray, not because He just wants us to come to Him to get answers, though that's part of it. He's just wanting us to communicate in order to build the personal, love relationship that He's offering us. And if you don't pray, and if you don't spend time talking to Him like that and interacting with him in prayer, then your

relationship with Him is going to be deformed at the least. And so He said, “Anne, wake up!”

So let me ask you something, “How’s your prayer life?” You’re a leader in ICRS or I’m assuming you wouldn’t be here. You’re a person of influence. What’s your prayer life like? When do you spend time in personal, individual, I’m talking about on-your-knees kind of prayer?

I remember once asking a Sunday School class when they prayed. One person said she prayed on the treadmill, another person said when he was going to work in the car and stuck in traffic, somebody else said when the kids go down for the nap and they had a few minutes and you can pray any time any place, praise God. He’s available 24/7. But I believe that in order to develop that personal relationship that will undergird everything in our lives that we need to make time to get alone with Him. Not when we’re doing something else. And for me I just have to set my alarm, get up early, spend time with Him in a place in my home where I keep another Bible I just use for my devotions. I keep my notebooks there so I can write down things He seems to be saying to me. Read His word, have some devotional books and just try to put Him back first in my life at the beginning of my day. “Wake up,” He said, “Strengthen the things that remain.” And so He rebuked the church at Sardis for prayerlessness. And there is something else here that He is rebuking them for. He did this in my life a long time ago, but it was a pretense or phoniness. And when he said, “wake up, you have a reputation for being alive.”

There was a time in my life when I was so bound up by the opinions of other people. Everyone had their idea of what Billy Graham's daughter ought to be like, dress like, look like, who the friends ought to be, you know how it is. (Well, maybe you don't). But anyways, a preacher's daughter — a preacher's child. If you're a preacher's kid I know you understand. Because they're spiritual people and you just want to please everybody. You want to measure up. You don't want to embarrass your folks. I was like a spiritual chameleon. I was just changing colors everywhere I went, trying to be what this group wanted or that group wanted. I was so bound by that. And finally somebody said, "Anne you're looking at God. Your relationship with God is like a prism — you're affected by what everybody else thinks of you. You need to forget about what other people think of you and just focus on God directly." Right then and there, I was 17 years of age, I just decided I wasn't going to do all that. I wasn't going to care what anybody else thought. I was going to live my life for an audience of one. And I'll tell you, in practical terms, you know, it took me a while to work that out into my experience. And so, choices, choices, choices every day. Whatever. But it was a life-defining decision at that point because it set me free. And I knew that if I pleased God, my parents would be pleased and my grandparents would be pleased and the people I loved most would be pleased. And you know, you can't please everybody anyway. But it set me free just to be myself.

So if you catch me in the grocery store, or if you catch me walking early in the morning, or if you catch me running through the lobby for a meeting, or if you catch me on a platform, pretty much I may be dressed differently but I'm going to be the same person. I just have to be myself, and that means you can see me struggling with sin in my life and

making mistakes, and this next week you can see me struggling not so hard in that one area and having victory here. And pretty soon you get this idea that if God can help Anne then why can't He help me? And you see it's just dropping the mask and being real and letting other people see Jesus at work in your life. How are they going to see Him at work in your life if you never show them the work? You know? So we can just be real. And what a grand thing. The church at Sardis was not real. They had a reputation; but they were dead. And the principle, I think, is that God is not impressed with our reputations. He doesn't read our bios. He's not impressed with a little press release or whatever Rick puts out to make us look good or... He sees our heart. He looks on the inside doesn't He? And so I think it's time that we made the decision to live our lives for Him and Him alone. And when we do that—not only will you be at peace within your self—you'll be set free. Other people may not understand, but you know something, the ones who care about you and love you are going to see the growth in you and they're going to be encouraged. And they're going to think, if God can do it for you, He can do it for them. And then we build each other up in the faith as we see each other growing in truth and authenticity.

He doesn't let us get by without making that time to pray. That may be why He's allowed (you wouldn't understand this) the brown package to show up. I talked about, the brown package this morning. But maybe that's why He's allowed you to be in a hard place and let things not go right in your life. I was sharing with Anne Kingsbury some of the things that we've shared, and some of her experiences are actually my experiences now—a lot of very hard things in my life. And yet I know the hard things are there because He's

allowing it to develop my faith, and make me dependent on him and cling to Him and spend more time in prayer. If everything was going great I would probably not be as prayerful if things were going great. And I think that's why He allows us to go through life and have problems and struggles because it increases our prayer life. Prayer develops our relationship with Him, and relationship with Him is the hub of your life. That's where your strength comes from that enables you to live life in a way that, not only makes an impact on your generation, but is a life that pleases Him.

Let me give you the promise at Sardis. He said, "For those who have ears to hear," He said, "I will dress them in white and I will never blot his name out from the Book of Life but will acknowledge his name before my Father in heaven." One day the promise: if you overcome the phoniness and the prayerlessness, and you put knowing God back first in your life, and develop that personal relationship with Him through prayer — through just being an authentic child of God — one day He is going to introduce you to His Father. And you're going to be acknowledged before the universe as being an authentic child of God. And people are going to see the old, it's going to drop off anyway, and they'll see the person that you've developed by faith in Jesus. One that is conformed to His image and reflects His glory. The church at Sardis did not have ears to hear what the Spirit was saying. And so we walk among the ruins of Sardis.

The last church that's impacted me, the next one on the list in Revelation is the church at Philadelphia. And He says these are the words of Him who is holy and true who holds the keys of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open. It's a

picture of Jesus holding the keys, not just to heaven and hell, but I think the doors to opportunity for service on Earth. And God has called me into service from this particular passage of Scripture.

It was over 33 years ago, I can't remember the date exactly, I had been so homesick for God. I had three small children. I wanted to come back to God. I knew that would be through the pages of my Bible and I didn't know how to get into my Bible. And somebody told me about Bible Study Fellowship, a great sort of lay Bible study. And so I applied to start a class because I wanted to be in it. Nobody else was starting one so I'll start it so I can be in it. I was turned down. They didn't accept the application. So my husband and I were taking a trip to Cape Cod and we had his parents and our three children in the Oldsmobile station wagon. We had three blowouts on that trip. It was like a trip from hell I'm here to tell you! But at one point, my mother-in-law was in the backseat reading her Bible out loud to nobody in particular and she was reading this passage. And she came to this next verse, and I said, "Grandma, pass the Bible up to me." Because it says, "I know your deeds. See I have placed before you an open door no one can shut. I know you have little strength, but you have kept my word and you have not denied my name." And I said this out loud, "Could God be speaking to me through this verse? Has He opened the door for me to teach Bible Study Fellowship? And if He has, even Bible Study Fellowship can't close that door." And He says, "I know your deeds." I hadn't done anything for Him. He knew that. And I knew I had little strength. I had children five, three and 10 months old. All I had was a little strength. He wasn't saying, "Anne if you do this you can have more strength than you know." He was just saying,

“All you have is a little strength and I know it. But you’ve kept my word. You have not denied my name.” And because of my family background I’ve identified with Him since I was born and I wasn’t ashamed of that. I had taken some pretty bold stands. And so He said, “I have opened this door for you.” And I was scared to death to walk through it. So I began to argue with Him, even though I wanted to be in the class when it actually came right down to it. I reapplied. They accepted the application. I went out for training. Found out what was involved. I was so terrified. I told the Lord, “I can’t do this.” And He said, “Anne, that’s okay, because I can.” And I said, “But God, I’m too weak to do this.” And He said, “That’s all right. I’m strong.” And I said, “Lord, I’m totally inadequate to teach a class of people.” And He said, “Anne, that’s okay. I’m sufficient.” You walk through the open door. And when He opens a door for us, it’s not just to satisfy your curiosity, so we can see what’s on the other side. He doesn’t open all these doors, so I can say, “Hey look at all these doors I’ve got open for me.” He means for you to walk through it, to take that opportunity, to step out there, get outside of your comfort zone, walk on the waves, you know, just DO it! And I was arguing. Finally, I ran out of arguments. And I knew, if He was my Lord, I was going to have to walk through the open door. So I said, “God, I walk through the open door.” And He said, “Anne, hold on to what you have.” (This is from verse 11.) “Hold on to what you have.” So I asked Him, “What do I have?” I know I don’t have the strength, I don’t have the time, I don’t have the energy, I don’t have the education, I don’t have the training, what do I have? He said, “Anne, you have my Word and you have Me. Walk through the door.” And so I just said, “Yes, sir.” And I walked through that open door. I was so terrified. And you know, 500 women showed up, would you believe that? I’d never taught Sunday School. My children didn’t listen to me. And

all the sudden I'm offering this class and there are 500 women sitting there. I was so terrified of their faces that I went into the bathroom before I went into the pulpit and threw up. For six weeks, every time I faced them I threw up first. Terrified, but I was more afraid to say "no" to my Lord.

And so I walked through the open door. I went to class every week for 12 years. I never missed a class. And then He called me to leave the class and to go out into all the world. And He told me this specifically from Scripture and I won't share the verses, but the last one He gave me was out of Acts 26: "Anne, I want you to get up on your feet. I am sending out into the world." And I said, "God, I can't do that!" And I could hear him chuckling, if He has a chuckle, "I know that, Anne, but I can." And I said, "God I'm too weak to do this." And He said, "Anne, I know that too and I'm strong." And I said "Lord, I'm totally inadequate to go around the world and do things like the opportunities that are coming my way." But He said, "Anne, I'm sufficient." And you know the neat thing is that He never argued with me or said, "Yes, you can. Anne, you're stronger than you know. You're more adequate than you think." He never argued with me. He just agreed with me, "I know you're weak and you're inadequate, and that you can't do this. But if you'll just make your life available to Him I can look in through your life and then, Anne, you're going to discover by experience My power and My greatness. And you're going to see what I can do in and through just an American housewife who has no education, no training, but is just available. And you step out there and together we'll see what the Holy Spirit in and through a human life can do."

And so I stepped through that open door. And I've been walking through it ever since. And I don't want to go through the other doors that He's opened. Some of them are terrifying, some of them still turn my stomach over, some of them are just precious, some of them are just a pure blessing, like this trip that we just had in Greece and Turkey. Such a blessing. I knew it was God's gift to me to be able to walk on site, teach on site with people who just wanted to hear every word that was said.

The church at Philadelphia, I think you know, He didn't find anything to correct in this church. I don't want to smear their beautiful reputation, but when He said, "I know you have just a little strength." I think that a person who has a little strength tends to be so aware of their inadequacy. When the door is open, they probably don't walk through it. So I think it's a challenge to overcome. Should I say, "weakness" or "timidness?" We're so afraid to step out there because we know we can't do it and our focus is on ourselves instead of putting our focus on Jesus.

I don't know if there is somebody here like this, but I know I was like this. I thought about the group that was coming and I didn't know if this was relevant to you because I feel like you can do so much more than I ever would dream of being able to do. But for me, the principle is that a sense of inadequacy and a sense of weakness is very attractive to the Lord. You know He can use somebody who's dependent on Him. If you're filled with pride and you just know you can do it, then you've got to fall first to learn that you can't do it in your own flesh. Because Jesus said, "Without Me, you can't do anything." And some of you have to learn to unlearn a lot before you learn that you have to let go

and let Him do it. For me, I didn't have to unlearn too much because I knew from the get go that I could never do this. And then I just made myself available and He's worked in and through my life.

The neat thing about this particular church is that, He said, "If you'll overcome, if you'll repent of this timidness and if you'll just walk through the open door, I will make you a strong pillar in the presence of my God." And I thought that would be that He would cause me, on a platform, to be so confident in God's call on my life and the message He put on my heart, that other people wouldn't know, that on the inside, I was shaking and trembling and had thrown up at first, and that I was inadequate and weak. They would just see the strength in my life that comes from living in the presence of God. And we went to the church at Philadelphia, do you remember? The only thing that's left standing in the church at Philadelphia is four pillars—great, big, tall pillars. But also, in the city of Philadelphia there is still a Christian church standing there today because the church at Philadelphia had ears to hear what the Spirit was saying. So, I don't know what doors of opportunity God has open for you, all I know is that when He opens the door you can argue with Him. But I think we'd just as soon say, "Yes, sir." And we walk through the open door holding on to what we have which is His word and Himself. And He will bless you.

So do you have the ears to hear what the Spirit is saying? I don't know the other things in your life. You know the other churches, the church at Smyrna was, I think, afraid to share the gospel. Because the last they had done it, they had a negative response. The church at

Pergamum had bought into the political corruptness and they had watered down the gospel. The church at Thyatira was immersed in immorality, their leadership so sinful. They were following their leadership's example and they were falling into sin and compromise. So there are all sorts of other churches. It might be where you could start in your devotions. If you haven't been spending time with the Lord, just start in Chapter 2 of Revelation and work through these churches. Let the Lord speak to you and shine the light of His word into your heart to reveal to you what He sees. He's going to hold you accountable, so you might as well deal with Him now. And get it straight so that you'll be right with Him when He comes, when we meet Him face to face. We will know that we haven't wasted our life because we've been busy, busy, busy. Because we didn't have ears to hear what He was saying. And our hearts were cluttered with all the sin. The dust bunnies and the cobwebs we hadn't noticed were there, because we were living our lives under ordinary light.

The last church was Laodicea. I'll just touch on that. It was one of the most dramatic sites we visited. It was up on a knoll, on a gorgeous day, not a cloud in the sky. One side was the snow-capped peaks, the other side was the sulphur springs or the hot springs. The water flowed from the hot springs to the valley, and the water flowed down from the snow-capped peaks. And the water was lukewarm. Jesus spoke to this church at Laodicea and said, "I know your deeds and you are lukewarm. You are neither hot nor cold." And it made me sick to my stomach. And the reason they were lukewarm, and I think that meant that they were useless to Him. It wasn't a refreshing drink it was just lukewarm, it was useless, it was their pride. Laodicea was a very wealthy city. When they were

destroyed by an earthquake, they refused Roman help. They rebuilt themselves, thank you. They didn't need anybody or anything. They were exclusive, wealthy, and luxurious. Today they lay in ruins because they actually, as a church, according to this passage, locked Jesus out. And He said, "Those whom I love I will rebuke." And He said, "I'm standing at the door of your heart, speaking to you at this moment. And those who have ears to hear listen to what the Spirit is saying. I will come into your heart and I will have fellowship with you and you with Me. But you have to open the door and invite Me to come in."

Those in the church at Laodicea, I don't think, had ever been born again. They had substituted their religiosity, their denomination, their organization, their institution, their traditions, their rituals for a personal relationship with God. And I just wonder, is there somebody here who's substituted all the trappings of being a Christian, and all the rituals, traditions, the things we talk about, the wonderful business that is ICRS and the reason that you're here at this convention? Is there pride in your life that's actually been a barrier that's keeping you from humbling yourself and coming to the Cross, confessing your sin like everybody else and repenting and receiving Jesus as your Savior? Do you have ears to hear? Is there somebody like that? You've never been born again because you've never really opened the door of your heart and invited Jesus to come inside. Do you know something? He's a gentleman. He's not going to come in by osmosis. He's not going to come in because you go to church. He's not going to come in because you walk an aisle and sign a piece of paper. He only comes in when you deliberately, intentionally, and consciously invite Him to come in. Confessing that you're a sinner, asking Him to

forgive you and come into your life as your Lord. To take control, and as your Savior to cleanse you of your sins.

Do you have ears to hear? The Laodiceans didn't. The ruins are beautiful but there is no church there today. So I don't know what the light of his word, perhaps has revealed in your heart. Every time I open my Bible, I read things that encourage me and I read things that don't discourage me. But the conviction is there, the correction is there. I tell you what; I want to be right with God. I don't want to be a pretense. I don't want to be, you know, looking good on the outside and have Him see on the inside that I'm not right with Him or pleasing to Him. I want to live my life to please Him from the inside out. So would you choose to have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying?

Father, we thank you for this time. Sort of a solemn word. An afternoon when we're going to have a smoothie and begin our week. And yet, I believe that it's Your word. And that You would want to shine Your light into our hearts. We're, according to Rick, the cream of the cream, people of influence. And if we get right with You from the inside out, what a difference it will make in the people we influence. And so I would just ask please — this afternoon, this time when we draw aside — that this would be an encounter with You. That You would take these simple words and the letter to these churches and that you would shine Your light into our hearts and that we wouldn't blink. We wouldn't draw back. We wouldn't hide but we would be willing first of all, to keep our focus on You. And then look to see what You see in our hearts that we might accept the commendation and the praise and the encouragement. And that we might also accept the correction, that we

might repent, return to the Cross, commit ourselves to live lives that are pleasing to you. Because we have ears to hear what the Spirit, the Savior is saying. The next generation, two generations from now, three generations from now, O Lord when my people walk over my life, will my life be ruins or will there be much eternal fruit? Something to impact generation after generation because of the decisions that I am making today. So bless us now. Bless our time of fellowship, our interaction, and at the same time, would you take what's been said by the Spirit, seal it in our hearts, and don't let it be snatched away by the things that happen this afternoon. If this is a word from You, we want to take it seriously and follow through on what you're saying. And we'll do that in the Name of the One who is the Lord, the head of the Church who speaks His word to us. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.