

Chapter One

# YOURS FOR THE ASKING

*I have one desire now—to live a life of reckless abandon for the Lord, putting all my energy and strength into it.*

Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*

As I walked into the pink-and-purple bedroom to tuck in my little rosebud, she sat up in bed and began braiding her hair. She had been waiting for me. News was bubbling in her heart that she simply *had* to share.

Through twists of hair, she began, “Mom! I know what I want to be when I grow up!”

“Well, tell me, Kennedy,” I replied, completely smitten with her eight-year-old enthusiasm.

“I want to be a *beautrionist!*”

“A beautrionist?” I questioned, both amused and intrigued.

“Yes, Mom! I want to be a beautrionist!”

“That completely rocks, girlfriend! I’m so excited for you! Do you mean that you want to do hair and makeup and help ladies look beautiful?”

“Yes!”

“Excellent! I think the word you meant to use was *beautician*, but I love the word you made up. The reason I love it is this: you combined two words, *beautician* and *nutritionist*. A beautician helps people look beautiful on the outside by fixing hair and makeup. A nutritionist helps people be healthy and well on the inside. So your new word is awesome, because a beautritionist would help others be healthy on the inside and beautiful on the outside. Yay! Fun! I want to be a beautritionist too, Kennedy!”

We giggled as I tucked her in—snug as a bug in a rug—and prayed for the Lord to help us be the women He created us to be, inside and outside.

Downstairs as I wrote in my journal about the exchange, it occurred to me that Kennedy was really telling me that she has big dreams in her little heart. She wants to make a positive impact on others. To matter. To live days filled with beauty and significance. She wants a life that is the mother lode of greatness.

She wants what we all want.

An incredible life.

We want it all, everything God has for us, but we feel trapped by messy, earthly things. By kids that talk back, jobs that drain us, schedules that leave us stressed, and marriages that are far less than what we had hoped for or expected. We’ve stopped believing that life is the stuff of little-girl dreams, because way too often, life hurts us. Others fail us. We fail ourselves. We flounder. We disappoint. And let’s face it, our failures—our sins—affect our peace and our people ... and often keep us from the best things God has for us.

Reflecting on Kennedy's fledgling desires, I'm forced to be real about the stuffed-down dreams in my own heart. I breathe deep. I'm sobered by the distance between where I am and where I long to be. I really want to be a beautritionist too. I want to rise above average. I want to do more. Be more. Believe deeper. Love better. Worship wholeheartedly. Fly higher.

I find myself wondering how sitting in car-pool lines, going to work, prepping healthy dinners that my family doesn't necessarily appreciate, and hushing sibling squabbles will get me there. I want to be set free from all of these strivings that leave me sucking wind.

It seems as if I'm on a treadmill that doesn't have a STOP button.

I frequently feel like I'm a substandard mom, wife, employee, friend ... and Christian. An avalanche of my reality rushes over my heart: I feel overcommitted, ineffective, and distracted. My husband deserves more from me, my kids deserve more, my friends deserve more, my church deserves more, and my God deserves more. I'm tired of being tired.

## MORE, PLEASE

I want more.

I want to live beyond ordinary. I want revival. Authentic soul-level revival. I want a maxed-out faith in Jesus that believes big things of God and waits in great expectation for how He is going to show up and show off on Main Street each day.

I want to live a new kind of beauty. One that is deep and mature ... far beyond my barely-below-the-surface, suburban

soccer-mom tendencies. I want God's grace to trump my grouchy. I want His peace to quiet my anxiousness. I want His plans and power to blow away my small thinking. I want His love to annihilate my indifference, His holiness to consume my sin, His disciplines to prune away my rebellion, and His vision to purify my heart ... and purify the world in and through me.

I want it all.

I mean, *I think I do*.

But this kind of *all* seems leaps and bounds more rigorous than the comfortable-ish life I'm used to.

I hesitate. Question.

Do I dare?

Do I dare ask God for *that* kind of all?

## MAKE THAT "EVERYTHING"!

If I really want it all—everything God has for me—it's going to be a battle. A beautiful, bloody battle of a girl gone wild for Jesus. A gloves-off, nitty-gritty, leave-it-all-on-the-floor-of-life brawl against a real enemy. A battle where I am in the trenches with a very real, powerful, trustworthy, mysterious, unsafe but faithful God who has promised to never leave my side, to be my defender, to love me beyond my brokenness, to strengthen and guide my weary, stubborn heart, and to work out His plan in and through my life.

Yes.

God has a plan for me, and I do want it. Every part of it. I want to live out God's sacred plan that invites me to a glorious adventure of faith, that beckons me to perfect love, that calls and challenges me

to His cross-carrying ways, that demands my everything and satisfies the longings of all I've ever dreamed my life can and should be.

But I promise you, I'm not there yet, and I don't have all the answers. I'm still just a struggling, sojourning sister who fumbles and stumbles countless times each day. I don't write as an authority of all things perfected; I write as one whose will is weak and infiltrated by selfishness, stubbornness, and arrogance.

Allow me to further qualify the journey we're about to embark on together. If you're reading this and feel as if your faith is off-the-charts amazing and you have no struggles, then immediately donate this book to your church library and call it a day. Go get a mani-pedi and sushi with your girlfriends. Email me for a refund. (Kidding.) If, however, you struggle to connect your questions to God's answers, or the harsh realities of your life to God's power, or your choices to God's wisdom, or your apathy to God's calling, then settle in a big, comfy chair. I expect we'll become good friends, and I cannot wait to walk this road with you.

So where are you with all of this "all" business? Are you in? 'Cause I'm chomping at the bit to help lead a band of beautritionists on an all-in adventure to do more believing and less doubting ... to be more courageous and less complacent.

## GOD HAS MORE FOR YOU

God has a plan for you too, and it isn't for you to have an "I'm fine," average life.

You were created to be a woman of impact who is so in love with her Lord and so aware of His might that she cannot help but expect

great things and move in His power and grace. As D. L. Moody said, “If God is your partner, make your plans big!”

God’s plan for you is unique. No cookie-cutter Christianity here.

His plan may not look like the dreams you had as a little girl, but it *is* a good one.

Do you trust that?

God wants you to have a full, beautiful life—in Him, through Him, and for Him. Truly. The Bible tells us so. He offers us joy, but not the world’s joy (John 15:11); peace, but not the world’s peace (16:33); power, but not the world’s power (2 Tim. 1:7); love, but not the world’s love (John 15:12–13). God’s plan is a good plan ... for us, not against us. A plan that is filled with “hope and a future” (Jer. 29:11). His is a plan that leads us directly to His presence in worship and, ultimately, to a deep and intimate relationship with Him.

And just as God spoke vision and life to the weary prophet Jeremiah thousands of years ago, His Word speaks vision and life to us today, and every day, reminding us of the beauty available to all in Christ. A beauty that brings Him glory.

That’s the “all” God wants us to want.

All of Him.

And that’s the dream I have for you. That you would read each page of this book and want more of *Him*. That you would groan, grapple, and giggle with me, because even though the struggle is fierce, your faith is growing stronger. My dream is that you would dive deep into the Word and wisdom of God and experience His rest because you have a heart that has been rejuvenated to pursue His power and experience His presence. I want your vision to be expanded, your mind to be blown, and your life to be a compelling

display of the love, grace, strength, purity, humility, wisdom, compassion, and mission of Jesus.

This “I want it all” journey will be walked in God’s Word and will release you to be the woman God created you to be. Inside and out. It will help you believe and beckon all of the big, bold, bodacious promises of Jesus.

Hear me, friend: those statements aren’t some fluffy, rah-rah Christian pep-rally cheers. I know many of you are going through difficult and painful challenges. Life throws curveballs that can leave us gasping for breath on any given day, at any given moment. I’m right there with you in the ditches of reality. God’s ways don’t always make sense. They don’t always feel good. At times they even sting wildly, but one thing is always true: the great life God intends for us to live begins and ends with the Word. The Word made flesh—Jesus. And though we remain broken and impacted by an imperfect world, we can rise above and get through *anything* in the power and hope of God, for His glory.

So, answer this: Are you ready to be a beautritionist? Ready to live the dream? His dream?

Everything God has for you is yours for the asking.

Are you asking?

## FOR YOUR REFLECTION AND RESPONSE

- What big dreams did you have as a little girl? What big dreams do you have now? How do the two compare?
- Identify anything in your life that might be keeping you from the best God has for you.
- If you were to ask God for “*that* kind of all,” as we talked about in this chapter, how would your life look different from the way you’re living now?
- Set a one-sentence goal for your “I want it all” journey. (Tweet your goal to me @GwenSmithMusic using the hashtag #iwantitall or leave a comment on my Facebook wall.)