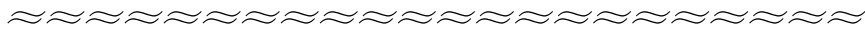


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Dr. Marilyn A. McGraw, Ph.D.

RUNNING AWAY FOR THREE WEEKS

*One woman's journey across the United States in search
of the American culture and God's place for her in it*



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**Dr. MARILYN A. McGRAW, Ph.D.**  
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FOREWORD BY DICK BERNAL

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Prologue



When God first called me to write a book about my experiences with Him after a lay-off, my only question was, “What does that have to do with getting back to work?” As reservation gave way to obedience, I learned that we must first have our “house” in order before we can focus on getting our “workplace” in order. The only way to do that is to understand the breadth of God’s intent regarding the gifts and abilities He provides us to do His work. In His wisdom, God knew He had to remove me from the workplace to teach me how He defines our place in it.

Once we have our personal lives and relationship with God in order, we can then begin to operate, as He desires, in our workplaces. Because personal concerns can block professional development, they must be resolved before maximum productivity and satisfaction can occur in the workplace. *Running Away for Three Weeks* is the first of two books addressing how to use our gifts to accomplish our work assignments, unrestrained by personal issues. When combined, these books articulate the focus of Excellence At Work - a business ministry designed to facilitate the ability of organizations and individuals to operate in the fullness of what they have been created to be.

When God first revealed Excellence At Work as a name for the business, I thought it simply meant excellence in the workplace. I have since come to understand that it also refers to operating in the totality of what He has created each of us to be. The chapters you are about to read are designed to evoke a personal communication between you and God, rather than simply share my experiences after a lay-off. Just as He has allowed me certain gifts to complete the work I am to perform, He has also provided you with your own gifts to utilize in the completion of your work assignments.

By writing this book and seeing it through to publication, I have completed the task set before me. As you hold it, the responsibility is now upon you to determine whether you are willing to ask that God reveal your work assignment as you read. If you choose to ask God to direct you during this process, He will because, “He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6 NKJV).



As you read, I pray you will experience a passionate desire to be about your Father’s business. I also pray that you will clearly hear and see what God desires to communicate to you personally, as you embark upon your own journey with Him. If you choose to embrace God’s desire for you to have your house in order - free of all spiritual, physical, and emotional bondage - you can expect to move towards the blessings that accompany having your workplace in order.

The next book in this series is *God’s Word for the Workplace*. Originally, I interpreted that title to imply the book would address ways in which we can glorify God at our places of employment. That is until God explained His definition of workplace transcends traditional organizational boundaries to include our sphere of influence in any situation. The term workplace is therefore expanded to include anywhere we are performing the job description God has assigned for our lives. Based on this, *God’s Word for the Workplace* focuses on ways in which we carry out our work assignments by using our gifts as He directs. Places of employment are addressed; but as we desire to be about our Father’s business, we learn that His business takes place both inside and outside corporate walls.

Running Away for Three Weeks will encourage you to discover your individual gifts and move you towards understanding your value in Christ’s economy. *God’s Word for the Workplace* will teach you how to use your individual gifts in the workplace God has assigned you. For the most current information regarding Excellence At Work, visit www.DrMarilyn-EAW.com. There you will find up to date information regarding this business ministry. More importantly, I

pray you will be encouraged to discover and walk in your own calling so you, too, can become “excellence at work” within your workplace.

Marilyn A. McGraw
Founder/CEO
Excellence At Work


Acknowledgments – Recognition of God’s Angels


“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all...”
1 Corinthians 12: 4 – 6 (NKJV)

The writing of this book could not have become a reality without the assistance of God’s Holy Spirit. As is so often the case, His Spirit can be observed through the works of human hands. A simple thank you does not begin to articulate the gratitude I personally feel towards the “angels” listed below. My only consolation is the belief that my lack of human ability to use words as an expression of thanks will be more than made-up for by God’s desire to bless each of them for their openly giving spirit.

In chronological order of their contribution to this book, I would like to thank: David Berheide, Judy Baus, Steve and Linda Blumenthal, Frank Daum, Scott Crill, David Brady, David Reyes, Lena Self, Larry Sambrano, Chet Strong, Nick Bariloni, Rosalie Gonzales, Carmen Lindsay, Rachel English, Chine Ngbemeneh, Ruth Umana, Clyde Cowart, Sandy Goins, Dick Bernal, Dale Abood, and Keith McGraw.



Foreword



Running Away for Three Weeks is a book written by a woman who ran from the reality of her life into the comforting arms of her Savior. Marilyn McGraw, after losing what seemed to be everything to her, found so much of her self on the back roads of the good ole' US of A. On this 3-week tour, she learned the simplicity of God's love for her, and that if God takes care of sparrows how much more will He take care of His sons and daughters. This book is full of truths and encouragement that she learned on her journey. I often encourage my congregation and parishioners to take life's tests and make them testimonies, take the mess life gives you and make it your message, this book is exactly that. I am so proud of Marilyn for putting words to her life experience and to her testimony; I know that this book will be a blessing to you! This book is simply put: one woman taking the mess life gave her and making it a message for all.

Pastor Dick Bernal
 Jubilee Christian Center
 Senior Pastor / Founder
 October 2002

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CHAPTER ONE

This book is dedicated to God, the mountain mover.



Life Happens

“And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you, He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed...” Deuteronomy 31:8 (NKJV)

If you have ever felt you were in a dark room with no light, where you could hear God’s voice calling, “This way, my beloved”, but as hard as you tried, you could not see the way, you could not detect the path you were to take – read on beloved, read on...

Friday, April 20th, 2001 found me telecommuting from my home in Silicon Valley, which is an elaborate way of disclosing that I was working at home - wearing slippers as opposed to high-heeled shoes. Anyone who has ever worked in a cubicle environment understands how difficult it can be to complete any task that requires a high level of concentration. For that reason, I had decided to work from home in order to finalize a project before heading out of town for a family member’s baby shower and a long weekend with my mother in South Lake Tahoe, California.

While my decision to work from home that day was not unusual, the call I received from my vice president at 3:38pm was anything but usual. As I heard his voice on the other end of the phone line, I knew something abnormal was about to happen; Cisco vice presidents don’t

make a practice of calling their employees at home on Friday afternoons, at least mine didn't.

He started the conversation by asking, "Are you enjoying an afternoon off?" I responded, "No, I'm just finishing a project so it is done since I'll be off for a couple of days next week." He proceeded to explain that he was calling because he had just remembered he had approved the following Monday and Tuesday as "paid time off" for me. This was significant because Cisco was scheduled to begin layoff notifications on Monday, April 23rd.

After an awkward minute or two of small talk, he clarified the intention behind his call. He wanted to tell me that an employee of mine was "impacted" - that's the word Cisco decided to use - "I did not want you to come in next week without some advance warning of her layoff" he said. For the next few minutes, my "manager hat" went on, and I asked what actions I could take to work with him to notify the employee. I explained that even though it was near the end of business day, I would come in immediately so I could be there to help my employee through this transition.

As my mouth spoke the words, externally I was able to successfully maintain the professional composure I had practiced so often while at Cisco. Internally, my heart sank as I thought about her brief employment with the company. The Organizational Effectiveness Department we were both a part of had undergone continuous change since her arrival. She had been hired in September of 2000 just as the group began a complete departmental reorganization. By all accounts, her experience at Cisco was anything but "uneventful" while a part of the Organizational Effectiveness group.

I mentioned to my vice president, "Because I have been there with her through the ambiguity and departmental changes over the last few months, I would like to support her through this final transition." After all, my own experience consisted of five different reporting

relationships during my year and a half at Cisco. Everything from reporting to the director who hired me to the current reporting relationship with the vice president of Organizational Effectiveness who himself had only been with Cisco since January of 2001. At that moment, he stated, "She is not the only one impacted." That was it - that was all he said. As "silence" rushed in to fill the void between his words that is how I was notified that I, too, was being laid off.

Without verbalizing any emotion during the remainder of our conversation, I completed the phone call with my now ex-vice president at exactly 3:51pm. After hanging-up the phone, I got up from the table where just a few minutes ago I had been working and walked slowly to my balcony window. As I stared in silence at the lush green leaves hanging from the trees and the bubbling fountain just below, tears began to flow down my cheeks. It was a strange, silent type of crying, no anger, no disbelief, and still, no emotion - just a need to release.

I awoke that morning a successful career woman and would now go to bed that evening a Bureau of Labor Statistics percentage point. As the financial security I derived from my job at Cisco had just been taken away, I could not escape the need to run to God. Fortunately, He prepared me for this moment by using the many stressful days during the last few months at Cisco to teach me a critical coping mechanism. The combination of continuous changes in leadership, departmental reorganization, and economic downturn created a need for a strategy that would allow me the ability to continue to function. I devised a personal "check-in" plan to be used at the end of particularly stressful days. Simple by nature, I asked myself, "Did I still love God?" and "Did God still love me?" If the answer to both those questions was yes, I counted it a good day. In the end what I was affirming was that if the day's events would not matter in a week, month, or year from then - I did not need to give any worry to them now. More importantly, I was actively acknowledging that the most important component of my life was my relationship with God. If that

relationship was intact, nothing else was worthy of worry. In answer to my cries there at the balcony window, God reassured me it was intact.

“I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill...” Psalms 3:4 (NKJV)

After a few minutes staring into the blue sky, my mind and body went into “emergency” mode. I immediately sat down at the computer and began to send a few emails. This was my way of yelling, “Hey world, see what was just done to me!” One of the first messages I typed was to my favorite vice president at Cisco. Within half an hour or so, he responded by calling me at home. (Wow, two vice president’s calls at home in one day!) This was truly an unusually eventful Friday afternoon.

As soon as I heard his voice on the other end of the phone, I began to cry. He was the first individual I spoke with and my pain could not be held back. His compassion and genuine expression of concern were overwhelming, and I shall always be grateful. We talked for a few minutes regarding the possibility of my working for him in his organization. However, it was clear that because of Cisco’s overall need to reduce its workforce, this would not be possible – after all, he was about to notify his own “impacted” employees in just three days.

By 4:30pm – the words “ROAD TRIP” flashed through my mind. I had always wanted to venture across the United States after finishing college however, because I was blessed with a job quickly, I was not able to act upon my desire. The current situation appeared to offer the perfect opportunity to run away from home, an opportunity I was intent on taking advantage of this time around. “Oops, wait a minute!” my mind raced. “I have to stop, slow down and get to a baby shower tomorrow.” So much for running away just yet...

Somehow, I got through the evening. Blind numbness had a way of allowing my brain to accept and cope with situations I would never have thought possible. By this stage of life, I knew how to live in plenty and how to live in poverty since past circumstances had provided ample opportunities to experience both. Interestingly enough, the ability to keep going when my “get-up and go has gotten up and gone” served me well in both plenty and poverty since both have their share of joy and sorrow. When we begin to see life from God’s point of view, we become capable of understanding it is our faith in Him that allows us to function from day to day; not our material wealth or possessions. Little did I know the events of this day were only the beginning of a new season of growth God had planned.

“I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me...” Philippians 4:12 - 13 (NKJV)

As I reflected on the day’s events, I was reminded of words God spoke to me a few years prior: “If I gave it to you, there is no way it can be taken away.” I knew at the time of my hiring, that God placed me at Cisco. My job as an organizational effectiveness manager surpassed everything I could have ever imagined for myself. However, it was clear to me that if God’s plan was for me to remain at Cisco, I would still be there. Since I was not, there was no option but to conclude He had a better position for me, an assignment that would guide me on to the next “rung on the ladder” towards the culmination of my life’s destiny as a child of God.

As this particular appointment was coming to a close, it was apparent there was no choice but to accept God’s words to me, “Hold on for the storm, and receive the gift within.” After all, it was clear that my layoff was simply God’s way of signaling He had a new appointment waiting for me, and it was time to move towards it. Debating or

questioning the issue would have been a waste of the effort God obviously had “earmarked” for something much more important. I believed that God was in control of my future. There was no choice for me but to step out in hope and embrace the next appointment.

“For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope...”
Jeremiah 29:11 (NKJV)

There are times when I wonder why we ask for so much less than God’s best for us. Why don’t we possess the innate ability to trust him enough to ask that His will be done in our lives? Even though I did not realize the power in my spoken prayer, “Thy will be done God” as I originally applied for my job at Cisco, God still chose to bestow His best upon me - for that season of my life. Learning to differentiate between “good outcomes” and “God outcomes” leads to the development of courage to submit to God’s will for our lives. By “dying to self” and fully submitting, we are free to receive increased blessings we could never expect to achieve through our own labors.

As I thought back on the job search that would ultimately lead me to Cisco, I recalled the “negotiation points” that I originally had in mind - the salary, benefits, and organizational culture I dreamed of. I am still amazed at God’s reply to my prayers. He blatantly said, “No, Marilyn, you are not aiming high enough”, and proceeded to give me so much more. To my defense, the one smart thing I prayed for was that God would place me in an environment where I would be so full of joy that I would be able to bless others. I believe because that was the foundational desire of my heart, God worked past my inability to dream big enough and placed me at the banquet table He had prepared for me - in spite of me.

There have been many instances when God allowed what I thought was best for me to be taken away or never achieved in the first place: a career as a police officer in my home town, finalizing Ph.D. work at

a Southern California college, working as a senior consultant at a San Jose consulting firm, and now working as an organizational effectiveness manager at Cisco. Each time something was taken away, I was always given something better to replace it – ALWAYS! This was the rock I stood on that Friday evening as I focused on God’s words, “If I gave it to you, there is no way it can be taken away.”

By now, I understood that God often removes things from our lives to make room for new blessings He desires us to have. Quite often our “moving to the next level” requires us to be receptive to new ways of doing things. If we choose to hold onto old ways, we only delay or, in some cases, halt the new growth God has for us.

“Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved...”
Matthew 9:17 (NKJV)

In each transition I learned valuable life lessons that would serve as preparation for the next stage of life. Just as there are times when God builds us up and takes us to heights that surpass our human understanding, there are also times when we must allow God to strip us down so He can build us up and clothe us in even finer garments. God’s timing for our lives is infinitely better than the calendar we would prepare, if given the opportunity. Over time I have come to realize that when we submit to God’s will, He gives us just what we can handle - no more and no less.

Our prayers must be rooted in the desire to follow God’s scheduling rather than attempting to circumvent it by inserting our own timetables. So often individuals make statements such as, “I want to be a CEO”, or “I want to be married with two children and a dog”, or “I want to be president.” These aspirations are not in and of themselves unworthy, or in some cases, inappropriate. What can be inappropriate and dangerous is when we get caught-up in the “I want

it now” syndrome, without first asking for and taking time to allow God to grow wisdom and respect for the true responsibilities attached to the goal within us. When we surrender to God’s timing, we can be assured of achieving every good thing He has for us.

*“Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli...”
Luke 3:23 (NKJV)*

We may never fully understand God’s timing, but I can only surmise that if Jesus surrendered to it, we must also. For many years I hoped for a job like the one I had at Cisco. Once there, I truly felt I had been given the desires of my heart and had finally been allowed to become the professional I dreamed of becoming. If I had been given that opportunity any sooner in life or without first living through the events I had, I would not have experienced the degree of success I did.

Back at the beginning of the job search that would ultimately lead to Cisco, God told me, “I am preparing you to receive your blessing.” True to his word, just prior to beginning the job, I had learned to accept that I do not have to be perfect, to accept help from others, and to accept what I am given. Those key acceptance points were put into practice even as I interviewed for the position at Cisco. God allowed me to be “imperfectly perfect” during my first interview to show that He desired me to accept myself as others already did. Talk about just in time information.

These are the words I spoke to my father over the phone as we discussed my lay-off that Friday evening. As I reminded him that God had always allowed something better to come my way when something was taken, my heart broke as I heard the pain in his voice as he said, “Well...yes, it does seem to work that way for you.” My father was so proud that I was (in his eyes) a “hot-shot” manager at Cisco and simply could not yet understand that God had something even better for me. As we hung up I took time to reassure myself that

God was “indeed” still in control and that the resilience and strength He had cultivated in me would, as it always had, sustain me through this new season of change. I also hoped some of my resilience, which stems from the realization that God will see to completion His plans for me, would rub-off on my dad.

*“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ...”
Philippians 1:6 (NKJV)*