

HOW CAN SHE BE A BLESSING TO OTHERS
WHEN SHE NEEDS A BLESSING HERSELF?

PAULA
MOWERY

BE THE
BLESSING

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Paula Mowery

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to those who have continued to
bless others even during suffering.

Praise for Paula Mowery

"We all wonder why bad things happen to good people. Can God use even the worst events in our lives to help us feed the world around us? *Be the Blessing* skillfully provides both food for thought and food for discussion."

~ Lisa Wingate, national best-selling author of *The Sea Glass Sisters* and *The Prayer Box*

The Blessing Seer

Mowery's gentle first person story of a woman who needs to be heard as much as she hears is one of joy in growing and loving God, of living and walking without fear, and being faithful to Him who calls us. The included Bible study guide will surely be a favorite with your group. Using the gifts of the Holy Spirit is a favorite subject, and I am delighted to read such a lovely story that makes such a thing natural. Whenever you need a dose of personal encouragement, bring out Paula's book for a refresher course.

~Reflections

1

My heart skipped a beat when I saw his approaching form. I'd recognize him anywhere—Conrad. I scanned my memory and wondered how long it had been since I had seen him, walked with him.

Five years. Had it truly been that long?

As he drew closer, my chest tightened in a hint of panic. Had I not been doing what I should? Was he back to show me the error of my ways? While he was still a distance away, I heard him call to me.

"Addy." His whisper rustled my way like fall leaves dancing. Then he stood in front of me. My throat constricted in a sudden rush of emotion.

"Do not fear, Addy." He gazed into my eyes.

A peace washed over me. "Conrad, I didn't know if I'd ever see you again."

He smiled. "Let's walk."

I fell into a comfortable and reminiscent stroll at his side. Our first meeting had taught me about blessings. We walked in silence awhile before Conrad spoke again.

"There are times that God adds new facets to you—to make you more like Jesus."

I swallowed. "New facets?"

"Yes, child." He stopped and faced me. "First Peter three—be the blessing." He turned as if he might walk away.

I touched his arm to stop him. "But, Conrad, I don't understand." I shook my head.

He covered my hand with his. "You will." His silhouette faded into the distance.

I wheeled around, dashed back to my house, and up the front steps. I headed straight for our home office where I'd left my Bible. I plopped into the chair and flipped to First Peter chapter three. I scanned verses, not really sure what I was looking for. The word "blessing" caught my attention.

I sighed and sat back, mulling over the meaning of the verses in light of what Conrad had said. He had referenced the verse and then added: "Be the blessing." Part of my job then as a Christian was to seek out opportunities to bless others in Jesus' name. What would that look like? How could I bless others?

Oh, no. I forgot about work. I glanced at the clock; I'd be late for sure. I sprang to my feet and rushed to the shower.

I did my best to speed through my morning routine, grabbed a granola bar on the way to the car, and stepped into the dental office at two minutes after eight. I sprinted to the lounge, crammed my purse into my locker, and turned to find Dr. Bennett grinning at me over a cup of coffee.

"In a hurry?"

I rolled my eyes, caught red-handed, I stifled a giggle. "A little bit."

He raised his cup toward me. "Take a breath. You're all right." He disappeared down the hallway.

All that morning at any breaks between patients, I contemplated my visit from Conrad and the verse from First Peter. I couldn't help anticipating having visions like I'd experienced the last time Conrad had paid me

visits. But, nothing out of the ordinary happened at work.

At home, I found Griffey dozing in the recliner. He always visited sick church members on Monday, having updated the list after Sunday services. This week's list had been a long one. It seemed nothing could wear a person out more than being at a hospital all day.

He cracked his eyelids open a bit.

"Hey." I kept my voice low.

He grinned.

"Everything OK with Joe's surgery? Pacemaker, right?"

He let out a low moan as he stretched. "Yep. He's doing good."

"What do you want for supper?" I glanced at the clock on the wall. Looked like dinner would be late tonight.

"Umm, let's run over to Justin's and get something."

I looked down at my uniform. "Let me change," I said, instantly relieved to not have to prepare anything. Since our daughter Elianna's marriage, we'd often found it easier to just grab something out.

Conrad's visit had me contemplative and as I tied my shoes, I recalled the changes in our lives over the last five years. Elianna finishing school, marrying, and heading to seminary. Griffey and I moving to another church in the area when he was called to a new pastorate. Getting used to the new dentist who had taken over when Dr. Reeves retired. I still hadn't quite found my niche in the new church. I missed being in the same church as my friend, Emily, and the women's Bible study group. I even missed my babies in the

nursery.

But, there was no doubt God had called Griffey to this church. After the turmoil they'd been through, the people needed a pastor to love them and help them heal, and Griffey fit the bill. I still wondered what I was to do. Maybe Conrad's visit shouldn't have surprised me. I hadn't done much for God, nothing of any significance, since arriving at the new congregation.

The phone began to ring, so I grabbed my purse and sprinted down the stairs and answered it.

"Hello?" I struggled to control my breathing.

"Is this Addy Townsend?" The female voice on the other end came through stiffly professional.

Bad news? Had Elianna been in an accident? My stomach knotted. "Yes?"

"Ms. Townsend, is your father Grant Reagan of Friendsville, Florida?"

"Yes." I hesitated.

The woman sighed. "I'm relieved to locate you. My name is Amy Cottrell. We have your father here at Clearwater Memorial Hospital. He's suffered a stroke. It's rather serious. You are needed here."

I sucked in a breath and plopped onto the couch. "Umm, ma'am, you understand I'm in Tennessee."

"Yes, Ms. Townsend—you are listed as next of kin."

I looked up to find Griffey's questioning gaze on me.

I covered the phone's mouthpiece. "It's my dad; he's had a stroke."

Griffey joined me on the couch, sliding close and slipping an arm around my shoulders. My mind scrambled. What could I do?

"Be the blessing," a voice whispered loudly.

My head jerked toward Griffey. "Did you say something?"

His brow knitted. "No, honey."

Suddenly my mind cleared, and I knew what I had to do. "I will be there as soon as I can make arrangements." I jotted down the hospital information and then ended the call.

Griffey was already scanning for plane tickets online, and I called Dr. Bennett to tell him I needed Wednesday and Thursday off.

"I've found tickets for tomorrow morning. Should I order two?" Griffey sat with his fingers poised above the laptop keyboard.

"No, I'll just go and check things out." I tried to sound more confident than I felt. I chewed my thumbnail.

"You're sure? Because I can arrange to go with you."

"You've got responsibilities here."

Maybe this was the reason Conrad had visited again and urged me. This was my opportunity to step up to the plate. I could do this.

2

Early the next morning, Griffey hauled me and my small, crammed suitcase an hour away to the airport in Knoxville. I fidgeted in my seat the whole flight to Florida, unable to distract myself by reading.

Upon landing, I procured a rental car and headed toward the hospital. I gnawed my bottom lip wondering what shape I would find my father in. I took a deep breath and let it out in an attempt to ease the tension in my body. I voiced a quick prayer for wisdom.

Tears sprang to my eyes when I entered the ICU room and caught a glimpse of my father. The hospital bed seemed to swallow his frail-looking body. I tiptoed to his side and noticed his eyelids flutter. Finally, he was able to open them, and his gaze tracked to my face. Recognition softened his expression. He opened his mouth, but only a grunt emerged. He closed his eyes tightly and shook his head, sighing with disgust.

I laid my hand on his shoulder. "Dad, it's OK. You don't have to talk."

A tear trailed down his face and onto the pillow.

A woman with dark, short-cropped hair entered, sporting a long white coat. She stuck her hand toward me, and I gave it a quick shake. "Are you Ms. Townsend, Mr. Reagan's daughter?"

I nodded. "Yes. Mrs. Townsend—Addy."

"I'm Dr. Lynford." She turned her attention to my

father. Her face took on a pleasant caring smile. "How are we doing, Mr. Reegan? I'm so glad we located your daughter."

He nodded and managed a lopsided smile.

"I noticed his speech is impaired. Will he get that back?" I grasped the bed railing and studied the doctor's face.

"We can't be sure. The stroke occurred in his left side so he's affected on the right side and his speech. Over the next few days we'll be testing to see the extent of the stroke's damage." She patted Dad's shoulder. As she turned to leave, I followed her out to the hallway.

"Now that he is stable and responsive, I'm having him moved to a regular room."

"Will I be able to stay with him? If not, I need to find a hotel." I glanced at my watch.

"You can stay with him. If it seems he'll be here for an extended time, we'll arrange for you a place to stay. We have rooms available on the hospital campus for family."

"OK, thank you."

As the doctor walked away, the words "extended time" kept ringing in my ears. I supposed I hadn't expected a long hospital stay.

I spotted an unoccupied area just down the hall and headed for it. I brought up Griffey's cell number. He would be waiting for my call.

He answered on the first ring. "Honey?"

"Yes, it's me." I leaned against the block wall.

"So, how serious is it?"

"He can't speak." My voice broke.

"Do you need me to come? I can be there in the morning."

"No, not right now. The doctor said we would

know more over the next few days. They'll do some testing."

"Do you have somewhere to stay?"

I explained what the doctor had said about accommodations. I promised to call in the morning, and then rushed back to Dad not wanting to miss when they transferred him to another room.

It was late when they finally settled Dad into a private room. The move seemed to exhaust Dad, and he quickly fell asleep.

A nurse brought an extra pillow and blanket for the fold-out chair I could use. As I struggled to get comfortable in my make-shift bed, I watched Dad and recalled when he reentered my life. At that time, I wasn't sure I wanted anything to do with him, but I witnessed the day he asked Jesus to forgive him, and I had to learn to extend forgiveness to him as well. We'd stayed in contact and even traveled to visit each other a few times. But now, I wished I'd made more of an effort than I had.

My lack of sleep tested my patience, especially the morning I woke with a pain in my upper chest area. No wonder I would be sore with the sleeping conditions. I was surprised I didn't have more aches and pains.

Over the next few days, Dad regained limited use of his right side and speech. When he spoke, I had to pay close attention to understand, and he was easily agitated by his disabilities.

Dr. Lynford met me in the hallway on my way back from the cafeteria. "I'm glad I'm running into

you." She stopped and shoved her hands into her coat pockets. "Mr. Reegan will be released from the hospital soon, but he can't go home without help."

"You mean a nurse to come in and check on him?"

"No, I mean he needs some place where he has constant supervision."

My mouth flew open.

"I can recommend some assisted living facilities."

"Be the blessing." There was the whisper again.

"I'll need to check into his finances so I'll know what he can afford."

The doctor nodded.

"Be the blessing."

The directive came stronger this time.

God, what do you want me to do? I silently pleaded to Him.

Then I looked directly at Dr. Lynford. "You know, I'll take him home with me. I need to call my husband to make arrangements."

Dr. Lynford smiled. "OK." She turned to leave but paused and spun back around. "You won't regret it."

I nodded, while deep down I wasn't sure. Could I bring this man into my home? A man I had barely begun to know.

I zipped into a quiet corner at the end of the hall and called Griffey's number. The moment he answered, I spilled out what the doctor had said and my exclamation that I would arrange to bring my father home.

"So, honey, what do you think? I mean, I suppose we could find him a facility there. We don't have to move him in with us." I paused but heard only silence on the other end. "Griffey, are you still there?"

"Yes, hon, I'm still here. I'm sorry; I was just in

shock for a moment.”

“I’m so sorry to call and dump this on you ...” I massaged my temple.

“No, you don’t understand, Addy. This morning God led me to First Timothy five during my quiet time. The passage speaks of providing for your family—if you don’t, you are no better than an unbeliever. I couldn’t understand why in the world I had to read that today, but now I know.”

“Let’s just say I’ve had my own version of a spiritual nudge.”

“I’ll talk to Anita—the lady at church—her employer is a medical supply company and provides hospital beds and medical aid equipment. The guest room will convert easily.”

“Thanks, babe. I’ll be back in touch when I know more details. And, Griffey, I love you.”

“Love you, too.”

I gazed out the window to my right letting all that had transpired sink in. I took a deep breath and headed back to Dad’s room.

Dad was propped up in the hospital bed when I entered. I pulled a chair from against the wall close to the bed and plopped down into it. “So, here’s the plan.” I kept my tone upbeat, and when he alluded to the fact he didn’t want to be a burden or intrude, I deflected his protest.

His bottom lip quivered. “—ank you.” He shook his head obviously still frustrated with his impaired speech.

“Don’t thank me yet. You haven’t had to live with me.” I grinned, crossing my arms over my chest dramatically.

He flashed a smile but then appeared serious,

brow knitted. "Griffey?"

"Don't worry. I just talked to him. He's already preparing your room." I propped my elbows on his bed. "He has had to live with me. Bless his heart." I shook my head. The situation had been so dark; I needed to keep things light.

When Dad was released, we loaded into a rental car and headed to his house. We collected some clothing hurriedly because we had to get to the airport to catch our flight to Tennessee. He plopped exhausted onto his couch. His stamina had not returned. He instructed me on where his suitcase was located, and I stuffed as much clothing into it as possible. If he needed anything else, we would buy it.

A framed picture on his nightstand caught my eye. It was my sister and me at a very young age. I glanced around the room recognizing several pictures of my mother. Dad had never remarried, but I was shocked to see he still displayed the family he left.

I ran next door explaining the situation to the neighbor and asking if she might check on the house every so often until Dad returned. Then, we picked up his bills, so I could make sure we took care of them long distance until he arrived home again.

And we were off to Tennessee.

3

Since he still required a lot of assistance with daily tasks and was scheduled for frequent therapy sessions, after much prayer and a discussion with Griffey, I resigned from my dental assistant job.

I feared having Dad living with us would be awkward or strained, but the opposite occurred. We shared meals and evenings in the family room. He and Griffey enjoyed watching sports, yelling at the television. He and I discussed every topic from favorite foods to why he left those many years before. I thanked God. I finally had the Dad I'd been missing and always wanted.

Three weeks into our new arrangement, Dad stared at me over his coffee one morning. His shoulders drooped.

"Dad, are you feeling OK?"

He sucked in a breath and let it out slowly. "Addy, I was such a chicken."

I shook my head in confusion. "What are you talking about?"

"When I left that day, the only excuse I have is that I was chicken. I couldn't fix your sister's leukemia, and that angered me. Of course, I'd made a mess of things long before then. I didn't care about anything but myself. How could I be so stupid? I regretted leaving before I pulled out of the driveway, but I kept going. I ran away thinking that would solve everything."

“Did it?” I leaned forward curious.

“No, nothing was solved except...you were better off with your mother. Even I knew that.” He wagged his head and smiled. “Your mother—she was a saint for what I put her through. At least I’ve been able to tell you that I’m sorry.” He blinked rapidly.

I scooted closer and laid my head on his shoulder. “I love you, Daddy.”

He leaned his head against mine.

Though he still struggled to walk, he insisted on going to church. I admired him for going. I could see how hard it was for him and how exhausted he was when we arrived home. He could barely eat before he fell into a nap that lasted all afternoon.

His faith grew as evidenced by the gleam in his eyes and the frequent theological discussions with Griffey.

A crashing sound jolted me awake. I blinked away sleep and sprinted to Dad’s room. He lay unconscious on the floor beside the bed. It was a second stroke. This episode proved more serious, and the doctor informed me that Dad would probably not leave the hospital.

In the last few months, I had gotten to know my dad, and I was grateful we’d had this time. Now the thought of letting him go was much more difficult. Much more painful. I feared leaving his bedside, missing even one more moment of lucidity.

Later that evening, my head began to bobble, and just as I had almost given in to sleep, Dad groaned. I leaned over his bed. As I watched his face, his eyes suddenly popped open and made contact with mine. A