

Women on
the
Edge

Cindi McMenamin



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Contents

Standing at the Crossroads	7
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Part One:

Surviving on the Edge: *Desperations That Can Devastate*

1. Desperate for More—Desiring God Alone	15
2. Desperate for Control—Desiring a Surrendered Heart	29
3. Desperate for Fulfillment—Desiring a Grateful Heart	51
4. Desperate for Change—Desiring a Deeper Trust	65
5. Desperate for Love—Desiring a Faithful Heart	83
6. Desperate to Avoid the Patterns of the Past— Desiring a New Legacy	101
7. Desperate to Accomplish—Desiring Him as the Prize	117
8. Desperate to Find Yourself— Desiring His Identity over Yours	129

Part Two:

Thriving on the Edge: *Desperations That Can Liberate*

9. Desperate to Obey Him—Desiring His Will over Yours . .	143
10. Desperate to Serve Him—Desiring His Pleasure	155
11. Desperate for His Touch—Desiring to Be Complete	171
12. Desperate for His Glory—Desiring Nothing Else	187
Remaining on the Path Toward Life	203
Notes	204

Part One

Surviving on the Edge

DESPERATIONS THAT CAN DEVASTATE

Longings within the heart of a woman can become desperations that drive her toward destruction—or detours that lead her toward a delightful destiny.

Let's examine the desperations of our hearts that take us to the edge and, in them, find the One to whom we can cling...and the spacious place where we can be free.

Desperate for More

DESIRING GOD ALONE

You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope.
With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

MATTHEW 5:3 MSG

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.

PSALM 27:4

Lara seemed to have it all. She had a husband and children who loved her, a beautiful home, many friends, and a promising future. She was the kind of woman everyone wanted to be around because of her optimism and energy.

I met Lara at a season in her life in which she was ready for more. Desperate for more. Although I didn't realize how desperate. All of her children were finally out of the house and either married or established in their careers. She'd served in her church alongside her husband for several years, being the wind beneath his wings. Now she felt it was *her* turn.

We met regularly and talked often about her next step in ministry. She wanted her life to count. She wanted her story—of incredible things that God had done in her life—to be heard. We talked about what she was ready for God to do in her life. I began to mentor her in speaking and we talked about writing her book. All seemed to be going well.

Then one day everything changed.

The Lara I knew was gone. Literally. She left her marriage and ministry.

She left her family and friends. She left her responsibilities and reputation. She was desperate for something and she, heartbreakingly, chose a path that hurt everyone who ever knew her—or *thought* they knew her. I tried to contact her, and she texted back that she was “fine.” I tried to set up a meeting, and she changed her phone number. I tried to hunt her down, and she remained elusive.

What had happened? What went wrong? And how could I have not seen it coming?

Yet somehow, I did.

Underneath the energy and enthusiasm of this woman was the gnawing hunger for something more. But I brushed it off as normal female talk. All women talk jokingly of what they could experience if they were single again, of where they could be in life if they weren’t tied down with children, of what more they could be doing if they had more money, or of what life certainly owes them by now, *don’t they?* All women vent now and then about how they’ve had it with all their responsibilities, all their hard work, and all the expectations placed upon them by everyone they know. All women sound, every now and then, like they’re ready to fly the coop. So why are we so surprised when they finally do?

My heart aches today with the realization that nearly every week for almost a year I was sitting across the table from a woman on the edge—on the edge of truly making a difference for God, or spiraling downward toward self destruction. She had two paths in front of her: the path toward life and blessings, or the path toward destruction. She, perhaps unknowingly, chose destruction. And I was powerless to intervene.

You and I, at times, are Lara, too. One minute we love life and others are feeding off of our energy. The next minute we are so weighed down with responsibilities, burdens, heartaches, or frustrations that we want to run—far away from anything that threatens to hold us down. One minute we appear happy and content with what life has brought us, and the next we are ready to dump it all and start over. Deep within us is a well that constantly screams for more.

Every day, in some way, two paths loom before us. One lures us with the fantasy of escape—a lie promising a life of less responsibility and less struggle. The other path doesn’t promise ease, but eternal fulfillment and joy if we put aside our desire for immediate pleasure and focus on long-term joy. I often have to ask myself, “Which one will I take?” Do

I long for blessings God's way...or will I insist on getting them in my own way? Do I long for life the way God designed and intended it? Or will I attempt to carve out my own path, not realizing it will lead to a destructive end?

There are many "paths" that seem right to a woman, which we'll look at throughout this book. But the end result is often pain—emotional, spiritual, and sometimes even physical pain. One of those paths includes wanting more because we believe we deserve it.

As humans, we are wired to want more. As women, we *long* for more. But what is at the core of our longing for more? And why does that longing turn to desperation and make us feel we're on the edge? I believe our longings for more started with the first woman to ever walk this earth—and the first woman to ever be given a choice.

Why Is More Never Enough?

Eve was a woman who had it all. Literally. She was married to Mr. Perfect. (Adam was the mold for masculinity, the ideal man formed in the likeness of God.) Besides having a perfect husband, Eve had a beautiful garden home (that never needed weeding!), no noisy (or nosey) neighbors, no job pressures on her or her husband, no debts or bills to pay, no in-laws, and no disobedient or demanding children. She didn't even have laundry! (Because they were naked before the Fall, remember?)

Yep, Eve had the perfect life. Not only was her life perfect, but *she* was perfect. No complaints about her health, her looks, her body, her weight, her hair. She was perfect and complete in every way. She and her husband experienced the perfect life in a perfect place with nothing but time to relish in the enjoyment of their world, their Creator, and each other. They were living one continuous honeymoon in Paradise. What a life! But for some reason, it wasn't enough for her.

We don't know how long Eve relished the beauty and bliss of her existence, living in close companionship with her husband and her Creator. Was it a few days, a week, a month? Or was it only a matter of a few hours? We do know that when Satan came along in the form of a serpent and pointed out to Eve something that she *didn't* have, Eve felt for the first time a desire for something more. The serpent told her if she ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). To be

the crown of God's creation apparently wasn't enough. Eve wanted to be *like God*. Her role as "*the Woman*"—the only woman on earth, and perfect at that!—wasn't enough. She wanted more.

When the serpent told her that her eyes would be opened and she would know the difference between good and evil, it appealed to her. She wanted her eyes to be "opened." Consider the beauty Eve's eyes had access to already: A breathtakingly beautiful garden with colors more vivid than anything we can imagine; a perfect, unblemished world without weeds or wilted leaves or dried up grass or any sign of death. Yet she wanted more.

Scripture says when Eve saw the fruit "was good for food [she wanted to taste it] and pleasing to the eye [she wanted to have what she saw] and also desirable for gaining wisdom,"¹ she wanted more. Eve had been given a perfectly sound mind. She could reason. She could point out to Satan his error and embellishment when he asked, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" She was able to repeat back to him God's command. But she wanted to know what she didn't know. Evidently the thought of having more wisdom than she already had must have pulled at her.

Oh, why didn't Eve trust God with what He had given her? What if she had not listened to that tempting voice that told her she'd be happier if she just had *more*? What if she had responded to the tempter by saying, "I don't need to know evil; God has given me all that I need to be happy in my relationship with Him"?

Couldn't she be satisfied with God's goodness toward her and choose not to believe He was holding out on her? What if Eve had responded by saying, "That doesn't sound like something my Master would do...withhold from me what I truly desire. I will take this matter before the One who has my best at heart." We learn from the story that that person was not her husband. Adam, too, succumbed to the temptation. Eve sought more *apart* from God. And she sought the safety of numbers by including her husband in her sin.

Couldn't she be satisfied with knowing that God had already given her all the wisdom she would ever need? Yet she wanted more.

When Satan made Eve aware of something she *didn't* have, she became desperate to have it. She actually brought God's goodness and love for her into question when she began to ponder the fact that God had withheld

something from her. In fact, Scripture says she looked and saw that something was “good” (in her own judgment, apparently) and partook of it. When she took that forbidden fruit, wanting more for herself than her Maker considered best for her, she ended up losing it all. She lost her home, her health, her happiness, her perfect unity with her husband, her unblemished intimacy with God, and ultimately her life on earth. Eve’s desperation for more led to a destiny of spiritual and physical death. Looking back now, was that one piece of fruit in the garden worth risking—and losing—it all? Was the desire for a little more worth losing everything?

We need to ask ourselves that question, too.

Our Unquenchable Longing

You and I are so like Eve. We, too, have been given so much, but we often believe if we had something more, we’d be happier. Like Eve, we too seek company and safety in numbers. *If someone will do this with me (if someone will give me their blessing, if someone will tell me it’s not wrong for me to be feeling this way), then it must not be that bad.*

Eve’s desire for more, apart from God, led to isolation—isolation from God and from the garden. Isolation, at times, from her husband, whom she knew complete unity with before she had ventured to get more. Her desperation for more led to devastation—living in a cursed world, as well as death for her and for all who would come after her. The stakes were extremely high. And she risked, and lost, it all. It’s ironic that Eve’s desire for *more* resulted in her losing *everything* she had.

What About You?

Do you know what it’s like to hear the Tempter do a number on you, as well? I do. Instead of tempting me to eat fruit that will supposedly make me wise, he changes the words a bit and makes it look like a whole different approach. But really, it’s the same strategy he used with Eve. His lines sound something like this (can you relate to these whispers from the enemy as well?):

“For the first time in your life, why don’t you think about *you*, instead of everyone else?”

“You shouldn’t have to put up with that anymore. You deserve far better.”

“Who says that’s off limits? Go ahead. You won’t hurt anyone. And nobody else has to know.”

“Why shouldn’t you have something like that? You’ve spent your life making sure everyone else has what *they* want.”

“You should know what it’s like to partake in that. Then you’ll be better able to minister to others who are struggling with it.”

“Go ahead...live for the moment. It’s really not that big of a deal.”

The lies are the same. They imply that God does *not* have your best interest at heart when it comes to your lot in life and your circumstances. Those lies imply that God is not a good God when it comes to the boundaries He drew for you. They call God a liar. Yet the Bible says, “No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless” (Psalm 84:11).

What are *you* longing for right now? Do you lack a husband, or one whom you can trust? Do you lack a child, or one who will obey, or a job that will pay, or a purpose that will satisfy? What has God already blessed you with? And what might He be withholding for your own good?

Unfortunately, I am like Eve sometimes. I have been given *so* much. And yet I often find myself not only desiring more, but *asking God* for more!

Focusing on the One Thing

Recently I went to God in prayer with my shopping list of what I was truly desperate for.

God, there are so many things on my heart right now. I’m concerned about this financial matter that seems to be pressing in on us. And then there’s my daughter’s MRI this afternoon, which will show us if she has to have another surgery on her knee. And my daughter should’ve had a call for a film audition by now. Please remember her in that, Lord, so she doesn’t get discouraged. And Lord, I really need peace about a disappointment in my life that is causing me to become restless. And God, there’s

a certain area of my life in which you know I am restless. God, would you bring about the desired changes so I can be happy and at peace?

My list was long, and I was exhausted after recounting it all to God. Then my devotional reading that morning took me to Psalm 27—a psalm I’d read many times, and taught, as well. But this time, it seemed to read differently to me—as a gentle reminder, or maybe even a rebuke:

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple (verse 4).

There were lots of things I was asking of God that morning. But the psalmist asked for only *one* thing: to dwell in God’s presence, seeking His face and glory.

I realized that if seeking God had been my one request—my *only* request—I would not have needed anything else I’d been praying for:

- *If His presence had been what I sought first*, I would’ve had the confidence that He is my Provider, both financially and otherwise.
- *If His character had been all that I sought*, I would’ve had the peace of mind that He is the Great Physician for whatever my daughter’s medical condition.
- *And if His glory had been my chief desire*, I would’ve had the perspective that He is the Healer of hurts and the Redeemer of all things when it came to my disappointed, restless heart.

When God becomes my Sole Desire, I am able to face whatever comes my way. Jesus said, “Seek *first* his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

The rest of my prayer that morning became this:

Simplify my heart, Lord, to have just one request: To know You and dwell with You intimately.

Can you simplify *your* long list of requests to just one? What if *you*

were to take your longing for more and turn it into a longing for more of God? Let me show you what happened when one woman did just that.

Desiring a Different Kind of More

Like Lara, Paula was also desperate for more. But in a strikingly different way.

The 42-year-old mother of three young children (and grandmother of two more children from an adult married daughter) was perfectly content with her life for a while. On staff at her large, growing church and a participant in a weekly women's Bible study, it appeared she was doing all she should do. And it appeared she had all she wanted. Until the day she realized there was so much more that she *should* be wanting.

"I came to an awful realization at a point last spring when I was studying the book of Acts that I was totally going through the motions," Paula said. "I filled in the blanks, checked the boxes, did the work, but I felt so fake. I remember thinking: *This is not it. This going-through-the-motions of filling in the blanks at Bible study is not working for me. It's becoming academic to me.*"

It was not intentional, Paula explains. She was in the right place at the right time, doing all the right things. But her *heart* wasn't in the right place.

"You can do a lot of good things and not be glorifying God in it," Paula said. When she became aware of the mechanical aspect of her relationship with God, she didn't want it to continue. In fact, it repulsed her. She cried out to God to help her be genuine in her faith and in her relationship with Him.

"It started with my desperation of telling Him, 'I just want to know You. I need *more*. More of *You*. I need to know You differently than how I know You right now.'"

Once Paula prayed that, she says, "It's been 'hold on' ever since."

The most immediate change that happened in Paula's life was that she developed a hunger for God's Word. She began to read every verse in the Bible she could find on God's love. Then she posed the question to herself: "How would your life be different now if you really believed it?" Instead of just reading a verse, she began to put the truth of it into her life and everyday situations. The result was that it transformed her life and her relationship with God.

Looking back now, Paula says, “I wasn’t hungry for the Person [of Christ]. I was hungry for the knowledge [about Him].” She says that loving God and His Word more “has opened my eyes to Him in a whole new way...my faith and my passion for Him have grown in ways that I can’t even explain. He has made it so clear to me that He wants me to know Him...there is such a huge difference between knowing about Him and intimately knowing Him.”

Could this be the difference between being *on the edge* and standing firm in a spacious place?

Paula says there are still days when she is tempted to go out on the edge in her own way of thinking and behaving. There are still days when she could be Lara, too. But, she says, when she inserts the Word of God into her situations, and God’s truth into the lies she hears from the Tempter, her life straightens out.

“I am at a point in my faith right now where I sometimes hear the lies and believe them, but it takes me a lot less time to realize I’m believing the lie,” she says. “I am so passionate about God’s Word and so absolutely fanatically in love with Him that He has brought me to the point where I can replace those lies so much more quickly.”

The lie that we are entitled to more, apart from God, can take a woman right out to—and even over—the edge, as was seen in Lara’s life. But God’s Word, as seen in Paula’s life, can replace those lies and bring a woman back to her spacious place where she can live solidly and be a testimony to others.

Which One Are You?

This is the ongoing tale of two women, two paths, two choices. And it’s not the first time I’ve seen it happen. Lara is now AWOL. Many of her friends never heard from her again. Most, like me, have tried to forget about her betrayal and move on.

But Paula? She continues to be a blessing in other women’s lives while working on staff at her church, as well as when she mentors women one-on-one. She is also taking time to train her children in the relationship—not the routine—of knowing and loving God.

Consider the two scenarios: two real-life women who each had a choice and each had two paths set out before them. One woman was desperate for more of *everything*. The other was desperate for more of *God*.

One woman alienated most of those who knew her and lives today on a smaller scale, one in which she is the central figure in the drama of her life. The other woman glorifies God with all that she is and is a blessing to all who come in contact with her. Paula—the woman who wanted more of God—sees her life as all about the One who *gave* her life. And she continues, daily, to give her life back to Him.

Which woman will *you* be? And what path will *you* take?

God told His people centuries ago that He had set two paths before them—two paths that are before us, too, as women on the edge:

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you...But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods [our own desires; the world's expectations; our lust for money, love, or power] and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed...This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. *Now choose life*, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life...(Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

I love how God doesn't just set the choice before us and walk away, leaving us to decide our own destiny. He instead *pleads* with His people to choose the right path to their destiny: "Now *choose* life...for the LORD is your life..."

The Choice Is Yours

When Eve was tempted to want more, she had two paths in front of her. She could choose the knowledge of evil (death and destruction) or she could choose the fruit of the tree of life. Oh, if only she had chosen life! Instead, she chose *knowledge* over life. She chose to know of more than she, in her innocence, knew. She wanted *more* in her life, and ended up losing her life because of it.

David, the psalmist, a man who met many crossroads throughout

his life, recognized that God was the One who laid the paths before him. And God never made the right path a mystery. “You have made known to me the path of life,” David sang in Psalm 16:11. “You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

And in Isaiah 30:21 we read that God is, again, faithful in letting us know which path to take: “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying ‘This is the way; walk in it.’”

Oh, I want to hear that whisper behind me, don’t you? And I want to obey it and find joy in God’s presence, and eternal pleasures at His right hand.

Think about it, my friend. Does God really need to *plead* with you to choose life? Isn’t the answer obvious? Aren’t the benefits (life and blessings) apparent?

Which path will you take? Will you allow your desperation for more to lead you down a path toward destruction? Or will you channel that desire for more into a desire for *more of God* and let Him lead you toward a destiny of delight?

I know which path I want to take. How about *you*?

Finding Your Spacious Place

He brought me out into a spacious place; he
rescued me because He delighted in me.

PSALM 18:19

We are women on the edge when we continue to want more in spite of our blessings. Yet when we are content, we have found our spacious place—the place where we are no longer living on the edge, but living fully in God’s purpose for us. If Eve had cherished her oneness with God, and trusted Him with all He had given—and what He chose *not* to give—she never would’ve felt He was withholding something from her. If she had learned to be content with the Lover of her soul, she never would have listened to the lie that she needed more than she already had. If she had embraced her spacious place in paradise, she never would’ve had to leave.

Work through the following exercises this week to help you find that spacious place of contentment when you begin to feel you want or need something more.

1. Make a list of the things that come to mind when you consider what *more* you wish you had:

2. Now list the blessings in your life:

I recently came across the following statistics, which shocked and convicted me about my heart that so often longs for more:

If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75 percent of the people in this world. If you have *any* money in the bank and some in your wallet and some spare change in a dish somewhere, you are among the top 8 percent of the world's wealthy; 92 percent have less to live on than you do! If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million other people in the world. If you can attend worship services at church without the fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than three billion people in the world.²

3. Write out a prayerful response to the paragraph above.

4. Read Psalm 27:4. If you, like David, boiled all your desires down to “one thing,” what would that be?

5. Using Psalm 27:4 as a guide, write out your prayer to the Lord, telling Him the *one thing* you desire in a way that puts Him first.