

CHAPTER 1



Daughters Indeed

*F*aded maroon and gray, the old, flannel housecoat holds just a hint of a familiar smell. Occasionally I dust it off, straighten the belt, and give it a quick hug before I tuck it away in the back of my closet. A visit with my peculiar treasure always beckons me back.

I pause to view my six-year-old reflection in the mirror before I tug on the wardrobe door. I listen. Has anyone heard the creak of the door, evidence of my exploring? The smell of cedar envelopes me as I leaf through the articles of clothing that hang side by side like the pages of a large mysterious book.

First is the sailor's uniform—a navy, hazy shadow under plastic. A yellowed wedding dress peers through layers of tissue paper. I stretch to reach the bag dangling from the next hanger. The baby's green hat and sweater is so small; did I really wear it? Next come several coats that sleepily wait for winter; the neck of one is circled with soft fur. From there my hand easily glides to the soft gray and maroon housecoat—a man's housecoat—worn and faded, but not tattered or unusable.

As that six-year-old youngster, I knew part of the story. The lanky, teenage sailor had outgrown the scratchy wool suit before he married Mother. Each of

us children had worn the green sweater and cap. Coats could be used another season. But the housecoat . . . why was it here? Why was it empty? What was the man really like who had worn it? Why had his fist pounded the supper table so often? Would he come back?

I did not know it then, but that empty housecoat held more than just pain and longing; it held a gift for me. The gift was invisible at first. When I grew older I recognized it, but I certainly did not consider it a gift. Now I cannot bring myself to throw the worn, old housecoat away. I loved the man who wore it; I longed for the man who left it; and I have come to embrace the gift that lay hidden in its empty folds.

Even after I recognized the gift, I had a lot to learn about the Giver. Some people told me God didn't really *give* the gift, but I knew He had allowed it to be given to me. Some people said it wasn't a *gift*, and I should not thank God for sin; I came to understand that I could thank Him for choosing me to be born into circumstances that resulted from sin but revealed God's grace. Some people said to *forget* the gift and get on with the really important things in life; I saw that the gift was an integral part of my journey, holding messages and miracles that were too important to forget.

I can tell you about the housecoat. I can still show it to you. But the lessons I learned and the gift I came to recognize are part of my journey as a daughter—a daughter of Eve and a daughter of God.

Daughters Indeed

Each of us is born of someone, so all women are daughters, clear back to Adam and Eve. You may have misgivings, as I did, about being a daughter, or you may have confidence in being a daughter. You may

even have been rejected, neglected, or disrespected. Whatever your earthly journey as a daughter entails, God offers you a unique daughterhood. Born as daughters of Eve, we inherited her humanity and we share in bearing the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). We are invited to be adopted as daughters of God (Ephesians 1:5). Through salvation we receive the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). One day believers will be united with Christ as part of His bride. A beautiful, three-part daughterhood awaits. We can be God's daughters by creation (daughters of Eve), daughters by adoption (daughters of God), and daughters-in-law by union with God's Son (daughters for eternity). Just think of it! Let your thoughts peer into the wonder of the invitation.

You and I are daughters of Eve, invited to journey forward as daughters of God. We are fragile at times, fallible, and femininely human. But the Lord's glory is manifested as we submit to being chastened, cherished, and challenged onward as daughters of God. Oh, it is a journey, and journeys vary from one individual to another; but God's grace is sufficient for each one. A garland of grace, eternity in heaven, an intimate relationship with God the Father as part of the bride of Christ—the rewards outweigh the struggle by far!

Gifts

God's gifts to daughters also include individualized personality traits, temperament, heritage, and family. Nor did we at birth choose our community, environment, or country. These things were inherited from our parents' genes or determined by their decisions. The fact that you and I received them is a gift of God's providence.

What about the circumstances and experiences of our lives—including those that trouble us? “Now wait just a minute. Are we going to call our circumstances a gift from God?” you may ask incredulously. Or you may say: “Don’t blame God for my experiences; they were the result of sinful decisions.” God may not have *caused* your circumstances, and some experiences do result from sin, but God *did allow* them. (Dare we entertain the thought that anything is beyond His control?) God allows us choices, and then He uses them for His honor and glory. I suggest that within our circumstances and experiences are gifts such as pain or empty longings. They are gifts because they call us to meet God.

“Where is God?” Job asked. “Oh that one would hear me! behold, my desire is, that the Almighty would answer me.” (Job 31:35). Job’s experiences drove him to seek audience with God. God replied to Job’s questions with more than seventy questions of His own. When the soul-searching had concluded, Job knew a lot more about himself (how little he had known) and a lot more about God (what an awesome, sovereign Giver He is).

What gifts have you been given? Shattered dreams? Unfulfilled longings? A faithful family? A family that mocks your faith? The loss of a parent, spouse, or child? A godly heritage? A church that practices Bible principles? Some are easily recognized as gifts; some are wrapped thickly in grief and pain so that only honest seekers find the less-than-obvious bequest. God can use whatever you or I have been given to show us Himself.

Under the Circumstances

Although our youngest daughter is approaching adolescence, she loves to be tucked into bed each

evening. If my husband tucks her in, I am sure to hear peels of childish laughter delightfully mixed with deep bass chuckles. Sometimes both of us tuck her in, much to her delight. Our hearts are warmed by her sincere thanks and appeals to God. (Her prayers are more insightful than one which her older sibling had uttered as a preschooler: "Lord, please help the heifers to become Christians." Apparently he thought that would change the behavior of the ornery ones he had watched his father chase back inside the fence!)

When I tuck our daughter into bed, our conversation often goes like this:

"I'm so glad you are my mother." Her arms slip around my neck.

"And I am so glad you are my daughter." I return her squeeze.

Last night when I tucked her in, tears coursed down her red-blotched cheeks. "I am so glad you and Dad are Christians, and that we do not have war here." I knew the tears were born out of her compassionate, sensitive spirit. Before going to bed she had read a personal account written by a boy her age. In the mission newsletter, he had described how he had watched rebels torture and kill his father and mother. How terrifying for that young boy. Just reading about it from far away was frightening enough for my own child. What promises could I offer her? That war will never come to our small town? That God would never let anything like that happen to her? To not worry, that her dad and I would not be killed by rebels?

I could not truthfully promise her any of these things. While it is unlikely she will witness something so horrifying, I cannot promise her that I can — or that God will — spare her from horrendous testing and trial. I cannot promise her that as her parents we will always