

**I was beginning to sense God calling me to full-time ministry.**

I remember as if it was yesterday. I was seven years old and in the first grade at a small town school. I can still feel the pressure of being so small while the eighth-grade boys seemed so big. We had two teachers in our eight-grade school. One teacher for grades one through four, and the other for grades five through eight.

It was a month before Christmas, and Mrs. Lamberton, the teacher who taught the big kids, was in charge of the Christmas program. She insisted that every student have a part in the program. That meant we were all together.

I can still see the eighth-grade boys laughing and whispering when I was trying to perform. Looking back on it now, I think they had their own thing going and could care less what I was doing.

I was given a short poem to memorize, and it wasn't difficult. I had it down pat within a few hours. But when we each had to rehearse our part in front of all the students, I couldn't do it. I tried so hard to say it without crying, but I panicked every time. The tears flowed, and I ran off the stage, sick to my stomach.

The teacher tried to convince me I could do it, and my parents tried everything they could think of. Nothing worked. Then, one afternoon, I was with my mom and dad in a furniture store, and I saw a child's little, wooden rocker. I sat in it and rocked while my parents looked for another piece of furniture. I fell in love with that little rocker and begged my parents to buy it. At first they said "no," but

they must have had an afterthought — *maybe it's worth a try.*

"If you say your poem at the Christmas program without crying," they offered, "we will buy the rocker for you."

Now I had a new motive for keeping back the tears. My focus was on the rocker instead of my fears. All I could think about was having that beautiful little rocker. And it worked! I never thought once about crying. My mind was on the beautiful gift that would be my very own.

I have often thought about this experience, and what a hard time God has had getting my focus on Him instead of me. I still have the little rocker as a reminder of how the power of refocusing my thoughts changed my emotions, and how fear often blocks the greater opportunities God has for us.

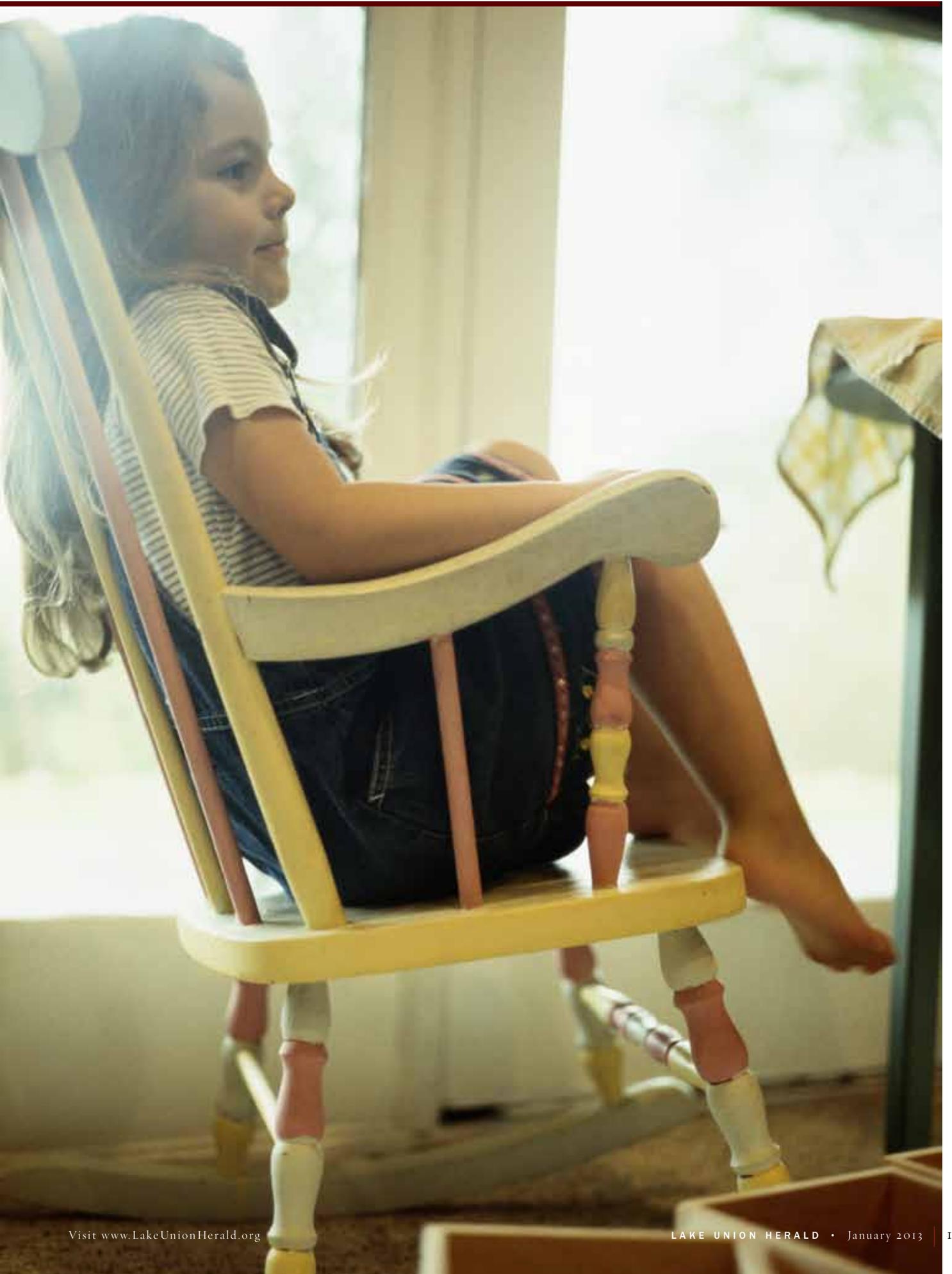
I was beginning to sense God calling me to full-time ministry. The Holy Spirit seemed to impress me to stop working. I knew I needed more time to spend with Jesus so there would be plenty of Living Water flowing to refresh the people I studied with each week.

God really enlarged my territory, and I now faced a new dilemma. I led three group Bible studies every week, so I had cut my workdays down to three. I also met with the students at the academy once a week and had several one-on-one Bible studies with some women who wanted to go deeper in the Word. My husband, Wayne, and I also opened our home to a group

**DO NOT**

**BE AFRAID**

**BY HAZEL BURNS**



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that came each week for soup and homemade bread. We called it our “Bible Study and Prayer Fellowship.”

I loved my job and had built up a great clientele through the years. I really enjoyed working with people and cutting and styling their hair. And, to be honest, I loved the additional income.

I sought the counsel of a few people I looked up to. They each seemed to think I should continue working in the beauty salon. As one chaplain put it, “This is your pulpit. This is your place of ministry. This is where you meet people to invite into a Bible study. Don’t close a door that God has opened.” I was cutting his hair at the time, and I questioned whether he was giving this counsel so he wouldn’t have to find another hairstylist.

I still felt a deep, unsettling sense that God was calling me to full-time ministry, and I struggled for months before coming to a decision. I was afraid to leave my comfortable place of work. My job gave me a sense of security; and it was a convenient place to make new friends and a natural setting to talk about life issues. But God’s tugging at my heart didn’t go away, and I knew I needed to trust Him.

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Since we lived in a small ranch house and were almost debt-free, I decided to share my struggle with Wayne. Without a moment’s hesitation, he said, “It’s okay with me if you quit work. You do whatever God shows you.” Wayne has always given me that kind of support, and I didn’t know just how much that support was going to be needed.

The way was clear, but my desire to be in the center of God’s will led me to one more step. I just needed to be absolutely sure. I needed a word from God.

The story of the woman at the well in John 4:32 reminds us that God prepares food for us that others know nothing about. He also

prepared food in the wilderness for the Children of Israel and on the mountainside for the 5,000 eager listeners. He prepared a huge catch of fish for the disciples when they had fished all night and caught nothing.

As He was on the shore preparing breakfast for them, He called out, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” — a question stated in a way no fisherman wants to answer. Then Jesus told them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat. When they obeyed His illogical command, they got their largest catch ever.

It was early one Friday morning when Jesus surprised me on the shore of my all-night struggle, with just the right food He had prepared for me personally. He asked me to fish on the other side of the boat — the side of faith, the side of the scary unknown.

“Lord,” I said, “help me make a right decision. I need your peace.” As I prayed, I opened my Bible as my father had taught me. The words I read in Genesis 15:1 seemed to be in bold letters. I turned a few pages to Exodus 14:13, then, turning a few more, I came to Numbers 14:9.

As I continued turning pages and landing on different passages of Scripture, the same four words leapt out to me as if they were the only words on the page: “Do not be afraid.”

I continued turning pages and reading, and saw these same four words 20 times in just a few minutes. As I ate the food Jesus prepared for me, I was strengthened to make the right decision. I was covered with a sense of His abiding peace.

Fear is one of our greatest enemies — possibly Satan’s most successful tool. Once more, I had to confess before God that my fears of letting go of control, of the money I took home every week, of my future and my retirement, were draining me of my peace. I cast them all down at His feet and, once more, I asked Him to be Lord of all. It has been said, “If He is not Lord *of* all, He is not Lord *at* all.”

After I quit work, the Lord affirmed my decision with a large catch on the other side

of the boat. The first month God blessed me with 17 new believers in Christ — people God brought into my life by Divine appointment! I was amazed at how fast God enlarged my territory once I quit working. I received several calls from people, who had heard I had quit the salon, asking if I would please give them Bible studies.

God was showing me that people are hungry for the Word of God. There are people who are thirsting for the Living Water of His abiding presence that the Holy Spirit brings.

Maybe some of you are like me — afraid of the unknown, afraid of letting go of some control, afraid of what others may think. Or maybe you don't think God can use you because you are not good enough. Remember these thoughts are not from God. God said, *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. ... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. You are precious and honored in my sight. ... I love you* (Isaiah 55:8, 9; 43:4 NIV).

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul said we are chosen, we are adopted, we are redeemed, we are forgiven, and God has lavishly poured out His grace on us, and given us the promised Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 1).

The enemy does everything he can to keep us from knowing who we are, that we have been called to be one of Christ's disciples. He doesn't care if we are a member of a church or an elder or a pastor. He doesn't care how much money we give or what our title is; he just doesn't want us to be filled with the Spirit and walk in faith.

When we are filled with the Spirit and walk in faith, people are drawn to Jesus through us. And, as we work with Him, we sense our purpose for living. His life in us, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, changes lives and brings healing to the broken and hope to the discouraged.

Jesus wants to surprise you with the gift of food that others know nothing about. And His food satisfies! There is nothing like it. You

have energy that is supernatural, peace that the world cannot experience, and the joy of His abiding presence. This food is not *the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind* (2 Timothy 1:7). His food increases our faith!

I don't know what God is calling you to do, but whatever it is, accept His calling. Obey His sometimes counter-intuitive and illogical instructions, and do it with all your might. Listen to His voice telling you, "Do not be afraid!"

### **A Divine Assignment: Becky**

Jesus always goes ahead of us and prepares us for what He has planned for our next step in faith. Some years after I had entered ministry full-time, I discovered His next assignment for me was Becky Vandiver.

One day, Becky visited our church and wrote a note on one of our blue "connect" cards. She asked if a woman could please come to visit her. God chose me. The enemy of our souls had her trapped in a destructive lifestyle, and she knew she needed help. Becky's mom and dad were divorced when she was about three. Her mom had multiple sclerosis and was confined to a wheelchair. One day, while her mom was going to the market, she was hit by a drunk driver and ended up at the hospital in a coma for six months. She later was moved to an extended care facility where she spent the rest of her life.

A Christian family took Becky and her two brothers into their home for the next nine years. When this family moved out of state, Becky's dad, who had remarried, arranged for the children to come live with him.

After a short time, Becky realized she and her stepmother were not going to connect so, at the age of 14, Becky left home. Her new "home" was with any friend who had parents willing to let her stay with them for an extended time.

At the age of 15, Becky had several physical crises: a bicycle crash, a car wreck and a gunshot wound to her stomach. She also found some sense of belonging in a community of friends who used drugs. At the age of 16, she overdosed

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Becky (Vandiver) Hackney (left) and her children joined the family for the celebration of Hazel and Wayne Burns' 60th wedding anniversary.

and it nearly killed her. Nothing seemed to wake her out of her abusive lifestyle.

At the age of 17, the courts placed Becky in a foster home. When she ran away, Becky was placed in an adolescent center, then a group home. She ran away from the group home from Tennessee to California.

At the age of 19, Becky moved to Dayton, Ohio, to live with her brother. She met a guy, continued using drugs with him and, a couple of months later, discovered that she was pregnant. In Becky's own words, she said, "This really opened my eyes and made me think." She knew she could no longer go on living that way and, eventually, told the man she was with that she no longer wanted to live his lifestyle and not to come around any more. Becky stopped smoking, drinking and doing drugs.

She told me, "I really felt God was knocking on my door, saying, 'Becky, please let Me in. I am giving you another chance. Come, follow Me. Teach this precious baby of My great love.'" From that day on, Becky made a choice to follow Jesus.

Becky and I studied the Bible together for several months, and then I was privileged to baptize her. She married a great Christian man and has a beautiful family. We call her our daughter, she calls us "Mom" and "Dad," and her children call us "Grandpa" and "Grandma." We are so blessed! That is why God chose me to visit her. He wanted to extend our family.

Since I had made the decision to quit my work at the beauty salon and do full-time ministry, I was able to spend time with Becky. And we did spend a lot of time together. After her delivery, mom and baby came to live at our house. Later, we helped Becky find her own apartment. When she was ready, we helped her enroll in a community college.

Becky has an electrifying personality. Everybody on campus loved her, and she did not hesitate to tell the reason why she was so happy — Jesus was Lord of her life. When she graduated, Becky was even selected to give the commencement address.

I am so glad the Holy Spirit nudged me out of the beauty salon comfort zone to extend my territory into full-time ministry. Through the years, I've had the privilege of partnering in ministry with seven senior pastors at the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kettering, Ohio. In 2008, I officially retired as associate pastor, but God continues to send people my way. Though I never received a formal education, it has been a privilege to trust God in the mission He has ordained for me — always with the assurance of His encouraging words, "Do not be afraid."

*God makes homes for the homeless, and leads prisoners to freedom (Psalm 68:6 NIV).* He calls us to love them, and give them the keys to set them free. What is God's ordained mission for you?

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Hazel Burns is a retired pastor living in Dayton, Ohio. This article is an adaptation of a chapter in her forthcoming book, *My Mind Instructs Me in the Night*.