



THELMA WELLS

HOLDING ON TO THE ONE
WHO HOLDS YOU CLOSE

GOD
IS NOT
THROUGH
WITH ME
YET

bliss

Uncommon Refreshment for Women

GOD
IS NOT
THROUGH
WITH ME
YET

THELMA WELLS



Multnomah Publishers

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED to God Almighty, who is the Person I write about. He is the Author and Finisher of my faith, my joy, my peace, my all. Without Him, I would not have a story of triumph to talk about. You are my Mighty God. • Jesus, without Your saving power to rescue a person as sinful as I, and the price You paid on the cross, I would still be condemned to eternal death. But You chose to rescue me from the depths of sin and sickness. I appreciate You. • Thanks, Holy Spirit, for dictating this book to me through my experiences and the study of the Word of God, the Bible. As You spoke in my spirit, I wrote. It would have been impossible for me to have written these words without Your prompting. • To the you who read this book, I dedicate the words to your heart and soul that you may become stronger in your mortal body, your inquiring soul, and your God-given spirit to cherish the beauty of the Holiness and God who is the great I AM — because God is not through with YOU yet!

GOD IS NOT THROUGH WITH ME YET

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SUCCESS COMES IN CANS

I n a hotel suite in Somewhere, USA, I stepped into the living room area and was immediately captivated by a framed poster on the wall. It was a painting of a thirty-gallon metal trashcan set against a sky blue background. Gracefully emerging out of the trashcan was a beautiful iris blossom held up by a strong green stem and accented by two long, green leaves. And written on the trashcan's side were these words: "Success Comes in Cans."

The image stayed with me, in the forefront of my mind. For days and days I thought about the reality that success really does come in "cans"—that anything we put our minds to do, and want to do badly enough, we *can* do it.

I started teaching others that the word *can't* is misleading.

I explained how we tend to prioritize our cans. We can practice piano lessons when we want to, or find an excuse

and say, “I can’t.” We can memorize anything we put our minds to, but if it seems hard, we quickly say, “I can’t.”

There really are some things that we cannot do—things that are simply too challenging for us physically, mentally, or emotionally. *But beside every “can’t” there is a “can.”*

I cannot become a star ballerina at my age; but if I had the desire (which I don’t), I *could* take lessons, and have fun doing it. I cannot give away all the money I want to (and this is a true desire for me) because I don’t have that kind of money; but I *can* give what I have, and be grateful I have it to give.

THE TRUE “I CAN”

But that’s not the complete story about our “cans.”

Philippians 4:13 says, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” This is really the perfect “Success Comes in Cans” situation. People often mistake this passage to mean that for everything we want to have or to do, if we just ask Jesus for it, then it becomes ours for the taking. No. I don’t believe that. God has ordained each of us to do certain and specific things in life, and each of us is called to do them in our own way, because we’re uniquely put together by God. The fact is, the “all things” in this verse means *all things that God has assigned us to do*, with the help

of Jesus Christ living in our lives and being our Lord and Master. That's what this verse is assuring us that we *can* do.

And when we do what God has made us to do, we are strengthened for it in our body, soul, and spirit. Therefore I can speak because God called and equipped me to speak. I can write because God assigned me to write. I can sing because God gave me a voice to sing. I can nurture people because God instilled within me a mothering, nurturing heart. I can love because God placed His Spirit of love inside me when I asked His Son to come into my heart.

So...I *can* do all things that God made me to do, that God tells me to do, that God enables me to do—because I know Him as God, I've accepted His Son as my Savior, and I have His Holy Spirit living inside my heart.

Consequently, *I can*...because I know the I AM—God's revealed name for Himself, which we'll explore in-depth in these pages.

In this book, I talk about how to know *I can* because *I know the I AM*. I see this book as an eye-opener to the blindness of our arrogant "I can!" thinking that has forgotten all about God.

WRAPPED UP IN "I AM"

How many times a day do you use the phrase "I am"?

"I am hungry..."

“I am tired...”

“I am busy...”

“I am hurting...”

The “I am’s” can go on and on.

Listen to a newborn baby’s cry. That baby’s saying, “I am in need of something.” And watch how we keep it up as we grow older and more mature. We never stop saying, “I am in need of something.”

There’s not a person anywhere who hasn’t wrapped themselves around those two little words *I am*. And have you thought about the fact that the first word in all our “I am’s” is “I”? We all enjoy talking about ourselves more than anybody else. For each of us, our inner radio is tuned to station WIIFM (What’s In It For Me?).

One big part of that is how we all want to be in control of ourselves and of our loved ones. We want to think we can make our own decisions, create our own career paths, handle our own circumstances, and solve our own problems without someone else’s aid. We think that way—until our backs are up against the wall and we’re between a rock and a hard place. That’s when we

&.....

When I feel

I’m in control,

I totally deceive myself

to make myself feel

important. But who can

count on feelings?

.....

submit, for the moment at least, to God—who is higher than our thoughts and greater than our power to control.

Over the past sixty-plus years, I have discovered and even submitted to the fact that I'm not in control of *anything*. When I *feel* I'm in control, I totally deceive myself to make myself feel important. But who can count on feelings?

I now know that in the stuff of life, the only way I can get the best results is through knowing the Great I AM....

TRUST THE GREAT I AM

It's so true that I am needy. I have endless needs! I get hungry and need to be fed. I get weary and need rest. I get hurt and need help. I get sick and need healing. I get confused and need guidance. I get scared and need protection. I get bogged down in life and need deliverance. I lose track of who I am and need a reminder. And goodness, I have a lot more needs—and I know I need the Great I AM.

I have learned more deeply than ever to feel God's presence...because I know the I AM is always with me.

Someone asks me, "Have you ever felt like you were far away from God, even though you've accepted Him as your Lord?"

My answer: Sure, Sweetie. Early in my adulthood I often thought I was far from God and that He was far from me. There were times when I couldn't see or feel Him. In

the back of my mind I *thought* He was there, but we just didn't seem to be communicating about anything.

So many believers are walking around with the same feelings of distance from God. So many are walking around defeated. They have tried all the programs, they have read all the how-to books, they have followed the seven keys to a successful... (you name it)—but they've come up short, again and again. They're tired and ready to give up. Why is it this way?

Because they haven't given in to the I AM. They're still trying to go it on their own and bring in God only when the rough times come.

To be able to see our lives and ourselves clearly—so we can do great feats, overcome limitations, deal with hurt and disappointment, forgive from the heart, and successfully tackle all the other stuff of life—there is only *one means*. And that is to trust and follow the Great I AM.

If we all were honest with ourselves, we would know we can't live up to the "standard." We don't have what it takes. We fall far short of our desired goals. And sometimes, when we're *really* honest, we recognize that we're just plain tired of being *us*—the excuses we make for our shortcomings, the lies and half-lies we tell to make us sound better than we are.

The neat thing is, all you have to do is *give up*.

The fact is, we're all a mess. But if we could just let go—die to ourselves—then and only then can God take over and truly live through us.

The Bible says, “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6). But we have to die to our own agendas and our own plans and realize how needy and sinful we really are.

SUCCESS...OR SINNER?

There was a time when I thought, *I can*—all on my own. And I had some success at it.

But the Lord has been gracious enough to bless me with significant trials—trials that have brought me low, and I've seen Him lift me higher than I have ever known.

I see myself like the woman washing Jesus' feet in the Pharisee's house—“she is a sinner” (Luke 7:39). She brought herself low, but Jesus lifted her up. Despite her many sins, He lifted her up because of her humility and total brokenness. I want to help people to be “brought low” so that Christ, in His infinite mercy, can lift them up.

P A R T I

I CAN...

HE KEEPS ME SINGING

In the 1920s and '30s, a certain little girl was growing up with severe physical deformities that would mark her for life.

Her whole right side was paralyzed. She could not extend her right arm, which had a permanent bend, and the fingers on her right hand looked like long chicken's feet matted together. Her right leg was twisted, and her deformed right foot turned inward. Even her lips were a little twisted on one side.

As this little girl was growing up, her mother was so angry about her child's condition that she would often attempt to straighten out the deformed hand and foot by vigorously turning and twisting them, but without success. When those efforts didn't work, her mother would beat her and put her in a closet out of her sight.

The little girl's father was more compassionate and understanding. He loved his daughter. All her life he tried

to teach her the ways of God, to shelter her from harm, to comfort her when people made fun of her, to hold her when she was sad, to encourage her in her school work, and to sweetly discipline her when she needed it.

One day, after their deformed daughter had grown into a teenager, the parents were devastated and appalled to learn that she was pregnant.

It was too much for the girl's mother to take. She said she was already taking care of a crippled daughter, and she was not about to take care of her baby too. The girl's father, however, wanted her to stay in the safety of their home after the baby came, in spite of the embarrassment and sadness of this situation. But the mother was insistent: Her daughter and the baby would have to get out of her house and make it on their own.

So when the child was born—a little girl—this unwed teenage mother found work as a maid cleaning “the big house” while living with her baby daughter in servants' quarters. She toiled away with her one good hand and foot.

A SURPRISING CHANGE

Two years later, both she and her baby became critically ill. Her mother was contacted and asked to nurse the baby back to health, but she still refused to bring her daughter's baby into her home.

The young woman's father, however, contacted his own sixty-year-old mother to ask if she would care for the sick baby. He promised to provide financial help and to do all he could to assist her with this child.

This woman, who was a true woman of God, eagerly accepted this responsibility of caring for her great-granddaughter. With all the love in her heart, she was determined that this child should live.

So the little girl was brought to her and her husband, and the crippled young mother was told that her baby would be returned to her when they both were well.

By the time the baby recovered, the two great-grandparents had become deeply attached to this child, and it was hard for them to imagine giving her up. But they had made a covenant with the mother to return the baby to her—and they were people of their word, no matter how difficult it was to part from their little great-granddaughter.

They called the young mother to say that her daughter was well enough to go home. To their delight and surprise, the young mother told them she thought the baby would have a better life living with them than with her. She made it clear, however, that she was not abandoning the child; the young mother was adamant that she needed a relationship with her daughter and wanted to be able to see her whenever she wanted.

The great-grandparents quickly agreed. This covenant, too, was one that they kept, for as the girl grew up in their home she was allowed to have an open and loving relationship with her mother, and the mother was never denied access to her.

This young child's life was wonderful with her great-grandparents. They loved God with every fiber of their being, and they led the little girl to Christ—she gave her heart to the Lord as a four-year-old. They took her to church all the time, where she especially learned to love the hymns that were sung there.

Sometimes the girl and her great-grandfather would play “Prayer Meeting.” They would pray long “prayers,” and “read Scriptures,” and sing, sing, sing. One of the great-grandfather's favorite songs was this one:

*I shall not, I shall not be moved;
I shall not, I shall not be moved;
just like a tree that's planted by the water,
I shall not be moved.*

The little girl kept this in her memory.

A DARK CLOSET

There were occasions when the girl was taken to her mother's parents to stay for a while at their house. On these vis-

its, her granddaddy loved her, played with her, took her to movies and the park, gave her rides on the train, and even took her shopping.

But it was much different with the grandmother, the woman who earlier had refused to let this child live with her when she was a baby. After the grandfather went to work, the grandmother would shut this little girl up in a dark, smelly, insect-infested closet to sit out the rest of the day, with no food or water or conversation. Just before time for the girl's granddaddy to return home from work, her grandmother would bring her out from the closet, clean her up, and act like all was well.

The little girl did not know why she was put in that closet; her grandmother told her it was to keep the iron from falling on her (likely story). But the little girl had been taught to obey adults, so she went into the closet upon demand.

She was scared in that closet. She had nothing to do in that closet. All she knew to do was to sing, because of what she had learned in church and from playing "Prayer

&.....
*She would sing herself
to sleep in the closet;
and when she came
out of the closet, she was
not angry, bitter,
hurt, or damaged
in any way.
What a miracle!*
.....

Meeting” with her great-grandfather. Sometimes she had to make up words when she couldn’t quite remember them all, but she did her best to sing the songs of the church, like “Throw Out the Life Line,” “Nearer My God to Thee,” “Rock of Ages,” “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” “The Old Rugged Cross,” “Amazing Grace,” and “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know.”

She would sing herself to sleep in the closet; and when she came out of the closet, she was not angry, bitter, hurt, or damaged in any way. What a miracle! The Lord had received this little girl’s innocent praise and had rewarded it with a little abundant life of joy.

In time, this little girl grew up to be an upstanding citizen in her community. Although many said that she would “never make it,” she became a trailblazer for other black women, a prominent international speaker and author, and a wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother herself.

It took many years before this girl understood the significance of singing in that closet at her grandmother’s house. It was not until she was grown up and married and had two children, and was verging on a nervous breakdown, that she remembered in the clearest way the peace and tranquility of singing in the closet. She realized she had experienced calmness by singing church songs that quieted her down when she wanted to go on a rage.

So now, in her adulthood, the memory of the closet helped her realize that when she wanted to cry, she could instead resort to singing or humming or listening to a Christian music album. She learned to do this as well when she held her babies or nursed her ailing, aging, great-grandmother. Each time the music would play, negative attitudes would subside, and she would find herself in a more soothing spirit. Listening to inspirational and gospel music became a habit for her, a ritual in her home. And not only did it soothe her, but it would also calm her kids and lull to sleep her great-grandmother.

Discovering the therapeutic power of Christian music was not an instant revelation for her, but one that evolved over years of applying it during periods of hurt, disappointment, neglect, questionable hope, anger, disillusionment, lack of harmony, unkind deeds, financial difficulties, seemingly unanswered prayers, and disbelief. In this way, these moments would become a time of spiritual growth.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Are you wondering who this person is, who had such an unpromising start in life as the child of a cast-out, unwed teenage mother?

I'll tell you.

The only name on that baby girl's birth certificate was "Baby Girl Morris" (a fact that she didn't discover until decades later, after considerable investigation). But the name she grew up with (and which was listed on her baptism and school records) was Thelma Louise Smith—until she married at age twenty and became Thelma Wells.

Yes, it's me!

That last name of "Morris" was apparently the attempt of my mysterious father, or somebody, to cover up my mother's sin. When I started, as an adult, to seek more answers about my birth, my childhood, and my father, nobody was willing to discuss this situation. My mother had the answers, but each time I asked her she would say, "You don't need to know about that," or "I'm not talking to you about that." I was mature enough to understand even the worst situation, but I was denied access to my history and background. It all went to the graves of my mother, father, and grandparents.

And so the now aging child of this crippled, unwed teenager still wonders sometimes what the real deal was. I'll never know, until I get to glory. So I've rested my case. To all my still unanswered questions, I just apply the Word of God: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

But one thing from my childhood that is *not* an unanswered secret is the discovery I made in that nasty closet of the worth of praise and worship. I didn't fully realize its true value for years; but I did know that *He kept me singing*.

I would think of him, and sing those hymns—and I realized *I had a friend in Jesus*, a wonderful friend. And I would sing (making up the words where necessary) something like this:

*What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and
griefs to bear!*

*What a privilege to carry everything to God
in prayer!*

*O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless
pain we bear,*

*All because we do not carry everything to God
in prayer.*

*Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble
anywhere?*

*We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord
in prayer.*

*Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our
sorrows share?*

*Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord
in prayer.*

Though I was only a little girl, and though I had to make up some of the words to the song, I knew I could take my situation to Jesus, because Jesus is indeed my Friend. I knew that if I would call on Him, whether I had the words right or not, He would be right there. And praise be to God, I walked out of that closet on those days having no bitterness, no anger, no animosity, nothing, because God met me at the point of my need.

And He will meet *you* at the point of your need, because *you* have—oh, glory!—a friend in Jesus.

SINGING IN THE CLOSETS OF LIFE

In all the closets of my life, I have learned to sing. When my body is racked with pain, I sing. When my budget is in excess of my income, I sing. When my relationships take a turn for the worse, I sing. When I don't understand what's going on in the government, I sing. When my children need assistance, I sing. When church feels uninviting, I sing. When I've missed an important engagement or assignment, I sing. When I don't feel like doing my housework, I sing. When things don't go my way, I sing. When storms come and the electricity is off, I sing. When the scales don't show me losing weight, I sing.

Yes, *He* keeps me singing! There's not a circumstance in my life that I don't sing my way through, just like an old hymn says:

*There's within my heart a melody
Jesus whispers sweet and low:
"Fear not, I am with thee; peace, be still,"
in all of life's ebb and flow.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,
sweetest name I know,
fills my every longing,
keeps me singing as I go.*

Life is full of ups and downs, uncertainties, issues, and situations. But in every one of them, God gives me peaceful consolation that when I sing praises to Him, He hears me and rejoices over me.

A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

Music is one of our love letters to God, and also His love response back to me. Christian praise music is the exterminator of the enemy of our souls. When we sing praises or keep praise music playing in our houses, cars, workplaces, or anywhere else, the atmosphere changes for the better. It is my firm belief that praise music chases away any foul spirits that are in our midst. The Lord inhabits our praises, and when praise is going on, Satan cannot stand to be in the same place where the Lord of Hosts dwells.

Christian music can calm a crying baby, ease a broken heart, soothe a troubled mind, open a closed mind, relieve a wounded spirit, comfort a grieving soul, speak peace to a sick body, disarm a combative person, defuse an angry person, captivate a longing desire, break down the walls of prejudice and injustice, set the atmosphere for worship, and speak messages of hope and encouragement to all of our hearts.

Singing will help your worries and anguish fade away like bubbles that succumb to still water. Singing will make you wonder why you were so mad. Singing can turn your adversary into your friend.

I didn't know how important music was in my life until I had hardships and regrets. But I learned to praise my way out of every situation. Some situations last for years and years, but if you can sing, hum, play music, or listen to it, your world will be an easier place to face your problems and work out your dilemmas.

Music is indeed a universal language. The tunes and often the words of great church music are recognized all over the world. I've visited many foreign countries, and everywhere I've gone, I've heard people singing (often in their native tongue) "Amazing Grace" as well as other hymns that are old and familiar to me.

I visited a village in South Africa several years ago, together with the ladies I speak with at the Women of Faith

conferences. In one South African setting we participated in the mourning tradition of sitting with the bereaved and singing and praying with them. When we began to sing the hymn “It Is Well with My Soul,” each of the mourners joined in, singing either in English or Zulu. It was a stirring moment of harmony, comfort, and even joy at the blending of nations in one accord with music.

PRAISE MOVES HEAVEN

I’ve learned in my sixty-five plus years that music is not only a universal language, it is also heavenly language understood by the God who made and ordered praise, the God who deserves all our praise, the God who is moved by our praise.

One of the most powerful praise stories is found in the book of Acts when Paul and Silas were in jail:

.....
&
The Lord Himself
sings along
in our music.
.....

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed. (Acts 16:25–26)

Now that's some powerful praise, baby!

Any time you're serious about your praise to God, and you buckle down and give it all you've got from a sincere and pure heart, you can shake up heaven, and God will move for you.

It's fascinating to study about praise music throughout the Bible. We find that musical praise of God has been going on since the universe began: Angels sang praise to God before the stars were put in space and before the earth was made.

We find also that music is not only a universal language, but also an eternal language. Those of us who are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ will forever sing praises to God in the New Jerusalem. We will join with the angels singing "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!"

According to Revelation 15:3, at the end of time the saints will be singing a song of victors:

They sing the song of Moses, the servant of
God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

"Great and marvelous are Your works,

Lord God Almighty!

Just and true are Your ways,

O King of the saints!

Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify

Your name?

*For You alone are holy.
For all nations shall come and worship before You.”*
(vv. 3–4)

So to praise God with singing is entirely biblical. Praise and music are found hundreds of times in the Scriptures, throughout every part of God’s Word. Praise is very important to God! Something happens in the heavenlies when we sing His praises, and that’s why the Bible commands it:

Sing praises to God, sing praises!
Sing praises to our King, sing praises! (Psalm 47:6)

With music comes dancing, and to worship God in dance is a biblical command as well: “Praise Him with the timbrel and dance” (Psalm 150:4). Scripture gives many references to the use of dance as a form of joyous celebration and of reverent worship.

So check out the Book of the Psalms and be overcome by the praise of David and others as they “give it up” in praise to God. The psalmists hold nothing back; they just let it all out.

And the Lord Himself sings along in this music, just as He tells us: “The LORD your God in your midst...He will rejoice over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17). I love the

way someone has portrayed this Scripture: The Daughters of Zion were dancing and singing in worship to the Lord God, and He asked them, “Is that a choir I hear?” Then He answered His own question: “No, that’s Me rejoicing over them.”

Imagine God rejoicing, walking on air, jubilant and dancing...*over us!* This blows my mind. It don’t get no better than that! The Lord of lords and King of kings celebrating over you because you gave Him total praise!

PRAISE FOR HIS GLORIOUS GRACE

When my children were young and were perplexed, I would put music on for them. After they became adults, they have followed the same tradition of listening to music or singing. They’re still lovers of inspirational music, and so are their spouses and children. In fact, my grandchildren are hams like their grandmother; they’ll break out in song on a whim. They’ll organize a “talent show” for the family dinners on Sundays, using a spoon or a flashlight as their microphone while they sing and dance like David danced to the Lord. The best thing about watching them is that they only know church music and praise dancing. Hallelujah!

I’ve always been quick to tell my family and friends how I feel when I listen to praise music. A few years ago, with

their encouragement and help, I even recorded an album of praise and testimony.

I still remember the Saturday morning when my daughter Vikki scolded me and told me I had to start work on this album that very day. For several months we had been waiting to get started until my voice was clear from colds and bouts with a sore throat. But that morning, Vikki said the Lord told her it had to be done that day. Fortunately, the studio was in her cousin's home, and Vikki had called him to make sure it was available, as well as making arrangements with my accompanist.

So I prayed and told the Lord that this project was dedicated to Him. I asked Him to anoint me with the vocal ability and songs of praise that would edify people and glorify Him. Without any practice—just prayer and surrender—we went into the studio, and within two hours, our work was done. The album is called *His Glorious Grace: Testimony in Song*. (You can find out more about it in the back of this book.)

Ike Johnson, one of my preacher friends, told me that he cried the first time he listened to this music. Ike said that the entire album was so anointed that he wept in his car. He was soothed and so blessed that he wanted to share it with people who would not have access to it. Now he buys a lot of these albums from me to take to nursing homes and to the sick.

I'M SO GLAD

I'm so glad my great-grandmother took me to church seven days a week. I'm so glad my great-grandfather played "Prayer Meeting" with me. Otherwise I might not have learned the songs of the church and been able to sing them in that wretched closet as a little girl.

I'm so glad I remembered how soothed I was in the closet, and I came to understand and believe that the same soothing power of singing could continue to bring comfort when I was depressed and angry.

I'm so glad nobody has discouraged me from playing praise music and singing it.

I realize that I will have many more ups and downs in the days of my life. But I have an entrance to the Holy of Holies where I can meet God in praise, and He will rejoice over me with comfort and peace. He'll always keep me singing in the good times and in the bad. He is my High Musician who conducts the orchestra of my heartstrings with a symphony of His Glorious Praise.

He keeps me singing...because God is not through with me yet!