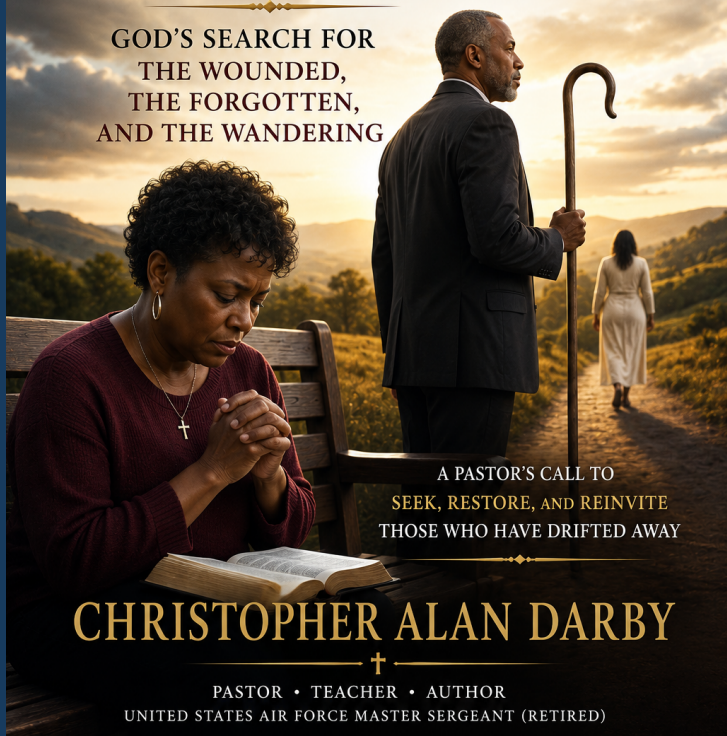


THE MINISTRY OF RESTORATION SERIES

VOLUME ONE

HAVE YOU SEEN HER?

GOD'S SEARCH FOR
THE WOUNDED,
THE FORGOTTEN,
AND THE WANDERING



A PASTOR'S CALL TO
SEEK, RESTORE, AND REINVITE
THOSE WHO HAVE DRIFTED AWAY

CHRISTOPHER ALAN DARBY



PASTOR • TEACHER • AUTHOR
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE MASTER SERGEANT (RETIRED)

FREE CHAPTER ONE SAMPLE

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HAVE YOU SEEN HER?

God's Search for the Wounded, the Forgotten, and the Wandering

A pastoral call to notice the missing, seek the wounded, and build a church culture where restoration becomes everyone's ministry.

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Chapter One

Have You Seen Her?

Ministry Reflection

“Pastoral ministry has taught me that people seldom disappear all at once. More often, they disappear one disappointment at a time. A missed Sunday becomes a missed month. A silent hurt becomes quiet isolation. Before long, someone who once worshiped beside us has become only a memory. This chapter is an invitation to slow down, look again, and ask the question Jesus would ask-not ‘Who’s to blame?’ but ‘Who is missing?’ The Ministry of Restoration begins when the people of God learn to see people through the compassionate eyes of Christ.”

- Christopher A. Darby

Chapter Scripture

Luke 15:8-10 (KJV)

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

The Question That Changed Everything

Every generation has questions that define its moment. Some questions change history. Some questions expose the heart. Some questions reveal what we value most. The question that began this book is one that has echoed through my own years

of pastoral ministry: Have you seen her? At first glance, it sounds like a simple question. Yet the more I reflected upon it, the more I realized that it was much deeper than I first imagined. It is a question that reaches beyond gender. It reaches beyond age. It reaches beyond race. It reaches beyond denomination. It reaches into the very heart of God. Every church has someone who once occupied a familiar place.

Every congregation remembers someone whose voice used to be heard in prayer. Someone who once taught Sunday School. Someone who faithfully sang in the choir. Someone who welcomed visitors with a warm smile. Someone who quietly served without asking for recognition. Then one day... They were simply gone. Not with anger. Not with an announcement. Not with fanfare. They just quietly disappeared. At first, everyone assumed they would return next Sunday. Then next month. Then perhaps after the holidays. Months became years. Eventually, their absence became normal. That may be one of the greatest tragedies facing the modern church. We have learned to adjust to missing people.

Learning to Notice Again

One of the dangers of long-term ministry is becoming familiar with loss. When a pew remains empty long enough, eventually it no longer looks empty. When a choir robe remains hanging in the closet long enough, eventually no one notices whose robe it once was. When a Sunday School class loses one faithful member after another, attendance sheets eventually become statistics instead of stories. But every statistic has a face. Every face has a name. Every name has a family. Every family has a story. And every story matters to God. Jesus never reduced people to numbers. He never measured ministry merely by attendance. He measured ministry by compassion.

When Jesus looked upon the multitudes, He did not merely see crowds. He saw sheep without a shepherd. He saw widows. He

saw blind men. He saw grieving parents. He saw children. He saw people that everyone else had learned to overlook. That is the heart of this book. The Ministry of Restoration begins when the church recovers the ability to notice people again.

The Invisible Wounds

One of the greatest misconceptions in ministry is believing that everyone who attends church is spiritually healthy. Attendance does not always equal healing. A person can sing every hymn while carrying overwhelming grief. A deacon can faithfully serve while silently battling discouragement. A minister can preach powerful sermons while privately questioning whether anyone understands the weight he carries. A wife can smile through every worship service while quietly wondering how she will survive another week. Invisible wounds are often the deepest wounds. Physical injuries usually receive immediate attention. Spiritual injuries are often hidden beneath polite smiles and familiar greetings. Many believers become experts at answering, “I’m fine,” even when they are anything but fine.

The church must become a place where people are safe enough to admit that they need help.

Why This Book Matters

This book is not written to criticize the church. I love the church. The church introduced me to Christ. The church nurtured my faith. The church gave me opportunities to preach the Gospel. The church has comforted my family during seasons of grief and celebrated with us during seasons of joy. Yet because I love the church, I believe we must continually become more like the One who established it. Jesus never ignored hurting people. Neither should we. Jesus never walked around broken people. Neither should we. Jesus never forgot the forgotten. Neither should we. If this book accomplishes anything, my prayer is that it will help pastors, church leaders,

Sunday School teachers, deacons, missionaries, and every believer become more intentional about noticing those who quietly slip away.

The Ministry of Restoration is not reserved for pastors alone. It belongs to every follower of Jesus Christ.

A Personal Invitation

As you read these pages, I invite you to do more than study Scripture. Allow Scripture to study you. Ask yourself difficult questions. Who have I stopped noticing? Who quietly disappeared from my life? Who needs a phone call? Who needs a visit? Who needs encouragement? Who needs forgiveness? Who simply needs someone to say, “I’ve been praying for you.”

Perhaps before you finish this book, God will place one name upon your heart. If He does... Don’t ignore it. That may be the beginning of someone’s journey home. And perhaps... It may also become the beginning of your own Ministry of Restoration.

Seeing the Person Behind the Absence

An empty place in worship is never merely empty space. It represents a life with a history, relationships, disappointments, questions, and hopes. The person who is absent may be caring for a sick relative, working an exhausting schedule, grieving a loss, wrestling with shame, or wondering whether anyone noticed the silence. We cannot know the whole story from a distance. That is why restoration begins with humility. We do not approach people as detectives gathering evidence against them. We approach them as brothers and sisters whose stories deserve patient attention.

The question Have you seen her must therefore be spoken with compassion, not suspicion. It should move a congregation from conversation about a person to loving contact with that person. A name mentioned in a meeting should become a name lifted in

prayer. A missing face should become a gentle telephone call, a handwritten note, or a visit made without pressure. The goal is not to improve a report. The goal is to remind a human being that she is seen, valued, and loved.

From Awareness to Action

Churches often care sincerely but act inconsistently. Good intentions need a faithful pattern. A small restoration team can review absences, coordinate contact, respect privacy, and report genuine needs to the right ministry leaders. The work must remain personal. A database can help us remember a name, but only love can carry the name into prayer and service. No one should be treated as a project, and no private struggle should become public information.

Begin with one person. Ask God to cleanse your motives, then make contact without demanding an explanation. Say simply, I have missed you and wanted to know how you are doing. Listen longer than you speak. If there has been hurt, resist the impulse to defend the church immediately. A truthful apology may open a door that a polished invitation never could. Restoration begins when people discover that our concern is real even if their return is slow.

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