

INAUGURAL ISSUE • WINTER 2026

FIRST LADY DOM

FIRST LADY DOM

THE MAGAZINE

IDENTITY CRISIS

CONDITIONAL VISIBILITY

Are You Operating
in Your Lane?

Avoiding the Three Bs

Find the YOU
in All that You Do

Self-care Corner:
When Did Self-care
Become Selfish?

The Sound of Me
My Voice, My Story

Rev. Shevalle T. Kimber, Founder and Editor in Chief, *FirstLadyDom Magazine*



Finally, a magazine that sees YOU—not just your title.

FIRSTLADYDOM

THE MAGAZINE

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- **IDENTITY CRISIS**
Conditional Visibility
 - Operating in Your Lane
 - Find the YOU in All that You Do:
Preserving Yourself in Ministry
 - Strong Women Need TLC, Too:
A Journey through Healing
 - Self-care Corner: When Did
Self-care Become Selfish?
- + 5 More Powerful Articles

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About This Issue

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *FirstLadyDom Magazine*!

It is with great joy and anticipation that we present this first edition to you. What you hold in your hands—or view on your screen—is more than a magazine. It is a sanctuary, a conversation, and a celebration of the women who serve alongside their pastor-husbands in ministry.

For this premier issue, we explore “Identity Crisis: Conditional Visibility”—a theme that resonates deeply with so many First Ladies. How often are they seen only when standing beside their husbands? How frequently they must wrestle with this question: *Who am I apart from this title?*

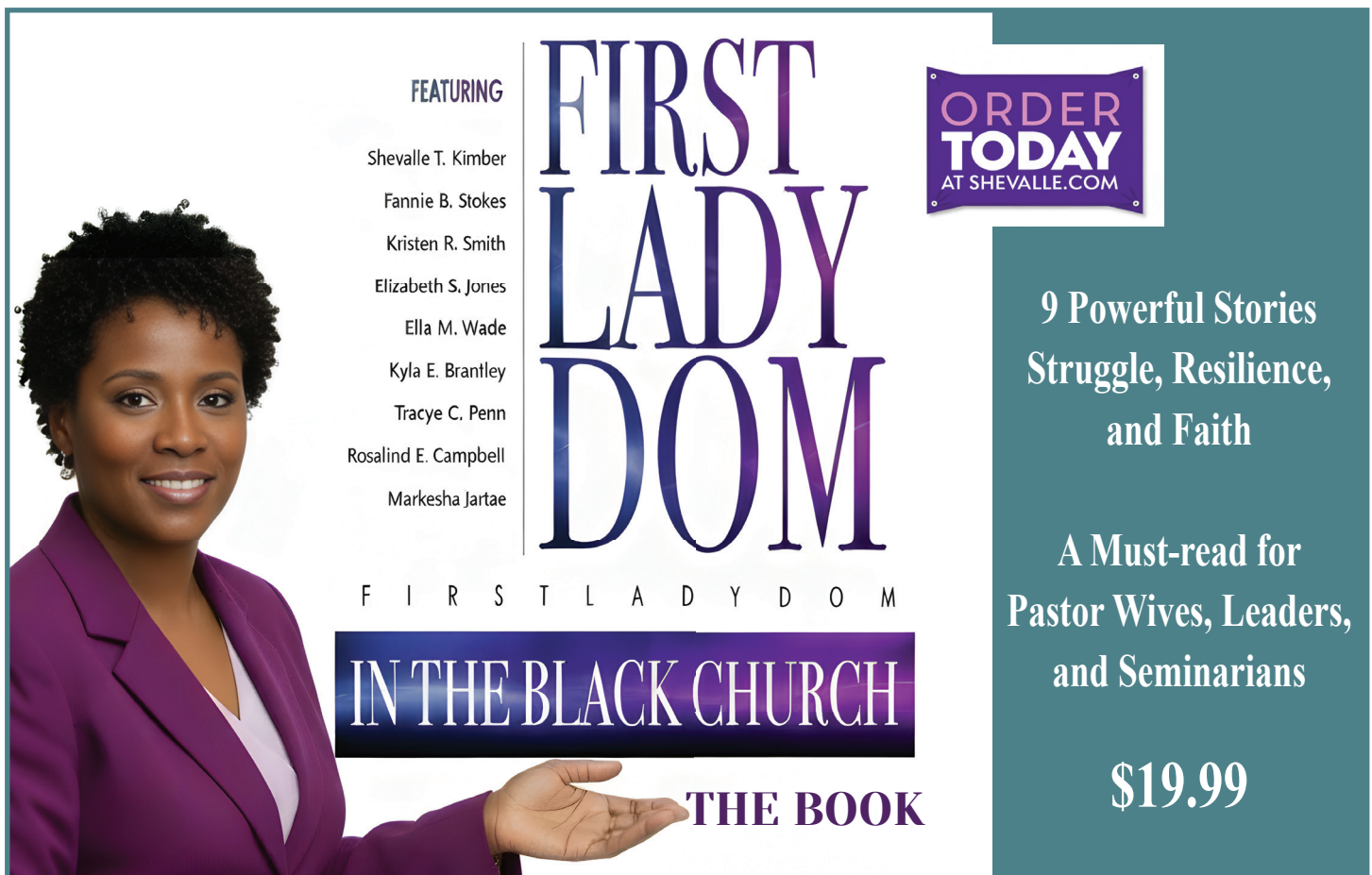
In these pages, you’ll discover powerful testimonies from women who have navigated these very questions. For example, Rev. Tracye Colette Penn invites pastors’ wives to find their voices in “The Sound of Me: My Voice, My Story.” Tierra S. Combs reminds readers of what they were made for when feelings of abandonment arise. Thursday Flint helps readers identify their lane to avoid burnout, while Lady Deborah Patton-Lawson encourages readers to preserve themselves in all they do.

Our “Self-care Corner” features essential wisdom on reclaiming rest, setting boundaries, and honoring the temples that God has given us. The “Grace and Style” section celebrates fashion as an expression of inner creativity, and our “Resource Roundup” segment offers curated recommendations to enrich your journey.

This magazine exists because these stories matter. These voices matter. The well-being of First Ladies matters. They are not invisible. They are chosen, appointed, and powerfully positioned for such a time as this.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. We pray the articles on these pages bring encouragement, inspiration, and the reminder that no First Lady walks alone.

Debra Berry
Managing Editor



FEATURING

- Shevalle T. Kimber
- Fannie B. Stokes
- Kristen R. Smith
- Elizabeth S. Jones
- Ella M. Wade
- Kyla E. Brantley
- Tracye C. Penn
- Rosalind E. Campbell
- Markesha Jartae

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Identity Crisis

Contents

- 2 | About This Issue** — Debra Berry, Managing Editor
6 | A Letter from the Founder — Rev. Shevalle T. Kimber, M.Div.

Features

- 8 | Identity Crisis: Conditional Visibility** — Rev. Valerie Brown Bostic
12 | The Sound of Me: My Voice, My Story
— Rev. Tracye Colette Penn
16 | Remembering What I Was Made For:
— Tierra S. Combs
20 | Are You Operating in Your Lane? *Avoiding the Sting of the Three Bs—Bored, Burdened, and Burnt Out* — Thursday Flint

Self-care Corner

- 24 | Find the YOU in All that You Do!** — Deborah Patton-Lawson
27 | When Did Self-care Become Selfish? — JoAnna Wringo
28 | Strong Women Need TLC, Too — Rahshedah Harrell
29 | The Power of No — Rev. Fannie B. Stokes
29 | Hustle Is Good, but It's the Flow for Me!
— Jeanette Greene-Washington

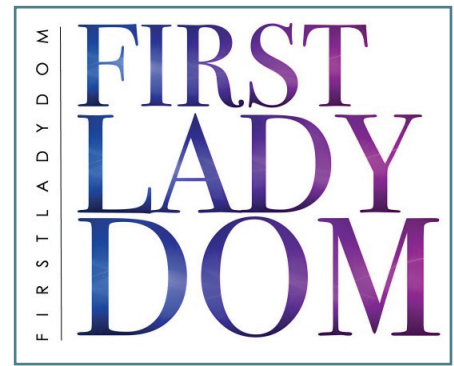
Resource Roundup

Books Every First Lady Should Read

- 30 | Learning to Be** by Juanita Campbell Rasmus
— Review written by Markesha Jartae
31 | Unthinkable by Dr. Mia K. Wright
— Review written by Kimberley Yancy
32 | Playlist Pick: “You Know My Name” (by Tasha Cobbs Leonard)
— Reviewed by Shevalle T. Kimber

Style and Grace

- 34 | YiaYia's Designs** — Zabrettia McCree



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Rev. Shevalle T. Kimber, Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *FirstLadyDom Magazine*, created the publication from her experience of being too often seen only as “the First Lady.” “A pastor, author, and cancer survivor, she established a space for First Ladies to be fully themselves. For our inaugural issue on identity, she graces the cover—asking, “Who am I beyond the title?”—and leading others to find the answer.

Our Space • Our Voice • Our Truth • Our Time

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Contributors for This Quarter

Thank you to all our contributors for sharing your voices, stories, and truth with this community.



Rev. Shevalle T. Kimber, M.Div.

Founder

Rev. Shevalle T. Kimber is a devoted spiritual leader, author, and First Lady of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.—of which her husband, Rev. Dr. Boise Kimber, serves as the nineteenth President. She empowers women through preaching, mentorship, and conferences, drawing on decades of ministry experience. With a heart for healing and purpose, she champions spiritual care, resilience, and transformative faith.

“Features” Contributors



Rev. Tracye Colette Penn

The Sound of Me: My Voice, My Story

Rev. Tracye Colette Penn was born in Harlem, New York. She earned her Master of Divinity degree from Virginia Union University, and currently serves as the State Director of Christian Education for the Connecticut State Missionary Baptist Convention. She is married to Dr. David E. Penn Sr., President of the Connecticut State Missionary Baptist Convention.



Tierra S. Combs

Remembering What I Was Made For

Tierra S. Combs resides in Lincoln, Nebraska. She is a health ministry leader and a registered nurse, and works as a health director of the New Era Baptist State Convention. She is married to Rev. Dr. Tremaine M. Combs and has five children: Michael-Eugene, Makenzie, Mary, Leah, and David.



Thursday Flint

Are You Operating in Your Lane?

Thursday Flint, organizer of L.A.C.E. Women’s Ministry, holds a BA degree in Business and an MBA. With twenty-four years in commercial lending and compliance. She owns Glamour Wrists—a custom jewelry company; she is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., is married to Rev. Dr. James Flint, and is the mother of Savannah and James III.



Valerie Brown Bostic

Identity Crisis: Conditional Visibility

Valerie Brown Bostic is the wife of Pastor Frank Bostic of Pilgrim Baptist Church in Buffalo, NY. A devoted servant, social worker, certified birth doula, lactation counselor, storyteller, and prayer warrior, she is passionate about encouraging women, supporting families, and honoring God through every calling placed on her life.

“Self-care Corner” Contributors



JoAnna Wringo

When Did Self-care Become Selfish?

JoAnna Wringo is a business owner and educator with more than twenty years of experience. She is a devoted community activist, a proud wife, a mother of five, and a grandmother of three. She inspires, leads, and serves with unwavering faith and purpose alongside her community-leading husband. She is the daughter of Bishop Vernon W. Huffman and the late Pastor JoAnn D. Huffman.



Rahshedah Harrell

Strong Women Need TLC, Too

Rahshedah Harrell is a Chicago native with an associate’s degree and more than twenty years of real-estate experience. She works for the Cook County Treasurer. She is married to Pastor John Harrell, who leads two churches. Together, they cherish a loving, beautiful, blended family of nine children and two grandsons.



Rev. Fannie B. Stokes

The Power of No

Rev. Fannie B. Stokes is a wife, mother, and minister dedicated to empowering others. A Yale graduate currently pursuing her master’s degree in nursing, she promotes holistic health and wellness for the lifespan. Fannie shares in ministry through her online platforms *Get Fit with Fannie B.* and *The Right Foot.*



Jeanette Greene-Washington

Hustle Is Good, but It’s the Flow for Me!

Jeanette Greene-Washington is a proud wife and mother of five, an ordained minister, and a licensed insurance and investment professional. She is the founder of RIBB, a ministry established to help youth achieve educational goals. Jeanette holds a bachelor’s degree in finance, and she is also the creator of Ezer Sisterhood, which meets weekly for Bible study and support.



Deborah Patton-Lawson

Find the YOU in All that You Do!

Deborah Patton-Lawson is a native and a resident of New Haven, Connecticut. She has been a retired First Lady for twenty-five years for Powerhouse Ministries in New Haven, Connecticut. She is currently a member of the leadership team at Revival Church in Hamden, Connecticut, under the leadership of Bishop Daniel Bland and Dr. Melonie Bland.



“Style and Grace” Contributor

Zabrettia McCree

YiaYia’s Designs

Affectionately known as Lady Z, Zabrettia McCree is an ordained minister of the Gospel and Founder of DOVE Ministries, inspiring and mentoring preteen and teen girls. Diligent, hardworking, open-hearted, and headstrong, she is innovative, congenial, and stylish. She is the devoted wife of Dr. Larry McCree and loving mother of four, and serves as First Lady of Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.



“Resource Roundup” Contributors

Markesha Jartae

Books Every First Lady Should Read: Learning to Be by Juanita Campbell Rasmus

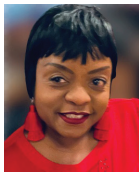
Markesha Jartae was born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee. She currently resides in Houston, Texas. She is the mother of one daughter and is passionate about encouraging others through teaching and writing. She is a proud graduate of Tennessee State University and Western New England College of Law.



Kimberley Yancy

Books Every First Lady Should Read: Unthinkable by Dr. Mia K. Wright

Kimberley Nicole Yancy is a community leader, author of *Confessions of a Preacher’s Wife* (as Mikasenoja), and First Lady of New Vision Baptist Church in Dickinson, Texas. As a La Marque City Councilwoman, she advances education and social justice through New Vision Alive CDC and Edutemps Staffing Solutions, inspiring faith-based community leadership.



“Advisory” Contributors

Rosetta Guns

Lady Rosetta Guns, a Richmond native, is a retired school social worker, global missionary, and dedicated church leader. A Norfolk State University alumna and member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., she serves her community through a host of ministries and organizations. She supports Second Calvary Baptist Church alongside her husband, Dr. Geoffrey Guns.



Chauna Tyler

Chauna Tyler is the dedicated owner of a professional pet styling salon established in 2018. Beyond her entrepreneurial work, she holds an associate’s degree in radiology and shares her musical gifts by singing with Bishop Hardy and The Sons of Thunder, a local quartet group and her church choirs. She is married to Rev. Preston Tyler, who is the pastor of Hill Street Baptist Church in their hometown of Roanoke, Virginia.



Beloved Sisters,

I remember waking up from a short nap one Tuesday afternoon in our Bronx condo and reaching for my phone to text my then-editor, Fannie Stokes. We were working on my memoir, and I still hadn't thought of a title. I typed, "First Lady something?" She replied, "No, that's for a different book." She didn't know it then, but God was already planting seeds for the work we are now living.

When I said "I do" in 2007, I instantly became the First Lady of two churches and a state convention. My life changed in an instant. Suddenly, simple things like where I sat, what I wore, or how I walked into a room became topics of discussion. One person told me I needed to sit in the pulpit. Another insisted on the second pew because the fifth-pew aisle seat I preferred was "not appropriate for a First Lady." Someone else told me I needed a hat. Without realizing it, I was going through a full identity crisis.

Before marriage, I was a successful businesswoman, a homeowner, and a mother raising three children while thriving. As a preacher's kid, I thought I understood church dynamics. But once I became "First Lady," it felt like Shevalle, the woman I had always known, was being quietly ushered out for a role for which I hadn't auditioned. The First Ladies I had grown up watching were elegant and well-dressed, but often distant, guarded, and superior in posture. None of that resonated with me.

Still, little by little, I started shifting, not because I wanted to, but because it seemed expected. I replaced my stylish, expressive wardrobe with long dresses, bows, and eventually a large green hat stuffed with tissue to keep it on my short haircut. I wore it once, sweating through the service and nursing a headache, while people applauded me for looking like the First Lady they imagined. I had become a reflection of expectations, not authenticity.

For eight years, I lived through that quiet struggle. My husband, who has always supported "Team Shevalle," kept telling me, "Honey, just be you." Eventually, I heard him. When I did, I had an awakening. As I started connecting with other First Ladies nationwide, I uncovered a powerful truth: many of us shared the same feelings . . . particularly, younger First Ladies. We existed in an in-between, unnamed, unspoken space—visible yet unseen, vital yet often misunderstood. The more I listened, the more I wondered, *Why is everything so secretive? Why are we scared to speak openly? Why is our truth kept hidden like a secret?*

Then God softly whispered a single word to me: *FirstLadyDom*.

This is not a fantasy world, but the real life of women married to pastors, who face unspoken expectations that you never learn how to handle. The idea started in 2019, and by 2022, *FirstLadyDom in the Black Church* was created. It was never intended to be "just a book" but, rather, a collection of authentic voices from the unseen parts of our lives, places where we smile outwardly but cry quietly, support our husbands' dreams yet often hide our own. That first book was my love letter to us.

A Letter from the Founder

Before the ink dried, the second took shape: *Gospels of FirstLadyDom in the Black Church*. This expanded volume introduced more voices and explored what I call the “sacred contradictions” of our role: the beauty and burden, the calling and cost, the applause and ache. Most importantly, it reaffirmed a truth that must continue to be spoken aloud: ***The First Lady in the Black church holds a legitimate, spiritually rooted role.***

Even two books were not enough, because our stories do not end—they evolve. Our insight deepens; our voices expand with every season. And so, *FirstLadyDom Magazine* was created, not as an addition, but as a continuation—a living, breathing extension of the work that God began.

This magazine exists because our role is too dynamic to be captured in just one publication. It exists because our daughters, both biological and spiritual, need to see our courage documented so they don’t feel alone in their own callings. It exists because we deserve a safe space in which to share our truth without judgment, fear, or comparison. And it exists because no one understands the complexities, joys, sacrifices, and strengths of a First Lady like another First Lady.

If the books are the foundation, then the magazine is the home we’re building together. A sanctuary within a sanctuary—a space for honesty, reflection, creativity, and community. Here, we will uplift, encourage, and educate. We will explore identity, calling, partnership, joy, and the truths behind the public roles we carry. We will feature self-care practices, spiritual renewal, resource roundups, playlists that restore the soul, and reflections that strengthen our walk.

Every woman who participates as a writer, a contributor, an advisor, or a reader joins a lineage—a sisterhood, a gospel in motion—because every First Lady carries a gospel: the good news of how God has shaped her, sustained her, and held her steady in spaces that were not always welcoming.

So, welcome to the inaugural pages of *FirstLadyDom Magazine*. May you find yourself in these stories. May you hear your voice echoed in the testimonies of other women. May you receive revelation, rest, and renewal. And may you be reminded that you are not alone. You are not invisible. You are not secondary. You are not an accessory to someone else’s calling. You are chosen, appointed, and powerful.

This magazine is our gift to the church, to each other, and to future generations. It is a blessing born from experience, shaped by prayer, and carried by God’s grace.

This is our space. Our voice. Our truth. Our time.

With peace, love, and gratitude,



Rev. Shevalle T. Kimber, M.Div.

Editor in Chief

Rev. Shevalle T. Kimber is a devoted spiritual leader, author, and First Lady of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.— of which her husband, Rev. Dr. Boise Kimber, serves as the nineteenth President. She empowers women through preaching, mentorship, and conferences, drawing on decades of ministry experience. With a heart for healing and purpose, she champions spiritual care, resilience, and transformative faith.

Cover
STORY

Identity Crisis

CONDITIONAL VISIBILITY

By Rev. Valerie Brown Bostic

Being married to a pastor is not an easy path to follow. Often, I must remind myself of this Scripture: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5, ESV). To me, this translates as the man I married, whom God created for me; all the flaws, challenges, triumphs, and celebrations were already known to God. I have to keep reminding myself of that. This man was created for me. When I look at him sleeping, I think, “Wow, God, You created this man for me!”

My pet peeve stems from when I am with my husband at any given church community and I am greeted warmly, embraced, welcomed, and treated very nicely: “Hello, Lady Bostic.” “Oh! Lady Bostic, how are you? You look amazing!”—yet, within that same church community, if I show up without him, there is nothing. No warm welcome, no pleasantries, nothing.

I remember a specific situation last fall, at an annual gathering of the saints. My husband told me that we had to go to this luncheon, and that he would meet me there. I knew that I needed to have a ticket, but I didn’t have one—so here I go, alone, waiting in line, when I am asked for the ticket. I told the ticket taker that my husband told me I should be taken care of. The person appeared frazzled and was unsure of what to do. She explained her role to me, and that she needed a ticket for me to come into the luncheon. I told her, as kindly as possible, that I understood, but I still needed to get in. During the interaction, another person came over and said, “Lady Bostic, just follow me; we are lining up over here.” The person who asked for the ticket was so apologetic and truly tried to explain that she did not know who I was at the time. This situation was awkward for both the ticket taker

and me; however, if my husband had been there, this would not have occurred at all.

How many times has this happened to you? Can you remain kind, calm, and humble in situations like these, or do you crash out?

And speaking of people’s not knowing who I am, sometimes, I just sit quietly and observe the interactions and wonder, *Wow, what is this?* I am only noticed when I am with my husband, or the only name they know is “oh, your pastor such and such’s wife; where is he?” Sometimes, I want to scream and tell them, “I am ME! I do exist outside of my husband, and my name is Valerie! I am more than his wife: I am a mother, sister, grandmother, friend, ally, supporter, and much, much more.” These situations, which I am sure we have all encountered at some point in our journey as pastors’ wives, are a real thing, and it’s called **conditional visibility**.

Discovering this phenomenon provided some much-needed insight into these unpleasant and awkward moments I have experienced. Speaking of crisis identity, this has nothing to do with me, my presence, or who I identify as. Exploring this concept really helped empower me to integrate social norms, my expectations, church roles, and many other thought processes. It helped me understand some dynamics of human behavior. Being in the public eye is just a thing that happens in the arena of which we have been blessed to be a part.

Understanding conditional visibility has helped me understand human behavior a little bit better. The way these interactions go is not directed toward me; it is not an intentional act. Most of the time, as they say, it is all part of the game. It’s more a perception of the position being held by pastor and wife as a unit, and what the human person sees in front of their eyes,

and how the mind processes the unit versus the pastor wife without the husband's visibility at that time.

That's why, when I meet other First Ladies, I purposely ask for their first name, letting them know I see them for who they are—as not only a wife, but also an individual who happens to be married to an amazing man of God, who is a pastor. It's important to me to know the name of the wife; I make it my intention to know them. To know what they enjoy, that fact about them that nobody has cared to ask. I heard from one wife that she played the accordion in high school, and that was quite amazing; I have never met anyone who played that instrument. That was a unique fact that belonged to her. She was happy to share something unique to her personality, and I was happy to give her the opportunity to share something that had long been forgotten in her life. Now we can connect on that point when we see one another at the annual gatherings and have a deeper connection, which has strengthened our sisterhood. We look forward to sharing more offbeat events or activities that we have done or would like to pursue. I have learned that we are linked together not just by the fact of our marriages to our husbands but by the life experiences—both good and bad—that we are able to share to inspire and rejuvenate each other on this journey.

First Ladies, remember this: We are the much-needed helpmates . . . period! I want other pastors' wives to know that I understand the challenges and trials you are going through, and I am uplifting you to break through and stand confidently in who you truly are, embracing our uniqueness as First Ladies and beautiful servants of the Most High God.

So, First Ladies, sharing these experiences on my journey has led to the discovery of what is called conditional visibility. I never even dreamed this was a real thing, but it is. This concept can now be part of your

toolbox of resources as we navigate First LadyDom. We will be educated and better prepared to manage the awkward and not-so-good moments when our husbands are not present with us, with grace and class, knowing who we are and that we were designed for this position before we were created in our mothers' wombs. YES, we got this!





SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON
AT A GLANCE


**“A Time to Be Bold;
a Time to Be Humble”**

**Genesis 18:25-27, 30-32;
Luke 18:9-14; 1 John 5:14-15**



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ON YOUTUBE JANUARY 18, 2026



*The Sound
of Me:*
My Voice,
My Story

By Rev. Tracie Colette Penn

“The one thing that you have that nobody else has is you. Your voice, your mind, your story.”




British author Neil Gaiman once said, “The one thing that you have that nobody else has is you. Your voice, your mind, your story.”

When I think about the human voice, to me it is more than just a sound or a tone. Our voice represents who we are. It introduces us in spaces and helps to give the world an idea of who we are at our core—our feelings, our innermost thoughts. Our voice represents our authentic selves, which at times can be a challenge for most people to deal with.

Over the years, I have been told a lot of things about me that were directly related to my voice. Usually, those thoughts and ideas always began with the word “too.” I was, and for some people still am, “too much.” Too much attitude, too many ideas, too much opinion, too loud, too boisterous, too loquacious—I have been told “you are just a little too much.”

So, then I go and marry a minister who becomes a pastor. I entered a world that at times demanded that I remain silent and invisible. I walked into a space where, most of the time, the expectation was that I should be seen and not heard. I should speak only when I am spoken to. I had to not only abandon my identity but also embrace the image that a well-meaning group of wonderful people felt I should become.



On occasion, I have had some of these well-meaning people let me know that even my worship, which is fiercely personal to me, was too much. A woman actually told me how distracting my style of worship was to them—that they were not used to such a demonstration in “their” church. I found out later that she was commended for having the courage to approach the pastor’s wife and let her know “how we do things in our church.”

I am aware that everyone worships in their own personal way. My way just happens at times to be too loud and in full voice. So here I was in the house of worship, the one place we can come together to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. The house of worship now became a place that dismissed certain expressions of worship and endorsed others. This idea was and is crushing to me. This experience has caused me to, when I enter churches for worship, observe the situation and adjust how I worship based on the environment in which I find myself. I walk into worship spaces fully conscious of the fact that I may be told that my expression of worship is “too much” for some to handle. I, at times, affectionately call this spiritual anxiety.

These types of encounters and experiences have occurred not just when I became a pastor’s wife; they have also shown up in some way, shape, or form throughout my life. Most of my life, from childhood to adulthood, I have struggled with the idea that my voice is not welcome in some spaces. Now, add to this trying to navigate the expectations of others as a pastor’s wife . . . this has caused me, over time, to question everything. My value, my self-worth—was I just misunderstood, or did being a pastor’s wife mean that I had to relinquish my sense of who I was and allow others to determine what that would look like?

I knew that if I decided to continue to follow Jesus, I needed to allow Him to order my steps and guide who I was becoming in life as opposed to taking the path of least resistance and giving others the pen to write my story.

Over time, I have come to realize that no one else can walk my path and live my truth. No one else knows the sound of my story but me. That is what makes me special—it is my truth, my journey, my identity, my story. My story is uniquely shaped and formed by my

personal experiences. My experiences, both good and bad, have informed my life and shaped my decisions; my ever-evolving relationship with God, which is intimate and personal, and my desire to live in peace with who I am.

My feelings, my thoughts, my story are not to be tied to anyone’s interpretation. I walk through many phases of life. I am a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a minister, a teacher, a preacher, a disciple of Jesus Christ, and a pastor’s wife. My identity is connected to all these wonderful versions of me. All of them are vital. All of them are valuable. All of them are special and should be celebrated.

The tricky part of this idea, as beautiful as it sounds, is the expectations of a pastor’s wife that seem to overshadow all the other parts of who I am at times and have the potential to affect my ability to become everything that God wants me to be.



Philippians 2:13—which is my personal mantra—reads, “*For God is working in you, giving you the desire and power to do what pleases him*” (NLT). If my focus, no matter what life looks like, is to please God, then I know I can and will hold on to my voice, my story, and my witness.

What I am to my community of faith as a pastor’s wife shows up differently with each person I encounter. Some see me as a sounding board when they are looking for personal peace. Some see me as a representation of years of church tradition. Some see me as a role model and one to be emulated. For some, I hold a special place in their lives, and I am personally connected to them like family. Some see me as the person who did not speak to them last week. And some do not see me at all.


Therefore, my strategy for my life is clear: What I was not and will not be doing in my life is spending

my precious days walking in fear of rejection and judgment—of being ignored and misunderstood. I will continue this beautiful journey of self-discovery, knowing that my voice is my *superpower*.

I will walk in confidence knowing that my empathy and compassion, born out of my intimate personal relationship with God, add life to my community. I will speak from the heart. I will live my life knowing that just as my voice is sometimes viewed as a burden, my voice is also one that comforts, inspires, encourages, and heals. This is the road I am intentionally traveling—allowing God to make me over to become a deeper expression of who I am because I know who He is. Knowing your voice, living your truth, and walking in the joy of your identity is not only about how others perceive you, but also about how you truly see yourself.

Remembering What I Was Made For

By Tierra S. Combs



If you are anything like me, you have many internal questions about this role called “First Lady.” Over the years, I have discovered that while our paths to First Ladyhood are unique, we all meet at a familiar juncture that asks the question, “Who am I as a First Lady?” sixteen years later, I still get nervous when asked, “What is it like to be a First Lady?” I must admit that, at the beginning, I would often just have a glazed look like, “Honey, I have no idea what is going on.” As I move along this journey, I am less uncertain, but I still face moments when I revisit this question.

Truth is, I knew truly little about being a First Lady. I did not know how I was going to be—but who did? There is no welcome packet, and I was not magically transformed into the First Lady; I had arrived by way of my husband. It seemed like an okay place. For the most part, I was greeted with smiles and hugs, but guess what? I also did not arrive at this destination as a blank canvas. I was newly married, a new pastor’s wife, and expecting our first child, amid plenty of the baggage that we all carry through life. I had twenty-three years of life experiences before arriving at that moment, experiences that would be intertwined in this new place.

Going back to a time within my first ten years of being a First Lady, I experienced deep feelings of abandonment. The cultural practice of the first church my husband pastored was to honor the First Lady with a luncheon during the Pastor’s Anniversary Weekend.

During the planning of the installation service, it was suggested that I have a luncheon to welcome me as First Lady. Well, some members believed that I did not deserve to have a luncheon because I was too young and I had never been a First Lady, so why did I need to be honored? At first, I did not care, but whenever it was brought up, my spirit was bruised. I am thankful for those few women who fought for me, but in those moments, that situation told me this: “I will never be accepted by them.”

It felt like abandonment, and there were times when I was growing up that I felt abandoned. I knew the feeling all too well. Sometimes the abandonment was intentional, but most of what I experienced as First Lady was caused by other people’s unresolved hurt. That small act said to me, “We want your husband, but not you.” Even though I had heard stories, nothing prepares you for that moment. It seemed like I was being left out of things that were beyond my control. But the damage was done, and the seed had been planted. That bruise showed for the next few years.

There were only a handful of people I allowed to get close to me, but I was suspicious of everyone. I felt alone in this new place despite the reassurance that I was not. Naturally, I looked to my husband. Despite those tender moments of solace in my confidant, there was still this feeling that his experiences were his. And his navigation to help me fully understand my feelings at this moment as a First Lady came with limitations beyond his control. He was providing great insight based upon his experience as the child of a First Lady . . . but he was never a First Lady.

This next step was terrifyingly difficult, and I struggled hard! Feelings of loneliness crept in, and whispers to my heart that I was not good enough began. I knew that God was faithful and present, but I just could not understand how my Father’s children could be so purposely hurtful. They had taken something that I thought was going to be a wonderful spiritual journey alongside them and tainted it.

Being called “First Lady” seemed like an assault on my character, and I preferred to be called anything but that! Later, I would be called much worse! You can ask me about that later. What happened in that moment was that God showed me that I would have to learn to stand on what He already planted in me. I was reminded that before I was a First Lady, I was His and will forever be His. Yet, I still had some work to do within myself. I stopped looking for the exuberant manifestations from God and focused on the simple ones. I had to learn to deny myself and fully take on Christ. I had to choose—no straddling. All or nothing. And the amazing thing about God is that He has taken the smallest amount of my faith and produced guaranteed dividends. God revealed to me that when I felt abandoned, He was still with me every step of the way. Even when I abandoned Him daily, He was still faithful, and He will be with me as He continues my transformation into the image of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

First Ladyhood is a status that I am growing connected to, but I still struggle with finding relationships within this space. Until year 10, I believed some of the reasons I may have struggled in this area were because of a budding family, fear of oversharing at the expense of ministry, limits on my availability, past feelings with female friend interactions, and possibly being judged because I wasn’t who they perceived me to be. But that one moment about a possible luncheon propelled me toward a path of feeling alone. Looking back, that feeling kept me in a cycle of isolation and fear, causing me to miss opportunities to meet and grow with wonderful individuals.

I thank God for His persistence in allowing people to still show up despite my real or perceived insecurities. I began to move out of my comfort zone by being intentional about returning calls to those who have reached out to me; I learned to be a safe place for others, and to grow in discerning safe spaces for myself. I have met some amazing people who have poured into me and reinforced God’s everlasting love for me.

In the last six years, I have been learning to belong in this sacred space for First Ladies through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As a First Lady, people lean on you for prayer, comfort, and authenticity. Though there are still expectations that you may never live up to, God has a way of revealing that you were crafted for moments such as this. You find reassurance in God's Word that reminds us, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you"* (Jeremiah 1:5a, ESV). Though I am no prophet, I believe that God feels this way about all His children. He waits for me to trust His knowledge of me, understanding that He walked before each heartbreak, each moment of joy, each moment of loneliness, and abandonment, all the way to this point.

I AM HERE, believing that God has created a good work in me. I believe that to be true for you,

too! Have I fully embodied being a First Lady? Absolutely not! I am becoming, and so are you! We are still under construction, a work in progress. In becoming all that God plans for you to be, allow yourself some grace on this Christian journey as a First Lady. Allow yourself some grace in becoming the beautiful creation that our Father sees and fashioned just for us. Moments will come to test our faith, but I am confident and reminded through Peter's epistle to the exiled followers of Christ scattered throughout various places: *"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:6-7, ESV).

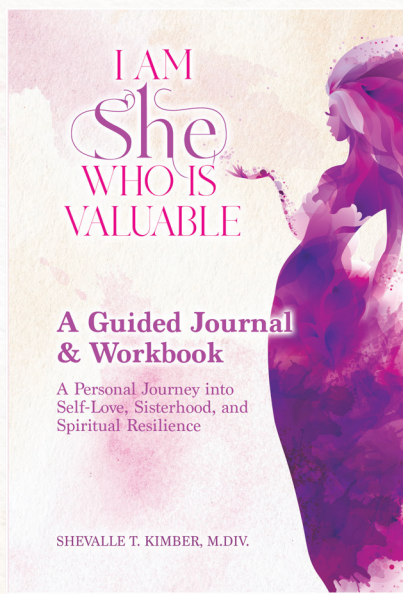


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Are You Operating in Your Lane?

Avoiding the Sting of the Three Bs—
Bored, Burdened, and Burnt Out

By Thursday Flint





As a pastor's wife, I cannot stress enough the importance of working in areas that bring you joy, peace, and satisfaction. Let's face it: work will find its way to our doorstep inevitably, whether it is out of a ministry need, a congregant's request, or because our sweet husbands need us to take something off their plates. If your ministry is as busy as mine, there is always a program, event, service, outreach opportunity, committee meeting—you name it. Sometimes you end up with an assignment that makes you feel like a rock star because it is something you enjoy, and it is relatable. On the other hand, you may find yourself working in an area that you dread, ultimately leaving you stung by the three Bs—bored, burdened, and burnt out. So, how do we avoid the sting? Let's talk about it!

First Ladies seem to wear an invisible cape that says, "Ask me anything! I can do it all! I have all the answers!"—standing tall with our hair blowing in the wind like Beyonce. I have learned over the years that it just comes with the territory. Because our husbands have so much knowledge, wisdom, and strength, it is assumed that we possess the same. I mean, *we are married*, right? In reality, we know that we cannot do it all, and we certainly do not have all the answers. First Ladies are often pushed into very visible, public speaking roles. But what if you are one of those women who breaks out into a nervous sweat and wishes you were anywhere else on earth at the sheer thought of public speaking? Most of us have seen it. She goes forth anyway, and she might even pull it off well, but she absolutely hates it. How about being asked to teach a class, organize an event, decorate, or lead the women's ministry, when none of those things interest you?

What do you like to do? What perks your attention? What makes your eyes light up? What satisfies your soul? Granted, ministry work is not glamorous, but it is quite rewarding and can even be fun when we are free to be creative. As we begin to discuss spiritual gifts, think about where God has allowed you to operate and grow. Most importantly, we must ask

God where He wants us to be. Ask this: "What gifts can I utilize in order to help build up the kingdom and uplift my brothers and sisters in Christ?" He will absolutely reveal it if you ask!

When we find ourselves in assignments just to fill a need because no one else wanted to do it, if we were "voluntold," or if we are simply trying to please our husbands, we become vulnerable to the sting. Oh yes . . . you wake up one day and find yourself bored, burdened, and burnt out—the three Bs. As precious as our children are, not every adult has the patience or desire to work closely with them. Yet, there you are working in the children's ministry when it is not your calling. It does not motivate or drive you. So, what happens? You become bored with the work, because you would much rather be doing something else like working with numbers or street evangelism.

The children's ministry leader at my church is truly a gem. All the children flock to her every Sunday as a result of her gentleness, her temperament, and the gigantic heart she has for them. We know how children can see right through people. As she stated before, it does not feel like work to her because she enjoys it so much. On the other hand, it feels like a double shift with no breaks when you are not in your lane. Your eyes are on the clock, just waiting to get out! Boredom can lead to a mundane experience in kingdom work. One way to avoid this is to find a ministry that does not feel like a job. Ministry is definitely work, but if you have the gift of comfort, for example, calling congregants on the phone and speaking words of hope, strength, and encouragement during their darkest days might be something that feels completely natural to you. It does not feel like a job, and it is not boring because it is a fulfilling task that God placed in your heart to do.

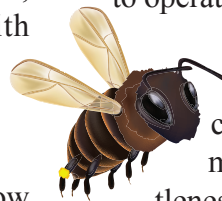
Next to being bored, here comes the next sting—*burdened*. Imagine being asked to teach a class or facilitate a session that is not in your lane. Instead of saying, "Oh, I can't wait to get to class to talk about this or that," you are saying, "I can't wait until this is over." You do not possess the gift of teaching, yet there you are. Instead of the assignment leaving you with feelings of excitement, anticipation, and joy, you are just . . . burdened. Personally, I love to cook. If someone asked me to design and prepare a five-course

meal, I would be hyped! Figuring out the menu, recipes, ingredients, prep, etc., is a challenge that I would welcome with enthusiasm. However, if you are someone who does not care to cook, the thought of cooking a five-course meal might be frightening, overwhelming, and burdensome.

Spiritually speaking, God wants us to take pleasure in our work for Him just as He wants us to be cheerful in whatever we give unto Him, including our time. It is not His desire for kingdom work to feel like an anchor around our necks. Perhaps you could cultivate a desire for the lane in which you find yourself. However, a butterfly will always be a butterfly. If you find yourself in this place, do not be afraid to allow the beauty and vibrance of the butterfly to light up the environment as best you can. Sometimes, we as First Ladies must create our own lane. With respect to what the previous First Lady did, that is her business and her ministry! You have to find what works for YOU!

Lastly, our final B—*burnt out*. My Lord, I know we have all been there a time or two. Someone with the gift of administration would likely love to spearhead the annual event that requires them to take charge, facilitate, organize, and create goals. Some women are so

great at this that they can do it in their sleep! It comes second nature to them. But now imagine if a First Lady is more of a behind-the-scenes type of woman, and she has constantly asked to spearhead something. It can be a daunting and terrifying task to take on. To get back into your lane and avoid this sting, find someone you have seen shine in this area and volunteer to assist the person. Be that behind-the-scenes support guru and step up as the resources queen. Then, you are both able to use the gifts and talents that God has blessed you with and avoid the burnout brought on by stress, anxiety, and negative feelings toward the work that you are doing. Aside from our husbands and families needing us, we need ourselves! Sister, you need to show up for the woman in the mirror 100 percent of the time, and that is nearly impossible to do if you are burnt out trying to operate in a lane not designed for you.



Lastly, we are encouraged in Psalm 100:2 to serve the Lord with gladness and come before Him with joyful singing. It is my prayer that the joy, peace, love, and gentleness in our hearts will shine through the work we render unto the Lord. May we be free to operate in spaces where it shines freely and is not stifled. May we avoid the sting of the three Bs and be fulfilled and successful in what is placed in our hands.





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Identity Crisis

Find the *YOU* in All that You Do

By Deborah Patton-Lawson

Wearing the hat of a First Lady comes with many different types of bends and dips. It lends itself to one's asking the question, more times than not, "Who are you? No, really, who am I?" Well, to answer that, it will always depend upon the day, the hour, and even the minute that you ask yourself this vacillating question. Now as a retired First Lady, I can say that while wearing this title, I could be automatically characterized as so many things to so many different groups of folks, at any given time. One day I would be considered the leading lady of the church—the one person whom everyone looked to for the answers that somehow couldn't always or readily be retrieved from the Pastor directly. The next minute I was the one who was looked upon to be that picture—perfect lady of the house, yes, the one whose most important job was to dress up and wear that appropriately flashy (yet classy) St. John suit with the matching hat, but who was also not allowed to give my opinion nor speak out on certain subjects. Sometimes, I was the peacemaker in the church house and at other times, that voice of reason for women who were silently going through their personal storms yet striving to be that good Christian example while fervently holding up the blood-stained banner but breaking up on the inside.



Yes, that was me . . . the one who was supposed to always have it all together and whom it was just assumed should have already had a plan, a resolve, and a solution to address every situation concerning most any issue that could possibly arise. While all the above actually, and at different intervals in my role, was appropriate and could ring true and may have even been needed in our church and ministry at the time, these tasks could certainly sometimes cloud and negate the fact that I am a **woman**, first! Understanding this shed light on the fact that I, too, had experienced and have had many of the same trials and concerns that I was attempting to address and deal with on the behalf of

others, regularly myself. While working diligently to ensure that my roles as a First Lady were fulfilled, it indeed could be extremely easy for me to lose my own self-image and identity while focusing on providing service for others.

While I really loved my job as a First Lady and as a productive helpmeet to my husband, I learned that I must respect the fact that the minute I took on that role, my life became transparent in general. No matter how hard I attempted to keep my personal life separate and somewhat private, I quickly learned that both my husband and I were always now under the watchful eyes of tons of people. I am thankful that I was able to adapt to this and learned to be okay with it. In all of that, I found it important not to forget to set a standard for how I wanted to be perceived, even in my transparency. What I did was to create a stage for myself where I could **BE MYSELF**, so that it didn't put any undue pressure on me to operate in or create a facade that would make me feel uncomfortable and not be true to myself. I looked at Esther in the Bible, who actually hid her Jewish identity—which caused an issue for her when she became queen. Even though Esther's story was a good one, I didn't want to go out like that . . . lesson learned: **BE WHO YOU ARE!**

Most First Ladies have fuller plates than they'd care to really acknowledge. To avoid identity crashes, I realized that I could not be all things to everyone at all times. Balance is key. Like the song by Lynda Randle goes, "One day at a time, Sweet Jesus, that's all I'm asking of You"—and that's all that's asked of us, too. Between my husband, household duties, and other chores to oversee—not to mention children and grandchildren, both older and younger to be concerned about, I concluded that it was imperative for me not to forget that I needed to be sure to carve out personal time, space, and energy for myself. I've found that these things do take precedence and did have invaluable credence in my overall ability to be a good First Lady. If I was unfulfilled and imbalanced in any of these areas, my identity as a leading lady in the church could become compromised very easily. That required me to make conscious, ongoing self-check-ins, so as not to forget that I am still precious in God's sight and not just valuable to my husband, my family, and our church—but I am precious to ME as well! If I'm not any good to myself, then how can I properly be of effective help to the

body of people I was entrusted to aid and serve? I didn't give room for doubt and fear to overshadow or define my purpose in any area of my life. It was my conscious decision to not let emotional instability or feelings of confusion take up space in your mind.

My experience is that self-care should be a mandate for every First Lady, sometimes referred to as "me time." Women in general must be balanced in their lifestyles to feel *special* about themselves. You see, none of us may get the "hip-hip hooray" from everyone, or sometimes not even from anyone—but knowing that I matter to me and to God is an important piece of who I am. It somehow validates me for the several tasks that I was duty-bound to take on. Self-care for me was whatever I wanted and needed it to be . . . I felt that it had to be reflective of what I *fancied!* It should be what *floats my boat* and what takes me to my *happy place!* I wouldn't allow guilt, doubt, or fear to upstage the designated time that I so desperately deserved and desired.

In closing, let me share a word or two of advice for how I look at preserving myself to avoid an identity crisis. Women of God, seek spiritual guidance by reading the Word of God. It will lead, guide, and direct you in knowing and reaffirming exactly who you are. It helped me to stand strong and to be steadfast in knowing just who I was in the kingdom of God and in the role of a First Lady. Find your own voice and let it be heard! Be diligent and seek to find self-fulfillment in what you do for your family, your church, and, moreover, **YOURSELF**. Ultimately, what I did for **ME** served as a strong additive for how I would go about successfully wearing the many different hats that I wore, and it gave me the ability to carry out those tasks effectively and in excellence. It is what solidified and sustained me. Throughout the years, these are some of the things that fueled and propelled me to work toward being the best version of ME that I could possibly be, thus allowing me to serve the people of God happily and wholeheartedly.

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Self-care Corner

When Did Self-care Become Selfish?

By JoAnna Wringo

When did taking care of ourselves become viewed as selfish, especially for women who carry the emotional and spiritual weight of entire ministries? As First Ladies, we pour into others, give generously, stretch our limits, fix problems, encourage those around us, host gatherings, pray continually, and still present ourselves with grace. Yet, somewhere along the journey, tending to our own needs became something for which we feel guilty. The truth is simple: caring for your body is not self-indulgence; it is a sacred responsibility. When you pause to breathe, stretch, walk, dance, or engage in active praise, you are not stepping away from ministry, you are strengthening the vessel that God uses to bless it.

Standing beside our husbands in ministry, we navigate many identities: wife, mother, mentor, counselor, and often the quiet spiritual anchor for others. In constantly pouring out, we must remember that we are vessels in need of intentional care and renewal. Maintaining our physical well-being is not vanity; it is obedience. Scripture reminds us, *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit . . . ?”* (1 Corinthians 6:19, ESV). Caring for ourselves is worship—an expression of gratitude for the sacred temples that God has entrusted to us. This self-care extends to how we view our bodies, not through comparison or cultural pressure, but through the truth of who God says we are. *“I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made”* (Psalm 139:14a, NIV). Speaking life over ourselves, treating our bodies with grace, and embracing our God-given worth models healthy, Christ-centered

confidence for those who look to us for leadership.

One of the most restorative habits that we can build is beginning each day with stillness. Meditation is more than silence; it is alignment. Before the world awakens and before ministry drains our energy, we must meet God in the quiet. Gentle stretching awakens our muscles and calms the mind, allowing us to move through the day with strength and purpose. Even five to ten minutes of reflection can set the tone for a peaceful, productive day.

Physical movement is equally essential. Ministry demands spiritual and emotional labor, and movement restores balance. Whether through brisk walks, light strength training, dancing to uplifting music, or a gentle Pilates routine, aim to move your body daily. Structured exercise two to three times a week, broken into morning, midday, or evening segments can fit naturally into our schedules and elevate our overall well-being.

Health is not about appearance but vitality, clarity, and longevity. When our bodies are nourished and energized, our spirits respond with joy. We lead with patience, think clearly, and serve from a full cup. As Proverbs reads, *“She surrounds her waist with strength and makes her arms strong”* (Proverbs 31:17, NASB).

As First Ladies, we give endlessly. But hear this truth: you also deserve to give to yourself. Self-care is not selfish; it is stewardship. Prioritize your health, honor your body, and embrace the truth that you are God’s chosen vessel, deserving of strength, beauty, and rest.

Daily Self-care Recipe

Serves: One beautiful, powerful First Lady

Prep Time: 15–20 minutes a day

Total Time: A lifetime of renewal

Ingredients:

- 1 quiet morning moment
- 5–10 minutes of deep breathing or stillness
- 1 dose of holy rest
- A handful of movement (walk, stretch, or praise dance)
- 1 Scripture reminder of strength (Proverbs 31:17)
- 1 daily affirmation (Psalm 139:14)
- Generous grace for yourself

Instructions:

1. Morning Preparation

Gently stretch and breathe as the sun rises, allowing your spirit to settle before the day begins.

Remember this: Rest is holy, resetting your mind and nourishing your soul.

2. Midday Movement

Add a brisk walk, a lunchtime stretch, or an evening of active praise to restore balance.

Let each burst of movement strengthen your joy and your body—*“She girds herself with strength.”*

3. Daily Affirmation

Speak over yourself: *“I am fearfully and wonderfully made,”* and bless your own reflection.

Treat your body with the same grace you freely offer to others.

Serving Suggestion:

Caring for your mind, body, and spirit enhances your ministry rather than subtracting from it. Serve daily with rest, movement, and renewal so you can pour into others with clarity and divine strength.

Strong Women Need TLC, Too

By Rahshedah Harrell

Ladies, when I started having symptoms of perimenopause, I thought I was losing my mind—sweating and drying out all at the same time . . . but God has been so good! As I look back over the past twelve years, I believe I started this perimenopause around age 40. It started with night sweats and then the emotional roller coaster, which was the worst part. I have never been an emotional being and I take pride in having the ability to stay in control of all aspects of my life, but when my mind and body started doing things that I couldn't control and had no explanation and no understanding of what was going on, I became depressed—and not just a little depression, but a full-blown depression that had me in a dark place. I was completely lost . . . or at least I thought so. I stopped talking to people and even stopped eating as well. I was melting away alone in my bedroom outside of going to work and going to church.

I was going through these things all alone because how dare I tell anyone how I feel and what I was going through because I'm supposed to be perfect and everyone looks up to me in my being the pastor's wife. I couldn't and didn't share with my husband/pastor because he's so busy with helping and restoring everyone else I didn't want to burden him with my personal issues. I did

pray to God daily and asked for hindsight, foresight, and any other sight I needed to get rid of all this mess that was going on with me.

Around 2021, I was fed up and I started talking to my husband and initially I felt like I was not being heard and I warned him that I will look for another pastor, since he didn't have the capacity to hear me and make intentional time for me. He knew I was usually a strong Black woman with everything under control, and he was not used to my being emotional and needy as I was being at the time. Instead of leaving the church and getting a new pastor, I decided to start self-care.

I tried all kinds of vitamin supplements for hot sweats, and I scheduled monthly deep-tissue massages for joint pains. But I was still an emotional wreck sometimes. It would come and go. I started going to the gym and I started eating dinner again. I had stopped eating dinner; I would only eat breakfast (and sometimes lunch) but never ate after 6:00 p.m. I would just go home and get in bed after work daily.

Earlier this year, I was on vacation with my husband in Aruba and one morning I was eating breakfast with a couple of women and they were talking about menopause and all the stuff that come with it and one of the women mentioned that she found

treatment that worked for her and I immediately contacted the place and set up an appointment at IVMe in River North. After the consultation I was all in and ready to get the pellets inserted for hormone replacement therapy. The unfortunate thing about the hormone replacement therapy is that the insurance companies do not pay for it (not even a portion), so I had to pay out of my pocket for this treatment, but I was fed up and was willing to pay anything to feel like me again. I even set up an appointment to find out why I stopped breathing in my sleep and ended up getting a mouthpiece that helps me to keep breathing while I sleep so I can sleep through the night and wake up refreshed.

This year was a turning point for me, and I am currently still receiving hormone replacement therapy every four months, still taking vitamins, still getting my massages and retail therapy every now and then. I am having conversations with the women I come in contact with about all I have gone through and I am not ashamed or hiding anymore. Self-care is necessary by any means necessary!

From this chapter of my life, I have learned to unapologetically take care of me. So, sisters, I pray that you take self-care seriously and know that nobody else but you will provide you that type of care.

The Power of No

By Rev. Fannie B. Stokes, M.Div.

For a long time, I struggled to say no. As the oldest girl in a family of eight, I always tried to make sure everyone else was taken care of, even if it meant sacrificing myself. As I grew up and left the nest, I found that this disposition often left me disappointed and empty-handed. It required me to learn the power of saying no. By always making room for the wants and needs of others, I had become accommodating, but never really attached to my own joy because everything came before that.

Learning the power of **NO** allowed me to make room for things

that made me respond with a resounding **YES**. It helped me to carve the time, space, and energy to find who I really am, what I really want, and ultimately what I was created to do.

I realized that boundaries are essential for maintaining my emotional balance, protecting my mental health, and sustaining healthy relationships. Once I learned how to set healthy boundaries, I found myself less overwhelmed, more rested, and with time to decide what I really wanted to do.

Unsurprisingly, setting healthy boundaries helped me to hear God more clearly as well. When I quieted the myriad of voices vying for my time and attention, I found that I could hear the voice that matters more clearly. God's voice—always a still, small voice waiting for my attention—came center stage. In THAT voice, I found all the answers I didn't know I had questions for.

Sometimes, learning who you are includes establishing who you are NOT. In this, the **NO** is just as important as (if not more than) your **YES**.

Hustle Is Good, but It's the Flow for Me!

By Jeanette Greene-Washington

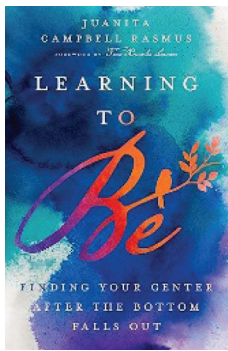
I learned self-care disciplines of stillness, rest, and surrender at an early age. As an entrepreneur in my mid-twenties, I desired to reignite my relationship with God. However, it was frustrating that this relationship kept getting in the way of my success! At least that's how I felt, always having to choose between business and church. No matter the choice, I experienced guilt about disappointing God and my mentors. As I yielded more to God, my business began to look like a ministry. People traveled far to train under me but always wanted prayer and counseling. My peers joked that

my business was a ministry. I was offended, but they were right. God was drawing people. Once again, God is getting in the way of my success!

I planned to work harder, to show my mentors that I was dedicated. I missed family celebrations and worked late nights; I was hustling. However, God was calling me into His plan, but I was too busy to hear His still, small voice; no longer working as unto Him, but instead to please people. Eventually, the hustle led to burnout. I realized I had stopped acknowledging God. Though he wasn't against success, hard

work, or my mentors, it was clear that God wanted my attention. I needed to be still so that I could hear Him. I was working in my own might but needed to rest in Jesus. I decided to surrender to the flow of God in every area of my life. I began teaching and preaching His Word. Events followed that changed my course of work, but God opened other doors, and all that I hustled for came flowing into my life. Acceleration, favor, blessings, and validation—all in His flow.

BE STILL, REST, SURRENDER TO HIS FLOW . . . you'll be glad you did!



Learning to Be

By Juanita Campbell Rasmus

Review by Markesha Jartae

Juanita Campbell Rasmus, in *Learning to Be: Finding Your Center After the Bottom Falls Out*, tells her intimate story of what she refers to as her “crash.” This period in her life was a time that stopped her and made

her slow down, be honest with herself, and rediscover her relationship with God. Juanita gives a walk-through of a spiritual journey that forced her to “learn to be” with herself and with God, and how she incorporates that journey into useful spiritual exercises. Blending honest storytelling with gentle spiritual lessons and easy-to-use reflection activities, Juanita helps readers find calm, healing, and a sense of balance when life feels overwhelming. Juanita is co-founder and pastor emeritus at St. John’s Downtown church in Houston, Texas. She is also an author and speaker with years of expertise helping people and communities overcome spiritual and personal obstacles.

Juanita’s honesty about what she refers to as her “crash” is what interested me most about this book. For example, she writes,

“Forty years of buried feelings and pent-up stress caused everything to come crashing down that morning. It was though I had built my life on foundation of toothpicks. I lacked the tools to deal with the inevitable bumps and bruises of life, and I allowed the pressure to escalate until the damage was inevitable.” (Rasmus, 2020, p. 7).

Juanita explains how not dealing with stress and burying your emotions for years will eventually lead to everything breaking apart. She does not cover up her battle with depression or pretend as though her recovery was simple. Instead, she talks openly about needing both medical help and spiritual support to heal. I really connected with that honesty because so many people today are dealing with stress, anxiety, and burnout. Her story is a good reminder that it is okay to slow down, ask for help, and take care of both your mind and your spirit. It is a hopeful and sensible book about finding peace when life feels heavy.

This book has so many benefits. It helps you renew your spirit and reconnect with God in a real, personal way. It also gives practical tools, including simple reflection questions

and calming activities that help you slow down and heal. Juanita combines mental health and faith, demonstrating that you can take care of your spirit and mind simultaneously. Another benefit is that it builds community. I was part of a prayer group that read this book together, and our talks were some of the most honest and healing conversations I have ever had. We even had Juanita visit and share her story with us, which made everything in the book come to life. That experience showed me how powerful it can be when people come together to grow, heal, and learn “to be.”

The big ideas like letting go of control, discovering who you are beyond your work, and learning how to slow down and reconnect with God are the focus of this book. Juanita talks about how life can feel overwhelming when everything around us is always busy, and how hitting rock bottom can actually give us a chance to find peace and purpose. The chapters follow her journey through burnout and recovery, starting with the stress of always being “on,” facing the moment when life feels completely stopped, and asking herself, “Who am I now?” She then talks about letting go of perfectionism, resting, listening to God in quiet moments, and leaning on others for support. After each chapter, there are reflection questions and exercises to help readers pause to reflect with God and themselves.

As I read this book, individually and with my prayer group, I kept a notebook recording my thoughts, my own reflection questions, and my answers to the reflection questions that come after each chapter. When I read this book with my prayer group, one of the practices we always do is to write down any points to ponder and any points of power. The points to ponder would be anything that made me stop and evaluate my life, including any questions. The points of power included any statement or statements mentioned that helped me remember the source of my strength and God’s presence in my life. This wonderful book, *Learning to Be: Finding Your Center After the Bottom Falls Out*, is sold at most major book retailers, including Amazon, Christian-Book.com, and Barnes and Noble. This book is also available in eBook and audiobook formats.

Quotes and information taken from book excerpts.

Markesha Jartae

Markesha Jartae was born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee. She currently resides in Houston, Texas. She is the mother of one daughter and is passionate about encouraging others through teaching and writing. She is a proud graduate of Tennessee State University and Western New England College of Law.



Unthinkable

By Dr. Mia K. Wright

Review by Kimberley Yancy

When God calls a woman into ministry partnership, He often calls her into a life that requires courage, authenticity, and a willingness to break molds. In *Unthinkable*, Dr. Mia K. Wright invites women—

especially First Ladies and ministry spouses—to step beyond the familiar and embrace the extraordinary life that God is waiting to release.

Dr. Wright teaches that the extraordinary rarely shows up in the ordinary. Instead, it is birthed when women obey God in ways that defy expectation, tradition, and comfort zones. For pastors' wives, this message is deeply relevant. The role comes with visibility, pressure, and silent expectations—but also with purpose, influence, and spiritual authority. First Ladies need this book because it does the following:

- It validates the emotional and spiritual load that pastors' wives carry.
- It gives permission to step out of tradition and into purpose.
- It equips women to lead inside and outside the church.
- It restores dreams that many First Ladies have neglected.
- It re-centers identity on *God's voice* rather than on expectations.

Break Old Mindsets

Wright challenges readers to release fear, people-pleasing and internal limitations that mute God's calling. She helps women identify where they have settled for comfort instead of courage.

Step into Unordinary Obedience

Through biblical stories and personal testimony, the book reminds readers that breakthrough and calling often hide behind one faith-filled, risky "yes."

Lead Boldly as a First Lady

Mia affirms that pastors' wives are not background

accessories to ministry—they are leaders, influencers, vision carriers, and generational changemakers.

Practical, Soul-fueling Growth

Readers learn how to do the following:

- Set bold spiritual and personal goals.
- Shift their identity narrative.
- Build confidence in their unique gifts.
- Develop strong leadership habits.
- Walk in purpose without guilt or apology.

Unthinkable is more than a book—it's an invitation to First Ladies to breathe again, dream again, and dare again. It equips pastoral wives with mindset, motivation, and spiritual courage to step into the extraordinary calling that God has assigned. Perfect for new First Ladies, seasoned ministry wives, women's ministry leaders, or any woman ready to break free from limits and thrive with holy boldness. To purchase this book, visit <https://www.miawright.com/unthinkable/>.

How to use the book *Unthinkable* in your Ministry: Small Group or First Lady Circle

Use the book for a four- to six-week mentoring circle among First Ladies or women in leadership.

Retreat or Conference Theme

"Unthinkable Faith" or "Unordinary Women" make excellent retreat themes.

"Call to Action" Journal Prompts:

- What "ordinary expectation" of others do I need to release?
- What bold step has God been nudging me to take?
- What part of my purpose have I been shrinking away from?
- Who is one younger woman that I can mentor this season?

Information taken from book excerpts.

Playlist Pick!

Tasha Cobbs Leonard

“You Know My Name”

Reviewed by Shevalle T. Kimber



Tasha Cobbs Leonard’s song “You Know My Name” remains a beautiful and empowering

anthem for women, especially First Ladies, who often carry the weight of being seen, known, and defined by the expectations of others. This worship song offers a sacred reminder that our truest identity is not shaped by titles, roles, or public perception, but by the God who calls us His own.

The song emphasizes divine identity, reminding listeners that God knows exactly who they are, beyond the labels, assumptions, and pressures that come with life in ministry. For First Ladies navigating visibility, responsibility, and vulnerability, this truth becomes a grounding force. The lyrics speak comfort and calm, offering peace in seasons that may feel foggy, heavy, or overwhelming.

Its declarative message, “*Oh how You walk with me, oh how You talk with me,*” affirms God’s nearness. The acknowledgment of life’s battles in lines like “*no fire can burn me; no battle can turn me*” resonates with women who quietly fight through challenges while remaining faithful.

What makes the song most powerful is its intimacy. The simple, repeated chorus, “*You know my name,*” becomes a personal confession that reconnects us to God’s voice above all others. It reminds every First Lady that she is seen, held, and truly known by God.





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YiaYia's Designs

By Zabrettia McCree

As First Ladies, we are referred to as “the fragrance of the church”! In other words, we set the tone of the church through our influence. It is through style, grace, class, and elegance that we achieve this goal—be it subtly or consciously.

Who can forget our Forever First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, who graced us with style, grace, class, and elegances! Whatever she wore, she wore it well! Her fashion choices would be the topic of discussion amongst many women. Many would exclaim, “Did you see what FLOTUS was wearing?” Though our platform may not be as broad as Mrs. Obama’s, we—the ladies in our arena of FirstLadyDom—have a sphere of influence when it comes to fashion, too.

It is known that First Ladies always lead the way when it comes to fashion in our churches. We have that sphere of influence not only through our internal greatness but through our external power through making our own fashion statements in what we wear. I have always loved fashion; it is an outer expression of my inner creativity! I dress how I feel—uniquely, fiercely, and unapologetically!

So, whenever I want to express myself through fashion, my go-to is YiaYia’s Design; she does it for me every time. Her designs are unique, fierce, and unapologetically elegant! She brings the edgy look with style and grace through her custom-made designs, made uniquely for you and for any occasion . . . and she is also a First Lady.

Brand Summary

YiaYia’s Designs is a faith-based fashion brand birthed in 2016 and entrusted to Pastor Shaurice as a vision of purpose, creativity, and healing. The journey began with vintage fashion traveling across the United States to source exclusive, one-of-a-kind pieces that quickly drew attention on social media for their uniqueness and bold style. But everything shifted after the sudden loss of her mother. Amid deep grief, she taught herself to sew, transforming a place of pain into a powerful boutique built on passion, faith, and resilience.

Today, YiaYia’s Designs is celebrated for its vibrant, structured blazers, dramatic peplum silhouettes, fringe designs, inspired dresses of all kinds, and artistic denim—each piece blending creativity with purpose. The brand has become a trusted favorite among gospel artists, bishops’ wives, celebrities, and countless remarkable women who value fashion with depth and distinction. Known for its rich color stories, impeccable craftsmanship, and empowering themes such as “Crowned,” “Grace,” and “Time & Season,” YiaYia’s Designs continues to rise as a luxury brand offering women fashion that carries meaning, pieces that honor their journey, embrace their identity, and illuminate the beauty that already lives within.

Website: Designs by Yiayia



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