

READY OR NOT

Preparing Today for a Young Woman's Tomorrow

SARA CARLSON

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Ready or Not

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THIS MINISTRY

Sara Carlson first came to the Bill Rice Ranch as a summer staff counselor from 1993-1995. She then spent one year teaching at Bill Rice Christian Academy. Her husband Troy, an evangelist, serves as the Director of West Branch of the Bill Rice Ranch, Williams, Arizona. The Carlsons, along with their two children, Abby and Nathan, spend their lives in revival work, both in camp programs and in week-long church meetings.

The Ranch was started over fifty years ago by Evangelist Bill and Cathy Rice as a way to reach the Deaf with the message of salvation. The Ranch now holds week-long camps all summer in three separate programs – Deaf, Junior, and Teen. These programs run simultaneously, allowing churches to bring young people from all three groups while only making one trip.

The truths of this book are heartfelt convictions, regularly preached from the pulpit of the Bill Rice Ranch. Whether dealing with teenagers, juniors, families or the Deaf, the Ranch's goal is to challenge people with revival truth.

For more information about the Bill Rice Ranch, please call 615-893-2767 or write to the Bill Rice Ranch, 627 Bill Rice Ranch Rd., Murfreesboro, TN 37128, or visit the website at www.billriceranch.org.

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FOREWORD

One fundamental key to the Christian life is applying the Word of God. If you cannot *apply* God's Word, then you are not going to *live by* it. If you do not *live by* it, then the Bible *is not* your authority in life. As a preacher, my goal is to communicate the Bible in such a way that it is clear and powerful, demanding a decision from the hearer. In the front flyleaf of one of my Bibles I have written, "Explain it. Illustrate it. Apply it."

That is exactly what you are about to read in this book. You will find truth after truth explained, illustrated, and applied. I dare say you will repeatedly be brought to the point of decision—good decisions which will help put you on or keep you on the path to success in your life.

Written in the front of another Bible from which I preach are these verses:

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. I Corinthians 2:4-5

As you read this book, you don't have to take a human author's word for it. You can accept God's very words.

I have now read this book several times as my wife has prepared it. I have found it to be powerfully convicting and thoroughly helpful even though I am not a part of the target audience. Prayerfully, this book, received with an open heart, will be used as a tool of God to mold young women into God-honoring success stories. And may you be one of them!

Evangelist Troy Carlson

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS BOOK

With the completion of this book, my heart is burdened. For while all the effort put into writing it has come to an end, the true work has just begun: the work in you and me as readers. In whatever stage of life we find ourselves, we all need to be prepared to do God's bidding in our lives—and that will not be accomplished by accident. It is my prayer that the biblical truths presented in the following pages will stir you to take steps toward a successful, fulfilling life—both now and in the future.

Preparing for the future will not happen in one day. Neither will reading this book. So take your time; absorb all you can. Use the Journal Thoughts at the end of each chapter to make notes concerning how the Lord spoke to your heart. And in the days to come, go back to those notes to remind yourself of the truths you have learned and of the decisions you have made.

CHAPTER ONE

Here It Comes

Do you remember summer days when you were seven or eight—how long those days seemed? I would play outside from morning until dark, enjoying every moment of it. There was hide and seek, hopscotch, swimming, forts and tree houses, roller skating, jump rope, playgrounds, popsicles, and secret missions in the woods. Life was good; days seemed to last forever. But they didn't—for me or for you. What seems like just yesterday is now several years past. Some days may seem long and some short, but time passes at the same speed for all, regardless of age, stage of life, circumstances or anything else. And it passes quickly.

For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. James 4:14b

I have heard many older folks talk about how fast time passes. "It will be gone before you know it," they warn. "Enjoy every minute of it now."

As a youth, I did not give much thought to it all. “They are old, and I am young” was more or less my carefree attitude. But now I am beginning to understand what they were telling me; I am beginning to see that life is short. One does not need to be older, however, to accept this truth. The Bible states it clearly.

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Psalm 90:10

We live seventy years—if we are healthy, maybe eighty years—yet this life ends. It is over. It flies away. My grandfather lived a very long life of ninety-six years. Yet he died, and his life was but a vapor. The life that lives the very longest is still short. The longest summer day will still have an end. The Bible does not point out the brevity of life to cause us depression, but to emphasize that we need to make the most of the days we have.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Psalm 90:12

Right now, tomorrow may seem like it will never arrive; but it will come and go. Ready or not—here it comes. Here comes tomorrow. Here comes your future. The question is: What are you doing to prepare for it?

What Your Future Does Not Need

Fretting

You are in a stage of life where it is very natural to think about the days to come. Many of my friends dreamed about their weddings as they discussed flowers, colors, dresses, and all the other details that go along with it. I was different. I did not think about my wedding much until it was time to plan it. But I did dream about my children and what I would name them. I wrote a list of names, narrowed it down, and picked out my favorites. Those types of dreams can be fun. We have hope for the future; we wonder about it. What will I do? Where will I live? Who will I marry? How many kids will I have? There are endless dreaming possibilities. You do, however, need to make sure your dreaming does not include fretting. The Bible is clear that we should not worry about tomorrow.

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?... Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Matthew 6:31, 34

The word *thought* implies anxious thought. What if we do not have anything to eat, drink, or wear tomorrow! What will we do? Oh, no! Worry, worry, worry. Perhaps it seems unrealistic to you at this stage of life that one would worry about having food, drink, and raiment; but what about *these* worries? What if I do not find anyone to marry! What if I can't have children! What if God sends me to Africa! What

if I can't get a job! Oh, no! Worry, worry, worry. There is no difference. While the focus of worry may change, worry is always the same. And it is always wrong. Do not let anxious thoughts have any part in your dreams for the future.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. Philippians 4:6

In the first part of the verse, God tells us not to be anxious about anything. To worry is to sin. Do not accept anxiety as no big deal. If, when you dream about the future, your thoughts include worry, then your thinking about the future is not Bible thinking. Deal with worry as sin and do not welcome it into your thoughts and life.

The second half of the verse tells what we are to do instead of worrying. Pray. I have heard it said many times that if you can worry about it, then you can pray about it. That is true. Prayer is exactly what God wants us to do with our concerns. When I find myself fretting, I need to first confess the sin to God, ask Him to give me victory, and then bring my concern to him in prayer. Worry has no power to control circumstances or futures, but the God of prayer does.

Boasting

Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Proverbs 27:1

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into

such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

James 4:13-15

How foolish these people were to make plans about the future without regard for God's will! They were proud of the fact that they were going to do what *they* wanted to do. They did not recognize that their life was not their own – that their future was not in their control.

I was alone in an airport waiting to board my plane. There was not much to do but watch people. (That is really the most interesting thing to do in an airport anyway!) Two teen girls walked into my gate area and sat down nearby – close enough for me to hear the conversation they struck up with an older lady. These girls were pretty, stylishly dressed, bright, and incredibly outgoing. They mentioned that they were headed to California. They were on spring break and had an agenda. It was their chance to get on the big screen. They were going to Hollywood expecting to be noticed by the movie crowd. These unsaved, I assume, teen girls boasted about their future, giving no regard to God. We would not really expect anything different from those who have never placed their faith in Christ for salvation. Yet many Christian young people are guilty of the same boasting concerning their own dreams and thoughts of the future. "Once I get done with high school, I am going to college for two years to get a secretarial degree. I will get a job, meet the man of my dreams, and get married. I

will only work two years because then I will have my first baby....” The plans go on and on. Have you, like the people in James, set an agenda; or are you acknowledging God’s hand in your future? Are you seeking what *you* want in life, or are you determined to follow God’s plan?

The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. Luke 12:16b-21

There are many truths in this passage, and one is definitely that we should not boast of the future. Our dreams ought to be surrounded by surrender to God’s will.

What Your Future Needs

My son and I were playing a quick game of hide-and-seek. It was his turn to count—to thirty. Now let me stop and say that I am a nice counter—dragging out every number so that my children will have plenty of time to hide. But not my son. He counts like an auctioneer! To make matters worse, I had not thought of a good hiding place ahead of

time. I was standing in the middle of the living room when I heard, "Ready or not, here I come!" I dashed behind a chair with my feet obviously poking out behind. He stepped out of the bedroom and exclaimed, "Found you!" Game over. I was not ready, and I lost.

The bell rings. You get yourself comfortable in your desk, set for a long lecture about the Civil War. You reach for your textbook when you notice that no one else is reaching for his book, but everyone is getting out a pen and paper. Suddenly, a sickening feeling comes into your stomach. That feeling worsens as you remember that today is history test day. You forgot. You did not study. You were not prepared. All of us can probably relate to a similar experience. We know that pit-in-the-stomach feeling that comes with not being ready for something important. We can be distraught by not being ready for an exam yet often give little thought to being prepared for what God has for us in days to come. We do not know what the future holds; our lives are in God's hands. That truth should not, however, promote a careless attitude that says, "Well, God will do whatever He wants with me, so there is no need to do anything today to be ready for tomorrow." The acknowledgement of God's omnipotence (complete power) in our lives should drive us to prepare ourselves to be ready to do His will tomorrow.

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Proverbs 6:6-9

We are to learn from the ants. They gather while there is time and food, so they will have what is needed in days to come. As a young woman, you should not be lazy but take advantage of this time you have and the means you have to learn, grow, and be prepared for your future.

The many God-fearing, courageous men and women of the Bible were not born ready for the tasks God had planned for them. If they had not followed God's leading and commands in tasks that seemed insignificant at the time, they would not have been ready to do huge things for God later in their lives. Samuel spent his childhood serving Eli in the temple. It was a time of preparation for him – a time of learning God's Word and applying it. Noah would not have been ready for the Flood had he not prepared by building the ark. Elisha learned from Elijah; he needed that time of preparation. After Paul's sight was restored, he spent "*certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus*" (Acts 9:19). No doubt these days played a great role in Paul's being ready to fulfill God's plan. The disciples of Jesus spent years at his feet learning and preparing for ministry.

While young women certainly can serve God now, this stage of your life is mostly a time of preparation. Not being ready for a test may result in a failing grade. Not being hidden by the time the counter yells out, "Ready or not, here I come!" will result in losing the game. Not being prepared for life will result in disappointment, despair, and devastation. The stakes are high. Ready or not, the future is coming!

JOURNAL THOUGHTS

☐ I have been worrying about the future. I realize that I need to confess that as sin and begin praying about these concerns:

☐ I have been planning out my future without regard to God's will. I need to surrender these desires of mine to Him:

☐ I have not been making the best use of this time of preparation in my life. I need to be more diligent in these specific areas: