

## PRAISE FOR *Too Loved to Be Lost*

“I’m telling you, I love *Too Loved to be Lost* from the title in and right out the other side! In her distinctively charming, chatting-among-girlfriends style, Deb Coty uses stories from real life and sweet biblical truths to remind us how we can know we’re loved, how to feel we’re loved, and how to spread that love outside our own comfort zones. Insightful, scriptural, smile-producing—you’ll get to the end of this book feeling, well, *precious*.”

~Rhonda Rhea, TV host, author of *Join the Insanity* and *Espresso Your Faith*

“In *Too Loved to be Lost*, award-winning author Deb Coty invites readers along on an uplifting, humorous journey to discover—or rediscover—the deep and wide and unlimited love of God. By the time you come to the last page, you’ll feel a boost in your soul, a jolt of spiritual inspiration, and a bounce in your step. I guarantee you’ll reach for another of Debora’s uplifting, thought-provoking books.”

~Suzanne Woods Fisher, winner of multiple literary awards and bestselling author of *The Inn at Eagle Hill* series

“The message in *Too Loved to Be Lost* is too good to miss! It’s a powerful reminder of how loved we are by God and how He has promised to hold us in His hand no matter how rough the waters get. Debora Coty has done it again!”

~Martha Bolton, Emmy-nominated writer for Bob Hope and the author of eighty-eight books and multiple musicals



“I don’t know of anyone conveying God’s unconditional love to the heart of women more clearly and with as much soul restoring humor as Debora Coty. *Too Loved to Be Lost* needs to be read by all of us. . .more than once.”

~Shellie Rushing Tomlinson, author of *Heart Wide Open and Trading Mundane Faith for an Exuberant Life with Jesus*

“Reading this beautiful book, *Too Loved to Be Lost*, you will laugh your heart merry as you grow even closer to your Papa God. Highly recommended!”

~Anita Highman, bestselling and award-winning author of 40 books.

“I’m head-over heels in love with Debora Coty’s amazing book, *Too Loved to Be Lost*. The stories are wonderfully witty—loaded with pizzazz and enough takeaway value to leave every woman saying, ‘Hmm. I think I needed that!’ Brilliantly written and highly recommended.”

~Janice Thompson, author of *The Weddings of Bella* series



Too  
Loved  
to be  
Lost

—\*—  
**Debora M.  
Coty**



**SHILOH RUN**  **PRESS**  
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*Our mission is to publish and distribute inspirational products offering exceptional value and biblical encouragement to the masses.*



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## *Dedication*


To my dear friend, Nancy Elizabeth Allen, whose longtime loyalty and faithfulness epitomized unconditional love gift-wrapped in a warm hug. I miss you so, so much, girlfriend.

And to Chuck, my best friend, laughing buddy, scripture go-to guy, techie extraordinaire, good-sport-when-I-write-embarrassing-things-about-you, terrific dad and Pop-Pop, tolerator of wifely quirks, chocolate stash provider, and long-suffering spouse of 36 years. You've mirrored Papa God's unconditional love for me in a hundred different ways and it's the delight of my life to grow weird with you.





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# Introduction



During my travels as a speaker, I've met lots and lots of women who view God as a stern, judgmental, impersonal entity lurking nearby with a huge frown and a big stick, just waiting to smite them to smithereens when they mess up. That perspective is usually based on harsh experiences they've had with an angry father, relentless coach, or strict teacher.

But you know what, girlfriend? That is so not Papa God.

Sure, our heavenly Father is holy and just. He's righteous and wants us to be, too. But that doesn't make Him a mean ol' hulking principal hovering in the hall with a big paddle.

Papa God has many other attributes as well—He's sovereign, ever present, kind, slow to anger, merciful, faithful, omniscient, and loving (to name a few). Did you know there are over fifty verses in the Bible describing our Creator's incredibly vast love for us? Listen, if assuring us of His unfailing love is that important to Him, it seems to me that we need to be picking up what He's putting down.

I'm often asked why I refer to Him as "Papa God." The reason is simple: because He is. My Papa. Your Papa. When we make the decision to believe in Him, to receive the unconditional love demonstrated by the sacrifice of His only Son, Jesus, in our place, we're adopted into Papa's family.<sup>1</sup> We become His beloved, adored, cherished daughters. Hey, we might not think we're much, but He thinks we're to die for!

The intimate term in the Bible for God the Father is the Aramaic word *Abba*, the name Jesus referred to Him by and offered to share with us as Papa's adopted children.<sup>2</sup> Children specifically chosen. Handpicked. Wanted. The Message translates "Abba" as

“Papa.” I totally love that. It’s warm, protective, and delightfully cuddly. What name could more richly express our close relationship with our heavenly Daddy?

That’s what this book is all about—nurturing a closer relationship with Papa God. Getting on a heart level with the One who sees us through eyes of affection, not criticism. The One who isn’t fixated on a list of dos and don’ts, but with the condition of our hearts. With Him it’s not about what we do, it’s about who we are through His lens of love.

And oh, does He ever love you and me. Intentionally. Unconditionally. Without limits.

I’m so happy you can join me in seeking a new perspective about love (my term for women seeing things in a fresh way). We’ll explore life-enriching topics like learning to feel cherished, recognizing everyday miracles, developing trust, gaining confidence, overcoming depression, curbing anxiety, and healing hidden hurts. We’ll find out how to survive collisions with difficult people and draw strength from our besties.

Above all, sister, won’t you take my hand and spend time in Papa God’s presence? The presence of the One who wants to lavish love on you.<sup>3</sup> (Really, how many people can you say that about?) The One who doesn’t condemn or critique you but instead forgives and accepts you, quirks, meltdowns, zits, and all.

The One who, despite your imperfections, considers you His precious, precious daughter.

Yep. Spend some time with Him. Just see if you don’t fall madly in love with your heavenly Papa, who already madly loves you. And always will.

SECTION 1



*Where Am I Going?  
Can I Get There from Here?*

*Praise the LORD! He is good.  
God's love never fails.*

PSALM 136:1 CEV

## CHAPTER 1

# *I Once Was Lost and Now I'm. . . Still Lost* (Gotta Start Somewhere)



*Do not despise these small beginnings,  
for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin.*

ZECARIAH 4:10 NLT

Our bus arrived in Edinburgh on Sunday around noon on a breezy, sunny, altogether gorgeous autumn day, and I was up for adventure. Scotland was the third country on the long-awaited UK tour Chuck and I had been enjoying in honor of our thirty-third wedding anniversary, and we were thrilled to be presented with a few free afternoon hours before a scheduled Scottish castle dinner at six o'clock. (Yep, I said *castle!* Woohoo! Bring on the glass slippers and flowing ball gown. . . . Cinderella, here I come!)

Chuck wanted to hit the sack for a catch-up nap after seven days of nonstop activity with our tour bus companions, but I was keen on exploring the ancient city. After all, our Scottish guide had said our hotel was only “a brisk walk” from bustling downtown Edinburgh.

I didn't want to waste a single minute. So after a brief check-in, I tossed my things into the hotel room and without more than a “See ya, honey!” I set off in the general direction in which the hotel clerk pointed.

Ah, the wonder of it all! I walked many miles, enjoying the

sights and sounds of the enchanting, romantic place, marveling at the intriguing architecture, the lovely Scottish accents, the cozy little coffee shop where J. K. Rowling painstakingly birthed Harry Potter, and the charming, heartwarming statue of Greyfriar's Bobby, the loyal little dog from the 1800s who'd sat on the grave of his beloved master in Greyfriar's Abbey cemetery every single day for fourteen years until his own death. The congregation of Greyfriar's fed Bobby and tried to lure him to shelter during the frigid winters, but he'd steadfastly refused to leave his master's grave.

Up to that point in my self-made tour, I had been keeping careful tabs of where I was in relation to where I'd been (Gaelic street signs, when they exist at all, are not very helpful). But I had been so deep in thought about dear Bobby that I turned a corner or two unawares.

Uh-oh. Where was I? It was then I realized that I'd left my cell phone back at the hotel. I had come away completely unprepared: no phone, no hotel name or address (we'd had a last-minute hotel substitution, which I hadn't written down), and a lousy sense of direction. The emergency number for our tour guide (whose first name was all I knew) was safe in Chuck's phone back at the hotel, which he'd turned off because of killer overseas roaming charges.

I didn't know what to do. I was embarrassed at my airheadedness. I couldn't even ask a policeman for help; I didn't know where I was staying or who to look for.

So I just kept walking. Walking and praying that at any moment I'd see something familiar that would give me a clue which direction to go. I hoofed it for nearly three hours, alone and lost in a bustling city, growing more frantic by the moment. I knew if I didn't find my way soon, I'd be kissing my dreamy castle dinner farewell. It seemed as though I was walking in gigantic circles. Sure enough, by the third time I encountered wee Bobby's statue,

I knew I was in trouble.

As I stood there staring at Bobby, internally wailing to Papa God in desperation and about to collapse to the curb in tears, I heard a woman's voice call out on the crowded street, "Hat girl! Oh, hat girl!"

Me? Could she mean me?

I touched the brim of my adorable black-and-gray tweed newsman's cap (one of four hats I'd purchased already on the trip—I *am* a hat girl, you know) and turned to find the smiling faces of a couple from our tour group who just happened to be passing by. With a map. And the name of our hotel.

In the midst of thousands of tourists traipsing the busy streets of the sprawling city, they'd somehow spotted me. They didn't know my name but recognized me because of the hats I'd worn every day on the bus.

Despite my fatigue and blistered feet, I had to laugh. My heavenly Papa had used my hat fetish—a weird personal habit of mine, which He knew as well as He knows all your silly personal quirks—to bail me out of a disaster of my own making. And it happened right in front of the statue of Bobby. . . a tribute to faithfulness.

Luck? Nah. Coincidence? No way. My Savior might as well have written across the sky with a giant black Sharpie, "I love you even when you screw up, dear child. You are precious to Me, quirks and all. Just like the extraordinary loyalty displayed by little Bobby here, I will *always* be faithful to you, even beyond death."

## LOVE THAT JUST WON'T QUIT

And in a nutshell, that's what Papa God's unconditional love is: Forever faithfulness. Limitless loyalty. Enduring allegiance. Eternal devotion. Spiritual security.



Let's explore these marvelous qualities.

- ✿ Forever faithfulness: “He has never let you down, never looked the other way when you were being kicked around. He has never wandered off to do his own thing; he has been right there, listening” (Psalm 22:24 MSG). In other words, whether you realized it or not, Papa was there during those times when you felt discouraged or miserable or hopeless. (Even when you were lost and alone in a foreign city!) He was still right by your side, faithfully preparing His next move to help you find your way.
- ✿ Limitless loyalty: His love for us won't fit in a box. There are no confining sides, top, or bottom. No conditions, qualifications, or rules that we must abide by or we're out. No barriers, not even when our present earth suits expire. “Neither death nor life. . .nor height nor depth. . .shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39 NKJV).
- ✿ Enduring allegiance: You pledge allegiance to the flag, your country, your club, sometimes your job. In your marriage vows you pledge allegiance to your spouse. But get this: Papa God pledges allegiance to you. To *you*. To the good and bad, the inconsistent and obsessive, the sensible and crazy all rolled up into the bundle that is you. And He vows that nothing you could ever do or think or say will drive Him away. *Nothing*. “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5 NIV). How utterly amazing is that?
- ✿ Eternal devotion: When you were a little girl, didn't you dream of Prince Charming galloping up on a white

charger and sweeping you off your feet to live happily ever after? Maybe you still dream that. (Maybe I've been thinking about castles entirely too much lately.) But you grew up and realized that fairy tale is unrealistic when it comes to flesh-and-blood lovers. . . . *Happily ever after* is awfully hard to come by if you're dependent on a fallible man to supply all the elements that make you happy. Imperfect human relationships might be ever after; however, they're certainly not 100 percent happy. But you know what? It's not a fairy tale when it comes to the Lover of your soul. It's reality. He adores you. He perceives nothing but the very best in you and thinks you're the most beautiful thing He's ever seen. He loves you with a passionate romance that will never, *ever* end.

✧ Spiritual security: I once raised a baby squirrel that my cat helped fall out of the nest. When I wasn't feeding him with an eyedropper, that tiny, hairless, helpless creature loved to curl up in my warm, safe pocket and go wherever I went. He could rest in complete security there, free from anxiety or harm, knowing I was watching over him. That's what spiritual security is for us, too—feeling that we're snug and safe, curled up in the pocket of Jesus' jeans. "In God I trust and am not afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 56:11 NIV). Regardless of what happens to our earth costumes—and one day, inevitably, the temporary bodies we currently live in will fade away—our security is in knowing that our spirits, our true selves, will live on forever with the One who loves us more than anyone on earth ever could.

Like the parable Jesus told about the lost sheep (meaning us!) in the fifteenth chapter of Luke (read verses 1–6 to refresh your memory), we can never stray from our Shepherd to the point of no return. He loves us far too much to let us go. I find that marvelously reassuring, don't you?

So when you lose your way and begin to wander, whether it's spiritually, emotionally, mentally, or physically (hey, I can get lost in a tote bag), be assured that Papa will find you. Know why? Because you, sister, are too loved to be lost.

## DINNER, SHREK STYLE

By the way, despite my lengthy detour, I did make it to the Scottish castle dinner. Unfortunately, the food wasn't as magically fairy tale-ish as the medieval ambiance. They served “neeps and tatties” (turnips and potatoes) alongside “haggis,” a traditional Scottish savory pudding containing—are you sitting down?—sheep's heart, liver, and lungs, encased in the sheep's stomach. It wobbled like a fat, black, gooey sausage.

Gulp.

Anyone need a slightly stained ball gown?

*To succeed in life, you need three things:  
a wishbone, a backbone, and a funnybone.*

~REBA McENTIRE



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## FOLLOWING MY PERSONAL GPS (GOD-POWERED SATELLITE)

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1. Can you recall a time when you felt hopelessly lost? How were you finally found?
2. Is there someone in your life who has demonstrated extraordinary faithfulness to you? How? Did you in turn feel faithful to him or her?
3. Are there people who have let you down because their loyalty was limited? How did their betrayal affect you?
4. Would you say that you feel assured of spiritual security? Why or why not?
5. One last smidgeon of advice from someone who truly understands wandering in physical, emotional, and spiritual circles: When you're feeling lost, forget faux pride. Stop, roll down your window, and ask for directions from the one holding the map.

## CHAPTER 2

# *Singed by the Dragon* (Overcoming Burnout)

*Are you tired? Worn out?  
Burned out? . . . Come to me.*

MATTHEW 11:28 MSG

Oh. My. Merciful. Heavens. What on earth was happening?

My husband, twenty-eight-year-old daughter, two-year-old grandson, and I had no clue when we found ourselves—in our SUV with a luggage topper—suddenly surrounded by more than a hundred roaring motorcycles racing at breakneck speed around crazy-steep curves as we traversed the Appalachians to visit friends in Tennessee. They swarmed us like gigantic, angry, black leather-jacketed bees, their frightening collective buzz nearly deafening.

Although there was no good place to pull off the twisting mountain road, we wedged the car sort of half-on and half-off to make way for the incredible black swarm that just kept coming. Motorcycle after motorcycle zipped by us, each nearly horizontal, their handlebars inches from the asphalt as they flew around the sharp curves. I saw sparks fly more than once as metal scraped pavement, and I just knew we'd round the next curve to find a motorcycle wrapped around a tree and body parts strewn everywhere.

We soon learned that we'd inadvertently wandered onto the Tail of the Dragon,<sup>4</sup> “America’s most twisted beast.” This jagged

strip of US-129 on the border of North Carolina and Tennessee boasts 318 curves in eleven miles and has claimed more than twenty lives since 2000 (and no doubt more before someone started keeping score). With no houses or intersecting roads to impede the flow, speed junkies from all over the world descend on the Dragon to try their skill on death-defying twists such as “Beginners End,” a hairpin turn called “The Whip,” and a fly-off-the-handle hump known as “Gravity Cavity.”

So there we were, a misplaced, seat-belted, all-about-safety family, just trying to stay on the road as we zigged through all these horrific zags, praying madly, wide-eyed and green around the gills as the adults downed Bonine and the baby lost his breakfast repeatedly until he was limp as a dishrag.

When we finally nosed our car into the parking lot of the Dragon’s one and only gas station, I was stunned to see a make-shift memorial to the scores of people who had fallen to the Dragon by injury or death. A huge pile of broken, twisted metal from demolished motorcycles and wrecked cars formed a towering macabre sculpture testifying to the horrible possibilities of your own fate if you chose to continue on this road.

Yet they kept on coming.

We just don’t think it could ever happen to us, do we?

Yep, us. You and me. We may not be motorcycle mamas (do ATVs count?), but I’m not talking about straddling Harleys here. There’s another dragon that claims our lives piece by piece. . . joyful moment by joyful moment. . . one irreplaceable sliver of vitality at a time, until it whittles away our motivation for going on and wrecks our inner peace. It’s called burnout. This fiery dragon breathes stress that just won’t end—relentless weariness that evolves into depression, hopelessness, and a wrecked life.

You know exactly what I’m talking about, don’t you? This

dragon has whacked you right off your feet with his wickedly spiked tail a time or two.

But sister, we don't want to become twisted, macabre memorials to the burnout dragon—broken pieces of our lives piled high in testimony of our inability to handle ridiculous schedules, unstable health, rocky marriages, troubled relationships, or choking finances. We must somehow learn how to defeat our personal dragon and choose to *not* stay on the same road that has brought us this far on the route to disaster.

### THAT'S GRATITUDE FOR YA

My friend Sheila is well acquainted with the burnout dragon. Besides working twelve-hour shifts, she takes care of her mother, who suffers with dementia, and her ninety-two-year-old stepfather. Some days the stress and fatigue seem overwhelming, and Sheila feels resentful of having to forfeit her days off to do their grocery shopping, cooking, house cleaning, and laundry. She admits to wondering more than once, "Is my life on hold until they pass away?"

On one such day, after picking up her mom and stepdad's groceries, Sheila was en route to their home to take care of these thankless chores, working up a major attitude. It just wasn't fair. Why should she have to give up so much of her limited time and energy to help people who didn't really appreciate it?

When she entered the house and began unpacking groceries, Sheila wasn't particularly surprised when her mom wandered into the kitchen and began crying. She did that sometimes when she felt "lost." But she was far from lost that day. Through warm, grateful tears, Sheila's mother thanked the Lord aloud for her daughter, for the groceries she brought, and for all she did for them.

As Sheila recalls, “My selfish attitude flew right out the window. Those hugs and snippets of appreciation were priceless. My exhaustion suddenly lifted. I no longer felt resentful and went on to spend five hours doing laundry and cleaning with a different heart—a cheerful heart—and a smile on my face.”

As she heard her mother singing happily in the background while she worked, Sheila realized that Papa God had seen her granite-hard heart prior to her arrival and knew she needed a heart transplant. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26 NKJV).

## HEY, I CAN BLOW FIRE OUT OF MY NOSTRILS, TOO

Sheila’s story demonstrates some effective dragon-slaying tools that can help us all defend ourselves against burnout. I’m also including some updated tips from my book, *Too Blessed to Be Stressed*.

Remember that you’re truly appreciated.

You may not ever receive sufficient thanks from others for all you do, but when you feel bummed over it, remind yourself that Papa God sees every little detail and is well aware of the sacrifices and effort you extend to serve others in your family, job, church, community. . .the inhabitants of your little world. Papa sees it all—every dollar you spend, all the time and energy you put in, each hour of sleep you miss, all the things you give up for someone else’s benefit—and He truly appreciates *you* acting as His fingers and toes on earth.

One day He’ll reward you with the immense gratitude you deserve, but brace yourself, it may not be till heaven. In the meantime, lean not on fallible people but on Papa as your source of



validation and satisfaction for a job well done and a life well lived.

Give your constipated calendar an activities enema.

Determine your top three priorities—the ministries Papa has assigned to you at this particular season of your life (and yes, your family definitely counts as a ministry!). Write those three priorities (*only* three for simplicity's sake) on an index card. Sit down with your calendar and card; study next month's constipated daily schedule. Bathe it in prayer. Then ruthlessly slash everything not conducive to your three priorities. Time to flush the excess.

Grab your phone (do it now while your motivation's hot) and explain to the Grand Poobah responsible for each deleted activity that you're simplifying, scaling back, washing away everything unrelated to the specific ministries the Lord has assigned to you. These are what you need to focus your finite time and energies on.

Stand firm in your resolve, and don't be swayed by guilt. You and I both know some folks have the guilt-you gift, but this is the time to woman up and repeat as many times as necessary: "Sorry, but no. Sorry, but no." Got that? You hereby have permission to say *no*. And memorize this verse: "Our purpose is to please God, not people" (1 Thessalonians 2:4 NLT).

- ✿ Remember that you're truly appreciated.
- ✿ Give your constipated calendar an activities enema.
- ✿ Simplify, yes, but preserve the important stuff.
- ✿ Tape those three priorities to your mirror where you'll see them every day. Schedule time with the peeps who matter most: your husband, your children, and *you*, girl.
- ✿ Get physical. Especially after spending hours on the computer.