Dear Sister Friend,

Thank you for your willingness to read this book. I hope that as you turn its pages you will laugh out loud, identify with the women portrayed, and perhaps even shed a tear. If you should discover any nuggets of wisdom or have an “aha, this is right where I am” moment, that’s all the better.

As women we share the same life experiences – the details are just different. I attended a women’s retreat some time ago, and the workshop leader made the statement that all women experience the same life cycle. We are in one of the following stages: pre-menstrual, menstrual, pre-menopausal, menopausal, or post-menopausal. I won’t tell you which stage I am currently experiencing. Don’t ask my family, either!

I am a daughter, granddaughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, aunt, teacher, and friend. I am married to a wonderful man whom I cherish, but the vast majority of my life these days is spent in relationships with other women. I am blessed to have such rich and varied female influences in my life. As a child, my friendships outside the family were very few. I never had an “Anne Shirley kindred spirit” experience while growing up. Although I was gregarious, outgoing and friendly, I protected my privacy and didn’t allow myself to open up to others. How thankful I am for my biological sister and the memories of growing up being her little pain in the neck.

As a mother of three growing daughters, it brings me great delight to see them enjoying their own bond of biological sisterhood. However, it matters not if one is related by blood or marriage to another woman. Genuine sisterhood is the solidarity of women based on shared interests, experiences, and concerns. It is devoid of “cliquish” behavior and transcends blood ties, ethnicity, age variance, or socio-economic status.

The circle of sisterhood is simply your female circle of influence. Your interaction with these women drives the dynamic of the circle as you influence and impact each other’s lives. One woman can be involved in many different circles if she has broad and varied interests that allow her to come in contact with a diverse group of women. The circle of sisterhood is also characterized by the unity, encouragement, service, and selflessness of those within the circle.

What pictures come to mind when you think about sisterhood? I envision girlfriends laughing together at a lunch date or volunteering at a local homeless shelter. I also think of sisters caring for an aged relative and friends sacrificing time and money to take a missions trip to minister to those less fortunate. I see a pastor’s wife admonishing the women in her congregation and teachers taking time to bake cookies with a young girls’ Sunday school class. Young mothers forming a babysitting co-op to care for each other’s children or providing a listening ear for a friend who’s down in the dumps and needs encouragement – all these permeate my thoughts. I’ve listed just a few examples. I’m sure you have many of your own.

Walking through the pages of history, I stand in awe when I think about the crucial role women have played in shaping our society. Since the beginning of time, women have been the quiet (and sometimes rather boisterous) backbone of every society. Women have been a source of encouragement and inspiration to their husbands and children. We have been teachers, homemakers, caregivers, and crusaders. We have traditionally been the ones who have nurtured the sick and elderly. During World War II, women united and began to seek employment outside the home while the men went off to fight for our country (remember Rosie the Riveter). Sisterhood was important in the days of yesteryear when it was commonplace for three generations to live within a few miles of each other. Back then our society wasn’t as mobile as it has become. Families didn’t relocate due to changes in employment as frequently as they do today. A young woman would have the support of her mother and grandmother as she attempted to keep house and raise her children. There was a genuine sense of community, and women felt connected to each other simply because they spent more time ‘doing life together’.

What influences are shaping your life today? This book wasn’t written with the goal of being a 10 step self-help manual. Nor is its purpose to condemn women and “shame” them into doing more to serve their families and communities. Rather, I hope to shed light on the importance of the sisterhood concept while helping women recognize the vital role sisterhood plays in our everyday lives. As twenty-first century women, we are each blessed with tremendous gifts and abilities that can be used to influence and impact the lives of those around us in positive ways.

At the end of each chapter is a “Take 5” quiet time thought. I hope you’ll take a few minutes during your day to **think about the thought**. I don’t know any women who aren’t leading incredibly busy lives serving the family while trying to give some attention to their own needs. Over the years a great deal of my quiet time thinking has been done with my hands in a sink full of soapy water and dirty dishes. I’m sure many of you can relate. The basic question to keep in mind while reading through the book is this: what impact is your circle of sisterhood having in your community today?

**Happy Reading**

Unity

Within the Circle

“A people with a unified purpose for existence are a chain not easily broken”

**Let’s Come Together**

She sees a need and responds in kind

Past assistance she herself received

Doing for others brings sweet peace of mind

Giving back to her community

Others are served with nary a thought

By this selfless soul with motives pure

The good can sometimes seem for naught

But still press on, seek strength, endure

Dear sister, friend, see what we can do

Impact a life – one person at a time

Let’s come together me and you

Discontent to leave anyone behind

Our children are watching with eyes open wide

To see our example of service and love

Will they sense our sincerity, or will they chide

The disunity and apathy we’ve yet to overcome

Dear sister, friend, see what we can do

Impact a life – one person at a time

Let’s come together me and you

Cohesiveness the goal – the results sublime

**Solidarity Breeds Strength but Division Breeds Deficiency:**

There was a funny jingle written back in the 1970s: “United we stand, divided we fall. We’re tighter than pantyhose two sizes small!” I know that in 21st century America pantyhose are becoming more and more unfashionable, but I still wear them. In fact my three daughters also wear them. The only difference in mine and theirs is the size. It goes without saying that theirs are smaller. I can’t even count the number of times I have accidentally gotten a pair of theirs and attempted to pull them up. You talk about tight and uncomfortable!! My girls ‘hose’ aren’t just smaller. They are also shorter, but I wear them anyway. It is such a pain in the neck to pull them off, hunt around for the right size, and then put those on. I never have that much time in the morning while I’m getting dressed. So, I continue to wear them while they are squeezing my legs and sliding down my rear. I think the visual image evoked by that jingle would be more powerful and effective had it said “we’re tighter than **compression** **hose** two sizes small.” For those of us who have twisted, turned, and gyrated ourselves into an aerobic frenzy trying to get those things on WITHOUT GETTING THEM TWISTED, we know what tight means - quite a funny sight.

I can remember a rather embarrassing episode where I literally pulled a hole in the thigh of a pair of stockings while my family was enjoying dinner at a Chinese restaurant one Sunday afternoon. To this day I still don’t know how I did it. The restaurant was located in a shopping strip, and there was a small ‘dollar store’ located a few doors down. I gingerly walked to that store as the hole continued to inch its way down my leg. The lady behind the register directed me to the very limited selection of women’s pantyhose. By limited I mean they sold only one color (black) in only one size (the package gave no indication). I shouldn’t complain; they were only a dollar, but you do get what you pay for. I went into the public restroom in the store and put them on. Even after pulling them up as tightly and as carefully as I could, they still only just came up over my hips. I debated putting the others back on, but by now they were unraveling on the floor. Through all of this I never even considered just going barelegged.

The changing room was large, so I could walk around and try out the new pantyhose. Every time I took a step forward, they would slip down below my hips. When I say slip down, I mean waaay down. There was no nylon or support in them at all. I don’t really know what they were made of. I knew that if I walked out of that store like that, by the time I reached my car, those stockings would be puddled around my ankles, and my husband would accuse me of doing a hilarious looking “Carol Burnett as the cleaning woman” routine. I just needed something/anything to keep them up. I began to rummage around in my purse, and I found what I thought just might work: a black binder clip like the ones sold at office supply stores. Eureka!! Thank God it was a small one and not jumbo sized. I pulled those pantyhose back up, grabbed the front waistband of my underwear and attached them to the front waistband of the pantyhose with that binder clip. Problem solved. New problem – I can’t walk and bend my knees. No worry. I don’t have that far to go. I **proudly** walked out of that bathroom **straight legged**, thanked the cashier for her help, and kept my head held high because I was not walking out in public with a run in my stockings!!!!

If we will be united as women, we will be a tight knit force (just like those pantyhose) that makes an impact in our communities. However, if we allow our circle of sisterhood to become plagued with division and strife, our efforts to impact the lives of others will be weak and less fruitful.

SISTERS IN LIFE[[1]](#endnote-2)

Undaunted by the division and strife that caused the house of the United States of America to be divided against itself during the Civil War and subsequent Reconstruction years, two school teachers from Massachusetts ventured south in 1879 to conduct a first person study of the living conditions of freedmen. Their names were Sophia B. Packard and Harriet E. Giles. Although they were born only 5 miles from each other in Salem, Massachusetts, Sophia and Harriet first met each other at New Salem Academy where Harriet was a student and Sophia was the principal. This unusual friendship would last nearly 40 years until Miss Packard’s death in 1891. These co-laborers for the cause of education were horrified by the illiteracy and degrading living conditions that were commonplace within the Negro community of that day. It was primarily the desire to do something about the lack of educational opportunity for black women that motivated them to return to Boston to petition the Woman’s American Baptist Home Mission Society (WABHMS) to financially and prayerfully support the opening of a school for African American women and girls in Georgia. Their request was granted, and in 1881 Misses Packard and Giles moved to Atlanta.

With a new vision burning within and a $100 donation from the congregation at First Baptist Church of Medford, Massachusetts, these two women opened the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary on April 11, 1881 in the basement of Friendship Baptist Church with 11 women in attendance. Unified in their endeavors and tireless in their devotion to the students, Sophia and Harriet held prayer meetings and conducted Sunday Schools in addition to teaching in the school. Enrollment at the school increased rapidly, and the basement was soon overflowing. The need for larger facilities was imminent. In 1882 the American Baptist Home Mission Society (parent to WABHMS) made a down payment on a permanent site for the school, and in February 1883 the school was relocated to its new nine acre site. Financial gifts and contributions from various sources kept the operating costs manageable; however, more support was needed. Spurred on by the school’s success, their will to succeed, and the vision they both shared, Sophia and Harriet continued their fundraising efforts up North. It was during a church conference at Erie Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio, that these two reformers met John D. Rockefeller. Mr. Rockefeller was so impressed with all that Sophia and Harriet were accomplishing, he agreed to pay the remaining balance on the property. In 1884 they expressed their gratitude and appreciation to the Rockefellers by changing the name of the school to Spelman Seminary in honor of the parents of his wife, Laura Spelman Rockefeller.

In 1888 the school was granted a state charter, and Sophia served as president and treasurer of the board of trustees until her death. Harriet succeeded her in the role of president and served faithfully for the next 18 years. Under the leadership of Sophia Packard and Harriet Giles the school flourished. During the first 10 years of Spelman Seminary, 800 students were enrolled, 30 teachers were employed and the property the school owned was valued at $90,000. The name of the school was officially changed to Spelman College in 1924.

Humble beginnings? Yes. Humble vision? No. Perseverance? Yes. Life changing, community impacting results that would shape an entire segment of the population? Most definitely. Worth the sacrifice and singular focus of two dedicated women? Priceless.

**Take 5: Do you realize how influential your life can be in making your community a better place?**

1. Spelman College Archives [↑](#endnote-ref-2)