

new start for single moms

participant's guide

about the author

An effective speaker, writer, and teacher, **Diane Strack** has been involved in various aspects of women's ministry for thirty years. She is the founder and author of *New Start for Single Moms*, a highly successful mentoring and Bible study program. With her husband of thirty-five years, Dr. Jay Strack, she co-founded Student Leadership University, a global, comprehensive leadership training program for students. Diane is the coauthor of *Good Kids Who Do Bad Things* and the *Experience Scripture* study guides, including *Worship in the Storm*. She is also the contributing editor of the *IMPACT Student Bible*. Utilizing her background as an author, teacher, and life management facilitator, Diane has the ability to present both the practical and inspirational in a unique way that impacts lives. She is the proud mom of two daughters, Missy and Christina, who both serve in ministry, mother-in-law of Reverend Brent Crowe, and grandmother to Charis Rose and Gabriel Joseph Crowe.

special thanks

Heartfelt love and thanks to the many friends and staff of First Baptist Orlando who joined me in the call to minister to single-parent families, and whose dedication in time and love has made *New Start for Single Moms* a success.

Special gratitude to Dr. David Ferguson who gave me an understanding of relational Christianity in its purest form.

Thank you to my husband of thirty-five years, Jay, and my daughters, Missy and Chris, my greatest encouragers and the joys of my life.

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DIANE STRACK



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO BEIJING

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New Start for Single Moms Participant's Guide

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one

let go of the past: take hold of the future

The LORD says, “Forget what happened before, and do not think about the past. Look at the new thing I am going to do. It is already happening. Don’t you see it? I will make a road in the desert and rivers in the dry land.” (Isaiah 43:18–19 NCV)

The story of Abraham, Sarah (or Sarai), and Hagar is the story of victims, villains, and volunteers. It is much like your story or the stories of others you know. The good news is that a life of victory is available to everyone and anyone!

Sarai, Abram’s wife, had no children . . . [she] said to Abram, “Look, the LORD has not allowed me to have children, so have sexual relations with my slave girl.” . . . Abram did what Sarai said . . . and she (Hagar) became pregnant. . . . Then Sarai said to Abram, “This is your fault.” . . . Then Sarai was hard on Hagar, and Hagar ran away. (Genesis 16:1–6 NCV)

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It sounded like a good idea at the time. Sarah thought she needed to help God keep His promise, so she came up with a plan. Do you ever feel God isn't paying attention and take matters in your own hands? Although you may mean well, trouble usually follows.

Look at God's promise to Abraham in Genesis chapter 15: "You will have a son." This was not a "maybe"; it was a sure promise. One thing you must believe as you start a new journey with God is that He does what He says He will do, but He has a certain timing for the events of your life just as He did in Sarah's life.

There is no doubt that Hagar was a victim in this situation. To cope with the stress, she ran away to the wilderness—probably to hide, possibly to think, maybe to try and punish Abraham and Sarah. For whatever reason, she found herself alone in the wilderness.

Have you ever felt that you were in the wilderness of aloneness? It is a horrible feeling, isn't it? No direction for life and the feeling that no one cares.

Did God have a plan for Hagar? Yes, He did. Does He have a plan for you? Yes, He does! Genuine, growing relationships with God and other persons are the sole cure for aloneness. Other behaviors might mask aloneness, but only God's plan can heal it. A genuine relationship is God's idea. He created the desire within us because He longs to be intimate with us, His creation. It can and should be experienced in every dimension of our being—spirit, soul, and body—in a continual way, never dependent on feeling or circumstances. Don't be willing to settle for imposters such as sexual or emotional intimacy or conditional bonding.

the meaning of a genuine relationship

YAD (Hebrew)—*to know deeply*. This word is used in Psalm 139:1–4 to express God's deep personal awareness and understanding of us. He knew us

let go of the past: take hold of the future

from our mother's womb and is acquainted with our every thought, emotion, and motivation. And the good news is that His love is unconditional, meaning that He loves us deeply even though He knows our innermost thoughts.

O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.
(Psalm 139:1–4)

SAKAN (Hebrew)—*living together, to make a home together.* God wants to dwell in your heart and be the foundation for your home. This beneficial or caring involvement is the hallmark of a genuine relationship.

And this is the reason: God lives forever and is holy. He is high and lifted up. He says, "I live in a high and holy place, but I also live with people who are sad and humble. I give new life to those who are humble and to those whose hearts are broken. (Isaiah 57:15 NCV)

Here is the message you must believe: the holy, all-powerful God is willing to help you, He is able to help you, and *He will most certainly help you!*

Many adults fear a genuine, intimate relationship because they were hurt either as children by someone who knew them well and abused or took advantage of them, or as an adult by someone with whom they were in a close relationship. God wants to heal your hurt through an understanding of His unconditional love and His deep, personal care for you.

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If you feel like you are in a desert today, there is good news! God is making provision to give you great joy, an abundant life.

The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a desert spring along the road to Shur. The angel said to her, “Hagar, Sarai’s servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?”

“I am running away from my mistress,” she replied. (Genesis 16:7–8 NLT)

What a beautiful picture of our proactive God! Our precious Lord knew Hagar was in such despair she could not come to Him, so He went to her. Notice that God asked Hagar, “Where have you come from, and where are you going?” (v. 8). Why ask if He already knew? The same reason He asks you now where you are going: we must always stop to think about where our reactions will take us and what we will accomplish through our choices.

God is asking you, “Where have you come from and where are you going?” Wherever you are at this moment, He is ready to meet you there, just as you are—but He loves you too much to leave you there.

And the angel also said, “You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means ‘God hears’), for the LORD has heard about your misery.” (Genesis 16:11 NLT)



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Hagar sat in pain, feeling as though no one cared, when suddenly the announcement was made: “You are to name him Ishmael, (which means ‘God hears’)” (v. 11). How those two words must have given her joy and strength. God hears! Every time she called the name of *Ishmael*, she remembered, *God hears my thoughts*. Understanding God’s personal love and care for your life is a powerful healer and gives confidence for the future. In fact, with that short conversation, Hagar was able to go home and resume her life.

But then fourteen years passed by and Hagar, a single mom, began to be hated by her mistress.



Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. (Genesis 21:2 NCV)

Isaac grew . . . But Sarah saw Ishmael making fun of Isaac . . . So Sarah said to Abraham, “Throw out this slave woman and her son.” . . . Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a leather bag full of water. He gave them to Hagar and sent her away . . . Hagar went and wandered in the desert. (Genesis 21:8–10, 14 NCV)

Once again Abraham listened to Sarah’s reactive personality and sent Hagar out to the wilderness, hoping to end the problem by throwing it out. She was abandoned, literally tossed out into the desert. Her child support payment was some food and a skin of water. Not much to start with, even less to raise a child on, and her bitterness and despair continued to grow.

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When the water was gone, she left the boy in the shade of a bush. Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards away. “I don’t want to watch the boy die,” she said, as she burst into tears. (Genesis 21:15–16 NLT)



This time Hagar didn’t just visit the wilderness of despair, she moved in. Notice that *she sat down*; in other words, she gave up. Depression overwhelmed her, and Hagar turned her back on the child as she wept uncontrollably. She lost all hope when she allowed the barren wilderness around her to move into her mind and heart. Many of us can relate to this feeling. Let’s see what God did for Hagar and what He will do for you.

the God who hears

God heard the boy crying, and God’s angel called to Hagar from heaven. He said, “What is wrong, Hagar? Don’t be afraid! God has heard the boy crying there.” . . . Then God showed Hagar a well of water. So she went to the well and filled her bag with water and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy as he grew up. (Genesis 21:17–21 NCV)

Again the Lord asked questions because He wanted Hagar to think through the future. He knows our fears, our loneliness, our despair. But, He asks, “Do you know about Me? Do you know My love and provision?”

let go of the past: take hold of the future



Verse 19 is the KEY. God opened her eyes and she saw the well of water! If you will allow Him to open your eyes to His provision for you, you will also see the flow of blessings that the Lord longs to give.

Man gave her a bottle of water. God gave her a well!

He wants to do the same for you by giving you a new view of life! No longer should you focus on the wilderness and the empty bottle. Instead, He wants to show you a well of peace, joy, and life that will never run dry. Listen as He calls to you from heaven, as He speaks to you through His Word:

The LORD says, “Forget about what happened before, and do not think about the past. Look at the new thing I am going to do. It is already happening. Don’t you see it? I will make a road in the desert and rivers in the dry land.” (Isaiah 43:18–19 NCV)

The Lord promises to provide for our needs and to give us an abundance of life. We must be willing to trust Him because He cares for us and sees our future as clearly as we can see yesterday.

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

Understand the scope of that verse: ALL of your needs—emotional, spiritual, relational, and physical. All of this is met through the riches available in Christ Jesus.

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Abraham sent her away; God came looking for her.

Man gave her a bottle of water; God gave her a well.

Hagar's extreme need became God's great opportunity. Your need is God's great opportunity. He longs to do a new thing for you. See, He has already begun!

We have talked about where you are coming from; now let us focus on where you are going.

*“Being proactive means more than taking initiative.
It means that we take responsibility for our lives.
Instead of blaming circumstances, conditions,
or chance for our behavior, we choose our
own responses and make our own decisions.”*

—STEPHEN COVEY

circle two or three LIFE AREAS
that you would like to begin a change in:

SPIRITUAL:

Intimacy with God, prayer life, studying the Bible

FAMILY:

Relationships with siblings, parents, children, father of your children

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Skills, hobbies, sports, seminars, classes

LEISURE TIME/SOCIAL:

Friendships, clubs, groups, activities

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PROFESSIONAL:

Career development, education

CHURCH/COMMUNITY:

Leadership in activities and events, volunteering

HEALTH:

Nutrition, exercise, weight management

HOUSEHOLD:

Organizing, cleaning, decorating

FINANCIAL:

Financial freedom, saving, investing, budgeting

The Dream Worksheet is the tool that will allow you to break your goals down into achievable steps and empower you to make your dreams come true! Use the worksheets on the following pages and follow the Sample Dream Worksheet as a guideline.



SAMPLE dream worksheet

*“A goal is a dream
with detailed direction
and a deadline.”*


—JAY STRACK

WHY DO I WANT TO DO THIS? Select one of the Life Areas and write two or three sentences that describe what you want to change about this area of your life.

FINANCIAL SECURITY: Because God’s part is to be faithful to provide
and my part is to be faithful with what He provides, preparing for the
future for my children, and able to live without worry or fear.

WHAT DO I WANT TO DO? Get very specific about the goal and describe it in a few sentences for your own understanding.

To successfully live within my financial means; to provide for my
children; to be prepared for financial emergencies such as repairs
and medical bills; to live peaceably without fear of a budget crisis.



WHEN SHOULD THE OVERALL GOAL BE COMPLETED? A goal must have detailed direction and a deadline to remove it from the pile of *somedays*. Assign a realistic date and write it down to keep yourself accountable.

Twelve weeks from today

HOW I PLAN TO ACHIEVE MY DREAM: By breaking down the goal into small steps, your dream becomes attainable. Write out the steps and assign an order to each one of 1, 2, 3, etc. Then assign a deadline date to each step. Note that flexibility is key. The deadline is for your own accountability, but if circumstances cause you to miss it, make a written change. Never abandon your goals or steps.

ORDER	INTERMEDIATE STEPS	DEADLINE
1.	fill out my budget sheet	this week
2.	pray in faith: Philippians 4:6–8	every week
3.	identify needs vs. wants	within the next 2 weeks
4.	faithful in giving back: Malachi 3:10	begin next paycheck
5.	continue to give my best: Matthew 25:14–30	every day
6.	make appointment with financial advisor	next week
7.	incorporate changes	in the next 4 weeks
8.	start an envelope system: Proverbs 6:6–8	week 8



dream worksheet

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my 10-week commitment to *new start*

*“God-confidence reckons that we, in ourselves,
have huge limitations, but that God does not.
God-confidence is the belief that we can do
anything God gives us to do.”*

—CAROL KENT & KAREN LEE-THORP

Believing that God has a wonderful plan for my life,
I pledge to complete the ten weekly sessions
through the *New Start for Single Moms* program.
I will give my best, by faith,
because God has already given His Best for me.

Signature of mom

Date

Signature of mentor

Date

The LORD says, “Forget what happened before, and do
not think about the past. Look at the new thing I am going
to do. It is already happening. Don’t you see it?”

(Isaiah 43:18–19 NCV)