

Endorsements

“With raw honesty and great courage, Michele tells her redemptive story so that we might find hope and freedom to step into God’s purpose for our life. Well done, Michele.”

— RUTH GRAHAM

author of *Fear Not Tomorrow, God Is Already There*

“If you think for a moment that you have out-sinned God’s forgiveness, meet Michele’s Savior. With startling clarity and heart-jolting honesty, Michele’s story is a stunning window of hope. It’s time to step out of our musty hiding places and join this brave, broken, redeemed woman in the light.”

— PATSY CLAIRMONT

Women of Faith speaker and author of *Kaleidoscope*

“*Untangled* reads like watching a great movie. I was sorry when it ended. Michele’s is a deep, rich, pain-and-glory redemption story. A beauty queen, a harsh childhood, solace under a bed, a beautiful voice. *Untangled* is universal and unique. I lost myself in it and found myself at the end standing on the Rock.”

—VICTORIA JACKSON

actor, writer, and comedian featured
on *Saturday Night Live*

“Thanks, Michele, for leading me safely home with your story.”

— BEBE WINANS

multiple Grammy and Dove
award-winning recording artist

“Some will describe this as an autobiography; others will call it a true-to-life mini novel. To me it will forever be a scalpel in the hand of God. *Untangled* did surgery on me.”

— ALLEN SHAMBLIN

Hall of Fame Songwriter: 2011 Song of the Year CMA, AMA,
and Grammy for “The House That Built Me”

“*Untangled* is a story of redemption told with beautiful transparent stories that boldly reveal Michele’s journey of life to her readers. I love her already! I am thankful for women like Michele who are willing to share the messiness they have endured, ultimately shining a bright light on the Lord’s grace, mercy, and love through their testimonies.”

— SHARI RIGBY

director, author, actress, and speaker

“For everyone who feels like Humpty Dumpty after the fall, my dear friend Michele Pillar has a message for you: The king’s horses and men never had the power to do anything. It’s only the King who can put you back together again. With unusual honesty and candor, Michele allows you a peek into her messy life so we may better see ourselves. *Untangled* is a mirror image of you and me, and a vivid reminder of the marvel of redemption.”

— JOE BATTAGLIA

president, Renaissance Communications,
and author of *The Politically Incorrect Jesus*

“*Untangled* is nothing short of an act of bravery. With a deft pen, Michele allows readers into the hidden, vulnerable places of her life’s story—including both glorious joys and bone-crushing pain. But she doesn’t stop there. Michele goes on to write the anecdote for the secrets that have bound us, and how we can truly live without shame. Don’t miss this book!”

— ALLISON ALLEN
author, speaker, and actor (Broadway, Women of Faith)

“Michele Pillar writes from the heart and lays out a blueprint for untangling our emotions. We have all felt stuck and trapped, like there was no way out. Michele has been there and did find a way through with God. She comes to us with a banner of hope and promises of redemption in *Untangled*.”

— MARGARET PHILLIPS, MS
licensed marital and family therapist

“I was accosted by Michele’s honesty.”

— TIM MARSHALL
Vice President of Distribution, Word International

“*Untangled* grabbed me from page one and wouldn’t let me go!”

— LISA PATTON
author of *Whistlin’ Dixie in a Nor’Easter*

“You will be surprised at the backstory of this pioneering Christian artist. Michele writes with amazing transparency and honesty. Darkness gives way to light. God meets her where she is, a true message of grace.”

— DR. LINDA MINTLE
speaker, BeliefNet blogger, and author of *Letting Go of Worry*

“*Untangled* is sacred. It is the incarnate Word of God fleshed out in the life of a modern-day woman, a woman whose heart and mind (perhaps like yours and mine), knotted through childhood circumstances, is touched by the gentle hands of her Savior—Jesus, bringing beauty from ashes, gladness from mourning, praise from fainting, freedom from prisons in her mind and heart. We all have things to untangle in our lives. God’s heart’s desire is to help us become untangled!”

— LEORA SHANKS
educator

“She dances a jig on a thread of sheer courage, laughing in the face of adversity. I never once felt sorry for her and in fact I envied her journey. Bravo, Michele!”

— GARY KELLER
CEO of Keller Williams International and *New York Times*
bestselling author of *The Millionaire Real Estate Agent*

“She’s untangled! Without it, she NEVER could have written this book. If you feel tangled up in anything, read and find freedom! Grace Chapel will be using *Untangled* in our home groups.”

— PASTOR STEVE BERGER
Grace Chapel, Leiper’s Fork, Tennessee

MICHELE PILLAR

UNTANGLED

THE TRUTH
will set you
FREE

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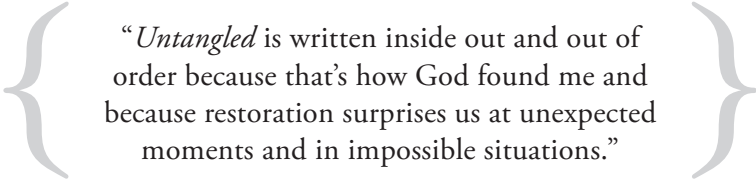
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Dedicated to the Beautiful *One*



“*Untangled* is written inside out and out of order because that’s how God found me and because restoration surprises us at unexpected moments and in impossible situations.”

—Michele Pillar

Foreword

The music industry is full of amazing stories and songs of hope, joy, love, and peace. So many great artists and writers share through song about life, love, and all the other mysteries we, the listeners, get to enjoy. The beauty of music is that it deeply touches a part of our heart that nothing else can.

But rarely, if ever, do we get to look into the beautiful full restoration of someone who as a young, successful Christian artist disappeared and then resurfaced, healed and restored. Very few times do we have the chance to experience and understand what went on beneath the surface, when no one but God was there with that artist.

Now, my precious, longtime friend, Michele Pillar, has done just that—with courage, grace, and hope written into every paragraph. She's back! She's been back for some time now, with a fresh new message of encouragement and restoration and how God, in all of His greatness, never left her side.

In this book, Michele writes about life with a fresh, bold depth of conviction, sincerity, apology, sensitivity, and vulnerability very few have chosen to write about. She will take you on a journey you won't soon forget! She has made the choice to dig deep into her own past, failures, struggles, and issues, thus bringing them into the open, and in doing so, not only helping herself, but helping the rest of us who are struggling to become *Untangled*. Michele's cinematic stories will give many people, who are in the midst of desperation, trying so hard to move

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beyond the wounds of their own past, *hope!* And for those of you who have already found resolve, you will celebrate with her!

In chapter one, Michele opens with such power and visual detail, I could feel her heart pounding, I could smell and taste her desperation, as I read each word. I was tempted to stop reading, but I'm glad I didn't!

What I love even more about this book is that Michele candidly laughs about it all now, and *that* is helping so many who have at one time or another lost their way or feel so endlessly alone in their earthly journey with God.

Michele has always been beautiful to listen to, but she has something more to say here, and I want to listen even more so to it. My friends, I invite you to sit down in your favorite quiet place and take some time to listen as well.

Michele is opening up her heart and soul to you, and I guarantee, her openness will help you in whatever it is you are dealing with.

—Dusty Wells
Senior Director, Sales and Marketing,
Word Entertainment

Chapter 1

YOU CAN'T FRIGHTEN THE DEAD *untangling the knot of hopelessness*

Year: 1985 / **Age:** 30

Place: mom's house in the converted garage

“*Y*ou’ve been nipping at my heels my whole life! I can’t outrun you anymore. Go ahead; show me what you’ve got. Get it over with. Finish me off!” In my mind I was yelling at him at the top of my lungs, but in reality my pleas were barely audible. There was no need for a gag over my mouth or twine as a ligature. He knew it, and so did I, too exhausted now to move, too weak to scream.

The object of my disdain was standing strong and steadfast right in front of me but not close enough for me to take a swing at. Any hope of escape was way out of reach as well. In fact, any hope at all was laughable at this point. He could have leaned in, pressed his nose against mine and breathed his foul breath down the front my neck, and I’d have let him do it. I’d taken guff from him all my life. At one time I had a strong kick. As a kid, I learned how to punch and scratch my way out of his filthy hands and got pretty good at ignoring the manic voices in

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my head. But now my arms felt like lead; so did my legs, soul, and spirit.

I'd never been able to see his face before now—only his handiwork. My life was riddled with it. Considering everything that led up to this moment, it was no surprise he was here and crystal clear in all his ungodly glory. It made perfect sense.

With my mind working in 20/20, it was a relief to finally put a face on the one who'd caused me so much pain. He was as real as the dirt on the floor and the mold in the air. Questioning his validity was a moot point now. An ugly smirk was stretched across his even uglier face. He was leaning against the far wall like he was holding it up. He reeked of self-confidence. His arms were folded Indian-style across his rail-thin chest. His legs were crossed, too, with his right foot resting atop his left one. His body language spoke sheer satisfaction.

My words felt feeble yet were somehow sharp and to the point with the intent of egging him on. I wasn't kidding. The whole thing needed to end this night, one way or another. I wanted more from this guy than the idle threats I'd put up with forever; I wanted him to make his move.

With my head in my hands I asked myself over and over again, "How on Earth did I get here? How did I get back to this hellhole of a house I grew up in?"

I was sitting on the edge of the twin bed I'd hidden under as a child and remembered how this rickety thing had once been a friend to me: a safe, dark place of refuge. Whenever my parents went on a full-fledged binge, or just threw back a couple of vodka tonics, our tiny house backslid into a five-alarm meltdown. I was well versed at reading everyone like a book. And thank God for long legs that winged me to safety more times than I could count.

When the yelling and screaming hit the three-quarter mark,

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my mother would take off down the hall, headed straight for the coat closet. That's where she kept her implements of torture—an ample supply of unoccupied wire hangers. Her trail of bobbing, weaving, and bumping against the walls as she went knocked our family photos right off their nails. One by one they hit the wood floor, and glass shattered everywhere. As each frame broke into a million pieces, it was as if that family member was shouting out Mom's exact location to me. They always helped me, letting me know just how much longer I had to find a hiding place. By the time she slammed open the closet door and fished out one of those thin, nasty hangers, I was safe and sound, hiding under my dear friend of a twin bed. I'd fling myself under it and lie on my tummy, quiet as a mouse. With my heart pounding in my ears, it was hard for me to hear where she was. But her shouts of "Michele! Where are you?" always gave her away.

That's when I did all I could do—pray. I prayed it the same way every single time. "God, please don't let anything happen to me." Before I could say "Amen," a peace covered me like a blanket. This is my first memory of God. Our family didn't go to church, so God came to me. He found me under that bed. He met me there every time. My mother never thought to look under it. Not once. Sad to say, I didn't always make it to my bed on time, but when I did, God made me invisible.

But what was I thinking? If not for the bruising, did I really need to hide? Most times my mom and dad were so engrossed in their own insanity there was no need to worry about little ole' me. I could have plopped down on the sofa and watched it all play out like a tennis match on quaaludes, and they wouldn't have noticed me sitting there. But I ran anyway, afraid of the crossfire. Heavy objects were known to fly without warning. Or

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I ran because I thought I was somehow to blame. Now that I think about it, any little person nearby could be pulled into the line of reasoning, without cause or notice. And there would be no correct answers in that interrogation. Since I was the youngest of four girls, I was an easy target. My sisters always fled, except for Madeline. If she was around at the time, she protected me. If not, I was left behind to face the music alone. I was too young to run away from home, so I ran up . . . up the stairs and straight to where God lived, under my unmade bed.

But now at thirty years of age, finding myself back here sitting on this pee-stained mattress didn't feel anything like a sanctuary to me. I was eighteen when I left this house the first time. My newfound faith in Jesus carried me far, far away from here. Since that time, I'd owned my own home a couple of times over, had a booming career as a Christian recording artist, enjoying all the trappings that came with it. Just eight miles up the road and two blocks from the Pacific Ocean stood a sweet cottage with the names Mr. and Mrs. Pillar on the mailbox. Two ancient avocado trees stood strong and tall in our backyard and gave us more guacamole than we could eat. We had friends—too many to count—and a faith that seemed strong and true.

So, what on Earth could have driven me back to this house of shame and torment? My guilt-ridden mother wasn't asking for details yet. She'd been down this road before, welcoming back any of my three older sisters when their lives fell apart. I'd always thought I was different than they were. I never believed I'd have a reason to return to this awful place.

But "never" came a'callin'. A few nights earlier I packed a small bag and drove away from my life in Huntington Beach. I watched my pretty little cottage fade to black in the rearview mirror of my late model Volvo.

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Could I have grabbed a nice hotel room instead? Or better still, could I have afforded a furnished apartment to think things over? Certainly.

But the deep feeling of shame and grief over what I'd done to annihilate my marriage covered me like a shroud from head to toe. The sting of disappointment with myself and of disappointing God told me I wasn't deserving of a respectable place of comfort. After leaving my husband, going someplace clean and nice didn't dawn on me. At the time, I didn't understand why I moved back here. But now I realize that, in order to pay penance, I marched straight back to the only place I felt I deserved. This, the house I grew up in.

The phone was silent. The friends were gone. The husband was angry, reeling and out there covering his tracks against me. And it hurt, but I understood. I'd messed up. Big time. And losing everything—my marriage, my ministry, and every friend—all at once was more than I could take; so earlier in the day I purchased an extra-large bottle of sleeping pills and was fully ready to swallow every single one of them.

The only friend that showed up to my going-away party was the horrid creature, the father of lies, standing in the far corner of my old bedroom. I wasn't asleep. This wasn't a nightmare. It was as if I was dreaming—wide-awake. I'd never been one to drink—not with alcoholics scattered throughout my family tree. I'd never been one to take pills. I'd never smoked anything. I wasn't attracted to the paranormal and didn't have a tendency to blame Satan for my troubles, but I may have underestimated him.

I wasn't hallucinating. I wasn't alone. This cinematic show-off's performance was bigger than life—mine anyway. This was personal and with a specific goal in mind. Yet, if any outside observer had stumbled into the room, they would have seen

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nothing but a girl sitting on a bed at the end of her rope. But in my mind, it was all loud and clear. Maybe it was just every low-life, insecure thought about myself I'd ever had, manifesting as a twisted daydream. Or maybe it was the not-flesh-and-blood warfare the Bible tells us we fight against every single day. Either way, in this my darkest hour, darkness himself showed up in living black and hideous.

I could feel what he felt. He stood immovable, dressed in his full regalia, something that's both impossible to explain and impossible to forget. The God-forsaken creature pointed his long, bony finger at me, began laughing hysterically, and answered my "How did I get here?" question with, "Who did you think you were anyway?" He elevated his craggy voice to a shout. "*You thought you could leave here?!*" He threw his head back and howled at the moon that was just coming out to play. "You can't leave this house; you ARE this house! Everything about it runs through your pathetic little veins! Where's your Jesus, your so-called savior, now? You've traveled the world doin' your thing for him!" He smiled and took a second to reload the hole in his face, "You gave him your youth, you gave him your voice, and *for what?*"

The demon laughed again and again and taunted, "You thought you could dress up like a Christian and convince the world that you're better than all this?"

His eyes slowly surveyed the dilapidated filth I inhabited, but then snapped back at me. "You gave your god everything. Where is HE now? You're right back where you started, little girl. You didn't get anywhere! You'll never get anywhere!"

I believed him. Every single word of it.

He was saying everything I'd been thinking, everything that had driven me back to this house. I just sat there, looking down

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at the cracked linoleum floor, nodding my head over and over in agreement with him. I felt like I had a cannonball-sized hole in my soul. I didn't have an ounce of kick left in me. I wasn't the slightest bit afraid of him or the situation. That's how I knew I was already dead. Under normal circumstances I would have been scared to death, but you can't frighten the dead. That's how I felt—dead. That's what I wanted to be—dead. I was too tired to feel or fear anything and too spent to have dreamt this all up. Every failure, every fear of success, every rotten and lonely day I'd ever known paled in comparison to this one. I was so tired of expecting more out of myself than I could deliver.

"You're right!" I told the thing. "You're absolutely right." I said it again and again. My voice softened, and I asked him, begged and pleaded with him, "Please, just help me do this. Let's just do this . . . okay?" I whispered. I so hoped this *deus ex machina* could come through for me. I'd fought this house my whole life and everything it stood for. I couldn't come back here, yet I hadn't the strength to go anywhere else.

The "how did I get here?" question kept racing through my mind. The sun was setting, and I didn't kick on the lamp. For the first time in my life I couldn't hear God's voice. I couldn't feel one ounce of God around me or inside of me.

I'd served Him, taught thousands of people about His abilities, powers, love, and forgiveness. But He didn't seem to be anywhere near me now. Only months ago my life looked as though it was in order. Now all I could picture were bowling pins standing upright; then, without warning, they were crashing at random, as the heavier-than-they-are bowling ball hit them with such force that there's nothing they could do but go flying—hitting walls, hitting each other, then falling silent.

The quiet was like nothing I'd ever known.

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For years I had a schedule that was impossible to meet. Interviews, more than I could fulfill. Even now there were concert dates on the books I'd have to carry out with people like the Billy Graham Association, Oral Roberts University, and Houston First Baptist Church. Limos and town cars took me anywhere I needed to go. Family and friends helped out by doing things I didn't have time for, like laundry, reading boxes of fan mail, even helping me shop for clothes to wear to the next big event.

I ate out 99 percent of the time and then had to work out at the gym at least four days a week to wear a size four. At five foot nine, that's nothing less than unrelenting slavery. I traveled from city to city two hundred days a year. Only months before, I'd been on the Grammy Awards telecast in front of millions of people. Michael Jackson wore a glove on one hand, while I was dressed in a classic Halston gown. Both Annie Lennox and Cindy Lauper told me during the show that I seemed "different" from the others. I was thankful Jesus was there guiding me, shining in His own gentlemanly fashion. I truly felt called of God to carry His light wherever I went, and I loved doing it. This calling possessed me from the first moment I asked Him into my heart in 1973.

I'd worked hard to fulfill every request anyone asked of me. The president of the record company told me I was the hardest working artist he'd ever signed to the label. And, yes, I enjoyed the accolades that followed. These pats on the back were perks for a little girl who grew up in emotionally and spiritually bankrupt surroundings. A girl who, when she found Jesus, found the Father she'd never had.

What else was there for her to sing about? What else mattered? What else was more important than Jesus? I had no choice. I wanted no other. I hit the highways and byways at the

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age of nineteen, when contemporary christian music was but an embryo. I—and artists like the 2nd Chapter of Acts, Keith Green, and Phil Keaggy—sang in church basements from the bottom of our hearts. The Maranatha! Music praise albums were just beginning, and little did I know the solos I sang with braces on my teeth would one day be deemed classics and would outlive me. Amy Grant was still in high school and was listening to the LP Erick Nelson and I recorded for Maranatha! called *The Misfit*. We sang for pennies and never thought to ask for more. Lives were being changed, and so were ours.

At first I thought I could keep up the pace. I felt powerful and authentic. But as time passed, I was elevated higher than my roots could steady me—up, up, up on a spiritual tightrope. I found it difficult to believe my own press, because it was larger than life and running on ahead of me. I eventually knew that one good gust of wind would blow me off the rope, and I'd topple to the ground. Yet, at the same time, I thought I could do anything in Jesus' name. My motto was "He is strong in my weakness." He was so amazing in what He did through me! I just kept praying that my essence could catch up with my public image.

But now, sitting on this bed, I couldn't lift my head from my hands. I wondered if the real truth was I'd been running on my own steam the whole time? Running to get away from this house or just running from myself, really. Was Jesus real? Or did I make the whole thing up?

The only logical thing to do was to take my own life, because there seemed to be nothing of value left of me. In self-detonating my marriage, I ruined my reputation as a minister of the gospel. Local stores caught wind of the gossip and pulled my music from their shelves. None of them called me to ask the validity of the

rumors. It was just as well they didn't. I wouldn't have had the strength to answer their calls. And the worst part was, I had absolutely no idea why I'd done what I'd done.

Why such a knee-jerk move? I asked myself. *I mean, an affair, Michele. Really? What an idiot. You are beyond disgusting.* I condemned myself. I thought surely God felt the same about me. Surely He walked away, too, and for the same reason everyone else did. They tiptoed away, truthfully. They left in disgust. I was not pleasing to them now. I was not productive any longer. I was a liability, a disappointment, and an embarrassment. I was disgusted with myself and wanted to walk away from me too.

So tonight I would walk away from me.

Today I was on the cover of *Today's Christian Woman Magazine*; tomorrow I'd be known as the Christian singer who copped out and killed herself.

In 1 Samuel 5:1, King Saul's public image was more important to him than anything else. He didn't take the time to build the inner strength necessary to lead the people. This deceptive road led him to tragedy, the taking of his own life. We humans are all alike; no matter what century we live in, we tend to gravitate toward shortcuts. Even though I started out serving God with vim and vigor, spiritual sloth had lulled me to sleep and straight back to this horrid house.

My pseudo-support system of managers, booking agents, and assistants was long gone. This demon was the only one managing me now, encouraging me to go ahead and do exactly what King Saul had done. In my mind, my suicide was a foregone conclusion.

The sun was fully set now. The room was pitch-black, and this darkness was heavier than any I'd ever known. My make-it-or-break-it moment was now. There was nothing more to talk about.

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I lifted my head, stared down the demon, and said, "Go ahead, take me out."

Looking at the pills and imagining how they'd feel going down my throat, I thought about my mom and how sad she'd be.

With one last glance back in time, I thought of the letters.

There had been a dramatic change in the fan mail over the past few months. Instead of writing and asking for an autographed photo or a specific recording, now people were expressing concern. Over and over they said they were praying for me. "Are you all right?" was the question scribed on page after page by countless people. The letters were frantic in nature, and they apologized for asking such personal questions. Yet their concerns wouldn't let them not ask. The letters made me nervous. The authors seemed to know more about my future than I did.

I rolled the pills around and around in my hand. "Did God send His people ahead to fight for me, knowing this night would come?" I considered the idea.

"None of that matters now, Michele." The enemy pressed, persistent.

I closed my eyes, placed the first pill in my mouth, and whispered, "I don't want this, but there's no other way."

I sat still, stalling, fighting with myself. Feeling the air going in and out of my lungs, hearing my heart beating its last beats with the bitter taste of death in my mouth. With eyes clenched shut, I dug deep down inside hoping to find one more ounce of courage.

Then, without warning, someone sat down next to me. The person's depression in the mattress shocked me. I gasped, embarrassed, or the way you would feel if someone shook you from a deep sleep.

Who knows I'm here . . . like this? I thought. Adrenaline shot through me like lightning.

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Whoever it was sat down so close to me you couldn't have slid a playing card between us.

I opened my eyes.

It was Jesus. His hands were clasped together. He was leaning forward, His elbows resting on the tops of His thighs. He wasn't looking at me. His eyes were fixed on that demon still standing across the room.

Jesus was as still as stone.

It was as if He was waiting for something, but for what, I didn't have a clue.

Silent and fixed, I gazed at Him with no desire to look anywhere else. His face was the most beautiful face I'd ever seen, yet not by human standards. My face, on the other hand, was burning from too many tears. He straightened up and gently put His arm around my shoulders. I tucked myself under His arm. He was as real and touchable as the vile creature had been. That dark presence, by the way, was long gone. The Light sitting beside me had swallowed it up. There was no space left in the room for anything or anyone else but us.

How my mind's eye saw all this so clearly, I can't fully explain; I only know it took place when my life was hanging in the balance, and this was how God fought for me. He allowed me to see a glimpse of how dark darkness is. Then He let me see Him, that He was bigger than my choices. He was bigger than my darkness and my mistakes. I am—and forever will be—grateful.

I had confessed Jesus as my Savior thirteen years earlier. I'm sure He looked beyond my first prayer to this moment. He knew that this would be the day I'd need a Savior. As I look back, I see that God (although in total disagreement with my choices) was not ruffled, rattled, or repulsed by me because of my choices, any of them. The blood of Jesus was my camouflage

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to the Father. No other covering or cleansing is an equal advocate. Even while I sat there with dirty hair and with mascara running down my cheeks, guilty from head to toe, to Him I was His bride dressed in spotless white! This clear photograph of God's perfect love for me will never fade from my memory or tarnish with time.

I spat out the pill that was melting in my mouth. Then I opened the empty bottle and dropped my life back inside the plastic container, one pill at a time.

God meets helpless people every day who have no time to spare, no time to pray, no time to make it right, as when driving on frozen bridges and ice-paved roads at midnight. He wraps His arms around the chest of the doe just as she's ready to leap in front of our cars. He stands with us when we're crumpled next to a hospital bed praying for our loved ones, or when we're on the gurney ourselves. And when we stand over a casket we never dreamed we'd stand over, He stands beside us. And yet again, the night our spouse leaves us, never to return, Jesus is there—when we feel Him and when we don't.

The next thing I saw during this encounter was a ball of string. I looked down, and in my lap sat a large, very tangled ball of tiny threads, the size of a basketball. The threads that made the sphere were knotted beyond what anyone could or would try to untangle. It made me think of the time I found a fourteen-karat gold chain in the bottom of my jewelry chest, tangled beyond its worth, so I threw it away. That's what I wanted to do with my life, but God had much different plans.

Jesus looked down at the ball of string, then looked me straight in the eye. *Michele, give Me your life.*

I smiled a smile soaked in tears. "I did that years ago. It didn't work for me. I am so sorry," I answered in apology.

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He repeated Himself, *Give Me your life, Michele. I want the whole thing.*

I knew what He was asking for, but He explained it to me anyway. *I want every part of you. The parts you've never given Me, the parts you've hidden. The ones that were Mine that you gave away and the ones stolen from you. Even the parts you don't know how to give Me, I want it all. There are pieces of your life, like the threads in this tangled mass, I've never been allowed to touch, to untangle, to change, to heal. There are crimps buried beneath threads, and because you can't see them, you pretend they don't exist. The knots and snags in your life are holding you back, catching you off guard, and keeping you from becoming all I designed and created you to be. It's time to give Me the whole thing, to give Me your whole life.*

He took my hands and placed one on top and the other underneath the ball of string and continued. *There is work to be done. We'll do whatever it takes to release and untangle each knot.*

He unwrapped me from His loving grasp and placed His hands on top of mine and said something I will never forget. *I could untangle them, all of them with one touch, but you wouldn't know how they got tangled to begin with and would walk out of here and tangle them all again. So, I am asking you to work together with Me until every last thread is free. There is wisdom, knowledge, and healing at the end of every knot. For the first time in your life, I want to show you the true definition of grace. I'm giving you back the parts of your life that are yours to keep track of and yet ours to take care of. You'll do your part, and I'll do Mine. Some of them are the tender threads of your youth, taken from you when you were too weak to hold on to them. Together we will reclaim and rebuild what is rightfully yours. It will take a lifetime, Michele.*

I sat still and in amazement. Nothing had ever been made so clear to me. It felt so good to feel my life in my hands again.

YOU CAN'T FRIGHTEN THE DEAD

And in His. The life I'd lost somewhere along the way. The life I almost threw away. Yes, it was tangled, but for the first time, I didn't care about that. I had it back. My tangled life was right where it belonged, safe in between God's hands and mine.

I asked Jesus, "Will we be staying here in this house the whole time?"

He smiled. *You don't belong to this house. You are not this house. You are Mine, Michele. In time you will walk out of here, never to return.*

Then we just sat together. Quiet.

He said, *Always remember. Remember this, Michele. Remember us.*

"How could I forget You? You're the only One I know. The only One I have. The only One who came here. Well, You and that . . . thing."

Then I cried.

Jesus rested His chin on the crown of my head, wrapped His arms around my heaving shoulders, and let me cry. I cried in thankfulness, in regret, and alas, I cried in sweet relief. There seemed to be a plan. A plan for a future and maybe even for His glory. But the only thing that mattered now was that He was with me and would stay, no matter what. I'd really never known that before. Not until now. Maybe all that had happened could somehow matter. Maybe my life could finally stop hurting.

When I had no more tears to cry, I collapsed into my pillow and tried to get some sleep. The battle was over. New life could begin.

Every detail of this encounter is as clear in my mind today as it was when it happened in 1985. Just like those who see Jesus while on operating tables and in ambulances, I saw Him.

Jesus came to me. He saved my life that night.

Was I "saved" before that time? I thought so. I spoke to Him,

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lived for Him. I sang about Him all over the world. But did I really know Him and trust Him? And did He know me? This is the question I wonder about to this day. I'm not 100 percent certain of the answer. Thankfully, it doesn't matter now.

This I know. I needed to know the Jesus who sat beside me on my bed. I needed to be certain He knew me, all of me. The devils know who He is and they tremble.¹ This makes me think of the sad story when Jesus said to the person at the threshold of eternity, "I never knew you; depart from Me."²

That person called Him Lord and had done miracles in His name. Yet somehow, Jesus didn't know him. I scared myself when I behaved in 1985 as if I'd never known Jesus, holding sleeping pills in the palm of my hand. At best, I was dancing on the edge of grace. At worst, He did not know me yet. Although I was doing many things in His name before that time, I don't think I was doing the will of Jesus' Father.³ When someone like me looks and talks like a Christian, yet does something out of the blue and completely off the wall, as I did, you have to wonder if they have taken full responsibility for their end of the bargain as a follower of Christ.

I wonder what would have happened to me if I had swallowed those pills that night? How tragic for me if I'd found myself reasoning with Jesus as a stranger like the man in the book of Matthew did.

The security of my relationship with Him rests in His promises, but the depth of our relationship rests with me—spending time with Him, getting to know Him, enjoying His love, and giving that love away. Serving Him plays a part, but service alone is not enough. I know that now.

I lived in my mother's house for the next two years, sleeping like a baby in that twin bed, telling Jesus my truths and

YOU CAN'T FRIGHTEN THE DEAD

watching Him reveal how one thread was connected to the next one. Sometimes I just listened, and I began understanding things about myself and about the choices I had made. I devoured the Bible with eyes that didn't shy away from the hard truths it wanted to teach me. I pressed into the pain and allowed God's words to do everything they're intended to do. He and I untangled knot after knot together. We are still doing that. Some threads are stubborn and complicated, don't want to let go. Others give up without a fight, yielding with a gentle tug. And so the sphere gets smaller every day.

I no longer pretend to the world that I'm more than I am, because I know who is sitting next to me. I know that showing people my flaws doesn't in any way dilute or diminish Jesus' beauty and power. My flaws don't change who He is. My flaws don't lessen His love for me. Jesus is the Beautiful One *in spite of* my knots and *for the sake of* my knots. And He sees me as beautiful, and so I'm learning to do the same. He didn't see me as broken that night in '85. He saw me as broken open, and that's the most beautiful broken of all. And as for my mask, the one I wore trying to be beautiful? Well, it's gone. It shattered into bits at the feet of my Lord that night. I threw it away instead of my life. I knew something needed to go, and God knew exactly what it was.

Notes

CHAPTER 1 You Can't Frighten the Dead

- 1 Reference to James 2:19
- 2 Matthew 7:23b, NKJV
- 3 Reference to Matthew 7:21

CHAPTER 3 The Power of Forgiveness

- 1 Story found in John 5
- 2 John 19:30
- 3 Referenced in Revelation 13:8 and 20:12

CHAPTER 4 Found

- 1 Referenced in Exodus 21:23–25 and Matthew 5:38–42

CHAPTER 5 Eating Crow and Keeping It Down

- 1 Referenced in Luke 9:14–17
- 2 Referenced in Jeremiah 8:20–22
- 3 Referenced in Joel 2:25
- 4 Referenced in Deuteronomy 30:19

CHAPTER 6 In Search of the Invisible Man

- 1 John 14:9
- 2 Referenced in 1 Corinthians 10:13
- 3 Referenced in Psalm 105:8
- 4 Jesus, in John 10:30

CHAPTER 9 Saving Face

- 1 Referenced in Matthew 10:34

CHAPTER 11 Living in the Land of Os

- 1 Author's paraphrase
- 2 Author's paraphrase

About the Author



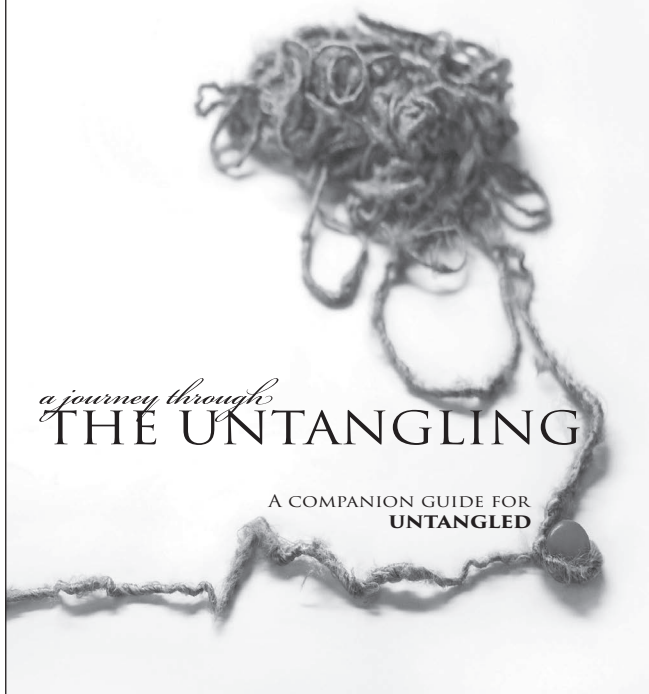
The voice of Michele Pillar entered the world through Contemporary Christian Radio in 1979 when she sang “Thou Art Worthy” on *The Praise II* record for Maranatha! Music. Soon after, “Jesus What a Wonder You Are,” “In Moments Like These,” and many other titles were hers for the series. Next, she recorded “The Misfit” with Erick Nelson and in the mid-1980s became Sparrow Record’s dominant seller with recordings *Michele Pillar*, *Reign on Me*, and *Look Who Loves You Now*, earning three Grammy Award and Dove nominations and total sales of more than 1.5 million. In 1992 Michele recorded *Love Makes All the Difference* for the Benson Company. The song “You Untangle Me”—penned by Michele and Hall of Fame Writers Allen Shamblin and Mike Reid—is featured in her latest music project, available on MichelePillar.com.

When not touring, Michele and her husband, Matt, live in Leiper’s Fork, Tennessee, and enjoy time with their children and grandchildren.

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The Untangling

MICHELE PILLAR



a journey through
THE UNTANGLING

A COMPANION GUIDE FOR
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**Group Leader notes are included*

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—Michele Pillar

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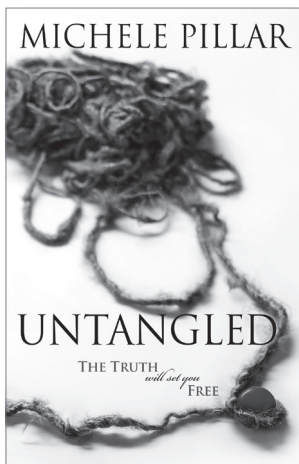
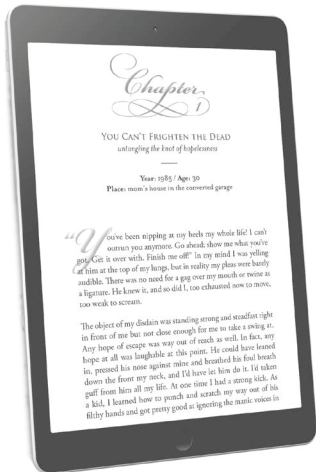
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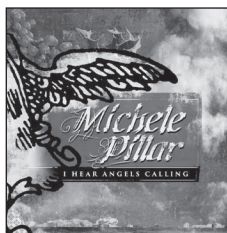


You Untangle Me (2016)

Produced by: Joe Chiccarelli & Randy Younger
Title song by: Grammy Award winners,
Allen Shamblin & Mike Reid



You Untangle Me Performance Tracks (All Titles)



I Hear Angels Calling

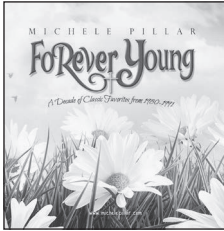
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