



What Are You Willing to Sacrifice For Your Education?

Guest: Dr. Ruby Dawn Lyman

Shelley Hunter: You're listening to the *Faithful Career Moves* podcast. I'm your host, Shelley Hunter. This is a place where we talk to people who recognize the Lord's hand in their lives and specifically in their careers. Thank you for joining me on episode 16.

Today, I'm talking to a woman whose story is one of sacrifice. She initially sacrificed completing her education to support her husband's career and to be home with her children, but when she felt prompted to return to school, the sacrifices she made to get there, let's just say, I'm glad I haven't been called to do the same. I'm not sure that I could.

Here's a little background on Dr. Lyman.

Ruby Dawn Lyman has a Ph.D. in learning sciences and human development from the University of Washington. Her specialization is talented and gifted twice-exceptional and teacher education. She spent her career so far teaching both K-12 and at various universities. Ruby Dawn has a passion for helping all students receive appropriate educational opportunities regardless of age or circumstances.

I asked Ruby Dawn to start out by explaining what she does today, and then we'll get to the backstory.

Ruby Dawn: Currently today, my career consists of several different university positions. I teach educational psychology full-time at Western Governors University. I am the director of the talented and gifted specialization program at Pacific University, and I've done that since 2017. I also teach a class at Boise State University through Teach for America. It's their first-year teaching and so I teach that.

Additionally, I give a lot of presentations and professional development for different school districts with regards to gifted education because one of my areas of specialty within educational psychology deals with gifted education.

Shelley: Okay. For clarification, what is gifted education?

Ruby Dawn: Gifted education deals with students who have been identified as talented and gifted. What that generally means for most school districts is that they are either in the 97th or 98th percentile, as far as academic intelligence goes, and they have been identified by their district as having specific needs because of their intelligence.

Shelley: You're teaching the teachers though?

Ruby Dawn: I do both. I teach teachers and then I also do a lot of presentations for parents of gifted students because most people think that gifted individuals have different academic needs and that's really all that it is, but what research has shown is that these individuals also have a variety of social-emotional needs that are different from their typically developing peers. That's where I come in with helping parents know how to best help their children with these specific social-emotional needs, in addition to helping them get the appropriate challenge in the school system.

Shelley: How did you get into this?

Ruby Dawn: That is such a great question. My journey is long, and I don't know if you want to hear the whole story of my journey right now, but how I got into gifted education was that my husband and I were both gifted kids growing up. We were in different gifted programs. I grew up in Montana and Idaho. He grew up in New Mexico. We both had very different experiences with the school system.

We were quirky. We never felt like we fit in all the way. Then we have four sons and each one of those sons, it turns out, was identified as gifted. Navigating both the school system and also trying to figure out how to help them with their different social-emotional needs was really, really, really challenging. That helped me know that I needed to pursue more education just so I would know how to help my own family.

Shelley: Take me back further then.

Ruby Dawn: Originally, my husband and I, we met freshman year in our undergraduate programs. Back then I was an international relations major, and we got married pretty young. We decided to have a child after we'd only been married a year. When our son was born, we were both in graduate programs and I, at that time was pursuing a master's in political science. That was back in the '90s. It was a really exciting time in the world, as far as what was going on politically, the Berlin Wall coming down and some of those things, so it was an exciting time to be in political science.

My husband was doing his MBA. However, he finished his degree before I finished mine and he got a job, so I left my degree without it being finished, which was really scary and frustrating for me because I really had wanted to finish that education but I decided that I would stay home for a while. We subsequently had three more sons.

During that time, I taught piano lessons, volunteered in the schools a lot, but my husband lost his job during the recession in about 2009.

It became apparent that I really needed to go back to work, but I felt like I didn't really have any skills that anybody would use. As I started to pursue that and look at what I could do, people kept saying, "You should be a teacher. You're so good at teaching." I thought, "I'm just a little stay-home mom. I don't really have a lot of skills to offer."

I took a long-term substitute position in a middle school, and that gave me the confidence that "You know what? I can go back and do a master's in teaching."

I got accepted to the program and did this one-year master's in teaching, was very intense, but I was loving it. I was loving it so much. It gave me the courage to go back to the University of Utah and say, "Hey, I have this degree. I've done everything except write my thesis and I would really like to finish this." It just so happens that the president of the university at the time, President Young was big into helping people who had left the University of Utah without completing their degrees, come back and finish those degrees. The timing just happened to be absolutely perfect.

I was able to also finish that, write that thesis and finish that master's. Doing all of this academic writing and working full-time and being able to do this, I kept having this prompting that I needed to pursue a Ph.D. I just kept thinking, "How am I going to do this? I have four kids at home." My oldest was going off to college, but I still had kids in elementary school. I just didn't know how it would work.

I started looking into programs to follow the prompting, and I saw this program at University of Washington. It was a top 10 program and I went, "You know what? They will never let me in. I am a mom, I'm a teacher. I have absolutely no qualifications to get into a program like this." However, they had a gifted ed program up there called the Robinson Center for Young Scholars. I reached out to the director of that program and I said, "I'm interested in learning more. Can I come up and meet you and take a tour and learn about what you do?" She said, "Sure, we'd love to talk to you about this."

I went up there. I just had this prompting, "You need to write your application around working with this program." That's how I decided to do it, went ahead and did it. My birthday's in March and the shock of all shocks on my birthday in March, I got an email that I had been accepted to this program. My husband and I just looked at each other and went, "Oh my goodness, this is really happening. How is this going to work?" Because we lived in the Portland area at the time and Seattle is three hours away, so how was I going to go to school up there? How was I going to still be a mom to my kids and still work? Because we couldn't afford for me to not work.

Shelley: Right. I will edit this out if you don't want me to ask this, but at this point, you're how old? or your kids are how old?

Ruby Dawn: I was in my 40s. I don't have this young plastic brain like all the young people do. I was just really worried about that, honestly. I did have kids. Like I said, I had kids in elementary school, middle school, high school. By this time, my oldest

had gone off to college for our church, he was serving a mission down in Argentina, but I still had a lot of home responsibilities. We still needed my income.

One thing that was such a blessing that ended up working out is they ended up right before I started my program finding funding. I had this research study that I could work on it at the University of Washington that would pay my salary and pay my tuition. I also had the opportunity, I'd been teaching some courses at Pacific University down in Forest Grove, Oregon, which was about 20 minutes from where we lived. I was able to keep doing that as well. The Lord had provided for our family to both be able to pay tuition, to be able to keep my income, and then many other blessings happened along the way, I have to just be honest.

Shelley: I'm on the edge of my seat for you because I feel like it sounds like too much for any one person to do.

Ruby Dawn: It really was too much for any one person to do. I will fully acknowledge that it was only with daily help from the Lord that I was able to accomplish what I had to accomplish. I spent half the week in Seattle, I was in the Portland area for half of the week. I was working two jobs. I was going to school full-time. I had to get up between 2:00 AM and 4:00 AM every single day for the entire time, and that was more than what was humanly possible. That's why I say I have all credits to heavenly father and to God for carrying me through this journey because there was no way that I could do it on my own.

Shelley: How did your family adjust to all of this?

Ruby Dawn: Interestingly, I started in the summer. I got done teaching and I had this job in the summer where I was going to work. I was going to be the principal up at the Robinson Center for Young Scholars over their summer program. It just so happened that I could take my youngest two with me and they were still fourth and sixth grade or fifth and seventh, but they were young. I was able to take them up there with me, and because they were gifted kids, they were able to be a part of the summer program while I was the principal.

Another way that the Lord really provided was that the Seattle housing market's extremely expensive. It just so happens that Roger's- Roger is my husband- aunt and uncle live in the Seattle area, Gayle and Steve Reiber. They were so gracious to just say, "You know what? Come stay with us. You can stay here for free." Who does that? They allowed me to stay there. They were about 15 minutes from campus and they let me stay there for free the entire time I was doing this program. They would not accept a cent.

In fact, it's something that I still look back and I cannot believe that my aunt, Gayle did was-- I have a lot of auto-immune issues and so I have to be very careful in how I take care of myself. I would come home from being gone 12, 13 hours, and I would come home to their house and she would have a very nutritious meal made for me every single night so that I could continue to be healthy. Just the sacrifice, the generosity, and the kindness that they were willing to give to me also, just another testament of how much God loved me and how much he was looking out for me.

Shelley: I love that so much. When I thought about your journey, the word "sacrifice" kept coming to mind. This was a time and a place, it was a tremendous sacrifice, but it doesn't seem like you're still in it.

Ruby Dawn: Absolutely. It really was for a two-year period. That is another thing though, that I'm amazed that I was able to finish this Ph.D. in nine quarters. I did it within two years, which is unheard of. Yes, I went in with two master's degrees, but I also think that the circumstances, the way that I was able to position my coursework, people who were on my committee, the way that they were able to help me, enabled me to do this in a two-year period where some other people who started with me, it took them four years to finish.

That was another thing that, yes, it was a sacrifice, but it was like you said, a time and a place. It was just for a really short amount of time.

That doesn't mean it was easy but because I was so passionate about what I was doing and I loved every minute of it, not saying that I loved getting up at 3:00 AM to do work or whatever, but what I was learning and the people with whom I was working, it was just like I was on a high the entire time.

I would look out my office window in University of Washington campus, those of you who have been there, there's an area of the campus called the Quad that there's cherry blossoms, these famous, famous cherry trees. My memories of being there are looking out the window and seeing these cherry blossoms and just thinking how fortunate I was that I had this opportunity, that I was able to do this and to pursue this education in a way that had been a personal goal of mine for my whole life. I just didn't know how it would ever work out.

Shelley: You keep saying, "Just so happens," and I know that you're giving all credit to God. It is amazing to me though, how many "just so happens," happened.

Ruby Dawn: [laughs] One of my favorite scriptures, and it has been since high school because I had a little plaque made in high school that had the scriptures, it's James 2:17. The gist of the scripture is that faith without works is dead being alone. Even though I had faith and like I said, I'm getting all credit to God, I did have to take the steps. I did have to do the work. I did have to sacrifice sleep. I did have to get up in the morning. I did have to do all of these things and that was just me showing the Lord that I had the faith to do this.

Shelley: I love that you got to have your boys with you. I think as moms, we worry so much about pursuing something when we feel inspired to do it. We have to recognize that the Lord has the whole family in mind. It sounds like he was definitely in charge of yours as well.

Ruby Dawn: He really, really was because I got to have my boys with me that summer but then during the school year, I was apart from them either four days a week or three days a week, depending on the term and how much I had to be in Seattle. My boys rose to the occasion. Everybody had a night that they cooked dinner. My boys learned how to do laundry. They learned how to clean. They all

ended up getting jobs, learning how to work hard. They're all pursuing their education. I honestly think that it was really positive for them to see me doing these things.

The parents with whom I work with, within my gifted presentations, I always tell them to model what they want their kids to do. Fortunately, I was able to model for my children, what I wanted them to do, and they were willing to do it. I acknowledged that not everybody's kids are going to see their parents doing something and do it, but my kids were, and they were willing to do that. I honestly think that a big part of the credit goes to my husband because he was so supportive of me along this journey. Had he not been supportive and willing and open to letting me do this, that could have caused a lot of problems and a lot of risks in our family.

Shelley: I was just going to ask about him. How much did him losing his job factor into you pursuing yours?

Ruby Dawn: A lot did. The reason why is because I didn't feel like I had a lot of confidence. I did not feel like I had a lot to offer. I don't know that I would have had the courage to go ahead and pursue a career had we not had those dire circumstances. In a way, I feel a little bit bad that my husband had to go through that so that I would be able to my journey but I do think that that's why it's because I had to get over all of my fears. As women a lot, we think, "Oh, we're not good enough, we don't really have that much to offer," but that's not what the Lord sees.

The Lord sees, "Hey, I've given you a lot of talents and you need to develop these so that you can serve those around you." We can serve those around us through the jobs that we do and the careers that we choose. I feel like every job I've ever had has been so that I can serve somebody. I can name the people at every job that I was put there to serve and to love and to help.

Shelley: It definitely allows us to increase our sphere of influence. One thing I've noticed is that when moms return to work after taking a break, they often go in new directions. If you had finished that master's initially, I believe you were in poli sci.

Ruby Dawn: I honestly thought back then that I would just stay on and get a Ph.D. and that I was going to be a political science professor. That's what I was going to do in the '90s, but the Lord had other plans. In my patriarchal blessing, it says, "You will be blessed with the ability to teach." I thought that was figurative, not literal. Or I thought that it meant the people I serve at church, I'd be able to teach at church. Roger and I have taught Sunday school together for seven years. I've taught kids in primary and young women and all of that, but this specifically meant with my career. I just didn't see it at the time and I had to be prepared to be open to that.

Shelley: Did you face any criticism in terms of going back?

Ruby Dawn: Yes, I received criticism, but I tried to not focus on that. What I tried to focus on was the immense support that I got. My kids went to an amazing elementary school. We happen to have lived right next to the elementary school for 15 years and I had spent a lot of time volunteering there. I went into the elementary

school and I told the teachers there who were serving my kids and teaching my kids at the time what we were doing, that I wanted to make sure that my children were still receiving what they needed, even though I wasn't going to be there, and would they please keep in touch with me? I just can't believe the amount of support that I got from people in the community.

For me, it was ignoring the criticism and focusing on the support that helped me get through.

Shelley: That's so good. I'm happy to hear that. In our faith, there's something called the family proclamation. I'm going to link to it in the show notes, but it's essentially a declaration of doctrines that we believe in. It contains some pretty traditional views of the roles of mothers and fathers. Now, I believe so strongly in personal revelation that not being fully aligned with the ideal is okay with me.

In fact, the proclamation even says, "Other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation," which I love. It's up to us to apply these principles in our lives, but I know some women really do wrestle with this. As you set off on this journey, did you struggle with the family proclamation at all, and how you fit into that?

Ruby Dawn: I'm so glad you brought that up. I actually keep a framed copy of the proclamation in my living room because to me it's such an important document, so foundational to my faith and how I choose to live my life. President Hinckley, who was one of our prophets, who was behind the proclamation, he was one of my favorite prophets because I feel like he always gave women so much credit and always talked about how important it was for women to be educated, that women had so much to contribute.

I feel like what has driven me, is that even when I don't feel like I have a lot to contribute, others around me have coached me and reminded me. I've felt the spirit pushing me along, telling me and prompting me, "You have something to share and there are people that you can help through talents that I've given you." I think that's completely in line with the proclamation. I'm doing what the Lord wants me to do. Yes, I put my family first, yes, I put the Lord first, but that doesn't mean that I don't have time and means to serve those around me through a job.

Shelley: Your kids are getting older at this point. How old are your kids now?

Ruby Dawn: Everybody's college-age now. I feel like everything that I was worried about with them missing out on as having a mom who did all these things for them it actually made more independent self-sufficient individuals in my sons. I'm so proud of what they're able to accomplish and what they're able to do, and that they're pursuing their education.

Shelley: If we had control of our own timing, then we would have said, "Hey, Lord, can you just give me a few years? The kids will all be graduated soon. How about I go do this after they're gone?"

Ruby Dawn: Yes. That is what I would have said, "My youngest, once Porter is gone, that's when I'll do it," but that would have been 10 years of learning and growing that my children would have missed out on. That would have been 10 years of example, that they wouldn't have seen me doing these hard things. We actually have a sign on our wall that says, "Do hard things." If I'm going to have that sign there, I need to practice what I preach.

Shelley: All right. Before I get into my last questions, what should I have asked you about your career that I haven't?

Ruby Dawn: I think that one of the things as women of faith that we forget is that a career can be really fulfilling. I gain a lot of personal fulfillment with my relationship with God and my church. I've gained a lot of personal fulfillment through my family. Of course, those things are the top, but I also gain a lot of personal fulfillment through my career, and that is something that is a huge blessing.

Shelley: I love that. Tell me about a leap of faith that you had to take to get where you are now.

Ruby Dawn: Oh, there's so many. I don't even know how to narrow it down. One that I will say is when I was at the University of Utah, the first time around, and I had worked on that degree, something that had been very, very challenging for me is that I had received a lot of discrimination in my program because I was religious, I was married, I was a mother. That was very looked down on. The attitude of everybody else, there was, "Why are you pursuing this degree? You're just going to be a stay-home mom. Why should we even acknowledge that you're a part of this program?" It was very much like that and it was super intimidating.

When I felt the prompting that I needed to go back and finish that master's at the University of Utah, I just thought, "Absolutely not. There is no way I am ever stepping foot on that campus again. I had the worst experience ever. They are not going to take me seriously there." It just so happened that my dad was serving a mission in Salt Lake at the time, so it was spring break and our family went to go visit my dad in Salt Lake.

While I was there, I had this feeling that would not go away, that "You need to call up--" One of my old professors. "You need to call her up and talk to her about continuing this degree." I could not sleep. I could not eat until I did that. I called her and talked to her. She was so kind, and she said, "There's this other person that you need to go talk to. He's the director of the program. If you're going to make it, this is who you need to talk to."

I set-up an appointment with him. I remember going into the bathroom at Orson Spencer Hall, and that's an interesting thing because all my courses were in Orson Spencer Hall.

Orson Spencer Hall is my great, great grandfather who was the first chancellor of the University of Utah. I think that his spirit was there helping me. I remember going in

that bathroom and almost having a panic attack before going to talk to this individual because I'm like, "I can't do this. I know they're going to tell me no."

I pulled myself together, went in, and had the meeting. He was like, "No, I think we can figure out a way to help you complete this. Really all you have left to do is write a thesis. I see all the coursework that you've done. You just need to write a thesis." Why that didn't work in the '90s was we didn't have all this technology that we have in the 2000s, luckily. It was going to be possible for me to be able to do that. Had I ignored that feeling, that prompting, who knows what would have happened? I don't think that I would have had the courage to pursue the Ph.D. had I not gone back and done the work for the masters.

Shelley: Isn't it interesting how we have to take these scary steps, which really are they that big a deal? You just had to talk to somebody. You just have to go into a meeting or make a phone call and the worst they could say is no, but because you overcame that fear, then you were able to get on the other side of it.

Ruby Dawn: Yes, I agree. Like I said, you have to take that first step. The faith without works is dead. You have to prove that you have enough faith to take the step, and then the Lord does pick up the slack. He makes things work. He helps things work.

Shelley: I love that. Tell me about an unexpected blessing, something you couldn't see for yourself in going back to school.

Ruby Dawn: The biggest fear was the finances because I needed to be able to have an income. I didn't have tens of thousands of dollars for out-of-state tuition, and I didn't have a way to make all these things happen. I started that summer job, but I didn't know that I had funding until August. My term started in September, and I just kept saying to my husband, because he was like, "How are we going to pay your tuition?" He was freaking out and I'm like, "I know something's going to work out."

The way that it worked out was once again, I had to take a leap of faith. I had registered for my classes and my aunt Gayle Reiber, like I said, bless her heart, she has given me so much amazing career advice. I was showing her my courses that I was enrolled in, and she's like, "You need to reach out to all of these professors." I reached out, and one of the ones happened to say to me, "Well, you know what? I just have this opening on my research study that I need somebody for. Are you interested?" It was out of the work on that research study that my dissertation came. Not only was it the funding that I needed, it was also the information that I needed to write my dissertation.

Shelley: It just so happens.

Ruby Dawn: It just so happens. Exactly. Right?

Shelley: Right. How have you seen the hand of God in your career?

Ruby Dawn: I think the more appropriate question or the one that would be easier to answer is, how haven't I? Because I could stay here all day. Honestly, every step of the way I felt the Lord there guiding me and helping me, prompting me to do things. I feel like every time, it's time for me to pursue something new, I am pushed in the right direction. That doesn't mean I get every job I apply for. Believe me, I have interviewed for hundreds of jobs that I did not get, but there has been learning experiences for me along the way.

What I've learned and gained from those experiences has grown my skills in such a way that I'm able to serve and do more with my career than I would have been, had I not had those experiences. Like I said, that doesn't mean they were easy. It's demoralizing to interview for job after job and not get them. Believe me, I'm not saying that that was fun or easy, but it has helped me learn and grow.

One of the things I would say about me is that I'm highly, highly sensitive so I've had to learn to develop a little bit of a thicker skin and not take things personally. There's a reason why I didn't get that job and it's doesn't mean that I'm subpar. It doesn't mean that I'm not good enough. It just means that there was somebody else who was a better match. I feel like learning some of those things has helped me when I'm actually in a job, have more competence, and not take things so personally.

Shelley: Thank you so much for being on the show with me.

Ruby Dawn: Thank you. It's been an honor. I just really appreciate that I get the opportunity to share my story. I hope that there's some people out there who can take that leap of faith and realize that sometimes you just have to take that step and God will do the rest.

Shelley: I'm sure there's somebody listening that needed to hear that today. I hope you learned something from this interview with Dr. Ruby Dawn Lyman, what a remarkable journey and testament of faith and works. Three things stood out to me in particular. One, "I'm just a mom. I have no skills. I have nothing to offer." Even this woman who already had her bachelor's degree and had nearly completed her master's thought she didn't have anything to offer. We know where that lie comes from.

Satan uses our lack of confidence to keep us from growing our talents and sharing our spiritual gifts with others so that he can limit our sphere of influence. Now I'm not saying you have to use your talents to go back to work, but please stop saying, you're just a mom who has nothing to offer. It's not true.

Two, as I mentioned in this interview, I'm pretty fascinated with how stay-at-home moms often reenter the workforce with entirely new goals and interests. I'm only 16 episodes into this podcast, and I've already heard that stay-at-home mom pivot a number of times, which speaks to purpose in the patients that the time spent at home, I believe is part of your career journey. Personal development is ongoing.

Lastly, needing to go back to work is what pushed Ruby Dawn to overcome her fears, and it just so happens that in doing so, God had something spectacular

waiting for her on the other side of that two-year sacrifice. Whether it's hardship or unexpected life changes or just something you've always wanted to do, when you feel inspired to pursue a job, a degree, a side gig, or even a volunteer position, just start walking and then start looking for the hand of God. I promise you'll find it.

Thank you for listening to the *Faithful Career Moves* podcast, a place where we talk to people who have seen the hand of God in their lives and specifically in their careers. If you want to learn more or you know someone you think I should interview connect with me on social media @faithfulcareermoves or on my website at faithfulcareermoves.com.