

Minister Destiny Testimony Schools

Adult: Family Court and Child Welfare: The DCF Process, Court Documents, and Reunification

Adult — Class Book · Section 8

Minister Destiny Marie Morgan
Minister & Founder

A Prayer Before You Begin

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

Lord, bless this reader on their journey. Guard their health in body, mind, and spirit as they study. Open their heart to knowledge and their mind to understanding, and let what they learn here become light in their hands. Guide them to the places where they are needed — to help others, and to save lives, safely. Bless their steps, their work, and every life their learning will one day protect.

Amen.

— Minister Destiny Marie Morgan

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Minister Destiny Testimony Schools — Adult: Family Court and Child Welfare: The DCF Process, Court Documents, and Reunification.

Published by Minister Destiny Marie Morgan, Minister & Founder.

Educational completion certificate only — not a state license, POST certification, or government credential.

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The lessons in this book are educational information, Massachusetts-first, and are not legal advice. If you have a real case, talk to a lawyer. Help lines: National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233 · 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (call/text 988) · Childhelp 1-800-422-4453.

How This Book Works

This book is one class of Minister Destiny Testimony Schools — Adult: Section 8 — Family Court and Child Welfare: The DCF Process, Court Documents, and Reunification. It is the study book for this class's test. Everything the test asks is taught in this book, in plain language: the full lesson, Words to know, the stories to think through, the Try-this activity, and Resources to keep.

Minister Destiny Testimony Schools is a free school. The classes, the tests, and the certificates are free online at destinymorganbooks.com — nothing about this class costs money. This book is the print edition, for people who want the class in their hands. You never need to buy a book to take a class or a test.

How to use this book: read the lesson, learn the Words to know, think through the stories, and do the activity. Try the word search for fun. Then take the Chapter Test at the back of the lesson — printed without answers marked. Score 80% or higher to complete the class and earn its certificate (the certificate page is in this book; write your name on it after you pass). The Answer Key is at the back of the book, for parents, teachers, and self-checking after you finish. Go at your own pace.

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Before You Start

This lesson is educational information, Massachusetts-first, and is not legal advice. Child-welfare cases move fast and every family's facts are different. If DCF contacts you or you receive family court papers, get a lawyer or legal aid involved as early as you possibly can.

Before you start

- **This school never asks your name.** Your progress and quiz answers stay on your own device. If you pass this section's quiz (80% or higher, retakes allowed, answers are not shown), you earn a downloadable certificate with a blank line — you write your own name on it after you save it.
- No parent walks into this section needing shame, and none will get it here. Families meet DCF through hospital rooms, school calls, police visits, poverty that looks like neglect on paper, addiction, mental illness, and sometimes real harm that needs real change. Whatever brought you here, panic helps no one and information helps everyone. This section explains the process in plain order — what happens, what the papers mean, what helps your children, and how reunification is actually earned.

Section 8 — Family Court and Child Welfare: The DCF Process, Court Documents, and Reunification

Minister Destiny Testimony Schools — Adult

The lesson

1. How a DCF case usually begins

In Massachusetts, the Department of Children and Families — DCF — is the agency responsible for protecting children and supporting families. Most cases begin with a report.

1. **A report is made.** Certain professionals — teachers, medical staff, police, counselors, and others — are mandated reporters who must report when they reasonably suspect a child is being abused or neglected. Neighbors, relatives, and anyone else may also make reports.
2. **Screening.** DCF reviews the report to decide whether the concerns, if true, fall within its responsibility and how urgently to respond. Not every report becomes an investigation, but every parent should treat a DCF contact as serious.
3. **Investigation or assessment.** A social worker gathers facts: speaking with the child, parents, and caregivers, visiting the home, and contacting schools, doctors, or others who know the child. DCF decides whether the concerns are supported and whether the child is safe.
4. **A decision about services and safety.** Outcomes range widely: the case may close, the family may be offered voluntary services, DCF may open a case for ongoing support and monitoring, or — where a child is believed to be in immediate danger — DCF may seek emergency custody through a court.
5. **Court involvement, when it happens.** If DCF files in court, the case commonly proceeds as a care and protection matter, in which a judge decides temporary custody, orders services, reviews progress at hearings, and ultimately decides whether a child returns home, stays with relatives or foster care, or — only after the legal process plays out — whether parental rights issues must be addressed.

A criminal case and a DCF case are separate tracks with separate standards. A parent can face both at once from one incident, each with its own lawyer, dates, and papers. Keeping the two tracks in separate folders, with separate date lists, prevents costly confusion.

2. The home visit and the investigation — what to expect and how to act

The knock parents fear most is usually a worker at the door with questions, not officers with an order. Knowing what the visit is helps you respond in a way that protects your children.

What a worker is looking at: whether the child is safe right now; food, sleeping arrangements, and basic care; who lives in and visits the home; any signs of violence, substance impairment, or untreated danger; the child's own statements and condition; and whether the parent understands the concern and can make a workable safety plan.

What helps, step by step:

1. Stay calm and polite, even while you are frightened. How you handle the visit itself becomes part of the record.
2. Ask for the worker's name, office, and contact information, and write it down. Ask what concern brought them, in plain terms.
3. You may ask whether they have a court order. Workers often begin by requesting cooperation voluntarily. What you must allow and what you may decline depends on the situation — this is a moment to get legal advice quickly rather than guess at the door.
4. Answer truthfully but do not ramble or speculate. If you do not know, say you do not know. Never coach a child on what to say.
5. If a safety plan is proposed, make sure you understand every word before you agree, ask what it requires, for how long, and write it down. A safety plan you cannot actually follow sets you up to fail it.
6. After the visit, write your own notes the same day: who came, what was said, what was promised, and by when.

What NOT to do: Do not hide children, send them away to avoid a visit, or refuse all contact in anger — avoidance reads as risk to the agency and the court. Do not clean up a genuine hazard by pretending it never existed; instead, fix it and show the fix. Do not discuss your legal strategy with everyone who asks; talk candidly with your lawyer, and be measured and truthful with the agency.

Red flags that a case is escalating: requests for a child to be placed with relatives "temporarily" without paperwork you understand, talk of filing in court, a second report, a missed drug screen where screening was agreed, or violence in the home after a safety plan forbade contact with a particular person. Any of these means lawyer, this week, no delay.

3. Reading the papers — court documents in plain language

Family court papers look alike and sound intimidating, but each one has a job. Learn to spot these parts in anything you receive:

- **Caption and docket number.** The case name and the court's identifying number. Put the docket number on every letter you send about the case.
- **Petition.** The document that starts the case, stating what the agency is asking the court to do and why. Read the reasons line by line — your services and your responses will be measured against them.

- **Temporary custody order.** A judge's short-term decision about where the child lives while the case proceeds. "Temporary" describes the stage, not a guaranteed short stay.
- **Service plan / family assessment.** DCF's written plan: the concerns, the tasks and services assigned to each parent, visitation arrangements, and the outcomes the agency wants to see. This document is the closest thing your case has to a syllabus — your progress is graded against it.
- **Court reports and reviews.** Written updates before hearings describing visits, services, the child's well-being, and each side's position. Read them before the hearing and bring errors to your lawyer's attention with proof.
- **Findings and orders after a hearing.** What the judge decided and what must happen next, with dates. The next deadline in your case is almost always inside the most recent order.

Your paperwork habits:

1. Keep a binder or folder with sections: orders, service plan, visit notes, service certificates, correspondence. Bring it to every meeting and hearing.
2. After every hearing, write down in your own words: what was decided, what I must do, by what date, and when we return.
3. Never sign a document you have not read. If you need an interpreter or more time to understand, say so — in court and at the agency.
4. If an address or phone number changes, notify your lawyer, the worker, and the court in writing. Missed mail about a child case can mean a missed hearing, and missed hearings are decided without you.

4. Visitation and services — where reunification is really decided

When children are placed outside the home, two things run in parallel: visits and the service plan. Judges and workers watch both closely, because together they answer the court's central question — can this child be safe at home now, and what has changed since removal?

Visitation:

- Visits may be supervised or unsupervised, at an agency office, a visitation center, a relative's home, or eventually your home, depending on progress and court orders.
- Attend every visit. A missed visit is recorded, and a pattern of missed visits reads as a pattern of priority. If an emergency truly prevents attendance, call before the visit time and document it.
- Use visits to parent, not just to visit: feed, read, play at the child's level, help with homework, keep routines. Bring what the child needs rather than only treats.
- End visits calmly, even when goodbye hurts. A child who leaves visits in distress after adult arguments carries that into the next report.

- If a visit goes badly or a supervisor's note seems wrong, write your own dated account the same day and give it to your lawyer.

Services:

Services commonly include parenting classes, substance-use treatment and screening, mental-health counseling, domestic-violence programming for survivors or for those who have used violence, housing stabilization, and supervised coaching during visits. Section 5 and Section 6 of this school build the parenting and stress skills these services teach.

Treat the service plan like the main road, not a side quest:

1. Enroll immediately — waiting lists are real, and "I called once" is weaker than a dated enrollment confirmation.
2. Attend and complete, and keep every certificate and attendance record in your binder.
3. If a service is impossible — wrong hours for your job, no transportation, a language it is not offered in — raise it in writing right away and ask for an alternative. Courts respond far better to a documented obstacle plus a requested solution than to silent non-completion.
4. Ask your providers, politely, what they are seeing improve. Their observations become reports the judge reads.

5. Reunification — how children come home, and what can delay it

Reunification means a child placed out of the home returns to a parent's custody, usually in stages and under court oversight. It is the stated goal in most cases where it can be made safe — and it is earned through demonstrated change, not promised change.

A typical path, though every case differs:

1. **Stabilization.** The immediate danger that caused removal is addressed: a violent person is out of the home and kept out, treatment is underway, the home is made safe, a protective caregiver is present.
2. **Consistent engagement.** Visits attended, services progressing, communication with the worker steady, court dates kept. Consistency over months is the evidence.
3. **Expanded contact.** Longer or unsupervised visits, overnights, then trial placement at home with continued monitoring, as the court orders allow.
4. **Reunification with aftercare.** The child returns, often with services continuing and review hearings scheduled to confirm the home remains safe.
5. **Case closure.** When the court and agency are satisfied the child is safe without oversight, the case closes. Many families keep voluntary supports afterward — a wise choice, not a weakness.

What delays or defeats reunification: returning to the person or substance the plan removed; missed or dirty screens where screening is ordered; services started but quietly

dropped; new police involvement; unstable housing at the moment of review; and — most quietly destructive — a parent arguing that nothing was ever wrong. Courts do not require perfection, and they do not require parents to agree with every claim ever made. They require credible, visible change on the specific concerns in the petition.

Kinship placement deserves special mention: when children cannot stay home temporarily, placement with relatives or familiar adults is generally preferred where safe. Parents help their case — and their children — by promptly giving the worker names of relatives who could be considered, even relatives they personally find difficult. The child's comfort comes before adult pride.

And a word for relatives and foster caregivers reading this: keep the child's routines, speak neutrally about the parents in front of the child, support visits, and document needs and milestones factually. The adults who make reunification easier for a child do that child a lasting good, whichever way the case ends.

If the court's path turns toward a different permanent plan, that happens through formal legal steps with notice, hearings, and appeal rights — not by surprise in a hallway. Whatever direction a case moves, the rules in this section hold: get counsel, read everything, keep every date, work the plan in writing, and let a documented record of change speak for you.

Words to know — Section 8

- **DCF** — the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, the state child-welfare agency.
- **Mandated reporter** — a professional required by law to report reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect.
- **Petition** — the court document that opens a case, stating what is being asked and why.
- **Care and protection** — the type of court case in which a judge decides custody and services for a child DCF believes is at risk.
- **Temporary custody** — a judge's short-term order about where a child lives while the case proceeds.
- **Service plan** — DCF's written plan of concerns, assigned tasks and services, visitation, and expected outcomes.
- **Safety plan** — a short-term written agreement about immediate steps that will keep a child safe.
- **Supervised visitation** — parent-child visits observed by an approved person, often with written notes.
- **Kinship placement** — placement of a child with relatives or familiar adults when the child cannot stay at home.

- **Reunification** — the staged return of a child to a parent's custody under court oversight, after demonstrated change.

Myths vs facts — Section 8

- **Myth:** If DCF gets a report about my family, they will automatically take my children.
Fact: Reports are screened, many cases close after investigation or with voluntary services, and removal generally requires serious safety concerns and, outside true emergencies, a court order — but every contact deserves a serious, organized response.
- **Myth:** Refusing to talk to anyone or skipping services shows the case is baseless. **Fact:** Silence and missed services are recorded and read as risk; documented participation, completion, and written questions are what move a case toward closure or reunification.
- **Myth:** Once my child is placed with a relative, the case is basically over. **Fact:** Kinship placement is a placement, not a finish line — visits, services, and hearings continue, and reunification still depends on the same demonstrated change.
- **Myth:** The service plan is optional paperwork I can get to when life calms down. **Fact:** The service plan is the document your progress is measured against at every hearing; enrolling promptly and documenting obstacles in writing is central to the outcome.

Think it through — Section 8

Tanya's two children were placed with their grandmother after police responded to a violent argument between Tanya and her boyfriend, and DCF filed in court. Tanya has moved the boyfriend out, enrolled in a parenting class and counseling, and attends every supervised visit. At the review hearing, though, the report notes she missed two counseling appointments and allowed the boyfriend to visit her new apartment once "to get his things" while the children were at school. Tanya asks: *"I am doing almost everything. Why is the judge still concerned?"*

Walk it through: (1) The petition's core concern was the children's exposure to violence from this specific person, so any renewed contact with him — even without the children present — goes directly to whether the danger is truly removed or only rearranged. (2) The missed appointments matter less as two absences than as a pattern question: were they documented emergencies with calls ahead, or silent gaps? In child-welfare cases, paperwork either explains a gap or the gap explains itself badly. (3) What helps now is exactly what this section teaches: no further contact, proof of the changed locks or lease where relevant, make-up sessions completed, and a written account through her lawyer before the next hearing rather than explanations improvised in the courtroom. (4) Reunification is judged on the specific concerns that opened the case — visible, sustained change on those concerns, not general effort alone, is what brings children home.

One more real-life story — Section 8

When Marcus's daughter was placed with her aunt, he treated his binder as a second job: every visit noted, every class certificate filed, every letter answered. Midway through the case, a court report mistakenly stated he had missed a month of visits. Because Marcus had dated sign-in sheets and his own notes, his lawyer corrected the record at the next hearing with documents, calmly and without accusing anyone of bad faith. Visits expanded to overnights the following month. **Takeaway:** in family court, memory argues and documents persuade — the parent with the organized binder is protecting their child with every page.

Try this — Section 8

Set up your case binder (or get ready before you ever need one):

- [] Create sections: court orders, the petition, service plan, visit notes, service certificates, letters sent and received.
- [] Write a one-page contact sheet: worker, supervisor, your lawyer, the court, and the docket number.
- [] Start a date log: every hearing, visit, appointment, and deadline, with what happened at each.
- [] Photograph every document you receive the day you receive it as backup.
- [] List three relatives or trusted adults who could be considered for kinship placement if it were ever needed.
- [] After any meeting or visit, write your same-day notes: who, what was said, what is due next, and by when.
- [] Write one paragraph, in your own words, answering: "What concern opened this case, and what will be different because of what I am doing?"

Resources to keep — Section 8

- **Emergency:** 911 — if a child is in immediate danger.
- **Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline:** 1-800-422-4453 — 24/7 guidance for parents, caregivers, and anyone worried about a child.
- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** call or text 988 — support for a parent in crisis during a case.
- **Crisis Text Line:** text HOME to 741741.
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 1-800-799-7233, or text START to 88788 — where violence in the home is part of the case.
- **Mass.gov:** named generally as the state's official site for DCF and court information.

- **Legal aid:** named generally — free legal help for family and child-welfare matters; seek it at the first letter, not the last.

What you earned / what's next — Section 8

Section 8 complete (quiz score 80% or higher): You can trace a DCF case from report to investigation to court, read the key documents by name and purpose, explain how visits and services drive decisions, and describe how reunification is earned in stages.

Word Search — Section 8

Find the words from this class's Words to know. Words run across, down, or diagonally.

X	B	S	J	Z	S	M	B	S	H	O	R	B
S	W	Z	X	W	A	I	O	S	G	I	E	Z
B	H	M	J	Z	F	W	T	E	N	K	U	I
Q	B	W	Y	F	E	T	A	R	E	L	N	E
X	A	S	F	N	T	M	O	V	R	P	I	Q
M	F	K	J	K	Y	Y	D	I	E	J	F	G
D	L	R	L	P	P	I	S	C	X	Y	I	J
Z	C	N	X	U	L	H	A	E	K	U	C	Y
N	T	L	B	R	A	G	O	P	X	E	A	N
P	W	X	Q	U	N	M	W	L	Z	D	T	Y
P	J	O	I	A	Z	N	U	A	X	K	I	T
T	P	E	T	I	T	I	O	N	P	V	O	D
Y	X	C	S	A	Q	S	Y	H	T	A	N	R

Words to find: Petition · Serviceplan · Safetyplan · Reunification

Words to Remember — Say It in Your Own Words

Cover the Words to know page. For each word from this class, write what it means in your own words, the way you would explain it to a friend. Then check yourself against the lesson.

DCF

Mandated reporter

Petition

Care and protection

Temporary custody

Service plan

Safety plan

Supervised visitation

Kinship placement

Reunification

Chapter Test — Section 8

Answer every question. Score 80% or higher to complete this class and earn its certificate. The answers are in the Answer Key at the back of this book — for parents, teachers, and self-checking after you finish.

1. In Massachusetts, what is DCF?

- A. A private foster-care company
- B. A school counseling department
- C. A family court judge's office
- D. The Department of Children and Families, the state child-welfare agency

2. Tanya's children were placed after violence in the home. She has moved the boyfriend out and attends visits, but allowed him at her apartment once and missed two counseling sessions. Why is the judge still concerned?

- A. Judges are never satisfied
- B. Because renewed contact goes to the core concern that opened the case, and unexplained gaps read as risk — reunification turns on visible change on those specific concerns
- C. Because supervised visits went well
- D. Because her grandmother is involved

3. What is a service plan in a DCF case?

- A. DCF's written plan of concerns, assigned tasks and services, visitation, and expected outcomes — the document progress is measured against
- B. A menu of optional classes
- C. A bill for services
- D. A parent's personal journal

4. What does the petition do in a family court case?

- A. It closes the case
- B. It sets the visitation menu
- C. It opens the case, stating what is being asked and why
- D. It is the judge's final decision

5. Which visitation habit most helps a parent's case and child?

- A. Attend every visit, call ahead and document any true emergency, and use visits to parent — feeding, reading, routines — not just to visit
- B. Miss visits that feel painful
- C. Use visits to question the child about the other home

D. Bring gifts instead of attending regularly

6. A service required by your plan has hours that conflict with your job and no transportation. What is the strongest response?

A. Quit attending silently

B. Wait until the next hearing to mention it

C. Raise it in writing right away and ask for an alternative, documenting the obstacle

D. Skip the service and complete a different one on your own

7. What is kinship placement?

A. Placement with a stranger in another state

B. Placement of a child with relatives or familiar adults when the child cannot stay home

C. A type of court hearing

D. The final step closing a case

8. In Marcus's story, how did he correct a court report that wrongly said he missed a month of visits?

A. He argued from memory in the hallway

B. He stopped attending visits

C. His lawyer presented his dated sign-in sheets and notes, calmly correcting the record with documents

D. He wrote to the newspaper

9. How does reunification usually proceed?

A. All at once, with no oversight, once a parent asks

B. By the worker's verbal promise alone

C. Only after a child turns eighteen

D. In stages — stabilization, consistent engagement, expanded contact and overnights, return home with aftercare, then closure

10. What should a parent do after every hearing?

A. Wait for the mail to explain it

B. Write down what was decided, what they must do, by what date, and when the case returns — and file it in the case binder

C. Call relatives to discuss strategy

D. Sign any paper presented without reading

Certificate — Section 8

Minister Destiny Testimony Schools

Certificate of Completion — Section 8: Family Court and Child Welfare: The DCF Process, Court Documents, and Reunification

This certifies that

Name (write your name here)

has completed

Minister Destiny Testimony Schools — Adult

Section 8: Family Court and Child Welfare: The DCF Process, Court
Documents, and Reunification

Date completed: _____

Presented by **Minister Destiny Marie Morgan**, Minister & Founder

*Congratulations. You understand the process that frightens so many families,
and understanding is power: read everything, keep every date, work the plan,
and let your change be visible on paper and in life. Your children are worth
that steady work. — Minister Destiny Marie Morgan*

Educational completion certificate only — not a state license, POST certification, or government
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My Agenda — Class Tracker

Everything in this agenda is yours to write in. It stays in your book — nothing is collected.

Step	Done	Date	Score	Grade
Week 1 — Study the lesson				
Week 2 — Study + Words to know				
Week 3 — Stories + Try-this activity				
Week 4 — Chapter test (pass at 80% or higher)				

Letter grades: A 90–100 · B 80–89 · C 70–79 · D 60–69 · F below 60.

My goals for this class

Write the goals you are working toward in this class — and for yourself.

My Weekly Planner

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Notes

Resources to Keep

This class's resources, in one place. Keep this page.

- Emergency: 911 — if a child is in immediate danger.
- Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-422-4453 — 24/7 guidance for parents, caregivers, and anyone worried about a child.
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988 — support for a parent in crisis during a case.
- Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 741741.
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233, or text START to 88788 — where violence in the home is part of the case.
- Mass.gov: named generally as the state's official site for DCF and court information.
- Legal aid: named generally — free legal help for family and child-welfare matters; seek it at the first letter, not the last.

Answer Key

For parents, teachers, and self-checking after you finish the chapter test.

Section 8 Test — Family Court and Child Welfare: The DCF Process, Court Documents, and Reunification

1. The Department of Children and Families, the state child-welfare agency
2. Because renewed contact goes to the core concern that opened the case, and unexplained gaps read as risk — reunification turns on visible change on those specific concerns
3. DCF's written plan of concerns, assigned tasks and services, visitation, and expected outcomes — the document progress is measured against
4. It opens the case, stating what is being asked and why
5. Attend every visit, call ahead and document any true emergency, and use visits to parent — feeding, reading, routines — not just to visit
6. Raise it in writing right away and ask for an alternative, documenting the obstacle
7. Placement of a child with relatives or familiar adults when the child cannot stay home
8. His lawyer presented his dated sign-in sheets and notes, calmly correcting the record with documents
9. In stages — stabilization, consistent engagement, expanded contact and overnights, return home with aftercare, then closure
10. Write down what was decided, what they must do, by what date, and when the case returns — and file it in the case binder

Sources & Credits

The lessons in this book were written for Minister Destiny Testimony Schools from public sources — official websites, public health and safety organizations, help lines, and the law itself. The sources each chapter was built from, and the help resources it points you to, are listed under that chapter's name, with credit, so you can check anything in this book and keep learning. Court opinions and laws are public documents that belong to everyone. Everything here is retold in the school's own plain words — nothing in this book is copied from anyone else's book.

Section 8 — Family Court and Child Welfare: The DCF Process, Court Documents, and Reunification

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The school itself is free: every class in this book, with its test and certificate, is free online at destinymorganbooks.com.

About the Author

Minister Destiny Marie Morgan is an ordained Muslim minister. She was ordained on May 15, 2025, through the Universal Life Church, and she is registered clergy in Massachusetts.

Her ministry is advocacy — standing up to injustice and helping people, locally and internationally.

She is the founder of Minister Destiny Testimony Schools, a free school. She built it so people can learn for free what cost her years to learn — people who may not have jobs, good credit, or loans, and who deserve real knowledge anyway. Every class is free online, for every age, with no sign-up and nothing collected.

She is also the author of two testimony series — Chronicles of Destiny Morgan and The Chronicle Trials — her own story, in her own words. Those books are her testimony; these school books are her teaching.

Follow her Amazon Author Page to find every new book as it comes out.

The school is free online at destinymorganbooks.com.

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From Minister Destiny

You finished this book — but the learning does not stop here. Keep your resources close, keep asking questions, and use what you now know to help the people around you. If this book helped you, pass it to someone who needs it. I built this school for you, and I am proud of you for showing up for yourself. — Minister Destiny Marie Morgan

Minister Destiny Testimony Schools — Adult
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