

5 Elements to Spiritual Strength

Part 2: Following God's Workout Plan -- Obedience

Part 1 of developing spiritual strength dealt with feeding our spirits God's word in order to grow. Now we deal with weightlifting. Once we begin our life in Christ we have to condition our spiritual bodies to defend ourselves against the wiles of the devil. God doesn't want us to sit idle after we accept Christ. As we study God's word we receive instructions on how to live in order to accomplish the things God put us here to do. We learn to listen, which is the first step toward obedience. Getting to obedience means following God's word with a positive and active response.

The Bible gives us God's will and His standards for living. (Ezekiel 20:19.) We should never feel alone in our spiritual exercise, because God gave us a personal trainer to demonstrate how to work out—or speaking plainly, how to live in obedience. (Psalms 32:8.) Jesus Christ was not only sent to die for us, but he also came to show us the perfect example of living in obedience to God's word. (Matthew 3:17, John 5:30). We want to be like our personal trainer, Jesus Christ. In fact, the meaning of the word Christian is “Christ like.”

To be Christ-like in our obedience to God's will, we must recognize God's instruction. I work with high school athletes on strength training. When they do weightlifting I can tell those who have received proper instruction by the way they lift the weights. Spiritually we have to handle and lift life's weights in obedience to God's word. Often we struggle with people or issues forgetting that God is our greatest advisor. We set ourselves up to fail when we take things into our own hands.

Our bodies can lift physical objects, but we don't have the spiritual strength to lift forces that burden our minds. First Corinthians 1:25 tells us that if God had a day of weakness he would still be stronger than us on our strongest day. This is why we put our faith in God, because in our weakness He gives us the strength to do some heavy life lifting. His promise of strength is guaranteed if we follow our personal trainer's example. (2 Corinthians 12:9). But, just as obedience gives us strength, disobedience weakens and can even injure or cripple us. (Titus 1:16.) We all have moments where we stray away from God's workout plan, but we have to shape up and get back into the image of Christ. (Romans 3:23-25, 1 Peter 1:22.)

So let's work to stay fit by following God's workout plan (God's Will). One man's (Adam) disobedience brought weakness (sin) into the world, and it took one man's (Jesus Christ) obedience to bring strength (righteousness) into the world. (Romans 5:19). So study God's word to learn His will. (2 Timothy 2:15.) Follow His plan and enjoy easy, blessed weightlifting for life. God Bless!

Minister Marcus Ivan Moore

A GOOD LEADER

What are the characteristics of a good leader? What evidence will we see? There are all kinds of leaders -- good and bad, effective and ineffective.

Leader = a person or thing that leads; directing, commanding, or guiding head.

Some leaders develop at a very young age. As a teacher I saw children who were able to get a team together on the yard in no time. There was no question when a leader put a player in a certain position the leader knew the player's strengths and weaknesses. I also recognized the leaders who could organize a group of followers to disobey teachers and break every rule in the school. Each of these leaders had charisma that attracted a following.

But as Christians good leadership is not what we are looking for, instead we want *godly Christian leaders*.

Leadership = the position or guidance of a leader, the ability to lead, the leaders of a group

Godly = devout, devoted to God, pious; religious

Christian = a person professing belief in Jesus as the Christ; having the qualities demonstrated and taught by Jesus Christ, as love, kindness, humility

In any given week we see many types of leaders. Some leaders we have to follow, but others we do not. Leaders have a vision or passion that drives them. It is important for every leader to know their purpose, and to work with all their heart to fulfill that purpose. Good leaders model desirable behaviors and guide. They encourage and work side-by-side with those who follow.

Correction is a strong component of leadership, and is very much needed when striving for excellence. A good leader points out things in us we may not otherwise see. Leaders must take a stand, and must sometimes stand alone. They should not waiver. Some will flee from a strong leader, while others will stand with them. Leaders must know their followers. They must be aware of their character, values, and personality so they can guide in the correct way.

Followers need instruction in order to serve God better. When following a good leader we must have a teachable spirit. We must submit to our leaders. If we are blessed with godly

Christian leaders, then we should trust them. We must allow them to teach us to be better servants of God.

Offense = the act of creating resentment, hurt feelings, displeasure

Both leaders and followers can be guilty of being easily offended. Let the Bible sort out any offences. Develop a thicker skin, and learn from correction. When offended we can question our leaders, and note where they find the answers. Do they give you the answers, or do they point you in the right direction to discover your own answers to remedy your offense?

Godly Christian leaders cheer us on when we step into leadership roles. They rejoice when we succeed; they stand with us in failure; and they wait until we can move forward. Pray for your godly leaders.

Yvonne Scott is a retired school teacher and native of San Francisco. She has been active member of the Daughters of Zion Women's Ministries since late 1997. The Daughters of Zion Women's Ministries has played an important role in shaping Yvonne's Christian life. She has served in many areas in the ministry and enjoys helping whenever the need arises. Yvonne enjoys being a mother of two and a grandmother of four.

Whatever Happened to WWJD?

Suggested Text: Mark 8:34, Ephesians 5:1, 1Corinthians 11:1

By: Rev. Anthony D. Scott, Sr.

Wikipedia reports that the well-known acronym for What Would Jesus Do (WWJD) became popular in the late 1990's. Entrepreneurs printed this powerful acronym on bumper stickers, bracelets, Bibles, billboards, etc. We purchased these items to remind ourselves to emulate Jesus in every aspect of our lives. This challenged us to evaluate what we really understood about Jesus. WWJD also posed a powerful question that remains unanswered by some cultures and individuals. Yet, with so many social, economic, environmental, and other challenges in our world today it is time to revisit this lingering question – WWJD? However, this time let's seek some answers from the source Himself. Let's ask the Lord Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 5:1, encourages us individually and collectively to be followers of Christ. In other words, we are encouraged to mimic our Master, or be impersonators of our Eternal King. In a sense we become like understudies. An understudy is an alternate actor/actress who through training has learned to mimic or impersonate the role of the original performer. Understudies serve as standbys should a replacement be necessary. Jesus encourages us to be His understudies. In Mark 11:29, Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you. Get connected to me and learn from me." (*Lit. Greek.*) The implication is that He comes alongside of you and instructs you. He does this for you by His Spirit.

We are fortunate as children of God, because we have an historical record for reference as we discover WWJD. We have His "Word" (what Jesus actually said). We have His "Work" (what Jesus actually did and how he lived). We also have His "Wit" (how Jesus thought, His insights and what motivated Him). We know His "Wit" always centered on seeking and saving that which was lost (Luke 19:10), and giving glory and honor to his Father.

His Spirit on the inside of us gives us the ability to carry out a role the Apostle Paul terms "Ambassadors of Christ." (1 Corinthians 5:20.) With this role comes accountability and responsibility. The scripture says to whom much is given, much is required. So, to fill the role of Ambassador or understudy we must consider some relevant questions. One question is when God reveals to you what needs to be done, are you willing to obey and DO IT? If you don't see the value in doing things God's way, then answering the WWJD question may be irrelevant.

When you understand the importance of doing things God's way, you'll see that His way is always the best way. You will also see that there are other ways that come to mind. However, following other ways leaves more questions than answers. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man that only leads to death." So, Choose Life Today! Read His Word. Study His Work. Learn His Wit! Seek the consistent leading of His Spirit to guide you into all truth.

If you seek Him, the messianic promise from Jesus is that you will find Him. Live out God's plan provided for you through His Son. WWJD? What Would Jesus Do? The answer is simple – **GOD'S WILL!!!** Fulfill God's will by obeying to His Word. In the words of the great Marilyn Hickey, "Let Jesus live big in you today."

Rev. Anthony Scott is a native of the San Francisco Bay Area in Northern California. He currently resides in Fort Worth, Texas and serves as the Associate Minister and the Minister of Music for the Christian Faith Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas. under the leadership of Dr. Larry Pruitt. He served as Musician for many Bay Area churches. Rev. Scott was called to preach the Gospel in June 1999 and received his license under the tutorial of Dr. Steven A. Bailey, Pastor of Olivet Baptist Church, in San Francisco, CA. He is the husband of Maya Scott and the father to five young men.

Though his achievements are many, Rev. Scott is humbled by his assignment of preaching the Gospel. His passion is to see souls saved and empowered by the word.

Being Content

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. Proverbs 13:12

Being content with our present circumstances is a struggle for Christians all over the world. Clear as day I can remember a conversation with one of my aunts when I was in my mid-twenties. I said to her,

“I don’t want the white-picket-fence, two kids and a dog in the backyard. I want a life that *means* something!”

To which my aunt replied,

“Well, I have that life (*referring to her own pickets, kids and pooch*), and it’s been meaningful. And honey, it’s really not that bad.”

Fast forward a few years, and I found myself living in South America serving as a missionary with my husband. I had the two kids and a dog in my yard, but instead of a picket fence there were bars on my windows. Add to that, I was speaking Spanish -- a language my husband and I had to work hard to learn. My life *meant* something! I was doing the Lord’s work and had promised my life to service abroad.

Yet loneliness, moments spent waiting for buses in the rain, riding taxis with rusted-out floors, making my own mayonnaise, and the tiny annoyance of my children asking for cereal (that we couldn’t buy in the stores where we were) made me start longing for my life “back in the states.” I found myself thinking more and more of the things I had left behind. I even counted the years-months-days until I would be back on US soil and hear that customs official say, “Welcome back to the United States,” as he stamped my passport. I spent so much time thinking about what I did not have that I almost missed seeing the blessing of living the life God had given me.

That is when the meaning of “hope deferred” came alive. The “hope deferred” in my life was of my own making. There I was struggling to accept the life for which I had longed and been given by God. It was the life He designed me to live. Although difficult, I allowed God to calm my heart, and I turned my longings over to Him. When I settled into living the life that God had given me, my “heart-sickness” went away, and I found peace living in a war-torn country.

Still it has been a life long struggle to be content where I am – and an unfortunate trait I have passed on to my children. But, struggle I do. I work at it. I work to verbalized and internalize contentment with the place where God has me now. I want to say as Paul said in Philippians:

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. . . I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:12-13

I can. You can. We can be content and do all things through Christ who strengthens us!

Brenda Boston Bio

Brenda is a long time believer in Jesus who cannot remember a day in her life when she did not love Jesus thanks to the example of Godly grandmothers, aunts and mother. She was a missionary in Latin America for 20 years and now is serving God alongside her husband who is starting a church in the Mission District of San Francisco -- San Francisco Alliance in the Mission (SFAM).

Brenda is also an active member of the Daughters of Zion Women's Ministries. Matthew 6:33 is her life verse.

Are You Thankful?

The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." You may ask the question, "Everything?" Yes, everything!

Life can be challenging at times, but if we focus on the promises of God and remember the words written in Romans 8:28, we won't lose hope. It tells us that all things will work out for good, for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. You see, God can take the worse of circumstances and cause them to work out for our good and His glory.

Such is the case of Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch Christian who, along with her entire family, was imprisoned for helping the Jews escape the Nazis during World War II. During their imprisonment, Corrie and her sister Betsy were kept in the Nazi concentration camp Ravensbruck, a crowded flea-infested place. Through the grace of God, Bibles were smuggled into the camp. They read the scripture found in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 that reads, "In everything give thanks." Betsy concluded that it meant they should thank God for the fleas. Corrie, although initially reluctant, joined Betsy in thanking God for the fleas. After several months, they noticed that the guards did not enter their barracks to assault or hurt them. In spite of being in the center of a Nazi concentration camp, the guards' absence granted them the freedom to hold open Bible studies and prayer meetings in their barracks. Many women came to have faith and trust in Christ through their meetings. Much later they discovered the reason the guards would not enter their barracks. It was because of the fleas!

In December of 1944 Corrie ten Boom was released from prison due to a clerical error. After learning about the reason for her release, she said, "God does not have problems—only plans."

Sisters and brothers, regardless to what you may be going through at this moment, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Elder Shirley Freeman

I'm not Living without You

On the TV Show, "The Voice", one of the contestants sang, "And I am Telling You I'm Not Going Anywhere," a song Jennifer Hudson made popular in the movie, *Dream Girls*. The young man sang with such passion that many were moved to tears. Although the song's title speaks volumes, it was the lyrics that captured my attention. They reminded me of my love and dependency on Jesus.

As I listened to the lyrics, I began to think about the goodness of Jesus. Part of the lyrics says, "You are the best man I've ever known." I don't know how you feel, but Jesus is the best man I've ever known. There are men who are good husbands, brothers, fathers and friends, but none can compare with Jesus.

Isaiah 54:5 tells us that our Maker is our husband (whether male or female). Like a good husband, He (Jesus) is always faithful, even when we are not. His faithfulness is not depended on our response, but on who He is. He covers, provides and protects those He loves. When I consider all that God has done for us through Jesus, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for His great love.

Have you ever considered what your life would be like without God? The lyrics, "I'm not living without you" caused me to consider what mine would be like without Him. No power on earth can mend a broken heart like Jesus. Without Him, I wouldn't have ever known what true love is. When I was sick, He healed me. When I wanted to give up, He gave me the strength to go on. He rescued me when I was in trouble and comforted me when I was distressed.

His great love for those who were unlovable still astonishes me. God's Word found in Romans 5:8 tells us that God demonstrated His love to us when we were still in our sins; He died for us. That's Love!

I join the Apostle Paul in proclaiming; "In Him we live move and have our being"(Acts 17:28). There is nothing you and I could accomplish or no temptation we could ever overcome without Jesus' help. You see, living without Jesus in my life is unthinkable. In Him I live, move and have my being. No, I'm not living without the LORD! I thank God that I don't have to, and neither do you.

Elder Shirley Freeman

“Portrait of a Godly Woman”

*“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.”*

Proverbs 31: 30 (NIV)

We live in a society that places great emphasis on physical appearances. Many are celebrated because of their outward beauty, which often fades with time, rather than a beauty from within. There is a beauty from within which far surpasses any outward appearance—it’s the beauty of a Godly Woman.

The word of God tells us in 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV), *“The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance—but the LORD looks at the heart.”* And in Proverbs 31:10-31 we are given a glimpse of a Godly woman who is also a woman of wisdom. Her character is something for younger women to aspire to and for young men to look for in a suitable companion. This woman is an asset to her husband—not a liability. She works hard and takes care of her household. She carries herself with dignity and respect. She shows compassion to the needy and is praised by her husband and children. She wears strength and dignity as her garments and is respected because of her character.

Proverbs 31: 30 summarizes what this woman of wisdom is all about. It says, *“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.”* Charm can be defined as a power of pleasing or attracting, as through personality or beauty.

The verse continues by stating, *“Beauty is fleeting.”* Beauty speaks of the outward or physical appearance. The quest for physical attractiveness is not limited to women because men are seeking cosmetic surgery in greater numbers than ever before. Are we trying to measure up to the world’s standard of beauty—instead of God’s? 1 Peter 2: 3-4 tells us, *“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. ⁴Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.”* .

We should take care of ourselves both physically and spiritually. A Christian’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we have a responsibility to take care of our temple through proper nutrition and exercise. An unhealthy body will limit one’s effectiveness in the kingdom. The problem arises when too much emphasis is placed on the external— instead of the internal. 1 Timothy 4:7b-8 says, *“Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”*

The latter part of Proverbs 31:30 tells us *“The woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”* Since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7), the woman who fears the Lord is wise. She trusts and honors God with her life. She understands that God is her Provider and Sustainer. The wise woman respects God and is in awe of Him. She would rather please God than man.

Sisters and brothers, God loves us just the way we are. Psalm 139:14 says, we have been fearfully and wonderfully made. Regardless to what the world may say, you are beautiful in His sight. Remember, charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord should be praised!

This is dedicated in memory of my mother, Bernice Johnson who loved the Lord with all her heart and to all other godly women.

Happy Mothers’ Day!

What Are You Willing to Sacrifice?

Sacrifice is defined as the surrender or destruction of something prized or desirable for the sake of something considered as having a higher or more pressing claim. Sacrifice and other spiritual disciplines such as fasting, meditation and solitude are not practiced as much during these days as they were in times past.

For the second year, we, the Daughters of Zion, have decided to consecrate ourselves for the forty- six days* of this Lenten Season. We begin each day with prayer and scripture reading, and we have committed to give up some of the thing(s) we desire. It's a sacrifice we make willingly to become more disciplined spiritually and to draw closer to God.

Jesus practiced spiritual disciplines. He arose early to pray and to spend time with the Father. He fasted regularly, and He customarily drew away from the crowds and His disciples to be alone (Luke 4:2, Mark 1:35). These disciplines helped Him to grow stronger and remain focused on His purpose. He taught us by example the necessity and benefits of spiritual disciplines.

What are you willing to sacrifice in order to receive something greater? I would like to share a story that I ran across of someone who was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for those he loved:

It is said that Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, once had captured a prince and his family. When they came before him, the monarch asked the prisoner, "What will you give me if I release you?"

"The half of my wealth," was his reply.

"And if I release your children?"

"Everything I possess."

"And if I release your wife?"

"Your Majesty, I will give myself." Cyrus was so moved by his devotion that he freed them all.

As they returned home, the prince said to his wife, "Wasn't Cyrus a handsome man!"

With a look of deep love for her husband, she said to him, "I didn't notice. I could only keep my eyes on you- the one who was willing to give himself for me."

Jesus, our Savior was willing to give Himself for all who would believe on Him (John 3:16). He suffered, bled and died that we might live. What a sacrifice! As we approach Resurrection Sunday (Easter), let's keep our eyes on Jesus. Always remember that our resurrected Savior paid the penalty for our sins because of His great love for us. There is no greater love than that!

Now, what are you willing to sacrifice for the Kingdom of God?

Elder Shirley Freeman

***Although the Lenten Season is forty days because Sundays are excluded, we have decided to include them.**

What are You Saying?

What are you saying? The Bible has a lot to say about the words we speak. Our words can heal or hurt, build up or tear down, bless or curse, encourage or discourage.

Proverbs 18:21a tells us that "***Death and life are in the power of the tongue.***" Have you ever considered the weightiness of your words? Words can have a lasting effect. There are adults today who are still suffering from ill words spoken to them as children. Twenty, thirty-- even forty years have passed, and still they have not healed.

Whether we know it or not, our words carry a lot of weight. We will be held accountable to God for the ones we speak. Let's take a look at Jesus' teaching concerning our words found in Matthew 12:36-37: "***But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.***" Since we will be held accountable, shouldn't we be careful what we say?

The words we speak can have a negative effect on ourselves as well as others. What are we saying to ourselves and others? Are we speaking life or death? Are we building ourselves and others up with the Word of God? It can help strengthen us when we are weak, lift us up when we are down, and assure us of God's love and assistance when we are in doubt.

We can choose to focus on the promises of God and speak life into our situations as well as others, or we can focus on the negative aspects. Don't allow another's words or your own to hinder you from becoming all God has planned for your life. Instead, build yourself up in the word and begin to speak life into your situation as well as others.

Listed below are some Biblical quotes that will aid you in this effort:

- **Philippians 4: 13:** "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"
- **Psalms 118: 17:** "*I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.*"
- **Isaiah 54:17:** "*No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment You shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is from Me,*" says the LORD."
- **Philippians 4: 19:** "*But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*"
- **Isaiah 41:10:** "*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*"

- **Psalm 27:1:** *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"*
- **Psalm 18:2:** *"The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."*

As we enter 2013 let's make certain that the words we speak to ourselves and others are words of *life, not death, words that build up, not tear down, words that bless, not curse, words that encourage, and not discourage*. What are you saying?

Elder Shirley Freeman

Founder

What are You Saying?

What are you saying? The Bible has a lot to say about the words we speak. Our words can heal or hurt, build up or tear down, bless or curse, encourage or discourage.

Proverbs 18:21a tells us that "***Death and life are in the power of the tongue.***" Have you ever considered the weightiness of your words? Words can have a lasting effect. There are adults today who are still suffering from ill words spoken to them as children. Twenty, thirty-- even forty years have passed, and still they have not healed.

Whether we know it or not, our words carry a lot of weight. We will be held accountable to God for the ones we speak. Let's take a look at Jesus' teaching concerning our words found in Matthew 12:36-37: "***But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.***" Since we will be held accountable, shouldn't we be careful what we say?

The words we speak can have a negative effect on ourselves as well as others. What are we saying to ourselves and others? Are we speaking life or death? Are we building ourselves and others up with the Word of God? It can help strengthen us when we are weak, lift us up when we are down, and assure us of God's love and assistance when we are in doubt.

We can choose to focus on the promises of God and speak life into our situations as well as others, or we can focus on the negative aspects. Don't allow another's words or your own to hinder you from becoming all God has planned for your life. Instead, build yourself up in the word and begin to speak life into your situation as well as others.

Listed below are some Biblical quotes that will aid you in this effort:

- **Philippians 4: 13:** "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"
- **Psalms 118: 17:** "*I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.*"
- **Isaiah 54:17:** "*No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment You shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is from Me,*" says the LORD."
- **Philippians 4: 19:** "*But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*"
- **Isaiah 41:10:** "*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*"

- **Psalm 27:1:** "*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*"
- **Psalm 18:2:** "*The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*"

As we enter 2013 let's make certain that the words we speak to ourselves and others are words of *life, not death, words that build up, not tear down, words that bless, not curse, words that encourage, and not discourage*. What are you saying?

Elder Shirley Freeman

Founder

Accept Your “Except”

Challenges and difficulties are a part of life. During difficult times we may feel hopeless or abandoned. There are even times we lose focus and throw ourselves grand pity parties. Our views of situations become distorted. We can literally “think” ourselves into a downward spiral.

Recently I studied the story of a woman who was troubled. I read in 2 Kings 4:1-7, about her husband’s death, her monumental debts and the possible loss of her sons. Yet in the middle of her circumstances she was blessed beyond measure using a resource she did not recognize as it sat right before her eyes. After reading the scripture, my attention went back to verse 2. What is significant about this verse is that the woman acknowledges her lack and her hope in the same breath – in the same sentence. In the NIV Bible she says I have nothing at all, “EXCEPT a little oil.” (Emphasis added.)

God can do great things with our EXCEPT. There is no reason we must accept defeat. Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus love and righteousness. This woman struck oil in her own living room! She paid all her debts and saved her sons. And it was all from her EXCEPT! When we look at our problems, our situation, even our life, we must learn to recognize our EXCEPT quickly. Our EXCEPT is our hope! When we look at our hope, our perception will be different and our relief will come sooner. When we acknowledge the small things as much as we embrace the big things, then God can deliver.

Words have a powerful impact on our mindset. And how we view our circumstance will determine how we deal with our situation. Perception is the key! We must speak life into our situations. During stressful times positive, encouraging words can help us shift our focus to our God-given EXCEPT. Ultimately, what we accomplish is all about our focus.

If we look at what God has given us as “nothing,” then we will treat it as nothing, and eventually it will become nothing. We must accept that our resources may not be as big as we desire to SEE, and in some instances our resources may be small. But GOD does not leave us nothing! He simply wants us to look beyond size and volume to move past our challenges. We need FAITH!

As Christians, we know God’s timing and decisions are not always easy to accept. But the one thing that makes the difference is our faith. Faith causes us to react in hope-filled ways to life’s obstacles. So I leave you with these words of encouragement:

*I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again,
And if you can’t hear me turn the volume to ten;*

*If He did it before He can do it again,
Our God of today is the same God back then.*

*So when trials come, remember you win
Therefore the question is not “IF” but “When”*

Gladys A. Livè



Sis. Gladys A. Livè is a native of Meridian, Mississippi who relocated to San Francisco in 1980. She is currently employed as the Northern California Material Manager for The Permanente Medical Group Regional Laboratories, and she has been a Kaiser Permanente employee since March 1991. Gladys is a new member of the Daughters of Zion Women's Ministries and she credits her increased Bible study time and growth to her participation in the ministry. Gladys and her husband, Julio, enjoy being the proud parents of three daughters, six grandchildren and two great-grandsons.

Great Possibilities!

The Les Brown quote, "The only limits to the possibilities in your life tomorrow are the butts you use today," reminds me of a conversation I had with a high ranking official at my workplace.

It was a Monday morning, and the gentleman walked into the office looking refreshed and enthusiastic. After our usual greeting, I said to him, "You seem really energetic for a Monday." (You see, I'm used to seeing everyone dragging in and hearing them complain that it's Monday again.)

His response is forever etched in my memory. He replied, "I don't view Mondays the way most people do. I see Mondays as the beginning of great possibilities for me. I have an opportunity to finish or begin a project or an opportunity to get things done." This official sees opportunities where others may see problems. Consequentially, I never viewed Mondays the same. Now I look forward to a week of great possibilities.

Jeremiah 29:11 tells us that God has a plan and a purpose for our lives. He has given all of us spiritual gifts and talents so we can fulfill those plans and purposes (1 Corinthians 12: 1-11). But what are we doing with those talents and gifts? Are we educating ourselves and making the most of our God-given abilities? Are we allowing fear or feelings of inadequacy to prevent us from moving forward? Sometimes what we need is right in front of us, but we fail to recognize its value.

This is reminiscent of Moses in Exodus 4 after he met God at the Burning Bush. God commissioned him to go back to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of bondage. Moses felt unequipped for the task and began offering excuses as to why he couldn't go. God did not entertain his excuses, but asked, "What is that you have in your hand?" The ordinary shepherd's rod in Moses' hand would prove to be useful to work miracles for an unbelieving nation. What is it you have in your hand? Have you failed to recognize its value?

The following quotes may help to inspire you to reach your goals:

"Everything is possible for one who believes." Jesus - Mark 9:23 (NIV)

"It is idleness that creates impossibilities; and where people don't care to do anything, they shelter themselves under a permission that it cannot be done." — Robert South

"A man can be as great as he wants to be. If you believe in yourself and have the courage, the determination, the dedication, the competitive drive and if you are willing to sacrifice the little things in life and pay the price for the things that are worthwhile, it can be done." Vince Lombardi

"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence." — Helen Keller

How do you view the challenges in your life? Do you complain, procrastinate, make excuses, or fail to use your time wisely? Time is a precious commodity that we cannot afford to waste. Once it is gone, we can never retrieve it. Don't allow an opportunity to slip away, because you didn't act in time. With God, life is full of great possibilities. All we need to do is act!

Elder Shirley Freeman

Giving Myself Away

Hebrews 12: A Letter to Christians

The lyrics to *I Give Myself Away* and *I Surrender All* are declarations of submission to God. The songs have beautiful melodies, but the declarations raise questions. Do we truly want to submit to God? Can we give ourselves to Him? Will we give up our way of thinking and allow God to use us wholly? Can we get beyond emotions in the music and the singing and live out the words in the songs?

Submission is a struggle (*Ephesians 6:12-13*), but we must continue to resist the devil (*James 4:7*) and our carnal mind will give way to God's will more each day (*Roman 8:12*). When we believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior we received eternal life, but our lives did not change completely at that time. Our way of thinking did not change. We still needed some work on the inside. In fact, it does not matter how long we have had salvation we will always need some work done on the inside. The old man does not want to let go of everything, and some undetected issues are lying dormant waiting to be discovered. Transforming our minds and sacrificially submitting ourselves to God is a process. (*Romans 12:1-2 and Hebrews 12:1*). Once the process starts it gradually changes the heart, and the change in our lives becomes evident.

The transformation process requires ongoing practice. Practicing transformation has to become a habit and a lifestyle. Daily depending on God, trusting and believing in Him, and allowing him to increase our faith will lead to sustained change. Denying ourselves things that simply look good, smell good or make us feel good is part of the process. Giving up bad habits, unhealthy relationships and familiar places can turn us into someone that others no longer recognize. Indeed, a transformed life will take us out of our comfort zones, but we must be willing to sacrifice our comfort for God's perfect plan.

Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice to implement God's salvation plan for man. Now Jesus sits at our Father's right hand. Remember the lyrics, "*I give myself away so you can use me,*" and "*I surrender all.*" These words are our declaration of willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice. Our sacrifice and our transformation can help change others and lead them to Christ. Without transformation our testimony is weak. We cannot persuade others to try Christ if our lives are not changed. There is no point in going to church and continuing to act like people in the world. Christians tipping and dipping in sin cannot build up the Kingdom of God.

So, let us daily practice surrendering to the Lord. Let us give up the old man and love the new man who reaches out to God for guidance every step of the way. Let us allow God to change us so our lives can encourage others. This holiday season and everyday give yourself to God so He can use you.

By Helen Gill Smith

“HOW BAD DO YOU WANT IT?”

Hebrews 11:6 – “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that **diligently seek him.**”

As I get older, I have witnessed first-hand Satan attacking church leaders, families, and nations with a vengeance. So many “church folk” are wreaking havoc throughout the body of Christ and seriously think they are doing right. I tremble at the thought of all the lost souls who do not know the Lord and may never know Him because of those on the Inside. Those who profess to know Him, but their walk does not align with their talk on the Outside. The number of those who once were of the Body of Christ has fallen away because of a lack of faith and hope. Saints, I implore you to get right so we can go home. If you don’t know it, judgment must begin at the house of God. Whatever you do for the Master, let it be real!

This sad observation only makes me want to draw even closer in true relationship with my Father because He means everything to me! **James 4:8a** says, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” My utmost desire is to live totally and completely for God! I want Him to be pleased with my life and all that I do and say for Him. I yearn for a greater anointing on my life that I can truly be a vessel of honor for Him. I want to be able to pull off more of me and put on more of Him daily, so that when folk look at me, they no longer see just me, but they see that the Father and I are one. Nothing else in this world matters – only what you do for Christ! All that we try to achieve and acquire on this side is merely temporal. But the word of God advises in **Matthew 6:20**, “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:” I can’t speak for you, but I diligently want to live so that God can use me any time, any way, and anywhere.

If you feel that there is a void in your life that can no longer be filled with the “*Stuff*” of this world, try filling it with the Savior! Are you tired of feeling that you have no purpose in life? **Jeremiah 29:11** reminds us, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” Are you thirsty for a Pentecostal experience from on high? Then you need to assemble yourself in one place, be on one accord, pray for power, and wait on the Holy Ghost to come upon you, then go out boldly and be a witness for Jesus. If you really want Him bad enough, start today and seek Him with all your mind, heart and soul and He will fill you with an everlasting love! How bad do YOU want it?

Reverend Anita P. Latin

Reverend Anita P. Latin was licensed to preach February 11, 2007 and Ordained March 22, 2009. She is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Ministry from American Baptist Seminary of the West. She received a Masters of Art in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary. She is a sought-after Minister of the Word and also a singer, songwriter, musician, poet and published author. She is the Visionary of ALB Ministry (www.albministry.org) and the Founder & CEO of OVL Foundation (www.ovlfoundation.org). Psalm 34:1 is her life motto. She gives God all glory and honor for what He is doing!



Forward Thinking

Weight Watcher, Jenny Craig, Nutrisystems and home gyms dominate television advertising this time of the year. The fact is every year billions of dollars go to companies promising a new you, a healthier lifestyle and a smaller waistline. What I find strange about ads emphasizing physical change is they miss the obvious. Obviously thought conditioning is essential to any lifestyle change. So, why doesn't Jenny Craig offer mind conditioning to make us think like a healthier person?

It turns out that thoughts are powerful but not necessarily transferable. Jesus said that if we had faith the size of a mustard seed we could tell the mountain to move and it would move. (Matthew 17:20.) These words define the power of our thoughts. Yet, Jesus could not give us powerful thoughts. Instead he told us that connecting with God produces powerful thoughts in us. (Matthew 17:21.) A connection with God conditions the mind leads to a better life. (Romans 12:2-3.)

God has carefully thought out the plans for our prosperity, so we need His direction to succeed. (Jeremiah 29:11.) Still, our own thoughts determine whether we live according to His plan or create our own disastrous detours. It is like the time we drove to Bossier City, Louisiana for our family reunion, and I tried to find the hotel without using my GPS navigation system. I lost the GPS signal at night, and I found myself driving down a scary, narrow country road without street lights. Fortunately, my son's phone had a stronger GPS signal. He was appointed co-pilot, and we turned the RV around and found the hotel. The point is that we must keep our minds on God's guidance and His promises to fulfill our purposes and to be our best.

The Bible contains many tips for transformational thinking. Philippians 4:8 says to "think on things that are pure and honest and of a good report." Think about things that build you up, and dismiss thoughts that tear you down. Think about the great things God has done for you, and minimize the setbacks or disappointments. In other words, God wants us to dwell on the positive and not the negative. He wants us to think about what we have and what we can do, instead of thinking about what we lack. God can elevate us with scarce resources and powerful thoughts. We are all like Moses – a fugitive with a speech defect holding a crooked staff – chosen to do a special work for God. To fulfill our purpose, God ask that we stop thinking about what's wrong with us and start thinking about the greatness of I AM.

Continually thinking about God's goodness leaves little time for worry and complaints that lead to discouragement and depression. If we always meditate on God's promises and His divine plan, then we are always going to be changing for the better. Even the products advertised on television can work when God is at the center of our thoughts.



Janie White loves studying God's Word. She mentors young women and is active in both her church and the Daughters of Zion. Janie thanks God for her 14 year marriage to John White. She has one biological son and several spiritual sons, daughters and grandchildren who keep her energized. Her personal joy comes from seeing others grow in faith and in knowledge of God's Word.

Strength is Weakness

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:10 (NIV)

Lance Armstrong popularized the slogan “Live Strong” some years ago. His LiveStrong Foundation celebrates his triumph over cancer and successful return to professional road cycle racing. The foundation’s mission is to empower and inspire cancer patients. Everyone agrees that strength is a good thing when facing adversity.

Quotes praising the virtues of strength abound.

“Only the strong survive.”

“A strong offense is the best defense.”

“True strength is keeping everything together when everyone expects you to fall apart.”

While almost everyone has a favorite quote about this valuable quality, I find it interesting that people have a hard time defining strength. The difficulty may lie in the fact that it is a concept that is Biblically counterintuitive to what popular culture teaches. For example, one of the dictionary definitions for strength is: “the state or quality or property of being strong.” True enough, but this circular definition does not tell us very much. Life coaches will provide similarly cloudy definitions, usually with positive intentions of guiding individuals to find their personal meaning of the word.

So what is a good definition of strength? How about this: strength is the ability to appreciate weakness. I used to hear about miraculous healings or great successes and think my faith was too small to get results like that. Like when menopause hit me about five years ago. The annoying hot flashes, sleepless nights and debilitating brain fog left me devastated. Initially, I prayed believing that God would heal me. After about a year, I saw a doctor who refused to prescribe HRTs, but thought I needed some anti-depressants. Rather than take the prescription, I tried several herbal remedies. Nothing worked entirely.

After dealing with the symptoms for so long, I adjusted to the change. Instead of praying for healing, my prayers changed to gratitude for everything God did through me. In my state of weakness I realized how amazingly gracious and powerful God truly is. My state of weakness reveals His strength that is perfected within me by revealing His strength to the world. Everyone has an opportunity to experience God’s strength through weakness, because life has so many struggles.

In 2 Corinthians Paul talks about having a “thorn” in his flesh. Historians have speculated widely about the thorn calling it a physical ailment and a mental illness. We may never know exactly what bothered Paul, but we do know that the thorn was sent by Satan. We also know that Paul chose to humble himself before God while under Satan’s attack. Like Paul, everyone can learn how a strength that is not our own grows and empowers us to do things that are unimaginable and impossible. God’s grace can be life sustaining and a source of hope through all our weaknesses and all our struggles. Our weakness can make us strong and bring God glory. “Live Weak !”

Janie White

THROUGH IT ALL

The Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness as punishment for their disobedience. During this spiritual “time-out” they experienced God’s Mighty Hand caring for them, providing, defending, guiding and directing them daily. Yet, even with God so merciful and close they moved through the wilderness with hesitance, doubt, fear, insecurity, and discouragement. It seems they could not enjoy God’s presence because they were too wrapped up in their problems.

Most of us, if not all, suffer the same doubts, fears, insecurities and disappointments when faced with setbacks that cause concern about our future and those we love. I want to share this testimony with you so you will LEARN AND GROW IN FAITH, OBEDIENCE and WISDOM. This story is a life or death account of what happened to a very dear friend who is also my sister in Christ.

Nearly seven months had passed since the doctor broke the news that she was pregnant. They could hardly believe it after she and her husband had tried to conceive for six years without any success. A few months after an ultrasound determined the baby’s sex, they got another big surprise. Instead of one baby, they were having twins. But this surprise came with the bad news of a high risk pregnancy that required her to be very careful during the following months.

A few months into the pregnancy the doctor noticed signs of a threatened spontaneous abortion, and he did not offer much hope that the babies would live. But she and I know the one God in whom we have hope. With our God we started a journey of faith through an uncertain wilderness. Day after day we read **Matthew 6:34**, “**Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**” Along with this verse we read promises in God’s Word, and we believed them in our minds and hearts.

Each doctor visit revealed disturbing news. Only one baby was growing and feeding properly. The other baby, a boy, was not getting any nourishment. Her body made two attempts to abort both babies. Finally at seven months the life-giving Lord God Almighty ordered the babies to come into the world. She gave birth to twins with proper weight and size. Both babies were large, powerful and entirely healthy.

While living day to day life and thanking God for the gift of these little twins, our Savior Jesus Christ gave new life to my dear friend’s sister, husband, and her mother. They each received Jesus Christ as their only Savior. Acknowledging God through this wildness experience proved to her family that Jesus Christ lives and He is the Almighty!

My question to you is: What or who causes you to feel fear, uncertainty, discouragement and doubt? I invite you to experience abundant life in Christ Jesus through His Word, and to live every day with confidence. Acknowledge Him THROUGH IT ALL, because He will lead you through the wilderness.

Luz Sandoval

The Hand of God (God's Mighty Right Hand)

We hear talk about the eyes, hands, finger and feet of God. These conversations may lead us to question why God, who is a Spirit, would have physical limbs. Does God look like us? The fact that we have such questions about God only proves we cannot comprehend or imagine God's supernatural appearance or His eternal existence.

Even though I don't know what God looks like, I often like to think of God's hands. More than just His hands, I like to imagine His mighty right hand. The word "hand" is more than a body part. The dictionary defines hand as that by which a work is accomplished, strength and power. The word hand appears 1,466 times in the Bible. Hand is used in phrases like, "given into the hand" of someone, which denotes coming under someone's authority. There is also mention of being rescued "out of the hands" of someone, which describes deliverance and freedom.

God's right hand is glorious and powerful. His right hand can dash our enemies to pieces. (Exodus 15:6.) Placing ourselves in God's hands ensures our safety. He covers us with His strong right hand, so that we need not fear our enemies. God fights for us just as He fought for Moses and the Israelites. We can always trust the Lord our God to fight the enemy for us, but we must resist the temptation to handle matters in our own way. Remember, the battle is not ours, it is the Lord's. His mighty right hand is at work.

In Joshua 4:24, God says, "That all the people of the earth might know the HAND of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever." (KJV, emphasis added.) In this passage God used his mighty hand to hold back the waters of the Jordan River allowing the Israelites to cross over to Jericho on dry land. The magnitude of this miracle goes beyond comprehension. Men can spend five years or longer building a dam to stop a river's flow. With God the process was instant, and there was not even a muddy river bottom – the land was completely dry. A God with that kind of power deserves fear, or, as we call it today, respect. We respect God by our humility, obedience, praise, giving, loving one another and living in unity.

David proclaimed, ". . . at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16:11.) When we exalt the Lord our God we discover joy, peace and divine pleasures forever. God's divine pleasures are a gift so that our joy may be full in Christ Jesus. He takes pleasure in the prosperity of his servants. God's outstretched hand revives the spirit and strengthens the heart. His hand empowers us to serve with our God-given talents. God's might hand is reaching for you and me today. No matter what the circumstances we can depend on God's might right hand.

Enjoy the Scenery

The Earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. Psalm 33:5

Every day has moments worth savoring and enjoying to the fullest. But, the real reward is a sense of enriched meaning in life, which is in turn motivating and satisfying. Gaze out a window and watch birds making their nest on a ledge. Take your brown bag lunch to the park and watch the geese circle on the pond. Watch puppies tumble about in their play. Inspirational moments and reminders of God's creativity are everywhere.

Live your life each day as you would climb a mountain. An occasional glance toward the summit keeps the goal in mind, but many beautiful scenes can be observed from each new vantage point. Climb slowly and steadily, while enjoying each passing moment; and then the view from the summit will serve as a fitting climax for the journey.

God's creation is all around us, not only in the form of foliage, animals and birds, but in people. Take time today to enjoy what God has done and is doing! You'll enjoy what you are doing more.

Mamie Burgess

Psalm 104

Verses 24-26, 31-34 (NIV)

- ²⁴ How many are your works, Lord!
In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
- ²⁵ There is the sea, vast and spacious,
teeming with creatures beyond number—
living things both large and small.
- ²⁶ There the ships go to and fro,
and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.
- ³¹ May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—
- ³² he who looks at the earth, and it trembles,
who touches the mountains, and they smoke.
- ³³ I will sing to the Lord all my life;
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
- ³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him,
as I rejoice in the Lord.

Men Ought to Always Pray

Luke 18:1-8

Looking at the world today we see very little justice, integrity and morality governing our land. We face problems never seen before. Worldwide spiritual, mental, physical and economic troubles continue with no end in sight. The world is spinning out of control, led by a succession of greedy, corrupt corporations, governments and nations. All around talk of crisis, fear, failure on Wall Street, and skyrocketing gas prices is common. Besides financial crises, there are perpetual cycles of genocide erupting throughout our communities. They manifest in the war against marriage, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, abortions, government fighting against the people's will and attacks on Christianity. Let's face it – we are in a crisis!

But through all of this man ought to always pray.

Jesus said in Luke 18:1, that men ought to always pray. I don't know about you, but I don't always feel like praying. Sometimes I want to throw a pity party, ignore the issue, or just throw in the towel and forget it. In this day and time the temptation to quit praying and give up is great. But despite our feelings or how things look, man ought to always pray. Pray even when it seems that trouble is striking faster than we can pray or faster than prayers are being answered. Man ought to always pray. We must keep pressing toward God, and we must pray until what we have prayed for has manifested.

After admonishing us to pray, Jesus continues with a parable about a judge who did not fear God, or have any regard for man. In the parable there was a widow who lived in the city. The widow persistently asked the judge for justice over her adversary. For a while the judge would not do anything, but after some time he said to himself, "Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." (Luke 18:4b-5.) Jesus points out that the corrupt judge does justice to avoid annoyance. On the other hand, God willingly gives justice to his chosen people who continue to cry out for help. But how much persistent faith will He find?

We ought to always pray because the government and the world will do the wrong thing. Human frailty will emerge, and we will find ourselves in situations where human strength, common wisdom and logical reasoning will fail. Did you know that if we keep praying about what troubles us, God will save us? If we pray about injustice, He will avenge us. He will provide for us. He will resolve every situation for us, and he will heal us! Let's continue crying out for justice and not give up, because help is on the way. Keep pressing and praying believing that our breakthrough will come. Be determined to be more persistent than the problem and the enemy's attack.

Minister Kasiaa Thomas

Waiting on God

Waiting on God is one of the hardest things in the world to do. Especially for an impatient person who wants fast results. Even so, waiting is part of our walk with God and essential for spiritual growth. Waiting reveals and tests our character. Waiting means staying, resting or remaining stationary expecting the arrival of some person or event.

Yes, waiting is hard. Let's be honest. Even the most patient soul gets weary waiting for God. At times waiting on God is like sitting in a hospital waiting room. It can be a most undesirable, fearful and uncomfortable place where you get no information about what is happening inside the operating room. The waiting is not the problem, but the real enemy is the frustration, impatience, fear, and fatigue you experience while hoping for a miracle. These factors make waiting on God very difficult too.

God promised Sarah, Abraham's wife, a child. There was one problem -- Sarah was past child bearing age. So, she laughed aloud thinking, "God knows I'm too old to have a baby!" God knew the biological limitations. God also knew He is not limited by time or age like we are. Sarah had a baby at age 90!

Some women fret about being 30 or 40, still single and having no children. They desperately rush to get a husband, while others give up thinking it is too late to be productive in this life. You might even be thinking you should be further along than you are now. How do you know for sure? You could be exactly where God wants you. His divine plan could be to bless you in your latter years! He has a set time for everything: marriage, giving birth, finishing college and walking in ministry. You are never too old for God to use and bless you.

Unfortunately, we live in a microwave society that pushes us to get everything at a young age and right now. Many make the mistake of getting too much, too soon and wind up regretting they moved so fast. Even Sarah made a decision she later regretted. She gave her handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham. Hagar and Abraham produced Ishmael. This child caused huge problems after God fulfilled his promise to Sarah. Her desperate heart and lack of faith in God's power to bring life to her dead womb are reasons why descendants of Ishmael and Isaac are at war today.

We all battle anxiousness and frustration while waiting on God. Waiting is not for the faint-hearted. You will need patience, longsuffering, perseverance, faith and trust to receive your blessing. God is faithful and reliable in keeping His promises. He has promised plans for prosperity and not for harm, and plans for hope and a future. (*Jeremiah 29:11*.) Your faith has to outlast frustrations, fears, road blocks and your biological clock. You must have confidence in God's perfect timing and know He will not withhold any good thing from you.

Minister Kasiaa Thomas



Kasiaa T. Thomas is a born again believer who loves the Lord with all of her heart, mind and body. Kasiaa received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and was called into the ministry at the age of 25. Kasiaa is a Licensed Minister and Psalmist, with a Prophetic call on her life. She was licensed by Pastor Steven A. Bailey of the Olivet Missionary Baptist Church in San Francisco, California in 2005, where she currently serves as Associate Minister. She has been anointed and empowered to teach and preach the gospel.

5 Elements to Spiritual Strength

Part 1: God's Word – Food

Our bodies are capable of doing many impressive things. But our bodies require preparation. Athletes do extreme training to keep their bodies ready for the time to perform. Our spiritual bodies also have tremendous power, but only with the proper strengthening and training.

Strengthening our spirits involves five key elements. One key element is knowledge of God's word. Reading and studying God's word is the part of our spiritual workout that ensures we can do God's will. (2 Timothy 3:16.) Christians acting outside of God's will are weak and stunted. There were times in my life when I struggled spiritually, because my study habits were not what they needed to be. Not studying enough caused my spirit to struggle during adversity, because it wasn't being fed enough of the word.

As we grow older our appetites grows too. The same goes for our spirits. Spiritual growth through studying the word should lead to a bigger appetite for the word. God's word is spiritual food that nourishes us and makes us grow. (Jeremiah 15:16, Acts 20:32, 1 Timothy 4:6). Our physical bodies cannot survive, let alone get stronger, without food for refueling. I do a lot of weightlifting, working out, and coaching. I always emphasize the importance of fueling the body before and after exercising. The same goes for our spiritual bodies. They need fuel before and after a life trial or tribulation. The fuel is not just for growth it is for survival.

Not much is worse than going through a spiritual workout or test with a malnourished spirit. This is why we continuously need to study and read God's word. The word keeps us prepared and strong for whatever the day, week, month, or year may bring. If we struggle with poor health, poverty, physical or substance abuse, death, family drama, hopelessness, depression, anger, hatred, or whatever, our spirits can carrying these burdens to God's altar. But without God's word our weak spirits may be unable to hand burdens to God.

I can honestly say that I love eating – even when I'm not necessarily hungry. Some foods I eat are good for me, and I know other foods are not appropriate for developing the strong physique I want. For spiritual growth it's important to eat God's word. "You are what you eat," is a true saying. If the spirit is fed *Bread of Heaven* and fruits of His Gospel, then strength, power, joy, understanding and growth will follow. (Psalm 119:50,103, 1 Corinthians. 3:2, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.) But if our spirits are fed things of this world they will become obese and lapse into poor health. They will not be capable of the lifting God requires of us. (Psalm 55:22, 1 Peter 5:7.) So make sure you feed your spirit what it needs, and let's grow strong in the Lord.

Please look for the next element in this series – Part 2: Following the Workout Plan – Obedience

Minister Marcus Ivan Moore

Dwell Where God is and Stay!

Psalms 91:1

If we are honest, we can admit the fact that we are living in some very problematic times. PROBLEMS are all around us. Don't kid yourself, all of us have dealt with, are dealing with or will deal with, a problem before leaving this world. There are problems in our homes. There are problems on our jobs. We see nations rising against nations, and civil unrest everywhere (Matthew 24:1-14). Instability defines our economy, our culture and even our character. We see people doing unthinkable acts, and even the children of God are not exempt.

However, no matter what the problems we must remember our Father gives us His perspective. He freely shares his point of view on our problems. God also has a convenient solution to our problems. With this in mind, the real question is where and how will you stand in the face of problems? Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 4:8, that although we will experience some problems, perspective (point of view) is extremely important. To paraphrase Paul I would say, "We have problems, but problems don't have us."

Psalm 91 tells us that in God's dwelling place our perspective on life's problems can change. When we are dwelling with God -- residing in Him, resting in Him, building a homestead in Him -- our problems can't frazzle our faith. It's there in that dwelling place that God becomes:

My Shepherd (Psalm 23), and

My Salvation (Psalm 27)

Psalm 27:3 implies that when we are dwelling in God, confidence shows up in the middle of calamity! This is just an extra bonus God gives us His in hiding place. His hiding place is a safety zone, a place of refuge, and, according to the KJV, it is a *pavilion* in times of trouble (Psalm 27:5). A pavilion is a large open structure or building used to shelter, shield, or secure. God's dwelling place is a safe covering.

In God's dwelling place He is:

My Strength and My Shield (Psalm 28)

Notice how David makes this personal, “The LORD is my. . . .” While in that dwelling place, maybe with problems perplexing us, we must learn to confess with our mouths that, “He is MY Shepherd, MY Salvation, MY Strength and MY Shield.”

In God’s dwelling place, He will provide us a song (Psalm 28:6, 7). What will your song be in the night seasons of your life?

Don’t let it be, “*Sitting on the dock of the bay wasting time;*”

or, “*What’s love got to do with it;*”

or worse, “*Just my imagination running away with me.*”

No, let it be the Lord’s song. Sing a song of testimony to the awesomeness of our God.

Sing, “**The LORD is My Shepherd.**”

Sing, “**The LORD is My Salvation.**”

Sing, “**The LORD is My Strength and Shield.**”

No matter what you are going through learn to sing in the night seasons of your life. Get to God’s dwelling place, and stay there! It’s the safest place!



Reverend Anthony Scott, Sr. is a native of San Francisco Bay Area, but now resides in Forth Worth, Texas. He and his wife Maya are the proud parents of five sons, and the grandparents of one grandson. Reverend Scott serves as Associate Minister and Minister of Music at Mahanaim Christian Fellowship Church in Crowley Texas, under the leadership of Senior Pastor Donald Ellison.

Reverend Scott accepted his call to preach in 1999, and was later licensed while serving as Minister of Music at Olivet Missionary Baptist Church, under the leadership of Pastor Steven A. Bailey. Though his accomplishments in music are many, he is humbled by and cherishes every opportunity to share the word of God with all who will listen. He believes that the Word of God should be preached simply to transform lives by God's awesome power.

Stay Connected

A story is told about a married couple who were going for a ride. During the ride, the wife said to her husband, "Something has changed. We are not like we use to be." The husband asked, "How were we before?" The wife replied, "We used to be closer. We held hands all the time, and even when we went for drives, I would sit close to you, but now we sit farther apart." To this the husband asked, "Who moved?"

If you don't feel as close to God as you did in the past, who moved? I can assure you that God didn't move. The problem is not God, but us. The Bible tells us in James 4: 8 "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you."

Our heavenly Father longs for an intimate relationship with His people. He desires to spend time with us when we pray, read His Word and worship. Have you ever been in a one-sided relationship where you were the only one doing the pursuing? How did that make you feel? I believe we grieve the Holy Spirit when we treat Him as one who has no value.

Every relationship requires work on the part of both parties. In marriage it takes both parties communicating and spending time together to ensure a successful union. Lack of communication and time spent together sharing goals, dreams and things of the heart will often lead to failure, loss of intimacy and passion. How many times have we heard a couple say, we just grew apart? No one suddenly just grows apart, it's progressive. They stopped spending time together, communication ceased, and eventually they lost their connection.

Sisters and brothers, let's not allow this to be the case concerning our relationship with Jesus. Spending time in His presence should be our priority. Let's stay connected by spending time with Him in prayer, reading and meditating on His Word, and when we worship. Our God longs for intimacy with those He loves. Don't allow the fire and passion you once felt for Him to fizzle out. Keep the fire in your heart burning with passion for the Lover of your soul, Jesus. Stay connected!