

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.

Elder Shirley Freeman

Can We Afford A Relationship With God?

Psalms 116:12 (Amplified Version) “What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? [How can I repay Him for all His bountiful dealings?]”

What can we give back to God for all the benefits He’s given us... benefits such as: health, strength, a sound mind, food, clothing, shelter, and most importantly, salvation.

The benefits that we are familiar with are the ones that we receive through employment and are based upon our service; such as health care and retirement plans. These are benefits that end when our service to the company ends. These kinds of benefits are based upon what we can give. But what shall we render to God?

Can we give Him what is already His? Can we create something that we think He doesn’t have?

When I ask myself these questions, I come up with one answer: Give myself to Him completely!

Sometimes we think God wants something that we are not capable of giving Him, when what He wants is a life completely committed to Him. He wants our dedication, our praise, and our worship. He wants us to spend time with Him in prayer, and in His Word.

Many times in marriages we see that commitment is based on convenience, happy times, excitement, comfort, and even financial gain. Marriage vows state that we are to be completely committed to each other for better or worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer.

My parents are a perfect example. They have been married over 57 years. Have they been all good years with no challenges, struggles, failures, disagreements and disappointments? Absolutely not. But they are committed to each other and to the covenant they made with God when they presented themselves to Him and to each other at the marriage altar.

Paul says it this way in Romans 12:1 (Amplified Version): “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, *and* beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service *and* spiritual worship.”

God wants us to be set apart for His use, and pleasing to Him. This should be our response for all that God does for us.

So the answer is yes, we can afford a relationship with God. All it requires is giving ourselves to Him completely!

Reverend Audrey Gail Batton is the Pastor of New Mount Vernon Missionary Baptist Church of San Francisco. She is an anointed woman of God who has a passion for the Word and love for God's people.



Reverend Batton is a preacher's kid who was taught by her father and founder, of the New Mount Vernon Church, Rev. Wince Batton. She is the mother of two sons and the fifth of seven children.

Pastor Batton is a sought after preacher, evangelist and conference speaker, who delivers the Gospel of Jesus Christ with passion and clarity. A woman God has called to preach at such a times as this.

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“Distractions”

We have just completed a study in the book of Ephesians. The last lesson was based on chapter 6: 10-24 which teaches about spiritual warfare. It reminded us that we have a real enemy who is out to destroy us. He is relentless and will use whatever method he deems effective to defeat us. The word of God says it like this in 1 Peter 3: 8, “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*” We cannot afford to be asleep (spiritually); we must always be on guard against the tactics and tricks of our adversary.

One of his favorite weapons is distractions. The New English Dictionary defines distraction as *an interruption; an obstacle to concentration*. Have you ever prayed and found yourself thinking about everything other than God? That’s a distraction. Uncontrollable thoughts broke your concentration and interrupted your prayer. The enemy uses any and everything to distract us. His purpose is to take us off course, so we will not fulfill our God-given purpose.

Many accidents have occurred, because someone was distracted. While driving a car or operating certain types of equipment, distractions can be dangerous--even fatal. A doctor who becomes distracted while performing surgery endangers the life of his or her patient. Indeed, distractions have been the cause of many lives being destroyed.

In the book of Judges (13-16) we read about Samson, a man who God chose to deliver the Israelites from their Philistine enemies. A Nazarite from birth, he was set apart for the service of God. He was forbidden to cut his hair or to drink strong drink, and he was supposed to keep his vows all the days of his life.

Although he was given supernatural physical strength to conquer Israel’s enemies, Samson was weak in other areas. He was lustful, never sought the Lord for direction and did not honor his vows. He visited prostitutes frequently and made unwise choices in his relationships. He even used his God-given strength on occasions for selfish reasons. He lost focus of his purpose. The things that he should have destroyed, he began to pursue. He became so distracted by his own lustful desires that he began feeding his enemies information which led to the loss of his strength, sight and his life.

Are you becoming distracted by unimportant things or people who are not a part of God’s plan and purpose for your life? Have you gotten sidetracked and lost your focus and concentration? Take heed of Samson’s mistakes, and don’t allow distractions to get you off course. Satan will send distractions of every sort, but we can counter those attacks with prayer and reading and meditating daily on the Word of God.

"Jesus, the Gift that keeps on Giving"

I love this time of the year! It's the time of year that seems to bring out the best in everyone. Many look for ways to serve others or give back to their communities during this holiday season. This is true of some who may never consider giving or volunteering during other times of the year.

There is one person I know who gives to the human race every day of the year. His name is Jesus. John 3:16 tells us that God loved the world so much that He gave us the gift of His only Son. Can you imagine sacrificing one of your children so someone else could live? The thought of doing this is unimaginable for most of us, but this is exactly what God did for the world through Jesus.

Jesus gave up His glory and riches in His heavenly kingdom and became poor that we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). The world is His and all of us who live in it, according to the scripture (Psalm 24:1). Yet He gave it all up, wrapped Himself in human flesh and dwelled among us. This kind of love and sacrifice is hard for most of us to comprehend. I join the Psalmist in asking the question, "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:4 NIV)

During His three year ministry, Jesus taught in the synagogues, trained His disciples, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, fed the hungry, caused the lame to walk, resurrected a man from the dead and more. Yet, He was despised and hated for doing good.

If that were not enough, Jesus gave up His life that we might live. Jesus continues to heal the sick, give sight to the blind (spiritually) and resurrect those of us who were dead in our trespasses and sins. He is now sitting at the right hand of the Father interceding on our behalf. He is always available any time we need Him. What a loving and amazing Savior! No wonder He is called the Wonderful Counselor!

Unlike most gifts any of us will ever receive, Jesus is the gift that keeps on giving.

Merry Christmas from the Daughters of Zion Women's Ministries!

Elder Shirley Freeman, Founder

Created to Worship

God's word tells us that we were created for God's glory and to worship Him (Revelation 4:11, Isaiah 43:7). To put it simply, it's not about us; it's all about God. The entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation is about God, not man! It begins with God and ends with God. In Genesis 1:1 the scripture says "In the beginning God...", and in Revelation 22: 7-21 Jesus speaks of His return and Who He is. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

I've learned that you can praise God and not be a worshipper, but you can not be a worshipper and not praise. There are some who praise God, because He has blessed them, brought them out of some situation or has healed them. Their praise is dependent on what God has done on their behalf and that's good. On the other hand, worshippers praise God in spite of their circumstance. They have determined in their hearts that even if He does not deliver, chooses not to heal, or does not give me that job, I still will bless the Lord at all times and praise Him continually.

Job was a worshipper. After receiving message that his children were dead and everything he once owned was gone, the Bible says in Job 1:20-21 *"Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."*

I dare you to praise God like that! The Bible tells us that God inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). Therefore, when you and I begin worshipping, God sits in the midst of our praise. When we jump, shout, dance and bless the Lord with our mouths, the enemy gets confused. He thought that what you and I were going through would make us give up on God. He did not understand the depth of our commitment and the greatness of our love for our God. So what the enemy meant for evil, will turn out for our good.

Because of his faithfulness, God blessed Job more at the end than the beginning. He received a double blessing! Sisters and brothers, let's be determined to worship and praise God in spite of our circumstances, because we were created to worship and to glorify His name. What better way to bring Him glory, than demonstrating our love and devotion, through praise and worship?

Elder Shirley Freeman, Founder

Just Do It

If you are reading this article, congratulations, you made it to 2014! What a blessing it is to have another opportunity to set new goals and reach those we were unable to reach in 2013. God has given us a chance to do it all again.

If you could turn back the hand of time, what would you do differently this year than you did last year? Would you start that business, complete that building project, write that novel, finish your sewing project, or simply get your house in order? I'm convinced that procrastination is the primary reason some of these goals are not implemented or completed. Life is too short and time is too precious to waste. Time lost can never be regained!

Let's look at some reasons we procrastinate:

1. Feeling that you have more time
2. Thinking that you work better under pressure
3. You fear failure or success
4. You lack self-discipline
5. You make too many commitments

What steps can we take to overcome the negative effects of procrastination?

1. Ask yourself what good will come out of putting things off again.
2. Realize you will feel a sense of accomplishment after completing a task.
3. Do not over commit yourself.
4. Make a checklist of things to accomplish.
5. Put your plans into action.

Below you will find quotes on procrastination that will inspire you to stop putting things off that can sabotage your future success:

"Procrastination is one of the most common and deadliest of diseases and its toll on success and happiness is heavy." ~Wayne Dyer

"Procrastination usually results in sorrowful regret. Today's duties put off until tomorrow give us a double burden to bear; the best way is to do them in their proper time." ~Ida Scott

"Procrastination is opportunity's assassin." ~Victor Kiam

John Maxwell, a well-known authority on leadership, is quoted as saying, ***"When a person says one of these days, it usually means none of these days."*** Make a commitment and stick to it. Remember, time is too precious of a commodity to waste. God has given us another opportunity to learn from our mistakes and make better choices. Make a commitment to yourself that you will no longer put off for tomorrow what can be done today. Just Do It!

Happy New Year!

Elder Shirley Freeman, Founder

LEARNING TO TRUST GOD COMPLETELY

Proverbs 3:5

Complete trust is something God intended for me to learn. I'd say He enrolled me in private tutoring, because I was struggling with actively trusting in God. My private lessons started with an intensive homework assignment. My dad and his siblings took ill, my personal life took a turn for the worse, and even my job was affected. I thought I could handle it. But the stress was taking me down, and I did not even know it. Despair set in with paralyzing force.

As a 13-year breast cancer survivor I knew firsthand that God is a healer. But I just couldn't seem to trust Him for things like homecare services, fixing relationships and managing my workload. One of the things I needed to change was complaining to friends about my problems and challenges. Friends really could not help. Instead of complaining I started to acknowledge God's goodness and His strength that helps me overcome my challenges. I also practiced not worrying about situations. If I totally trusted God, then I had to recognize that my problems are in His capable hands.

I learned that faith is trusting God when things don't turn out the way I expect. Proverbs 3:5- 6, tells us to "[t]rust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight." Trusting in God means having faith that He will see to it that everything turns out for the best. We walk by faith (believing without seeing) and not by sight. God has demonstrated His power to turn my bad situations into blessings on many occasions. Sometimes I was unaware of what God was doing until the situation was resolved. God closed doors I wanted to open, and he opened doors I didn't want to enter. I did not understand at times, because I was not totally trusting God.

Learning to trust God may take many steps. One step for me was finding scriptures that encourage me to trust in God's Word. Another step was changing my way of thinking so that it is consistent with the scriptures. Also, I had to change my actions to reflect my new way of thinking. This meant stepping out of my comfort zone and facing challenges for which I had not prepared. I struggled, got confused and felt miserable at times. Through it all Proverbs 3:5 kept replaying in my mind, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart!"

I learned that when God directs our paths sometimes we are led in directions that do not make sense to us. Many times we may not understand His plan. If we try to override God with our own plan, then we make a mess of things. His plan may lead us on a rocky path at times but, Romans 8:28, assures us, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." This is why we can trust in the Lord with all of our hearts.

From Hell to God's Grace
A SISTER'S JOURNEY

“I held onto him so tight”... I shouted to him how much I hated him for what he had done to me. I screamed, “How does it feel, Michael to burn?” I shifted my weight and placed my knee on his throat. I listened to him gurgle for a couple of moments. I had snapped. Satan almost had me, but God sent the Holy Spirit to stop me once again. I would have killed Michael and **my life would have been done.”**

This is an excerpt from my novel, *From Hell to God's Grace ... A Sister's Journey*. I was born in St. Louis, Missouri. My family later moved to Chicago where I was raised on the notorious South Side. I am a mother of two, and I have experienced my share of life's tragedies. Through my struggles I lost sight of God's plan for my life. In spite of countless poor decisions, God saved me from myself. I later realized God saved me because He wanted my testimony. Now I write to fulfill God's plan for my life.

The good news is that God kept us though all the chaos that we endured for a divine purpose. No matter how dark our circumstances, He never leaves our side. The fact that we survived perilous ordeals is proof that God is still in the business of saving souls. God's grace and mercy are available to all. Although we lose sight of God's plan for our lives, He patiently waits for us to realize that He already cleared the path. God knows that we are incapable of perfection. We must understand that God doesn't expect perfection from us, **He just expects progress.** God understands how foolish we can be, that is why He gave his only begotten son to save us.

God is awesomely patient and faithful. Like me, some of us have followed a self-destruction and despair plan. We believe that because of our many sins there is no way we can fulfill God's awesome plan for our lives. **This is just one of the lies the enemy feeds our minds!** The enemy can peek into our futures. He knows God's perfect plan for our lives. To stop God's plan the enemy uses extreme trickery. But God equipped us with weapons to fight the enemy, including our greatest weapon--God's Word.

Jesus already paid the price for our sins. Don't let the enemy have the victory in your life. Get onboard with God's plan. Change your heart, meditate on His word, feed your soul, and confess your faith. Get delivered from hell to God's amazing grace.

My book is available at Barnes and Noble Bookstores, and online at barnesandnoble.com, Amazon.com, and cynthiawhite.tateauthor.com. Get your copy and get free. Feel free to follow me on Facebook and Twitter by book title. Contact me for speaking engagements at cyndarn117@gmail.com.

® Cynthia White



Cynthia White has experienced more than her share of near death experiences, trials and tribulations. Through her struggles she lost sight of God's plan for her life. She eventually realized that she survived all of her life tragedies because God wanted her testimony. She uses written expression to deliver her story and help others on their journey to the path God planned for them.

Cynthia is now happily married to Terry White and living in Oklahoma City. God has delivered her to a peaceful and loving marriage, along with a grounded lifestyle. She spends most of her time telling all who will listen of God's goodness, and that He is still in the business of changing lives. Follow Cynthia on Facebook and Twitter, and keep an eye out for future publishing. She is still writing about the glory of God.

"God's Blessings"

1 Chronicles 4:9-10 records a story of a man named Jabez whose name means, "One who gives pain." According to the scriptures, he was more honorable than his brothers but still lived with a name that meant pain.

Jabez did not allow what someone else called him to determine his future. One day he asked God to bless him indeed in a big way and enlarge his territory. The Bible does not tell us that he asked his mother why she gave him this name which means pain. No, he went directly to the one who could take away the pain. Jabez did not ask the Lord only to bless him and enlarge his coast or territory, but to take away the pain also. We serve a God who is able to do exceedingly, and abundantly, above all we could ever ask or think and He invites us to come boldly before His throne and request the things we need (Ephesians 3:20, Hebrews 4:16). That's exactly what Jabez did!

He was not satisfied with his condition. The name that was given to him emanated from his mother's pain. He asked that the Lord's hand be with him. He knew that God alone had the power to turn that situation around. This lets us know we should always request God's guidance before seeking outside help. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Jabez wanted God to do something big in his life, and it's all right to ask God to do something extraordinary in your life also, especially if what you are asking will bring glory to His name. Just as Jabez wanted God to expand his territory, we Christians should desire to expand our outreach for Christ. If God increases our area of influence, this will give us more opportunities to share His love with many.

Lastly, Jabez asked God to keep him from causing pain as his name suggests. Because he was an honorable man, Jabez was concerned about causing pain to others. He was not just asking for a blessing for himself, but he was asking God to bless him, so he could be a blessing. Jabez's prayer is a great example for all of us. It is your Father's good pleasure to bless you. To bless in the biblical sense means to impart supernatural favor. God honored Jabez's request.

It's sometimes easy to forget the greatest gift (blessing) given to mankind, which is the gift of salvation (John 3:16). Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted, set the captives free and to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19:10, Psalm 147:3). Like Jabez, we can ask the Lord for whatever we need today. He will not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly. (Psalm 84:11)

Elder Shirley M. Freeman, Founder

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!

Abiding In God (Psalm 91)

In Psalm 91, David writes about living in God's secret place. This place is safe, tranquil, a retreat from the noise, and a shelter from all danger. It's a warm and fuzzy place that feels like snuggling under downy soft feathered wings. The images of this place change to meet every need. With everything we need for peace, protection and prosperity we should learn to abide in God's secret place.

On a personal note my experience with abiding in God's secret place has been more like sailing across a vast ocean in a ship. Sometimes the waters get rough, and I get tossed around. Sometimes I can't see land, and the ship just floats seemingly standing still on the calm waters. Sometimes the ship runs aground in a strange port. Sometimes the ship hits rock and I'm tossed overboard afloat in the water, but still clinging to the ropes. But like David, no matter what happens I feel secure and empowered when I visualize myself inside the place that represents God's love and protection.

We usually associate being inside shelter with security, so it is only fitting that Jesus told us to "Abide in [Him] (John 15:4.) He is our rock, our salvation, our peace and so much more. We can easily see Jesus as a secure place in turbulent times. He calmed the stormy sea. He silenced an angry mob. He healed the sick. He ordered demons to flee. No powers could stand up against him. God demonstrated the characteristics David describes in Psalm 91, through Jesus. Jesus is the manifestation of God's secret place.

Making the decision to live in God's secret place requires us to spend daily time studying the Word and in prayer. Setting up residence in the secret place means regularly acknowledging God's presence. You can acknowledge Him almost like you would greet a friend who invites you into their home. If we resolve to dwell in Him and with Him, then God will cover us with His impenetrable presence. He literally becomes our refuge, our rock, and our bomb shelter.

All it takes is a heart that says, "God, I want to live in You. Help me to always acknowledge Your loving and protecting presence. Give me the desire to draw closer to You, just as You want to draw closer to me." We have His promise, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8). God knows we have families, jobs, ministries, and the stresses associated with meeting our responsibilities. Still, He has made it possible through His indwelling Holy Spirit and covering presence to meet all of life's challenges with Him as the center of all that we do. Make up your mind to abide in God's secure presence each day.

THE POWER OF PRAISE

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High.
Psalm 92:1

Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. Psalm 146:1

Shabach is one of seven Hebrew words for praise. It means to shout, to address in a loud tone, to command, or to triumph. Tehillah is another of the seven Hebrew words for praise that means to celebrate, to laud someone praiseworthy, and to show exaltation to God. In English praise commends, shows adoration, or glory. In any language praise is the release of an expression that commands attention. For Christians praise is an act of faith to which God responds. The power of praise ushers in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

I recently heard the story of a ten year old boy who was walking his dog when suddenly a stranger grabbed him and threw him in a car. The stranger told the boy to shut up before speeding away with him. Well this young boy did not panic, as many of us would do. He remembered a secret weapon that was especially suited for times of adversity. The boy began singing praises to God, which caused the kidnapper to set him free. The power of this boy's praise was enough to set him free.

This young boy learned early about the power of praise. Perhaps he heard about Paul and Silas in the book of Acts. They found themselves bound in prison stocks for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Stocks are large wooden boards joined together with iron clamps. Holes cut in the boards are just big enough for the ankles. Paul and Silas' ankles were clamped in stocks, and they also locked in a prison cell. They had committed no crime and were peaceful men. Still, they were bound like the most dangerous criminals in a maximum security unit.

Instead of being fearful or hopeless about seemingly tragic circumstances, Paul and Silas pulled out their secret weapon. Around midnight they prayed and sang praises to God. Suddenly there was a great earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison. All the prison doors were opened, and the stocks were loosed. The prison guards and other prisoners watched in amazement this supernatural act of deliverance. Praise had moved God to set Paul and Silas free. Our praise will also bring divine deliverance and break the yoke of bondage.

So, remember when going through times of adversity don't get angry, impatient, frustrated, depressed, or simply turn to others for help. Instead, pull out your weapon of praise, and call on the presence of God for deliverance. If you can't think of anything to praise God for, then just praise Him because He is God, and He loves us with an everlasting love. Do like Paul and Silas and praise God in your darkest moments. You will experience the power of God's deliverance in your heart and over your circumstances.

Malvia Bailey

Marriage Tips for Our Family in Christ

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! Psalm 133:1

When God's people live together in unity it is one of the most joyful experiences we can have on earth. But living in unity is not easy.

Lately I've seen a lot of articles on my Facebook feed and on the internet about "habits of successful marriages". It occurred to me, as I skimmed through some of those articles, that we could apply many of the same behaviors and attitudes towards our brothers and sisters in Christ and perhaps get a little closer to living in unity.

One thing all the articles recommend is that spouses always try to think the best of each other, and concentrate on the positive. What if I always thought the best of my sister in Christ? Then maybe I would be more willing to overlook some of the problems that are a part of living in family. Instead of taking offense at my sister's cold shoulder, I could think about her more than myself. Maybe she had a lot on her mind and that's why she didn't see me when she walked right by me in the hall? Maybe she was struggling with something I didn't know about when I saw her frowning or she snapped at me?

Another thing the articles recommend is that couples have fun together and share joyous occasions. This is something we need to work at more in our churches. We need to celebrate the good things in our lives with each other. While it's true that we need to bear one another's burdens, I think we also need to laugh together and just enjoy each other's company.

Psalm 133 goes on to tell us that when God's people live in unity it's like "oil poured on the head," and like the "morning dew." I understand this to mean that Christians living in unity are both soothing (oil on the head) and refreshing (the morning dew). On top of that is God's promise to bestow blessings on Christians who live in unity!

I have been a Christian as long as I can remember. Unfortunately, I can remember times in my Christian walk when I did not live in harmony with other believers. But, I have also experienced the joy of unity in many different churches I attended. That unity in the family of Christ has met a deep need for friendship and companionship, and has kept me from feeling lonely at difficult times in my life.

So, sisters let's work to love the church. Let's work at loving one another, and let's practice overlooking our differences and celebrating our joys and victories. Let's carry one another's burdens, and then let's rejoice in freedom from those burdens. Let's position ourselves where God can bless.

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

. . . . For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forever more. Psalm 133:1, 3

- Brenda Boston

My Thanksgiving Turkey

by Karina Fantillo

I teach Sunday school to first-year students at my church. For Thanksgiving, we do an art project where each child receives a foam turkey and feathers made of different-colored construction paper. I tell the children to write what they are thankful for on the feathers. As I look at the example I made years ago, I am reminded of why I am thankful.

I am thankful for my family. My parents, my brothers, and my daughter all drive me crazy at times, but when it really matters, like when I was going through divorce this year, they are there without hesitation. The older we get, the more easily we can get annoyed with our family members. We share a history; we know each other's strengths and shortcomings. Even with our faults, family accepts us unconditionally for who we are. My family supported me by listening, not judging, and just by being there. They reassured me that everything was going to be okay.

I am thankful for my friends, old and new. I have a renewed respect for the word friend. It's not the number of friends you have online that count, but the ones who make the effort to check in with you even with their busy lives. Friendship is a two-way street, where each person gives and takes. Because I have experienced the positive difference one person can make, I try to make time for my friends. Being there for them helps me not dwell on my own problems. They have lifted me, made me laugh, and showed me I am not alone.

I am thankful for my students. To them, life is simple. As adults, we have more responsibilities and get caught up with work, our family's activities, our social engagements. Each Sunday, I am reminded of how much God loves me. I try to be the face of Jesus to my students, but sometimes, I see Jesus in them. At these moments, I am humbled and remember what is truly important.

I am thankful to have a home, food, and a job that enables me to provide for my family. When my daughter and I moved out of our house, I was devastated. To me, the house symbolized my family: where my daughter grew up, where my family gathered on holidays, and was the site of many wonderful memories. I realized the house alone was not home. It was us, we helped create the good memories, and we have the ability to make more. Thanksgiving to my family is all about the food, we savor the delicious dishes we enjoy once a year. We eat once, take a break, and watch TV or converse, then eat again. The cycle repeats. We will continue this Thanksgiving tradition. It is the gathering that makes the tradition, not the location.

So, as you gather with your loved ones this Thanksgiving, take a moment to pause and remember all the reasons why you celebrate the holiday. Then give praise and thanks to God.



Karina Fantillo was born in the Philippines and immigrated with her family to the US at the age of nine. She grew up in San Francisco and graduated from Lowell High School and later attended the University of San Francisco as an English major. She currently works as a Grants Administrator at a leading medical research institute and lives in the East Bay.

Ms. Fantillo has been writing since she was 10 years old. She has written short stories, essays and poetry, and aspires to be published someday. She is also a mother, dancer, teacher, and daydreamer.

Placing your cares at God's Feet

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7 NIV).

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall. (Psalm 55:22 NIV).

These are difficult scriptures to follow, because it's just human nature to worry. Actually it's our sin nature that insists on carrying our worries everywhere as if they were an American Express card. Life presents so many problems that it seems almost impossible not to worry. Still God assures us in these verses that He wants to handle our problems and save us from destruction.

Examining key words in these verses gives us insight into how we can stop worrying. Let's look closely at: HUMBLE, CARES and CAST.

HUMBLE. We should clothe ourselves with humility toward one another (1 Peter 5:5b), because God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble (James 4:6). Strive for an attitude like Jesus who humbled himself and became a servant for our sins. (Philippians 2:2-8).

CARES. Cares are burdens, worries or anxiety, nervousness, concern, unease, apprehension and fear. The opposite of cares is REASSURANCE. Reassurance puts our mind at ease or makes us less anxious or worried. It also brings us comfort, encouragement, hope, support, and a guarantee that everything will work out just fine. However, having reassurance without knowing exactly how God will resolve a situation takes FAITH.

CAST. Cast means shed something; throw something away from oneself, get rid of it, or **dismiss something from the mind**. The cares that Peter and the Psalmist talk about casting on the Lord are not physical loads but weights on the mind. They are issues that spring up on us and limit, control or influence us.

We often get discouraged and bogged down with life's cares. Problems are inevitable in this life. Worries are optional. God allows us to go through some things, so we can actual see that He can save us. Jesus taught us to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and God would take care of our needs. We should not worry about anything. (Matthew 6:33-34.) Paul preached do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let our request be known to God. (Philippians 4:6.) God already knows our needs and desires, but He wants us to humble ourselves and pray. He wants to see our show of dependence and reverence.

We can pray for faith to cast worries, fears or whatever life throws at us at His feet. We can ask for grace to leave it there with assurance that God is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all that we can ask or think according to the power that works in us. (Ephesians 3:20.) After all, nothing is too difficult for Him.

Frankie Nickson is a member of New Providence Baptist Church in San Francisco, and a former Transit Operator for the San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency. She is active in the Daughters of Zion, Sunday School and Mission. She loves family, friends, traveling and doing what she can to help others. Frankie always says she is, "A Work In Progress for the Lord."

What is True Joy?

By: Reverend Lamont Scott

According to Webster's Dictionary joy means to experience great pleasure or delight. In Hebrew the word for joy is "Chedvah," which means rejoicing, gladness, or joy, and in Greek it is "Chara" meaning cheerfulness. The many meanings for the word joy show that it is expressed in many ways. Christians can experience two types of joy.

The first type of joy deals with your emotions. For instance, I remember the joy and excitement I felt when I made the honor roll for first time. I recall the good times and laughter that I have shared with my family and friends. I rejoice when I think of special moments, such as my wedding, or the birth of my four beautiful daughters. As I reflect on all of those great occasions, I am filled with warmth and a smile arches along my face. Still all these memories are of events that brought me emotional joy, and all of those moments and experiences were temporary. Emotions are like a roller coaster, one minute you are up and the next you are down. Joy just can't be an emotional experience. As I have transitioned from a boy to a man, I found out that if I wanted to experience true joy I would have to look to a source way beyond my emotions!!!

Beyond emotions I experienced a second, and really profound, type of joy that is anchored in someone greater than me. When I was a young boy I was told about a man named Jesus Christ who sacrificed his life for mine over two thousand years ago. I was told that Jesus had been beaten, killed, placed in a borrowed tomb, and raised on the third day according to the holy scriptures of the Bible. It was at that time that I repented of my sins, and I accepted Jesus into my heart. That is when I experienced real joy!!! Hebrews 12:2 says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

You see, the joy that I have now does not depend on my mood, my circumstances, my money, or my position in life, but it is a gift from God. The joy that I have now is constant, because Jesus Christ dwells in me!!! It is because Jesus lives in me that it doesn't matter whether I am up or down, in a trial or in a storm; because whatever state I am in, I can be content with God's great joy!!! Psalm 34:1 says, "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth." I challenge everyone to bless the Lord at all times and see how God will bless you in return!!!

True joy can only be experienced in Jesus Christ. If you are searching for joy, try JESUS today!!!



Reverend Lamont Scott was born in San Francisco, California to proud parents -- Reverend Willie (deceased) and Yvonne Scott. He also has a sibling who resides in San Francisco. Rev. Scott graduated from Balboa High School and San Francisco State University with a Bachelors of Arts degree in Sociology and a minor in Criminal Justice. He accepted Jesus Christ at an early age, and he is very active in his church's music ministry and choir. In December of 2007, Rev. Scott accepted God's calling to preach the gospel. He was licensed by Pastor Steven A. Bailey at the Olivet Missionary Baptist Church in San Francisco where he currently serves as the Youth and Young Adults Pastor. Rev. Scott is married and has four beautiful daughters.

“Seeking the Face of God”

*“When You said, “seek My face,” My heart said to You, “Your face Lord, I will seek.”
Psalm 27:8 (NKJV)*

To seek means to pursue, go in search of, and try to discover. As Christians, we seek the face of God when we spend time in His Word, when we pray, and when we offer up praise to Him. God desires an intimate relationship with His children above all else. Spending time with the Lord should be the number one priority of all born again, baptized believers.

David, the author of Psalm 27, was called a man after God’s own heart. David made knowing God his priority (Psalm 63:1-6). In Psalm 27 David shares with us his confidence in God’s strength and ability, his desire or longing to get to know God more intimately, his desire for safety from his enemies, and a longing to spend time in the House of God.

When we seek God’s hand rather than His face saying, “Give me, bless me, heal me,” it is equivalent to a child who only communicates with his or her parents when they are in need. Think of how you would feel if your child or children only communicated with you when they were in need.

Spending time with a person we love is the only way to cultivate an intimate relationship with him or her. There is no substitute for gaining intimate knowledge of anyone, without spending time with that person. Seeking (knowing) God has to become our number one priority.

Luke records a story in chapter 10: 38-42 which helps us understand the importance of spending time in the presence of God. It reads, *“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her."*

Most of us are like Martha. We are busy working for Jesus, doing a lot of stuff, but missing the greatest blessing of all, which is sitting at His feet listening and communicating with Him. Never neglect spending time with the Lord to do what we refer to as the Lord’s work.

We may need to develop creative ways to ensure we spend time with the Lord on a daily basis. Most of my acquaintances live busy lives. Some have children, full time jobs, are active in the church/community or are involved in some form of ministry. Still, all of those things, which may be good and noble, should not prevent us from carving out a portion of our time to meet with our Lord.

The person who makes sacrifices in order to seek the face of God will gain much more than they've lost. Being in the presence of God ensures blessings, peace, joy (in spite of circumstances), confidence, and security. It transforms us into Christ-likeness. His desires will become our desires and His will our will. Our love for the Lord will grow deeper, we will grow into spiritual maturity, and our lives will be changed, as we get to know Him in a more intimate way.

Do you seek God's face or only His hand? Seek God's face and you will automatically have His hand (provision). Let's begin today to make spending time with the Lord our number one priority.

In His Service,

Elder Shirley Freeman, Founder

Total Commitment

The word commitment is often used loosely, and without any thought as to what it truly means to be committed. When we make a commitment we vow, or pledge, to do what we promise. We have all made promises or commitments that we could not fulfill due to circumstances beyond our control. Those broken promises, though disappointing, are understandable. However, some make promises or commitments they have no intention of fulfilling.

Faithfulness and commitment are important to God. God always keeps His promises. He does what He says He will do, and when He says He will do it. God expects nothing less from those who profess to be His followers. Despite God's example, we often fall short in the area of commitment. Marriage vows are broken on a daily basis. Friendships and other relationships suffer because someone fails to honor their commitment. These failures should be the exception and not the rule for those of us who are followers of Jesus. We should make every effort to keep our promises. The word of God found in Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 (NIV) says it this way, *"When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it."*

In Acts chapters 20 and 21, the Apostle Paul is informed by the Holy Spirit, and the Prophet Agabus, that suffering lay ahead of him. Yet, Paul was not concerned about what he would suffer, or about saving his own life. His only concern was to be able to finish the mission entrusted to him by Jesus. He was not only willing to suffer for Christ, but to die for Him as well.

Is there anything or anyone to whom you are totally committed? Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is quoted as saying, *"If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live."*

The Apostle Paul found someone he was willing to die for -- Jesus! Paul always looked for ways to be identified with Jesus and to honor Him. (Galatians 2:20, Philippians 3:10-11, 2 Timothy 4:7.) Threats of suffering and death did not deter Paul from his mission, and he remained faithful to the end.

The Lord Jesus Christ was totally committed to the Father and to finishing the course set before Him. (John 8:29.) Aren't you glad Jesus didn't abandon His mission? Are you grateful Jesus honored His commitment? Indeed, Jesus was willing to endure humiliation, pain and death for our salvation.

The late Erma Bombeck said, *"When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'I used everything you gave me.'"*

My desire is to do the same. Are you totally committed to Jesus? If not, make a decision to do so today.

Happy Resurrection Day!

Elder Shirley Freeman, Founder

TOTAL SURRENDER

When I was a young girl, every Saturday my brother and I would hurry to finish our chores and race to the Up Town Theater for an afternoon of movies. In those days you could see cartoons, a serial, the news real and two full-length movies. It was a guarantee that I would see someone surrender, get caught, have to give up, or get overpowered by the good guys. Every Saturday the good guy forced the bad guy to surrender, submit and give up.

When I began studying the Bible the examples of surrender were very different from what I saw in the movies. Surrendering our lives to God is a very fulfilling act, and in no way are we forced. When we surrender to God we do so of our own free will. We submit to God because he knows what is best for our life. Surrender is not easy. However, it gets easier after God gets our attention, and after we get to know His Son. Submitting to His will takes faith and daily renewal, and even with all that we have problems surrendering our all to God. When we read about Noah, Abraham, Ruth, and Daniel we learn about surrendering. These people went to places they knew nothing about. They built things they had not seen for reasons they didn't understand. They stood strong in the face of death and allowed God to show His saving power. Their lifestyles won over unbelievers.

The book of Acts shows us a beautiful picture of the Apostle Paul's surrendered life. Paul, then called Saul, was a persecutor of Christians. He did it with zeal until the day he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. From then on his life was never the same. When we read this account, we see Paul's journey to total surrender to Jesus. Just like us, he had those who didn't believe his conversion was real. Oftentimes he had to praise God despite his circumstances. Religious leaders were jealous of him, and Jews tried to discredit him. Still Paul happily considered himself a prisoner for Christ.

Something that encourages me is the account of Paul's trials. Beginning in chapter 21, Paul was brought before other rulers before speaking to King Agrippa in chapter 26. As we read, we see again the man of God running up against false accusers. Paul used his life of surrender to preach the gospel. King Agrippa's response to the gospel in verse 28 was that he was almost persuaded to become a Christian. How many times have we had the same results after sharing the gospel with someone? We must be just like Paul who surrendered his will to God under dire circumstances and without wavering. As we do so our faith will increase, our power will grow stronger, and our trials will become easier to bear. Surrender your all to God today.

Yvonne Scott

Why I'm So Grateful

Gratitude means to be appreciative of kindness or benefits received. I am grateful to God for everything He has done for me. When I think back to where I once was and where I am now, it's as if I'm living someone else's life.

As a child, I experienced the love of my mother and siblings, who treated me as though I were someone special. We did not have much in material possessions, but we had a lot of love. My mother was a godly woman who led by example. She loved God, attended church regularly, treated everyone with dignity and respect and worked five to six days weekly. Often, my brothers and I would hear her praying her heart out to God. When she was not working, she prayed at least three times a day, always praying for the salvation of her children. Yes, I had a praying and loving mother, and for that, I'm grateful!

After suffering great loss in different areas of my life, God promised that He would restore the years that the Canker Worm and the locust had stolen. So, eight years ago my husband and I reconciled after being divorced for fifteen years. Never give up on God no matter how long it takes, because He always keeps His promises, and for that, I'm grateful!

When I was in trouble, God didn't give up on me. When I lost my job, God kept me. When I didn't know how I would pay my mortgage, He made a way for me. When I didn't know which way to go, He directed me. He kept my son out of trouble in the midst of a drug infested neighborhood with gang related violence, and for that, I'm grateful!

This is a new season in my life. Thanks to God and the hard work and diligence of my husband, I was able to retire a few months ago. Now I will have more time and freedom to devote to the Women's Ministry and the church, and for this, I'm grateful!

For what are you grateful today? Is it good health, employment, family, food and shelter, or do you take them for granted, along with the freedom to openly and freely worship the Lord? God blesses us in incalculable ways, and for this, I'm grateful, and so should you!

I join the psalmist in *Psalms 116:12* in asking the question, "*What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?*" I can offer up praise and show Him my gratitude, and for this, I'm grateful!

Happy Thanksgiving!