

Moms Over 50 Devotions to Go



**Ina Mae Brooks
LeAnn Campbell**

**Enjoying all
the Stages
of
Motherhood**

Moms' Devotions to Go Series

Over 50 Moms' Devotions to Go

Enjoying All Stages of Motherhood

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LeAnn Campbell**

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Part One
Adult Children

Damaged—but Reparable

Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'

Luke 15:8-9 (NIV)

Six weeks before our daughter Patti's wedding to Jeff, we took the three bridesmaids' dresses to show to Jeff's mother, Gisele. "A friend loaned us the dresses," I said. "She was generous enough to let us borrow them this weekend to show you, and said we could keep them until after the wedding."

Gisele led the way to her bedroom. "Leave the dresses here tonight. We'll put them over the back of this chair and they will be all right until you come for supper tomorrow evening."

Wrong! The dresses were not all right, and we never had that supper. The Tulsa flood of 1984 swept through town on Saturday night and changed our plans. Back at Gisele's ruined mobile home the next day, we wondered if anything could be salvaged. We stepped over broken glass and walked around the refrigerator that lay on its side. Gisele stared at her overturned china hutch and the fragile goblets on the floor.

But we had to laugh at the sight of the wedding invitations Patti and Jeff had been addressing the night before. The invitations still lay on the table, slightly damp but useable. As flood waters had filled the mobile home, the table floated to the ceiling and down again without spilling the invitations.

We went back to Gisele's bedroom, afraid to see what the dresses looked like. They still hung over the back of the chair but filthy mud dripped off into puddles on the floor.

It is not easy to hand-clean satin dresses any time, but especially so on a Sunday afternoon in a flooded city. We took the dresses to Patti's apartment and dumped them into the bathtub. What a slimy mess! Patti and I got on our knees and set to work. We scrubbed, ever so gently, and rinsed the mud down the drain, time and time again and hour after hour. It seemed like a miracle when the dresses looked new again.

Each of us has times when we are like those blue satin dresses. It doesn't take a flood or mud to make dirty stains on our lives. Gossiping, lying, cheating on our tax returns all leave soiled marks on us. Even an unkind retort to the grocery cashier is like a blob of mud on the fabric of our lives.

In today's Scripture, the Pharisees and teachers of the law complained about Jesus. "This man welcomes sinners," they muttered. Jesus told them a parable about the woman who lost her silver coin. The distraught woman swept the house and searched until she found her coin, and then she rejoiced. Jesus concluded the parable by saying, "I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

When we repent and tell God we are sorry for what we have done, He forgives us and the angels rejoice. Jesus understands our weaknesses. Our muddy stains wash away, in the same way the mud washed out of the satin dresses. The woman in the parable rejoiced when she found her lost coin, just as we rejoiced when the last trace of mud washed away. We have far greater reason to rejoice when we repent and God forgives us for the muddy stains in our lives.

Prayer: Dear Father, sometimes my children and I make mistakes and do things that stain our lives. Many stains are minor, but some divide us from God and others. The motivation in our heart is what matters to Him, and He wants us to be quick to forgive others. Children can understand this when they are very young, but not

always. Whatever they have done, help me to want to forgive them. Not only that, but let your Spirit guide them to choose to live lives that are free of those stains. In Jesus name. Amen.

Activity

No matter whether we have young children at home, or if they have now reached adulthood, some days our children manage to irritate us. Many times the problems are merely aggravations, but other times the attitude or actions have serious consequences. Let us lovingly teach our children to obey God, and for today, let's focus on the good traits of each child.

Is your child a joy to be around? Be thankful to God and rejoice.

Or are you looking for things that aren't yet apparent in your child, like the woman who swept the house and looked for her lost coin? If your child is breaking your heart, you may have to ask God for patience as you search to see the good traits.

Maybe your child's life resembles the blue satin dresses covered with mud. But rejoicing will come as you gradually see the mud wash away.

Just for today, why not try making a list of five qualities that you love about each of your children. Focus on those positives, pray about them, and let your children know that you appreciate them. Everyone needs hugs. When you give your child a hug, you get one, too. Soon you will be rejoicing over the good in each of your children.

LC

Kids Need Mom—in Childhood and Adulthood

I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea; 'Do not close your ears to my cry for relief.'

Lamentations 3:55-56 (NIV)

Mama, help us!” My children called and called, but I did not answer. From inside the house I could not hear them. It had been a rainy day, and my five children put on their red rain boots and went out to play. Although I looked out the kitchen window often to check on them, I did not realize they had gotten themselves into a predicament and needed help.

Instead of staying in the grassy area of the yard, the kids took daring steps into the plowed, rain-soaked garden. Now their little red boots were stuck fast in the mud, holding the children prisoners. They were prisoners of the mud.

“Mama, Mama,” they called repeatedly. I finally heard them and went outside to see what they wanted. There they stood, five little children lined up like stair steps in the mud.

I had to pull their feet free and leave the boots, to be retrieved another day. Needless to say, five muddy children and one muddy mama needed baths by the time I had unstuck all of them.

If the children had only come and asked permission to play in the garden, I would have told them that the mud was too deep. However, children are prone to act first and think later. How often we adults are the same way! That day the consequences of playing in the mud did not concern them. Probably one led the way, said “Let’s go,” and the others followed.

Now they are adults with families of their own. With age and maturity, they are wiser. However, even adult children sometimes need Mom and Dad's help. The requests may be simple: Can you baby sit? Do you have time to run an errand for me? Can you loan me some money?

Other times our children (and probably yours, too) may draw on memories from the past for help. One of our sons faced many struggles with his rebellious teenage daughter. "I remember what you told me, and I try to do the same thing with her," he says. What a surprise his words are to us.

"We never thought you heard anything we said," we tell him, for he had been a rebellious teenager, too.

"Oh, I heard, and I remembered."

Prayer: Father, my adult children no longer need me to rescue them from playtime mishaps. Now they have other needs. Will you give me the ears to hear their pleas, and the wisdom to know how to help them? Each one is so precious, and I am thankful to be their mother. I want to help them according to your will. In Jesus' name.

Amen

Activity

Make prayer bookmarks to keep in your Bible. Find a photograph of each child's family—if they are married, use a photo that includes their spouse and children. Reduce the size of the photo. If you have a computer photo program, you can reduce the photo yourself. If you need to take it to a print shop, the cost will be minimal to reduce it to a size that fits on a bookmark. Attach the photo to one side.

On the other side, make two prayer lists. The first is for the concerns that you pray about for each member of that family. The second list is for the things you give thanks for about each one.

You may want to make the prayer lists on a separate sheet of paper and paperclip them to the back of the bookmark. Then you can change the list as the family's needs change.

LC

Clean Sweep

Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.

Proverbs 17:6 (NIV)

I swept the dirt into the dustpan, put the broom away, and knew the floor would soon be dirty again. The day of my daughter's birthday party was the day that I realized how important repetitious housework is.

Our oldest daughter, Janet, invited two or three girls to come over after school to celebrate her tenth birthday. She wasn't having a fancy party, but a backyard wiener roast, so I did not have to spend the day cleaning and decorating.

That day I didn't even stay home, but drove to the farm to visit my parents. Early in the afternoon, I told Mother, "I should go home and straighten up the house before the girls come." My five children had left a lot of clutter that morning. Even though Janet's friends probably would not notice or care how our house looked, I went home to restore a bit of order.

The girls came in after school and headed straight for the living room. Did they notice that I had picked up all the toys, papers, and assorted clutter? You'd better believe it! One wide-eyed girl looked around in amazement. "Your house is all cleaned up. Ours almost never is."

Her words made an impression that I have never forgotten. That afternoon I had not polished and shined the house to perfection, but I had made it presentable. As the mother in this family, I have an obligation to keep our home neat and orderly enough that my children can take pride in it.

Now that our children are grown and on their own, keeping the house clutter-free is much easier, but my husband and I still work at it. We put the dishes in the dishwasher instead of piling them in the sink, pick up

newspapers at the end of the day, and drop dirty clothes in the hamper instead of on the floor. Our children can still walk into our house without feeling shame.

Today's Scripture says that parents are the pride of their children. What a sobering thought! We often think about being proud of our children, but they need to be proud of us, too.

Being the pride of our children is not just about keeping a clutter-free house. It is about the way we live and the examples we set.

Prayer: Dear God, help me today to be a good example not only to my own children but to all who see and hear me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Draw a vertical line down the center of a sheet of paper to make two columns. Label the first column “Examples I have set” and the second “Examples to work on.”

As you fill in the first column, you may have some good examples and some that are not. Go ahead and list the bad along with the good. The list is only for your eyes.

For the second column, think of examples you have not yet tried but would like to think about doing. Maybe some day you hope to volunteer in a classroom at school, but it is not possible right now. Add it to your list of things to do in the future.

Do you want to set an example of being better organized but don’t know where to start? Begin with the first small step, which might be to clean out one drawer in the kitchen cabinet. Go ahead and put it on your list of examples to work on. When that is accomplished, add another goal to work on.

As you consider your two lists of examples, pray that you will give your children reasons to be proud of you.

LC

A Crystal Pendant

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

“Did you tell your mom and dad what you got for Christmas?” Our son-in-law waited for our daughter to tell us about her gift.

We knew he surely gave her something special and romantic, for this was their first Christmas together as husband and wife.

“Chickens,” she said, and smiled.

Chickens? He gave her chickens? No crowing roosters or clucking hens filled the backyard, and no boxes of little peepers sat in the kitchen corner. Where were they?

Our daughter's chickens would never live in her Missouri backyard. They were destined to spend their lives thousands of miles away and our daughter would never see them or eat one of their eggs. Her husband gave her the chickens through World Vision, so an impoverished family in another country could have eggs and an income to survive.

What a beautiful trait this is in my children, for they gladly share their gifts with those who have so little. Joe and Vicki joyfully sent the money for chickens, thankful that they could give to a family that needed help.

As I see my children share what they have with others, I think how much they are like the crystal pendant hanging in my window. The sun's rays reflect off the pendant and colorful beams of light bounce around the

room. The beautiful beams (my husband and I refer to them as rainbows) remind me of the many beautiful traits of our six children.

Like that little piece of crystal that sends countless rainbows bouncing off the walls and ceiling, our children have an abundance of beautiful traits. They shared chickens for Christmas, but they do so much more every day. How thankful I am for the good that I see in each of them.

Prayer: Dear Father, my children have so many good traits; they truly are like rainbows themselves. My children are even more beautiful than those sun rays reflecting off the piece of crystal. But sometimes I let negative things blind my eyes to the good my sons and daughters do. Help me to let each of my children know how thankful I am for his or her good traits. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Think about your children and some of their traits. This is a time to concentrate on the positive. Write a note to each child and tell him or her how proud you are of something they have done. They may think you did not notice, but hearing that you not only noticed but appreciated it may give them the boost they need.

People should be valued for who they are. A good time to mail the notes is on their birthdays, but why wait? Most children have more than one good trait. Why not write a note about one trait and mail it this week.

Go ahead and write a second note for each child and save it to mail on his birthday. You might want to carry it farther, and keep a box of cards in a drawer, ready to write a note whenever you think of something good.

Remember to include sons-in-law, daughters-in-law and the grandchildren. Let each one know what he has done that you appreciate.

LC

Share the Memories

Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.

Joel 1:3 (NIV)

Who has Grandma's wedding dish? Where is Grandpa's old shaving brush, the one he used every morning to lather his face?

I know the answer! The cut-glass dish that was Grandma's wedding present in 1903 is in my daughter's memory box. Grandpa's shaving brush? It's right where it belongs, in our oldest son's memory box. What happened to my favorite book, *Little Women*? I put it in another daughter's memory box.

These treasures are part of our children's heritage. They are valuable, but their value is in the memories that go with them. I want my children and grandchildren to understand why my beloved copy of *Little Women* is practically falling apart. With their easy access to bookstores, libraries, and the Internet, none of them can imagine having only a few books in the house.

Passing on family heirlooms is fun. My husband made memory boxes from oak, cherry, and walnut for our six adult children for Christmas one year. Our kids loved them. We filled the boxes with heirlooms, and that put our minds at ease, for now we know nobody will throw these family treasures out after we are gone.

In today's Scripture, the prophet Joel said to the elders, "Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation." Joel was talking about passing on history.

Passing on our family history is important, too. I like to take my tape recorder to family get-togethers and turn it on when my cousins, or my husband's siblings, tell stories from the past. One night I took the tape recorder to my dad's house, turned it on, and said, "Tell me about all the tractors you've had." My farmer dad told about

every tractor from the time he was a young boy until he retired. I typed up my notes and gave copies to each of Dad's grandchildren.

A friend told me that her grandchildren throw such things in the trash. Our children and grandchildren, and the nieces and nephews, appreciate them. One of my nephews keeps his in his safety deposit box at the bank.

We have much to pass on, but it is not just the possessions we have accumulated. Our faith in God and our values are the most important heritage we can give our children.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for giving me a family to share my heritage. May they cherish the possessions and the history. But that is only part of their heritage. I pray they will realize the importance of our culture, traditions and family values, and pass them on to their children and their children's children. Above all, God, I want my children and grandchildren to worship and serve you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Start recording your family history and give your children copies. Make enough for the nieces and nephews, too.

Take a tape recorder to a family gathering or get a notebook and write down a few questions to ask. Ask questions to which you do not know the answers. Some suggestions are: What were your teachers like? What responsibilities did you have at home as a child? What do you remember about your grandparents?

Record your own memories, too. Turn on the tape recorder while you are driving (but keep your eyes on the road) and tell about your childhood, your courtship and your wedding day.

Look around the house for heirlooms. Package the memories in ways that are meaningful to your family. My husband made wooden memory boxes because our children like gifts from his workshop. But you might want to make a collage in a frame, fill a basket, Grandpa's fishing tackle box, or an old trunk.

You may not be ready to pass your heirlooms on yet, but go ahead and get them ready. Put a note on each one telling something about it. If you want it given to one particular person, include a note about who is to receive it.

LC

Part Two

Keeping Mind and Body Fit and Healthy

We Plant and Then We Reap

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Luke 12:15 (NIV)

With a big garden to plant and five small children to feed, my husband and I had spring fever. We were young and enthusiastic and couldn't wait to start the garden. We bought vegetable seeds and planted long rows of beans, peas, carrots, and onions. With the hoe, we made little hills for the cucumber seeds, not just a few but hill after hill, up one row and down another.

The seeds sprouted and grew. Our garden looked great, and the cucumber plants were green and healthy. Vines spread across more and more of the garden and bloomed. Before long, the tiny yellow blossoms produced little cucumbers.

Oh, they looked good. Within a few days, the first ones were big enough to eat. I picked a few for supper and sliced them into a bowl with onions, vinegar, and sugar. Delicious.

The next day the vines produced more and I picked a bucketful. We could not eat that many, but no problem. Our family liked pickles, so I would can some for winter. Downtown at the hardware store I found a stone crock that would be just the right container for pickling cucumbers. Next, a trip to the grocery store, where I stocked up on sugar, vinegar, spices, jars and lids. I was ready to take care of our cucumber crop.

But I could not keep up with them. I went back to the hardware store and bought a bigger stone crock. It wasn't enough! Cucumbers need several days in the crock with the spices, vinegar, and sugar. The vines produced cucumbers faster than I could get a batch pickled and out of the crock.

Spring turned to summer with typical Missouri weather of ninety degree temperatures and about ninety per cent humidity. The big garden lost its appeal. When the buckets didn't hold enough, we filled baskets. We ate cucumbers for lunch and dinner, with plenty more to share with the neighbors.

I filled the crocks and made more pickles—bread and butter (my favorites), lime, dills, and little sweet pickles. On my last trip to the hardware store, I found a stone crock big enough to hold buckets and buckets of cucumbers.

The day came when we gave up and pulled the vines. No more cucumbers.

“Man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions,” Luke warned in today's Scripture. Did we ever learn the truth of that statement! Life does not consist of bushels and bushels of cucumbers.

Prayer: We can laugh about it now, Lord, but our cucumbers overproduced that summer. Our problem wasn't greed, because we did not want to own all the cucumbers in town. But in our youth and enthusiasm, we did not stop to think what a big crop our vines would produce. Will you give me a gentle reminder of the cucumbers whenever I am tempted to do anything to excess? I don't want to be guilty of overloading my life with cucumbers or anything that uses time and energy that belongs to you, God. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Do possessions or activities crowd out time that you should give to God? What about time that belongs to your family? Maybe the children are all on their own now and it is just you and your husband. What interferes with time the two of you should spend together?

Keep a journal for a week. Include all you do: time on the computer, telephone conversations, and the food you eat. Write down everything. What claims an unfair amount of your time or energy?

Do not try to change all your problems at once, but concentrate on one. Pray for God's help and then decide how to take charge of this one overabundance in your life. Do you need to go on a diet, start an exercise program, or cut back on TV time? Make a plan to get the situation under control.

LC

Moms Over 50 Learn New Things

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good spirit lead me on level ground.

Psalm 143:10 (NIV)

Anyone who learned to ride a bicycle knows how hard it is. Hold the bicycle upright, throw one leg over the bar to straddle, grip the handlebars, balance, steer, and remember to use the brakes.

When I grew up in the early 1940s, my brother Bill and I shared a bicycle and helped each other learn to ride. After I managed to get both feet on the pedals without falling over, I gripped the handlebars and tried to steer, guided by Bill's brotherly coaching. After my wobbly attempts, Bill took his turn.

A smooth sidewalk would have been nice. Soft grass to cushion our falls would have been good, too. But we lived on a farm and had weeds instead of grass. We had rocks, too, and they added an extra challenge.

Sometimes we tried riding on the gravel road in front of our house. That wasn't much better and we took lots of spills. But after many scrapes and bruises, we did it! We conquered bicycle riding.

A few years later, I turned sixteen and learned to drive. For my first lesson, Mother got in on the passenger side of our pickup and told me, "Get behind the wheel."

I had no idea what to do. We lived on a farm but Dad never let me drive the tractor or truck. Now Mother expected me to drive six miles on the highway. Not only that, but I had to cross a bridge, then leave the highway and drive up the curving, hilly road to our house.

Mother may have held her breath and gripped the edge of the seat, but all went well until halfway up the hill. Then I killed the engine. Following Mother's instructions, I steered back around the curve and down the hill to a level place where I could restart the engine.

I am still learning. New technology provides endless opportunities for learning new things into the fifties and sixties (yes, even seventies and eighties). At age forty, I returned to college to earn my degree and became a school teacher. In my fifties I took up freelance writing, and became a writing workshop leader in my sixties. In my seventies, I have the joy of my first published book.

For each new endeavor, I have had help from books and others, but that wasn't enough. I wanted God's wisdom, too. His wisdom guides me to make right choices based on His will for me.

Prayer: Dear God, when I have opportunities to learn new things, first I want to know if it is your will. If it is, I ask for the wisdom to learn each skill well and to use it in a way that pleases you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Think about something new to try. If no idea comes to mind, draw a circle in the middle of a sheet of paper. Inside the circle, write New Things to Learn. Draw four or five lines out from the circle and at the end of each line write something you might like to learn.

Here are a few ideas for starters:

Ride a bicycle (or motorcycle)

Crochet

Join (or start) a Bible study group

When you have several ideas, choose one and make a commitment to start this week. Pray for God's guidance. When you feel it is His will for you to proceed, get a calendar and write in your goal. If the new skill will require several steps, write small goals on the calendar for Week One, Week Two, and so on.

Be realistic. Don't expect instant success when you learn to ride a bike on a gravel road!

LC

Seek a New Adventure

Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.

Ecclesiastes 11:1 (NIV)

"Sorry, we don't have any teaching vacancies this year."

Every school superintendent said the same thing. Now what? I was 42 years old, a brand new college graduate with my teaching certificate, and nobody needed me.

A friend suggested that I visit the Developmental Center. "They need a teacher," she said. The Center served children with developmental disabilities-- not what I wanted, but I went to please her.

At the Center I experienced culture shock, for I did not know such a classroom existed in our town. Those children needed a teacher trained to work with severe disabilities. I would stay until noon, but no longer.

However, God had insight that I lacked. He knew those children would win me over.

By noon I realized I could teach them, and I took the job. The children needed basic skills for daily living. My teaching supplies included educational toys for therapy, sing-a-long tapes for stimulation, and plenty of TLC (tender loving care).

The other staff members and I loved children and wanted to help these develop their limited abilities. We coached Roger to get off the floor and into his chair without assistance. When he succeeded, he rewarded us with a happy smile.

Our children needed to learn to play. The Center's backyard had trees, and in the fall we taught the children to run and jump into piles of leaves. What fun for all of us! In wintertime, we played in the snow and made snow ice cream.

When Jim, a teenager, asked how bread got brown on top, we let him find out for himself. Following a pictorial recipe on poster board, Jim made bread. He watched through the glass in the oven door as it baked and he saw the crust turn brown.

I only had four years to teach the children. Circumstances changed in the group home where most of them lived, and the state agency moved them.

I approached the superintendent of our local school district, and heard the same words as four years earlier. "We don't have any openings." However, he had just received approval to begin a new special education program in the vocational-technical school. He offered me the job and I accepted.

Once again, God had intervened and led me to the right job. It turned out to be just what I wanted and I stayed until time to retire.

I cast my bread upon the waters, as today's Scripture says, by going back to college. Although I planned to teach in a regular classroom, my bread returned in an unexpected way. It led to a career in special education that I had never considered.

Prayer: Father, you are faithful to return our bread when we cast it upon the waters. Sometimes you return it in ways that surprise us, but that's all right. Surprises can be very nice. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Try something new this week. It might be a new game to play with the grandchildren, or a weekend trip with your husband. Maybe you are ready to try a different recipe, hobby, or skill. Why not go to the library and check out a book that is completely different from what you usually read?

LC

Thirty-second Scrub

As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

James 5: 11 (NIV)

Soap scum! It is so unsightly. I despaired of ever getting our old bathtub clean, for the gray-tinged scum had built up for years. But I had to try, so got down on my knees, leaned over the side and scrubbed. After several minutes all I had to show for my effort was a backache. The built-up scum in the tub still looked dingy, and I knew there must be a better way.

There was, and I called it the thirty-second scrub. I went into the bathroom, picked up my brush, scrubbed for thirty seconds, and quit. On each return trip to the bathroom, I leaned over the tub and did another quick scrub. It took a long time to remove the scum, but thirty seconds at a time were more manageable than long hours bent over the tub.

Many goals are easier to reach when broken into short tasks. Clean a cluttered kitchen drawer this way and soon you will have it organized. Empty all the contents into a box and you are ready to start. Get a wastebasket ready for the things you no longer need or can't identify.

That's it. You have done the first part. Walk away and come back to it later.

As you cook dinner or talk on the telephone, sort a few items. In a short time, you should have that drawer clean and orderly.

Use the same method to sort through stacks of magazines. Put sticky notes on articles you want to save and set them aside to read when you have a few minutes. Cut out recipes or tips and file them. Work your way through a few magazines at a time, and discard or donate the ones you no longer want.

Do you plan to read a devotional book when you have more time? That time may never come, but keep a book handy for short reads (in the car, your purse, in the bathroom). Devotionals in books like this one are short enough to read in just a minute or two. Keep the thought in mind and mull over it throughout the day.

Prayer: Lord, help me to persevere in using the time you give me. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed with too many tasks and too little time. When I get frustrated, help me to persist by doing a little now and a little later. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Try this method to memorize Scripture.

Print today's Scripture on a card and refer to it throughout the day. James 5:11 "As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."

For the first step of memorization, say the reference several times. "James 5:11."

For your next session, again say the reference, "James 5:11," and add "As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered." Repeat this portion until you feel you know it.

When you are ready to go on, add: "You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about."

It's getting longer, so you may need to spend two sessions before adding the last sentence, "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."

After just a few brief sessions, you have memorized today's Scripture. Try another verse tomorrow.

LC

Moms Over Fifty Need Boundaries

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

Psalm 32:8 (NIV)

Our little grandsons ran out our back door, anxious to get on their bicycles. Few cars travel on the paved dead end road. However, we knew four little boys on bicycles needed a few guidelines, or they might be tempted to ride farther than they should.

My husband, Bud, is a wise grandpa and he knew just what kind of guideline the boys needed. He went to the garage for a can of spray paint, and called the boys to him.

“See this can of blue paint.” He held it up.

The seven year-olds, Daniel and Parker, and the four-year-olds, Phillip and Tucker, nodded. They looked at Bud and waited to see what he would paint.

He walked several yards down the road and the boys trailed behind. They watched while Bud shook the can of paint to mix it well. When he squatted on the road, the boys squatted beside him and watched him spray a blue line across the road.

He turned and led them down the road in the other direction. Again, the boys and their grandpa squatted on the road and he sprayed another blue line. Then Bud said, “Don’t cross the blue line. You can ride all the way up to this blue line, then turn around and ride to the other blue line.”

The boys nodded.

Bud and I went back inside the house. No sooner did we sit down than Tucker pounded on the kitchen door. "Grandpa and Grandma, Phillip crossed the blue line. Is he in trouble?"

We went outside and brought Phillip back inside the boundary. We explained again that they were not to cross it.

The other three stood beside their bicycles and watched, wondering if we would punish Phillip.

Instead of punishment, we wanted to teach them to follow our guidelines so they would be safe. Our goal was the same as the psalmist's in today's Scripture, when he said, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you."

Prayer: Lord, you have promised to guide and counsel me, to protect me. Help me to recognize and follow your counsel. Your guidance comes in different ways. It may not be as easy to spot as the line of blue paint we sprayed on the road. It might come as advice from others, in an article or book I read, or words that someone speaks. I pray for the wisdom to be alert to your guidance and to follow it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Stand in front of the mirror and take an honest look. What boundaries should you set? Do you need to get your eating habits under control or start exercising? Is it the way you dress or take care of yourself? Some boundaries that would improve life are not visible in the mirror. Most of us need to set limits in the way we spend our time, or in our choices of television programs, books, and magazines. Make a plan today to set boundaries for one area of your life and determine to bring it under control.

Do you have a problem you can't handle alone? Pray that God will show you where to get help. If you need help from others, make the necessary telephone call or write the letter to ask for help.

LC

Part Three

Staying Spiritually Healthy

I Will Spend Time with You

Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.

Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

My six-year-old granddaughter Amber came out of her Sunday school class and handed me a check made out to “Grandma.” On the amount line she wrote “Spend time with you.”

Instead of giving me a genuine check, Amber’s was a page torn out of her Sunday school activity book. It did not look authentic and I knew better than to try to cash it at the bank.

The one Amber gave me was good. She kept her promise to pay, not once but many times. Throughout her childhood and teen years, she often came to visit and we spent time together. Sometimes we sat side by side at my sewing machine while I taught her to make blouses, skirts, and dresses. Other times we went to the kitchen and baked brownies. We did not always have special projects, but she liked to come and we enjoyed spending the time together.

Doing things with our grandchildren takes time and effort, but is time well spent. The same is true of time spent with God. The Scripture in Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still and know that I am God.” So often we let things crowd out time that belongs to Him, but we need to take time to be still. How else will we know that He is the Lord?

When a six-year-old promises to spend time with her grandma, her promise is important. Amber grew up and lives in another state now, but I still treasure her check and the time we spend together. Unlike real ones that sometimes say, “Void after ninety days,” Amber’s has no expiration date.

Prayer: God, too many times I get so busy that I forget to be still and know that you are God. But that is who you are, and you will be exalted in the nations and in the earth. I want to learn to be still and know you, exalt you, and spend the time with you that you desire. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Read Psalm 9 and make a list of the ways the Psalmist shows that the Lord is our God and is worthy of our time. Resolve to give Him more time through prayer, Bible study, or serving others in His name.

Resolutions are easier to carry out in small steps, so start with a goal that is attainable this week.

Try one of these for starters:

Add one person or topic to your prayer list.

Spend five minutes a day in obedience to God's command to be still and know that He is God. If you aren't ready for five minutes, start with one minute and work your way up.

Memorize a verse of Scripture.

LC

Do Something Daring

Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

Ecclesiastes 11:7 (NIV)

One day my husband answered the telephone and then handed it to me. “This is Jennifer O’Neill,” the voice on the other end said.

Could this really be happening? Why would a world famous actress, often described as the most beautiful woman in the world, call me?

But I knew why she called. She did it because I contacted her first. As today’s Scripture says, I sowed my seed but had no idea whether it would succeed.

My chance to meet Ms. O’Neill started a few weeks before the day she made the telephone call. The staff at Precious Moments Park in Carthage, Missouri, had organized a women’s conference, with Ms. O’Neill to be the guest speaker. They invited me to attend the conference as a freelance writer. It would be an ideal opportunity to interview the actress, but did I have enough nerve to ask?

“Go for it,” my friends said. Easy enough for them to say. I was the one that had to do it.

The old axiom, “Nothing ventured, nothing gained,” seemed rooted in my mind and would not let go. The Scripture in Ecclesiastes puts it in different words: “You do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or if both will do equally well.”

One thing I knew, I would not get the interview unless I tried. So I sat down at the computer, wrote an e-mail to Ms. O'Neill's agent, and hit Send. My message went on its way and I could not call it back.

Nothing happened. No reply from the agent and no call from Ms. O'Neill. The silence might have been a sign for me to forget the whole thing, but I was not ready to give up. I prayed about it, and then sent another e-mail.

This time the agent replied and explained that he had been having e-mail server problems. He said Ms. O'Neill would be happy to grant the interview and she would call to make the arrangements.

Just as the agent promised, Ms. O'Neill called and we arranged to meet at the conference. Later I wrote my article and a magazine published it. I had met the challenge and had a great interview with this warm and personable movie actress.

Prayer: Father, it is so easy for me to fear the unknown and to avoid unfamiliar situations. Help me to learn to bring all my fears and uncertainties to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Be daring. Try something new to improve yourself. List three new things that might help you grow spiritually—then do them. Choose one. Be bold. Take the necessary steps to try it.

Here are some suggestions:

Take the lead to start a Bible study group. Invite a few people to meet with you, decide what you will study, get the materials and set a meeting time.

Write a devotional or Christian article or story and share it with others, either individually or by sending it off for publication.

Draw, paint, or photograph a scene that will help you focus your thoughts on Jesus.

Find a new place to have your prayer time. Listen to God's instructions and then do them.

LC

Hold Onto That Old Waffle

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

I tossed a leftover waffle out the door after breakfast. Muffin, our little Welsh Corgi, grabbed the waffle in the air. For days after that, the dog carried it around like a toy. Each morning when my husband Bud and I stepped out the back door for our daily walk, Muffin met us with that dirty waffle in her mouth. Sometimes she dug a hole in the yard and buried it. But she never left it buried long enough to forget where it was. She might walk with us for a morning or two without it, but then would show up again with it in her mouth.

Bud and I did not see anything appealing about the waffle. However, it belonged to Muffin and seemed to be a treasure for her to bury, dig up and carry around for a while, and then bury again.

We reasonable adults would never do such a silly thing, would we?

Oh, but how often we carry grudges and grievances. Like Muffin's waffle, the grudges we have against others are ours to treasure. Leave them alone!

Today's Scripture says we are to bear with each other and forgive the grievances we have against each other. That seems all right for the other person, but our personal gripes are more like Muffin's old waffle. They are ours and we are not ready to bury them permanently. Like our funny little dog, we drag a grudge out and hang onto it, clenched between our teeth like a dirty waffle.

If somebody cheats me out of money or overcharges me, do I have a right to complain? If they say something unkind about me, or about my child or grandchild, surely I have a legitimate reason to be angry. That is not the

same as a dirty waffle, is it? Should I be entitled to treasure my anger, bury it for a while, and then dig it out to carry around again?

Prayer: Lord, I'm sorry. You told me to forgive, just as you forgive me. But sometimes I don't want to let go of my grudges and grievances. Will you forgive me for holding onto them? My grudges are as unappealing as the waffle that Muffin buried and dug up. I'm asking for help, Lord, to forgive and bury my grievances permanently.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

If you are holding onto a grudge or a grievance against somebody, decide today that you will take care of it. Pray for guidance for the right way to handle the situation, and then take the necessary action to resolve it.

Maybe you don't have an old grudge or grievance to get rid of. Then be an encourager to somebody who needs a lift. Write a note in a greeting card and put it in the mail, or make an encouraging telephone call.

A smile encourages others. Share yours often.

LC

I Would Change...if I Could

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)

We had a house! No longer would we move from town to town, with our mobile home hitched behind our pickup truck. Our three little girls would have a large fenced yard to play in, and our family could spread out in rooms that were more than eight feet wide.

All of us were ready for this change in our lives. We scheduled the moving day for the first day of March. The girls packed toys, I put dishes and clothing in boxes, and my husband got the mobile home and pickup ready.

March first did not prove to be a good choice. The sky clouded up and snow fell. It did not snow just that day, but for many days. Throughout that entire month, deep snow covered the ground. As we stood at the window and gazed at the winter scene, we found it hard to appreciate its beauty. We felt trapped by the snow, held like prisoners in the confines of our long, narrow home.

Days stretched into weeks. The girls pulled favorite toys out of the packed boxes and I unpacked clothes and dishes as we needed them.

All this time, our big house sat empty in a town thirty miles away. All we could do was wait and pray for the snow to melt so we could move.

As anxious as we were for the move, we could not change the weather or order a perfect day. Instead, we trusted God to let us know when the time was right. God promised long ago that one season would follow another, and He kept that promise. After what seemed to us to be an endless month of waiting, the winter of 1960 ended. Spring arrived and brought bright blue skies, warmer temperatures, and melting snow.

We repacked the dishes, clothes, and toys, completed all the last-minute preparations, hitched the mobile home to our pickup and pulled out of the trailer park. Our long-anticipated moving day had arrived.

Prayer: Lord, help me to know your will and remember that your plans will prevail, even if it takes a snowstorm to get my attention. When I am impatient and want to hurry up and do things my way, I need your reminder to stop and listen to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

What changes are you ready to try? Do you want to change the way you look, the way you speak to your husband, or the way you spend your leisure time? Decide on one change and the date that you can realistically start on it. Write your goal on the calendar. Pray every day about it.

Ask God if the change you have in mind is His will. If it does not seem to be His will, ask for patience as you wait to learn what He wants you to do. Seek God's guidance in going about the change in the right way.

LC

Impress Them on Your Children

Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

Deuteronomy 6:8 (NIV)

When my children were young, Vacation Bible School and the pea crop in our garden always came at the same time. Every morning we went to the church for VBS, and in the afternoons my mother, my five children, and I went to the garden.

The children grumbled about working in the garden on those hot June afternoons, for they would rather have been riding bicycles or watching cartoons. However, each child picked up a bucket and we got started. We all squatted beside the long rows, close enough to talk to each other. We reached into the vines for handfuls of the fat pods, pulled them off and dropped them into our buckets.

As we filled our buckets with tender green peas, we memorized Scripture. The Vacation Bible School teachers handed out Bible verses each day, with instructions to memorize them for the next day's lesson. As we made our way down the rows of pea vines, we accomplished three things:

We filled our buckets with peas to put in the freezer (and the kids popped many into their mouths for immediate enjoyment)

All seven of us memorized Scripture

We had fun as we worked and learned together

Today's Scripture says to tie them (God's words) on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. We did not follow that Old Testament command, but we did say the verses over and over as we picked peas.

After we finished and took the buckets of peas to the kitchen, Mother got out her big enamel dishpans and bowls and we started podding. Pop them open, put the peas in the bowls (and eat a few more), and drop the empty pods into the dishpans. Later, Mother and I would get the peas into the freezer and the children would carry the pans of pods out to feed to the pigs.

Prayer: Thank you, God that we have your Word to study. We have Bibles at home and church and your Word is available in many other places. We can find Scripture on the Internet and in libraries, and our newspaper publishes a verse every day. Thank you for the many opportunities to study and learn your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

You may not want to tie today's Scripture on your hands or bind it on your forehead, but how many ways can you find to keep it visible throughout the day?

Try some of these suggestions:

Write today's verse on an index card and put it where you will see it often during the day—on the bathroom mirror, taped to your desk, or on the dashboard of the car

Put it on the computer as a screensaver

Write very small, or type it in a small font, on a piece of paper. Laminate with clear adhesive and punch a hole to attach it to your keychain

Keep it anywhere that will get your attention (even tying it on your hands and binding it on your forehead if that's what it takes)

Try to learn a verse or portion of Scripture every week. The first chapter of John is a good place to start.

LC

Part Four
Working Moms

Sewing Grace in the Factory

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight,

O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

Psalms 19:14 (KJV)

“Bertha,” I yelled over the din. “These repairs are not mine.” Bertha, the garment factory supervisor, started walking in my direction. She had a scowl on her face.

Workers who make blue jeans on an assembly line are urged to work as fast as possible with a minimum number of mistakes. Inspectors check the jeans for sewing flaws. The defective garments, called ‘repairs,’ are sent back to the operator. Workers expect to get two or three repairs back a day.

I grabbed a pair and flipped the leg back to check the hem’s thread color. The flawed stitching was in green thread; my thread was blue. I was receiving someone else’s repairs to fix.

A workman brought me more jeans. Operators stopped their machines and stared at the wall of work behind me. It was unusual to see so much work piled behind an operator. I looked around for Bertha. Where was she? *I hope she doesn’t expect me to fix them!*

On this day, the air was stifling; the growing pile of jeans blocked the circulation. The sewing machines roared as Bertha reached my side. She leaned over and yelled in my ear, “You fix them.”

“They ain’t mine!”

“Lola’s havin’ machine trouble and she’s sick.”

I was shocked. That was not fair! I turned back to my work and ignored the stack of jeans behind me. Bertha did not say when I had to fix them.

The size of one’s paycheck is determined by the amount of work produced plus a minimum. Operators sew as fast as possible to increase earnings. My paycheck suffers when I stop to fix repairs. It was nearly quitting time. The work could wait.

The next morning, I remembered that I had earned leave time, so I took the day off.

The situation at the factory returned to normal in my absence. Bertha had divided the jeans among several employees. Even Lola had to fix some.

The workers re-stitched the faulty garments without compensation. My co-workers were angry with me because I left, leaving the work for them. They were unhappy with Bertha because she made them fix the jeans on their own time. The workers filed a labor grievance and a hearing was scheduled on a day when the union representative could be present.

I refused to discuss the incident, but it was far from over. One afternoon, I noticed the union representative coming in the front door. I hadn’t been told, but labor and management leaders had scheduled the hearing for that afternoon.

The loud speaker blared the names of the workers who were to testify at the hearing.

When my name was called, I shut off my machine and walked to the front. This was my chance to be vindicated. I had never been involved in a labor grievance. I was nervous, so rehearsed everything I intended to say.

One by one, machines slowed as operators raised their heads and looked my way.

All I knew was that I was right and Bertha was wrong.

But as I strode toward the meeting room, I heard, *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord.* Startled, I stopped walking. *Oh, Lord!*

I recognized the Scripture but did not know if the voice had spoken or came to me alone. I entered the hearing room thinking about the Scripture, forgetting what I intended to say.

“It was stifling hot in the plant the day of the incident,” Bertha said. “We were all under a great pressure, because the number of defective blue jeans was mounting.”

The plant manager agreed to instruct the custodian to check the plant’s climate-control system. Management agreed to recalculate the time cards and compensate the workers for the extra work. The proceedings were calm and good-natured and the grievance was settled. I left the room in awe of God, glowing with the warmth of his love, grace and forgiveness.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for bringing your Word to mind just when I needed it. You intervened, hushed my mouth, and allowed your Spirit of Reconciliation to prevail. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Activity

Plant the Word of God in your subconscious mind. Memorize a Bible verse or short passage each week. Repeat it silently every time you check your hair or make up. Write it on note paper and post it on mirrors in your house. Include its address: book, chapter and verse numbers.

Know the meaning of each week's Scripture. Remember, it is not enough to memorize Scripture text, try to understand what it means. Study and compare the way it reads in different versions of the Bible. Talk with your pastor; he may recommend a Bible commentary.

imb

The Turning Point

Leave your orphans; I will protect their lives. Your widows too can trust in me.

Jeremiah 49:11 (NIV)

My boss, Lester, called me into his office. As I walked into the room, I overheard Lester mumble to himself. “This is a downsizing move, that’s what it is, just a way to save money. Recession is the problem.”

I sat down and watched him shuffle papers on his desk. He put them down, looked up and said, “Maria’s job has been cut.”

I caught my breath and blinked. This made no sense. Maria was my assistant. She handled all of the church office’s smaller jobs.

“How am I supposed to keep up?”

Lester shrugged his shoulders and lowered his head. “You’ll just have to manage.”

“But you don’t understand. This is a hectic office.”

“I know, I know! We’ll all feel the pinch. I’ll pick up the slack. Together, we’ll roll with the punches.”

Lester stood, strode to the door and opened it for me. I started out, stopped and turned back.

“What’ll Maria do? She needs this job.”

“I will write a letter of recommendation for her. Maria should find another job without any trouble.”

He looked past me into the next room. Maria was packing her belongings.

“Don’t worry, she’ll be okay. She’s a good worker.”

I stopped, turned around and walked back to my office.

The impact hit me when I got to my desk. My hands shook. *Maybe I’m next! What about me, my family?* I grabbed a tissue and blotted tears as I struggled to maintain composure. It was lunch time so I left the building.

I needed a quiet place to be alone. I wanted to pray, to unload my panic and fear on God.

My favorite hideaway was under a weeping willow that shaded a parking place in the city park. When I got to the park the spot was vacant, so I drove under the branches of the huge tree. With a sigh of relief, I locked the car doors and lay back in the seat. The tree’s shade provided relief from the noonday heat. Closing my eyes, I willed myself to relax.

I breathed in, filled my lungs and exhaled. Taking a deep breath, I held it and gradually let it out as peace moved through my body. Soon God’s peace, the peace that passes all understanding, relaxed my body and dissolved the tension. I envisioned God saying to me, *One day at a time. I give one day at a time. Trust me, I will help you.*

That was the turning point. Now each day I leave my stress in God’s hands, work harder, yes—even organize better. I try to remain calm, let Christ show the way.

I suppose I just resisted change. Had I not reversed my first reaction, had I permitted my overheated emotions to govern, my fears would have been self-fulfilling.

In the Bible, both Old and New Testaments warn against fretting about pending disaster. The prophet Jeremiah quotes God, saying, *Leave your orphans, I will protect their lives. Your widows too can trust in me.* Jeremiah 49:11 (NIV)

Jeremiah was a realist; he prophesied that trouble would enter the lives of the Hebrew people. In nearly every edict, he included a glimmer of hope, a reminder that God cares for the faithful.

I discovered that to be true. The Christian has troubles. God is willing and able to teach us how to handle life, how to roll with the punches.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for being there when I need you. Help me remember that "... all things work together for good to those who love God, who have been called to His purpose." Romans 8:28 (NIV). In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Activity

Working moms benefit from knowing and practicing relaxation techniques. The method described above is one that can be done anywhere at anytime, sitting or lying down, eyes open or closed.

Consider power naps, sleeping a short time during the daytime, no longer than ten to fifteen minutes. Try to drink a cup of coffee or tea before you lie down if you are concerned that you will sleep too long. It takes about ten to fifteen minutes for the caffeine to be absorbed by your system. It will not let you oversleep. Go to the self-help sections of the local bookstore or public library. Select a method for relieving tension and try it.

To learn about the ordeals God's people endured, study the Scriptures. Look for the glimmer of hope in each of them.

imb

Whose Children Are They?

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray, the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Romans 8:16, 26 (NIV).

Have you ever felt that evil triumphs over good? That is the way I felt when our thirty-two-year-old son died.

Bill was a husband, and father of two young children. He seldom missed Sunday worship and sang in the choir. I was sure that our oldest boy was a child of God.

Our local physician ran a battery of tests when Bill first became ill. After he read the results, the doctor described what was happening in Bill's heart and lungs. The findings did not explain why or how to stop the damage. Medication might slow the progress, but the doctor's prognosis gave Bill less than two years to live. A heart/lung transplant, rare and experimental at that time, might have saved him.

A cardiovascular specialist ran additional tests and his findings confirmed the original prognosis. The specialist put our son's name on an organ transplant list. It was difficult to accept that uncertain diagnosis, but we praised God that he was still alive. The doctors permitted Bill to return to work for as long as he was able.

I tried to reflect a positive attitude as I performed my office duties. Regular customers expressed concern over Bill's health, assuring me of their prayers. Co-workers substituted for me when I needed to be absent. Knowing so many people cared helped me keep faith in God. As I look back on those days, their love and concern bolstered me more than I knew. I am thankful I had a job. It kept me busy and mindful of the love and support of friends.

My prayers focused on the prospect of an organ transplant. I was so certain that surgery could save Bill that I wouldn't let myself think about any other possibility. I wanted Bill's health restored.

However, the time came when it took every ounce of strength he had just to breathe. My prayers became, *Father God, not my will but yours be done*. Bill died three days later.

Bill's son is now a grown man, the picture of his father. Bill's daughter is a beautiful young woman. They and their mother are in church every Sunday.

I was so busy begging for what I wanted that I forgot Bill was God's son, too. The Apostle Paul put it this way, "We do not know what we ought to pray, the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." (Romans 8:26).

Prayer: Father, you wait patiently for me to seek your counsel. Why do I struggle so long on my own? In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

You can help a friend or loved one who experiences a death in the family. When they appear sad or depressed, a pat on their shoulder helps them know you care. A casual comment like, 'How's it going?' gives your friend an opportunity to talk if she wishes. If they want to talk, be ready to listen.

Send sympathy cards or write short notes when the death first occurs and then again weeks later. Record the date that their loved one died. Mark it on your calendar. Send thinking-of-you notes on the anniversary of their loved one's death. The anniversary of the death can be very difficult for a grieving person.

We all grieve in our own way; there is no right or wrong way. Assure your friend that the emotional turmoil she may be experiencing is normal. If she has experienced the death of a child, be aware that type of grief is one of the most difficult to endure.

If you are not familiar with the benefits of grief support groups, learn about ®The Compassionate Friends, Inc (TCF). Study their Internet Web site. TCF is a free, national non-profit, self-help support group for those whose child has died. Offer to go with your friend to a meeting of the local chapter. It helps to talk with others who have been through a similar situation.

imb

Distractions Part of the Job

“While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. ‘Your daughter is dead,’ they said. ‘Why bother the teacher any more?’ Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler;

‘Don’t be afraid; just believe.’

Mark 5: 35-36 (NIV)

The other day I had an opportunity to study the confident way Jolene, a receptionist in a doctor’s office, coped with several jobs at once. But I tend to get nervous when anyone interrupts me, even when I try to control my emotions. I arrived in her office in time for my appointment.

Jolene smiled as I walked up.

“I’ll be with you in a minute.”

I watched as Jolene completed paperwork for the patient in front of me. She handed it to a nurse who waited to take him to see his doctor.

Jolene looked at me and smiled again. “Sorry about the wait. May I help you?”

I handed her my medical cards and said, “I have a two o’clock appointment with Dr. Marlow.”

Before I could say another word, the phone rang.

“Just a moment,” Jolene said.

She picked up the handset, put it to her ear and said, “Hospital Clinic, Jolene speaking. May I help you?”

I'd give anything to be able to juggle jobs like that.

Stepping back so as to not eavesdrop, I turned to look out the window and glanced at my watch. It was almost two o'clock.

"Would you mind holding while I ring his office?" Jolene said into the handset.

I looked back and saw Jolene press an intercom button. The button blinked red.

She turned to the computer, pressed the keyboard page-up key until she located the desired screen and studied it. Looking at me, she said, "Has your address changed?"

A man rushed up before I could answer and elbowed me aside. He shoved a paper under Jolene's nose.

"Is it right this time?" He clinched his teeth as he ground out those words.

I gawked at the man in disbelief. *What's his problem?*

Jolene glanced up at him, blinked and swallowed hard. She looked at the paper and nodded. Then she added it to the pile beside her. The man waited a moment and then shrugged and turned to leave. Jolene and I watched as he walked to the waiting room, selected a magazine, sat down and began to read.

Looking back at me, Jolene smiled warmly.

"I'm sorry. Now, where were we? Oh, yes. Your address, has it changed since the last time you were here?"

I verified the information and before long the nurse called me in to see the doctor.

The way Jolene handled a potentially disrupting incident compares to the way Jesus handled the events in today's Scripture text.

Jesus' actions and reactions begin with verse 22 of the 5th chapter in the book of Mark. The ruler of the synagogue, Jairus, meets Jesus and begs Him to come and heal his child. The Master starts to go to the leader's home. A crowd of people accompany Him and as they walk, they brush against Him. A woman with a long-term ailment touches His cloak. Jesus feels power issue from him so he stops and talks with her. Some men walk up to Jairus and Jesus and tell them to forget about going, the girl has died. But Jesus goes to the home anyway and heals the child.

The Master's determination to stay on task and Jolene's skill in handling people illustrate an ability to juggle multiple tasks at one time.

Prayer: Lord, help me manage interruptions so I can stay focused on important assignments. Show me the jobs You would have me accomplish today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

You can with practice learn the skill of multi-tasking. It involves an ability to concentrate on a primary mission while managing secondary ones.

Follow the plot of a TV program as you do needlework or read a book.

File documents as you talk on the phone.

Manage a receptionist desk in an active business establishment. Be prepared to think fast and react appropriately as others call you from task to task. Strive to maintain your composure and reflect a friendly attitude. It is not easy to do this, but you can do it.

imb

When They Just Won't Listen

“I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me . . . Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

Psalms 50: 8, 14-15 (NIV)

I looked around at the spotless garage and thought, *Bill must be in trouble again!* My teenage son, Bill, tried to get on my good side when he cleaned the garage without me telling him to do so.

The letter from the school counselor lay on the kitchen table. I picked it up and learned that Bill, my oldest, had skipped school for the third time, and his grades were pathetic.

My supervisor made me work overtime that night, then I got into heavy traffic on my way home, and now Bill was in trouble. I did not have the strength to deal with him that night.

Trying to work and cope with that teenager was more than I could handle. I sat down in a chair, laid my head on the table, and cried.

“What’s wrong, Mom,” Bill said as he walked into the room.

I looked up.

“I begged you to take your education seriously, and now this! You’ll never get into college at this rate.”

“But I gave up the big game and cleaned out the garage for you. Aren’t you happy about that? There’s no pleasing you,” he said.

“Besides I’m quitting school anyway. Who needs it?” He stormed out of the room.

“There is no way you’re quitting school, young man!” I shouted at his retreating back.

The following Sunday I went alone to my parents’ home for dinner. During the meal, I unloaded my worries about Bill and his latest exploits.

My eighty-year-old father said, “If Bill really wants to quit school, let him. He can learn a trade and get a job, just like I did.”

Shocked, I nearly dropped my fork. “Daddy, I want him to get a college degree. He can’t get anywhere today without one, and now he wants to quit high school. He has so much potential; I have such big plans for him. I haven’t worked all these years for nothing. I want him to succeed in life. I’m so disappointed in him. I ...”

“Your father’s right, dear,” Mother interrupted. “Besides, this is not about what you want. Bill knows what you want. It’s a matter of FREE WILL. Bill’s FREE WILL. He’s reached an age when he wants to chart his own life. Hopefully, he does not really intend to quit school. It’s hard to back off when you care so much, but everyone has to live with the consequences of their actions.”

Later, I decided my parents were right ... Bill’s and my conflict was not about a spotless garage or his sacrifices. I wanted him to want what I wanted for his life. Neither Bill nor the Hebrew children in today’s lesson would listen. What would it take to make them understand?

Prayer: Oh, God, thank you for allowing me to exercise FREE WILL, but help me to want what you want for my life. No amount of sacrifice can replace my desire to serve you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Activity

Read the entire 50th Psalm. Then reread the 50th Psalm in more than one Bible translation. Does different wording bring out deeper meaning for you? Notice the reasons why God was unimpressed by the sacrifices the Hebrew children offered. What did God want from them?

Talk with others who work with or have had children of any age. Ask them what they do or have done when young people do not want to take their advice.

Write a letter to your child (children) expressing your hopes for their future(s). Remember to praise them for the positive life choices they have made, and assure them of your love.

imb

Part Five

The Empty Nest

That Going Home Feeling

How I love your Temple, Almighty God! How I want to be there! I long to be in the Lord's Temple. With my whole being I sing for joy to the living God.

Psalm 84: 1-2 (TEV)

Like many young adults, Chuck behaved as if he were invincible. He was certain that he was physically fit and ready for the rigors of Army boot camp. No one, not even the National Guard recruiter, could get him to exercise.

Chuck took basic training in the State of Georgia. It was there that he learned how unprepared he was-- the hard way. He suffered aches and pains from the strenuous exercise and the heartache of loneliness. No one at camp cared about him, he complained. Boot camp was like a foreign land.

As his mother, I hurt for him. He cried over the phone when we talked, and I cried when I read his letters. Chuck was the only recruit in his barracks from the Ozark Mountains of Missouri. The rest were big city boys, and he was from the backwoods, someone for them to ridicule. Lonely and homesick, he wanted to go home, but it was too late for that.

There was nothing I could do to change the situation. I prayed daily for him and wrote often, reminding him to pray. A few weeks later, he called home, ecstatic because he had found a friend.

Gathering courage, he had ignored his tormentors and went to the chapel to pray. There he found a man kneeling in prayer. This soldier planned to be a military chaplain and basic training was one of the requirements.

At his new friend's suggestion, Chuck spent his free time in the chapel's activity room. The young minister and Chuck had interests in common, and that helped him feel at home on base.

Boot camp concluded with bivouac and war games. All the recruits feared trying to survive in the woods and traversing the rugged terrain.

One night Chuck called me and he sounded worried. Caught up in the other recruits' fears, he forgot what he knew and where he came from. As a member of the Boy Scouts of America™, he had earned survival badges in the Ozarks.

"You should feel right at home in the timber," I said.

He laughed when I suggested that those city boys might be afraid of the dark without electric lights.

Chuck's boot camp experience was similar to the psalmist's in today's Scripture. He sang with deep longing in his heart, a body hunger, a homesickness of sorts. The Hebrew expatriate ached to be in the Lord's Temple, but he was a long way from home, forced to live among strangers in a foreign land.

Prayer: Heavenly Father: Be with our young men and women as they prepare for military service. They need you by their sides, regardless of where they serve. And be with our troops on foreign soil, and keep them out of harm's way. Please bring peace to your people. In Jesus name. Amen.

Activity

Write to your adult children in the armed service. Keep in touch with all of them even if they do not reply. This may prevent them from getting homesick and help you adjust to their absence. Mail time is important no matter where they are.

If you do not have a family member in the military, call the nearest National Guard Unit. The commander can give you names and mailing addresses for military personal who would love to hear from you. If you run out of things to write about, send humorous greeting cards, ones designed to lift their spirits.

Keep your young adults supplied with phone cards, but don't insist they call you. Avoid mentioning unfortunate events at home, unless they ask. Do not worry them unnecessarily.

Go through old photo albums and look for duplicate pictures to send them. They treasure the ones that trigger memories of happier times.

imb

Ask and You'll Receive

And suppose your friend should answer from inside, 'Don't bother me!' Well, what then? I tell you that even if he did not get up and give you the bread because you are his friend, yet he will get up and give you everything you need because you are not ashamed to keep on asking. ...How much more then will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Luke 11:7-13 (TEV)

It was past midnight when the train pulled into the deserted depot. Exhausted from weeks of travel, Charlie and I got off the Amtrak in Kansas City, claimed our luggage and made our way to the underground parking garage. We had parked our little red Tracer down there before we left.

It felt good to get into our own car. We drove to the exit gate, paid the attendant and left the dimly lit structure. It took us a minute to adjust our eyes to the glare of the inner-city lights. The streets appeared deserted, but seeing young men huddling in the shadows made me nervous.

I longed for the security of our motel room. The wary look on Charlie's face told me that he felt the same. When we got to the motel he got out, locked the driver-side door and went in. I stayed in the car.

Charlie had our receipt for overnight lodging in his pocket. I watched him through the glass doors. He approached the desk and spoke to the clerk. The clerk consulted the computer and shook his head. My husband turned and headed for the door.

He was the picture of dejection, sagging shoulders, downcast eyes and dragging feet. Charlie didn't look up until he got in the car. His tear-filled eyes said it all. They gave our guaranteed-late-arrival room to someone else.

“Why didn’t you ask to see the night manager? I paid for the room weeks ago,” I said. “They can’t do this!”

Shocked when the clerk turned him away, he forgot to appeal to someone in charge. Reluctantly, he dug the receipt from his pocket, climbed out of the car and walked back into the motel.

I saw a man come out of the manager’s office. He took Charlie to one side. The manager studied our receipt, stepped to the computer and rechecked the records. He looked up at Charlie and grinned. They shook hands. With one phone call, the manager arranged for us to use a luxurious suite in a nearby hotel.

As we drove home the next morning, the previous night’s experience caused me to reflect on Jesus’ words, *Ask, and you will receive* ... That night in Kansas City, Charlie failed to ask to see the person in charge at first, but his persistence prevailed. The manager was generous in his response.

Prayer: Dear Lord, prompt me to slow down, breathe deeply and relax when things go wrong. Remind me to take my problems to you in prayer, to involve you in my everyday life. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Activity

Go to a supermarket and look for a rare type of seasoning. Did you get frustrated when you could not find it easily? Did you get flustered and upset, or did you seek help? Which reaction worked best?

Practice talking to God as you go through the day. It is not necessary to speak aloud; thought prayers are equally effective. Trust God. He hears even when He does not answer immediately.

Visit a bookstore or a library. Check the shelves for self-help books, the best of which is the Holy Bible. Look for a book that encourages assertiveness, tempered with consideration for the other person's point of view, the kind that teaches the motto: Be sure you are right and then go ahead.

imb

You and Your Children

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children: instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Proverbs 22:6 and Ephesians 6:4 (NIV)

Paul of Tarsus gave the Ephesians much the same advice about training their children as did the ancient Israelite who wrote the Book of Proverbs. However, Paul gave the Ephesians a little extra advice—he cautioned fathers not to exasperate their offspring. That puts an interesting spin on the way we should raise our kids, doesn't it? Their instructions caused me to think of our grown family.

My husband and I had three sons and a daughter. Tim was our youngest child, and when he was a young person, he was active in the community. Our two oldest, Bill and Sandra were grown and gone by the time Tim got into high school. My husband and I thought we had weathered almost every adolescent behavior a parent might encounter; we had to develop a whole new method of parenting to deal with Tim.

One Halloween night when he was about fifteen, Tim asked to go on a hayride. We gave permission, providing he would come straight home afterward. However, instead of coming home, he went with a group of older boys on a Snipe Hunt in a dangerous wooded section called Bluff Creek. The name alone was enough to tell us he had no business out there after dark.

We were so upset with Tim that we made him set his own disciplinary action, something to prevent him from doing such a thing again. After forestalling the inevitable, he ruled that he should be grounded for the rest of the school year. That was stricter punishment than anything we might have chosen. So we shortened his sentence to one month.

That was years ago. Now he is an independent businessman with a growing family. He has teenagers of his own so he knows what we went through. However, he is still our most active child in the community.

Charles Lee is our middle son, a single father. We see more of him than any of the others. He seems to appreciate our parenting tips and having someone with whom he can share his problems. Chuck learned to cook out of necessity and developed a love for it. Raising children alone is no easier for him than it is for other single parents.

My daughter, Sandra, lives in a distant city and is busy with her friends and career. I understand, but I miss being part of her life.

I long to have a part in the lives of my children, just as God longs to have a part in my life. The more time I spend with Him, the closer I feel. When I get busy, my heavenly parent patiently waits and misses me.

Prayer: Dear Lord: help me keep in touch. Help me maintain a good relationship with you and with my loved ones. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Write a letter to each of your children. Reminisce about a time that both you and they can laugh. Remind them of a time they had a close call, when they were frightened and so were you. Mention how God brought you through it. Close by asking them to let you know of anything you said or did that influenced their lives. You might be surprised at the result.

Look through your photo albums for pictures of each child alone. Make a childhood memory book for each, using photos of activities they used to enjoy. A memory book makes a priceless Christmas or birthday present. Be careful not to give away all your precious photos.

Make a video or audio love gift for each child's birthday. Talk to the recorder as if that child was in the room. Mention one or more of their personality traits that makes them special to you. Tell them how proud you are of them and why. Put a note on the outside of the box that suggests they open this personal message in private.

imb

Empty Nest Brings Change

At that time Jesus went up a hill to pray and spent the whole night there praying to God. When day came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he named apostles ...

Luke 6: 12-13b (TEV)

My enthusiasm rose as I stuffed the day planner, pens and notebook into my brief case.

I checked my appearance in the hall mirror before I went downstairs. *The executive director says I need to be there, so I'd better get going.* My job did not usually include weekend training, but this one offered continuing education units.

“With your college degree, I’d think you’d know it all by now,” my husband commented as I walked by him.

He was lying in the overstuffed recliner reading the newspaper. Ignoring his sarcasm, I leaned over, pushed the paper aside and kissed his cheek. He was having trouble getting used to our role reversal, and I knew it.

Straightening up, I pulled the briefcase strap up on my shoulder, dug out my car keys and headed for the door.

I couldn’t resist a counterattack. “They had special training back when you were working, didn’t they?”

“Yah, but during working hours,” he said. “You even go on Saturdays.”

I didn’t have time to argue. “The director wants us ‘all on the same page,’ ready to teach others.” I turned and looked at him. He did not appear to be listening, so I walked out.

Years ago we agreed that I would stay home and raise the kids while he earned the living. As time went by, I yearned to complete my college degree and start a career. We decided that when he retired, he would stay home while I worked.

The children were grown and gone. Our daughter was still in college, but the boys had moved out and were on their own. We were happy they had become capable, independent adults.

I missed having a child to follow me around the kitchen as I fixed supper, eager to share the events of the day. Without them, the house seemed cold and empty. I got more depressed every day. The last thing I wanted to do was to cook or do housework. One morning I woke up and realized that now was the time to start a career. If I got a job, I could be productive, maybe even build a retirement fund of my own.

Charlie had worked with the same company for over thirty years and looked forward to retirement. He was ready for a change of pace, time to do things he enjoyed. There was one problem—his friends had to work. He had dreamed of taking his sons deer hunting, but now that he had time, they were off on their own.

He didn't mind cooking, but he hated housework. It wasn't as much fun to be home as he thought. Neither of us was prepared for the 'shifting of gears.'

Change can be difficult even when you prepare for it. I was getting training so I could teach others how to work efficiently. Jesus knew His followers were not ready to carry on God's work. He knew what he had to do—He had to make leaders out of his followers. He prayed all night, consulted his Father and got up-to-date instructions. After He prepared himself, He was ready to train the apostles.

Prayer: Oh, Lord, when changes come my way, prompt me to seek your guidance and make the adjustment. Help me accept changes as they come into my life, knowing that every good and perfect thing comes from you.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Talk with individuals or couples who have successfully retired. Their experiences may be different from yours, but it helps to know other marriages survived. Visit with your parents and grandparents; learn how they handled changes in their lives. Benefit from their experience.

Rekindle your relationship by planning mutually enjoyable activities. If one person doesn't enjoy an activity, try something else. Spend time alone once in a while.

If you raised a family, you experienced the complexities of adjusting your life to meet their needs. The reverse occurs when they leave home. You may experience a feeling of emptiness—the empty nest syndrome.

In the business world, counselors advise employees to not retire from something, but to retire to something. Make a definite plan for keeping yourself occupied.

Both partners in a marriage should not retire at the same time. It is difficult enough when one retires. When a spouse retires, both spouses must adjust to the change in the other person's life. Think back to when you were newlyweds; adjustments that were fun back then may be an aggravation now.

imb

Don't Nit-Pick Your Spouse

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye! You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, then you will see to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Matthew 7: 3-5 (TEV)

My mother-in-law had a saying: "When we find fault with every little thing about a person's looks or behavior, we are nit-picking." Secondary definition for the word, 'nit:' minor shortcoming, harmless little nuisance. (Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary Eleventh Edition).

One night Charlie's mother invited us over for supper. I hated going to her house for a meal. She was a good cook, but we had nothing in common any more. Our children, her grandchildren, were grown and gone. I didn't like to complain, but it seemed like she had an old English adage for every circumstance. That tended to get on my nerves after a while.

Charlie and I were in the bedroom getting ready to go. I glanced down at his shoes.

"You're not wearing those awful canvas shoes, are you?" I asked. "The leather ones are so much nicer. And that tie, it just isn't right."

He took off the tie and selected another.

"You didn't shave, did you? Look at that stubble! Charlie, you just look awful!"

He rushed into the bathroom, slammed the door and turned on the bathwater full blast.

“You are a nit-picker!” he bellowed at the top of his voice. “Who are you to criticize me?”

I stomped my foot and yelled back, “You’re just like your mother!”

Tears filled my eyes. *That’s not fair! I don’t criticize everything.* I flopped on the bed and buried my face in the pillow. Charlie’s accusation stung, but it did have a ring of truth.

Charlie yelled something back at me, but I couldn’t understand his muffled voice.

Left alone, I calmed down and dried my tears. I sat on the bed and looked out the window, remembering how I used to double-check our teenager’s outfits. They hated to go back and change clothes and often told me so.

I was only trying to help. Had I made Charlie to feel like a foolish child? I don’t find fault with others while ignoring my own behavior . . . or do I?

Prayer: Dear Lord, Search my heart and help me consider the other person’s feelings before I criticize. I know how much it hurts me when others scrutinize my behavior and appearance too closely. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Activity

It is difficult to change a long-standing habit like nit-picking. Ask your spouse if he would help. It might help if you could hear yourselves. If he agrees, set up a tape recorder near where you and he usually talk. If possible, set it to turn off when it is quiet and back on when someone speaks. Let it run, and each evening play the tape back. Listen for exchanges where one complains about the other's shortcomings.

Analyze what you hear. Who is at fault? This experiment might reveal that both of you need to change attitude and behavior. Be fair. Some couples bicker when they are bored, with nothing better to do. Maybe you need to take time for a date together once a week. Consider working together on a new hobby or exercise.

Is there an underlying cause that neither of you have considered? Any major change in your lives can be a stressor. What significant changes occurred during the past five years?

Has one or both of you invested much of your married life raising children? Do you miss having someone need you?

Does the house seem empty?

Do you spend more time with grandchildren than with him?

Is one or both of you retired?

Has there been a death in your family?

Are you feeling the results of aging?

Do you care for an aged family member and find you have less 'together' time? Have you quit praying together? Maybe this is the ideal time to start again.

Talking it out in the presence of an impartial family therapist helps. Your marital relationship will improve.

imb

Part Six
Nurturing Others

Accepting Someone Different

He said to them, 'go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to all mankind.' Tell them not to speak evil of anyone, but to be peaceful and friendly, and always to show a gentle attitude toward everyone.

Mark 16:15, Titus 3:2 (TEV)

I sat alone in the church sanctuary that Sunday morning, warm and cozy in the sun as it shone through the stained glass window. The sun beams shone through the window and burst into a brilliant prism. I looked up and fixed my gaze on the depiction of Jesus as He prepared to send out His followers. Mesmerized by the beauty of the experience, I longed to embrace the whole world.

My euphoria evaporated when my pew gave a little as somebody plopped down on the other end. I glanced in the person's direction. There sat a broad-beamed fellow, his back against the pew and legs spread. He rocked back and forth. When I noticed his shirt strained to cover his belly, I fought the impulse to move.

I know how it hurts when anyone snubs me, and yet I struggle to show a friendly attitude toward everyone. As a Christian, wife and mother of a grown family, I often forget how lonely it feels to be an outsider. I was not proud of that attitude the day I met the newcomer.

The man grinned and a little drool dribbled from the corner of his mouth. He ducked his head and glanced away. He never said a word, but his self-conscious expression caused me to rethink my desire to flee.

I thought of my grandchild with special needs. Someday she could be an adult version of this visitor, precious in her own way. Then I remembered my manners. I made myself lean over and extend my hand.

“Good morning. Good to see you.”

He blinked in surprise and then reached over and offered a limp hand to shake.

“My name is Ina. What’s yours?”

“Greg, I’m Gregory Camp. This is a pretty church.”

I detected a southern drawl in his bass voice. His soft hazel eyes made timid contact with mine. *Just the same color as my grandchild’s.*

“You’re right. This is a pretty church.”

“Beautiful day, isn’t it? I work at the Sheltered Workshop. I like it there. They’re good to me.”

“Is that right?” I smiled at him. “It is good to have you here. I hope you come back.” This time I meant it.

He grinned as he picked up a hymnal and began to leaf through it.

Greg comes to church nearly every week now. After I got to know him better, I helped him look more presentable by visiting with his caregiver and obtaining big-and-tall sized clothing.

God wants us to love and accept everyone as equals. My experience with Greg teaches that prejudice comes in many forms and most of us are guilty of it at some time. Often our attitude is the only thing that needs to change.

Prayer: Father, forgive me. You say to share your love with everyone. Yet, I hesitate before I touch the one next to me. Help me to be open and understanding. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

When you meet an individual who has special needs and you want to help, start by getting to know him. Consider his feelings. He may not want or need help. Respect his privacy. If he is unwilling to answer questions, do not pry. Get permission from him before you talk to a caregiver or employer.

Barriers that isolate people are not limited to ethnicity or disability. Consider other diversities that separate us, like age, gender, vocation, education and financial status.

Volunteer in a nursing home, hospital, day care, hospice or in a soup kitchen/shelter or by visiting the jail.

If a minority culture in your area speaks a language different from yours, learn to speak that language. Check out an audio tape from a library and use it to teach yourself. Smile and be friendly as you greet them in their own language.

imb

The Wedding Gift

. . . And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ . . .

Ephesians 3: 17b-18 (NIV)

The little house in which we lived was cold and dark. The musty smell and constant drizzle matched my mood. I was lonely and in a strange town. Our marriage was shaky and what friends I had were busy with problems. Too proud to go back to my parents, I needed help.

Aimlessly, I searched the living room bookshelves for something to get my mind off my troubles. I spotted a little brown volume, long forgotten. Taking it off the shelf, I opened it.

“Oh, yes,” I said aloud, remembering the neighbor who gave me the book long ago. “She’s the one who always gave such unusual presents.”

The handwritten inscription on the inside cover read, *So that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith. . .* Ephesians 3:17a (NIV).

As a bride, I considered this little religious book to be a strange wedding gift, but now I was curious. I carried it to my favorite chair and started to read. The inscription and the Bible verses were clues to the book’s message. I had leafed through these pages before. Each page was assigned a day of the week and featured a different story.

It was a unique concept to me, an unbeliever. Christianity had been a subject for ridicule in my home, so the book had gathered dust on the shelf. But I was desperate, willing to try anything.

If you're going to do this, you might just as well do it right. I shuffled through the keepsakes in the storage trunk and pulled out an old Bible. *What have you got to lose?* I found the illustration and Scripture lesson for the day and before long, I began to experience the comfort I sought.

With the Bible and study book to guide me, I developed a hunger to learn about Jesus and His teachings.

At first, afraid of what my husband would say, I hid the books and read them only when I was alone. Then, I became bolder and studied the Bible passages and lessons every day. The good news of Jesus Christ made perfect sense. A friend invited me to church and Bible study. I went. After I accepted the Lord as my Savior, I found the strength and courage to work harder at my marriage.

I invited my husband to join me in weekly worship. He refused at first, but I decided not to nag him about it. Eventually, he agreed to give it a try. Now we are a couple again.

But I never had a chance to thank that neighbor; she died soon after our wedding. Her unusual wedding gift was at my fingertips when I needed guidance. By giving a daily devotional guide, she found a way to reach me without saying a word. That little brown book not only helped me find the Lord but it saved our marriage.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for thoughtful people who reach out in your love. Prompt me to seek ways to show others your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Remember the Holy Bible is a thoughtful present to give at any gift-giving time, especially in celebration of a crucial point in your loved one's life.

If you plan to give an inspirational guide, consider the person's age and interests in life. You will find a large variety and types to select from.

imb

Wisdom Based on Experience

And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature.

Ephesians 4: 13 (TEV)

Josh shuffled into the room during the big argument and sat in the back. Arthritic knees prevented him from walking closer to the front. It was getting harder and harder for him to attend school board meetings, but he seldom missed. The board needed former members like him to help with difficult decisions. He leaned forward to hear the speaker.

A hot debate raged over a proposed after-school program for children of working parents. Everyone in the room was so engrossed in the proceedings that no one had heard him come in.

The board chairman had opened the meeting and asked for new business. Rob, an elementary school teacher, made the initial proposal.

Josh arrived in time to hear Rob propose they hire a part-time director for an after-school program. The teacher mentioned that a budget increase might be required to cover the expense, but quickly added that the need justified it.

To the school board, this was both an opportunity to help working parents and a money issue, which was a touchy subject.

Bill stood up, turned around and bellowed his opinion at the group.

“We can’t afford to increase the school budget by one single cent!” He sat down, banging his chair against his neighbor’s. Bill then leaned back and folded his arms across his barrel-shaped chest. He glared at Rob.

Before the chairman could call for further discussion, Rob pushed on.

“Spring City School System hires a director who supervises their after-school program,

“Spring City offers organized sports. Spring City’s children are supervised until ...”

Josh started to doze until he heard Rob change tactics. Josh awoke and leaned forward. He grabbed the back of the chair in front of him and stood. His thundering voice resounded from the vaulted ceiling.

“Is this just ‘cause Spring City’s doing this or do the children of working parents need after-school care?”

Rob turned pale. Recovering, he said, “Oh! THE CHILDREN NEED an after-school program!”

“Okay. That’s your talking point.” He sat back down.

Josh’s insight caused Rob to realize the board members needed to focus on the needs of this school. The elementary teacher sat down.

The board voted to hire an after-school program director, thanks to Josh’s intervention. The older man had worked in public relations for years, both in the school system and in the business world. He understood the way mature adults reason.

Just as Josh’s knowledge of workable methods for persuading others helped the school board make its decision, the Bible contains stories where God uses people who are both capable and shrewd.

Simeon was one of those people. Even though he was elderly, Simeon's wisdom and experience helped him recognize the infant Jesus as the long awaited sign from God. Luke 2:25-35 (TEV). He did not allow his advanced years and declining health to stop him from declaring Jesus to be the promised Messiah.

Josh attended that school board meeting in spite of his limitations and listened to what the elementary teacher had to say. When he heard Rob reinforce his proposal with an adolescent ploy, 'Let's do this because others are doing it,' Josh challenged that reasoning.

He knew someone could lead but not pressure this board into doing something for the wrong reason. Simeon, like Josh, would not allow age or limited mobility to silence his counsel.

Prayer: Teach me, Lord, to be a grown-up who can still see through the eyes of a youth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Look for opportunities to guide young people as they step into leadership roles. Be willing to teach leadership classes. Encourage them to take courses in debate.

Be available to mentor a potential leader. Listen to his thoughts and ideas. Stem the impulse to dominate the conversation, but do share your wisdom.

Try to remain involved with others. The senior who remains interested in family, church and community is more likely to stay mentally alert and physically fit.

The church and community need grown-ups, and there is much work to do.

imb

Eye Witness Needed

If I testify on my own behalf, what I say is not to be accepted as real proof. But there is someone who testifies on my behalf, and I know that what he says about me is true.

John 5: 31-32 (TEV)

Our word alone may not always be enough to prove our innocence. One time I was in an accident and another accused me of speeding. An eye witness testimony preserved my driving record.

A pickup smashed into the passenger side of my van. There was a dispute about whether the truck ran a stop sign before he hit me.

The trucker told the judge that he drove his truck down Grand Avenue. When he got to the intersection at Eleventh Street, he stopped at the stop sign and looked in both directions.

“The traffic was clear,” he said, “so I started to cross the street. A vehicle zoomed into my path. I tried to stop, but my truck hit the van.”

After he finished, I got up and testified.

“I drove down Eleventh that day because it was a through street,” I said. “A pickup hit my van as I crossed Grand.”

When I took the stand in my own defense, I felt frightened and alone. I knew I had been driving under the speed limit, but my word alone was not enough.

“Art Morris, please come to the stand,” the clerk called.

Who's Art Morris? What's he got to do with this case?

Morris told the court that he walked down Grand on the date of the accident. He stopped when he got to Eleventh. A pickup was coming so he waited on the corner.

"The truck was almost in front of me when out of the corner of my eye I saw a van go by on Eleventh," he said. "I can't say if the pickup stopped or just slowed, but I saw the truck smash into the van."

Morris told the court what he saw and that took courage. He volunteered his time to help the court make a decision.

The judge ruled the trucker guilty of running a stop sign and fined him. His insurance company was responsible for repair costs, and the judge cleared me of the speeding charge.

Later, I thanked Morris for testifying. He told me that he did not come forward at first, because he didn't think he saw enough to help. Morris changed his mind after he talked to the investigating officer.

When it was my word against the trucker's, I felt scared and helpless. All I had at stake was an unblemished driving record. While my experience is not a precise parallel to Jesus' situation, He must have feared the Crucifixion. He knew his testimony alone would not save him.

He said, "... there is someone else who testifies on my behalf, and I know that what He says about me is true." John 5:22 (TEV).

Jesus relied on God's authority to prevail no matter what happened. I pray I have courage to testify for the Lord and for others when an opportunity arises.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being my Advocate, my Savior. Give me the courage to witness for you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Write or tape record a story about a dispute that you witnessed. Select a situation that taught you a lesson. Your story may or may not involve a court of law. Remember to include the details about the lesson you learned. A written or tape-recorded account of such an experience serves as a teaching tool for grandchildren and other family members.

The story you tell might be about a childhood experience. What happened? As a child, you might have run and told your mother or teacher. As an adult, you might have found a mediator, someone in a position to help or to advise.

Tell how you felt about stepping forward. Were you afraid; if so, what did you fear? Did your testimony bring someone to justice or prevent an injustice? Did you come forward voluntarily or did you hesitate to get involved? What lesson did you learn from this experience?

imb

Yeast of Life

Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Luke 13: 20-21 (NIV)

The woman in today's Scripture combined flour and yeast when she made bread for her family. Jesus challenged his followers to compare the familiar characteristic of yeast to the growing and spreading action of the kingdom of God. The woman kneaded her bread to the proper texture, as women had done for centuries, and then let it rise before putting it into the oven. Much like today's cooks do.

Close your eyes and imagine the warm yeasty smell of bread baking in the oven. Breathe in the marvelous aroma. Make you yearn for a bite smeared with butter? It does me. The woman that Jesus spoke of did all the work by hand, but today's cook might use a bread maker.

Cook's today often skip the manual labor of kneading bread. They use a machine that does it for them. An electric bread maker is an appliance I never felt a need for, but I understand it is a wonderful invention. I love the rhythmic movements of my hands and body as I knead the dough: the pushing forward, rolling back, folding over and pushing again, over and over again until the dough is the right degree of tackiness.

Years ago, a group of us was visiting, and the topic of conversation turned to bread making. Some preferred dry yeast, but others liked cake yeast best. The next day one of my friends brought a copy of her sourdough bread recipe, and offered me some yeast starter.

I keep the leavening alive by storing it in the refrigerator in a covered bowl, and replenishing it each time I use some. After removing the starter needed for my recipe, say ½ cup, I replace it with ½ cup of a slightly thickened

mixture (like gravy) of flour and warm water, and cover the bowl and return it to the refrigerator. There are many recipes for growing yeast starter. It is delicate stuff.

Today's families consider homemade bread a treat, but families in Jesus' time needed that staple to survive. God's people back then, like us today, need another basic staple, the Kingdom of God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to love and nurture your word in my heart so it can grow and win others to Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Activity

Read the entire chapter of Luke 13. To what did He compare the Kingdom of God?

Research yeast and sourdough bread in your local library or on the Internet.

To make sourdough starter: In a 4-cup glass or plastic container, combine 1 cup water (110 to 115 degrees F) with 2 ¼ teaspoons active dry yeast and 1 ½ cups white rice flour. If you have a start of someone else's, use it in place of the dry yeast. The mixture will be thick. Cover loosely with plastic wrap or foil. Let stand in a warm place one to three days, stirring two or three times a day. The leavening "rises and falls" during the fermentation period, and becomes thinner as it stands.

When it becomes bubbly, it is developed. If it has a liquid layer on top, drain off or stir it into the batter for stronger sourdough flavor. Starter is ready to use for baking or storing in the refrigerator. When recipe calls for dry yeast dissolved in warm water, say ½ cup, replace the mixture with ½ cup of yeast starter; it serves as the leavening. Three simple rules: use your starter every week or two; feed it after each use; and wait patiently during rising – wild yeasts are slow.

To replenish, reserve at least one cup of starter. Add 1 cup of water (110 to 115 degrees F) and 1 ½ cups of white rice flour. Cover loosely and let stand in a warm place 12 hours. It is ready to use for baking or to place in the refrigerator for later use.

Share your starter and bread.