

A Survey of Women's Studies

Seminaries are beginning to support the calling of women to full-time ministry. Which institutions are on the forefront of this trend?

Jennifer Kemp was fairly certain God was calling her into the ministry, so to test the waters, she decided to take a weekend course at a seminary near her job in Boston. The class, "Proclamation and Communication," had two women and 22 men.

"The first night," Jennifer recalled, "one gentleman asked me why I was in seminary. I said, 'I am not in seminary right now. I am taking this class to see if seminary is something I'd like to pursue in the future.'

Becoming One With God

Achieving true oneness with the trinity requires laying aside our own self or soul-life in order to live by the thoughts, desires and choices of Christ.

The bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11 changed all our perspectives. Nonbelievers watched the crumbling towers and faced their own mortality. Believers saw the beginning of the end.

Seeing that we have little time to allow the Holy Spirit to bring us into conformity to the life of Christ, we asked ourselves, How should we then live? We recognized that of ourselves we were sloppy, self-indulgent witnesses to Christ, and suddenly we were galvanized into a deadly seriousness about our Christian walk.

He Gently Leads

My husband and I both grew up in homes where yelling, swearing and physical violence were considered normal. We hadn't called it abuse; it was just the way things were.

I'd been raised to believe that I didn't matter at all. My job was to "keep the family together no matter what."

When my son was born, I assumed that I could protect him from my husband's anger, but when he was 2 years old, my husband barreled into the kitchen and screamed, "Shut up!" right into the baby's face because he'd been crying. I was so frightened that I determined I'd never let my husband hear our son crying again.

Find Your Special Child's Destiny

Don't lose hope if your son or daughter has special needs. God has a great plan for both of you.

When a child is diagnosed with **special needs**, it can be an overwhelming, even devastating event in a parent's life. My husband, Jack, and I know because our son Nicholas was diagnosed with **autism** in January 2001.

If you are the parent of a **special-needs child**, you've

experienced the agonizing pain, shock and even **hopelessness** that can grip your soul with such a diagnosis. In the midst of what seems to be a “dark night,” one question may be burning in your spirit: Where is God?

Within that question lies many others we are often left to ponder: Does God have a plan for those afflicted with autism, **ADHD, Down’s syndrome** or any other disorder? What destiny could they possibly have? Can God, will God **heal** them?

And what of the families? You may be wondering, as we were: Will we ever get our lives back? Will our marriage survive? Will we survive?

God has given all of us a promise we can hold on to: “‘For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,’” says the Lord, “‘thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart’” (Jer. 29:11-13).

As you face one of life’s greatest trials, know that God is there for you. Despite numerous challenges, there is good news: You can still experience the joy of the Lord.

Joy and Sorrow I remember the first time our son Nicholas said the word *shoe*. Though that may not be a big deal for most parents, it was one of the most joyful moments of my entire life.

For months we had gone through the same ritual every day: I showed him the shoe, said the word over and over and then said, “This is a sh...” I always paused hopefully, and yet many days I felt the tears well up as I finished the sentence myself.

I felt lonely, confused and unheard by God. “Please,” I pleaded, “just let him say one word!” And yet, day after day, nothing. The well of disappointment in my heart became deeper

and deeper.

Then came that miraculous day when I said, "This is a sh..." and heard our son, diagnosed with nonverbal autism, say "shoe." Everything within me jumped! I laughed, wept and shouted. I hugged him and thanked God over and over.

The joy I felt that day was intense. It was easily as intense as all the pain I had felt each day that he had not responded.

Almost every parent of a special needs child can relate to this story. There has been some breakthrough somewhere that they struggled to see. When it finally came, the joy could not be described.

And yet, even though there can be moments of intense joy and victory, more often than not there is grief and sorrow.

So here's the big question: Can you live a life of joy and victory even if you have a child with special needs? I believe the answer is yes.

Sorrow and joy are firmly linked. Perhaps it is because the deeper we experience sorrow, the more capacity we have for joy.

That is why I felt such a deep sense of joy the first time Nicholas said "shoe": because I had felt such deep sorrow each time he did not.

Although right now we may see only the sorrow and tears of the night, God has planned a bright and beautiful morning full of joy. The Bible tells us this over and over:

"Weeping may go on all night, but joy comes with the morning" (Ps. 30:5, NLT).

"You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy" ().

“‘Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy'” (John 16: 22, NIV).

There are seasons in our lives when we will mourn and have sorrow. But there also are times that are meant for joy.

God sends times of refreshing to us. But regardless of the season, He is always at work to strengthen us and bring purpose and meaning to our lives.

His Joy Is Our Strength One reason God may have for bringing joy after a season of sorrow is to bring a new wind of strength to our spirits. Grief and mourning rob us of our strength, both spiritually and physically.

But God knows that joy brings a new vitality and strength, for the joy of the Lord is your strength (see Neh. 8:10). Joy produces the kind of strength we need to move forward.

It is often very easy for us to believe that we cannot experience joy until we see this or that breakthrough in our children's lives. We can actually come to the place where we feel disqualified from a life of joy because of the burden we bear.

But quite honestly, that is a lie from Satan, who is the father of all lies. Satan knows that if he can prevent us from experiencing the joy of the Lord, he will keep us in a place of weakness and defeat.

Satan has a stake in keeping us separated from the joy of the Lord because it is linked with our strength. If we are sapped of strength, we will have difficulty in moving forward out of the hassles, anxieties and warfare we are in. Furthermore, we will not have the ability to receive the strategy we need to move into our next season.

As parents of special needs children, we are not disqualified

from the joy of the Lord; we absolutely need His joy in order to remain in a place of strength for all that is required of us. God has promised us abundant life, part of which is joy.

Here are some of the disciplines that can help us maintain a joyful, abundant life:

Meditation. One of the ways that God has provided for our joy is contingent upon our willingness to take time to meditate on His Word. Why? Because if we just read God's Word without taking the time to give it thought, we deny ourselves the opportunity to receive personal revelation, refreshment and the promises He has for us and our children.

Prayer. Very simply, prayer is communicating with God. We will never advance in any aspect of our Christian lives without prayer. When we pray, the channels to God open—both ways. To neglect prayer is to neglect God Himself.

Fasting. For the Christian, fasting is essential. Often you cannot gain the revelation you need for your next step without it. Even Jesus agreed that some things simply could not be accomplished without fasting.

Fasting does not always have to mean food; it may mean other things we enjoy, such as television. But by choosing to give up something temporal in order to pursue something eternal, we make it possible for the Lord to reveal Himself more powerfully to us. And to the degree that we allow ourselves to hunger after God, to that degree we will be satisfied by Him and experience His joy.

Giving. It is the very heart of God. And it is linked with worship. We cannot come into all He has for us in our lives if we are unwilling to give because we cannot reap what we will not sow.

Warfare. Whether we like it or not, we are in a war between the power of darkness and the power of light. There are times

when we must enter into warfare-style praying in order to gain the strategy we need to defeat the enemy in whatever battles we face.

Worship. This is the place where we can come into intimacy with God. Worship is a lifestyle of focusing our minds and hearts on God and all that He is. It is a response to all He has done for us, and it is essential to living in joy.

Work. Many times we can speak to the mountain and see it removed (see Matt. 21:21). But other times we have to dig through the mountain to get to the other side.

This is what I call spiritual work. Most parents of special needs children that I have met understand this and are great at working for their child's recovery.

Rest. It is so essential to regaining strength and, in this way, it is linked with joy. We need rest for several reasons:

1. Rest is a matter of obedience to God. He directed us to rest through the observance of the Sabbath.
2. Rest is an issue of trust in God. If we are at rest, God is going to have to "watch the stuff" for us as we regain our strength.
3. Rest is a factor in our physical well-being. God created rest for us to stop and meditate on Him.
4. Restful quietness is necessary for us to receive revelation and strategy for moving forward toward victory.

Destined to Overcome It is my prayer that you will allow the Lord to bless you with abundant life, great joy, and a fresh wind of strength that will carry you and your family through to victorious days ahead! To help you, my husband and I have created a Web site that sends out daily prayers and scriptural encouragement for parents, family and friends of children with special needs.

Here is an example of a parent's prayer:

"Dear Lord, You see the pain and hopelessness that this disorder brings. You have seen my tears and know my heartaches in the midst of this devastating trial. And yet, God, You say that You have plans for _____ to bring him or her a hope and a future.

I thank You, God, that You have promised that when I call upon You, You will listen to me. So, Lord, I pray that You will begin this very day to set that hope and that future in motion.

Father, You do have a destiny for _____ beyond the confines of this illness. You have a great purpose for his or her life. I thank You, Lord, that I can trust in those promises and believe that there will be breakthroughs in days ahead.

The best is truly ahead, for You have many promises in Your Word concerning _____. Show me each and every day how You would have me pray to see all Your promises come to pass. In Jesus' name, Amen."

God has promised you hope, life, restoration and a future. Begin to receive His provision of joy and strength today. Seek Him and pray.

Grab hold of all that God offers You. You'll discover that He has a plan and a destiny for every child.

Read a companion devotional.

Rebecca Wagner Sytsema has co-authored several books with Chuck Pierce, including *The Best is Yet Ahead* (Wagner Publications) and *Possessing Your Inheritance* (Renew), from which portions of this article were adapted. Sytsema and her husband, Jack, hosts a website for parents of autistic and

other special needs children, .

How to Strategically Pray for Salvation for Your Friends and Family

I have found that where faith for the salvation of the lost is concerned, unbelief controls much of the church. Perhaps it's because we've prayed and waited so long that we are no longer convinced God really will do it.

But if we don't believe God will answer our prayers, we will not pray with consistency and diligence. We may sporadically ask Him, but we certainly will not persevere.

Acts 13:36 says that King David "served the purpose of God in his own generation" (NASB). Our purpose as a generation is to bring in the greatest harvest of souls the world has ever seen.

To accomplish that purpose, we must do some important and fulfilling work. Much of it involves strategic prayer to loose our loved ones from Satan's grasp.

The Bible tells us, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4).

There is a covering over the minds of unbelievers that keeps them from clearly seeing the light and truth of the gospel. Until unbelievers have an unveiling—a revelation—they won't understand the gospel because the veil prevents them from

comprehending it.

Satan's goal is to hide the truth of the gospel in order to keep unbelievers in his grasp. How does he accomplish this?

The Greek word *tuphloo*, translated "blinded" in this verse, means, "to dull the intellect" (The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Bethany House Publishers). Satan has an ability to dull the unbeliever's thinking where the gospel is concerned.

The root word of *tuphloo*, *tupho*, has the meaning of making smoke (The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible). Blindness in this passage can be compared to a smoke screen that clouds or darkens the air to the point that a person cannot see clearly.

From this same root comes the word *tuphoo* which refers to being high-minded, proud or inflated with self-conceit (Strong's). The blindness of the unbeliever to the gospel is directly linked to the root of pride that Satan passed on to humankind in the Garden at the fall.

Pride causes unbelievers to think humanity's knowledge is greater than God's. This leads not to a knowledge dependent on God but to an independent knowledge that looks to one's own mind and intellect as the judge of truth.

This quest for knowledge glorifies one's own reasoning ability and rejects God's knowledge. Because everything is filtered through this inward knowledge, all of which is inundated with pride, it usually translates into the exalting and serving of self and its desires.

Simply stated, self loves anything that satisfies and exalts self. Any message that preaches self-denial or that self needs to be saved is offensive.

The only answer to this self-god is death—the cross—where we

die with Christ. The only problem is self wants so desperately to live.

The very nature of pride is to be self-serving and preserving. Thus, the very thing that needs to die is bent on living and must remain the enemy of God in order to do so.

DEALING PRIDE A DEATH BLOW Understanding this blinding ability of pride provides a tremendous clue to how to pray effectively for the lost. We must attack the root of pride!

Most rejection of Christ, whether from the works motivation of false religions or the simple fact that most people don't want to give lordship of their lives to another, is due to the veil of pride.

This satanically initiated stronghold is the ultimate enemy of Christ and will be dealt with in finality when every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Christ is Lord. Pride will be dealt its final blow!

How do we deal with the vision-altering force of pride inflicted upon us by the serpent himself, Satan? The Bible identifies a solution for the pride problem and gives us key strategies for effectively praying for unbelievers.

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

We will never win people to Christ on an intellectual basis or through innovative methods alone. Certainly, a continual barrage of nagging and harassing questions won't bring them to the Lord.

In *How to Pray for Your Family and Friends* (Servant Publications), author Quin Sherrer wrote: "I've talked with many women who believed it was their responsibility to do everything in their power to 'make' their husbands become Christians, but by their manipulative scheming, they only succeeded in turning their husbands away from any interest in spiritual matters. As many wives have learned the hard way, only the Holy Spirit can reveal to an individual the truth of who Jesus is" (see John 16:8-13).

Sometimes we can talk people into a salvation prayer without a true revelation (unveiling), but there is usually no real change because there is no true repentance, which comes only from biblical revelation.

When we approach people on a human basis, especially if they feel we are pressuring them, we generally make things worse. The root of pride in them rises up and defends itself. If we attack this pride on a human level, we will only strengthen it.

But we do have weapons that are "divinely powerful." These weapons, empowered by God, will work miracles.

GOD'S ARMORY FOR BREAKING HUMAN PRIDE Paul E. Billheimer, a 20th-century authority on prayer and author of *Destined for the Throne* (Christian Literature Crusade), said his salvation resulted from spiritual warfare waged on his behalf. He explains: "My mother used these weapons on me. I was as hostile to God as any sinner.

"I was fighting with all my might. But the time came when it was easier to lay down my arms of rebellion than to continue my resistance. The pressure exerted upon me by the Holy Spirit became so powerful that I voluntarily sought relief by yielding my rebellious will.

"The wooing of divine love was so strong that of my own free will I fell into the arms of redeeming grace. I became a

willing 'captive.'"

What are these weapons we use in our warfare?

All forms of prayer. This would include supplication, agreement with other Christians, travail, praying in the Spirit, binding and loosing—any biblical form of prayer (see Eph. 6:18).

Praise. God uses our praise of Him as a weapon. Always praise God for the salvation of the one(s) for whom you are praying (see Ps. 149:5-9).

The Word of God. Speaking Scriptures that apply to your situation releases great power against the enemy (see Matt. 4; Luke 4; Eph. 6:17).

The name of Jesus. Though praying in the name of Jesus is our access to the Father, it is also a powerful weapon against demonic powers and strongholds (see Mark 16:17).

These weapons will help produce enlightenment in the unbeliever and reveal a true picture of Christ. We must ask God to lift the veil from unbelievers' spiritual eyes.

As Paul prayed for the Ephesian church, ask God for revelation and enlightenment to come to the one for whom you are praying (see Eph. 1:17-18).

INFORMATION VERSUS REVELATION We need to understand the difference between information and revelation. Information is of the mind; biblical revelation originates from the heart.

Spiritual power is released only through revelation knowledge. The written Word must become the living word. Even as believers, we must not just read but abide in the Word (see Ps. 119:18).

Information can come immediately, but revelation is normally a

process. As the parable of the sower demonstrates, all biblical truth comes in seed form (see Matt. 13:1-9).

Knowledge or information alone, which is what humans have glorified since the fall, does not produce salvation. It does not necessarily lead to a true knowledge of God.

The Pharisees knew the Scriptures, but they did not know God (see John 5:39; 8:37). Information from the Word had not progressed to revelation.

Many theologians today know the Scriptures thoroughly but don't know God well. They have much information but little or no revelation.

Revelation makes the Scriptures "spirit" and "life" (John 6:63). It makes them live.

This is so important because we are forever short-circuiting God's process and, in so doing, short-circuiting the results.

Only revelation leads to biblical faith and true change. Without it we are simply appealing to a fallen, selfish, humanistic mind that is always asking, "What's in it for me?"

When we appeal to this mentality through human wisdom and intellect alone, we often preach a humanistic "What's in it for them?" gospel, and we produce humanistic, self-centered converts.

If, on the other hand, we preach a pure gospel, including repentance and the laying down of a person's own life (lordship of Christ), unbelievers are sure to reject it unless they receive a biblical revelation. In fact, our gospel often sounds ridiculous to them (see 1 Cor. 2:14).

What is the solution? We must allow the Holy Spirit time to birth true repentance in unbelievers through God-given revelation.

THE FIRE POWER OF PRAYER We must ask God to bring revelation to the unbeliever. Prayer must accompany the hearing of the gospel. I suggest that the following be included:

Pray that the person's heart be prepared, so that it will be "good soil" for the seed (see Mark 4:8).

Pray that Satan will not be able to steal the seeds of truth (see Mark 4:15) and that nothing else will be able to destroy the seeds (see Mark 4:16-19).

Pray that the Word becomes revelation through the lifting of the veil (see 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 1:17).

Pray that the root of pride be broken (see 2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Pray that the person comes to true repentance (see 2 Pet. 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).

Repentance does not mean to "turn and go another way." That change of direction is the result of repentance. Repentance—metanoia—means to have "a new knowledge or understanding"—a change of mind (Spiros Zodhiates, Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible, AMG Publishers).

In biblical contexts, repentance is a new understanding that comes from God through an unveiling (revelation) and results in a new direction or lifestyle. Biblical repentance will produce God-centered Christians, not self-centered ones. It reverses the effects of the fall through Adam.

Humanity chose their own wisdom, their own knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong. Humanity now needs "a new knowledge" from God.

Paul said in Acts 26:18 that he was called "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light." We help to create this "new knowledge" (repentance) through intercession. Our prayers play a role in the lifting of the veil (revelation), which allows for the heart to be enlightened.

I want to encourage you and see your faith lifted to a new

level. God really does want to save those dear to you.

We must be persuaded that God will save the people we love, the ones for whom we pray. We should be so convinced that we would be shocked if they didn't get saved.

Serving our generation demands faith that doesn't quit. We need a motivational faith that truly believes God is hearing us and will answer.

Read a companion devotional.

Dutch Sheets serves as senior pastor of Springs Harvest Fellowship in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and is the best-selling author of *Intercessory Prayer* (Regal Books).