

4 Ways to Be Thankful!

by Joyce Meyer

There is much for us to be grateful for, and we need to focus on it every day of the year.

We all know that we should be grateful for our many blessings. God tells us in His Word to be thankful, and we know from our own experience that once we seriously start praising God, our burdens and troubles seem to weigh less heavily on our shoulders. David said: "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. ... Many evils confront the [consistently] righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Ps. 34:1,19, The Amplified Bible).

That's part of the power of being thankful. As we pause to give thanks to God for the blessings we enjoy in our lives, we actually begin to find more blessings—even more to be thankful for!

However, many times the struggle is getting into the habit of being thankful. There are countless ways to practice giving thanks—here are four of them:

When a person does something nice for you, let him know you appreciate it. One day as I was going into an office building, a man standing nearby opened the door for me. I thanked him and smiled.

"You're the fifth person I've held the door for," he said, "and you're the first one to smile and the second to thank me."

I thanked him a second time, with a smile on my face. Afterward, I thought how much we take others for granted, even in simple things such as opening a door for a stranger.

Instead of accepting that that's the way things are, we can develop an attitude of thankfulness.

Did your bus arrive on time today? If so, did you thank the driver? The last time you ate at a restaurant, did you thank the waiter for filling your coffee cup a second time without being asked? This is the point I want to make: Develop an attitude of gratitude toward the people in your life.

Appreciate your family members, especially your spouse. I appreciate Dave, and even though we've been married a long time, I still tell him that I appreciate him. I thank him for being patient with me and thoughtful. Just those few words of thanks are a great way to develop a thankful mind and heart.

When you express appreciation to those close to you, it's good for them to hear the words, but it's also good for you. Remember, giving thanks releases joy in you. You can enrich your life and theirs just by showing appreciation.

Meditate daily on things for which you can be thankful. I have a friend who absolutely will not get out of bed in the morning until he has thanked God for at least 10 things. He counts them on his fingers, and they're small things really, such as having a good car to drive, being a member of an exciting Sunday school class, enjoying good health.

He says that he goes to sleep at night by focusing on at least three things that went well that day. He relives those three positive things. For him, it can be as simple as his supervisor telling him what a good job he did on a project or an affirming e-mail from a friend.

Be thankful for the honesty in other people. I once heard someone say, "Only two people will tell you the truth about yourself: someone who is angry at you and someone who loves you very much." God uses both types in our lives, and their honesty makes us better people.

I urge you to be thankful for people who tell you the truth about yourself, even if it's not what you want to hear. When you hear the truth—especially something of which you're not aware—you can change. And after you've changed, you have yet another thing for which you can be thankful. It's a win-win situation.

I encourage you to take time this to practice being thankful in these four ways. There is so much for us to be grateful for, and we need to focus on it—not just on Thanksgiving Day but every day of the year. Keep in mind the admonition of the psalmist, “Be thankful and say so to Him, bless and affectionately praise His name” (Ps. 100:4).

Energy Drainers

People who are depressed, whining and complaining can drain your energy.

Question: I have found that when I am around certain people, especially at work, I feel fatigued. Do you have any suggestions?

L.D., Washington, D.C.

Answer: I have personally experienced this during the years in my own practice. I began to notice that certain people, especially those who were depressed, whining and complaining, were draining my energy. I call such people “energy suckers.” After spending time with me, they would leave feeling better—but I would be exhausted. I realized that if they drained that much of my energy in such a short period of time, they must be doing the same to their own spouse, children and co-workers.

My response was to decrease the time I spent with these individuals and start providing them with assignments to begin

reprogramming their minds. I knew that these people were not purposely sapping my energy; that were just stuck in a rut of whining, complaining and grumbling.

If you are spending too much time with “energy suckers,” the first thing you need to learn is how to identify these people. Then begin to limit the time you spend with them. If your spouse falls into this category, you need to explain to him that there are occasions when it feels as though he is literally draining you of all your energy.

Discuss this issue and decide on a “signal” that will alert your spouse to the onset of each episode. Hopefully, through time and practice your spouse will recognize the problem, and you both can work together to resolve your energy crisis and the feelings associated with it.

If the energy sucker is someone at work, I recommend that once you have identified the person, you limit the time you spend with him if at all possible.

Perhaps the energy sucker in your life is one of your parents, or maybe your mother or father-in-law. In these cases you will also need to limit your contact or else make them aware of the problem in a kind, gentle manner. Each time you either eliminate or decrease contact with one of the energy suckers in your life, your energy level will begin to rise.

It's like having a car with multiple leaks in its gas tank. With each leak you plug, you will save more gasoline and will have more gas to go the distance. Just as you can identify a rattlesnake by its rattle, you can generally identify an energy sucker by his whining, nagging and complaining. For more information on this and related topics, refer to my book *Deadly Emotions*.

Are You Ready for War?

Every day from every direction the winds keep blowing. The continuing war with Iraq coupled with the ongoing global war on terror threaten to disrupt the peace and calm so many of us have taken for granted. Since 9/11, it has been easy to see that we in America were not prepared for this period of instability.

Often there is a parallel between the natural and supernatural realms. In the supernatural realm today, the winds of war are blowing as well. The church in America needs to be prepared for the spiritual challenges that lie on our very doorsteps. But are we?

In Judges 3 we read how a generation of Israel was somewhat oblivious to what war was really about. The Lord remedied this situation by allowing some enemy nations to exist so that “the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war” (see v. 2, NKJV).

For Christians, learning to do “war” means gaining measurable victories over the kingdom of darkness. Think about it this way: When a thief gets saved, stealing diminishes; when a wife-beater gets saved, a family might be restored; when a drug dealer gets saved, drug dealing decreases in one neighborhood. As James 5:20 says, “He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

There are five primary ways for us to effectively fight the good fight of faith—the kind that changes lives for Jesus.

The will to work, fight and win. Gen. Douglas MacArthur said, “It is fatal to enter any war without the will to win it.” The

Bible says that the Jews in Nehemiah's day "had a mind to work" when it came time to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem in the face of their enemies (see Neh. 4:6).

Knowing and having faith in Jesus' victory at Calvary and how it has changed countless situations, lives and families through the ages ought to provide plenty of motivation for pressing through to victory.

Righteous living. A clear heart and life allow us to stand in the face of adversity as well as to draw inner strength and stamina for undertaking spiritual action. Without righteousness, the devil can rightfully accuse us of attitudes and actions we have not repented of.

If our lives are not right with God we can pray the prayers, sing the songs and yell the formulated declarations but our voice is a shout with no clout. The condition of our heart matters: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

Prayer. So much can be said about praying, but I like what James wrote best: "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). The "much" it avails includes the power of God being loosed in us and through us as we fight for the lives of our family, friends, cities and nations. I have watched it thwart the works of darkness and help open the doors to evangelistic ministry.

The Word of God. God's Word ought to be stored up in our lives so that when we need it, we don't have to run to a bookshelf to find it. The Word is to be hidden in our hearts where it is available to be brought to our minds by the Holy Spirit on a moment's notice. In this way, Scripture becomes "the sword of the Spirit"—ready to be used when we face a situation in our own life or in another's. Is your ammo ready?

Winning people to Christ. This could be the most underused or even forgotten weapon of spiritual warfare, especially when

influencing families, neighborhoods—even cities. There is no spiritual weapon that can replace evangelism. There is no spiritual substitute for evangelism, for it is the primary way of actually reaching out and touching another person with the life, love and gospel of Jesus Christ.

One of the easiest ways to measure the victories of our war is with this question: Are lives being changed and people getting saved? People coming to Christ and lives being transformed are a sure way to measure if our ministries or churches are effectively waging war in our communities.

Let's not be like the Israelites in Judges who knew nothing of war. Every day gives us great opportunities to make a difference. Let's move to the front lines.

You Are What You Think

by Joyce Meyer

Positive, faith-filled words are full of life, but negative words are full of death.

Many years ago I was an extremely negative person. My whole philosophy was, "Don't expect anything good to happen, and then you won't be disappointed when it doesn't." So many devastating things had happened to me through the years, I was afraid to believe something good might actually happen.

Because my thoughts were all negative, my talk—and my life—were too. Proverbs 23:7 says that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. My life was a reflection of my thoughts and my words.

When I began to study the Word in earnest and to trust God to restore me, one of the first things I realized was that the negativism had to go. And the longer I serve God, the more I

realize the tremendous power in being positive in my thoughts and words. Positive, faith-filled words are full of life, but negative words are full of death.

Perhaps you are like I was. You are avoiding hope to protect yourself against being hurt. Unfortunately, this type of behavior sets up a negative lifestyle. Everything seems to go wrong because our thoughts are negative.

But if you are thinking according to the mind of Christ, your thoughts will be positive. God is positive, and if you want to flow with Him, you must get on the same wavelength and begin to think positively.

Have a positive outlook and attitude. Maintain positive thoughts and expectations. Engage in positive conversation.

Throughout His life Jesus endured tremendous difficulties, including personal attacks, and yet He remained positive. He always had an uplifting comment, an encouraging word. He always gave hope to those around Him.

The condition of your mind should be as described by Paul in Philippians 4:8. You have the mind of Christ, so begin to use it. If He wouldn't think it, you shouldn't think it!

The road to freedom from negative thinking begins when we face the problem without making excuses for it. The choice is ours. Any time we don't get what we want, our minds will rise up and try to get us into self-pity and a negative attitude. Or we can choose to adjust to the situation and go ahead and enjoy what God has for us no matter what happens.

Stop and think about what you are thinking about. Satan usually deceives people into believing that the source of their misery or trouble is something other than what it is. But by continually "watching over" your thoughts you can begin to take every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ

(see 2 Cor. 10:5).

The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8:28 that “we are assured and know that [God being a partner in their labor] all things work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good to and for those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose” (The Amplified Bible). Notice Paul does not say that all things are good, but he does say that all things work together for good.

Paul also tells us in Romans 12:16 to “readily adjust yourself to [people, things].” The idea is that we must learn to become the kind of person who plans things but who doesn’t fall apart if that plan doesn’t work out.

Let’s say you get in your car, and it won’t start. There are two ways you can look at the situation.

You can think: I knew it! It never fails. My plans always flop. Or you can tell yourself: Well, it looks as if I can’t leave right now. I’ll go later. But I believe this change in plans is going to work out for my good. There is probably some reason I need to be at home today, so I’m going to enjoy my time here.

Allow God to be the glory and lifter of your head (see Ps. 3:3). He wants to lift everything: your hopes, attitudes, moods, head, hands, heart—your entire life.

The Holy Spirit will be quick to caution you if your mind begins to take you in a negative direction. The decision becomes yours whether or not you will continue. Will you flow in the mind of the flesh or in the mind of the Spirit? One leads to death, the other to life. The choice is yours.

The Servant Leader

Jesus overturned every worldly idea about power when He introduced the concept of servant leadership

The spirit of Christ is the spirit of ministry. It is in serving, healing, blessing and binding up that the children of the King most resemble their Father.

The spirit of Babylon and of Rome is the lust for power, the power to lift up or sweep away, to own, to kill and to make the lowly fear. Whether in a day laborer or a corporate king, the spirit of Christ is servanthood, ego-crucifying, self-denying, others-centered servanthood.

The power of servant leadership lies not in position but in motive. The CEO of a massive corporation, holding great responsibility, may “wash his employees’ feet” by seeking their benefit in business.

There is no conflict between a well-managed business making a profit for its stockholders and one making a good life for its employees. There is no room for exploitation in Jesus’ model of servant leadership.

The servant leader is still in authority even as Jesus was when He washed the disciples’ feet. No one in the room doubted who the leader was. Because He authentically ministered to their needs, no one resigned, no respect was squandered and no face was lost.

Servant fathers will still discipline their children. The servant CEO will still make decisions, sometimes decide for layoffs, and will dismiss employees who fail to meet company standards. He will never browbeat, threaten or manipulate. He will not withhold money or praise or encouragement.

The servant leader stoops to anoint his followers with the oil of gladness and never stands taller than when he kneels to wash their feet. His power rests in servanthood, not in dominion. Far from losing power in serving, he is enriched by it. He goes from strength to strength not by bending others to his will, but by sacrificing that they might be blessed.

What does servant leadership really mean in practical terms for a CEO or a college president? Does it mean that the CEO is out in the parking lot washing his employees' cars every day? Does it mean that the college president makes the beds and cleans the bathrooms in the dorms?

No, it doesn't mean that. Jesus washed the disciples' feet once, and the fact that it is recorded is the surest proof that He did not do it every day.

Being a servant leader is about being genuinely interested in the well-being of those entrusted to you. It means treating subordinates with respect and securing the dignity of all. To reduce Jesus' model of servant leadership to random acts of servitude is to trivialize a great truth.

To make foot-washing merely ceremonial is to risk ritualizing the call to practical servanthood, thereby separating it from real life. Authentic servant leadership is indeed sacramental, and does, in fact, mean practical acts of kindness, but it is so much more.

Servanthood is a mysterious spirit with power sufficient to break proud hearts and humble the high and mighty. Infinitely more important for leaders than for servants—an attitude more than an action—the power of servanthood is very near who Jesus is and who He was on the last night before He was crucified. Loving Him, we grow like Him.

Like He did, we serve. Serving, we know His power. Empowered, we change and heal whom we serve.

Jesus cared more for His influence upon the few closest at hand than for His image among the masses. The life of a leader, his character and his servant spirit will do much to influence his closest associates.

Here is the rule: The closer to the area of immediate impact, the greater the influence. A preacher may, even from a great distance, have some small influence upon the guy in the back row. But his longtime associate, his secretary, and his kids know the real man, and upon their lives and souls he writes the story of his own character.

After the cross, after all their betrayals and denials and disappointments, the apostles became what they became in great part because of the influence of Jesus. As they walked in wisdom and grew in grace, surely upon occasion they saw Christ in one another.

In the way one or the other would turn a phrase while preaching or pray aloud or even work a miracle, the others would surely smile at one another knowingly: "That looked just like Jesus." "Your voice just then reminded me so of Him." "That is exactly the way He used to do it."

What they were, the giants they became, how they lived and how they died were reflections of Jesus' power. His influence upon them as well as His spirit within them was the power by which they turned the world upside down.

Not one of the apostles was ever a king, prince or president. None ever held any office, ruled a country or ran a company. Yet they lived their lives in His power, serving and submitting themselves to God and humanity as they had seen Him do. Theirs was never the power of the current age but the mysterious, eternal power of the suffering servant.

When they died—some by the sword, some in the fire and one on a cross—they were not powerless victims. They were more than conquerors.

Finding the Father

by T.D. Jakes

AFTER SPENDING ALMOST 30 YEARS OF MY LIFE traveling around the world, I have not found a perfect church-not Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal or apostolic. Yet God is still God. Whether a big church or small, there will always be some tempter or temptation lurking in the corner ready to take advantage of the saints.

But the miracle of God is that He doesn't need the body of Christ to be perfect to reveal Himself to those He has called. He can step into flawed situations such as a blemished church, a dysfunctional family or a disfigured society and still reveal Himself.

I hear people say, "I can't grow in this church," or, "I can't be used in that setting," but the devil is a liar. If you have a gift-and everyone does-you can be used anywhere. You don't have to be in an ideal setting to do what God has called you to do.

There is so much pressure in the church to act like you know the Lord. The number of people who know all about God but aren't saved would surprise you. There are countless people who get excited about God but have not experienced a life-changing, vibrant, mind-renewing relationship with God.

The old folks said it best: "Everybody talking about heaven ain't going there." It's true. Religious tradition does not ensure knowledge of the Lord. That's why we must begin to pray for the generations that follow us. We don't want them to fall into the same religious ruts.

Today's youth are faced with a flurry of options. For them

it's like walking into a room with many doors. They're not new options; young people have not invented new sins. But who would have ever imagined that the pornography once available only behind brown paper wrappers is now on your TV screen and on the Internet?

As if it were not enough that young people must deal with raging hormones and a myriad of temptations surrounding them every day, television provides even more negative exposure. The media have glamorized the choices available to our youth. There's perversion, drug abuse and the like. If they don't know how to do it, television can show them how.

And when they come to church, there are options lurking in the corners and crevices, on the boards and among the volunteers. Predators sneak in with a wink and a smile, talking the talk but not walking the walk.

If you were an uncalled, unmarked person you could come to church for years and not necessarily find God. In fact, there are people who have lived almost literally in the church, only to die never knowing Him. But when God has marked and predestined you, you have a role to play that no one in the entire world can fulfill except you.

Why do we want young people to know God? It's not just that they will find moral repair. That's important, but it's not the only reason. It's not just that they will find integrity in the arms of God. The greatest reason for searching for God is that when we find Him we find ourselves. We find the answer to the question: Who am I really (because how will I know if I am successful if I don't know what I was created to be)? This is an important question whether you are 9 or 90.

When God got ready to create light, He stepped into gross darkness, and His Word was still effective enough that none of the darkness could stop the light from breaking loose. Finding God gives you direction; without that you're vulnerable to

anybody's touch, anybody's drug deal and anybody's disease because you don't know what you were created to be or to do.

The Bible doesn't talk about the prodigal son finding God; it says he came to himself. Isn't that the real journey, to come to yourself? To wake up and discover why you had to go through what you had to go through to get where you are today?

A man with the unanswered question "Who am I?" hanging over his head walks in confusion all the days of his life. Finding God makes sense out of the madness that is in your life. It answers your question. It puts you on a path called straight. This is what finding God is all about.

BISHOP T.D. JAKES is founding pastor of The Potter's House, a 30,000-member church in Dallas

No More Masks

by Joyce Meyer

So many times we struggle to be real. We act one way on the outside, but we're actually different on the inside. Because we have weaknesses, faults and fears—things that we think make us less likable or desirable—we'd rather hide them from other people.

Over time, we devise masks to effectively hide our blemishes and give others a different perception of who we really are. In fact, we've become so comfortable with our masks that we forget we're wearing them.

But pride, shame or fear keeps us from taking off the disguises and revealing our true identities to others—even those we love. The thought of shedding the layers of deception

and defenses and standing exposed to the world is more than many of us can bear.

The desire to be accepted and liked is so strong in us that we will do almost anything to feel validated.

When we were children, if we felt that we were not being loved or accepted for who we were, we would change. We would completely reinvent ourselves. Like a chameleon, we would change our outer appearances and attitudes so we could fit in better with our surroundings. But inside that chameleon stays the same—it can't change what it is.

The same is true of each of us. We can change the outside, but we can't revise who we really are deep down inside.

The danger of wearing a mask, of course, is that it misrepresents us. What other people see is a lie. It's not who we are or who we were born to be.

By the time we reach adulthood, we've had years of experience in role-playing and covering up. Our masks have become as comfortable as an old pair of slippers—and we've lost touch with who we really are. We have spent so many years hiding that we've forgotten those things about ourselves that make us different and special.

What a waste! A loving Father who rejoices in our individuality uniquely created each of us. In fact, it's the distinctive things about us, not our "sameness," that make us special to Him.

The little girl with freckles, the young man with dimples and the beloved gray-haired grandparents with the sweet smiles—they all stand out because they are special. And you are special too!

We all have fears and weaknesses. We're all less than perfect

and wish we were better. But we need to realize that God loves us just the way we are right now, and His love for us will never diminish.

And there's more good news. Second Corinthians 3:18 says that "all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another" (Amplified Bible).

This means that when we believe and cooperate with God's good plan for our lives, He will help us to let down the defenses we've had up for so long. God knows how badly we want to fit in, but His love is powerful enough to reach beyond our willingness to hide our faults in our effort to gain acceptance.

Trust Him enough to take off your mask and look into the mirror of His Word. You will find as I have that you are being changed, little by little, into the very image of your Lord.

Eventually, all the good things that God has done in us will begin to show on the outside and cause others to become hungry for what we have. As we continue to follow Jesus as our example, people will want to follow us. This is the higher standard that we are called to live by as Christians.

God wants us to honor Him with our lives and our love toward others. As genuine worshipers of the Lord, let us resist the temptation to "play the imposter" and endeavor to be real.

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times best-selling author and one of the world's leading practical Bible teachers. She has written more than 70 books, including the popular *Beauty for Ashes* and *Battlefield of the Mind*, and her most recent, *The Power of Simple Prayer* (all FaithWords). She is also the founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries Inc. and the host of *Enjoying Everyday*

Life radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide.

You Are Unique

by Joyce Meyer

I want to remind you of something I consider to be important to your well-being: You are no surprise to God. He knew what He was getting when He chose you, just as He knew what He was getting when He chose me.

The Bible says, "He chose us [actually picked us out for Himself as His own] in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4, The Amplified Bible).

God already knew our weaknesses, every flaw we would have, every time we would fail, and He still said, "I want you." Ephesians 1:5 declares He foreordained us to be adopted as His own children. God is our daddy! With Him on our side things are bound to work out all right in the end.

We need to refrain from comparing ourselves to anyone else, because God doesn't want us to be frustrated and feel unworthy of the blessings He so desires to give us.

Comparing our lives with other people's lives is unfair—to them and to us. We can look at others and wonder why we don't look as they look, know what they know, own what they own or do what they do. But it's interesting to note that Satan never points out what they don't have, only what they do have that we don't have.

God, on the other hand, never reminds us how far we have to go. He always reminds us how far we have come, how well we are doing, how precious we are in His sight and how much He loves

us.

I spent many unhappy days comparing myself with other people. Why couldn't I just cast my care on God like my husband, Dave? Why couldn't I be sweet, merciful and submissive like my pastor's wife?

Why couldn't I sew like my neighbor? Why couldn't I have a faster-working metabolism so I could eat more and not gain weight? Why? Why? Why? God never answered me except with the same answer He gave Peter when he compared himself with John. Jesus had told Peter that he was going to enter a time of suffering. Jesus was speaking of the kind of death Peter would die and thereby glorify God (see John 21:18-22).

Peter's initial response was to ask what was going to happen to John. Jesus promptly said: "If I want him to stay (survive, live) until I come, what is that to you? [What concern is it of yours?] You follow Me!" (v. 22). It sounds to me as though Jesus was politely telling Peter to mind his own business and not to worry about John.

The Lord has an individual plan for each of us, and often we can't understand what He is doing or why He is doing it. We look at others as the standard for what should happen to us, but God has a unique standard for each person. That we all have a different set of fingerprints is proof enough we are not to compete with one another.

It isn't fair to compare ourselves with others. It says to God, "I want to limit You to this and nothing else." What if God ends up giving you something far greater than anyone you know? Galatians 6:4 says to do "something commendable [in itself alone] without [resorting to] boastful comparison" with our neighbors. In other words our goal should be to be the very best we can be.

When your value as an individual is firmly rooted in Christ, you are free from the agony of comparisons and competition.

That kind of freedom releases joy, and joy is the result of being thankful for every single thing that you have, counting yourself blessed just to be alive and to know Jesus as your Lord.

God wants you to know that His hand is upon you, that His angels are watching over you, that His Holy Spirit is in you and with you to help you in everything you do.

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times best-selling author and one of the world's leading practical Bible teachers.

Things Can Change in a Snap

by Maureen Eha

Are you tired of waiting for a prophetic word to be fulfilled in your life? Have you received it, claimed it, believed for it, fought the good fight of faith with it—and still have yet to see it come to pass?

If so, don't give up! Things can change in a day.

Think about the significant events in the lives of our fathers and mothers in the faith. One day Sarah, Abraham's wife, was just an old woman with a barren womb. The next, she was pregnant with the child of promise. After 24 years of waiting for God's word to come to pass, she was doubtful. But her situation changed—big time—in just a day!

One day David was being forced to live like a gypsy, running from the armies of King Saul. The next, his enemy was dead, and he was not only a free man but the anointed heir to the

throne. David, too, had had a word from God—and after 15 years, he too had probably begun to doubt. But God saw to it that he became king on the appointed day.

There are other examples. What about Esther? One day she was a young Israelite woman with an uncertain future. The next she was Ahasueras' queen.

One day Jeremiah was just a kid. The next he was a prophet to the nation of Israel.

One day the Jewish people were lost, wondering why the heavens were silent and God no longer spoke to them. The next they were gazing into the eyes of their long-awaited Messiah.

One day the disciples were hiding in an upper room for fear of persecution. The next they were filled with the power of the promised Holy Spirit and eager to preach, teach and work miracles in Jesus' name!

Now think about your own life. Can you point to times when things changed drastically for you—in just a day? Perhaps you graduated from college or had a major career change or bought your first house or gave birth to a child. One day your circumstances could be defined one way, and the next they were totally different.

I know I have plenty of examples like this. One day I was a sinner, the next a saint. One day I was single and the next a married woman. One day I was unaware of my purpose and the next I was walking in destiny.

That's the way it is when God takes control of your life. He gives you a word, a promise, a vision and begins to set into motion all the things that are required to bring it into being. But He doesn't cause it to be fulfilled until just the right moment. He allows you to wait—in order to prepare you and teach you to trust in Him.

The waiting does not negate the validity of His word. “‘God is

not a man,'" the Bible says, "'that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?'" (Num. 23:19, NKJV).

Sometimes we become impatient because God's timing is not the same as ours. We want Him to do the thing as soon as He speaks it! Or we develop expectations because a particular prophetic word has a time frame attached to it. But we must remember that even the most seasoned prophet "[sees] through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12, KJV) and may not have God's timing perfectly in view.

There is always a need to test each prophecy you receive. But once you are sure you've heard God's voice, either through someone else or in your own heart, have faith that His promise will be fulfilled—if not today, perhaps tomorrow. Look forward each day to all the good things He has ordained for you (see Ps. 84:11).

Maureen Eha is features editor of Charisma.

Are You Telling God to Shut Up?

by Joyce Rodgers

Returning from yet another speaking engagement, I promised myself: "I'll do it tomorrow. I really mean it this time." Despite my exhaustion, I rested comfortably that night. As daylight broke, I rose to pray and then began my morning routine. My mind was racing as I rehearsed my to-do list. How

can I get all of this done in one day? I thought. With so much to do and another trip scheduled, I've got to start these errands, or I'll run out of time.

At that moment the decision was made: "I'll run my errands now, and then I'll check on my ailing neighbor later today."

As I backed out of my driveway, I spotted my two good friends in the rearview mirror. Bev and Anna were sharing a cup of coffee as they sat peacefully enjoying the morning.

"Good morning!" I shouted excitedly, waving to them. "Tell Diane I'm coming by later today! I can't stop now!"

A sick feeling in my stomach stopped me cold as I looked at their faces. I quickly learned that our friend died days before. With her last ounce of strength, she wrote letters to her husband, to her children and to me.

In the midst of shock and regret, I asked myself: "How is it that I missed being there in such a time of need? We met many times before and shared so many prayerful, worshipful and celebrated moments together. How could I have missed the last earthly opportunity to be with my friend?"

How often does this scenario occur in the everyday lives of well-meaning, Spirit-filled Christians? With our conferences, church-growth seminars, "instantaneous anointing" services and building projects, how many times do we miss an opportunity for genuine ministry both outside and inside the walls of our churches?

I am reminded of the time when Jesus visited Mary and Martha in their home. It was Martha who welcomed Jesus. Martha loved Jesus and wanted to be around Him, as did Mary. It is clear Martha wanted to be associated with Jesus. But did she really want to be with Him?

Unfortunately, there are millions of Marthas among us today. We are comfortable being around the church, yet we do not

yearn to be in the presence of the Lord. Though God desires for us to worship Him in the “inner court,” our minds are distracted. Our cell phones are going off; our appointment books are filling up.

Through her “ministry of busyness,” Martha prepared for Jesus instead of spending time with Him. She was a meticulous hostess but a poor servant. As a result of her adjusting the flower arrangement, straightening the furniture and setting the table, she ignored her guest, our Lord.

Consequently, Martha failed to listen to what Jesus had to say. She missed the opportunity to hear the intimate things He whispered. The ministry Jesus desired for her house would take place as she hurriedly rushed by.

In response to Martha's actions, Jesus said: “‘You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better’” (Luke 10:41-42, NIV).

The one thing Jesus desired, Martha didn't have: time. Time to minister. Time for her to listen to the divine plan He had for her. Time for Him to express His love for her.

When was the last time you sat in the presence of the Lord, not to ask something of Him, but simply to listen?

Has God expressed His pleasure toward you lately? How can He do so unless you spend time with Him? Is the day you have planned one you ordered, or have you consulted God?

The only way we can really know we're on track is to stop our activity long enough to listen. If we aren't careful, we can miss God's voice on our road to destiny, despite our ministry for Him.

Take a step back from your day-to-day activities. Step away from your cell phone and your busy schedule and ask yourself, “Have I chosen what is best?”

When we listen, we can begin effective ministry. Real ministry must extend beyond church work and religious obligations. Real ministry is adopting the posture of Mary, taking the time to sit at Jesus' feet and listen.

While we sit, we minister to Him; while we listen, He ministers to us about people such as my friend Diane. Jesus is waiting to talk with you. Are you listening? Joyce Rodgers is the founder of Primary Purpose Ministries based in Denton, Texas. A highly sought-after evangelist, she is the international youth department chairwoman for the 5.5 million-member Church of God in Christ.